

Policy Paper No. 168**BillTally Report 111-3****March 15, 2011**

Destination: Debt – How Unbalanced Agendas Led to Unbalanced Budgets in the 111th Congress

This spring Congress will vote on whether to increase the limit on the amount of money the federal government is permitted to borrow. Experts differ on the impact of this exercise, with some skeptical of Treasury Secretary Geithner's prediction of fiscal Armageddon unless Congress rubber-stamps a higher allowable debt amount with no strings attached. Regardless of this debate, many taxpayers are astounded that the current ceiling of \$14.3 trillion is insufficient to underwrite Washington's ongoing financial obligations, since the limit had stood at \$12.1 trillion just two years ago. By some estimates, the Treasury will need to borrow \$738 billion to cover shortfalls from April through the rest of the fiscal year, which ends in September. That amounts to about \$123 billion of deficit spending per month. Unless the economy resumes a period of healthy annual growth, the long-term costs of such borrowing could potentially run even higher as interest charges accrue.

In 1981, when federal spending was 22.2 percent of GDP, President Ronald Reagan warned a joint session of Congress, "Our government is too big and it spends too much money." Thirty years later, the government is even larger. Federal spending will grow to 25.3 percent of the entire economy this year, the highest since World War II.

How and why did America reach this ominous fiscal milestone? Because, as the National Taxpayers Union Foundation's BillTally project has quantifiably demonstrated, the House and Senate's workload is typically geared toward ways to increase spending by either expanding current programs or creating new ones. The last Congress, in response to the grassroots Tea Party movement, saw a marked increase in the number of lawmakers calling for net spending reductions. The most hopeful signs have been in the House, where more Members sought budgetary savings. But is this shift in direction too little, too late, or will the trend evolve into a sharp turn away from deficit spending and future debt-limit hikes in the new 112th Congress?

This report summarizes data from NTUF's BillTally accounting software, which studies the cost or savings of all legislation introduced in the 111th Congress that affects federal 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 1,654 House bills and 1,002 Senate bills under BillTally accounting rules that prevent the double-counting of overlapping proposals. Each Congressional office was given the opportunity to review all sponsorship and cost data in this report confidentially prior to publication. Appendix A lists all Members alphabetically, Appendix B lists Members by state delegation, and Appendix C provides a thorough explanation of the BillTally methodology.¹

I. Key Findings

- The 111th Congress saw a sharp rise in the number of bills to reduce federal spending, with 122 introduced in the House and 54 in the Senate. This is the highest number of spending-cut bills NTUF has recorded since the 105th Congress (1997-1998).
- Yet, legislation to boost spending is still far more popular. Representatives authored 1,532 increase bills – 13 bills for each savings bill. Senators offered 948 bills that would increase budgetary outlays, 18 for each savings bill. Many proposals to lower spending were simply duplicates introduced by different Members, a phenomenon less prevalent with increases in expenditures. After adjusting for these overlaps, the gaps between increases and cuts grew even wider: 21 to 1 in the House and 27 to 1 in the Senate.
- For each of the 286 days that the House was in session during 2009 and 2010, Members introduced, on average, five bills per day to increase spending. Savings bills were introduced at a rate of about once every other day.
- Senators were in Session a total of 349 days over the two years of the 111th Congress. On average they authored three spending-hike bills each of those days, and a spending-cut bill every six days.
- Excluding overlapping legislation, if each of the House increase bills became law, annual spending would rise by \$2.68 trillion. The passage of all the House savings bills would subtract \$480.7 billion – an offset of 18.0 percent – for a net increase of \$2.20 trillion. This amounts to additional federal outlays of \$18,752 per household. The Senate spending bills would add \$1.51 trillion to federal outlays, 16.0 percent of which was offset by \$241.6 billion in savings – for a net cost of \$1.27 trillion (\$10,861 per household).
- If all the bills supported by the average House Republican were enacted into law, spending would have fallen by \$78.1 billion, the net of \$114.2 billion in savings and \$36.2 billion in new outlays. House Democrats proposed \$549.7 billion in new spending. Two percent of this would be offset by \$10.8 billion in savings, for a net spending agenda of \$538.8 billion.
- Compared to their House colleagues, Democrats in the Senate would not raise spending as much. On average, they advocated \$3.4 billion in budget reductions and \$199.0 billion in increases, for a net agenda of \$195.6 billion. Senate Democrats have not called for spending reductions greater than \$10 billion since the 103rd Congress (1993-1994).
- The typical Senate Republican sought \$76.4 billion in new outlays. Two-thirds of this would be offset by \$51.0 billion in cuts, for a net spending agenda of \$25.4 billion. The \$51.0 billion in cuts was the most that GOP Members in the upper chamber have sought since the 103rd Congress.
- The number of “net cutters” – Members whose net agendas would reduce the budget – jumped to 153 last year, from 34 in the 110th Congress, including 12 Democrats and 141 Republicans. This

represents over a third of the whole House and 80 percent of the Republican caucus. The low-point for House net cutters was during the 108th Congress, when their ranks had dwindled to nine. The number of net cutters in the Senate, which stood at zero in the 107th Congress, rose to 32 in the 111th Congress.

