

Obama veto threats at record pace to begin new Congress



Gregory Korte, USA TODAY

5:26 p.m. EST January 27, 2015



(Photo: Carolyn Kaster, AP)

WASHINGTON — The Obama White House has threatened to veto eight bills taken up by the Republican House in January — the most veto threats to begin a new Congress since the Reagan White House first started issuing formal veto threats in 1985.

The spurt of veto threats has rankled congressional Republicans, who say that President Obama isn't giving bipartisanship a chance. But the White House blames Republicans, saying they're bringing up bills they already know he opposes.

Whoever's at fault, the amount of veto brinksmanship appears to be at a modern high. Counting a verbal veto threat on an Iran sanctions bill that hasn't been drafted yet, Obama's veto threat count so far this year rises to nine. By comparison, Reagan issued five veto threats by this point in 1987, but those threats were on different versions of just two bills.



USA TODAY

For Obama, nine veto threats in one month

(<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2015/01/27/obama-veto-threat-list/22358185/>)

Until now, Obama had been relatively restrained in his use of vetoes and veto threats. Working with a Democratic-controlled Congress, Obama spent the first 17 months of his presidency without issuing a single veto threat, before using it on a Republican-sponsored bill on greenhouse gas emissions.

His 148 veto threats in his first six years had been the fewest of any president since Reagan. And he's vetoed just two bills, the fewest of any president since James Garfield's assassination-shortened 199-day term in 1881.



USA TODAY

Obama uses veto pen sparingly, but could that change?

(<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2014/11/19/obama-veto-threats/19177413/>)

So the spurt of veto threats may bode poorly for bipartisan cooperation as Obama faces a Republican-controlled Congress for the first time in his presidency.

Congressional Republicans say the veto threats are sabotaging any chance of bipartisanship. House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., said he confronted Obama about his veto threats [at a meeting at the White House two weeks ago \(/story/news/politics/2015/01/13/obama-mcconnell-boehner-reid-pelosi-white-house-meeting/21684751/\)](http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2015/01/13/obama-mcconnell-boehner-reid-pelosi-white-house-meeting/21684751/).

"He starts off how he wants to work together. I said, 'Mr, President, you've already issued five veto threats. If you want to work together, why not let the legislative process play out?' " McCarthy said. "The president really couldn't answer me when I called him on it."



President Obama is joined by congressional leaders from both parties to discuss a wide range of issues on Jan. 13, 2015, in the Cabinet Room of the White House. (Photo: Carolyn Kaster, AP)

But the White House says congressional Republicans are deliberately passing veto-bait bills they already know the president opposes.

"Right out of the gate we see that the new Republican majority in Congress is actually recycling old legislation that they know that the President strongly opposes," Press Secretary Josh Earnest said this month. "So it doesn't send a very clear signal that this new Republican Congress is ready to pursue a different political strategy than the one that they've pursued for the last four years."

Most veto threats come through what's known as a statement of administration policy, issued by the Office of Management and Budget.



USA TODAY

[Is that a threat? White House veto signals often nuanced](http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2015/01/07/obama-veto-threat-rhetoric/21398415/)

(<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2015/01/07/obama-veto-threat-rhetoric/21398415/>)

But Obama also issued four veto threats in a single paragraph of his State of the Union speech. "We can't slow down businesses or put our economy at risk with government shutdowns or fiscal showdowns. We can't put the security of families at risk by taking away their health insurance, or unraveling the new rules on Wall Street, or refighting past battles on immigration when we've got a system to fix. And if a bill comes to my desk that tries to do any of these things, it will earn my veto," he said.

Then he issued a fifth veto threat on an as-yet-unwritten Iran sanctions bill. "New sanctions passed by this Congress, at this moment in time, will all but guarantee that diplomacy fails — alienating America from its allies; and ensuring that Iran starts up its nuclear program again," Obama said. "That is why I will veto any new sanctions bill that threatens to undo this progress."

That's the most veto threats in a single State of the Union Address since at least Franklin Roosevelt, [according to the fact-checking web site Politifact](http://www.politifact.com/punditfact/article/2015/jan/22/obamas-state-union-veto-threats-most-ever/) (<http://www.politifact.com/punditfact/article/2015/jan/22/obamas-state-union-veto-threats-most-ever/>).



USA TODAY

[Full text: Obama's 2015 State of the Union Address](http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2015/01/20/full-text-obama-2015-state-of-the-union/22064089/)

(<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2015/01/20/full-text-obama-2015-state-of-the-union/22064089/>)

Do veto threats make a difference? Consider the case of the Promoting Job Creation and Reducing Small Business Burdens Act, which would roll back some of the Dodd-Frank financial regulations passed in the aftermath of the financial meltdown.

That bill first came to the House floor on Jan. 7 under suspension of the rules — meaning it needed a two-thirds majority to pass. It fell short, 276-146, with 35 Democrats voting for the bill. The next week, the House voted again on a straight up-or-down vote.

In the meantime, Obama issued a veto threat on Jan. 12 — and the bill lost the support of seven more Democrats.

Two members — Rep. Hank Johnson, D-Ga., and Rep. Bobby Rush, D-Ill. — said they simply hit the wrong button the first time they voted on the bill. But others said the veto threat did force them to reconsider the bill.

Rep. Suzan DelBene, D-Wash., originally supported the bill despite misgivings over the delaying implementation of the Volcker Rule, which prohibits banks from making speculative investments.

"After the veto threat and the lack of support to pass it under suspension of the rules, she saw that there would be an opportunity to go back to the drawing board and pass a bipartisan bill that doesn't include this damaging provision and craft a more reasonable bill that would actually have a chance of becoming law," said DelBene spokeswoman Ramsey Cox.

Another bill Obama threatened to veto would have banned abortions after 20 weeks. That bill was pulled from the floor after moderate House Republicans objected to provisions dealing with rape.

McCarthy said veto threats do make it more difficult for House members — especially Democrats — to take tough votes. "I think in their minds, they're afraid of losing on a bill he could veto," he said.

But Samuel Kernell, a political science professor at the University of California, San Diego, said the real audience for Obama's veto threats is in the upper chamber. The House rarely removes an objectionable provision from a bill because of a veto threat, but the Senate — where rules give the minority party more clout — often does.

"The Senate is where the action is," Kernell said. "The vast majority of all veto threats, if they are going to be accommodated at all, will be accommodated in the Senate."

That accommodation doesn't seem to be happening. The Senate is poised to vote on a bill approving the Keystone XL pipeline before turning to a Homeland Security spending bill that attempts to block Obama's executive action on immigration. Both are subject to veto threats.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., remains unfazed.

"The President vetoed two bills in six years — two little bills over technicalities," he said on CBS' *60 Minutes* Sunday. "The reason was the Senate never sent him anything that caused him any discomfort. In our system, it's going to happen occasionally. Presidents veto bills."

Adam Jentleson, a spokesman for Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., said McConnell "is deciding to spend 100% of the Republican Senate's first month on bills certain to be vetoed."

"This is not a serious attempt to govern," Jentleson said. "Not even close."

Follow [@gregorykorte](https://twitter.com/gregorykorte) (<http://twitter.com/gregorykorte>) on Twitter.

Read or Share this story: <http://usat.ly/1JZrKcd>

USA NOW



[\(media/cnn.com/video/2015/01/27/1381-spanking-your-kids-is-ok-by-the-pope/\)](http://media.cnn.com/video/2015/01/27/1381-spanking-your-kids-is-ok-by-the-pope/)
spanking-your-kids-is-ok-by-the-pope/