



Spotlight on Paul Ryan posted October 1, 2012

Domestic-Policy Votes of the 112th Congress

(This report covers 24 major domestic-policy votes of the 112th Congress, with a spotlight on the record of Rep. Paul Ryan, R-Wis., who is campaigning both as the GOP vice-presidential candidate and to keep his House seat in Wisconsin.)

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As the GOP and Democratic presidential camps trade punches in attack ads and stump speeches, they are rehashing arguments heard many times before by anybody paying attention to the work of the current Congress.

Whether the issue splitting former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney and President Barack Obama is Medicare, tax rates, contraception, Wall Street rules, oil and gas drilling, China trade, clean energy, healthcare or payroll equity, it already has been fully debated on the House and/or Senate floors and now on the congressional campaign trail as well.

As a result, the White House race and many close-fought House and Senate campaigns across the country sound a lot like one another. But while the presidential candidates are mostly pointing to the future and talking in generalities, many congressional races are dealing with the recent past in a very specific way — haggling over incumbents' voting records in the 112th Congress.

This report spotlights 24 House and Senate votes on domestic-policy issues that have become flashpoints in the presidential race. Many of these issues will or have been discussed in formal White House and congressional debates. Some might even ring a bell with hard-to-impress undecided voters. While most have been prominent in the news, others are less publicized but equally useful in illuminating where federal candidates stand.

One House vote covered here (Issue 8, below) put members on record on an issue that Romney has refused to discuss in specifics, the question of whether the popular mortgage-interest and charitable-giving deductions would have to be ended to gain revenue needed to offset tax cuts.

According to a study by the non-partisan Tax Policy Center, Romney as president would have to eliminate those and other breaks favored by the middle class to help pay the \$456 billion annual cost of his economic plan, which is built around a 20 percent cut in personal

rates on top of a permanent extension of the Bush-era tax cuts. The conservative Heritage Foundation has debunked the study as based on flawed assumptions.

Asked by “60 Minutes” if “the devil is in the details” with respect to the home-mortgage and charitable deductions, Romney said: “The angel is in the policy, which is creating more jobs.”

In another recent overlap of House business and presidential politics, the GOP leadership on Sept. 20 guided passage of a bill to block the administration’s experimentation with work requirements for welfare recipients in a few states. This vote (Issue 9, below) provided fodder for the GOP to portray House Democrats as enablers of welfare dependency, a charge Romney has been leveling against Obama in ads that independent fact checkers have judged untruthful.

With Rep. Paul Ryan campaigning both as the GOP vice-presidential candidate and to keep his House seat in Wisconsin, his voting record (below) faces scrutiny nationally and locally. And given Ryan’s status as the GOP thought-leader in Congress on fiscal issues, it’s not surprising that policies he drafted or heavily influenced have become the focus of presidential-campaign disputes.

This report covers a vote (Issue 2, below) on “the Paul Ryan budget,” which is best known for its plan to transform traditional Medicare into a voucher program. The report also covers the 2011 Budget Control Act (Issue 12, below), which is the force behind “sequestration” cuts in defense and domestic programs scheduled to start next year. Ryan and Obama helped to hatch this draconian law in order to stave off a Tea Party-inspired U.S. debt default that was only hours away. Ryan voted for it and called it “a big step in the right direction” of cutting spending. But he now criticizes the law in swing states for its impact on the Pentagon budget.

Ryan voted with other House Republicans (Issue 1, below) to repeal the Independent Payment Advisory Board, which was created by “Obamacare” to use expert advice from outside of government to slow the growth of Medicare costs. The repeal bid died in the Senate. Ryan refers to the board in the presidential campaign as “bureaucrats” who would unilaterally “ration care” for those on Medicare. In fact, the 2010 health law gives Congress control over the membership of the panel as well as veto power over its specific proposals to control costs.

Starting in 2015, the board will have power to restrain any annual spending increases for Medicare that exceed official per-capita projections tied to factors such as inflation and the Gross Domestic Product. Congress cannot reduce the sum of its proposed cuts but can change individual parts after clearing high parliamentary hurdles. The 15 panel members will serve fulltime for six years and require Senate confirmation. House and Senate leaders of both parties will recommend 12 of the 15 nominees and the president will choose the others.

Ryan compares his “premium support” plan for voucherizing Medicare to the health plan for members of Congress and federal workers. Just as the Federal Employees Health Benefits (FEHB) program offers a menu of commercial policies from which participants

can choose, his plan would enable Medicare participants to pick from an array of private plans or stay in what is left of government-run traditional Medicare.

Critics note a major difference in how the two approaches protect seniors from rising medical costs. By law, Ryan and other FEHB participants are entitled to have 72-to-75 percent of their premiums paid by taxpayers. By contrast, increases in the value of Ryan's vouchers are indexed to GDP growth rather than the more rapid growth of healthcare costs.

