

Monday, August 4th, 2008

A Week on the House Floor: Usually your mainstream news source will tell you about some bill that was passed or failed on the House floor during a week. But we always do a lot more than just one or two bills. To give you a better perspective of what an entire week on the House floor looks like, here is a list of every vote held on the floor last week. Now remember, it is entirely the decision of the majority leadership what gets voted on and what does not. So, a bill may have passed out of committee or have 400 cosponsors but if the Speaker doesn't want it, she can simply say that no vote will be held on the bill. Conversely, the Speaker or her delegates can bring things to the floor nearly out of thin air if they want to. The Senate doesn't work this way and that is one of the things that make the two Houses so different.

One other thing you should know before you read this list. Some bills can be brought to the floor under a "suspension of the rules." What that means is that the bill bypasses the normal processes and amendments are not allowed. But the "penalty" for bypassing the rules is that you must get a 2/3rd vote of all those present and voting (rather than a simple majority) to pass the bill. Normally the "suspension" process is used for non-controversial bills. Increasingly in this Congress however, Speaker Pelosi has brought bills to the floor under "suspension" when she wants to limit debate (there is less than 1/3 debate time allowed on suspensions) and ensure that there are no amendments offered. All energy legislation on the floor this month has been under "suspension" because Pelosi wanted to avoid any amendments on offshore or ANWR oil drilling because such amendments would certainly pass.

Sometimes you will see 3 numbers in a vote such as 232-200-3. The last number is the number of members voting present. A vote of present usually means that the member for some reason neither wants to be for or against the bill but does not want people to think they were absent.

So, here's every vote in chronological order; what it was for; how I voted; what the outcome was; and, of course, some scintillating commentary from yours truly. I have indicated where any vote was "under suspension" and therefore required a 2/3rds majority to pass.

By the way, Congress is now in recess until September 9th. The Republic is safe for a while.

- **HR 2490** – To require the Secretary of Homeland Security to conduct a pilot program for the mobile biometric identification in the maritime environment of aliens unlawfully attempting to enter the United States. (Suspension – requires 2/3rds vote) Passed 394-3-1. I voted **Yes**.

- **HR 6113** – Requires each federal agency to include a contact telephone number in it's collection of information that would assist people with filling out the form. (Suspension – requires 2/3rds vote) Passed 394-0. I voted **Yes**.

- **HR 2192** – Establish a position of Ombudsman within the Department of Veteran's Affairs. (Suspension – requires 2/3rds vote) Passed 398-0. I voted **Yes**.

- **H.Con.Res. 398** – Allows the adjournment of both the House and the Senate for the 5 week August recess. This is normally no big deal but it became quite contentious this year. The Republican position was that we should not adjourn without passing substantive legislation to deal with soaring energy prices. So virtually all Republicans (including this one) and some Democrats voted No. The measure passed by the slimmest of majorities – one vote- 213-212.

- **HR 5892** – Veterans Disability Benefits Claims Modernization Act of 2008. (Suspension – requires 2/3rds vote) Passed 429-0. I voted **Yes**.

- **H.Res 1370** – Calling on the government of the People's Republic of China to immediately end abuses of human rights of its citizens, to cease repression of Tibetan and Uighur citizens, and to end its support for the governments of Sudan and Burma to ensure that the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games take place in an atmosphere that honors the Olympic traditions of freedom and openness. Passed 419-1-1. I voted **Yes**. The lone No vote was Ron Paul

(R-TX).

- **HR 6604** – A bill that would have put a bunch of new restrictions on commodities trading in the oil and other markets. This bill was a big deal because it is part of Pelosi's energy package. This entire package was offered on suspension (requiring a 2/3rds vote) to avoid any amendments and all the previous bills had failed. This one failed too by a vote of 276-151. I voted no because current law prohibits manipulation in the markets. In fact manipulation charges were filed on a company as recently as last week. But this bill would prohibit much legitimate trading and make the commodities markets more opaque, less effective as hedging tools for American businesses and simply move such trading to London and Dubai. We will reduce oil prices when we send a strong message that we are going to increase domestic supplies, promote available alternatives and reduce demand. This bill was a distraction, and it failed.

- **HR 6445** – Prohibiting the Secretary of Veterans Affairs from collecting copayments from veterans who are catastrophically disabled and cannot make such payments. (Suspension – requires 2/3rds vote) It passed by a vote of 421-0. I voted **Yes.**

- **HR 1108** – Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act (Suspension – requires 2/3rds vote). This bill would have the FDA regulate tobacco as they now do with prescription drugs. I opposed this measure. I do not smoke, never have smoked and don't like smoking. But people who do it are well aware of the risks and they do it because they like to smoke. My now deceased Uncle smoked 3 packs of cigarettes a day. I once asked him to stop smoking because it was bad for him. He told me "I like to smoke. It makes me happy. I would rather live a short and happy life than a long and miserable one." That is his right. I never asked him to stop again. He should be able to do it without the FDA telling him he can't. But the bill passed by a vote of 326-102.

- **HR 4040** – Consumer Product Safety Commission Reform Act. (Suspension – requires 2/3rds vote). 424-1. I voted **Yes.**

- **A Conference report from the Senate on HR 4137** – The Higher Education Opportunity Act. This was a very long bill with many provisions both good and bad. But it increases spending by almost \$100 billion over the next 5 years. We have a \$500 billion deficit that keeps rising and rising. Where will this money come from? I voted

No

. But only 49 of my colleagues joined me in fiscal responsibility so the bill passed by a vote of 380-49.

