



Policy Paper No. 130

BillTally Report 106–2

August 30, 2000

The 106th Congress after 18 Months: Re-Opening the Candy Store

With the traditional post-Labor Day campaign season set to begin amidst the closest election contests in years, an analysis of data for the past eighteen months of the 106th Congress suggests that Members of Congress may see the projected Congressional Budget Office (CBO) surplus as an excuse to careen deliberately off the path of fiscal discipline from which they have been gradually straying since the 104th Congress. The total *number* of bills has increased - as have the number of bills to increase spending - yet there has been a drastic decrease in bills introduced that would actually save taxpayers money. It seems to many Members of Congress that sweeter surpluses mean more trips to the federal candy store.

This report summarizes data from NTUF's BillTally accounting software, which for ten years has studied the cost or savings of all legislation introduced in Congress that affects spending by at least \$1 million. Agenda totals for individual lawmakers were developed by cross-indexing their sponsorship and cosponsorship records with cost estimates for 912 House bills and 644 Senate bills under BillTally accounting rules that prevent the double counting of overlapping proposals. All sponsorship and cost data in this report were reviewed confidentially by each Congressional office prior to publication. Appendix A lists all Members alphabetically with the number of spending and saving bills they introduced, Appendix B lists Members by state delegation, Appendix C lists the data used for Table 3 and Figures 3 and 4, and Appendix D gives a thorough explanation of the BillTally methodology.

I. General Observations

- The data from the 106th Congress shows a return to increased spending for both parties in the Senate. In the House, Democrats have reduced their net average agenda from the last Congress by more than half, yet still, on average, they would raise spending by \$51 billion per year. House Republicans have actually changed their net agenda from a cost savings to a spending increase agenda of \$4.7 billion annually. In fact this is the first Congress since the 102nd where both major parties in both chambers have net average agendas that spend.

- If all the bills introduced in the House for the 106th Congress were enacted, it would equal \$770 billion¹ or 9 times the projected on-budget surplus for the year 2000 of \$84 billion.² In the Senate, the figure is \$203 billion.
- Spending priorities in the 106th Congress compared to the 105th have shifted to costly and more numerous bills. While the number of bills introduced that decrease spending have dropped by 116 from the 105th, the number of bills to increase spending have risen by 365 at the same time - the equivalent of a new spending increase proposal every day of the year compared to the 105th.
- If the average agenda of House Members with a pro-spending agenda were enacted, it would increase spending by approximately \$305 per American taxpayer. In contrast, if the House Members with a pro-cutting agenda enacted the legislation they support, the result would be \$11 billion in savings, or approximately \$94 per American taxpayer.
- If the average agenda of a Senator proposing net spending hikes were enacted, it would raise spending by \$230 per American taxpayer. If the average agenda of a pro-cutting Senator were adopted, the savings would equal approximately \$86 per American taxpayer.

II. Analysis of Findings

A. *Nothing Left to Save - Or Too Much to Spend?*

1. Can We Cut More?

Lawmakers have indeed been busy during the past eighteen months of the 106th Congress. Not only has the overall number of spending bills risen, but also the ratios of increase bills to decrease bills from the 104th Congress to the 106th Congress in the House and Senate have grown by 800 percent and 1,100 percent respectively. Is this an indication that the federal government is now running so efficiently that there are no more savings to achieve? Or do Members of the 106th Congress see the projected surplus as candy with a shelf life too short to share with taxpayers? According to the government's own Congressional Budget Office (CBO)³ and the non-profit watchdog organization Citizens Against Government Waste⁴ (CAGW) the answer would seem to be the latter. CBO annually releases budget and revenue options to the House and Senate Budget Committees that includes options for reducing spending from various categories such as national defense, agriculture and Medicare - which, for the most part, are ignored. If all the CBO's suggestions for saving taxpayer money in the area of national defense were implemented it would annually save \$12 billion over five years - the annual savings over ten years would rise to \$23 billion. All of CBO's suggestions for savings in Medicare would annually save \$32 billion over five years, and \$52 billion annually over ten. Every year CAGW also looks at different ways Congress can save taxpayers money by reducing or cutting low-priority programs. CAGW's *2000 Prime Cuts* offers 545 waste-

cutting proposals that would save taxpayers \$1.2 trillion over five years. The recommendations range from eliminating President Clinton's "paid volunteer" program AmeriCorps (saving \$1.2 billion over five years) to eliminating U.S. steel subsidies (saving \$2.5 billion over five years).⁵ As Figures 1 and 2 indicate most Members of Congress have disregarded this advice and have shunned that would actually save taxpayers' money and reduce government efficiency.