A House Budget Committee report says the Ryan plan "will allow seniors to enjoy the same kind of choices in their plans that members of Congress enjoy."

Rep. Chris Van Hollen, D-Md., said in House debate the Ryan plan "does not give seniors the deal that members of Congress give to themselves, and that should be put to rest right now."

The House has conducted 1,552 roll-call votes so far in the 112th Congress and the Senate 435. This report boils that activity down to the following important votes, all of which have split the parties both on the floors of Congress and in this year's presidential and congressional campaigns.

In the House

1. Medicare Costs Panel Members on March 22, 2012, voted, 223-181, to repeal the Independent Payment Advisory Board created by the 2010 health law to curb Medicare costs with Congress having veto power over in its decisions. A yes vote was to pass a bill that also made medical-malpractice changes such as capping punitive-damage awards at \$250,000 and limiting attorneys' contingency fees. (HR 5) Ryan voted yes. Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., voted no.

2. 'The Paul Ryan Budget' Members on March 29, 2012, passed, 228-191, a Republican budget drafted by Rep. Paul Ryan, R-Wis., for fiscal 2013 and later years that would eventually privatize Medicare, make Bush-era tax cuts permanent, cut personal and business taxes, simplify the tax code, reduce deficits and slash domestic spending. A yes vote was to pass H Con Res 112.

Ryan voted yes. Pelosi did not vote.

3. Financial Deregulation Members on April 25, 2012, voted, 312-111, to exempt derivatives transactions by credit unions, small banks and rural lenders from transparency and collateral rules set by the

In the Senate

1. Contraception, Religion, Healthcare Senators on March 1, 2012, tabled, 51-48, and thus killed an amendment enabling employers and insurers to refuse to insure contraception or any other medical care that conflicts with their religion or moral code. The care targeted by the amendment would be provided under the "Essential Health Benefits" section of the 2010 health law. A yes vote was to kill what was known as "the Blunt amendment" to a pending transportation bill. (S 1813)

2. Violence Against Women Senators on April 26, 2012, renewed, 68-31, the Violence Against Women Act and expanded it to cover gay men and battered undocumented immigrants and Native Americans on reservations. A yes vote was to pass a bill (S 1925) that also protects children and the elderly from abuse.

3. GOP Violence Bill Senators on April 26, 2012, defeated, 37-62, a GOP substitute for S 1925 (above) that also extended coverage to gay men but which was less costly than the underlying bipartisan bill and did not cover battered immigrants or Native women. A yes vote backed a bill that also dealt harshly with pornographers and child-abusers.

In the House

2010 Dodd-Frank financial-regulation law. A yes vote was to waive the regulations on grounds that they raise the cost of credit for small businesses. (HR 3336)

Ryan voted yes. Pelosi voted no.

4. Voter ID Laws Members on May 10, 2012, voted, 232-190, to prevent the Justice Department from interfering with state voter ID laws. This followed the department's blocking of such laws in South Carolina and Texas as racially discriminatory. The department acted under authority of the 1965 Voting Rights Act. A yes vote backed the amendment to HR 5326.

Ryan voted yes. Pelosi voted no.

5. Violence Against Women Members on May 16, 2012, passed, 222-205, a Republican bill to renew the Violence Against Women Act for five years at funding of \$680 million annually. A yes vote was to pass the bill (HR 4970) over Democratic arguments it left unprotected some battered Native Americans, illegal immigrants and gays and lesbians.

Ryan voted yes. Pelosi voted no.

6. Republican Tax Cuts Members on Aug. 1, 2012, passed, 256-171, a Republican bill to extend Bush-era tax cuts for all income levels through 2013. The bill also kept estate taxes low, retained 15 percent as the capital-gains and dividends rate and allowed certain credits for the working poor to expire. A yes vote was to pass HR 8.

Ryan voted yes. Pelosi voted no.

7. Democratic Tax Cuts Members on Aug. 1, 2012, defeated, 170-257, a Democratic bill to extend Bush-era tax cuts through 2013 for couples with incomes under \$250,000 and singles under \$200,000, or 98 percent of taxpayers. A yes vote was to also raise taxes next year on the top 2 percent of payers. (HR 8)

Ryan voted no. Pelosi voted yes.

8. Home-Mortgage, Charity Deductions Voting 188-235, members on Aug. 2, 2012, defeated a Democratic motion stating that any Tax Code overhaul should retain deductions for home mortgages and charitable contributions. The underlying bill by

In the Senate

4. Gender-Based Payroll Bias Senators on June 5, 2012, failed, 52-47, to reach 60 votes for advancing a bill giving women more tools for fighting wage discrimination based on gender. A yes vote backed a bill (S 3220) allowing class-action suits, enabling plaintiffs to receive punitive damages and barring employer retaliation against those who seek pay data on co-workers.

