

Did President Trump Inherit Obama's 'Do-Nothing' Congress?

While Congress is out on spring break—or what they euphemistically term a “district work period”—it is a good time to ask what the GOP-led Congress has been doing since Inauguration Day.

The short answer is not much.

As our friend Jonathan Bydlak of the Coalition to Reduce Spending, recently observed, “By this time in 2009, then-President Obama had signed 12 bills into law, including the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (\$663 billion), the 2009 Omnibus Act (\$410 billion) and the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) Reauthorization Act (\$73.8 billion), totaling roughly \$1.1 trillion in spending. No doubt these bills represented the foundation of Democratic priorities at the time ... In contrast, President Trump has thus far signed a grand total of ... one bill with significant spending implications—the reauthorization of NASA.”

Bydlak points out that while the House has voted on eight bills with spending implications, the Senate has yet to address a single one.

We will give the Senate a little slack since McConnell did manage to muster the energy to get Justice Neil Gorsuch confirmed before this term of the Supreme Court slipped away. However, many key positions in the Trump administration remain unfilled due to the Democrats’ obstruction of the confirmation process that McConnell continues to allow.

Indeed, due to Democrat obstruction three Cabinet Secretaries, Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue, Labor Secretary R.

Alexander Acosta and U.S. Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer remain unconfirmed.

Then again, there may be some benefit in a do-nothing Congress.

Our friend Stephen Moore writing for the Cato Institute back in 2000 noted that In Washington, "do-nothingism" is defined as refusing to pass the Democratic legislative wish list.

And that Economist Jim Bianco of Arbor Trading Co. has documented that during the past several decades, the stock market performs more than twice as well when Congress is out of session and isn't regulating, taxing, spending or engaging in other meddlesome activities that erase wealth.

So to some extent complainers about congressional do-nothingism are missing the idea that in a growing economy, there's a lot to be said for do-nothingism and gridlock. "When you're in the groove economically," says economist Arthur Laffer, "you want to stay in the groove. The less Congress does, the better." And Moore noted that Ray Keating of the Small Business Survival Committee has shown that the economy tends to do better the fewer laws Congress passes.

That's all well and good, but we elected this Congress not to pass laws, but repeal them, and to scrub the economy clean of the drag of all the Obama-era regulatory barnacles that are slowing it down.

To a casual observer, said Jonathan Bydlak, it might look like President Trump has been busy dismantling the many machinations of government, and it is true that regulatory policy has moved swiftly in a direction pleasing to most conservatives.

But Bydlak concluded that a closer look reveals that the last two months have not been characterized so much by what has happened but by what has not. Near-daily controversy over

executive orders or tweets does not represent substantial policy changes but instead masks an almost complete lack of movement on many issues.

Bydlak is right, and it is time Speaker Paul Ryan and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell got something remotely resembling President Trump's legislative agenda moving. {eo}

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