



January 9, 2004

Major Accomplishments of the U.S. Senate During the 108th Congress, First Session

Republicans regained control of the Senate at the start of the 108th Congress after a dismal year and a half of the Democrats in the majority. At the end of the 107th Congress, the Democrat-run Senate had failed to pass a budget, failed to pass a Medicare prescription drug law, and nearly failed to enact legislation creating the Department of Homeland Security because of petty partisan wrangling. By contrast, the 108th Republican Senate, led by Dr. Bill Frist, has begun to make amends for those failings by passing a budget that reestablished the priorities of fiscal restraint and allowed both for significant tax relief and the enactment of the historic Medicare reform bill.

Here is a sampling of the Republican-led Senate's accomplishments from this first session of the 108th Congress. Those bills already signed into law are listed in numerical order within each category. Much has been accomplished, and much remains for the second session.

CREATING JOBS AND GROWING THE ECONOMY

Budget Resolution for Fiscal Year 2004 - Conference Report Agreed to on 4/11/2003

Despite significant fiscal and political obstacles, Congress passed the FY04 Budget Resolution in near-record time and reinstated expired budget-enforcement rules for the Senate. The Budget Resolution was critical this year in providing a framework and management tools that led to passage of the Jobs and Growth Tax Relief Act (see below), and the reconciliation instructions to allow for the Medicare (see Health section) and energy reform bills. It also provided instructions to accelerate the repeal of the Death Tax from January 1, 2010 to January 1, 2009.

Fiscal Year 2003 and 2004 Appropriations - P.L. 108-7

Once returned to the majority, Republicans spent the first few days of the 108th Congress quickly passing the remaining 11 appropriations bills necessary to fund the government for Fiscal Year 2003 that the Democratic-led Senate had failed to pass in the previous year. The FY03 omnibus bill included appropriations for Agriculture, Commerce/State/Justice/Judiciary, District of Columbia, Energy & Water, Foreign Operations, Interior, Labor/HHS/Education, Legislative Branch, Transportation, Treasury, and VA/HUD. While this session (108th, 1st) ended with six bills signed into law and the seven-bill FY04 omnibus still pending (due to Democrat objections), the Senate did succeed in passing 12 of the 13 bills. Conversely, the Democrats were only able to pass three appropriations bills last year – resulting in the worst appropriations record in the Senate in more than two decades. Perhaps more important than process is the fact that non-defense discretionary spending – including supplemental spending – amounted to only a 2.9-percent increase, which continues a trend of decreasing the percentage growth of non-defense discretionary spending for the third consecutive year.

Jobs and Growth Tax Relief Act - P.L. 108-27

This tax relief bill provides \$350 billion in net tax relief over 10 years to create jobs, spur economic growth, and reduce the tax burden on families. It includes marginal rate reductions, small business tax relief, dividend tax relief, marriage penalty relief, child tax credits, and AMT relief, and many economists are already crediting it with spurring the current economic recovery.

Accountant, Compliance, and Enforcement Staffing Act - P.L. 108-44

This law will help assure the Securities and Exchange Commission can provide appropriate oversight of U.S. corporations in the post-Enron era by streamlining the agency's hiring process for some of the critical oversight positions. This will better provide for the protection of investors and increase confidence in the capital markets.

United States-Chile Free Trade Agreement Implementation Act - P.L. 108-77

This bill implements the United States-Chile Free Trade Agreement. This is the first Free Trade Agreement with a South American nation and, along with the U.S.-Singapore Free Trade Agreement, this is the first agreement passed under the Congressionally-approved Trade Promotion Authority (TPA). Under the terms of the free trade agreement, more than 85 percent of two-way trade in consumer and industrial products becomes tariff-free immediately, with most remaining tariffs eliminated in four years. More than three-quarters of U.S. farm goods will enter Chile tariff-free within four years.

United States-Singapore Free Trade Agreement Implementation Act - P.L. 108-78

This bill implements the United States-Singapore Free Trade Agreement. This is the first Free Trade Agreement with an Asian-Pacific nation. Under the terms of the agreement, Singapore guarantees zero tariffs immediately on all U.S. goods and cannot increase its duties on any U.S. product.

