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Super Committee Approaches Deadline; Congress Takes Action to Prevent Government Shutdown

AHIP, Washington Update, 11/18/2011

The Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction is just five days away from its deadline for approving recommendations to reduce the federal budget deficit. Meanwhile, Congress made progress this week toward the goal of finalizing the fiscal year 2012 appropriations process.

Super Committee Update

Members and staff on the Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction are planning to work through the weekend in a final effort to reach a bipartisan agreement before the November 23 deadline. There have been no visible signs of progress in recent days, and participants in the negotiations increasingly are voicing frustration about the current impasse in the committee's deliberations. Still, a number of Democrats and Republicans are continuing to push for a breakthrough to prevent the across-the-board sequestration that would be triggered if the committee fails to recommend at least \$1.2 trillion in deficit reduction.

The Joint Select Committee may convene a meeting at some point next week to vote on deficit reduction recommendations and provide an opportunity for committee members to make statements. If a bipartisan agreement is not achieved, there is a possibility that the committee will vote on competing Democratic and Republican plans, neither of which would be expected to win approval. Any plans considered by the committee, whether partisan or bipartisan, are likely to target health care programs – with both provider cuts and beneficiary cuts – for a portion of the budget savings. A two-step process, under which congressional committees would be charged with developing tax reforms and entitlement reforms next year, also continues to be on the table.

At this late stage of the process, members of the Joint Select Committee are focusing mostly on policy proposals that already have been scored by the Congressional Budget Office (CBO). Therefore, if an agreement is reached early next week, the need for a CBO score is not expected to prevent the committee from voting before the November 23 deadline.

Appropriations Update

On November 17, both the House and the Senate voted to approve the final version of a "minibus" spending bill (H.R. 2112) that consolidates three of the 12 annual appropriations bills into one legislative package. This bill was approved by a vote of 298 to 121 in the House and by a vote of 70 to 30 in the Senate. President Obama signed this measure into law earlier today.



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This bill includes language that extends temporary funding through December 16 for federal programs and agencies that have not yet received appropriations for the fiscal year that began on October 1. The federal government previously was operating under a “continuing resolution” that expires today.

Enactment of the new continuing resolution will prevent a government shutdown at this time. However, further legislative action will be needed by December 16 to finalize the appropriations process for fiscal year 2012. The pace of legislative action on the unfinished appropriations bills (including funding for agencies and programs within the Department of Health and Human Services) – along with consideration of possible recommendations from the Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction – will significantly influence when Congress completes its 2011 session.

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