



## The Congressional Thaw

*Compromise may finally be coming back in style on Capitol Hill*

By [ALEX M. PARKER](#)  
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Last year, Congress was like a lazy student facing a deadline—only doing what it had to do, and at the last possible moment.

This year, the usual partisan bitterness is beginning to mellow into a slight flavor of bipartisanship—but only a tiny bit.

On Wednesday, the White House met with congressional leaders to discuss the economy, one day after House Republicans unveiled their [jobs](#) proposal. As House Democrats were quick to note, most of the elements of the bill—which would change Wall Street regulations to allow small businesses more access to quick cash—had already been passed individually in the House with overwhelming Democratic support, although they had stalled in the Senate. But with new support from Senate Democrats, who had initially opposed the measure, the proposals now have a shot at becoming law.

"It might seem to be that the stars are beginning to align," House Majority Leader Eric Cantor said while unveiling [the jobs](#) package.

During Wednesday's meeting, House Speaker John Boehner talked with the president about the jobs bill and came away "encouraged," according to a Boehner aide.

### [\[11 Things Wrong With Congress\]](#)

The White House had already indicated its support for the measure, which Republicans are viewing as a victory after they were blocked for months by Democrats in the Senate.

"That's a concession from the White House on the Republicans' agenda," says one GOP strategist. "Whether it's a Charlie Brown and Lucy kind of deal, we'll see."

But Democrats are also savoring the change in tone of their counterparts, from their usual style of brinkmanship with the White House to agreeing—without a deadline or standoff—to look for a deal. It's also an indication that Republicans are spooked about facing their constituents without more accomplishments, according to some political observers.

"They really would like to pass a few bills, so they can say that they've actually passed something," says Michael Tanner, a Congressional analyst with the libertarian Cato Institute.

Some Democrats are downright giddy that the low Congressional approval ratings—a February Gallup poll shows that only 10 percent of Americans approve of the job that lawmakers have been doing—and the rising economic tide are not only giving them the upper hand in negotiations, but are also allowing them the chance to control the legislative agenda. Even

though the president's hopes for comprehensive tax reform or higher taxes for millionaires still seems unlikely, Democrats are still itching to put Republicans on the spot over issues on the economy, home mortgages, and taxes.

"It's creating a situation where some Republicans may start saving face and may try to cut deals with the President and Democrats in order to pass legislation to save their seats," one House Democratic aide says.

[\[When the Senate worked.\]](#)

The parties are still locking horns over issues such as gas prices and contraception, but there are other brief glimpses of comity.

On Tuesday party leaders indicated that they would try to move forward with the traditional appropriations process, rather than enter a showdown over the deficit—the playbook from the last several congressional sessions. And in February, the GOP unexpectedly caved early on the [payroll](#) tax deal rather than take the issue down to the deadline negotiations of the past.

For the most part, Congressional business will be drowned out by the upcoming elections, and that's a big part of why the tides may be shifting.

"As much as [the Republican] base likes being just in opposition, I do think that middle of the road voters are disgusted by the partisanship," Tanner says.