

Vol. 69, Issue 26

Thursday, June 26, 2025

Parliamentarian Rules out Key Medicaid Provisions in One Big Beautiful Bill

On June 26, the U.S. Senate Parliamentarian ruled that key Medicaid provisions from the One Big Beautiful Bill Act violated the Byrd Rule, essentially saying they cannot be included in the reconciliation package in their current form.

This comes after the Senate Finance Committee introduced its proposed changes to Medicaid provisions of the reconciliation language. WHA has continued to warn members of Wisconsin's Congressional delegation about the unfair Medicaid provisions in the legislation that have a disproportionate impact on Wisconsin.

As detailed in a previous edition of *The Valued Voice*, the House provisions would freeze Wisconsin's low provider tax in place, while allowing other states to keep the federal funding and higher Medicaid reimbursements generated by having provider taxes more than three times the rate of Wisconsin.

The Senate Finance Committee's proposal would go even further than the House, by gradually winding down the provider tax and the directed payments such taxes generate. Non-expansion states would see the limit go down 0.5% per year starting in 2027 until they reach 3.5%. Meanwhile, directed payments would also be reduced by 10% per year starting in 2027 until they reach 100% of Medicare rates for expansion states and or 110% of Medicare rates for non-expansion states.

WHA has continued to express concerns to Wisconsin's Congressional Delegation over how these proposals continue to treat Wisconsin unfairly compared to other states. While WHA is working with Governor Tony Evers and legislative leaders on an increase to the hospital assessment and state directed Medicaid reimbursements in the same way other states have done, actions by Congress could sweep the rug out from under Wisconsin if the One Big Beautiful Bill Act passes in its current form before a state budget is enacted.

WHA activated its grassroots HEAT alert network again earlier this week, urging hospital leaders to contact their federal officials urging them to oppose this legislation so long as it continues to treat Wisconsin unfairly. WHA also continues to be in close contact with federal legislative offices to urge them to contact House and Senate leadership with the request that flexibility be provided for Wisconsin.

As of publishing time, it was unclear how Senate Republicans intend to move forward with these key Medicaid provisions being ruled out. Some news reports have suggested that Republican Senate leadership is holding firm to the idea it can still start votes on the budget reconciliation as soon as Friday, with debate on amendments continuing over the weekend. This would all be in an attempt to send the bill back to the House for votes and then to President Trump before his preferred July 4 deadline.

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Trump Administration Announces Agreement by Health Insurers to Improve Prior Authorization Processes

WHA continues to advocate for passage of prior authorization reform legislation

On June 23, top federal health officials announced an agreement by a group of private health insurers to voluntarily make improvements to their prior authorization processes.

Under the voluntary agreement announced this week by Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. and Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services Administrator Dr. Mehmet Oz, participating health insurers pledged to standardize and streamline prior authorizations in their Medicare Advantage, Medicaid Managed Care, Health Insurance Marketplace and commercial plans.

According to HHS, the health insurers committed to standardizing electronic prior authorization submissions, including by expanding real-time approvals to 80% of prior authorizations and reducing the number of services requiring prior authorization, by 2027.

The announcement comes about a month after re-introduction of a WHA-backed bipartisan bill in Congress meant to curb prior authorization abuse in Medicare Advantage. The Improving Seniors Timely Access to Care Act seeks to provide federal statutory protections against prior authorization abuse. While the voluntary announcement is a welcomed development, the federal legislation would require specific transparency measures of health insurers relating to their use of prior authorization, as well as enforcement mechanisms to hold them accountable.

WHA will continue to support this important federal legislation and is exploring other efforts to reduce the burden of prior authorization on health care providers and the patients they serve.

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WHA Board Convenes for June Meeting Amid Fast-Moving State and Federal Policy Activity

The Wisconsin Hospital Association (WHA) Board of Directors met in Madison on June 19 for a full agenda, including strategic updates, key advocacy discussions and special recognitions for outgoing board members.

State and Federal Advocacy: High Stakes, Intersecting Timelines

WHA's Government Relations team provided an in-depth update on concurrent and complex deliberations occurring at both the state and federal levels. For the first time in recent memory, both the state and federal budgets are advancing on nearly parallel tracks, with significant implications for Wisconsin hospitals.

Key among the challenges are critical discussions around provider assessments. Board members engaged in robust discussion about how outcomes at one level could significantly affect the other.

WHA Quality Department Celebrates Major Grant Awards

WHA Clinical Quality Improvement Manager Jenny Pritchett shared important updates on new grant-supported quality initiatives. WHA was recognized through Superior Health Quality Alliance's 13th Scope of Work award from Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) and the Landmark Initiative by the Advancing a Healthier Wisconsin (AHW) Endowment.

