

The Sly Fox Congress

By Rick Olanoff

I've never liked the term "lame duck". As my friend Mark pointed out, the term includes a slur against differently-abled people who happen to have leg problems. If we were to talk about Congress as a disempowered group whose composition would be changing significantly in a short time, perhaps "dead duck" Congress would be slightly better.

But this particular post-2010 election Congress has been remarkably productive! Therefore I suggest that we call them the "Sly Fox Congress". First they made a necessary, if somewhat repugnant, compromise with Republican leaders that kept working class and middle class tax cuts, extended unemployment benefits, and created other job-producing incentives. The GOP insistence on preserving tax cuts for the very wealthy was morally and economically wrong, yet thanks to their greed, nothing would have been done about the good parts of this deal otherwise.

And what a wonderful series of bills have been passed by both the Senate and the House since this compromise on taxes! These include:

- 1) The end of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell", allowing gay, lesbian and bi-sexual soldiers to serve openly.
- 2) Passage of the New Start Treaty with Russia to allow for nuclear weapon inspections, American-Russian cooperation on nuclear issues, and a significant reduction in each country's nuclear arsenal.
- 3) A food safety bill, including 1800 more inspectors, and new standards.
- 4) A very overdue and deserved health care coverage plan for 9/11 responders.

All of this was done in just a few weeks and each bill represents a major accomplishment. Wisdom and common sense prevailed over partisan politics, a very welcome change in Washington. Still there is so much more we need our government to do, even in these 4 areas:

- A) We all need comprehensive affordable health care. Take some time to understand Canadian health care, European health care and yes, Cuban health care—You could watch Michael Moore's film *Sicko*, a powerful indictment of America's health care that includes his taking Hurricane Katrina victims to Cuba to get treatment.
- B) It is my understanding that the food safety bill does not satisfactorily address the meat packing industry. The gross excesses of this industry in the name of profit, disregarding consumer and worker safety, have been very well documented in 1906 when Upton Sinclair wrote **The Jungle** and 95 years later when Eric Schlosser authored **Fast Food Nation**.
- C) Our fragile world needs to rid itself of all, not just some, of its nuclear weapons. President Obama has said that this is a priority of his. Never again

should any nation or group explode these evil bombs, murdering large numbers of innocent human beings.

D) Most importantly we need to look way beyond equal opportunity to serve in the military: America has to completely change course: away from war, away from military bases and occupations of other countries, and away from an economic system that thrives on military profits, exploitation of soldiers, and teaching humans to kill other humans. Additionally, America has to create a just economic system rather than one where people can become multi-millionaires by selling fraudulent mortgages, by financial manipulations, by stock sales, and by all other schemes to get rich without making a significant contribution to the betterment of humankind.

I do not mean to downplay the importance of these new laws; rather I want to put them in context of our long-term economic crisis, our very long wars, and the dwindling of America's middle class. So, congratulations to President Barack Obama for his vision and leadership. Congratulations to the Democratic Congressional leadership, and congratulations to those Republicans who broke rank with Senators Mitch McConnell and John Kyl to put the needs of all Americans first.

It was then candidate Barack Obama who in March of 2008 used these words from the preamble of our Constitution to address the persistence of racism: " ' We the people, in order to form a more perfect union.' " Mr. Obama went on to say, " Two hundred and twenty-one years ago...a group of men gathered and with these simple words, launched America's improbable experiment with democracy. " Later in this brilliant, historical speech he reminded us that, "The document (*The Constitution*) they produced was eventually signed, but ultimately unfinished. It was stained by the nation's original sin of slavery."

I contend that America's work towards a more perfect union where all of us have equal rights, true legal and social justice, equal opportunities, and a clear path towards health, happiness and economic justice is far from done. So I challenge the new Congress and President Obama to do all that they can to make this happen, rather than serving the narrow interests of the rich and the powerful. The fate of our improbable democracy lies in their hands.

In late 2012 we could then decide what nickname this particular Congressional law-making body deserves.