



Frustrated House still waiting for Senate action on 420 bills



By Russell Berman - 10/05/10 08:28 PM EDT

The House ran another legislative lap around the Senate in September, widening the gap in the number of bills the chambers have passed this Congress to more than 400.

With only a lame-duck session remaining, the House since January 2009 has passed 420 bills that have sat on the Senate shelf, according to an updated list provided to The Hill.

The gulf in productivity has led to an escalation in tensions between the chambers, culminating in a veritable staring contest last month over the expiring George W. Bush-era tax cuts.

House Democratic leaders have frequently griped at the disparity, and the caucus chairman, Rep. John Larson (D-Conn.), told The Hill last week that the slow pace of legislating in the Senate, where bills can be held up by the filibuster and other rules, “infuriates” members of the House.

Rank-and-file House Democrats said the lack of Senate action on legislation they had cast tough votes on had left them twisting in the wind before an increasingly agitated electorate. At the top of the list was the June 2009 cap-and-trade energy and climate bill, which passed the House by a slim margin but never made it to the Senate floor.

The gap in approved legislation increased by 48 in the three weeks Congress was in session in September, and by 130 since The Hill first reported on the disparity in February.

Among the House-passed bills from the most recent period still awaiting action in the Senate are measures to audit the claims fund set up by BP after the Gulf oil spill and legislation to increase screening for diabetes. The Senate has also yet to sign off on naming post offices for George C. Marshall, the late actor Jimmy Stewart and the civil rights leader Dorothy Height.

A spokesman for Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) declined comment. The Senate has a busy agenda for the lame-duck session in November but is expected to make no more than a small dent in the House stack before the 111th Congress concludes.

There are also bills that have passed the Senate but not the House, including a child nutrition measure being pushed by first lady Michelle Obama and the White House. (Lawmakers in the House have yet to agree on a way to pay for the funding in the bill.)

House leaders drew a line in the sand on holding a House vote on tax cuts set to expire at the end of the year, saying the Senate would have to act first.

When the Senate decided to punt the issue until after the elections, the House followed suit, despite protests from liberal members who wanted to cast their vote to extend middle-class tax cuts before they left for the campaign trail.

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