



# Top Votes 2017, Outlook 2018

**By Randy Wynn**

Special to Voterama in Congress

After unifying in late 2017 to enact an overhaul of the tax code, congressional Republicans enter the new legislative year uncertain over what to do for an encore.

House Speaker Paul Ryan, R-Wis., floated an ambitious plan to pursue restructuring of health programs that fuel national debt while providing care to large numbers of Americans. With speculation rampant on Capitol Hill that the Wisconsin lawmaker intends this to be his final year in Congress, it could be now or never for his long-sought “entitlement reform.”

Ryan staked out his turf in a December 6 radio interview in which he called Medicare and Medicaid “the big drivers of debt” and said Congress is “going to have to get back next year at entitlement reform, which is how you tackle the debt and the deficit.”

But Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., the Senate majority leader, threw cold water on Ryan’s plans, telling reporters that any legislation overhauling the federal safety net would need bipartisan backing to win Senate passage. “I think the Democrats are not going to be interested in entitlement reform, so I would not expect to see that on the agenda,” McConnell declared. “I hope we can go forward on infrastructure.”

Likewise, with control of both chambers of Congress at stake in this fall’s elections, there has been no indication that the Trump administration is interested in a serious bid to reduce spending on Medicare, Medicaid or Social Security.

Facing the current highly partisan climate, Ryan will likely have to settle for discussion of safety net changes rather than action on legislation to restrain their costs.

From a practical standpoint, lawmakers eager to spend much of 2018 campaigning for re-election would be hard-pressed to add a major overhaul of safety net programs to a legislative agenda already crowded with must-do items, many left over from last year’s session. Congress needs to find agreement on long-term military and domestic spending and on the budget for the balance of fiscal 2018. Disaster relief, children’s health, telecommunications surveillance, and flood insurance programs also require action.

In addition, an election-year showdown is shaping up over immigration legislation. President Trump threatens to deport “dreamers,” immigrants brought to this country by undocumented parents and permitted to remain here legally under an Obama administration program, unless Democrats agree to his border security proposals

including a wall on the southern border. That issue has to be resolved by March 5, when some 800,000 dreamers become eligible for deportation.

But it is a possible new infrastructure program that may offer the best prospect for bipartisan legislation this year. Infrastructure rebuilding was a Trump campaign promise, but the administration has offered few details on how it would proceed. Congressional Republicans, who refuse to raise the federal gasoline tax to finance road improvements, are leery of using deficits to finance public works after having just put at least \$1 trillion in tax cuts on the national credit card over 10 years.

All of which leads to speculation that GOP-controlled Washington will call upon private equity to help rebuild America's roads and bridges, giving participating firms ownership in what have always been public facilities and affording them profit opportunities while saddling taxpayers with the cost of ventures that underperform or go bankrupt.

Here are summaries of 20 of the most important congressional votes in 2017, along with links showing where your lawmakers stand on each issue.

## In the House

**1. Mental Issues, Gun Checks:** The House on Feb. 2 voted, 235-180, to nullify a federal rule under which the Social Security Administration gives the FBI system of gun background checks the names of persons who receive benefits because of mental issues, so that they cannot buy firearms. Backers of the rule said it is common sense to keep guns away from the deranged, while foes said the rule cuts against both Second Amendment and disability rights. A yes vote was to send the nullification measure (HJ Res 40) to the Senate. [Roll Call 77](#)

**2. Reducing Internet Privacy:** The House on March 28 voted, 215-205, to nullify a Federal Communications Commission rule that Internet service providers must obtain customers' consent before sharing their personal data—such as location, financial and medical details and browsing activity—with advertisers. A yes vote was to send the nullification measure (SJ Res 34) to President Trump. [Roll Call 202](#)

**3. Republican Health Care Plan:** Voting 217-213, the House on May 4 passed a GOP-sponsored bill (HR 1628) to dismantle the Affordable Care Act on terms that would allow states to waive most ACA coverage requirements. Over 10 years, the bill would

