



# WASHINGTON UPDATE

JANUARY 2015

## Bipartisan Older Americans Act Reauthorization Introduced

In a surprising development, Chairman Lamar Alexander of the Senate Health Education Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee and Ranking Member Senator Patty Murray announced their intention to jointly introduce the Older Americans Act Reauthorization Act of 2015 on January 20, 2015.

The bill would reauthorize (extend) the Act for three years through 2018. The Alexander-Murray bill builds on legislation from the last Congress authored by Sen. Bernie Sanders, which did not pass before the 113th Congress adjourned. As a result the process has to start over. This bill is the first important step in that process.

In a summary provided by Sen. Alexander, the bill “includes provisions that aim to protect vulnerable elders by strengthening the Long-Term Care Ombudsman program and existing elder abuse screening and prevention efforts. The bill also promotes the delivery of evidence-based programs, such as falls prevention and chronic disease self-management programs.”

## Congressional Update The 114th Congress Begins

On January 6, 2015, the 114th Congress officially convened. Rep. John Boehner (R-OH) was re-elected Speaker of the House, though 25 Republicans dissented. Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) was re-elected House Minority Leader with only four dissenting Democrats. In November, Sen. Mitch McConnell (R-KY) was elected Senate Majority Leader and Sen. Harry Reid (D-NV) was elected Senate Minority Leader. As longest-serving member of the majority party in the Senate, Sen. Orrin Hatch (R-UT) was elected president pro tem of the Senate, a Constitutional position that puts Hatch third in line for the presidency behind the Vice President and the Speaker.

## Rules Adopted by House

The House also adopted a rules package on January 6 which contains a key provision for Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI). The package would prevent legislation that allows reallocation of the Social Security Trust Fund from the Old-Age and Survivors Insurance Trust Fund to the SSDI Trust Fund. This reallocation, typically noncontroversial, has previously happened 11 times back and forth between the trust funds. According to advocates, this is an attempt to cut the disability insurance fund and to cut benefits. For more information visit:

[www.offthechartsblog.org](http://www.offthechartsblog.org)

The rules package also included a move toward “dynamic scoring,” which will require that more macroeconomic effects be taken into account when analyzing cost estimates for “major legislation” in the House. Republicans say that the current Congressional Budget Office’s method of estimation does not reflect revenues generated when tax cuts boost economic growth; Democrats say that this would make it easier for Republicans to cut taxes without increasing federal deficits.

Finally, the House also adopted a rules provision which states that the Independent Payment Advisory Board, or IPAB, “shall not apply” in the 114th Congress.

## Pressing Issue: SGR Reform

An early issue for Congress to address is Sustainable Growth Rate (SGR) reform or repeal. The SGR formula would cut doctors' Medicare reimbursements and has been repeatedly "patched" by lawmakers to keep doctors' compensation for treating Medicare patients from dropping by 24%. Bills for full repeal were voted out of the House Ways and Means Committee and the Senate Finance Committee last Congress, but a deal was never finalized. The current "patch" or "doc fix" expires April 1, 2015, so action will have to be taken by then.

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## Contact Us

We welcome your feedback!  
Please share questions,  
suggestions or concerns.

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## Committee Chairs and Ranking Members

The final Committee Chair and Ranking Member positions have been determined for the Senate and House. All Committees will be chaired by Republicans in both chambers since they are in the majority.

### *In the Senate:*

- Appropriations: Chair: Sen. Thad Cochran (R-MS), Ranking Member: Sen. Barbara Mikulski (D-MD)
- Budget: Chair: Sen. Orrin Hatch (R-UT), Ranking Member: Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-VT)
- Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP): Chair: Sen. Lamar Alexander (R-TN), Ranking Member: Sen. Patty Murray (D-WA)
- Finance (covers Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security): Chair: Sen. Orrin Hatch (R-UT), Ranking Member: Sen. Ron Wyden (D-OR)
- Veterans Affairs: Chair: Sen. Johnny Isakson (R-GA), Ranking Member: Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D-CT)
- Aging: Chair: Sen. Susan Collins (R-ME), Ranking Member: Sen. Claire McCaskill (D-MO)

### *In the House:*

- Appropriations: Chair: Rep. Hal Rogers (R-KY), Ranking Member: Rep. Nita Lowey (D-NY)
- Education and the Workforce: Chair: Rep. John Kline (R-MN), Ranking Member: Rep. Bobby Scott (D-VA)
- Energy and Commerce: Chair: Rep. Fred Upton (R-MI), Ranking Member: Rep. Frank Pallone (D-NJ)
- Veterans Affairs: Chair: Rep. Jeff Miller (R-FL), Ranking Member: Rep. Corrine Brown (D-FL)
- Ways and Means: Chair: Rep. Paul Ryan (R-WI), Ranking Member: Rep. Sander Levin (D-MI)

We will include a link to a full list of committees and subcommittees in a future report. Final committee composition and subcommittees are still being determined.

## Appointments for Senators from Ohio

Ohio Senator Rob Portman (R-OH) will be serving on the Budget, Energy and Natural Resources, Finance and Homeland Security and Government Affairs committees. Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-OH) will be serving on the Agriculture, Finance, and Veterans Affairs committees and will be chairing the Banking committee. Finally, of note, Sen. Portman has hired a new Chief of Staff after the departure of Rob Lehman. Mark Isakowitz, a Cleveland native, has previously worked as a lobbyist, on the Hill, on many campaigns including Dole for President, and the Bush-Cheney Transition Advisory Team.