

Monday, November 20th, 2006

Lame Duck: We are now in that session of Congress known as the "lame duck session." It is so-called because the "new" 110th Congress will not be sworn in until the first week of January. Although the election has passed and many members of Congress are either retiring or lost their seats, they are still meeting as part of the "old" Congress. There are still literally hundreds of bills pending before the House and Senate. Most of these will die having never gotten a vote. The question now is, which ones will get a vote and which ones will actually pass and head to the president?

Unlike most years, power in Congress this year is shifting from one party to the other. That means that Republican priorities need to pass in the lame duck session or face likely failure when Democrats take over. Similarly, Democrats want little to pass in lame duck so that they can put their own stamp on things next year.

The key to what actually will pass is the Senate. Because of the 60 vote "cloture" requirement in the Senate, it effectively takes all Republicans and 5 Democrats to pass anything over there. So, if the Senate Democrats agree they don't want something to pass in lame duck, it won't pass.

There are lots of "little" bills hanging out there that individual members will be pushing to get passed in lame duck. I, for one, will be pushing for HR 1295 which will provide some home loan restructuring to help lots of people in high cost areas like California. But there are also the "big" issues: permanent Death Tax repeal; the R&D tax credit and a tax deduction for sales taxes paid; trade agreements with countries like Vietnam, South Korea and Peru; and oil and gas extraction in the Gulf of Mexico amongst others. On top of that, the federal government is funded by eleven appropriations bills each year. Only 2 of these 10 bills have passed both chambers and signed into the law even though the government's fiscal year began nearly 2 months ago.

Right now, it doesn't look good for too many of these bills. In spite of their bipartisanship rhetoric, it looks like the House and Senate Democrats may not want bipartisanship until they are in charge. Something I have observed in politics is that we all define bipartisanship as occurring when the other side agrees with our viewpoint. That is not a partisan statement

because it applies to all of us.

We go back into session December 5th. We'll see what happens.

Milton Friedman: As an economics major in college, I would be remiss if I did not make at least some comment on the passing of one of my greatest economic mentors, Professor Milton Friedman. He said and did so much to advance the cause of economic and personal freedom during his long and fruitful life, that it is hard to single anything out. But since we still have a federal budget to pass and in light of the coming change in power in Washington, I thought the following quote might be apropos: "Given our monstrous, overgrown government structure, any three letters chosen at random would probably designate an agency or part of a department that could be profitably abolished." Amen. The professor has passed on. But the truth of his teachings is timeless.

Happy Thanksgiving to you all!

Until next week, I remain respectfully,

Congressman John Campbell