



Congress Adjourns Leaving Much for the **Lame Duck Session**

With an approval rating of 16 percent, members of Congress are suspending all unnecessary decision-making, hastily exiting their posts to campaign, and unfortunately putting off highly important issues to be resolved during the “lame duck session” — typically a period of legislative inactivity, but often an interval of time during which members of Congress whose successors have already been elected pass controversial items.



As the Dems prepare to lose their majority in November, they have halted votes on controversial issues to discourage any further drop in approval ratings with the intent of revisiting these items during the lame duck session. *The Hill* Reports that congressional Democrats are interested in pursuing nearly 20 pieces of legislation during that lame-duck session.

In order to ensure that the entire federal government does not simply come to a standstill, *Yahoo News* reports, As a last necessary task before leaving, both the Senate and House passed a temporary spending measure needed to keep federal agencies operating when the new budget year starts.

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Dubbed a stopgap measure, the continuing resolution to keep the federal government in operation became controversial when Dems attempted to use the resolution to appropriate funds for Race to the Top grants and \$4 billion to pay for settlements for lawsuits by black farmers and American Indians against the federal government. In the end, the add-ons did not make their way into the resolution.

The resolution passed the Senate with a vote of 69 to 30, and the House followed with a vote of 228-194.

Congress voted to adjourn this morning at 1:04 a.m. by a vote of 210 to 209, and is scheduled to return at 2:00 p.m. on November 15.

The *Christian Science Monitor* explains, Thirty-nine Democrats in the House and two in the Senate joined Republicans Wednesday in opposing motions to adjourn, citing the need to renew the tax cuts to assure businesses and the public that they will not incur big tax increases next year. In a floor speech, Republican leader John Boehner said that those members voting yes on the adjournment resolution were ‘putting their election above the needs of your constituents.’

Unfortunately, Boehner’s speech did not discourage politicians from adjourning. Republicans and



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fiscally responsible Democrats have urged Congress to extend the tax-cuts to all Americans, including those making more than \$250,000, asserting that those Americans will help to stimulate the economy by increasing jobs and businesses. Most Democrats, however, are uninterested in extending the tax cuts to those making more than \$250,000, contending that the Republicans are simply out to make the rich richer.

Perhaps sensing a devastating loss, 47 Democrats, led by Representative John Adler called upon Nancy Pelosi to extend the tax cuts to all Americans.

In addition to delaying the vote on the tax-cut extensions, Congressional Democrats have also delayed the ethics trials of Representatives Charles Rangel and Maxine Waters until after the elections.

Another matter left for the lame-duck session is the defense authorization bill, jammed with controversial measures like a repeal of the Don't ask, don't tell policy, and one that will provide amnesty to illegal aliens enrolled in college or enlisted in the military.

The Dems are also anxious to pass an extension of unemployment insurance benefits as thousands of laid-off workers will begin to lose their benefits on November 30. Additionally, they hope to suspend a freeze in scheduled cuts to doctors' Medicare reimbursements, lest doctors see a 23-percent cut in Medicare reimbursements beginning on December 1.

The Hill reports, The limited amount of time in a lame-duck session has only heightened competition among Democrats pushing different set priorities.

One such Democrat is Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus, who urges Congress to consider a package that he has been constructing all year, which would allegedly provide tax-relief extensions by cutting taxes for families paying college tuition and for teachers and employers who purchase supplies for their job.

Additionally, Senator Jeff Bingaman hopes to pass a renewable electricity standard; Senator Joe Lieberman urges Congress to pass a cybersecurity bill; and Senator Jay Rockefeller hopes to take action to curb carbon gas emissions for the next two years.

It doesn't end there.

Senator Chuck Schumer intends to bring up a bill that would address Chinese currency manipulation; Senator Tom Harkin is urging Congress to pass food-safety legislation, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi intends to take up child nutrition legislation, and Representative George Miller wants Congress to act on the Elementary and Secondary Education Act reauthorization.

The Hill explains the Dems' sense of urgency:

Bills that have been painstakingly negotiated may have to be overhauled if Republicans control the House next year or pick up half a dozen Senate seats. Deals that were made to satisfy retiring senators will become moot, and an incoming class of as many as 19 freshman senators could raise fresh objections. All pending bills die at the end of a Congress and must be reintroduced at the start of a new two-year term. This means lawmakers will have to repeat the laborious process of holding committee hearings, markups and rounds of private negotiations before legislation is brought to the floor again in 2011 or 2012.

Prior to adjourning, however, the House managed to advance a NASA policy bill and a measure that would strengthen spy operations.

Democrats in tough races like Harry Reid in Nevada and Barbara Boxer in California are anxious to



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return to their states and campaign aggressively and have enlisted the help of Barack Obama to encourage voters that the Dems are in fact on the right track. Obama traveled to Iowa and Virginia to campaign for his fellow Democrats, during which time he took the opportunity to accuse Republicans of failing to properly educate Americans on what needs to be done to rescue the economy.

Other Democrats aren't so eager to face their constituents. According to Yahoo, Staying or going might seem an equally unpleasant prospect for some embattled Democrats, who are facing more than four weeks of defending unpopular votes in favor of Obama's economic stimulus measure, health care law, and uncompleted legislation for curbing global warming.

An August Rasmussen Report shows that 42 percent of voters perceive members of Congress to be corrupt. Seventy-seven percent say that members of Congress put their careers ahead of the needs of the American people. Furthermore, 53 percent believe Congress has not passed anything significant since 2006.

Congressional historian at Princeton University Julian Zelizer remarks, You've had a year when Congress has passed a lot of big bills that caused a lot of controversy and where the benefits aren't yet apparent to voters. The Democrats leave themselves in a vulnerable position.



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