

"McConnell sided with conservatives eager to dramatically slow the program's growth, and laid into Portman for opposing it. 'As OMB director, you backed entitlement reform,' he said, according to multiple GOP sources in the leadership meeting. Portman was Office of Management and Budget director under President George W. Bush, and McConnell was implying that Portman had changed his stance from when he worked in the White House.

"But Portman, who has backed individual spending caps for Medicaid under the GOP plan but not the slower growth, was having none of it. 'The leadership has overreached on this bill,' Portman shot back." <http://politi.co/2sptlpN>

-- THE FRUSTRATION IS GROWING ... -- "Republicans frustrated as their to-do list grows: The GOP agenda is stalled, and even more difficult votes loom," by Rachael Bade and Burgess Everett. <http://politi.co/2tojnJA>

BEHIND-THE-SCENES -- "How the push for a Senate health-care vote fell apart amid GOP tensions," by WaPo's Bob Costa, Sean Sullivan, Juliet Eilperin and Kelsey Snell. <http://wapo.st/2sTuj0Y>

-- ON FOX: "As GOP buckles down on health care, conservative media loses interest," by WaPo's Dave Weigel: "The network's prime-time shows, ratings kings of cable news, ignored the health-care story. Fox's 8 p.m. and 10 p.m. shows began with stories about a sting video that caught a CNN producer dismissing his network's coverage of Russia and the 2016 election. 'The Five,' Fox's 9 p.m. show, began with the 'bombshell' news that President Barack Obama had said - in October 2016 - that it would be 'impossible' to rig the election. Nine minutes were spent on the Senate bill before a segue way into the CNN story." <http://wapo.st/2s4UrmU>

******* A message from the Coalition for Affordable Prescription Drugs (CAPD):** A new study found that pharmacy benefit managers (PBMs) reduced spending in Medicare Part D by 58 percent in 2014, driving down costs for the government, taxpayers, and beneficiaries. The study forecasts that PBMs will save \$1,800 per Medicare beneficiary, per year over the next ten years. Learn more at affordableprescriptiondrugs.org *****

THE BIG QUESTION, via AP'S JULIE PACE: "GOP ponders whether Trump helps sell health care": "It was a platform most politicians can only hope for: A captivated, 6,000-person crowd and more than an hour of live, prime-time television coverage to

hype the Republican vision for a new health care system. But when President Donald Trump got around to talking about the Republican plan - about 15 minutes into his speech - he was wildly off message. Instead of preaching party lines about getting the government out of Americans' health decisions and cutting costs, he declared: 'Add some money to it!'

"The moment captured a major dilemma for Republicans as they look for ways to jumpstart their stalled health care overhaul. A master salesman, Trump has an inimitable ability to command attention, and that could be used to bolster Americans' support for Republican efforts and ramp up pressure on wavering lawmakers. But some lawmakers and congressional aides privately bemoan his thin grasp of the bill's principles, and worry that his difficulty staying on message will do more harm than good. 'You know, he's very personable and people like talking to him and he's very embracing of that, so there will be certain people he'd like to talk to,' said Sen. Bob Corker, R-Tenn. 'But I'd let Mitch handle it,' he continued, referring to the lead role Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell has played thus far.'"

<http://apne.ws/2skdVbq>

DEPT. OF POLITICAL MALPRACTICE -- "Senate Democrats Sought to Work With Trump. Then He Began Governing," by NYT's Jennifer Steinhauer: "Rather than taking advantage of his honeymoon phase to pick an issue on which Democrats from conservative states might be amenable - fixing the nation's crumbling infrastructure, cutting taxes or stiffening immigration laws - Mr. Trump raced toward the most partisan corner of the room, pushing to repeal the health care law with no input from Democrats, in a manner that has proved deeply unpopular. ...

"I am a moderate from a state Trump won," said Senator Claire McCaskill, Democrat of Missouri, who is up for re-election next year in a state where Hillary Clinton received just 38 percent of the vote. 'You'd think they would have called me sometime.' 'I am ready to work with President Trump on things like infrastructure. I happen to agree with him on the water rule,' she added, referring to a regulation that Mr. Trump is seeking to roll back. "These are just lower priorities for them, I guess."

With a Scott Mulhauser cameo <http://nyti.ms/2sTU8Ol>

TRUMP'S THURSDAY -- TRUMP is going to the Department of Energy to "give remarks at the Unleashing American Energy event." The president and first lady are hosting South Korean President Moon Jae-in at the White House for a reception and dinner.