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House Decision To Vote On Senate SCHIP Bill Offers Reprieve To Specialty Hospitals

The House Rules Committee Tuesday evening (Feb. 3) approved a measure that allows the House to take up the Senate-passed SCHIP reauthorization bill, and in doing so scuttled a long-time legislative effort to outlaw most physician-owned specialty hospitals.

Provisions of the House bill would have forced most specialty hospitals to close their doors, but the latest legislative move appears to have offered the providers another lease on life.

Republican amendments in the committee were voted down 7 -2. Rep. Michael Burgess (R-TX) offered a pair of amendments to require documentation for patients seeking coverage under the program and to create an asset verification requirement for SCHIP.

Rep. Tom Price (R-GA) offered an amendment that would have replaced the underlying bill with language to reauthorize the program and provide coverage for five years for children who live in families at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty limit. Also voted down was a measure that would have provided a tax credit for those who live between 200 percent and 300 percent of the FPL. Price's amendment also would have altered the current proof-of-citizenship requirements in the bill, limited eligibility based on net assets and expanded private insurance through premium assistance.

Price is an orthopedic surgeon and Burgess an obstetrician/gynecologist and both sit on the House Energy and Commerce Committee.

The move by Rules paves the way for final approval of the bill, giving congressional Democrats -- and President Barack Obama -- a needed win after a series of controversies have cast a pall over a number of the administration's cabinet nominees (see related story http://insidehealthpolicy.com/secure/health_docnum.asp?f=health_2001.ask&docnum=232009_exit).

Washington insiders are predicting final approval for the bill and expect it to be on Obama's desk by week's end.--Brett Coughlin (bcoughlin@iwpnews.com <<mailto:bcoughlin@iwpnews.com>>)