## In the Senate

**11. Protecting Social Security, Medicare:** On a 49-49 tie vote, senators on Jan. 10 turned back a Democratic-sponsored amendment requiring the Senate to formally endorse Donald Trump's campaign vow to protect Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid against cuts if he were president. The vote came during debate on the fiscal 2018 budget resolution (S Con Res 3). A yes vote was in opposition to any GOP restructuring of Social Security, Medicare or Medicaid in later legislation. [Roll Call 6](#)

**12. Mental Issues, Gun Checks:** Voting 57-43, the Senate on Feb. 15 nullified a rule under which the Social Security Administration gives the FBI system of gun background checks the names of persons who receive benefits because of mental issues, so that they cannot buy firearms. A yes vote was to send the nullification measure (HJ Res 40) to President Trump, who signed it into law. [Roll Call 66](#)

**13. Retirement Savings at Work:** The Senate on March 30 voted, 50-49, to nullify a rule that would help states and cities set up privately run retirement plans for private-sector employees who lack access to such plans at work. Nationwide, about half of private-sector employees are in this situation.

## In the House

increase the uninsured population by an estimated 24 million persons, reduce Medicaid spending by 25 percent, cut taxes for high-earning taxpayers and some health-related companies by at least \$600 billion and reduce projected budget deficits by \$300 billion. A yes vote was to send the bill to the Senate. [Roll Call 256](#)

**4. Russian Election Meddling:** The House on May 17 blocked, 230-189, a Democratic bid to force floor debate on a bill (HR 356) shelved in committee that would create an independent commission to probe Russian meddling in the 2016 U.S. presidential election. A yes vote was in opposition to bringing the bill to the floor. [Roll Call 259](#)

**5. Trump Tax Returns, GOP Tax Bill:** Voting 227-188, the House on June 21 blocked a Democratic bid to compel floor debate on a measure to delay action the GOP's tax bill until after President Trump had released his personal income tax returns for 2006-2015 along with tax information for the 500-plus companies worldwide that he either controls or serves in some official capacity. A yes vote opposed the bid for disclosure of Trump's tax returns. [Roll Call 311](#)

**6. Climate Change, National Security:** Voting 185-234, the House on July 13 refused to strip the fiscal 2018 military budget (HR 2810) of a requirement that the Department of Defense compile reports on the impact of climate change on U.S. military installations and combat readiness. A yes vote was in opposition to requiring military-related climate reports. [Roll Call 368](#)

**7. Class Actions, Arbitration Clauses:** Voting 231-190, the House on July 25 nullified a Consumer Financial Protection Bureau rule allowing individuals to file class-action lawsuits against credit card issuers, banks, payday lenders and other retail financial firms regulated by the bureau. The rule would prohibit contracts from including arbitration clauses that require handling of disputes through arbitration and bar customers from joining class-action suits. A yes vote was to send the nullification measure (HJ Res 111) to the Senate. [Roll Call 412](#)

## In the Senate

Several jurisdictions have set up voluntary work-based IRA-style plans that uncovered individuals without plans at work can use to save for retirement. A yes vote was to send the nullification measure (HJ Res 67) to President Trump, who signed it into law. [Roll Call 99](#)

**14. Confirming Neil Gorsuch:** The Senate on April 7 confirmed, 54-45, Judge Neil M. Gorsuch of the 10th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals as the 113th Supreme Court justice. He filled a vacancy created when Justice Antonin Scalia died in February 2016. The Senate's GOP majority kept the seat open during Barack Obama's final 10 months as president by refusing to act on his nomination of Judge Merrick Garland to replace Scalia. A yes vote was to confirm Gorsuch. [Roll Call 111](#)

**15. Sanctions on Russia:** The Senate on July 27 passed, 98-2, a bill (HR 3364) intended to prevent any U.S. president from softening or removing U.S. economic sanctions on Russia without congressional approval. The bill also placed new sanctions on the Russian economy while putting into law several of former President Barack Obama's executive orders penalizing the Kremlin for its interventions in the United States and other countries. Both the new and existing penalties were responses to Russia's interference in U.S. elections, annexation of Crimea and aggression in Ukraine. A yes vote was to send the bill to President Trump, who signed it into law. [Roll Call 175](#)

