



# WASHINGTON UPDATE

444 N. Capitol Street NW, Suite 234 ♦ Washington, DC 20001 February 01, 2010

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## Budget Committees Hear the Country's Economic Forecast

Last week, the House and Senate Budget Committees heard from the Congressional Budget Office, which summarized new economic forecasts and baseline budget projections covering fiscal years 2010 through 2020. The hearings, entitled *The Budget and Economic Outlook: Fiscal Years 2011-2020*, featured Douglas W. Elmendorf, director of the CBO. Mr. Elmendorf noted that the deep recession that began two years ago appears to have ended in mid-2009, but that economic growth in the next few years will probably be muted in the aftermath of the financial and economic turmoil.

He also went on to predict what economy might look like in the next few years:

“Severe economic downturns often sow the seeds of robust recoveries. During a slump in economic activity, consumers defer purchases, especially for housing and durable goods, and businesses postpone capital spending and try to cut inventories. Once demand in the economy picks up, the disparity between the desired and actual stocks of capital assets and consumer durable goods widens quickly, and spending by consumers and businesses can accelerate rapidly. Although CBO expects that the current recovery will be spurred by that dynamic, in all likelihood, the recovery will also be dampened by a number of factors. Those factors include the continuing fragility of some financial markets and institutions; declining support from fiscal policy as the effects of the

Recovery Act wane and tax rates increase because of the scheduled expiration of key tax provisions; slow wage and employment growth; and a large excess of vacant houses.”

Elmendorf’s testimony to the House and Senate can be found at [http://budget.senate.gov/democratic/testimony/2010/Elmendorf\\_Testimony\\_Senate.pdf](http://budget.senate.gov/democratic/testimony/2010/Elmendorf_Testimony_Senate.pdf).

## Subcommittee Field Hearing Reviews Federal Nutrition Programs/ Improper Payments

The House Agriculture Subcommittee on Department Operations, Oversight, Nutrition and Forestry held a field hearing in Colton, California, to review federal nutrition programs, focusing on Food Stamp Program operations within the state. Christine Webb-Curtis, chief of the Food Stamp Branch of the California Department of Social Services, highlighted future policy initiatives to cut down on improper payments: a pilot program leveraging Division of Motor Vehicle information to assist in establishing identity for individuals in the Food Stamp Program. The pilot is an attempt to see if there can be a decrease in administrative costs between the state and its counties, as well as “a more public-friendly mechanism for detecting duplicate aid.”

Her full testimony can be found at <http://agriculture.house.gov/testimony/111/h012510/WebbCurtis.pdf>.

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All of the panelist's statements can be found at <http://agriculture.house.gov/hearings/statements.html>.

### President's Open Government Initiative Underway

In a Memorandum on Transparency and Open Government issued on January 21, 2009, President Barack Obama instructed the director of the U.S. Office of Management and Budget to issue an "Open Government Directive" to all federal agencies. This Open Government Directive establishes deadlines for action based on projects to be completed at intervals of 45, 60 and 120 days. The directive will require agencies to do the following:

- **Publish Government Information Online**

To increase accountability, promote informed participation by the public, and create economic opportunity, each agency shall take prompt steps to expand access to information by making it available online in open formats.

- **Improve the Quality of Government Information**

To improve the quality of government information available to the public, senior leaders should make certain that the information conforms to OMB guidance on information quality and that adequate systems and processes are in place within the agencies to promote such conformity.

- **Create and Institutionalize a Culture of Open Government**

To create an unprecedented and sustained level of openness and accountability in every agency, senior leaders should strive to incorporate the values of transparency, participation, and collaboration into the ongoing work of their agency. Achieving a more open government will require the various professional disciplines within the government – such as policy, legal, procurement, finance, and technology operations – to work together to define and to develop open government solutions. Integration of various disciplines facilitates organization-wide and lasting change in the way that government works.

- **Create an Enabling Policy Framework for Open Government**

Emerging technologies open new forms of communication between a government and the people. It is important that policies evolve to realize the potential of technology for open government.

The press memorandum can be found at [www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/news/20090121/2009\\_transparency\\_memo.pdf](http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/news/20090121/2009_transparency_memo.pdf)