

The 111th Congress had a strong start and accomplished a great deal in the first five months. In a recent op-ed in Roll Call, Congressional scholar Norman Ornstein wrote: "This Congress has been as active and productive as any I can remember. The number of major bills passed and enacted into law, the serious, sustained activity in areas of broad, complex and critical importance, all are truly impressive."

Our work, however, is far from over. This month, House Members returned from a very productive District work period, where Democrats held over 800 events to discuss with their constituents economic recovery efforts, health care reform, and clean energy. As we continue to address issues critical to rebuilding our Nation's economy, we will focus on two priorities of President Obama and the American people: health care reform and clean energy legislation. Our Committees are working hard and making great progress on both issues, and it is my hope that we can bring these bills to the Floor before August.

Last week, President Obama's Council of Economic Advisers released a report showing why the current American health care system is on an unsustainable path. The new study underscores this key point: health care reform is an economic imperative that is essential to our economic health and security. Working together with President Obama, Congressional Democrats intend to deliver quality, affordable health care to all Americans this year that contains costs while guaranteeing your choice of health plans and doctors. Achieving this objective will not be easy, but the benefits of reforming health care are too great to delay action any longer.

Clean energy legislation also remains a top priority this summer, with a comprehensive bill to create jobs, invest in clean alternative sources of energy and promote energy efficiency. In doing this we will contain energy costs, increase energy independence and ensure the long-term stability of our nation's energy structure. Congress did take one step last week to promote fuel-efficiency in vehicles in passing the "Cash for Clunkers" legislation, which provides incentives for consumers to trade in old, gas-guzzling vehicles in exchange for vouchers to help pay for new, more fuel efficient cars and trucks.

The House also passed the Foreign Relations Authorization Act and Pakistan Enduring Assistance and Cooperation Enhancement Act, which complement President Obama's new strategy for the Middle East and reinforce our strong commitment to national security. Continuing the focus on national security, we expect to consider this week the Fiscal Year 2009 Supplemental Appropriations bill, funding military operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and

providing additional resources to address the pandemic flu.

In addition, we will begin the process of passing our appropriations bills for the coming year. There are twelve bills altogether that fund the basic operations of government. Our goal is to pass these bills through the House by August in order to keep the process moving on track and ensure the uninterrupted continuation of government services.

Finally, I look forward to introducing a bill this week that will be crucial to bringing down the federal deficit and putting America's fiscal house in order. Along with President Obama, Congressional Democrats are committed to the principle that America must pay for what it buys.

During the Clinton Administration, statutory pay-as-you-go (PAYGO) resulted in record surpluses. But Republicans subsequently abandoned PAYGO and pursued fiscally reckless policies, putting America in record debt. As our first act back in the majority in 2007, Democrats restored PAYGO as part of House rules.

Enacting statutory PAYGO will give this policy the force of law. However, statutory PAYGO, as important as it is, is only a first step toward restoring fiscal discipline. It must be accompanied by hard work to reform our healthcare system and control the rapidly-rising costs of our entitlement programs. By restoring PAYGO and taking action on those challenges, we can begin putting our fiscal house back in order.

This is just a snapshot of what Congress is working on this month. While we have accomplished a lot in these short five months, it will be a busy summer, and I look forward to hearing from you about the work Congress is doing.