

Week ending 12/17/17 - PA-08 MoCTrack Report

With the holiday season upon us, some segments of MoCTrack are on hiatus until the new year. Please expect a special publication within the next few days - a recap of Rep. Fitzpatrick's voting record, broken down by topic, for all of 2017. It is our holiday gift to you, and we hope you will use it in the coming year to assist in your advocacy efforts! A similar report on the votes in the Senate will come out in the week between Christmas and New Years. From all of us at MoCTrack, have a safe and healthy holiday season and a wonderful New Year. We'll be back with our next regular MoCTrack Report with all our normal features on January 7, 2018. Never forget - "together our voices will carry!"

Tracking Congress in the Age of Trump

The lower the number, the more the legislator is in opposition to the Trump agenda.

Senator Bob Casey - **29.6%** (no change from last week)

Representative Brian Fitzpatrick - **80.4%** (no change from last week)

Senator Pat Toomey - **90.4%** (no change from last week)

Nate Silver's FiveThirtyEight website assesses the voting records of our MoCs to provide this index assessment. There were no votes scored this past week.

Votes of Interest

Not very many votes were taken this week. The House votes on some small, technical amendments to annual reporting requirements for 'vehicle financial companies' ([H.R. 2396](#)). They also passed two measures related to Iran. In one, the Department of the Treasury was directed to create a report on Iranian funds and assets held in financial institutions ([H.R. 1638](#)), and in the other, Treasury was required to report on commercial passenger aircraft sales to Iran ([H.R. 4324](#)). Both of these Iran-related bills passed, and while Republicans supported them more heavily than Democrats, neither were party line votes and each measure passed with a wide margin.

In the Senate, most business seemed to be occupied with negotiating the tax bill. They did take time out from that to deal with two judicial nominations. One of them, the Nomination [PN1108](#): James C. Ho, of Texas, to be United States Circuit Judge for the Fifth Circuit, passed in a 53-43 vote. As for the other...

On the Nomination PN878: Leonard Steven Grasz, of Nebraska, to be United States Circuit Judge for the Eighth Circuit

<https://www.govtrack.us/congress/votes/115-2017/s313>

Yet another Trump Administration nominee has been confirmed to the federal bench, despite vigorous opposition and a seriously compromised legal reputation. [CBS News](#) reported on Mr. Grasz's background, observing that he was the state of Nebraska's chief deputy attorney general and also served as general counsel to the Nebraska Republican Party. That outlet also noted, "in one opinion he helped craft, he said the legacy of the landmark abortion rights ruling *Roe v. Wade* was its 'moral bankruptcy.' Another opinion he helped write warned of the 'grave danger' of the Nebraska Supreme Court recognizing same-sex marriages from other states, and he advised that legislation refusing to recognize same-sex marriages could be defended against a constitutional challenge." Even more disturbing, Mr. Grasz received a unanimous rating of "not qualified" by the American Bar Association. [Huffington Post](#) explains, "It is extremely rare for the Senate to confirm a judge with such an abysmal rating from the national legal organization. The ABA has reviewed more than 1,700 federal judicial nominees since 1989, and only three, including Grasz, have been deemed unanimously unqualified. The other two, both nominees of President George W. Bush, were withdrawn and replaced with other nominees after the ABA's assessment came in." Senator Sheldon Whitehouse posted an [excerpt](#) of his questioning of Mr. Grasz during the hearing process that provides ample evidence of why the Democrats voted against this Trump judicial nominee. The vote took place on 12/12/17, and the nomination was confirmed in a 50-48 vote. **Casey voted NO and Toomey voted YES.**

MoC Twitter Action

Senator Bob Casey hot topics: The Senator split his attention between urging his colleagues to reauthorize the CHIP program and pass a DACA solution, and pointing out the inequities of the GOP tax plan. He also criticized the FCC decision to end “net neutrality” and issued a warning about the GOP’s attempts to discredit Special Counsel Robert Mueller. And, like fellow lawmakers, he shared sentiments about holidays and historic events.

Casey tweet of the week, 12/12/17: “@realDonaldTrump CHIP not reauthorized. Dreamers without protections. Government funding not settled. None of these challenges will be solved by attacking an honorable Senator for standing with victims. Less tweeting and more governing, please.”

Representative Fitzpatrick hot topics: The Representative shared one tweet this week, congratulating himself on his language related to water contamination making it into a larger bill, and that bill getting passed.