Surface Transportation Extension Act - P.L. 108-88

This law extends federal highway safety, motor carriers safety, and transit programs for five months and authorizes appropriations through February 29, 2004. This extension assures that vital highway construction and repair projects are financed while a six-year reauthorization is finalized. A strong economy requires a healthy infrastructure.

Nanotechnology Research and Development - P.L. 108-153

This bill would authorize \$4.8 billion over the next five years to be invested in a National Nanotechnology Initiative program as a multi-agency federal research priority. Nanotechnology is a newly emerging field of science in which matter is manipulated at the molecular and atomic levels. The potential applications of nanotechnology hold untold promise for the future of America's economy, ranging from innovations in medicine to manufacturing.

American Dream Downpayment Act (S. 811) - P.L. 108-186

This bill would provide \$200 million a year in down-payment assistance for low-income, first-time homebuyers and would increase the value of loans the Federal Housing Administration may guarantee in disadvantaged areas. This would not only make the dream of homeownership more accessible, but would also connect these borrowers to the broader financial markets and provide a boost to liquidity and economic growth.

Tax Relief Simplification and Equity (H.R. 1308) - In Conference

This bill moves up to 2003 (from 2005) the refundability of the child tax credit, reduces the marriage penalty in the credit, and increases the value of the credit for parents receiving combat pay.

Workforce Investment Act (H.R. 1261) - Passed Senate

The bill makes current workforce training programs more effective in their mission of training almost 1.5 million workers annually for new or better jobs. Under the bill, job training programs will be more responsive to the needs of local employers, streamlined to provide workers with the services most useful to them, and more accessible to workers in rural areas through the use of technology.

Small Business Administration Reauthorization (S. 1375) - Passed Senate

This bill renews critical small business programs that help play a central role in assuring economic growth, and provides a blueprint for more efficient programs to help meet the needs of small businesses and entrepreneurs across the country – the source of some two-thirds of the net new jobs in the economy.

Digital and Wireless Technology Opportunity Act (S. 196) - Passed Senate

This bill establishes within the National Science Foundation (NSF) an office dedicated solely to aiding eligible minority institutions in providing educational instruction in digital and wireless network technologies.

REDUCING RED TAPE & OTHER PRO-CONSUMER INITIATIVES

Do-Not-Call Implementation and Ratification - P.L. 108-10 and P.L. 108-82

The implementation act authorizes the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) to establish a system of fees sufficient to implement and enforce a “do-not-call” registry to defend consumers from unwanted commercial phone solicitations. The “Do-Not-Call” registry ratification law explicitly authorizes the FTC to implement its “Do-Not-Call” registry, which was necessary after the regulations were challenged in court.

Check Clearing Act - P.L. 108-100

This law improves the efficiency of the nation’s check-collection system by giving electronic checks the same validity as their paper counterparts. This should help banks prevent fraud and help consumers gain more control over their checking accounts.

Fair and Accurate Credit Transactions - P.L. 108-159

This bill would assure a national standard for credit reporting in order to combat the growing problem of identity theft, reduce consumers’ borrowing costs and increase their access to their own credit reports when obtaining a mortgage or other loan, reduce the time it takes them to get a loan or earn access to credit, and enable them to stop receiving certain commercial solicitations.

CAN-SPAM Act (S. 877) - P.L. 108-187

This bill makes the sending of deceptive, unsolicited commercial e-mail a crime, and provides the Federal Trade Commission with the tools to go after “spammers” who deceive consumers about the source or content of such e-mail. Among its provisions, the bill requires e-mail dealing with adult content to be so identified in the subject line. Spam, once a minor nuisance, now represents more than half of all e-mail traffic, which has substantially added to business costs.

Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act of 2003 (S. 1053) - Passed Senate

This bill prohibits discrimination on the basis of genetic information with respect to health insurance and employment. It prohibits health insurance plans from denying enrollment or charging higher premiums based on the individual's or family member's genetic information. In addition, the bill bans the collection, use, and disclosure of genetic information for insurance underwriting purposes. In the employment context, it prohibits the use of genetic information use for employment decisions, such as hiring, firing, job assignments, and promotions.

