

House Considers Opioid Bills

By Andrew Siddons, CQ Roll Call

The House began floor consideration of legislation to combat opioid and heroin abuse Tuesday, debating five bills on the issue with more queued up for Wednesday.

The five measures appeared to have the votes to pass later Tuesday or Wednesday. Among them was a bill (HR 4063) to update pain management practices for military service members and veterans and two measures (HR 4958, S 32) that would make it easier for the U.S. to prosecute foreign drug traffickers.

The House also prepared to pass a bill (HR 5048) to assess state laws that protect people who help overdose victims and a measure (HR 5052) that would require the departments of Justice and Health and Human Services to report on the success of opioid-related grants the agencies issue. All measures were considered under suspension of the rules, which requires a two-thirds affirmative vote for passage.

Meanwhile, the Rules Committee was poised later Tuesday to weigh parameters for floor debate for two more prominent opioid-related bills. The panel will determine which amendments may be considered and set the stage for roll call votes later in the week.

The panel was given a slew of potential amendments to consider. For a bill (HR 4641) that would establish a federal pain-management task force made up of government officials and public health experts, 27 amendments were submitted.

The most significant Democratic provision comes from Rep. Joe Courtney of Connecticut. That amendment would provide \$600 million in emergency supplemental funds for HHS and Justice officials to carry out opioid-focused programs. Even if the Rules Committee allows that amendment, Republicans would be unlikely to support it during floor debate.

Other amendments would require the task force to gather information on alternative pain treatments, including medical marijuana. Several amendments from Rep. Frank Guinta, R-N.H., would establish grant programs at HHS and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

The Rules Committee also will set up the debate for the centerpiece of the House opioid legislation, a bill (HR 5046) that would authorize around \$100 million in Justice Department grants to expand programs to treat opioid abuse or prevent overdoses.

Lawmakers submitted 31 amendments for that bill, including the funding provision from Courtney. An amendment from Reps. Phil Roe, R-Tenn., and Ami Bera, D-Calif., would allow the grant funds to be used for programs that help people dispose of unused or expired prescription drugs. Other proposed amendments would allow the grants to be used for prescription drug monitoring programs and training medical practitioners.

On Wednesday, the House is set to consider 11 more bills under suspension of the rules, and hold a vote on the pain management task force bill. The measures being considered under suspension include a bill (HR 1818) that would make it easier for doctors and patients to have opioid prescriptions only partially filled and a bill (HR 3680) to promote the practice of prescribing overdose reversal drugs alongside opioid painkillers.