- Still, the net cutters were outnumbered by those calling for annual spending hikes in excess of \$100 billion – 170 in the House (including three Republicans and 167 Democrats) and 43 in the Senate (including both Independents, five Republicans, and 36 Democrats). This is a slight rise in the lower chamber and a slight drop in the upper chamber, when compared to the 110th Congress.
- With the exception of the freshman Democratic class in the Senate, the average newcomer to Congress called for less spending and more savings than their returning colleagues.
- Representatives who belong to either the Blue Dog Caucus or the Republican Study Committee – groups which identify themselves as “fiscally conservative” – proposed, on average, less spending and more savings than their colleagues. However, the average House Member of the Republican Main Street Partnership, a related caucus that also espouses “fiscal discipline,” offered \$31.7 billion in greater expenditures.

II. Analysis of Findings

A. Representatives' "Wish Lists"

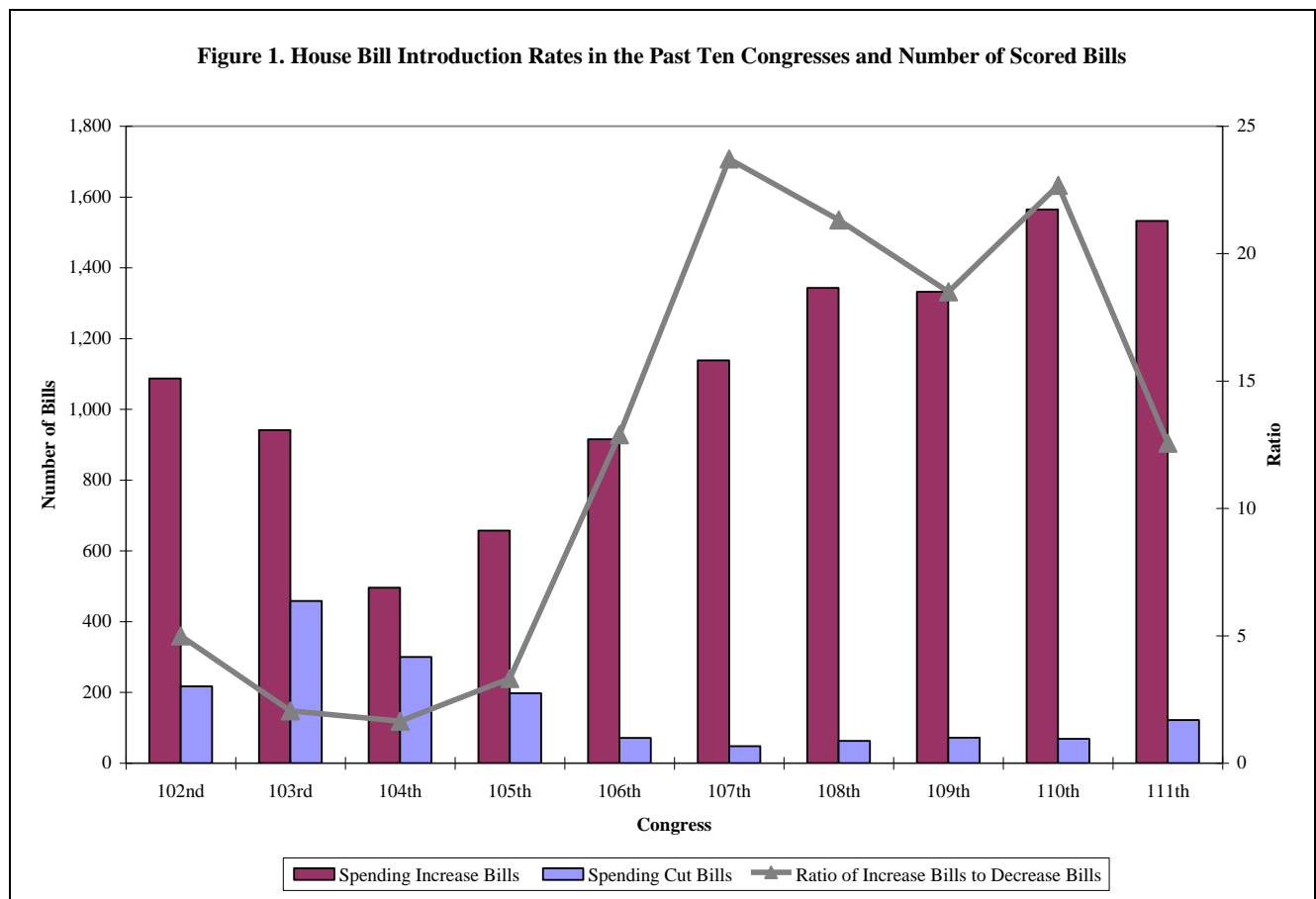
NTUF examines nearly every bill introduced in each Session of Congress to determine its effect on federal outlays.² After gathering this data, the cost estimates are matched up with the bills sponsored by each Member of Congress. A Senator's or Representative's record of authored and sponsored bills can be viewed as his or her legislative "wish list," free from the pressure of party leaders that normally comes with the voting process. By tabulating the cost and/or savings of each Member's agenda, taxpayers and constituents can gain a better understanding of the policy interests as well as the guiding budgetary philosophies of their elected representatives.

