



## Will the New Congress Have the Guts to Do It?

Looking back, I would have to say that the most pleasant surprise of 2010 was the astounding success of Tea Party candidates in the November elections. I'm still amazed that what began as a handful of rallies and occasionally uncivil "meet the candidate" meetings grew into a gigantic uprising against bloated, big-spending government.

Even as millions of newly aroused voters headed to the polls, the mainstream media continued to demonstrate how out-of-the-mainstream they really are, by dismissing the Tea Party as an insignificant bunch of racist malcontents.



But ignoring them didn't work. And smearing them only caused their numbers to grow. By the evening of Nov. 3, the truth could no longer be denied — something new had happened in America. And a lot of the old guard, who had practiced "pork as usual" on Capitol Hill for many decades, found themselves swept out of office. How sweet it was!

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Ah, but while campaigning can be tough — the smears, the innuendos, the microscopic investigation of everything a candidate has ever said or done are enough to dissuade most mortals from ever running for office — actually doing what you promised can be even harder.

The 112th Congress will be sworn into office this week. Each and every Senator and Representative will take a solemn oath to "preserve and protect" the Constitution of the United States of America. Very soon thereafter we'll see how many of them actually meant it.

Two key issues will come up almost at once. The first will be a new budget bill. As I've discussed in previous columns, nearly a dozen different appropriation bills were introduced in the last Congress. Not a single one of them passed.

So the Democrats in charge tried to pull off quite a stunt in the closing days of the recent and unlamented lame duck session. Senate Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.), House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.), and the White House agreed to combine everything they wanted into one gigantic 1,924-page legislative package. There was something in it for everyone. One columnist called it "one oozing ball of pork and bad policy, going beyond even the obscene budget of 2000."

It was all of that and more. One of the bill's sponsors was Daniel Inouye (D-Hawaii), who has proven many times that he is a wily and sly strategist. This time was no exception. As a "favor" to his Republican friends on the other side of the aisle, Inouye and his staff dug out every earmark request they could find that a Republican had ever requested. No matter if they had long since abandoned such pork; they decided to cram it all into the new bill.

Word is that by the time they got done there were more than 6,000 earmarks in the new legislation. No one knows the exact number, because by the time the Frankenstein's monster came up for a vote, no



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one had had a chance to read it. Which was just how Reid and his cohorts wanted it.

Two of the toughest conservatives in the Senate — Tom Coburn of Oklahoma and Jim DeMint of South Carolina — came up with a great stalling tactic, however. They proposed that before a vote could be taken on the measure, the entire thing — all 1,924 pages of it — had to be read out loud to the assembled Senators.

When he finally realized he didn't have the votes to squash debate and ram the measure through, Sir Harry finally threw in the towel. Instead of Reid's nearly 2,000 page monstrosity, Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell introduced a one-page resolution that would maintain spending levels for all departments at then-current levels for the next 60 days. There would be no new increases (such as the billion bucks the Dems wanted so they could start funding ObamaCare). But no cuts, either — something almost every Republican had promised the folks back home.

Facing the inevitable, Reid allowed a vote on the measure. A majority quickly said "aye," then headed home for the holidays. The House approved the measure later that day on a 193-165 vote. (Yes, I know that only adds up to 358 votes. What can I tell you? Seems that 77 of your representatives pleaded they had a plane to catch and left early.)

So the 111th Congress is now history. And a pretty sad one it is. The latest Gallup poll, taken in the final days of the lame-duck session, showed that the approval rating of Congress hit an all-time low of 13 percent. Is there any profession anywhere in more disrepute?

What happens next? We're about to find out, folks. Look for the fireworks to start soon after the new Congress takes their seats next week.

Among the many issues they'll have to address fairly soon is raising the debt ceiling once again. Even without any new spending, total U.S. public debt continues to grow by more than \$100 billion a month. This means it will approach the mandated limit of \$14.3 trillion sometime in March. If Congress does not agree to raise the ceiling, the Treasury will not be able to continue issuing new debt.

I can already hear the near-hysteria in the popular press about what refusing to raise the debt ceiling would mean. After all, we have to keep the government operating, don't we? We can't have an "emergency" shut down of vital government services, can we?

One congressman you know is going to stand fast is Dr. Ron Paul of Texas. A few days ago, he issued this blunt warning:

If the new Congress gives in to establishment pressure and media alarmism about shutting down the government by voting to increase the debt ceiling once again, you will know that the status quo has prevailed. You will know that Congress, despite the rhetoric of the midterm elections, is doing business as usual. You will know that the simple notion of balancing the budget by limiting federal spending to federal revenue remains a shallow and laughable campaign platitude.

As you can see, the lines in the sand are already being drawn. I'll be reporting on many of the battles in future columns. But for now, let me ask you something: In the coming contests, which side will your congressman be on? If you don't know the answer — or even who he or she is — you're not part of the solution. You're part of the problem.

Until next time, keep some powder dry.

**Chip Wood** was the first news editor of *The Review of the News* and also wrote for *American Opinion*, our two predecessor publications. He is now the geopolitical editor of *Personal Liberty Digest*, where



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