

## HOW MANY MEMBERS OF CONGRESS COULD PASS ECON 101?

Over three-quarters lack an academic background in business or economics

### Findings

In July 2011, the debate over the country's \$14 trillion national debt reached a fever pitch amid competing claims about the economic wisdom of cutting government spending and raising taxes. Congress will return to the merits of a deficit reduction plan later this fall, but will first consider a variety of proposals aimed at spurring job creation and revitalizing the country's stagnant labor market.

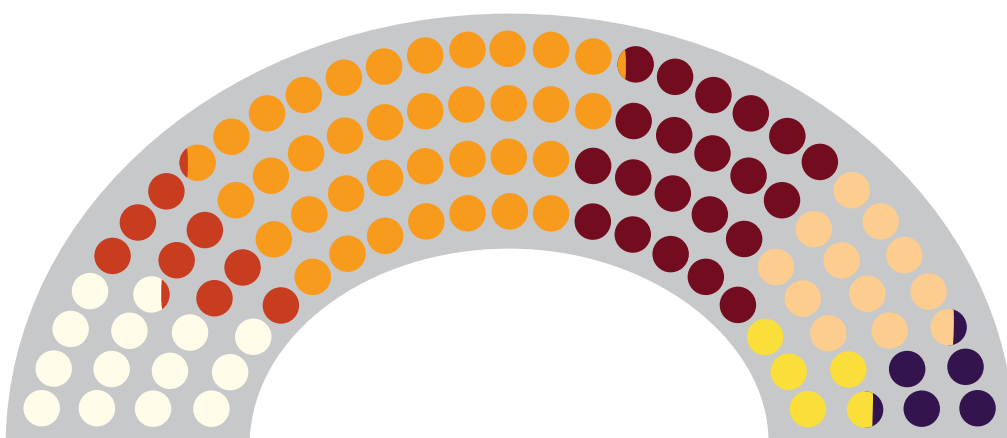
In both the jobs and debt debates, there has been no shortage of competing claims about how a particular piece of legislation will impact the economy. These appeals to economic expertise beg the question: How many members of Congress have an academic background that provided them with a basic understanding how the economy works?

The answer, it turns out, is not many. Publicly available data (see "Research Methods") show that over three-quarters of members of Congress—nearly 8 out of 10—lack an academic background in business or economics. Only 8.4 percent majored in an economics-related field, and 13.8 percent majored in a business or accounting-related field.

Over half (55.5 percent) majored in either government-related fields or the humanities; another 11.5 percent majored in science or technology-related fields.

This research suggests that our elected Representatives may want to dust off their Econ 101 textbook (if they have one) before trying to tackle weighty questions about the impact of taxes, spending, and debt on our economy and the labor market.

### College Background of Members of Congress



- 13.8% Business & Accounting
- 8.4% Economics
- 34.8% Government & Law
- 20.7% Humanities
- 4.9% Human Service
- 11.5% Science & Technology
- 5.9% Other

### Research Methods

To identify the academic background of a member of Congress, we used a standard set of search tools, including the CQ Press Congressional Directory, the member's official website, and other online biographical sources.

Members' college education was classified in seven different categories: Government & Law, Business & Accounting, Economics, Humanities, Human Service, Science & Technology, and Other. The Other category includes college degrees not well classified in other categories (like Religion) as well as members that haven't obtained a college degree.

We excluded 20 members of Congress for whom we couldn't locate a specific degree subject. We also excluded non-voting Representatives (Guam, Virgin Islands, District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the Northern Mariana Islands, and American Samoa) and Congressional seats that are currently unfilled.

We generally classified members of Congress according to their undergraduate degree. However, members of Congress with an advanced degree relevant to this project (i.e. an undergraduate degree in history and a Masters in Business Administration) were classified according to that advanced degree.

*Defeat the Debt is a project of the Employment Policies Institute, a nonprofit dedicated to studying policy issues surrounding employment growth and the economy*