



National Taxpayers Union Finds Major Spending Shift in 112th Congress

A report from the National Taxpayers Union's foundation, published on Tuesday, illustrates a massive shift in spending versus cutting that occurred during the 112th Congress from 2010 to 2012. If the trend continues in the current Congress and into 2014 and beyond, the 112th Congress might just be the "inflection point" many have been looking for as Washington wrestles with government spending.



By tallying the cost of each member's "wish list" of bills he has either sponsored or cosponsored (1,076 in the House and 712 in the Senate), the NTU's BillTally software came up with some startling conclusions. First, the number of bills to cut government spending, 348, was the highest number of such bills since the 104th Congress (the third and fourth years of Bill Clinton's presidency, which were characterized by the Contract with America and the brief shutdown of the government in late 1995 and early 1996). That Congress offered 432 bills to cut spending.

The other side of the coin showed equally dramatic change: Bills presented to increase government spending declined sharply, to 1,439 from 2,480 such bills in the previous Congress. BillTally also calculated the ratio of spending-bills-to-cuts, which hit a peak of 24 to 1 in the 107th Congress (the first two years of the George W. Bush presidency) and was 14 to 1 in the 111th Congress (President Obama's first term). In last year's Congress, that ratio was just a little over 4 to 1. By comparison, that spending-bills-to-cuts ratio in the 104th Congress was 2 to 1.

The NTU also cut the statistical cake another way: measuring the number of "net cutters" in the House of Representatives (those members whose total "wish list" bills resulted in spending cuts) jumped to 234 in last year's House, compared to just 9 in the 108th Congress (the third and fourth years of George W. Bush's presidency), and up from the 153 in the 111th Congress.

In the Senate the change was even more dramatic. In the 107th Congress, there was not a single senator whose "wish list" of bills he either sponsored or cosponsored would have resulted in a cut in government spending, whereas in last year's Congress, there were an astonishing 53 — every Republican and six Democrats.

Yet Demian Brady, the director of research for the foundation, was hard-pressed to find much positive to say about the numbers, noting that while they represented an "encouraging sign for taxpayers seeking budgetary restraint ... the balance of Congress' workload is still tilted in favor of ... spending increases." Nevertheless, when looked at from a broader perspective, if the trend from the 111th and 112th Congresses continues into next year and then into 2014 and beyond, there may still be time to rein in government spending before it causes catastrophe for the average American. That task is enormous, grant the point, and one is often inclined to look at any glass with water in it as being half full, but the trend is comforting, nevertheless.

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