



Lame-duck Accomplishments and Upcoming Agenda

Given the quantity of items planned for this year's lame-duck session, it is imperative to keep up with the items addressed in the final month of the 111th Congress on a regular basis. Here is a quick analysis of what the lame-duck session has covered thus far, and what is on the agenda for today.

To date, the only prominent piece of legislation to pass in the lame-duck session is the [food safety bill](#). However, even that bill is [not final](#), as the Senate version must go back to the House for a vote, where it may run into some trouble. Democratic Representative John Dingell indicates, "There are some remaining concerns with the final Senate legislation," including a lack of industry fees.



Another item that cleared in the lame-duck session is the \$4.55 billion payout for black farmers and would-be farmers, and American Indians who claimed racial discrimination in federal funding.

A smaller item that has passed in the lame-duck session is a one-month extension of the "doc fix," which prevents cuts in Medicare payments to doctors, though a large decrease in the rates paid to doctors who treat Medicare patients may occur on January 1.

Today, Senate Republicans threatened to block all other legislation until expiring tax cuts are extended and a bill is passed to fund the federal government, reports the Associated Press.

[Fox News](#) writes, "Fox has obtained a letter being circulated to Senate Republicans that calls for a filibuster blockade of any legislation not directly related to time-sensitive votes on taxes and spending. All 42 Republican senators have signed on to the plan."

House Minority Leader John Boehner asserts that he and other Republicans wish to see an up-and-down vote on extending all of the tax cuts.

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid insists, however, that there will be two votes — one that will extend income tax cuts for only Americans earning less than \$250,000, and another for all Americans.

Most expect both bills to fail, prompting compromise.

As far as the filibuster, the AP notes that the Republican threat to block all legislation does "not apply to a new arms control treaty with Russia that is pending, since it would be debated under rules that differ from those that apply to routine legislation."

The threat applies to a variety of other items, however, including the Democrats' plan to repeal "don't ask, don't tell," as well as the [DREAM Act](#).

As for the DREAM Act, while Reid has attempted to attach the DREAM Act to other bills, including the military defense authorization bill, he has now announced that he will bring up the DREAM Act as a



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stand-alone bill. *Technorati* declares that the effort to pass the DREAM Act would be much more difficult as a stand-alone bill.

Another issue plaguing the lame-duck session is the expiration of federal unemployment benefits beginning today. The House bill that would have extended those benefits failed on November 18, and the suspension vote failed to acquire a two-thirds vote. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer have been giving assurances that they will continue to push those benefits this week.

Meanwhile, tensions on the floor of the House of Representatives rose today when Republican Representative Steve Buyer of Indiana grew angry after being denied a request to speak by Democratic Representative Laura Richardson of California, who is acting as Speaker today. Buyer requested time to speak on a veterans' bill, but was denied by Richardson.

Buyer, who is retiring after 18 years in Congress, proceeded to call the session a waste of time, and told Richardson, "This is why the American people have thrown you out of power."

Photo of Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell: AP Images



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