Fitzpatrick tweet of the week, 12/12/17: “From addressing water contamination from former and active military installations to putting American leadership and security first, I’m proud to deliver these results for the people of our district.”

Senator Pat Toomey hot topics: While the Senator did commemorate several holidays and historical events (Hanukkah, Sandy Hook, PA’s 230th anniversary of ratifying the Constitution) the majority of his attention remains on the GOP tax bill. He promoted several interviews he did on the subject.

Toomey tweet of the week, 12/15/17: “The vast majority of Pennsylvanians will soon get a pay raise because less of their hard earned money will go to Uncle Sam. Read my statement on the conference agreement for the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act” (shared with image of his statement)

Honorable mention, lawmaker

From @RonWyden, Sen. Ron Wyden (D-OR), 12/15/17: “Republicans are putting their #GOPTaxScam out on a Friday night because they’re counting on you to be quiet. But we’re NOT going to be quiet. It’s time to get LOUD. #RonReport”

Honorable mention, journalist

From @DavidSirota, David Sirota, International Business Times, 12/17/17: “BREAKING: Sen. @JohnCornyn just admitted a provision personally enriching @BobCorker was added to the tax bill as part of an effort to secure GOP votes for passage of the bill. Corker switched his vote to yes only after the provision was added to the bill” (with [link](#) to his article)

Honorable mention, PARODY account

From @LynBrianFitz, 12/12/17: “This will be a joyous occasion everyone is so happy about their tax increases, I mean cuts I totally meant cuts.” (shared with [link](#) to a Tuesday with Toomey/Indivisible PHL event invite)

The GOP tax bill - where things stand as of 12/17/17

The wonderful folks over at GovTrack put together this [concise and helpful update](#) about what is included in the GOP tax plan, as agreed to by the conference committee on Friday night.

For Corporations:

- The corporate tax rate would be reduced to 21% instead of the originally proposed 20%, as a compromise to reduce the bill’s impact on the deficit. The current rate is 35%, and this would still be the largest corporate tax reduction in United States history.
- Businesses would be allowed to completely deduct certain equipment expenses.
- Corporation’s overseas earnings would be taxed at 15.5% for liquid assets and 8% for non-liquid assets, as opposed to the current 35%. This may seem like an enormous reduction, but the current law also states that companies only need to pay tax on overseas earnings if they are returned to the United States, which has led to companies stockpiling those earnings to avoid the tax altogether. The 15.5% and 8% rates would apply regardless.

- The corporate alternative minimum tax would be repealed.

For Individuals:

- The final bill would keep the seven-tier tax bracket structure of current law, as opposed to the House's proposed four tiers, but would lower the rate for the highest earners from 39.6% to 37% and raise the threshold significantly.
- The bill would also nearly double the standard deductions for individuals but would repeal personal exemptions, would cap previously unlimited state and local tax deductions at \$10,000, and would limit the mortgage-interest deduction to mortgages up to \$750,000 (down from \$1,000,000).
- The Affordable Care Act's individual mandate would be repealed.
- The threshold for the individual alternative minimum tax would be increased significantly.

For Senators:

There were a few provisions included specifically to appease Republican Senators on the verge of voting no. They are:

- Reducing the threshold for medical expense deductions from 10% of the individual's income to 7.5%. This was included to win the vote of Sen. Susan Collins (R-ME).
- Most pass-through business owners would be able to deduct 20% of their income. This provision was included to appease Sens. Ron Johnson (R-WI) and Steve Daines (R-MT).
- The Child Tax Credit would double from \$1,000 to \$2,000. This provision was included to appease Sen. Marco Rubio (R-FL).

Our Senators each responded to the conference agreement:

"Must be some really great stuff in there if Republicans don't want to show anyone what's in the bill until 5:30pm on a Friday." - Sen. Bob Casey, via Twitter, 12/15/17

"I am elated that my colleagues and I have reached an agreement on a tax bill because it puts us one step closer to delivering both direct tax relief and a better economy to all Pennsylvanians. In just a few weeks, the vast majority of my constituents will get a pay raise because less of their hard-earned money will be going to Uncle Sam. Workers and employers will see a surge of new investment as this agreement takes the industrialized world's worst business tax code and makes it one of the best. At the beginning of this process, I promised that I would work hard in support of pro-growth principles that deliver a brighter economic future for Pennsylvanians and all Americans. I am thrilled that the conference bill achieves that goal. I thank Majority Leader McConnell, Speaker Ryan, Chairman Hatch, and Chairman Brady for their leadership throughout this process and I am optimistic the full Senate will approve this measure next week." - Sen. Pat Toomey, via his website, 12/15/17

Casey in the News

Brought to you by MoCTrack contributor Clair Oaks

Topic One: Sexual Harassment

From the [Morning Call](#), Sen. Bob Casey has joined other Democrats saying Donald Trump should step down because of the sexual misconduct allegations against him. [Travel Weekly](#) reported on sexual harassment on airplanes...discussing the problem and reporting that Senator Bob Casey along with Senator Patty Murray (D-Wash.) introduced a bill to address oversight of sexual misconduct in the sky.