Figure 1.
House Bills Introduced and Scored in the First 18 Months of Each Session

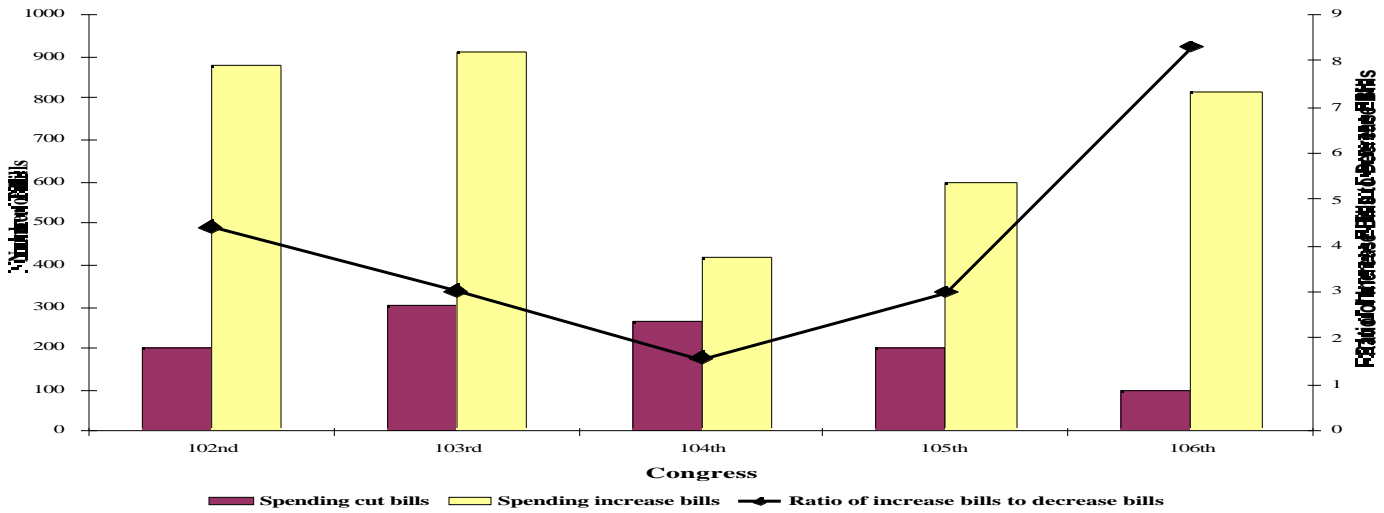
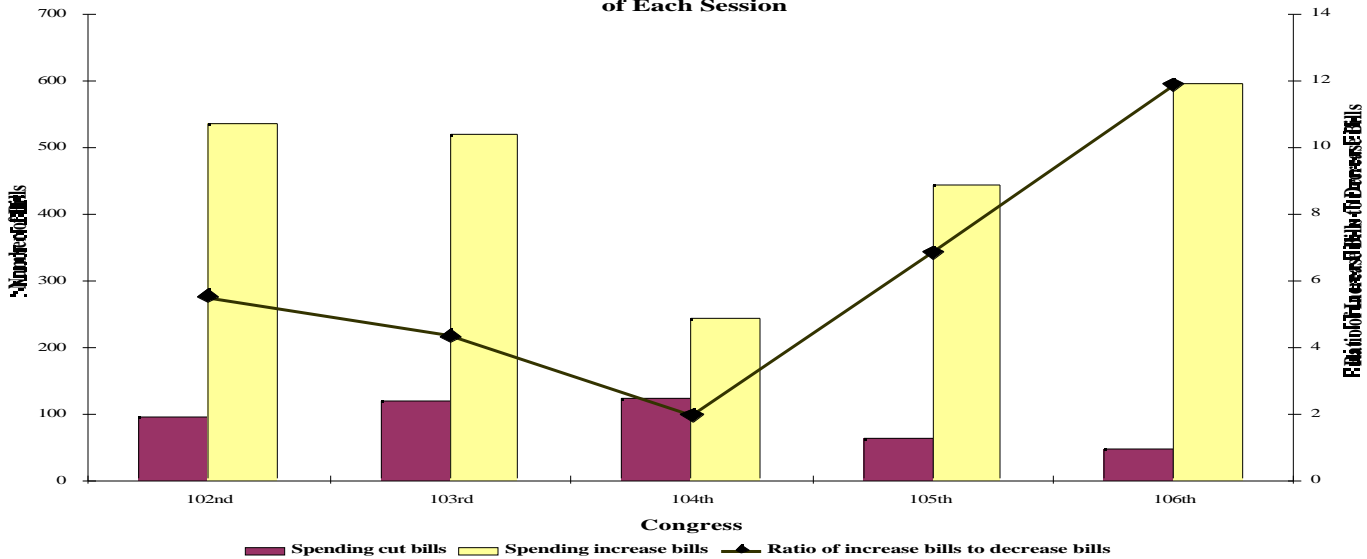


