

Conservative Action Project

April 14, 2016

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader of the Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Paul Ryan
Speaker of the House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Leader and Mr. Speaker:

As the 114th Congress approaches the midpoint of its second session, we the undersigned urge you to not hold a so-called “lame duck” session at the end of this year.

Historically, lame duck sessions have been used by both parties to enact backroom deals that are neither beneficial to the American people nor representative of their will as expressed in the elections of only a few days or weeks before. Past lame duck sessions have produced, among other actions, massive tax and spending increases, increases in the gasoline tax, pay raises for members of Congress, and ratifications of treaties that threaten U.S. sovereignty.

At a time when the American people’s trust in their government is near an all-time low, the Republican-led Congress should demonstrate exemplary behavior by completing its work before the November elections so that voters can judge all the legislators on the basis of the votes they have cast. Because legislators who have been defeated in an election or are retiring are no longer accountable to the voters for their votes, any actions taken which required their votes are essentially undemocratic.

The Republican-led Congress must not provide President Obama with an additional opportunity to enact his agenda of progressive social engineering programs and job-killing economic policies before he leaves office. A lame duck session would be his swan song: he can be expected to leave no arm untwisted, no threat unmade, no quid un-quod, to get his dream-policies enacted, his liberal judges confirmed, and his international agreements approved. And all of it could be done without any concern for what the voters actually want because neither he nor the departing legislators will ever face the voters again. We think that’s a bad way to run a democracy.

After the death of Justice Antonin Scalia a few weeks ago, Leader McConnell stated that “the American people, rather than a lame duck president whose priorities and policies they just rejected in the most-recent national election, [should] be afforded the opportunity” to fill the

resulting vacancy on the Supreme Court. We respectfully suggest that the American people deserve that same opportunity with regard to confirming other federal judges, as well as to passing legislation and making international agreements. It will be necessary, however, for Congress to hold pro forma sessions on a regular basis (as distinguished from regular legislating sessions) in order to prevent the President from making a recess appointment to the Supreme Court.

By promising now that there will be no lame duck session of Congress (except, of course, in the case of an unforeseen sudden emergency requiring immediate federal action) the Republican-led Congress can take an important first step in restoring the American people's trust in their government. By making it absolutely clear that there will not be a lame duck session, the Republican leaders in Congress will encourage all members of Congress to complete the people's work in an orderly manner before the elections, putting an end to the unfortunate practice of recent years of governing by manufactured "cliffs and crises" at the end of the year.

The American people want, and should have, good representation by their elected officials. The way to get good representation is by having the opportunity to hold those officials accountable. True accountability means finishing Congress' work for the year before the November elections and not holding a lame duck session.

Respectfully,

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Former White House Advisor, President Ronald Reagan

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