

Republican Vows Action on Health Costs, Transparency in Panel

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Reporter

House Energy and Commerce Chair Brett Guthrie promised Wednesday to move a health care affordability bill in his committee during a health subcommittee hearing in which lawmakers grilled hospitals and providers over skyrocketing costs.

“I was committed to transparent competition in health care. And I am telling you, I am committed not to just moving a bill, I’m committed to getting it done,” said the Kentucky Republican, and who relayed his motivation due to his wife’s recent experiences with the medical system, in which she received a \$28,000 bill and was referred to a medical debt collector despite having health insurance.

Republicans are increasingly acknowledging health care is an emerging vulnerability for them in this year’s midterm elections. Guthrie’s call means the party could move on legislation, and he pressed the panel on reducing costs and improving hospital bill transparency.

The witnesses acknowledged the frustration among consumers. “Health care pricing is utterly irrational, and it is not related to quality, it’s basically whatever a hospital can charge,” said Elizabeth Mitchell, president and CEO of the Purchaser Business Group on Health, which represents top U.S. private employers. Mitchell suggested that Congress should enforce hospital price sharing.

Hospitals “are balancing rising costs across the board,” said Rick Pollack, the president of the American Hospital Association trade group, and argued they are facing growing levels of uncompensated care after the federal overhauls to Medicaid and expired Obamacare enhanced tax credits.

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