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August Recess Is Fully Underway As Senate Finishes Legislative Business

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The Senate recessed this afternoon, beginning a four-week recess that will continue through Labor Day. The House recessed at the end of last week. Both chambers are scheduled to reconvene on Tuesday, September 8.

Health reform will be a high profile issue throughout the recess, as lawmakers hold town hall meetings and prepare for the next round of legislative activity in September. While Congress is no longer in session, some lawmakers will continue to be actively engaged in negotiations over legislation. In the Senate Finance Committee, a bipartisan group of six senators are working to develop a bipartisan health reform bill. Sen. Max Baucus (D-MT), the committee chairman, has indicated that the senators will be meeting by video conference during the recess, and that they also may meet in person. Baucus signaled this week that he hopes to reach an agreement by September 15, but the Republican negotiators emphasized that they do not want to be constrained by a specific deadline. Any bill produced by the Finance Committee will be merged, prior to the Senate floor debate, with the reform bill that was approved by the Senate HELP Committee bill on July 14.

On the other side of the Capitol, House leaders will be working to merge the three separate versions of H.R. 3200, the "America's Affordable Health Choices Act," that have been approved by the House Energy and Commerce Committee, the House Ways and Means Committee, and the House Education and Labor Committee. The House Rules Committee also will play a significant role in combining these bills.

Appropriations Bills Await Congressional Action in September

When Congress reconvenes in September, completion of the annual appropriations bills for fiscal year 2010 will be a high priority that lawmakers will devote considerable time and energy to this fall.

To date, the House has approved 12 of the annual spending bills and the Senate has approved four. After winning approval in both chambers, all 12 bills will need to go through conference committee deliberations before they can be signed into



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law by the President. October 1 is the beginning of the new fiscal year, although Congress is unlikely to finalize all of the appropriations bills before that deadline.

H.R. 3293, the "Labor, Health and Human Services (HHS), and Education Appropriations Act," provides funding for dozens of federal programs and agencies within the Department of HHS. The House approved its version of this bill on July 24 by a vote of 264 to 153. The Senate version was approved by the Senate Appropriations Committee on July 30.

Notable appropriations in H.R. 3293 include the following:

- **State High-Risk Pools:** \$65 million in the House bill; \$0 in the Senate bill. This funding would assist states in covering the operational costs of high-risk pools that offer a safety net for people with high medical costs.
- **State Health Access Grants:** \$75 million in both the House and Senate bills. This funding would support state initiatives to cover the uninsured.
- **AHRQ Research on Health Costs, Quality, and Outcomes:** \$309 million in the House bill; \$314 million in the Senate bill. Within these amounts are included \$12.5 million for comparative effectiveness research in the House bill and \$50 million for comparative effectiveness research in the Senate bill. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 previously provided \$1.1 billion for such research.

The American Senior Benefits Association (ASBA) is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit association where membership is completely free. ASBA is committed to lifestyle enhancement through benefits, advocacy and education for the over-50 population. ASBA concentrates its efforts on the issues that are of greatest concern to its members. Through its partners and programs, ASBA members receive product and service discounts, as well as other benefits. Current ASBA membership stands at over 500,000 nationally.