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K Street Files: No End for K Street Deficit Lobbying

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Capitol Hill may have given up on a sweeping deficit reduction plan, at least for the moment, but K Street is still pushing for it.

Even as the Joint Committee on Deficit Reduction conceded defeat, a half-dozen former Members of Congress are advocating for ambitious tax and entitlement changes to reduce the deficit.

The Coalition for a Fiscally Sound America, headed by a group of ex-lawmakers on both sides of the aisle who now lead some of K Street's most influential firms and trade groups, aims to educate voters about the budget crisis. Coalition members want Congress to enact a deficit reduction package that includes a "pro-growth" tax overhaul with entitlement reform — precisely the combination that's managed to elude the super committee.

"The need for a coalition like this is even greater than before," said ex-Rep. Dave McCurdy (D-Okla.), president and CEO of the American Gas Association and a co-chairman of the new coalition. "Because this is going to be a long-term effort, there is a need to not only continue to educate but to provide support for those willing to take on the tough choices and make tough decisions."

As a 501(c)(4) social welfare group, the coalition is more free to engage in advocacy than some like-minded allies, including the nonprofit Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, that have been pushing the super committee to "go big" and find even more than the original target of \$1.2 trillion in federal savings over a decade.

The coalition's co-chairmen were among 43 former Members of Congress who wrote an eleventh-hour letter to super committee members and House and Senate leaders Monday to reiterate that plea.

The coalition's other co-chairmen are former Reps. Steve Bartlett (R-Texas), now president and CEO of the Financial Services Roundtable; Harold Ford Jr. (D-Tenn.), managing director and senior client relationship manager at Morgan Stanley; Steve Largent (R-Okla.), president and CEO of CTIA; Charlie Stenholm (D-Texas), a senior adviser at Olsson, Frank and Weeda; and Tom Tauke (R-Iowa), executive vice president of Verizon Communications.

"We want to reach out beyond just the business community and business organizations," McCurdy said. "We want to form a coalition of people who are a bit more strategically focused and understand the impact of not reaching an agreement and that compromise is going to be part of a long-term solution."

Far from "going big," the super committee failed to issue any recommendations at all in time for its deadline this week, despite months of negotiations.

"This is incredibly disappointing to see the failure to move forward here," McCurdy said. Of course, it's easier to take aim at taxes and entitlements once you've left Capitol Hill. Regulation Redux.

A coalition of consumer, labor, health, scientific, environmental and government watchdog groups is gearing up for a post-Thanksgiving push to fight new GOP-authored bills aimed at reining in federal rules.

"We will be working hard to explain to people that these bills aren't as innocent as they seem," said Lisa Gilbert, deputy director of Congress Watch at Public Citizen, which is helping spearhead [the Coalition for Sensible Safeguards](#). The coalition includes several dozen groups, including the AFL-CIO, Consumer Federation of America, Friends of the Earth and People for the American Way.

Congress is expected to take up two regulatory reform bills — the Regulations from the Executive in Need of Scrutiny Act and the Regulatory Accountability Act — the week after Thanksgiving. Coalition members plan a series of lobby days that week aimed at convincing Members that, far from killing jobs as the bills' authors argue, federal regulations protect public health and safety

The Regulatory Accountability Act, sponsored in the Senate by [Rob Portman](#) (R-Ohio) and in the House by Lamar Smith (R-Texas), particularly alarms coalition members. That legislation seems "very innocuous" on the surface, Gilbert said, in that it subjects proposed regulations to exhaustive administrative review.

"Who doesn't want to have a better sense of the cost benefit of the rule or a little more judicial oversight?" Gilbert asked. "What they don't explain is that most of these proposals would end the ability of many agencies to promulgate any rules." This Coalition for Sensible Safeguards is a revival of a similar lobbying coalition launched in the 1990s, when the GOP-led Congress introduced similar regulatory curbs.