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## FEBRUARY 15 - 19: THIS WEEK

The House and Senate are not in session this week for the Presidents Day recess. Both chambers will reconvene on February 22, 2010.

### Banking/Financial Services

On Thursday, **Senate Banking Chairman Chris Dodd (D-Conn.)** announced that he would be working with **Sen. Bob Corker (R-Tenn.)** to reach a bipartisan deal on financial regulatory reform legislation after Dodd was unable to come to an agreement with **Ranking Member Richard Shelby (R-Ala.)**. Sen. Corker ranks as the fifth most senior Republican on the

Committee, however he has taken a leadership role in the past particularly over the rescue of domestic auto manufacturers. Sen. Corker said they plan to tackle the contentious Consumer Financial Protection Agency issue last and hope to have their negotiations done by mid-March.

### Defense

**Rep. Norm Dicks (D-Wash.)** is expected to take over the chairmanship of the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee following the death last week of longtime chairman **John Murtha (D-Pa.)**. Rep. Dicks has strong ties to Boeing Co., which builds many of its large planes in his

district. However, industry insiders anticipate a seamless transition as Dicks takes over the chairmanship and the subcommittee begins work on the FY2011 Defense Appropriations bills later this month.

### Employment/Labor

On Thursday, **Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.)** announced a four part jobs bill, which was a scaled back version of the larger package that has been in discussion for weeks. The bill will include a payroll tax break, an extension through this year of federal surface transportation programs, an expansion of the **Build America Bonds** program of tax-credit bonds for state and local infrastructure projects, and an extension through the end of the year for higher expensing limits for small businesses. Reid also filed a cloture motion on HR 2847, the **Jobs for Main Street Act of 2010**, which he plans to use as the

vehicle for the Senate proposal. A vote on the bill is scheduled for February 22, 2010.

Senate Republicans blocked the nomination of Craig Becker to the National Labor Relations Board on Thursday as the Senate rejected the cloture motion by a vote of 52-33. Republicans argued that Becker, a lawyer for the Service Employees International Union, would not be able to balance the interests of employers and unionized employees. Labor groups as well as Senate leadership are urging President Obama to make a recess appointment.

### Energy/Environment/Climate Change

A group of 13 House Republicans joined with 17 companies last Wednesday to file a lawsuit against the EPA challenging the agency's December finding that greenhouse gases qualify as dangerous pollutants under the **Clean Air Act**. The suit, which legal experts say is unlikely to gain traction, asks courts to

reverse a 2007 Supreme Court decision finding that greenhouse gases are a pollutant and directing the EPA to determine whether they threaten the public. Some experts viewed the ruling made in December 2009 as an attempt by the White House to spur action on climate change legislation in Congress.

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## Health Care

Senate Majority Leader Reid's announcement of his jobs bill voided the bill introduced earlier on Thursday by **Senate Finance Chairman Max Baucus (D-Mont.)** and **Ranking Member Charles Grassley (R-Iowa)** which had included several key health care elements. The **Baucus-Grassley** package would have address the Medicare physician fee cut as well as Medicare's ability to grant exemptions to its spending caps on physical and

rehabilitative therapy. Without action, Medicare will be required to cut physician fees by 21 percent on March 1, 2010. Other health care provisions had also been included in the Baucus-Grassley package, such as an exemption for pharmacists from a requirement that retailers of products known as durable medical equipment seek third-party accreditation in order to sell to Medicare patients.

## Insurance

**House Committee on Energy and Commerce Chairman Henry Waxman (D-Calif.)** and **Subcommittee Chairman Bart Stupak (D-Mich.)** sent letters on February 9, 2010, to five automobile insurance companies (Allstate, Farmers, GEICO, Progressive, State Farm) requesting information regarding persistent consumer complaints of sudden unintended acceleration in vehicles manufactured by Toyota Motor Corporation, and warnings the insurance companies may have provided to the **National Highway Traffic Safety Administration** about defect trends in Toyota vehicles. **The Energy and Commerce Committee** will hold a hearing on February 25 to examine the complaints of sudden unintended acceleration in Toyota vehicles.

The **National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP)** is scheduled to expire on February 28, 2010. The NFIP is on its fourth extension since expiring on

September 30, 2009. Significant reforms or lengthier extensions of the program have been considered for some time. **House Financial Services Chairman Barney Frank (D-Mass.)** has indicated that he would seek another temporary reauthorization of the program. It has been reported that Chairman Frank would like the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee to take responsibility for the NFIP.

Legislation sponsored by freshman members **Rep. Tom Perriello (D-VA)** and **Rep. Betsy Markey (D-Colo.)** that will repeal the antitrust exemption for health insurance companies and medical malpractice insurance companies is expected to be introduced when the House returns the week of February 22. According to **House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-Md.)**, the new legislation will be allowed to bypass the committee process and proceed to a floor vote.

## Transportation and Infrastructure

**House Oversight and Government Reform Committee Chairman Edolphus Towns (D-N.Y.)** has scheduled a committee hearing on February 25, 2010, to examine the Federal government's response to the recall of Toyota vehicles due to

reports of malfunctioning gas pedals. On March 2, 2010, **The Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation** is holding a full committee hearing on Toyota's recently announced safety recalls.