These recognitions affirm WHA's foundational role in shaping health care quality efforts across Wisconsin and beyond. Through the new CMS contract, WHA and its partners will support Medicare quality improvement across 14 states. The AHW award will allow WHA to work with the Dr. Lorna Breen Heroes Foundation to implement workforce well-being strategies in health care organizations throughout Wisconsin.

Special Recognitions

The meeting concluded with special recognitions for outgoing board members – Chris Woleske, Scott Turner and Gordy Lewis.

Woleske, President of Bellin Health and Executive Vice President of Bellin and Gundersen Health System at Emplify Health, will retire on June 30, 2025. Woleske has been a long-standing and deeply engaged WHA leader since 2016. Over the years, she has contributed meaningfully to WHA's mission through active service, advocacy and thought leadership. Woleske was consistently a top supporter of the Wisconsin Hospitals PAC & Conduit. In 2023, Woleske received the WHA Distinguished Service Award, recognizing her exceptional service and leadership with the organization and Wisconsin's health care community.

"Chris has been the exemplar WHA member and board member in so many ways it's hard to recount them all. She has served on the WHA board since 2016, and among other things, participated in some critical board work groups during that time, including helping lead our strategic plan development in 2019 and 2022. The list of her contributions to WHA and our work is so impressive, but I will forever be grateful to Chris for her engagement and counsel during the COVID pandemic. She helped us, and her state and local colleagues, including from different health systems, and the WI Department of Health Services navigate some unprecedented challenges," said Borgerding.

"I was very proud and truly honored to present my friend Chris with the well-deserved WHA Distinguished Service Award in 2023, and again recognize her at our June board gathering, her final meeting. Chris leaves a true and admirable imprint on Wisconsin health care. We wish Chris, who is also a proud new Grandma, a wonderful retirement," Borgerding continued.



Chris Woleske and Eric Borgerding



of the Wisconsin Hospital Association's leadership since joining the WHA Board of Directors in 2022. During his tenure, Turner was a regular participant in WHA's flagship advocacy and educational events, including his personal commitment to political advocacy through the Wisconsin Hospitals PAC & Conduit.

"Scott Turner has been a valued member of the WHA Board, bringing thoughtful insight to our work. While we're sad to see him leave Wisconsin, we're grateful for his service and leadership during a critical time for our state's health care system. We wish Scott all the best in his new role and know he will continue to make a positive impact wherever he serves," said Borgerding.

Lewis, CEO of Burnett Medical Center, is retiring on June 30, 2025 after a distinguished career of leadership in rural health care and deep, sustained engagement with the Wisconsin Hospital Association. Lewis

has served on the WHA Board since 2010 participating in many policy committees, including Public Policy Council, Advocacy Committee, Telemedicine Taskforce, Council on Rural Health and Council on Finance and Payment. He has been a strong grassroots advocate and consistent supporter of the Wisconsin Hospitals PAC & Conduit.

Borgerding said, "Gordy Lewis has been a rock-solid leader for rural health care in Wisconsin and a committed, trusted voice within WHA since 2010. His insight, candor and deep concern for patients and communities have made him an indispensable part of our advocacy and policy work. As Gordy enters retirement, we thank him for his exceptional service and wish him the very best in this well-earned next chapter."



Gordy Lewis

Borgerding's Final Board Meeting



Dr. Jeff Bahr recognized Eric Borgerding for his 27 years at WHA.

Finally, the WHA Board took the final minutes of the meeting to recognize and celebrate the leadership of WHA President and CEO Eric Borgerding, who will retire on June 30, 2025, after 27 years with the organization—including the past 10 as CEO. In a heartfelt tribute, WHA Board Chair Dr. Jeff Bahr delivered remarks that cleverly wove in song titles and lyrics from Rush, Eric's favorite band, offering both humor and sincere appreciation for Borgerding's legacy.

Borgerding, who will continue in an advisory capacity through the end of 2025, thanked the Board, saying: "Representing Wisconsin's hospitals and health systems has been the honor of a lifetime. I've had the privilege to work with some of the most talented, mission-driven people in health care and public policy—inside and outside WHA. I'm grateful for every moment, and I know WHA's best days are still ahead with Kyle and this incredible team at the helm."

Incoming President and CEO, WHA's Senior Vice President of Government Relations Kyle O'Brien, will assume leadership on July 1, 2025, becoming only the seventh chief executive

officer in WHA's 105-year history.