Figure 2.
Senate Bills Introduced and Scored in the First 18 Months of Each Session



2. They Can All Agree On One Thing - Spend!

Embracing a profligate past does not seem to be a rational way to repeat budget surpluses in future years, but this seems to be the contradictory principle of the 106th Congress. As Tables 1 and 2 indicate this is the first Congress since 1991 that both chambers of Congress and both major parties have net agendas that wish to spend more money as opposed to save it. While average spending agendas for all involved have gradually increased from the more fiscally conservative 104th Congress, average cutting agendas have been steadily getting smaller since the 103rd. The only group to reduce gross spending proposals has been the House Democrats, who have reduced their net agendas by more than half to \$51 billion a year - an impressive amount that still manages to advocate \$47 billion more than House Republicans. The issues on which both parties wish to increase spending are the same that now crowd the campaign trails. If all the bills introduced in the House dealing with education were enacted, they would raise federal school spending by \$99 billion⁶ - on top of the \$190 billion that Washington already spends on education. Prescription drugs through the Medicare program, another election year hot-topic, has prompted the Senate, the House, and the President to introduce legislation with ten-year price tags ranging from \$78 billion to \$444 billion. Such bipartisan clamoring for a new and expensive entitlement - - despite recent studies showing such aid is ill-targeted and harmful to Medicare solvency - - would suggest a Medicare prescription drug plan is a questionable answer to an unanswerable question. As Senator John Breaux (D-LA) recently put it, pouring billions of additional tax dollars into a Medicare system that is already insolvent – losing \$9 billion last year alone – is the equivalent of “putting more gas into an old car.”⁷ In fact millions of low-income Americans are already serviced by federal, state and private programs which provide free or inexpensive prescription drugs.⁸ With a surplus in front of them, lawmakers apparently don't want facts to get in the way of further spending.

Table 1. House Sponsorship of Legislation in the First 18 Months of Past 5 Congresses by Party (in millions)			
Congress	Proposed Increases in Spending	Proposed Decreases in Spending	Net Agenda
Democrats			
102 nd	\$148,955	(\$2,780)	\$146,175
103 rd	\$293,367	(\$23,393)	\$269,973
104 th	\$173,912	(\$10,121)	\$163,791
105 th	\$109,374	(\$3,262)	\$106,112
106 th	\$52,557	(\$1,068)	\$51,490
Republicans			
102 nd	\$23,804	(\$9,600)	\$14,204
103 rd	\$39,523	(\$62,394)	(\$22,871)

104 th	\$7,603	(\$26,627)	(\$19,024)
105 th	\$11,307	(\$22,041)	(\$10,734)
106 th	\$21,506	(\$16,771)	\$4,736
Notes: Totals may not add due to rounding. Representative Sanders (I-VT) and the Delegate from the Virgin Islands for the 104th Congress, Representative Frazier (I-VI), are not included in this table.			

