

2025: New Year, New President, New Congress, New HLAA Advocacy Efforts

BY NEIL SNYDER

Here is what is happening in Washington, the Nation's Capital, as we look at policy relating to people with hearing loss. Advocacy at HLAA means maintaining our focus, staying committed to our mission and being responsive to the latest information. HLAA members and supporters can expect new advocacy tools to engage and advocate for access to the hearing world and more.

The year 2025 ushered in the 47th president of the United States, the 119th Congress and the 45th year of hearing advocacy by the Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA). This new year brings many changes that HLAA is closely monitoring and advocating for.

These changes include a new president, a new Republican majority in the Senate, the preservation of their majority in the House of Representatives, new chairs of key congressional committees and new leadership at federal departments and agencies.

With any new administration there are positions open for cabinet secretaries and other government officials. For example, at the time of this writing, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has a commissioner vacancy. The FCC has authority over captioning and other accessibility for phones (including cell/smartphones), television, broadcast, and streaming services, which must provide access to these services, platforms, and devices.

President Trump is expected to submit a budget request for the next federal fiscal year (October 2025–September 2026). That request will lay out the new president's funding and policy priorities and will set the tone for the 119th Congress.

Key Committees We Follow and Why

HLAA is a staunch supporter of the Communications, Video, and Technology Accessibility (CVTA) Act of 2023, which updates the Communications and Video Accessibility Act (CVAA) of 2010. This legislation will ensure that people with disabilities have full access to the ever-expanding video programming options on television and the Internet. It will also guarantee that

our community is included in all aspects of daily living through accessible communication technologies as these continue to evolve. Senator Edward Markey (D-MA), the Senate sponsor of the CVTA, has returned for the 119th Congress.

In the House of Representatives, Congresswoman Anna Eshoo (D-CA), the former ranking Democrat on the Energy and Commerce Committee who sponsored H.R.4858, the House version of CVTA, retired from Congress in 2024. Representative Debbie Dingell (D-MI) indicated she will become the new bill sponsor. HLAA and its partner consumer and disability organizations will be advocating to reintroduce an updated version of this legislation in 2025.

Representative Cathy McMorris Rodgers (R-WA), former chair of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, the committee with jurisdiction over hearing aids and cellphones, has retired. In early 2025, Representative Bret Guthrie (R-KY) was elected by his colleagues to replace her as chairman and Representative Frank Pallone (D-NJ) was elected as the ranking Democrat of this committee.

The House Ways and Means Committee has jurisdiction over federal tax policy, including the funding and coverage of Medicaid and Medicare. Since tax legislation enacted under President Trump in 2017 is set to expire in 2025, Congress will need to consider whether to continue, modify, replace and/or enact new tax policies in 2025. In addition, legislation that would expand Medicare coverage of hearing aids and provide tax credits for hearing aid purchases is expected to be introduced in 2025. HLAA will be advocating for the passage of these bills.

In the U.S. Senate, Senator Mitch McConnell (R-TN), the longest-serving party leader in Senate history, has stepped down from that role but will finish his term ending in 2027. Senator John Thune (R-SD) was elected to be the new Republican Party leader and Senator Charles Schumer (D-NY) was re-elected to his role as Democratic Party leader in the 119th Congress.

Senate committees of interest to HLAA and its members also include the Commerce Committee, the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP)

Committee, and the Finance Committee. The Commerce Committee, now led by Chairman Senator Ted Cruz (R-TX) and Ranking Member Senator Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), oversees the FCC.

The HELP Committee, now chaired by Senator Bill Cassidy (R-LA) and Ranking Member Senator Bernie Sanders (D-VT), has jurisdiction over Medicare, Medicaid, and the FDA. Finally, the Finance Committee, which covers tax legislation including funding the Medicare program, will be led by Chairman Senator Mike Crapo (R-ID) and Ranking Member Senator Ron Wyden (D-OR).

You Can Take Action with HLAA's New Advocacy Tool

In February 2025, HLAA launched a new legislative advocacy tool to expand our ability to engage members and direct their advocacy efforts. Integrated into our website, it enables HLAA members and supporters to easily view and act on policy and legislative issues happening before Congress, as well as state initiatives. The tool will seamlessly list the issues and bills that HLAA is supporting or opposing, identify your U.S. representative and senators and provide model emails to send to them—complementing our “boots on the ground” advocacy before Congress and the administration in Washington, D.C. You can access it at hearingloss.org/action-alerts.

HLAA Appointments—Representing You

Over at the Department of Transportation (DOT), HLAA will be advocating for the issuance of accessibility regulations as promised in the recent Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Reauthorization Act. In September 2024, HLAA's Director of Public Policy Neil Snyder was appointed by Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg to serve on the Air Carrier Accessibility Advisory Board for a two-year term. The Advisory Board is tasked with assessing the existing and emerging disability-related access barriers for passengers with disabilities; evaluating the extent to which the department's programs and activities are eliminating disability-related access barriers; and recommending actions to improve the air travel experience of passengers with disabilities.

Similarly, HLAA Executive Director Barbara Kelley and Neil Snyder serve on the Disability Advisory Committee (DAC) at the FCC. The DAC provides a means for stakeholders with interests in accessibility issues to exchange ideas, facilitates the participation of consumers with disabilities in proceedings before the Commission, and assists the Commission in educating the greater disability community and covered entities on disability-



Neil Snyder (third from right) with the Defense Health Research Consortium on Capitol Hill, February 20, 2025.



Barbara Kelley and Neil Snyder at the National Institutes of Health (NIH), June 21, 2024.



Barbara Kelley, Neil Snyder and Linda Kozma-Spytek, HLAA Technology Adviser, at the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), October 17, 2024.

related matters. The DAC keeps the Commission apprised of current and evolving communications issues for people with disabilities.

Barbara Kelley also serves on the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Council of Councils. The Council advises the NIH Director on matters related to the policies and activities of the Division of Program Coordination, Planning, and Strategic Initiatives (DPCPSI).

Finally, HLAA will continue to monitor and work with our colleagues at the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), since it has authority over hearing aids as medical devices. Prescription and over-the-counter (OTC) hearing aid users who encounter issues with their hearing devices can file complaints with the FDA. **HL**

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