- **Approval of the Journal.** A vote to approve the official record of what we did in the Congress this week. Since the majority party writes the Journal and nobody actually reads it, traditionally members of the majority party (whichever that is) vote for this and the minority party opposes it. That's what happened this time too and I voted **No** as the Journal passed by a vote of 223-203.

- **Next was a relatively unusual thing** – a Privileged Resolution offered by the Minority Leader. Such resolutions are allowed under the rules so the minority has an opportunity to point out when they think the majority is doing wrong. Then Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi did many of these. This particular resolution was a censure of House Ways and Means Chairman Charles Rangel (D-NY) for what appear to be admitted violations of campaign finance laws and for bringing "dishonor" to the House. The Democrats then offered a motion to basically kill it. I voted

No, to not kill the resolution. 138 votes were cast in favor of censure and 254 were cast against it, with 34 'present' votes.

- **Next were 4 miscellaneous procedural** votes which all passed on virtually straight party line votes.

- Then, we had 5 amendments and passage of a bill called the "Paycheck Fairness Act" that was ostensibly about equal pay for equal work for women. Except that equal pay for equal work is already the law. What this bill really did was greatly expand the ability of trial lawyers to file and win lawsuits in such cases. The five amendments were as follows:

- **Amendment by Price (R-GA)** requiring a study to see if the bill would likely reduce employment of women. I voted for the amendment but it was defeated by a vote of 188-240.

- **Amendment by Altmire (D-PA)** to delay implementation of the act by 6 months to educate small businesses on how to comply. I voted for it and it passed by a vote of 426-1.

- **Amendment by Giffords (D-AZ)** to say that a plaintiff must show malicious intent or indifference to recover punitive damages. I voted for the amendment and it passed by a vote of 397-29.

- **Amendment by Cazayoux (D-LA)** to say that nothing in this bill would reduce the obligation of employers to comply with other immigration laws. I voted for it and it passed by a vote of 410-16-1.

- **Amendment by Price (R-GA)** that would limit contingent attorney's fees from lawsuits made under this bill to \$1000/ hour. By the way, that's over \$2 million per year!! Apparently, trial lawyers cannot be expected to live on that little. This amendment failed by a vote of 189-236 in spite of my enthusiastic vote in favor.

- **The "Paycheck Fairness" Act**, HR 1338, then passed by a vote of 247-178. I voted **No**.

- **HR 6633** which was the E-Verify Act to give tools to employers to make sure they are only hiring legal workers and require employers to use them. This is a good bill and it passed 407-2-4 with my strong support.

- The next series of votes concerned the first (and probably only) of the 12 appropriations bills that will be brought to the floor this year. This was the Military Construction and Veterans Appropriations bill which funds all construction projects on military bases as well as the VA. There were 5 amendments voted on as well as the bill itself as follows:

- **Garrett (R-NJ) Amendment** to reduce funding for VA administration expenses by \$18 million and move it to VA hospitals. I voted for this amendment but it failed by a vote of 227-185.

- **McCaul (R-TX) Amendment** which would prohibit any funding going to anything named after a sitting member of Congress such as Charlie Rangel's now infamous "Monument to Me." There are dozens of these that I will tell you about at a later time. This amendment passed by a vote of 329-86. I voted for it. Interestingly, although Charlie Rangel opposed it, other members who have things named after themselves (such as Jerry Lewis (R-CA) in other bills voted to support this one.

- **Flake (R-AZ)/ Campbell (me) Amendment** which would eliminate all 103 earmarks in the bill and reduce the spending, thereby saving taxpayers \$622 million. These earmarks were all put in there by certain powerful members of Congress and none that we could find were requested by or supported by the military. Still the amendment was defeated by a vote of

350-63-1. Obviously, I voted for my own amendment. Just as obviously, members of Congress of both parties are still willing to defy the will of the people by continuing rampant, wasteful earmarking.

- **King (R-IA) Amendment** would prohibit funds in this act from being spent under the rules of Davis/Bacon where they require union scale wages to be paid even if the same project can be done with equal or better quality for less. Passage of this amendment would save BILLIONS of dollars in just one year. I voted for it. It failed 275-143.

- **Lewis (CA) Amendment** was an attempt to put an offshore and other oil drilling bill in this bill. I voted for it. The attempt failed by near party line vote of 230-184.

- **HR 6599** was the Military Construction and VA Appropriations Bill itself after the amendments. It passed 409-4. I was one of the 4 no votes along with Jeff Flake (AZ), Ron Paul (TX) and John Duncan (TN). We are basically the Libertarian caucus in the House. Military facilities and the VA are important. But spending here is up over 40% from 2 years ago, and it has billions in pork and waste and we have a half a trillion dollar deficit which this bill increases. We have to start living within our means.

- **H.Res 1008** condemns Iran's persecution of the Baha'is. I voted **Yes** and it passed 408-3.

- **H.Res 1316** honors Navy and Coast Guard veterans who served on LSTs. I voted **Yes** and it passed 415-0.

- The final vote before we adjourned for the August recess was an interesting one. 75 Republicans (including yours truly) had signed up to give 5 minute speeches on the floor about energy. This adjournment vote was to immediately adjourn for the day, thereby eliminating the ability for any of us to even speak about energy not to mention actually vote on something. Nancy Pelosi promised the "most open Congress in history." How "open" is it when you don't even allow opposing views to be expressed in speeches. No Madam Speaker, this may be the most closed Congress in history. That's why we have an 8% approval rating and declining.

Congress is now in recess, but your laptop writer will not recess. I will be back at you later in August with more stuff to give you a break from whatever great vacuous summer novel you may be in the middle of. The hero will beat the bad guy and get the girl. Oops, I spoiled it for you.

Until then, I remain respectfully,

Congressman John Campbell