Table 1. Bill Introduction Rates and Number of Scored Bills in the Past Ten Congresses				
Congress	Scored Bills	Spending Increase Bills	Spending Decrease Bills	Ratio of Increase Bills to Decrease Bills
House				
102 nd	1,304	1,087	217	5.00
103 rd	1,399	941	458	2.05
104 th	796	496	300	1.65
105 th	855	657	198	3.32
106 th	986	915	71	12.89
107 th	1,186	1,138	48	23.71
108 th	1,406	1,343	63	21.32
109 th	1,404	1,332	72	18.50
110 th	1,634	1,565	69	22.68
111 th	1,654	1,532	122	12.56
Senate				
102 nd	756	641	115	5.57
103 rd	729	548	181	3.03
104 th	410	278	132	2.10
105 th	548	481	67	7.18
106 th	790	739	51	14.49
107 th	851	828	23	36.00
108 th	1,075	1,040	35	29.71
109 th	1,029	985	44	22.39
110 th	1,126	1,090	36	30.28
111 th	1,002	948	54	17.56

The 111th Congress experienced a revival of interest in ways to scale back the federal government. Representatives drafted 122 bills that would reduce spending. This is the highest number of cuts seen since 198 were offered in the 105th Congress, which ended in 1998. The low point was seen in the 107th Congress, when there were just 48 bills to cut spending.

This rebound is an encouraging sign for taxpayers seeking budgetary restraint, but as the data shows, the balance of Congress's workload is still tilted heavily in favor of consideration of spending increases. For each of the 122 cuts, Members in the House introduced over 12 bills that would boost federal outlays. Nearly 93 percent of the 1,654 House bills with verifiable cost estimates in the 111th Congress contained higher spending. The number of increase measures (1,532) was down slightly from the record high of such bills authored in the 110th Congress.

Just how focused was the House on seeking an expansion of the federal government? For each of the 286 days that the House was in session during 2009 and 2010, Members introduced, on average, five bills per day to increase spending.³ Savings bills were introduced at a rate of about once every other day.



The record is even more skewed in favor of increases when identical and closely-related bills are excluded from the data. NTUF identified 205 bills in 124 categories of overlapping legislation. Apparently some Members of Congress would prefer to have their own name appearing as the author on a given spending cut bill rather than to appear as a signatory on someone else's proposal, even if both are identical. For example, Representatives wrote 16 bills that would eliminate Congress's automatic annual cost-of-living salary increase, eight bills to enact across-the-board rescissions, seven bills to repeal all or part of the 2009 "stimulus," six bills to repeal the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA), and six bills to implement medical liability reform.

Members also drafted overlapping bills on the spending-increase side of the ledger, but there were not as many large groupings of such legislation. The exceptions were nine offsetting bills to enact a major expansion of health insurance coverage through federal programs, and the seven matching bills to extend the refundable first-time homebuyers credit. Under BillTally rules designed to prevent the double counting sponsorships of matching legislation, only the largest increase or the largest cut is counted toward a Member's net agenda. Excluding the overlapping legislation, the House introduced 1,382 increase bills and 67 unique cut bills – a ratio of 20.6 to 1.

