**Important Laws enacted during the 112th Congress of 2011-12**

**Laws for calendar 2011:**

***DEBT CEILING DEAL*. Bipartisan compromise to raise the debt ceiling, and to cut government spending by $2.1 trillion in two stages--$900 billion immediately, and $1.2 trillion via decisions delegated to a congressional supercommittee or else via a stipulated sequester of domestic and military spending if that committee couldn’t later come to an agreement (it couldn’t). (August)**

***Modernization of patent law*. To cut an application backlog, make obtaining patents easier, align US law with other countries. (September)**

***Trade agreements with Colombia, Panama, South Korea.* (October)**

**Laws for calendar 2012:**

***FISCAL CLIFF DEAL*. Income and other taxes hiked on the high brackets; Bush tax cuts of 2001 made permanent for the bulk of taxpayers; capital gains and dividend taxes set permanently at 20%; estate tax set permanently at 40% with a $5 million exemption; the Alternative Minimum Tax permanently patched to inflation. (enacted in early January 2013 at the tail end of the lame-duck session of the 112th)**

***Ban on insider trading by members of Congress* (March)**

***Jumpstart Our Business Startups (JOBS) Act.* To ease small businesses’ access to investments and capital markets. (April)**

***Normalization of trade relations with Russia*, including the “Magnitsky Act” banning certain rights abusers from traveling or banking in the U.S. (December)**

**Prominent features of lawmaking during the 112th Congress included:**

**--its sequence of a major spending cut in mid-2011 followed by a major tax hike on the rich at the cusp of 2012-13. These two results matched the flavors of the elections that preceded them—the midterm of 2010 and the pre-lame-duck election of November 2012.**

**--prolonged drama and angst in the run-ups to these two enactments.**

**--a failure to address longterm debt/deficit problems, in the judgment of most referees.**

**--in general, a record of very low congressional productivity, as well as a very long list of “things left undone,” in the judgment of most referees.**

**The close calls on the side of inclusion: the insider trading ban; the JOBS Act.**

**The close calls on the side of exclusion: FAA overhaul.**

**Methodology. Calendar 2012 was difficult to code. Most of the veteran wrap-up reporters seem to have retired their pens. And everyone was transfixed by the “fiscal cliff” politics of late 2012, a bent that may have exacted an attention cost on other issues. Also, some journalists were distracted by a widely circulated time series of total laws passed per Congress, regardless of their importance, that features, among other things, the Eisenhower Congress of 1955-56 as the most productive one since World War II; the 112th Congress ranks last, the preceding 111th Congress known for its Affordable Care Act, Dodd-Frank and more, next-to last. (For an exhibit of this chart material, see the Roll Call piece of 9/13/12 cited below.) I thought that Congressional Quarterly Weekly offered the best coverage of the year’s activity (and inactivity), in its October 2012 and January 2013 articles.**

**Prominent legislative proposals not enacted into law in 2011-12 included the following. There are entries from right, center, and left: repeal of the Affordable Care Act; rollback of the Dodd-Frank financial services act; reform of the tax code; trim of entitlements that face longterm money problems; immigration reform; fix of the No Child Left Behind Act; overhaul of the Postal Service; reauthorization and tuneup of the Violence Against Women Act; multi-year transportation (building highways, etc.) authority; multi-year authorization of agriculture programs; improvement of cybersecurity; energy planning; raising the debt ceiling (in late 2012); Obama’s full jobs package; relief for Hurricane Sandy (delayed from December 2012 into January 2013). The Senate put off taking up the Law of the Sea treaty.**

**Wrap-up sources for calendar 2011. (These reports, which have the cast of wrap-ups, were written at various breakpoints during or following the congressional year.)**

**Brian Friel, “The Big Push: If Congress can reach a deal on the debt ceiling, a number of important bills could quickly fall into place,” Congressional Quarterly Weekly, June 20, 2011, pp. 1311-15.**

**Ben Pershing, “Congress Lagging in Legislative Output: Fewest bills passed in recent memory,” Boston Globe, December 7, 2011, p. A10.**

**“A Downgrade for Congress,” The Economist, November 26, 2011, p. 16.**

**Major Garrett, “The Year of Living Darkly: Time’s running out on the first year of the 112th Congress. It’s not looking like one for the history books,” National Journal, December 3, 2011, pp. 28-31.**

**Fred Barbash, “Not Nothing, But Not Much: A year of legislative stalemates, near-shutdowns and partisan haggling has led to record low approval of Congress. Can the 112th be salvaged in its second half?” Congressional Quarterly Weekly, January 9, 2012, pp. 14-16.**

**Stephen Dinan, “Congress logs most futile legislative year on record,” Washington Times, January 15, 2012 online.**

**Wrap-up sources for calendar 2012:**

**Jake Sherman & John Bresnahan, “Congress flummoxed by can’t-miss bills,” Politico, May 30, 2012 online**

**Jonathan Allen & Jake Sherman, “GOP majority stumbles into August recess,” Politico, August 1, 2012 online**

**Jennifer Steinhauer, “Bills Unfinished, Congress Breaks for Campaigning,” New York Times, August 3, 2012, p. A1.**

**Humberto Sanchez & Neils Lesniewski, “Lawmakers Lay Groundwork for Recess,” Roll Call, August 6, 2012, pp. 3, 15.**

**Jennifer Steinhauer, “Congress Nearing End of Session Where Partisan Input Impeded Output,” New York Times, September 19, 2012, p. A21**

**Jonathan Strong & Humberto Sanchez, “Congress On Pace to Be Least Productive,” Roll Call, September 13, 2012, p. B-9.**

**Andrew Taylor, “Congress departs Washington for the campaign trail,” Boston Globe. September 22, 2012, p. B6.**

**Associated Press, “What Congress did and didn’t do in its final week,” Washington Post, September 23, 2012 online**

**Billy House, “Broken Promises; Neither party in the 112th Congress achieved what it set out to accomplish. They were more adept at staking out political positions than at governing,” National Journal, September 22, 2012, p. 44**

**Kent Allen, “’Do-Nothing’ Redux; Heading into lame duck, 112th boasts few feats,” Congressional Quarterly Weekly, October 8, 2012, p. 2000**

**John Cranford, “Uncompromising Positions: A look back at the rancorous 112th Congress, which may be remembered for its spectacular standoffs and recurrent allusions to falling off a cliff,” Congressional Quarterly Weekly, January 14, 2003, pp. 66-67.**

**Joshua Green, “Holiday kudos for Congress,” Boston Globe, December 28, 2012, p. A15**

**Rosalind S. Helderman, “Outgoing Congress proves to be unproductive to the end,” Washington Post, December 29, 2012 online**

**Christopher Rowland, “Congress nears a desultory end; Voter confidence at low ebb amid fiscal cliff talks,” Boston Globe, December 13, 2012, p. A8**

**David Horsey, “Derelict 112th Congress sets new record for low achievement,” Los Angeles Times, January 3, 2013 online**