



Today in Congress

Today, the lame-duck session of Congress has four cloture votes scheduled: the DREAM Act, the 9/11 health bill, a piece of legislation providing a one-time payment of \$250 to senior citizens, and collective bargaining legislation in regard to firefighters. Likewise, Senate leadership is expected to bring to the floor the military defense authorization bill that holds a provision which would repeal the military policy “don’t ask, don’t tell.”



The *Washington Blade* reports, “Fred Sainz, the Human Rights Campaign’s vice president of communications, said Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) could make an attempt to bring to the floor early in the afternoon the fiscal year 2011 defense authorization bill.”

According to Sainz, “It’s completely situational depending on whether or not there is time available on the Senate floor — depending on whether or not those other motions pass their cloture votes.”

However, Sainz indicates that if cloture is invoked on any of the four items, the Senate will likely not move forward on the defense authorization bill until later in the lame-duck session.

As a result, more Senators are pushing to extend the lame-duck session, solely to assure the repeal of “don’t ask, don’t tell.” Included in that group is Independent Senator Joe Lieberman of Connecticut, Democratic Senator Kirsten Gillibrand of New York, and Democrat Carl Levin of Michigan.

Ironically, Senator Reid, who has vowed to see to the end of “don’t ask, don’t tell,” is not ready to commit to staying on the Hill past the scheduled holiday break.

Of the four cloture votes scheduled for today, [Fire Dog Lake](#) explains, “When the Senate holds chained cloture votes like this, it’s typically a sign that they don’t have the votes to move any of them.” Cloture votes require 60 votes to begin the final debate on the measure.

As such, the Senate would be prompted to reconsider the [failed September cloture vote](#) on the military defense authorization bill. The inclusion of controversial provisions such as the legislative appeal of “don’t ask, don’t tell,” the DREAM Act, and an amendment introduced by Senator Roland Burris that would have ended the longstanding ban on elective military abortions at overseas hospitals, ultimately brought about the failed vote in September, but the White House has been successfully working to appeal to the more moderate votes in the Senate.

[Fire Dog Lake](#) explains that the White House has managed to turn Republican Mark Pryor’s “no” vote into a “yes.”

Pryor explained his transition: “On many previous occasions, I have said that I would oppose repeal of



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on December 8, 2010

‘Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell’ until I had heard from our serviceman and women regarding this policy. I have now carefully reviewed all of the findings, reports, and testimony from our armed forces on this matter and I accept the Pentagon’s recommendations to repeal ‘Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell.’”

Pryor’s “yes” vote, notes *Fire Dog Lake*, “significantly improves the chances for cloture, though two Republican votes would have to be secured. At least three, Susan Collins, Scott Brown, and Dick Lugar, have pledged to move forward, but only with assurances on time for amendments. They both have also said they want to get to the tax issue first.”

FDL predicts, “What we could see is that they vote for cloture today, and then the bill gets shelved for a short while until the time agreements get worked out. But the showdown could come today.”

In the end, the Senate Democrats still run the risk of a [filibuster](#) from Republicans since Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell and his caucus promised to block consideration of any legislation until the Senate has resolved issues over the extension of the Bush tax cuts, as well as passed a budget bill to fund the federal government next year.

In the House of Representatives, a vote is scheduled today for a [\\$1.4 trillion spending bill](#) that would fund government operations through September 30, 2011. *Democratic Underground* notes that the bill “funds Obama priorities,” including the Dodd-Frank banking oversight effort, as well as an earmark ban.

Also in the spending bill, Democrats conveniently tucked the [food safety legislation](#), which had been previously stalled by issues of [unconstitutionality](#), despite objections from House Republicans.

House Dems tout the spending bill as an example of their commitment to fiscal responsibility, though the bill is a measly \$46 billion less than what was originally requested by President Obama.



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