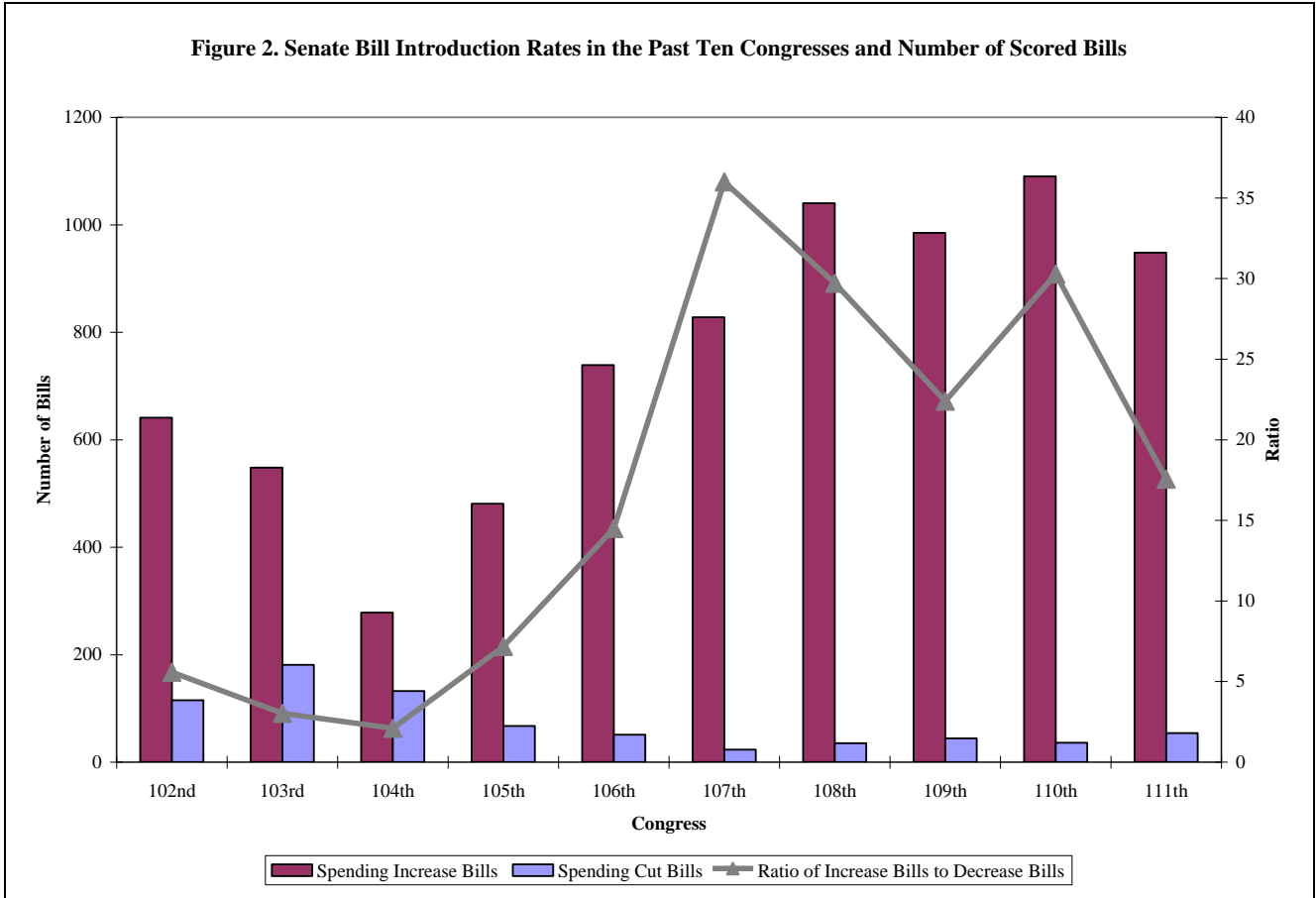
The amount of spending under consideration is large by any measurement. If every non-overlapping bill in the House became law, increases of \$2.678 trillion would be offset by \$480.7 billion in cuts, for a net total of \$2.197 trillion. This amount would increase the current \$3.82 trillion budget by nearly 60 percent. The household share of the cost of this spending would be \$18,752.⁴

B. Senators' "Wish Lists"

Similar trends in the balance of legislation were also evident in the upper chamber of Congress. Senators introduced 1,002 total bills, 95 percent of which would lead to higher outlays. The 948 increase bills represented a drop from the previous Congress's 1,090 spending hikes – the record high over the past 10 Congresses. Senators drafted 54 cut bills in the 111th, the most since the 105th Congress. However, for each of these 54 cuts, they authored nearly 18 spending bills.

Senators were in Session a total of 349 days over the two years of the 111th Congress. On average they authored three spending-hike bills each of those days, and a spending-cut bill every six days.

NTUF identified 98 bills within 69 different categories of overlapping provisions among the Senate bills, including nine bills to increase the federal burden of major health insurance coverage programs and seven bills to repeal the Congressional automatic cost-of-living salary increases. Excluding the overlapping bills, the Senate considered 872 unique increase bills and 32 cut proposals – a ratio of 27 to 1. The increase bills had price tag of \$1.51 trillion. The cuts would amount to \$241.6 billion in savings. The net total of \$1.27 trillion – \$10,861 per household – would increase the current budget by a third. This would be roughly comparable to doubling the current level of funding for Medicare and Social Security.



C. House Members' Spending Agendas

Many additional *savings* proposals were available, but how aggressively did Members of Congress use them to offset their own *spending* proposals? More savings were sought in the 111th Congress, but the average Representative, regardless of party, failed to balance their agendas. The average Member backed a mix of legislation which, if enacted, would result in higher spending that would have to be financed through higher taxes or more federal debt. The typical Member of the House sponsored or cosponsored 74 increase-bills with a price tag of \$341.7 billion and seven cut-bills to trim outlays by \$52.7 billion – for a net spending agenda of \$289.0 billion.