Table 2. Senate Sponsorship of Legislation in the First 18 Months of Past 5 Congresses by Party (in millions)			
Congress	Proposed Increases in Spending	Proposed Decreases in Spending	Net Agenda
Democrats			
102 nd	\$67,336	(\$5,101)	\$62,235
103 rd	\$212,869	(\$16,375)	\$196,494
104 th	\$5,584	(\$4,950)	\$633
105 th	\$27,310	(\$1,318)	\$25,992
106 th	\$39,039	(\$863)	\$38,176
Republicans			
102 nd	\$20,541	(\$9,262)	\$11,280
103 rd	\$45,343	(\$68,452)	(\$23,110)
104 th	\$7,136	(\$23,618)	(\$16,482)
105 th	\$17,021	(\$20,197)	(\$3,175)
106 th	\$20,064	(\$9,701)	\$10,363
Note: Totals may not add due to rounding.			

B. Musical Chairs - What Will the 107th Congress Look Like?

Although the current Presidential election seems to be attracting all the headlines, it is not the only tight race to be decided on November 7. Ever since the Republicans won control of the House and the Senate in the 1994 elections, the question every two years has been can they hold onto their slight and ever dwindling majority? Due to the retirement of a record number of Republicans to pursue other interests or to honor their term limits pledges, the issue of which party will head the next Congress has never been more contentious. Two polls conducted over the same period last week seem to bolster the confusion. A Public Opinion Strategies poll examining a generic match-up between a Democrat and a Republican candidate showed Republicans leading Democrats 46 percent to 45 percent; yet, a Rasmussen Research poll asking the same question showed Democrats leading Republicans 40 percent to 37 percent.⁹ The unknown factor of who will be in the majority in the 107th, coupled with current Republican Chairmen in the House facing term

limits as Chairs under a procedural rule passed in 1995 mean the make-up of the committees will certainly change. As Table 3 illustrates, the net agendas for Republican and Democrat Leaders and Chairmen in the House are significantly different than the average net agendas for all House Republicans and Democrats. The average agenda for Republican Leaders is a cost-cutting agenda of \$21 billion - compared to the average House Republican agenda of increasing annual spending by \$4 billion. On the other hand, potential Republican Committee Chairs are closer to their fellow Republicans, with a difference of \$2 billion. The average agenda for Democrat Leaders compared to rank-and-file Democrats represents a pro-spending difference of nearly \$23 billion. Potential Democrat Chairs would be more like their Leaders than their fellow Democrats by wishing to increase spending over \$80 billion annually - this is accomplished mainly due to the fact that a number of the potential Democrat Chairs also have the highest overall spending totals this Congress.

Table 3. Agendas of Potential 107th Republican Leaders and Committee Chairs to Potential 107th Democrat Leaders and Committee Chairs			
(in millions)			
	Proposed Increases	Proposed Decreases	Net Agenda
HOUSE			
Republican Leaders	\$3,705	(\$25,466)	(\$21,760)
Democrat Leaders	\$74,086	(\$15)	\$74,071
Republican Potential Chairs	\$18,650	(\$16,583)	\$2,067
Democrat Potential Chairs	\$82,756	(\$2,167)	\$80,589
SENATE			
Republican Leaders	\$11,293	(\$7,376)	\$3,917
Democrat Leaders	\$42,041	(\$14,975)	\$27,068
Republican Potential Chairs	\$17,149	(\$9,883)	\$7,266
Democrat Potential Chairs	\$41,228	(\$685)	\$40,543
Notes: Totals may not add due to rounding. Data used to compile this chart may be found in Appendix C.			

