



JOHN C. GORE  
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# WASHINGTON OVERVIEW: WHETHER OR NOT YOU AGREE WITH THE SPENDING OR THE POLICY DECISIONS, THE ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THE DEMOCRATS IN CONGRESS OVER THE PAST TWO YEARS HAVE BEEN VERY IMPRESSIVE—ESPECIALLY CONSIDERING THAT THEY HAD THE SLIMMEST OF MAJORITIES IN THE HOUSE AND A 50-50 SENATE.

Read it and weep. So say budget hawks and conservative Republicans after having had time to read and digest the \$1.7 trillion, 4000+ page Omnibus appropriations bill that passed Congress just before adjournment and funds the government through September 30, 2023. Business as usual, say those who have been following the tax and spend maneuvers on Capitol Hill for the last 40 years. The last time Congress passed appropriations bills in “regular order”—passing all twelve appropriations bills—was 1996.

This year’s “Bus” did manage to incorporate some measures that might not have passed on their own, e.g. the Electoral College Reform act which makes it more difficult to overturn the electoral college vote count, a phase-out of pandemic emergency Medicaid enrollment, a partial ban on the popular social media platform Tik Tok, and almost \$100 billion more in defense spending. There is \$45 billion in aid to Ukraine and \$15 billion for Justice Department efforts to investigate and prosecute domestic terrorist cases, including those involved in the January 6th Capitol riot. There is also \$15 billion for over 7200 “special projects” in Members’ home states and districts, much of it for environmental reclamation, but lots for line items such as the “Michelle Obama

Hiking Trail” in Alabama (\$3.6 million), \$3 million for an LGBTQ+ museum exhibit in NYC, and \$150,000 for sidewalks in small town in NY. “You fund my project, and I’ll fund yours” is a time-honored Congressional courtesy.

Left on the appropriators cutting room floor were provisions to extend or make permanent the Child Care Tax Credit (too expensive) and multiple corporate and individual tax breaks opposed by Democrats. Republicans who voted for the mammoth spending bill are taking lots of heat—as is the party—but things probably would have been a lot hotter had they punted spending decisions until next year when they “control” the House. The political calculation was: compromise now to avoid chaos later.

Aside from the process, which precludes disclosure and debate, the Omnibus spending bill continues Congress’ unbroken penchant for deficit spending. Sixty years ago, defense spending was by far the largest portion of the federal budget. With the Fed raising interest rates, the cost of servicing the \$31 trillion in debt is expected to exceed the total defense budget (\$800 billion) by 2025. This, like the Administration’s border policy, is unsustainable. But don’t look for the 118th Congress to solve either problem unless faced with a crisis of catastrophic proportions.

Whether or not you agree with the spending or the policy decisions, the accomplishments of the Democrats in Congress over the past two years have been very impressive—especially considering that they had the slimmest of majorities in the House and a 50-50 Senate. Here are the major bills which became law in the last two years:

- American Rescue Plan (\$1.9 trillion Covid economic stimulus)
- Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (\$1.2 trillion)
- Two Defense Authorization bills
- Postal Service Reform
- Aid to Ukraine (\$100 billion)
- Incentives for domestic semiconductor manufacture (\$280 billion CHIPS Act)
- Veterans’ healthcare improvements
- Inflation Reduction Act (\$740 billion Schumer-Manchin “Build Back Better” compromise)
- Respect for Marriage Act
- Consolidated Appropriations Act (\$1.7 trillion)

All of which proves the adage that you can get a lot done in Washington if you are willing to spend the money.

The 118th Congress convenes on January 3rd, with high drama expected over the election of a Speaker—necessary before the first Session can begin under Republican control. Right now McCarthy is five votes short, and those five Republicans are telling all who will listen that they are solid “N’s” as in NEVER. Washington insiders continue to express confidence that McCarthy will prevail, but Republicans better have an organizational Plan B if they want to have a Happy New Year.

—John C. Gore