Topic Two: GOP Tax reform

An article from the [Washington Post](#) discussed how divided Senate Republicans are re: whether to pursue Medicare cuts in 2018. "Democrats have vowed to block any GOP-led attempts to cut Medicare. 'I would support a fierce, unyielding resistance to what the speaker is trying to do,' Sen. Robert P. Casey Jr. (D-Pa.) said. 'If they want a fight, we're ready to fight.'

Topic Three: Net Neutrality

[Gray Washington News Bureau](#) reported that “This Thursday Chairman Ajit Pai plans to rollback Obama era regulations meant to ensure everyone has access to the same Internet regardless of their provider,” and “Democrats like Pennsylvania Senator Bob Casey (D-PA) are making new calls to Pai and the administration to abandon their plan to repeal the net neutrality rules.”

Fitzpatrick in the News

Topic One: 2018 National Defense Authorization Act

The [Ripon Advance](#), a centrist Republican publication, reports that some of Rep, Fitzpatrick’s text has made it into the most recent defense Authorization. They note that six amendments relating to water contamination and researching and redressing that problem, are in the Act due to Fitzpatrick’s efforts. Fitzpatrick said, “I’m proud that the House accepted my amendments in overwhelming bipartisan fashion. I’m proud to deliver these results for the people of our district...When it comes to protecting our homeland, our families and our allies abroad, there is no room for partisanship.”

Topic Two: DACA

[Penn State News](#) reports that five area lawmakers, including Rep. Fitzpatrick, “requesting that U.S. House Speaker Paul Ryan hold a vote this month on legislation to protect recipients of the DACA program.”

Toomey in the News

Topic One: the GOP tax plan

[Philadelphia Business Journal](#) concentrated their reporting on the fact that Senator Toomey had been selected as a conferee for the tax bill negotiations. When asked about the appointment, Toomey joked, “Yes, indeed, that’s congratulations or condolences?” [WHYY](#), the local NPR station, also reported on that quip, but noted that the Senator added, “My mindset is I want to get an outcome as soon as we reasonably can that can pass both bodies.”

Topic Two: Cutting social safety net programs

Senator Toomey spoke to [CBS Philly Talk Radio 1210](#), and the topic of entitlement reform came up (audio available at link). “The sad reality is that at this stage right now, we don’t have the political will to make the structural changes to cut the spending as needed,” Toomey said. “But the good news is we’ve designed tax reform. It’s much more than just a tax cut. This is a complete restructuring of the business side of our tax code. It’s going to encourage so much investment, so much growth, that I am very confident that it will generate enough additional economic growth, from which added federal revenue will leave us with a smaller deficit not a larger one. Do we still need to get our big spending programs under control? Absolutely.”

If you are interested in following all of the voting action in Congress there are a number of phone apps that come in handy. One of the Lower Bucks Indivisible leaders, Connie Gruen, recommends the Countable app. It is available for both Apple and Android phones. You can sign up at [Countable.us](#) to get instant notification when our legislators vote, as well as details on each measure, pros and cons, status, and links to take action.

For those of you who are more computer- versus phone-oriented, I recommend [Govtrack.us](#) - the website enables you to add individual bills that interest you to a docket, so you can easily see the status of all your items in one place. They can also provide daily or weekly digest emails (your choice) to track the action of any legislator, committee, bill or vote. If not for Govtrack, I would not be able to compile this report.

This report brought to you by the PA-08 MoCTrack team...

Clair Oaks

Gail Friedman

Gary Garb

Kierstyn Piotrowski Zolfo

We are seeking additional assistance. Our Congresspeople are always busy and there is always more for us to cover - tasks big and small to fit any level of time commitment. Can you help us out? Please email KierstynPZ@gmail.com and put "MoCTrack Help" in the subject. Thanks!