The data in Table 2 (below) shows that for the first time since the 105th Congress, the average Republican was a “net cutter,” i.e., the collective impact of all the bills that he or she sponsored or cosponsored, would cut spending.

If all the bills supported by the average House Republican were enacted into law, spending would have been reduced by \$78.1 billion. Although the \$36.2 billion of increases supported were above the Republican average over the previous nine Congresses (\$28.2 billion), this was more than offset by

the record amount of reductions they offered – \$114.2 billion. Over the past three Congresses, they identified just \$4.2, \$6.1, and \$7.6 billion in cuts, respectively, to the multi-trillion dollar budget.

Table 2. Average House Sponsorship of Legislation in the Past Ten Congresses (by Party, in Millions)				
Congress	Proposed Increases	Proposed Cuts	Net Agenda	% of Increases Offset
Democrats				
102 nd	\$123,982	(\$5,786)	\$118,195	4.7%
103 rd	\$293,367	(\$23,393)	\$269,973	8.0%
104 th	\$175,208	(\$10,123)	\$165,085	5.8%
105 th	\$115,024	(\$2,871)	\$112,152	2.5%
106 th	\$60,917	(\$1,174)	\$59,743	1.9%
107 th	\$418,428	(\$864)	\$417,564	0.2%
108 th	\$521,158	(\$171)	\$520,987	0.0%
109 th	\$766,366	(\$614)	\$765,752	0.1%
110 th	\$626,091	(\$1,388)	\$624,702	4.7%
111 th	\$549,660	(\$10,819)	\$538,841	2.0%
Republicans				
102 nd	\$19,917	(\$9,602)	\$10,314	48.2%
103 rd	\$39,523	(\$62,394)	(\$22,871)	157.9%
104 th	\$8,162	(\$26,638)	(\$18,476)	326.4%
105 th	\$14,297	(\$16,366)	(\$2,069)	114.5%
106 th	\$24,299	(\$16,121)	\$8,178	66.3%
107 th	\$46,175	(\$13,887)	\$32,287	30.1%
108 th	\$39,245	(\$4,245)	\$35,000	10.8%
109 th	\$27,610	(\$6,058)	\$21,551	21.9%
110 th	\$34,321	(\$7,612)	\$26,709	22.2%
111 th	\$36,166	(\$114,248)	(\$78,082)	315.9%
Note: Totals may not add due to rounding. Averages exclude the Speaker of the House and Members who are Independents.				

What accounts for this sudden and dramatic shift? One reason is that many Members revived a type of reform measure that would establish a statutory limit on discretionary spending. Taxpayers have not seen such widespread legislative interest and activity on behalf of spending caps for more than a decade. The most-supported Republican version of these proposals, H.R. 3964 (with 25

cosponsors), would have cut spending by an average of \$116.2 billion in its first-two years.^a In total, the spending-cap bills had 76 individual cosponsors (including 26 Republicans and 50 Democrats).

Members also sought to reverse several costly initiatives passed into law during the 111th Congress. There were seven widely-supported proposals to repeal the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, the so-called “stimulus” bill. H.R. 3140, the most popular of the seven “stimulus” repeal bills, with 91 signatories, would have saved \$91.6 billion annually over five years had it been immediately implemented.^b Altogether, this category of bills had 121 unique cosponsors.

Republicans also introduced six bills that would repeal the PPACA. Media reports touted data that repealing this measure would add to the deficit, but this is largely because the tax increases that were passed in the Act would no longer be in effect. The legislation also included a new long-term assisted living insurance program (known as the CLASS Act) that would start collecting premiums (scored as offsetting receipts) in 2011 but would not start paying benefits until 2016. (Soon thereafter, the CLASS Act would be as unsustainable as the other major entitlement programs.) Various Congressional Budget Office cost estimates released in 2010 detailed \$102.7 billion in outlays resulting from the PPACA over the FY2011-2015 period.⁵ These six repeal measures had 115 non-overlapping cosponsors (including one Democrat).

As discussed above, Democrats joined Republicans in calls for discretionary spending caps. Two such bills that would each save approximately \$44 billion garnered 50 Democratic sponsors. These cutbacks pushed the net savings advocated by the average House Democrat to its highest point in years, \$10.8 billion, second only to the \$23 billion in cuts the average Democrat supported back in the 103rd Congress (1993-1994).

Despite the Democrats’ increased support for spending cuts in the 111th Congress, the amount of savings identified would only have offset 2 percent of the cost of the \$549.7 billion in spending increases that they also backed. The net agenda supported by the average Democrat would therefore cause spending to rise by \$538.8 billion.

This costly agenda total can be largely accounted for by the push for an expanded federal role in health insurance coverage. A bitter debate took place in Congress both between the parties, and to a lesser degree among Democrats, about the proper role of the federal government in financing the health care needs of the uninsured and other high-risk segments of the populace. The controversial PPACA was eventually propelled to passage. While many Republicans sought its repeal because of, among other things, the potential expense of the program, a faction of 91 Democrats supported variants of an alternative single-payer universal health care coverage plan with an even larger price tag – annual costs could exceed \$1 trillion once fully implemented.