STRENGTHENING AND IMPROVING HEALTH CARE

State Children’s Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) Extension - P.L. 108-74

The bill allows states with unexpended SCHIP allotments for FY98 and FY99 to retain them through FY04 rather than forfeit them. The bill also extends the period of time states may expend 50 percent of their allotments unexpended from FY00 through FY03.

Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities Prevention - P.L. 108-154

The bill requires the Secretary of HHS to conduct research on and promote the prevention of birth defects and disabilities, and to support a National Spina Bifida Program to prevent and reduce suffering from the nation’s most common permanently disabling birth defect.

Pediatric Research Equity Act of 2003 - P.L. 108-155

This law gives the Food and Drug Administration authority to require makers of drugs and biological products to conduct tests specifically to assess such product's safety and effectiveness for children, including proper dosage.

Medicare Prescription Drug, Improvement, and Modernization Act - P.L. 108-173

The Republican Senate led the way for passage of this historic legislation, providing \$400 billion over 10 years for a new and improved Medicare program. This legislation, for the first time ever, provides Medicare beneficiaries with a prescription drug benefit and expanded health plan options to help them meet their specific medical needs. In addition, the measure creates Health Savings Accounts to help all Americans with rising medical expenses; it takes important steps to reduce the cost of prescription drugs for all consumers through new trade negotiation channels; it also takes the initial steps toward cost containment to help preserve the program for future generations.

Mental Health Parity - P.L. 108-197

This provides a one-year extension of the Mental Health Parity Act coverage policy from December 31, 2003 to December 31, 2004, to maintain mental health benefits in health insurance policies.

Trauma Care Systems Planning and Development (S. 239) - Passed Senate

The bill would double the funding to help states develop more effective trauma care systems, with an emphasis on rural areas. The bill also requires the Department of Health and Human Services to provide technical assistance regarding trauma care to state and local agencies.

KEEPING AMERICANS SAFE AT HOME AND ABROAD

At Home

National Flood Insurance Program Reauthorization Act of 2003 - P.L. 108-3

This amends the National Flood Insurance Act of 1968 to extend the Director of FEMA's ability to carry out the national flood insurance program through 2003.

Smallpox Emergency Personnel Protection - P.L. 108-20

Under the law, the federal government will provide – to eligible individuals (or their survivors), for covered injuries – payment for related medical care, lost employment income, and death benefits, due to the administration of a smallpox vaccine or arising in specified circumstances from an accidental smallpox inoculation.

PROTECT Act - P.L. 108-21

This law strengthens existing laws against child pornography, reversing much of the damage done by a recent Supreme Court ruling that made it very difficult to prosecute child pornographers who use the Internet. This law also codifies and expands the President's initiative to provide national coordination for AMBER Alert programs, the immediate alert programs designed to find kidnapped children soon after they are abducted.

Keeping Children and Families Safe Act of 2003 - P.L. 108-36

This law enhances the nation's child abuse prevention programs by authorizing grants to States for programs to prevent child abuse and provide care for victims.

Prison Rape Elimination Act of 2003 - P.L. 108-79

This law directs the Bureau of Justice Statistics within the Department of Justice to conduct an annual statistical study and analysis of the incidence and effects of prison rape.

Partial Birth Abortion Ban Act of 2003 - P.L. 108-105

This law bans partial-birth abortions — a procedure in which a living fetus of 20 weeks gestation or more is partially delivered before being deliberately killed. The law bans this atrocious practice and is consistent with the Supreme Court's past rulings on abortion issues.

Nomination of Thomas J. Ridge to be Secretary of Homeland Security - Confirmed 94-0 and Homeland Security Appropriations bill for FY 2004 - P.L. 108-90

Before Secretary Ridge was nominated to be the first head of the new Department of Homeland Security, which was created in response to the events of September 11th, President Bush chose him as the Director of the White House Office of Homeland Security where he proved himself equal to this most critical task. Prior to answering the call of President Bush, Secretary Ridge was twice elected Governor and five times elected to the U.S. House of Representatives from Pennsylvania. Congress this year passed its first appropriations bill for the newly created Department, which now houses customs and border protection, immigration and customs enforcement, the Transportation Security Administration, the Coast Guard, the Office for Domestic Preparedness, and Emergency Preparedness and Response.

