



The Daily Dish

Under the Radar Lawmaking

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Eakinomics: Under the Radar Lawmaking

The United States faces a list of overwhelming policy and budget problems. Social Security faces the prospect of an exhaustion of the trust fund in the next 15 years, imposing 25 percent cuts in benefits to retirees and creating income insecurity in the very population for which it was supposed to alleviate income uncertainty. Medicare and Medicaid continue to create fiscal distress and underserve seniors and low-income Americans. The list goes on.

To fix large swaths of the social safety net will require bipartisan legislative initiatives. It does not take a political science genius to recognize that we are not living in an era of rampant bipartisanship. The sharply divided Congress and public debate makes some pessimistic about the ability of the United States to meet its policy challenges.

But even in this environment that favors partisan cheap shots over substantive improvement, there are efforts to deal with the substance of the problem. Take, for example, the recent efforts emanating from the House and Senate Budget Committees. This past week, two members of the House committee — Tim Burchett, a Republican from Tennessee, and Ed Case, a Democrat from Hawaii — introduced the RAFT Act (Reforming America's Fiscal Toolkit). Gordon Gray of AAF [notes](#) that the Act would “require the budget resolution to include a debt-to-GDP target. In even-numbered years, the budget resolution would be required to include one of two pathways for meeting the debt target: fast track procedures similar to reconciliation or a bicameral, bipartisan commission that can report fiscal policy changes.”

There is more (read Gray's piece), but the point is that there is an initial effort to deal with the fiscal outlook on a bipartisan basis. On the [Senate side](#), 15 members of the Senate Budget Committee voted to advance The Bipartisan Congressional Budget Reform Act. As Gray reports, “The Act is the first major process reform reported out of the committee since 1990 and offers a meaningful improvement in how Congress goes about its budgeting business. Broadly, the Act improves the budget calendar, formally institutionalizing the recent practice of two-year budgeting while creating new mechanisms that could, should Congress so choose, reduce some of the risk of budget-driven crises such as shutdowns and defaults on the debt limit.”

The future will include bills passed by Democrats and Republicans that address the fiscal future. To date, there is no work on this front. But it is promising to see this infrastructure being put in place.