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## **Congress Prepares for Busy Week As Recess Approaches**

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With just one week remaining before the Memorial Day recess, lawmakers are preparing for House and Senate action on a major legislative package that would extend numerous provisions of existing law while also addressing a wide range of other legislative priorities. The coming week also will include initial action on a supplemental appropriations bill and continued discussion about the annual budget resolution and appropriations process.

The extenders package addresses several significant health issues along with a long list of legislative priorities including infrastructure projects, mine safety, energy policy, and numerous other issues. Congressional leaders are strongly focused on passing this bill before the Memorial Day recess, which is scheduled to begin one week from today. Many of the provisions addressed by this bill – including Medicare physician payment and premium assistance for the unemployed – require legislative action before May 31.

Another short-term legislative priority is passage of a \$59 billion supplemental appropriations bill that would provide emergency funding for ongoing military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, the FEMA Disaster Relief Fund, and veterans' disability benefits. The Senate will begin debating this bill on Monday, but final action will be delayed until after the recess.

House leaders also are weighing a decision about the annual budget resolution. Although April 15 was the nonbinding deadline by which Congress was supposed to pass a final budget resolution, the House Budget Committee has not yet addressed this priority. If House leaders decide not to advance a budget resolution this year, they may choose instead to pass a "deeming resolution" to set funding levels for the appropriations bills for fiscal year 2011. The Senate Budget Committee approved its budget resolution on April 22.

## **Key Health Provisions Included in Broadly Focused Extenders Package**

On May 20, House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Sander Levin (D-MI) and Senate Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus (D-MT) released legislative language for the "American Jobs and Closing Tax Loopholes Act." Congressional



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leaders are aiming to move this bill through Congress before the Memorial Day recess.

This is a major legislative package addressing – in addition to several key health care issues – small business lending and tax relief, individual tax cuts, infrastructure investments, summer jobs, trade provisions, unemployment insurance, oil spill response, mine safety, national flood insurance, agriculture disaster relief, energy policy, and numerous other issues.

The following are highlights of the major health provisions of this broadly focused bill:

- **Medicare Physician Payment:** The bill includes a Medicare physician payment “fix” that would provide modest updates in 2010 and 2011, and ensure that reimbursement rates will not be reduced in 2012 and 2013.
- **Premium Assistance for the Unemployed:** The bill would extend by seven months the eligibility period for premium assistance for unemployed workers with COBRA and state continuation coverage. The proposed extension would make premium assistance available to eligible persons who are unemployed before December 31, 2010 at an estimated cost of \$7.8 billion over ten years. This premium assistance initially was enacted last year as part of the economic recovery law.
- **Medicaid Funding:** The temporary increase in federal matching funds for state Medicaid programs, also enacted as part of the economic recovery law, would be extended by six months through June 2011. This extension is projected to cost \$24 billion over ten 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.