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## **Congress Faces Heavy Agenda Following Summer Recess**

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The Senate and the House reconvened earlier this week following the month-long congressional recess. Highlights of the past week included a major speech before Congress by President Obama and the initial meeting of the Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction.

On September 8, in a speech before a joint session of Congress, President Obama outlined a \$447 billion proposal, the "American Jobs Act," aimed at promoting job creation. Noting that the Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction has been charged with recommending \$1.5 trillion in deficit reduction, the President urged Congress to go beyond this goal and achieve additional cost savings to cover the cost of his proposed jobs program. The President also indicated that on September 19 he intends to release an ambitious deficit reduction plan that will cover the cost of the jobs bill and stabilize the nation's debt in the long run.

In addition to deficit reduction and job creation, Congress also will be focusing in the coming weeks on the appropriations process for the fiscal year that begins on October 1. House leaders have indicated that they will pursue a "continuing resolution" to provide temporary appropriations for approximately one month. This move will allow time for Congress to work toward an agreement on an omnibus spending bill for the remainder of fiscal year 2012.

House leaders also have announced that they will be advancing a regulatory relief agenda that will focus on repealing "job-destroying regulations." One key issue on this agenda addresses regulations that have been issued for implementing the Affordable Care Act's (ACA) provisions for grandfathered health plans. Other priorities on the legislative agenda for the remaining months of the 2011 session include: an extension of unemployment benefits; extension of expiring tax provisions; a Medicare physician payment "fix," a defense authorization bill; an FAA reauthorization bill; a surface transportation bill; and several free trade agreements.

A number of congressional committees will hold hearings next week, including the following:



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- The House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Health will hold a September 15 hearing on “Cutting the Red Tape: Saving Jobs from the ACA’s Harmful Regulations.” This hearing will focus on ACA provisions addressing grandfathered health plans and medical loss ratios (MLRs).
- The Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction will hold a September 13 hearing on “The History and Drivers of Our Nation’s Debt and Its Threats.” CBO Director Douglas Elmendorf will be the sole witness at this hearing.
- The Senate HELP Committee will hold a September 14 hearing on “Securing the Pharmaceutical Supply Chain.”

## **Deficit Reduction Committee Holds Organizational Meeting**

On September 8, the Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction held its first meeting, taking action to approve a package of rules that will govern the committee’s deliberations.

The meeting included opening statements by all 12 members of the Joint Committee. The members’ statements generally focused on broad themes and the need for bipartisanship, without commenting on specific policy options. Job creation and economic growth were emphasized repeatedly by both Democratic and Republican members as keys to achieving deficit reduction.

The rules approved include the following:

- Seven of the committee’s twelve members must be present to form a quorum for purposes of voting, meeting, and holding hearings. Proxy voting will not be allowed.
- All meetings and hearings will be open to the public and the media, unless the committee determines by majority vote that a hearing or meeting will be held in closed session.
- The committee may not vote on any final report, bill, or recommendations unless estimates from the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) are available to members at least 48 hours prior to the vote.



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- The committee's final report must include a statement on the possible effects of the legislation on economic growth, employment, and U.S. competitiveness.

The Joint Committee is charged with voting on deficit reduction recommendations by November 23.

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