

Friday, December 14th, 2007

Earmarks Reign Supreme: Lest anyone doubt the power of earmarks, various people (including yours truly) proposed that one way to close the budget stalemate between Republicans and Democrats would be to eliminate all \$20 billion in earmarks from the budget. We would do this regardless of whether those earmarks were proposed by Republicans or Democrats. This idea got some traction for a while. Then, following a meeting with her caucus, Speaker Pelosi rejected the idea and said that they would cut other spending to try and close the gap. Similarly, the Intelligence bill is riddled with abusive earmarks, but a proposal to eliminate them was defeated on the floor.

Earmarks should be the first thing we cut when we are looking for money. Apparently, this Congress believes that earmarks should be the last thing we cut.

Chaos in Congress: Well, this was supposed to be the last week Congress would be in session for the year as we were to resolve many of the disputed issues which have impending deadlines.

It was supposed to be. But in fact, not a single one of these issues was brought to a vote. One of the most dysfunctional Congresses in history reached a new level of dysfunctionality with Democrats fighting almost as hard with each other as they have been with the President and Republicans. I am writing you this while winging home for the weekend on JetBlue and listening to Brit Hume on Fox News detail out all the nasty things that major Democratic leaders are saying about each other! Time was wasted as Democratic leaders spent most of the week trying to agree amongst themselves, but without any input from the President or Republican leaders. Naturally, it is no surprise when their "consensus" was met with a veto threat from the President and/or opposition from us. These should be multi-party negotiations but the current House leadership is either unable or unwilling to do this. I suspect the latter.

Here is a rundown of where we are on the major issues:

- **Alternative Minimum Tax:** The Senate passed a clean, straight extension of the current AMT rates (preventing a tax increase on 25 million taxpayers) by a vote of 88-5. The President wants this. Every Republican in the House, without exception, will vote for it. But House Democrats want to raise business taxes to "offset" not raising individual income taxes and as of now they are not budging. If they hold their position, then the AMT tax will go up. I think they will give in rather than confirm to the public in an election year how desperate they are to raise taxes.

- **Federal Budget:** Democrats agreed to "split" the \$23 billion difference with the President but the President is holding firm to his budget number. I'm not sure who will blink here. I hope the President doesn't. I actually think his spending amount is too big also, so I am unlikely to support whatever deal is reached.

- **War Funding:** The Democrats have come up with an artful way to allow some war funding (probably about \$50 billion) to get us through the first couple of months of next year, while still allowing their more anti-war members to vote for the budget, but against the war

funding. How they are doing it is pretty inside baseball stuff that will bore you. But suffice it to say that there is likely to be sufficient war funding, but a majority of House Democrats will be able to go home and say they didn't and don't support it.

- **Energy:** As expected, the Senate took the House energy bill and stripped out its most objectionable provisions (tax increases and renewable portfolio standards) and have sent it back to the House. My guess is that the House will pare it down some more and then send it back again. Or, it is possible that nothing will get done because Pelosi is so upset about what the Senate did that she suggested the cloture vote rule is "unconstitutional."

I will be heading back to Washington next week and we will see what happens. It may take a while. Does anyone know a good restaurant open in DC where I can have Christmas dinner?

Of Christmas and Ramadan: A few weeks ago, a resolution was on the House floor which congratulated American Muslims for their faith and the celebration of Ramadan. It passed by a vote of 376-0, with 42 members voting "present" (abstaining). Congressman Steve King (R-IA) wondered why we only did this for Ramadan and introduced a similar resolution congratulating Christians for their faith and the celebration of Christmas. It passed by a vote of 372-9 with 10 members voting "present."

What is most interesting is how consistent members were on these votes. I, for example, voted for them both, as did most members. A few, like Mike Pence (R-IN) were equally consistent voting present in both cases. Mike told me that he thinks such things are not the job of Congress. He is probably right.

But 18 members of Congress voted for the Muslim resolution and against or "present" on the Christian one. Remember, they were very similar. Do they think that Muslims are worthy of praise but Christians are not? The 18 are:

Voting "No:" Gary Ackerman (D-NY); Yvette Clarke (D-NY); Diana DeGette (D-CO); Alcee Hastings (D-FL); Barbara Lee (D-CA); Jim McDermott (D-WA); Bobby Scott (D-VA); Pete Stark (D-CA); and Lynn Woolsey (D-CA)

Voting "Present:" John Conyers (D-MI); Barney Frank (D-MA); Rush Holt (D-NJ); Donald Payne (D-NJ); Jan Schakowsky (D-IL); Allyson Schwartz (D-PA); Debbie Wasserman Schultz (D-FL); Peter Welch (D-VT); and John Yarmuth (D-KY)

Until next week, I remain respectfully,

Congressman John Campbell