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Subject: WEEK IN REVIEW: ACA Premiums Falling in Arkansas, CBO Projects Medicare Savings, PA Expanding Medicaid

Welcome to the first installment of #ACA Week in Review, where we deliver Affordable Care Act news straight to your inbox.

This week, a wave of new evidence pointed to one clear conclusion: The Affordable Care Act is working to make quality health care affordable and accessible for Americans. Consumers in **Arkansas** received good news: insurance companies have proposed a *net reduction in premiums* of 2 percent next year for the Arkansas Health Insurance Marketplace. Consumers in Montana and Washington received similarly good news. **Montana** announced that prices for health insurance policies sold through the Marketplace in Montana for 2015 will increase by an average of only 1.35 percent. In **Washington**, people who buy health insurance through the state's Marketplace "*will have more choices next year and will only see a small rate increase*" of 1.9 percent, according to the [AP](#).

Pennsylvania will become the 28th state, including the District of Columbia, to expand Medicaid. The ACA's **Medicaid expansion** will help approximately 500,000 Pennsylvanians get the health care coverage they need. Nationwide, [17 million](#) people could benefit from Medicaid expansion. Unfortunately, millions of Americans are still without Medicaid coverage because their state has refused to act.

The [New York Times'](#) Upshot blog noted that according to this week's **CBO projections** "the difference between the current estimate for Medicare's 2019 budget and the estimate for the 2019 budget four years ago is about \$95 billion. That sum is greater than the government is expected to spend that year on unemployment insurance, welfare and Amtrak — combined."

This week, Secretary Sylvia Burwell announced that Kevin Counihan will join the CMS team as **Marketplace CEO**. Since joining HHS, the Secretary has taken a number of steps to further strengthen its management and deliver impact for the American people. As the [Washington Post](#) noted, "It's easy to see why CMS saw Counihan as the right person...[he] ran the Connecticut exchange, which managed to avoid major tech glitches while reportedly cutting the state's uninsured rate in half this year."

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

"I take the increased interest from health insurers this year as a clear sign that health reform is working," – Washington State Insurance Commissioner Mike Kreidler. ([Seattle Times](#))

Bonus Quote: "We've been accustomed to double-digit increases, so these figures are a real step in the right direction," –Montana State Insurance Commissioner Monica Lindeen. ([Missoulian](#))

ICYMI

[Obamacare premiums in Arkansas projected to drop 2 percent in 2015](#)

Arkansas Times // David Ramsey

Insurance companies have proposed a net reduction in premiums of 2 percent next year for the Arkansas Health Insurance Marketplace, the health insurance exchange created by the Affordable Care Act. The Marketplace includes all of the plans used for the private option, the state's unique plan which uses Medicaid funds to purchase private health insurance for low-income Arkansans.

[People buying their own health insurance will have more choices; small rate increase](#)

Associated Press // Martha Bellisle

People in Washington who buy their own health insurance through the state's health exchange will have more choices next year and will only see a small rate increase. On Wednesday, the Office of the Insurance Commissioner approved 10 health insurers to sell 90 plans for 2015, according to Stephanie Marquis, spokeswoman for the state insurance commissioner. That's two more insurers than were approved for 2014. Marquis says the average rate change will be 1.9 percent.

2015 health insurance premiums on Obamacare exchanges won't increase much

Missoulia // Mike Dennison

HELENA – Prices for health-insurance policies sold on the “Obamacare” online marketplace in Montana for 2015 will increase by an average of only 1.35 percent – significantly below what’s happening in many other states, the state insurance commissioner said today.

Medicare: Not Such a Budget-Buster Anymore

NY Times // Margot Sanger-Katz and Kevin Quealy

Every year for the last six years in a row, the Congressional Budget Office has reduced its estimate for how much the federal government will need to spend on Medicare in coming years. The difference between the current estimate for Medicare’s 2019 budget and the estimate for the 2019 budget four years ago is about \$95 billion. That sum is greater than the government is expected to spend that year on unemployment insurance, welfare and Amtrak — combined. It’s equal to about one-fifth of the expected Pentagon budget in 2019.

Yes, Obamacare is cutting the deficit

Washington Post // Paul Waldman

Today the Congressional Budget Office released its latest economic and fiscal projections, and guess what: The news is pretty good. In fact, all the “deficit hawks” out there who are deeply concerned about too much borrowing and the terrible choices our grandchildren will confront might want to write a letter of thanks to one Barack Obama. To start things off, the CBO says the deficit this year will be \$506 billion, or 2.9 percent of GDP. In 2013 it was \$680 billion, so that’s a pretty steep drop. And in terms of GDP, not only is that slightly lower than the average deficit of the last 40 years (3.1 percent), it’s also a 70 percent decline from Obama’s first year in office, where because of the Great Recession, which brought both the need for more spending and a plunge in tax revenues, the deficit peaked at 9.8 percent of GDP.

The Word on Obamacare: It’s Shrinking as a Political Issue

New York Times // Derek Willis

Last summer, lawmakers churned out news releases using the term Obamacare, 530 of them in June, July and August. This summer? 138. A year ago, the individual mandate for what is officially known as the Affordable Care Act had yet to go into effect. Federal and state exchange websites had yet to go live, and congressional appropriators were still writing government spending legislation with an eye toward defunding the law (leading to the partial government shutdown later that year). In a typical expression of sentiment from last summer, John Culberson, a Texas Republican, published an email to constituents entitled “My Day Is Not Complete Unless I Vote to Cut Spending and Repeal Obamacare.”