National Transportation Safety Board Reauthorization (S. 579) - P.L. 108-168

This law authorizes funding for the NTSB, which is responsible for investigating and determining the cause of every civil aviation accident and significant accidents in other modes of transportation. Corrective responses recommended by the NTSB save lives.

Undetectable Firearms Act Extension - P.L. 108-174

This bill reauthorizes the ban on undetectable firearms (sometimes referred to as “plastic guns”) for another 10 years under the Undetectable Firearms Act of 1988 (which makes it illegal to manufacture, import, possess, or transfer a firearm that is not detectable by walk-through metal detectors or airport x-ray machines).

Poison Control Center Enhancement - P.L. 108-194

This bill authorizes continued funding for the maintenance of a national toll-free number to access regional poison control centers.

Vision 100 -Century of Aviation Reauthorization Act - P.L. 108-176

This bill would authorize funding for the entire suite of federal aviation programs until 2007. Specifically, the bill provides \$10.5 billion to improve safety and increase airport capacity, and creates an Aviation Security Capital Fund to help airports pay for new detection and counterterrorism technology to keep the American flying public safe.

Homeland Security Federal Workforce Act (S. 589) - Passed Senate

This bill would help the government recruit and retain excellent candidates to work in critical areas of national security; it would provide an education loan repayment program and a fellowship program for qualified, superior candidates. This bill would also assist government agencies in addressing personnel deficiencies in specialized skill areas important to national security.

Iraqi Scientists Immigration Act of 2003 (S. 205) - Passed Senate

This bill authorizes the issuance of immigrant visas to, and the admission to the United States for permanent residence of, certain scientists, engineers, and technicians who have worked in Iraqi weapons of mass destruction programs.

Air Cargo Security Act (S. 165) - Passed Senate

This bill would improve America’s air transportation security by requiring the screening of cargo transported on commercial passenger aircraft.

Arming of Cargo Pilots Against Terrorism (S. 1657) - Passed Senate

This bill amends current law to allow flight deck crew members of a cargo aircraft to be armed with a firearm and taser to defend the aircraft against an attack by terrorists that could result in

the use of the aircraft as a weapon of mass destruction or for other terrorist purposes.

Federal Railroad Safety Improvement Act (S. 1402) - Passed Senate

This bill authorizes nearly \$1 billion over five years to improve safety on the nation's railways through the Federal Railroad Administration's safety and research programs. The bill also would study the conditions of the nation's railways and recommend ways to improve the ability of emergency responders to perform their duties.

Disaster Area Health and Environmental Monitoring (S. 1279) - Passed Senate

This bill authorizes the President to carry out a program for the protection of the health and safety of residents, workers, volunteers, and others in a disaster area.

Defending and Promoting Freedom

Emergency Wartime Supplemental Appropriations Act of 2003 - P.L. 108-11

This bill provides \$78.49 billion for ongoing military operations in Iraq, postwar occupation, reconstruction and relief in Iraq, international assistance to countries contributing to the war in Iraq or the global war on terrorism, the cost of the continued U.S. presence in Afghanistan, and additional homeland security needs. The bill provides an additional \$13.7 billion for military personnel in FY03.

Global HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria Assistance - P.L. 108-25

This law meets the President's request to provide assistance to foreign countries to combat HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria. The President will establish a comprehensive, integrated, five-year strategy to combat the global spread of HIV and AIDS.

Taiwan Participation in the World Health Organization - P.L. 108-28

Under this law, the U.S. Secretary of State is required to develop a plan to promote and obtain observer status for Taiwan in the World Health Organization at its annual meeting in Geneva, Switzerland. Observer status in the WHO provides Taiwan with access to medical expertise and emergency health assistance from the international community.

