

House Vote Brings Next Step For Senate Bid To Repeal ACA Individual Mandate

The next step for the Senate's move to repeal the Affordable Care Act's (ACA) individual mandate as part tax overhaul comes this week, when the House will decide whether to conference its version of the tax bill, which doesn't include the mandate repeal, with the Senate version or simply accept the upper chamber's bill as is. Another question mark is whether the final tax bill that hits the president's desk will pick up Senate language that makes it easier for people to deduct medical expenses from their taxes, or House language that would get rid of the medical tax deduction. Also unclear is whether both chambers will pass by year's end a bipartisan market stabilization bill to fund the ACA's cost-sharing reduction (CSR) payments, as well as legislation to pay for state reinsurance funds – both of which Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) endorsed at the 11th-hour of the Senate tax debate to garner GOP votes.

The Senate passed its tax bill 51-49 late Friday, with only Senator Bob Corker (R-TN) voting against party lines. The House passed its version of the bill in mid-November.

House Speaker Paul Ryan (R-WI) confirmed that he and other Republicans would like to take the bill to conference, rather than attempt to ram the Senate's version through the House.

Although the House tax bill wouldn't repeal the individual mandate, the lower chamber previously passed legislation that included a mandate repeal. President Donald Trump also threw his support behind

the Senate's repeal measure last week. Also to be worked out: The Senate bill also would raise the medical expense deduction threshold from 7.5 to 10 percent, whereas the House bill would scrap the deduction.

Questions also remain as to when and how both Houses will make good on a deal brokered between Senator Susan Collins (R-ME) and the president to provide states \$10 billion in reinsurance funding over two years and to fund CSRs. Collins earlier this week backed off her opposition to the inclusion of the individual mandate repeal in the tax bill after getting Trump to throw his support behind her legislation to create a federal reinsurance program and the Alexander-Murray market stabilization bill to fund the ACA's cost-sharing reduction payments.

As part of her deal, the two bills would be considered and signed into law before the conference report on the tax bill came back to the Senate.

Senate health committee Chair Lamar Alexander (R-TN) said he was optimistic that the CSR and reinsurance legislation could become law by the end of the year. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) also said he would support passage of both bills before year's end.

Collins also secured a deal with McConnell and Ryan to override the 4 percent cut to Medicare provider-payment rates that would have been triggered by the Republican tax legislation.