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Help Us Cross the Halfway Mark – Support the Wisconsin Hospitals PAC & Conduit Today



As we reach the midpoint of 2025, the Wisconsin Hospitals State PAC & Conduit campaign is gaining momentum. To date, 96 individuals have contributed a total of \$146,000—putting us at 41% of our \$350,000 goal. Thank you to everyone who has already supported this effort!

With six months to go, now is the perfect time to make your personal contribution and be counted among the leaders helping to shape sound health care policy in Wisconsin.

An updated list of contributors will be published next week in the July 3 edition of *The Valued Voice*—make your contribution today to ensure your name appears on it!

And now it's easier than ever to contribute—the WH PAC & Conduit contribution form now accepts Apple Pay and Google Pay, giving you secure, one-click options to complete your commitment in seconds.

Whether you've given in previous years or are considering a first-time contribution, your support makes a difference.

Contribute here.

For questions about the WH PAC & Conduit or how to contribute, contact Kari Hofer or Nora Statsick.

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Dr. Mark Thompson Returns to Wisconsin to Lead Upland Hills Health

Longtime WHA leader named President & CEO

Dr. Mark Thompson has been named the next president and CEO of Upland Hills Health (UHH) in Dodgeville, effective September 15. A seasoned health care executive and longtime WHA leader, Thompson returns to Wisconsin to lead the rural health organization following a national search conducted by the UHH Board of Trustees. He succeeds WHA Board Member Lisa Schnedler, who is retiring after 12 years of service.

Thompson brings more than 25 years of health care leadership experience to the role, having served in senior clinical and administrative positions across large health systems and community-based hospitals in Wisconsin and beyond. Most recently, he served as market president for the western district of Essentia Health. His previous roles include president of medical groups and chief clinical officer at SSM Health.

In addition to his professional accomplishments, Thompson has been a highly engaged leader within WHA. He served multiple terms on WHA's Board of Directors as an at-large physician member (2017–2023) and contributed extensively through WHA's Councils on Public Policy, Workforce Development and the Physician Leaders Council, among others. He was also an active participant in WHA events and webinars and a consistent supporter of the Wisconsin Hospitals PAC and Conduit.



Mark Thompson, MD

"Dr. Thompson has long been a valued contributor to WHA's work to strengthen health care in Wisconsin," said WHA President and CEO Eric Borgerding. "His leadership, especially on workforce and physician issues, has made a meaningful impact. We congratulate him on this well-deserved appointment and look forward to continuing our partnership as he takes on this important role at Upland Hills Health."

In a statement on his appointment, Thompson said, "I am honored to accept the role of president and CEO at Upland Hills Health and am deeply inspired by the organization's exceptional culture and unwavering dedication to excellence. UHH stands as a model of compassionate, high-quality care, and I am committed to advancing our shared mission of delivering leading-edge healthcare services to the rural communities we serve."

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Register for Aug. 8 WHA Financial Workshop

Hospital finance leaders and staff are invited to attend an in-person workshop focused on key state and federal regulatory updates, current compliance requirements and the evolving health care finance landscape. This one-day event also offers a valuable opportunity to connect and network with peers from critical access hospitals across Wisconsin.

This workshop will provide practical insights into financial strategy, regulatory updates and tools to help you lead with confidence and clarity. Whether you're a seasoned executive or an emerging leader, the content is tailored to support your success in navigating today's financial challenges.

- **Date/Time:** August 8, 2025, 9 a.m. – 3 p.m.
- **Location:** Rural Wisconsin Health Cooperative, 880 Independence Lane, Sauk City, WI 53583
- **Register here:** WHA Financial Workshop
- **Cost:** \$50

Spots are limited, so register soon and share this opportunity with your colleagues. We hope to see you there!

For questions regarding the content of this event, contact WHA Clinical Quality Improvement Manager Jenny Pritchett.

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Gundersen Partners of WHA Celebrates 75 Years

On June 17, the Gundersen Partners of WHA celebrated their 75th anniversary. WHA Vice President of Education and Marketing and Partners of WHA liaison Leigh Ann Larson joined the celebration at The Waterfront in La Crosse.

The celebration included remarks by Gundersen Partners President Jill Blackburn; City of La Crosse Mayor, the Honorable Shaundel Washington-Spivey; and Josh Court, clinical operations director of inpatient behavioral health for Emplify Health by Gundersen. The group also heard from Marilyn McElligott, recipient of the Gundersen Partners Ambassador/Advocate Award for her 50+ years of volunteerism.

Gundersen Partners serves as a group of caring, committed individuals dedicated to enhancing patient and family care, health care education and community well-being through service and giving.

WHA congratulates Gundersen Partners on this historic and remarkable milestone.



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