

420 Bills Passed by House Got No Senate Attention

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CNC News | October 17, 2010

WASHINGTON -- To date during the 111th Congress, House members have expended enormous amounts of manpower and resources to craft, debate and pass 420 bills that the Senate has essentially ignored, according to a list released by Speaker Nancy Pelosi's office.

One of those is the 'Paycheck Fairness Act' (H.R. 12) that was one of the first pieces of legislation approved in the House when the new Congress convened in 2009. It won by a vote of 256 to 163. According to sponsor Rep. Rose DeLauro, D-Conn., it will help promote pay equity for women.

"In this economy, families are struggling to make ends meet.

Not one of them deserves to be shortchanged, but because

women still earn 78 cents for every dollar men earn, many unfortunately are," said DeLauro.

Languishing bills

Other languishing bills include the Postal Service Financial Relief Act, the Elder Abuse Victims Act and the National Bombing Prevention Act.

To put the issue into perspective, some of the 420 stalled bills include routine measures like naming a post office or making sure caller ID information is not fake. Others include more noteworthy items like the stalled 'cap and trade' legislation and some economic recovery bills.

A bill can take countless worker hours to shepherd from introduction to House passage. Many involve numerous hearings and lobbying on both sides.

'House doesn't like the Senate very much'

"Let me say that the House doesn't really like the Senate very much right now because they have worked so hard from subcommittee, full committee, to the floor to get these things done, and then they die in the Senate," said professor James Thurber, Director of American University's Center for Congressional and

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Presidential Studies.

Democrats talk-up all the bills passed in the House and stalled in the Senate as evidence of Republican obstruction.

"Unlike the house, we don't have a Rules Committee that we can use to ram legislation over the objection of Republicans. Everything we do needs consensus," said Jim Manley, spokesman for Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid.

Temper public whims

The Founding Fathers created the Senate in part as a means to temper public whims as represented by the House. They wanted to promote thorough deliberation of policies. The institution's rules and traditions have evolved in such a way that the minority party can significantly slow down the legislative process.

"You need 60 votes to govern," Thurber said. "It's a unique institution in the world, in the sense that you need a supermajority to get anything done in a normal way."

Some political observers wonder why Speaker Pelosi and other leaders in that chamber have brought so many bills to the floor for a vote when they know those measures are likely to die almost immediately upon arrival in the Senate at the other end of the Capitol.

Bargain for what you really want

According to Thurber, "When you bargain, you have to give something to get something, it's best if you are bargaining, as the House of Representatives, to go forward with exactly what you want, what you can get, and then bargain with the Senate at that point."

But with the post-election lame duck session packed with priorities, like debating the so-called Bush tax cuts, many of the bills passed in the House will simply disappear into the history books. They don't carry over from one Congress to another and sponsors of these hundreds of measures must introduce them once again.