



McConnell Goal: Public Should Not Regard GOP Majority as “Scary”

Incoming Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (shown, R-Ky.) told members of the press in a pre-Christmas interview that he doesn't want the American people to think of the possibility of electing a Republican president in 2016 — on top of a Republican-controlled Congress — is scary. McConnell said:



I don't want the American people to think that if they add a Republican president to a Republican Congress, that's going to be a scary outcome. I want the American people to be comfortable with the fact that the Republican House and Senate is a responsible, right-of-center, governing majority.”

Translating McConnell's message into everyday terms: If Republicans want to win the White House in 2016, they must avoid controversial stand-offs, not only with President Obama, but also within their own party.

McConnell continued, projecting how he wants the GOP to be viewed prior to the 2016 presidential election:

There would be nothing frightening about adding a Republican president to that governing majority. I think that's the single best thing we can do, is to not mess up the playing field, if you will, for whoever the nominee ultimately is.

In a statement obviously directed at more conservative members of the GOP, especially those aligned with the Tea Party, McConnell said: “I've asked my members to restrain themselves.”

In a commentary on McConnell's statement, the *Washington Post* showed its traditionally liberal colors:

Restraint has been hard to come by in this political era, particularly because a small army of conservative groups has made it a mission to push Republicans to the most strident stands, even if it means shutting down the government or risking default on the national debt.

The *Post* noted that McConnell faced opposition from some of those conservative groups in his bid for reelection in the 2014 GOP primary. He won against challenger Matt Bevin, a Louisville businessman, who was backed by several Tea Party groups. Though winning the primary, McConnell's 60.2 percent of the vote was the lowest voter support for a Kentucky U.S. Senator in a primary by either party since 1938. Fellow Kentucky senator Rand Paul endorsed McConnell but would not reveal his reason for doing so when asked by a constituent at a public forum. A reporter for the *Huffington Post* commented on the Paul-McConnell partnership in an article last April:



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McConnell and Paul are assumed to have a marriage of convenience: Paul helps the more senior senator with his reelection battle in return for help seeking the Republican presidential nomination in 2016.

Whether that assessment is correct or not, McConnell's statements do indicate that he considers the 2016 presidential race as being important enough to justify watering down the GOP's congressional agenda in the next Congress.

"Don't try to reinvent yourself. Be yourself, number one. And don't be afraid of a primary. We will win all the primaries. We did it in '14. We will do it in '16," McConnell advised congressional Republicans who apparently might be tempted to take more conservative positions for fear of alienating Tea Party members in their reelection bids.

McConnell did share some of his vision for the next Congress in a recent interview with the Associated Press. He said:

I'd like to have more money for defense. What I want is the overall cap to stay in place if possible. And it's a challenge because to restore money on defense, the Democrats are going to want to restore money on the domestic side. So it's a big challenge.

The *New York Times* reported that McConnell recently acknowledged that he would need to cooperate with some Democrats who were willing to work with Republicans. The Senate leader said he has held discussions with a number of Democrats he thought were potential partners on various issues.

"There is a pool of Democrats who want to do business," he said.

When the 114th Congress begins its first session on Tuesday, one of the first orders of business in both the House and Senate will be legislation to expedite the Keystone XL pipeline. The House will also seek legislation to modify the Affordable Care Act (ObamaCare) to change that law's definition of full-time workers from the current one defining full-time workers as those working at least 30 hours a week to 40 hours. This measure is expected to receive bipartisan support in both houses.

Both proposals became bogged down in the Democratic-controlled Senate in the last Congress.

Another big priority for Republicans is a Department of Homeland Security spending measure expected to be taken up by the House the end of January. It would deny money to carry out the Obama executive action to eliminate the threat of deportation for millions of illegal immigrants.

House Speaker John Boehner (R-Ohio) — who faces some opposition to his reelection as speaker but is considered likely to keep that position — indicated recently that opposing Obama's executive action approach to granting amnesty to illegal aliens will be a priority for Republicans in this Congress. Said Boehner,

The new American Congress will bring us an opportunity to begin anew, and as Sen. McConnell and I have pledged, the people's priorities will be our priorities. We've also made clear that early on, we'll make a direct challenge to the president's unilateral actions on immigration.

Though the new Senate has a 54-46 Republican majority, that margin is still not filibuster-proof, with 60 votes being needed to invoke cloture, a procedure that requires an end to debate and allows legislation to be voted on.

"The Senate will be ground zero," the *New York Times* quoted a House Republican leadership aide as saying, who was not authorized to talk publicly about party strategy.



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While the Senate might be ground zero in the new Congress, McConnell's recent statements indicate that the battle might not be as hard-fought as some of the Senate's more staunch conservatives prefer.

Photo of Senator Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.): AP Images

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