REPUBLICAN AGENDA
President Trump and Republican congressional leaders met recently at Camp David to discuss the 2018 Republican agenda. Attendees included Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) and Speaker of the House Paul Ryan (R-WI). The meeting included discussion of a fourth CR to fund the federal government for the remainder of FY 2018. Other long-term agenda items for President Trump include entitlement reform, infrastructure spending, immigration reform, and healthcare.

THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE
Congress faces a significant number of priorities to address in a very short time. The most pressing of them, funding for the federal government beyond January 19, will likely consume significant attention through much of the first quarter of 2018. Again, this is the most significant opportunity to make meaningful progress on the Medicare O&P Improvement Act in the past several years.

New HHS Secretary Expected to be Confirmed
On January 9, the Senate Finance Committee convened a hearing to consider the nomination of Alex Azar for Secretary of the HHS. The Finance Committee has jurisdiction over major aspects of the U.S. healthcare system, including Medicare, Medicaid, and CHIP. Azar is expected to be confirmed.

Orrin Hatch (R-Utah) to Retire
On January 2, Senator Orrin Hatch announced his plans to retire at the end of the year. Elected in 1976, Senator Hatch is the longest-serving Republican senator. The senator’s retirement opens a Senate seat in Utah, which many analysts expect former Massachusetts governor and former presidential candidate Mitt Romney (R-MA) to pursue. Senator Hatch is the chairman of the Senate Committee on Finance, a member of the Judiciary Committee, and a member of the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee. He perhaps plays the largest role in the fate of the Medicare O&P Improvement Act as the bill is subject to the jurisdiction of the Senate Finance Committee.

Two Democratic Senators Confirmed
Senators Doug Jones (D-AL) and Tina Smith (D-MN) were sworn in on January 3. Senator Jones recently won a special election to fill the seat of former Senator Jeff Sessions (R-AL), who gave up his seat to become attorney general. Senator Smith, the former lieutenant governor of Minnesota, was appointed as a replacement for former Senator Al Franken (D-MN), who resigned from the Senate on January 2 following allegations of sexual harassment. Smith plans to run in the November special election to complete the remaining two years of Franken’s term. The Republican Senate majority is now 51-49.

POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT
Several significant developments have already occurred in 2018.

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