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Congress Set to Resume Legislative Business Following Recess

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As the two-week Easter recess nears a conclusion, the Senate is scheduled to reconvene on Monday and the House will return on Tuesday.

The first order of business in the Senate will be H.R. 4851, the “Continuing Extension Act,” which includes a temporary extension – through April 30 – of the Medicare physician payment fix and the eligibility period for premium assistance for COBRA and state continuation coverage. The Senate is scheduled to vote on a cloture motion pertaining to this bill on Monday afternoon. To prevail on this vote, Senate Democrats will need at least one Republican to join them in supporting cloture. Congressional leaders are aiming to send this bill to the President’s desk as quickly as possible, with the goal of applying the extensions retroactively to minimize disruptions in Medicare reimbursement and premium assistance for unemployed workers. Under current law, these legislative provisions expired on March 31.

The House floor schedule for next week includes several non-controversial bills, including the Truth in Caller ID Act, the Radio Spectrum Inventory Act, the Clean Estuaries Act, and numerous nonbinding resolutions.

The annual budget resolution will be a high priority over the next several weeks, beginning with markups in the Senate and House Budget Committees. One of the key issues the committees will consider is whether to adopt language allowing the budget reconciliation process to be used to advance any major legislative priorities later this year.

Sebelius Discusses Implementation of Health Reform at National Press Club Speech

Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS) Kathleen Sebelius delivered a speech this week at the National Press Club, discussing a wide range of issues relating to the implementation of the new health reform law.

The Secretary urged the American people to visit the healthreform.gov website to get regular updates on health reform and to read fact sheets, watch weekly web



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chats, and find other resources. She also emphasized that the Administration is working with various stakeholder groups and forming partnerships and collaborations to publicize information about the new law.

Secretary Sebelius discussed a number of reforms that take effect in 2010, including the small employer tax credit, rebates for Medicare Part D enrollees affected by the coverage gap, protections for children with pre-existing conditions, a temporary high-risk pool program for adults with pre-existing conditions, the elimination of lifetime benefit limits, and dependent coverage for young adults up to the age of 26.

While acknowledging that “there will be bumps along the way” as the health reform law is implemented, Secretary Sebelius expressed satisfaction that the reform process is finally moving forward. She suggested that the law is likely to be “revisited” over time in the same way that Medicare has been modified over the past 45 years.

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.