5. Clean-Air Rules Senators on June 20, 2012, defeated. 46-53, a Republican bid to nullify the Environmental Protection Agency's first national curbs on air pollution from coal- and oil-fueled power plants. A yes vote was to block a set of rules, soon to take effect, that would give plants generating electricity at least three years to add scrubbers and other technology for cleansing emissions. (SJ Res 37)

6. Democratic Tax Cuts Senators on July 25, 2012, passed, 51-48, a bill by Democrats to extend Bush-era tax cuts through 2013 for couples with adjusted gross incomes under \$250,000 and singles under \$200,000 — 98 percent of taxpayers. A yes vote was to raise taxes next year only on the top 2 percent of taxpayers. (S 3412)

7. Republican Tax Cuts Senators on July 25, 2012, defeated, 45-54, a Republican amendment to S 3412 (above) that sought to extend Bush-era tax cuts for all income levels through 2013. A yes vote backed a measure that also retained 15 percent as the capital-gains and dividends tax rate and averted an increase next year in estate taxes.

8. Veterans Jobs Corps Senators on Sept. 19, 2012, failed, 58-40, to reach 60 votes for advancing a bipartisan bill to start a Veterans Jobs Corps at a deficit-neutral cost of \$1 billion over five years. A yes vote backed the bill over arguments by some Republicans that it violates the Budget Control Act and adds to several other federal jobs programs for veterans that are poorly managed. (S 3457)

9. Healthcare Repeal Senators on Feb. 2, 2011, rejected, 47-51, a bid to repeal the 2010 health law in its entirety. Repeal was backed by all 47 Republican senators and

In the House

Republicans (HR 8) did not identify breaks they would repeal to pay for tax cuts in their proposed reform. A yes vote was to affirm the tax deductions.

Ryan voted no. Pelosi voted yes.

9. Welfare-to-Work Rules Members on Sept. 20, 2012, voted, 250-164, to block an Obama administration policy that would allow certain states to experiment with new strategies for meeting work requirements in the 1996 welfare-to-work law. Republicans said the measure would preserve welfare reform, while Democrats called it blatantly political. A yes vote was to pass the resolution (HJ Res 118).

Ryan voted yes. Pelosi voted no.

10. Planned Parenthood Voting 241-185, members on April 14, 2011, cancelled funding in the fiscal 2011 federal budget for Planned Parenthood, a private organization that provides healthcare for women at 800 clinics nationwide. A yes vote was to eliminate \$363 million in appropriations for Planned Parenthood. (H Con Res 36)

Ryan voted yes. Pelosi voted no.

11. Expanded Offshore Drilling Members on May 12, 2011, approved, 243-179, energy drilling in several Outer Continental Shelf regions where it is now barred for environmental reasons. A yes vote was to pass a bill (HR 1231) to start drilling, in part, off much of the Atlantic Coast, southern California and the eastern Gulf of Mexico.

Ryan voted yes. Pelosi voted no.

12. Budget Control Act Members on Aug. 1, 2011, passed, 269-161, a bill that raised the national-debt ceiling by \$2.7 trillion to \$17 trillion when it became law the next day, while requiring at least \$2.7 trillion in deficit reduction by 2021, to be imposed either by the fiat of a newly created super-committee or an across-the-board "sequestration" process. A yes vote was to pass the Budget Control Act, which effectively barred tax increases as tools for reducing deficits. (S 365)

Ryan and Pelosi voted yes.

In the Senate

opposed by all members of the Democratic caucus who voted. A yes vote was to advance a House-passed repeal of "Obamacare." (S 223)

10. Budget Control Act Senators on Aug. 2, 2011, joined the House, 74-26, in raising the national-debt limit so the Treasury could pay bills already incurred by the 112th Congress and previous ones and keep the U.S. out of default. A yes vote was to pass the Budget Control Act, which mandated at least \$2.7 trillion in deficit reduction over ten years that would come from domestic, defense and entitlement budgets but not tax increases. (S 365)

11: Obama Jobs Bill Senators on Oct. 11, 2011, failed, 50-49, to reach 60 votes needed to end Republican blockage of a jobs plan offered by President Obama. The bill would cost \$447 billion over ten years in tax cuts and programs such as highway and schools construction to stimulate employment, with the cost offset by raising taxes on incomes over \$1 million. A yes vote was to advance the bill. (S 1660)

12. China Trade Penalties Senators on Oct. 11, 2011, passed, 63-35, a bill prodding the administration to begin trade retaliation against countries such as China that artificially devalue their currencies to gain advantage over American goods and services. A yes vote was to encourage U.S. tariffs on imports from China. (S 1619)

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