Comparing potential Chairs by party shows that the projected surplus could be in even more jeopardy than it currently is, if Congress were to switch hands. As shown in Figures 3 and 4 the differences in net spending agendas between the parties is clearly noticeable, with the most striking being between Republican House Leaders and Democrat House Leaders - net agendas with a difference of over \$95 billion. That is \$11 billion more than Fiscal Year 2000's projected surplus of \$84 billion (excluding Social Security).

Figure 3.
Potential 107th House Leaders' Net Spending Agendas
(in millions)

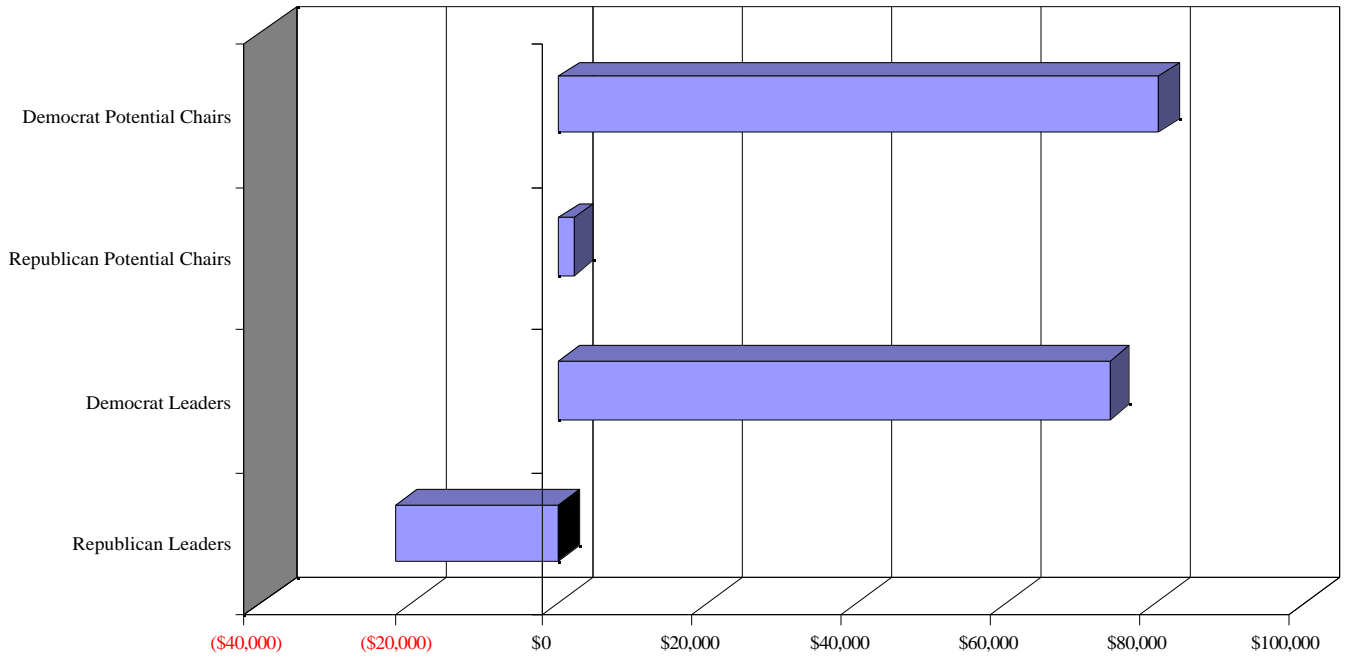
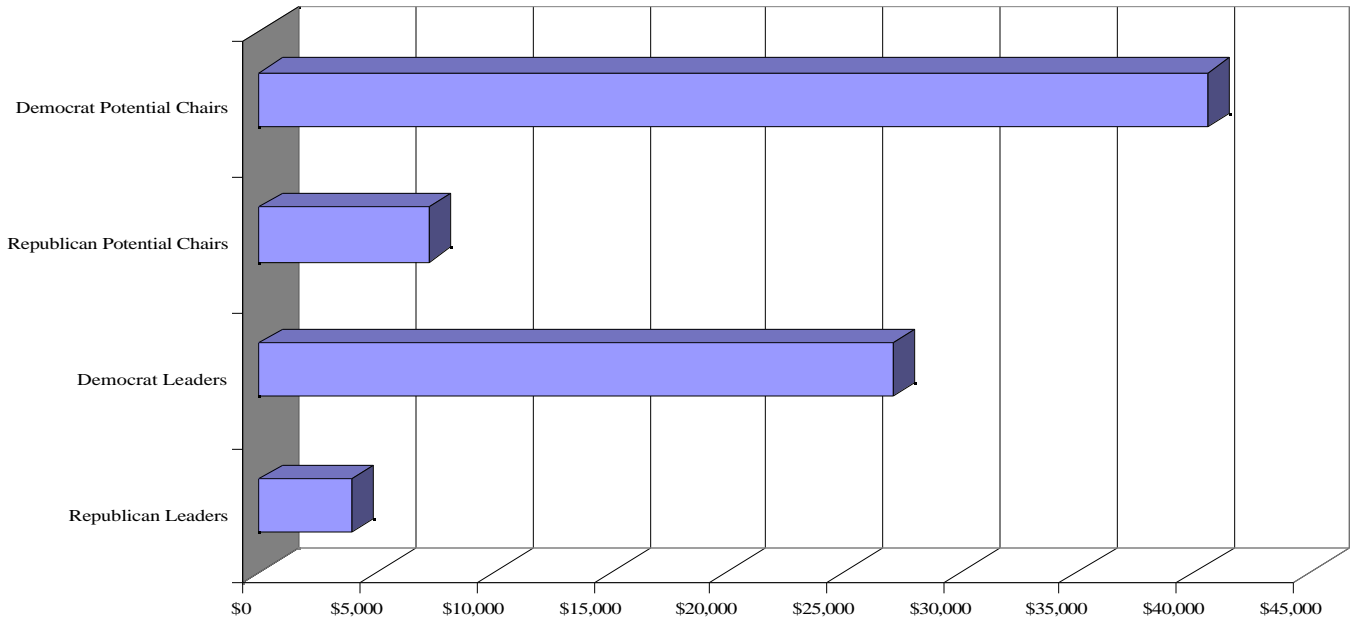


