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President Obama and Republican Leaders Address Health Reform in Post-Election Comments

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Following the November 2 mid-term elections, President Obama and Republican leaders held press conferences or delivered speeches in which they discussed their respective priorities in the new post-election political environment.

The President emphasized at a November 3 press conference that he is committed to finding common ground with Republicans to address the nation's economic challenges and other key issues. In response to a question about health reform, the President said he is open to considering Republican ideas to improve the health care system, but he cautioned that he does not want to re-litigate the arguments of the past two years. The President signaled that he is looking forward to receiving the recommendations of the National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform, and he emphasized the need for additional measures to create jobs, encourage businesses to invest, and reduce the federal budget deficit.

House Republican Leader John Boehner (R-OH) commented on the health reform law at a November 3 press conference, stating that "we have to do everything we can to try to repeal this bill and replace it with common sense reforms that will bring down the cost of health insurance." Boehner expressed concern that the law, if left in place, will kill jobs, ruin the health care system, and bankrupt the nation.

Yesterday, Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) delivered a speech at the Heritage Foundation in which he expressed interest in repealing health reform, but acknowledged that legislation to repeal the new law would not be signed by the President. McConnell stated: "So we'll also have to work in the House on denying funds for implementation, and in the Senate on votes against its most egregious provisions."

Congress Poised to Resume Legislative Business on November 15

The House and Senate are scheduled to reconvene on November 15 to begin a lame duck session that will focus on the annual appropriations process and other unfinished business from the 2009-2010 legislative cycle.



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While the agenda for this lame duck session is somewhat uncertain, it may also address a Medicare physician payment “fix,” data security legislation, an extension of the 2001 and 2003 tax cuts, and possibly any recommendations that are agreed to by the National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform.

Completing the annual appropriations process, possibly through an omnibus spending bill, will be the top priority when Congress reconvenes in mid-November. To date, Congress has not approved any of the annual appropriations bills for fiscal year 2011. Instead, in late September, Congress passed a “continuing resolution” (H.R. 3081) that provides temporary funding for federal programs and agencies – including those within the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) – from October 1, 2010 through December 3, 2010. Most programs are being funded at fiscal year 2010 levels during this time period.

Additional priorities may be added to the agenda after congressional leaders meet with the President at a White House meeting scheduled for November 18. When the President announced this meeting, he indicated that “the immediate focus is going to be what we need to get done during the lame duck session.”

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