Burmese Freedom and Democracy Act of 2003 - P.L. 108-61

This bill sanctions the ruling Burmese military junta to strengthen Burma's democratic forces, and supports and recognizes the National League of Democracy as the legitimate representative of the Burmese people as a means of promoting democratic rule and freedom of expression in Burma.

Emergency Funds for Defense and Reconstruction of Iraq and Afghanistan - P.L. 108-106

This bill provides \$87.44 billion in emergency supplemental appropriations for defense and for the reconstruction of Iraq and Afghanistan for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2004. The bill provides an additional \$17.8 billion for military personnel in FY04. Just as the Marshall Plan was an investment in the future of a stable and peaceful Europe, this bill provides the necessary funding to support the reconstruction of Iraq, and provides our troops with the resources needed to successfully continue the War on Terrorism.

Defense Authorization Act - P.L. 108-136

This bill authorizes \$401.3 billion for FY04 for military activities of the Department of Defense – including programs to combat terrorism and for initial deployment of a national missile defense system. It also includes a military pay raise of 3.7 percent for all uniformed service personnel, and higher targeted pay raises for mid-grade personnel, for an overall average raise of 4.15 percent. Additionally, the bill phases in concurrent receipt of both military retired pay and veterans’ disability compensation.

Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty - P.L. 108-175

In this bill, the U.S. government calls on Syria to halt its support for terrorism, end its occupation of Lebanon, and stop its development of weapons of mass destruction. It holds Syria accountable for the serious international security problems it has caused in the Middle East, and imposes sanctions on Syria.

Moscow Treaty (Treaty Doc. 107-8) - Enacted on March 6, 2003

This treaty provides Senate consent for an agreement between the United States and Russian Federation that each country will commit to reduce the total number of strategic offensive nuclear warheads in its possession to between 1,700 and 2,200 warheads by December 31, 2012.

NATO Enlargement (Treaty Doc. 108-04) - Enacted on May 8, 2003

This treaty provides Senate consent to amend the 1949 North Atlantic Treaty to allow seven Central and Eastern European nations to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). They are Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia.

Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) Amendment (S. 113) - Passed Senate

This bill amends the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act of 1978 to cover individuals (“agents of a foreign power”), other than United States persons, who engage in international terrorism without affiliation with an international terrorist group, for the purposes of securing warrants for the electronic surveillance of communications between and among foreign powers.

Support for Our Troops and Our Veterans

National Cemetery Expansion Act of 2003 - P.L. 108-109

This bill directs the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish five new cemeteries for our nation's veterans.

Military Family Tax Relief Act of 2003 - P.L. 108-121

This bill provides a special rule for members of the uniformed services in determining the exclusion of gain from the sale of a principal residence and restores the tax-exempt status of death gratuity payments to members of the uniformed services. Also doubles, from \$6,000 to \$12,000, the military death gratuity payment and amends the Internal Revenue Code to provide that the full payment shall be tax exempt.

Vietnam Veterans Memorial Visitor Center Act - P.L. 108-126

This bill authorizes the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, Inc. to design and construct a visitor center for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2003 - P.L. 108-147

This bill increases the rates of veterans' disability compensation, additional compensation for dependents, the clothing allowance for certain disabled adult children, and dependency and indemnity compensation for surviving spouses and children. The increase is the same percentage as that payable to Social Security recipients.

Veterans' Memorial Preservation and Recognition Act of 2003 - P.L. 108-29

Establishes criminal penalties for willfully injuring or destroying or attempting to injure or destroy any structure, plaque, statue, or other monument on public property commemorating the service of any person(s) in the U.S. armed forces. It also requires that veterans cemeteries be treated as sites permitting supplemental guide signs on Federal-aid highways.

Servicemembers' Civil Relief Act (S. 1136; now part of H.R. 100) - P.L. 108-189

This bill provides for financial protection and temporary suspension of certain judicial proceedings for servicemembers on active duty. It increases the rent level under which a servicemember or family members are protected from eviction, limits a state's ability to increase the tax liability of a servicemember's spouse, and increases the value of life insurance coverage that is protected by the government if premiums are not paid.

