

United States Senate

The Bipartisan Task Force for Responsible Fiscal Action Act of 2009

A Bipartisan Approach to America's Greatest Fiscal Challenge

What is the Purpose of the Bipartisan Fiscal Task Force?

- To ensure the nation's future economic security and prosperity, the Task Force requires lawmakers to swiftly address the nation's long-term fiscal challenges.
- The Act establishes a bipartisan task force of Congressional Members and Administration officials who will make bipartisan recommendations on how to substantially improve the government's long-term fiscal imbalances.
- All options will be considered by the Task Force. Its legislative recommendations will require expedited consideration by committees of jurisdiction, a super-majority vote in each House of Congress, and then Presidential approval to be enacted.

Why is the Bipartisan Fiscal Task Force Needed?

- Long-term projections show an unsustainable imbalance between government spending and revenues. Gross debt is likely to exceed 100 percent of GDP within the next few years, nearing levels not seen since the end of WWII. This cannot be corrected by economic growth alone.
- Health care entitlements and Social Security will consume increasingly more fiscal resources – about 15 percent of GDP by 2031 under one scenario. And, we have an outdated and inefficient revenue system that is incapable of meeting our needs. There is currently no plan in place to handle this looming crisis.
- If we fail to act, the projected explosion in federal debt will not only threaten the federal government's ability to continue providing support for Social Security, health care, education, defense, and other critical priorities, it could literally swamp our economy and throw us into an economic tailspin far worse than anything we have seen before. This would especially hurt the most vulnerable in our society.

Who Will Serve on the Bipartisan Fiscal Task Force?

- The Task Force is made up of 18 voting members, ten Democrats and eight Republicans. The Senate Majority Leader, Speaker of the House, Senate Minority Leader, and House Minority Leader will each select four members. All Task Force members chosen by Congressional leadership must be current Members of Congress. The President will appoint two members: the Secretary of the Treasury and another Administration official.
- The Task Force will have bipartisan co-chairs: one selected jointly by the President, Senate Majority Leader, and Speaker of the House; the other selected jointly by the Senate and House Minority Leaders.

How Does the Bipartisan Fiscal Task Force Work?

- The Task Force must review projected federal revenues and expenditures and the long-term

actuarial financial condition of the Federal Government, identify factors that affect the long-term fiscal imbalance, and analyze potential courses of action. The Task Force may hold hearings and draw upon resources from both executive and legislative branches of government.

- The Task Force will make recommendations (with legislative text) about spending and revenues to improve the long-term federal fiscal imbalance.
- The Task Force vote on recommendations will occur immediately after the 2010 election. Scores from the Congressional Budget Office and Joint Committee on Taxation must be available for 72 hours before the Task Force can vote. Fourteen out of 18 Task Force members must agree to the recommendations in order for them to get fast-track consideration in Congress.

What Happens to the Bipartisan Fiscal Task Force's Recommendations?

- Once submitted to Congress, the Task Force's recommendations will be introduced as legislation by each chamber's Majority or Minority Leader, or their designees, no later than November 23, 2010.
- The legislation is referred jointly to all committees of jurisdiction and the Budget Committees. These committees must consider and report the legislation, without amendment, within 7 calendar days after the date of introduction, or it will be automatically discharged from the committee. The legislation can be reported from the committee with or without recommendation.
- The reported legislation is then considered under an expedited procedure, which ensures it must be considered by the full House and Senate within 2 congressional session days of being reported from committee. Floor debate in each chamber is limited to 100 hours, and the reported legislation is not amendable. Final passage requires 3/5 of the Senate (60 votes) and 3/5 of the House (261 votes). Congress must act before December 23, 2010.
- Unlike most commission reports, this Task Force's recommendations, if approved by 14 of its 18 members, must be considered by Congress. The recommendations will not just sit on a shelf.

How Does the Task Force Ensure a Bipartisan Outcome and Why is This Important?

- *Bipartisan Recommendations* – More than 75% (14 out of 18) of the Task Force's members must agree to the recommendations made in its report. Both political parties will be represented.
- *Bipartisan Senate and House Consideration* – 3/5 of the Senate (60 votes) and 3/5 of the House (261 votes) must vote for passage of the recommendations, which is intended to ensure strong bipartisan support.
- *Bipartisanship is Critical to Solving Fiscal Challenges* – This is not a Democratic or Republican problem; it affects everyone. Change cannot be accomplished without both political parties being invested in the outcome and committed to its success. No one party can or will do this on its own.