^a Under BillTally methodology, only the first two years of a spending cap are counted, and savings achieved within the first fiscal year are not double-counted in the second fiscal year.

^b Savings were based on the Congressional Budget Office’s cost estimate of the conference agreement for H.R. 1 (<http://www.cbo.gov/doc.cfm?index=9989&zzz=38482>) and the amount of unexpended program outlays as listed on Recovery.gov when each bill was introduced.

The sheer number of increases that Democrats sought was also a contributing factor to their unbalanced agenda. The typical Democrat backed an average of 100 increase bills compared to just five cut bills. One Member sponsored a grand total of 292 spending bills. He was joined by six other Democrats who each sponsored or cosponsored over 200 bills to increase outlays. Another 108 Democrats backed between 100 and 200 increase proposals.

D. Senators' Spending Agendas

Table 3. Average Senate Sponsorship of Legislation in the Past Ten Congresses (by Party, in Millions)				
Congress	Proposed Increases	Proposed Cuts	Net Agenda	% of Increases Offset
Democrats				
102 nd	\$77,149	(\$5,449)	\$71,700	7.1%
103 rd	\$212,869	(\$16,375)	\$196,494	7.7%
104 th	\$6,399	(\$5,227)	\$1,171	81.7%
105 th	\$39,301	(\$1,730)	\$37,571	4.4%
106 th	\$53,933	(\$863)	\$53,069	1.6%
107 th	\$151,158	(\$270)	\$150,887	0.2%
108 th	\$158,052	(\$465)	\$157,588	0.3%
109 th	\$117,869	(\$295)	\$117,574	0.3%
110 th	\$194,357	(\$1,014)	\$193,343	0.5%
111 th	\$199,015	(\$3,448)	\$195,567	1.7%
Republicans				
102 nd	\$26,329	(\$9,847)	\$16,482	37.4%
103 rd	\$45,343	(\$68,452)	(\$23,110)	151.0%
104 th	\$8,233	(\$23,826)	(\$15,592)	289.4%
105 th	\$17,196	(\$8,204)	\$8,992	47.7%
106 th	\$24,508	(\$10,234)	\$14,274	41.8%
107 th	\$34,371	(\$179)	\$34,192	0.5%
108 th	\$36,175	(\$2,509)	\$33,667	6.9%
109 th	\$27,028	(\$5,977)	\$21,051	22.1%
110 th	\$124,907	(\$6,665)	\$118,242	5.3%
111 th	\$76,362	(\$50,959)	\$25,402	66.7%
Note: Totals may not add due to rounding. Averages exclude Members who are Independents.				

The Senate is often referred to as Congress’s “cooling chamber.” The theory behind this characterization is that Senators, in office for six years at a time, are not as motivated by the passions of the day; this is in supposed contrast to the House, whose Members face the voters every other year and so are more in touch with the electorate’s prevailing mood. The data shows that with regard to the average spending agendas of each party, the Senate often does live up to this “cooling” reputation. Compared to their colleagues in the House, Democrats in the Senate typically would not raise spending as much and Republicans would not cut as much.

On average, Democrat Senators identified \$3.4 billion in budget reductions. While this is a small fraction of a percentage of the entire budget, it is the most cuts that Democrats have sponsored in the Senate since the 104th Congress. It also would offset only 1.7 percent of the new spending proposals offered during 2009 and 2010. Due largely to calls for health care coverage reform, the typical Democrat supported spending hikes of \$199.0 billion. The net result would push spending upward by \$195.6 billion annually – just short of the high-water mark of \$196.5 billion reached in the 103rd Congress.

Whereas the Democrats on average supported 92 spending bills, Republicans supported 32. The total cost of these increases – \$76.4 billion – was second only to the GOP Senators pressed for in the previous 110th Congress. Two-thirds of this new spending was offset by \$51.0 billion in cuts – second only to the level of *cuts* they offered back in the 103rd Congress – leaving a net agenda seeking budgetary increases of \$25.4 billion annually.

In the Chamber as a whole, the typical Senator, regardless of party, supported hikes of \$159.7 billion, offset by \$23.1 billion in reductions for a net spending agenda of \$136.6 billion.

E. The Outliers

Table 4. Total Number of Members with Net Agendas to Reduce Spending and Number of Members with Spending Agendas Greater than \$100 Billion		
Congress	Members with Net Agendas to Reduce Spending	Members with Net Spending Agendas Greater than \$100 Billion
House		
106 th	75	4
107 th	26	97
108 th	9	190
109 th	28	151
110 th	34	149
111 th	153	170
Senate		
106 th	11	2
107 th	0	27
108 th	3	30
109 th	8	19
110 th	7	44
111 th	32	43

Table 4 tracks the “net cutters” – Members whose net agendas would reduce the budget – and those calling for the largest spending increases. The number of net cutters, whose ranks had dwindled to nine in the House during the 108th Congress, dramatically swelled to 153 last year, including 12 Democrats and 141 Republicans. This represents over a third of the whole House and 80 percent of the Republican caucus (all but 36 Members).