Combat Pay Tax Relief (H.R. 1308) – In Conference

This tax-relief package includes combat pay in the calculation to determine refundability related to the Child Tax Credit [see also discussion of this bill on page 3].

Troops Phone Home Free (S. 718) - Passed Senate

This bill directs the Secretary of Defense to provide prepaid phone cards, or the equivalent

telephone service benefit, to military personnel stationed outside the United States who are directly supporting military operations in Iraq or Afghanistan so that they may call family and friends in the United States at no cost, for calls up to \$40 per month, per person.

Re-enlistment Bonus (S. 711) - Passed Senate

This bill alleviates the delay in the payment of the Selected Reserve reenlistment bonus to members of the Selected Reserve who are mobilized.

Survivor Benefit Increase (S. 704) - Passed Senate

This bill increases the amount of the death gratuity payable with respect to deceased members of the Armed Forces.

Reserve Survivor Benefits (S. 712) - Passed Senate

This bill provides Survivor Benefit Plan annuities for surviving spouses of Reservists not eligible for retirement who die from a cause incurred or aggravated while on inactive-duty training.

EDUCATION INITIATIVES: LEAVING NO CHILD BEHIND

Museum and Library Services Act of 2003 - P.L. 108-16

This bill reauthorizes programs that increase access to and cooperation among our nation's museums and libraries.

Child Nutrition and School Lunch Programs Reauthorization (H.R. 3232) - P.L. 108-134

This bill reauthorizes programs that ensure America's students are provided nourishing meals at school that will help improve their ability to learn, and also ensures that children in economically disadvantaged families do not go hungry.

American History and Civics Education Act of 2003 (S. 504) - Passed Senate

This bill creates a pilot program to encourage the teaching of American History and Civics through residential academies for teachers and students, and authorizes \$25 million annually in appropriations for fiscal years 2004-2007.

PROTECTING AMERICA'S RESOURCES and PROMOTING AGRICULTURE

Agriculture Disaster Assistance - P.L. 108-7

The Senate provided \$3.1 billion in disaster relief to farmers and ranchers to cover losses resulting from the drought of 2002 (contained in the consolidated appropriations bill).

Healthy Forest Restoration Act of 2003 - P.L. 108-148

This bill improves the capacity of the Secretary of Agriculture and the Secretary of the Interior to plan and conduct hazardous fuels reduction projects on National Forest System lands and Bureau of Land Management lands aimed at protecting communities, watersheds, and certain other at-risk lands from catastrophic wildfire. In addition, it will improve the capacity to enhance efforts that protect watersheds and address threats to forest and rangeland health, including catastrophic wildfire.

Energy Policy Act of 2003 (H.R. 6) - Passed Senate

This bill provides for security and diversity in energy supply for the American people, and enhances energy conservation, research, and development.

STRENGTHENING THE SAFETY NET

Unemployment Benefit Extensions - P.L. 108-1 and P.L. 108-26

Congress has twice extended a program to provide additional unemployment compensation to unemployed individuals who have exhausted their traditional benefits—which are 26 weeks in most cases. The program provides 50 percent more benefits for all workers, and 100 percent more for workers in high unemployment states.

Welfare Reform Extension - P.L. 108-7, P.L. 108-40, and P.L. 108-89

Congress has three times extended the reformed welfare program, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), which, since its enactment in 1996, has resulted in more than half of the families that made up the welfare caseloads moving into lives of self-sufficiency.

Strengthen AmeriCorps Program Act - P.L. 108-45

This bill updated the accounting system used by the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) to fund the AmeriCorps program to improve the program's financial integrity and allow the program to fund a larger number of volunteers.

Adoption Promotion Act - P. L. 108-145

This bill provides payments to those states that increase the number of foster-care adoptions in their states, and particularly targets the adoption of older children (aged nine and above) and special needs children.

CARE Act (S. 476) - Passed Senate

This bill provides a number of tax incentives and other measures to encourage charitable giving, saving, and equitable treatment of religious and secular charitable organizations.