**16. Defeat of Health Care Repeal:** Voting 49-51, the Senate on July 28 turned back a GOP measure to dismantle the Affordable Care Act. This amendment to HR 1628 sought to eliminate the law's individual and employer mandates; scale back Medicaid; delay an excise tax on medical devices; expand Health Savings Accounts; weaken the ACA's minimum coverage standards and put a one-year hold on patients using Medicaid for Planned Parenthood care. A yes vote was to repeal the core of the 2010 health law. [Roll Call 179](#)

**17. \$700 Billion for Military:** Voting 89-8, the Senate on Sept. 18 authorized a \$700 billion military budget (HR 2810) for fiscal 2018, including \$60 billion in emergency

## In the House

**8. Sanctions on Russia:** Voting 419-3, the House on July 25 passed a bill (HR 3364) that would empower Congress to block any U.S. president from softening or removing U.S. economic sanctions against Russia. The bill also would place new sanctions on the Russian economy while putting into law several of former President Barack Obama's executive orders penalizing the Kremlin for its interventions in the United States and other countries. Both the new and existing penalties were responses to Russia's interference in U.S. elections, annexation of Crimea and aggression in Ukraine. A yes vote was to send the bill to the Senate. [Roll Call 413](#)

**9. State and Local Tax Deductions:** The House on Nov. 15 blocked, 234-193, a Democratic move to strip the Republican tax bill (HR 1) of its provisions to end the deductibility on federal returns of state and local income and sales taxes and cap the deductibility of property taxes at \$10,000. A yes vote opposed a motion aimed at retaining non-federal tax deductions. [Roll Call 632](#)

**10. Republican Tax Bill:** Voting 227-203, the House on Dec. 19 adopted the conference report on a GOP-drafted bill (HR 1) that would permanently reduce the top corporate tax rate from 35 percent to 21 percent; temporarily lower personal income taxes for most Americans; permanently cut the inheritance tax; open the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil drilling, repeal the 2010 health law's individual mandate and make numerous other changes to the tax code and domestic programs. A yes vote was to approve the tax bill. [Roll Call 692](#)

## In the Senate

spending for war-fighting abroad; \$50 billion-plus for active-duty and retiree health care; \$8.5 billion for missile defenses; and funding for a 2.1 percent pay raise for uniformed personnel. The bill requires the administration to develop a strategy to counter Russia's undermining of Western democracies and institutions. A yes vote was to approve the military budget. [Roll Call 199](#)

**18. State and Local Tax Deductions:** The Senate on Oct. 19 adopted, 52-47, a GOP amendment to the congressional budget resolution (H Con Res 71) setting the stage for later action to limit the deductibility of state and local taxes on itemized federal income tax returns. A yes vote was to endorse GOP plans to scale back state and local tax deductions. [Roll Call 226](#)

**19. Class-Actions, Arbitration Clauses:** The Senate on Oct. 24 voted, 51-50, to nullify a new Consumer Financial Protection Bureau rule that would enable individuals to band together in class-action lawsuits against credit card issuers, banks, payday lenders and other retail financial firms. Vice President Pence cast the deciding vote. Scheduled to take effect in March 2018, the rule sought to prohibit the use of arbitration clauses to bar customers from participating in class-action suits. A yes vote was to send the measure (HJ Res 111) to President Trump, who signed it into law. [Roll Call 249](#)

**20. Republican Tax Bill:** Voting 51-48, the Senate on Dec. 20 adopted the final version of a GOP-drafted tax bill (HR 1) that would reduce business and personal taxes by about \$1.5 trillion through fiscal 2027 while adding more than \$1 trillion to the \$20.6 trillion national debt over 10 years. Because the bill triggered a pay-as-you-go rule, it required deep cuts over time in safety-net programs including Medicare and Medicaid, according to the Congressional Budget Office. A one-year, \$25 billion Medicare spending cut was factored into the bill. A yes vote was to approve the tax bill. [Roll Call 323](#)