GOP Shys Away From Obamacare Repeal

Kaiser Health News // Phil Galewitz

And while political ads on television are still common, the number of new ads about the law has declined since spring when the administration rebounded from the troubled launch of healthcare.gov, said Elizabeth Wilner, senior vice president for Kantar Media Intelligence in New York, a nonpartisan group that tracks political advertising.

Obamacare Has Growing Support, Even If Its name Does Not

Washington Post // E.J. Dionne Jr.

The Affordable Care Act was supposed to be a slam-dunk issue for Republicans in this fall’s elections. Karl Rove told us so in April, writing that “Obamacare is and will remain a political problem for Democrats.” So how’s that Obamacare thing working out for the GOP? The most significant bit of election news last week was the decision of Sen. Mark Pryor, the embattled Arkansas Democrat, to run an ad touting his vote for the health care law as a positive for the people of his increasingly Republican state.

Hating on Obamacare Not Really A Great Strategy for GOP Governors

Mother Jones // Kevin Drum

Does opposing Obamacare hurt you or help you if you're a Republican governor? To find out, Sam Wang took a look at nine Republican governors who were first elected in 2010 and are now running for reelection. The chart on the right tells the story. Governors who have resisted Medicaid expansion—a key part of Obamacare, and the one that most directly affects individual states—are generally doing poorly. Those who accepted Medicaid expansion are polling pretty well.

Pennsylvania to expand Medicaid under Obamacare program

CNBC // Dan Mangan

Obamacare's continued push to expand Medicaid to nearly all poor adults nationwide got a boost Thursday as Pennsylvania was formally approved for its version of the program, which will provide health benefits to about a half-million new people. The Keystone State in 2015 will join 26 other states and the District of Columbia, which already have adopted so-called Medicaid expansion, one of the primary goals of Obamacare.

Obama Administration, Pennsylvania Governor Reach Deal to Expand Medicaid

WSJ // Louise Radnofsky

The Obama administration has reached a deal with Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Corbett to expand the state's Medicaid program to half a million low-income residents under the Affordable Care Act, state officials said. The deal makes Pennsylvania the 27th state to agree to participate in a provision of the federal health law. It also marks a win for the federal government in its efforts to coax reluctant states to grow their Medicaid programs to include everyone earning up to a third more than the federal poverty level, in the wake of a Supreme Court decision in June 2012 that allowed states to opt out.

Access Health CT leader Kevin Counihan to run federal health care exchange

New Haven Register // Christine Stuart

Recruited by the U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services, the head of Connecticut's insurance exchange will be leaving next month to start his new job in Washington D.C. Kevin Counihan, CEO of Access Health CT, will be leaving Sept. 5 to start his new job as Marketplace CEO at the Centers of Medicaid and Medicare Services. In his new position Counihan will be in charge responsible for the federal marketplace, managing relationships with state marketplaces, and running the Center for Consumer Information and Insurance Oversight, which regulated health insurance at the federal level.

More health insurers lining up for business in Indiana

Post Tribune // Christin Nance Lazerus

Indiana residents will have three times the amount of health insurance plans to choose from when the Affordable Care Act health insurance enrollment period starts in November, according to a state insurance official.

3 Alabama Health Clinics To Split \$750,000 In Grants Under Obamacare

Alabama Live // Brendan Kirby

Three Alabama health care centers will share \$750,000 in grants awarded under the Affordable Care Act, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Resources announced Tuesday. The grants are part of \$35 million that the government awarded to 147 health centers to support "patient-centered" medical homes in 44 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico.

Affordable Care Act Supports Patient-centered Medical Homes In Virginia Health Centers

Augusta Free Press // Chris Graham

Health and Human Services Secretary Sylvia M. Burwell today announced \$544,912 in Affordable Care Act funding to 3 health centers in Virginia to support patient-centered medical homes through new construction and facility renovations. Nationally, over \$35 million was awarded to 147 health centers in 44 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. "Health Centers provide access to quality health care for Virginians regardless of their ability to pay," said Secretary Burwell. "We're making these investments so that Virginia Health Centers will be able to provide even higher quality services to the patients that rely upon them."

PolitiFact Florida: GOP claim on Obamacare rated Pants on Fire

Tampa Bay Times // Joshua Gillin

Charlie Crist's vow to change Florida law about insurance regulation during a Facebook Q&A on Aug. 6 was not liked by the Republican Party of Florida. In answer to a voter's question, Crist said he would reinstate the state insurance commissioner's power to renegotiate 2015 health insurance rates in time to keep costs down. But the state Republican Party contradicted him. "Wrong, Charlie," the GOP's Facebook account wrote. "It's Obamacare that prevents OIR (the Office of Insurance Regulation) from regulating insurance ... a law that you think is great even though premiums will go up by double digits for Floridians."... So the state GOP not only misrepresented the terms of the law, but it also implied it was to blame for the state's (temporary) regulatory woes. And it was mostly Republican lawmakers who spearheaded change to Florida law after the state rejected a \$1 million federal grant to help improve the process. Most other states regulate insurance rates without the difficulty the Republican Party of Florida claimed. We rate its statement Pants on Fire!

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