Figure 4.
Potential 107th Senate Leaders' Net Spending Agendas
(in millions)



III. Conclusion

With the rest of the 106th Congress focused on the looming election and the remaining 11 appropriation bills (all 13 are exceeding initial projections by a total of \$25 to \$30 billion)¹⁰ data would suggest that if trends continue, the projected surplus will quickly disappear and true tax reform and relief will be even harder to obtain. For his part President Clinton is vetoing or threatening to veto the major tax relief sent to him this year, while offering little of his own. The hopes of the surplus being returned to the taxpayers who created it - to decide what they want to spend it on - dwindle as the next Congress approaches. Only time will tell whether the Federal Treasury will serve as a temporary repository for overdue tax refunds or as a permanent candy store for overweight special interests.

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End Notes

¹ These numbers do not reflect offsets for either increase or decrease bills.

² Congressional Budget Office, *The Budget and Economic Outlook: An Update*, July 2000. These numbers exclude the Social Security surplus.

³ Congressional Budget Office, *Budget Options*, March 2000.

⁴ Citizens Against Government Waste, *2000 Prime Cuts Summary*, <http://www.cagw.org/publications/prime/pubs.primecuts.home.htm>.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ These numbers do not reflect offsets for either increase or decrease bills.

⁷ Eric V. Schlecht, "A Prescription That Shouldn't Be Filled," *National Taxpayers Union Issue Brief 105*, August 25, 1999.

⁸ Daniel J. Murphy, "New Benefits for Prescription Drugs," *Investor's Business Daily*, August 21, 2000, A26.

⁹ "Polls Show Parties Close On Generic Ballot," *BNN Frontrunner*, August 24, 2000.

¹⁰ Daniel J. Parks, "Republican Leaders Boxed in as Spending Measures Languish," *CQ Weekly*, July 29, 2000.