There was a similar turnaround in the Senate. As recently as the 107th Congress, there was not a single Senator who called for net savings. Now, nearly a third of the body would shrink the budget. One Democrat joined 31 Republicans in pursuing net reductions.

Despite the expanding ranks of net cutters, they remained outnumbered by legions of Representatives and Senators calling for annual spending hikes in excess of \$100 billion – 170 in the House (including three Republicans and 167 Democrats) and 43 in the Senate (including both Independents, five Republicans, and 36 Democrats).

F. Freshmen vs. Returning Members

Table 5. Average Net Spending Agendas of Freshmen and Returning Members in the 111th Congress (by Party, in Millions)					
	Number of Increase Bills	Proposed Increases	Number of Savings Bills	Proposed Cuts	Net Agenda
House					
All Freshmen	59	\$174,041	7	(\$53,978)	\$120,063
All Returning	76	\$368,873	7	(\$52,506)	\$316,368
Freshman Democrats	75	\$262,506	5	(\$16,268)	\$246,237
Returning Democrats	104	\$598,812	5	(\$9,886)	\$588,927
Freshman Republicans	33	\$27,882	11	(\$116,281)	(\$88,398)
Returning Republicans	36	\$37,403	10	(\$113,944)	(\$76,541)
Senate					
All Freshmen	73	\$160,908	6	(\$15,049)	\$145,859
All Returning	66	\$159,453	7	(\$24,497)	\$134,956
Freshman Democrats	90	\$217,611	6	(\$1,046)	\$216,565
Returning Democrats	92	\$194,469	7	(\$4,035)	\$190,434
Freshman Republicans	4	\$4,975	26	(\$53,557)	(\$48,582)
Returning Republicans	6	\$84,079	32	(\$50,679)	\$33,400
Notes: Totals may not add due to rounding.					

The data in Table 5 shows that in general, the newcomers to the House backed fewer increases and more cuts than their returning colleagues. This difference was most notable among the Democrats. The average returning Democrat’s net agenda (\$588.9 billion) was more than twice as much as the freshman’s (\$246.2 billion). Freshman Republicans identified, on average, \$11.9 billion more in savings than their longer serving colleagues.

The results were not as uniform in the Senate where there was a difference between the parties. The new Democratic class in the Senate, on average, supported an agenda of \$216.6 billion including more spending and less savings than the incumbents, whose net agenda would increase outlays by \$190.4 billion. The four Republican freshmen, however, were net cutters. Their legislation, on average, would have shrunk the budget by a net of \$48.6 billion while their returning colleagues would grow the budget by \$33.4 billion.

G. Fiscally-Related Member Caucuses

Once elected to Congress, a Representative has the option to join any of several Member caucuses that organize around a particular issue area and/or political philosophy. In these caucuses, Members can share ideas and coordinate strategies to promote or oppose particular legislation. Two such caucuses, the Republican Study Committee (RSC) and the Democratic Blue Dog Coalition (BDC), both espouse fiscal discipline for their respective parties. The RSC states that it is dedicated to “a limited and Constitutional role for the federal government.”⁶ On its website during the 111th Congress, the BDC stated that its members are “independent voices for fiscal responsibility and accountability” and the coalition also outlines “15 steps that can be taken to put the country back on a path to balance [sic] budgets and long term fiscal sustainability.”⁷ A related third caucus, the Republican Main Street Partnership (RMSP)⁸ is “dedicated to promoting and building a pragmatic, thoughtful, fiscally conservative, and inclusive ‘Governing Majority.’”⁹ The Partnership’s mission page claims its members are “fiscally conservative deficit hawks.”¹⁰

Table 6. Average Spending Agendas by Caucuses and Member Organizations in the 111th Congress (in Millions)

Caucus	Number of Increase Bills	Proposed Increases	Number of Savings Bills	Proposed Cuts	Net Agenda
Republican Study Committee	31	\$26,044	13	(\$150,599)	(\$124,555)
Republican Main Street Partnership	50	\$71,311	6	(\$39,600)	\$31,711
Average Republican	36	\$36,166	10	(\$114,248)	(\$78,082)
Blue Dog Democrats	69	\$165,599	5	(\$39,241)	\$126,358
All Other Democrats	108	\$650,336	5	(\$3,368)	\$646,968
Average Democrat	100	\$549,660	5	(\$10,819)	\$538,841
Progressive Caucus	136	\$1,174,312	6	(\$2,054)	\$1,172,259

Note: Totals may not add due to rounding. Seven of the nine Republicans listed openly in both the RSC and the RMSP were net cutters. RMSP data only includes its Members in the House. Members of the BDC are all Democrats.

Since these caucuses seem to share at least some fiscal objectives, it may be surprising that there is quite a bit of range in the net agendas produced by the average Member of each of these organizations. The RSC was the only one of the three that would cut overall spending (see Table 6, above). Members of the RMSP, on average, sponsored legislation that would increase spending by \$31.7 billion. Both caucuses would be outspent by the average Blue Dog, who supported legislation

that would boost outlays by \$126.4 billion – an amount greater than the savings sought by the average Member of the RSC, but also about one-fifth the size of other Democrats’ net agendas.

The “fiscal conservative” Democrats may be an endangered species in the new 112th Congress. The Blue Dogs took a beating during the last year’s election, losing 26 of their 54 members. They will comprise a smaller part of the Democratic Caucus in the 112th Congress. The Congressional Progressive Caucus (CPC), which claims to be the largest subgroup within the general Democratic Caucus, lost (on net) one House Member last November and will thus make up an even larger percentage of the minority party in the new Congress. The Progressive Caucus makes no claim to “fiscal discipline” but instead favors “economic justice.”¹¹ The average Member of the CPC sponsored 136 bills to increase spending and four bills to cut spending, for a net agenda of nearly \$1.1 trillion.

III. Conclusion

With over a decade of Congressional data available showing that more often than not, spenders trump the cutters, no one should be surprised or shocked that the country’s fiscal situation is in such dire straits. Certainly, overspending is not all Congress’s fault. We’ve seen in State of the Union Addresses that Presidents’ annual “to do” lists tend to dwell upon initiatives that would expand the federal government rather than pare it back (apart from highly generalized pronouncements about eliminating “waste, fraud, and abuse”). Moreover, many Presidential budgets, whether coming from Republican or Democratic Chief Executives, often contain gimmicks designed to give a mere impression of progress toward deficit reduction goals.

The record shows that more Members focused on reining in the budget during the 111th Congress. Now many of these Members are in the majority in the House, and have been joined by freshmen who campaigned on a vow to shrink the size of government. The 2011 House Committee Chairs have legislative agendas that are generally much more aggressive toward budget reductions than those of their predecessors.¹² But before taxpayers get too hopeful, they should be mindful that Members with large spending agendas still control the Committees in the Senate. Moreover, most of the savings proposals tracked in this study pertained to non-defense, non-homeland security discretionary spending, which comprises less than 20 percent of budget outlays. Federal benefit programs such as Social Security and Medicare carry trillions of dollars in unfunded liabilities; so far most lawmakers remain reluctant to take specific steps that would control these costs.

Members of the 111th Congress took some tentative steps on the journey toward a more balanced bill-writing process that included the introduction of more spending cuts and fewer spending increases. Even so, they ultimately steered budget policy in a direction that collided with a mountain of new federal debt. Taxpayers will soon know whether Members of the 112th Congress intend to reach a different fiscal destination.

Demian S. Brady
Senior Policy Analyst

Research was compiled with the assistance of Policy Analyst Dan Barrett.

End Notes

¹ Members who resigned, died, or served temporarily were excluded from the study.

² Regular appropriations bills are excluded. For more information, see the Methodology in Appendix C.

³ “Interim Résumé of Congressional Activity: First Session of the One Hundred Eleventh Congress,” Congressional Record-Daily Digest. (5 Jan. 2010). D3.

³ “Interim Résumé of Congressional Activity: Second Session of the One Hundred Eleventh Congress,” Congressional Record-Daily Digest. (29 Dec. 2010). D1249.

⁴ “Households, Families, Subfamilies, and Married Couples: 1980 to 2009,” *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 2011 (130th edition)*, U.S. Census Bureau (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2010), Table 59.

⁵ A detailed table is available in NTUF’s Taxpayers Tab, Issue #2, January 18, 2011, <http://www.ntu.org/ntuf/taxpayerstab/2-2.html>.

⁶ <http://rsc.jordan.house.gov/AboutRSC/>.

⁷ During the 111th Congress, the BDC’s website was available on the official website of Representative Charlie Melancon (D-LA), one of the coalition’s co-chairs, <http://www.house.gov/melancon/BlueDogs/>. A record of the page is available on the Internet Archive, http://waybackmachine.org/*/http://www.house.gov/melancon/BlueDogs/.

⁸ The Republican Main Street Partnership includes Members from both Chambers, as well as officials at the state level. These figures are based only on RMSP Members serving in the House.

⁹ <http://www.republicanmainstreet.org/>.

¹⁰ <http://www.republicanmainstreet.org/index.php/Mission>.

¹¹ <http://cpc.grijalva.house.gov/index.cfm?SectionID=2&ParentID=0&SectionTypeID=2&SectionTree=2>.

¹² For a detailed discussion of this phenomenon, see, Brady, Demian S., “House Committee Leadership in the 112th Congress: Back in Black?” *NTUF Issue Brief 162*, December 6, 2010, <http://www.ntu.org/ntuf/back-in-black.html>.