

Even the names of bills are polarizing these days

Many lawmakers in Congress opt for partisan stingers to keep their messages front and center.

[By Richard Simon • Los Angeles Times](#) | Posted: Sunday, June 26, 2011 12:00 am | [\(2\) Comments](#)

WASHINGTON • It wasn't enough to introduce HR145 this year. Instead, the Republican-sponsored bill became the Revoke Excessive Policies that Encroach on American Liberties Act. Or for easy reference, the Repeal Act targeting President Barack Obama's health care overhaul.

Congressional bills used to be known by succinct, nonpartisan names — say, the Homestead Act or Civil Rights Act. But these days, many lawmakers are opting for partisan stingers.

This new generation of attack titles is ratcheting up the gamesmanship among lawmakers in both parties who are vying to make their bills stand out from the thousands introduced every year.

Lawmakers have long used catchy names and acronyms for bills. Controversy over Bruce Springsteen concert ticket sales two years ago prompted the Boss Act for Better Oversight of Secondary Sales and Accountability in Concert Ticketing. But now, the titles increasingly hammer home a political point of view.

"The fact is that everything on Capitol Hill has become incredibly polarized along partisan lines, and members of each side of the aisle try to take advantage of anything they can get their hands on to outflank their opponents," said Julian Zelizer, a congressional historian at Princeton University.

"So it's logical that eventually even the name of bills would be another mechanism to stick it to the other party."

But Rep. George Miller, D-Calif., a 36-year House veteran, complained that the partisan-named bills, like those that target the president, are "not substantive" because "they're just a vehicle for a message." Lawmakers tend to lament the lack of bipartisanship in Congress, but then "they fuel it" with bill names, he said. "It's just not helpful."

But winning approval isn't necessarily the point.

"If Republicans can take a silly name like the Repealing the Job-Killing Health Care Law Act and make it stick, they've helped communicate its meaning and importance to audiences they're trying to reach," said Jim Harper, the Cato Institute's director of information policy studies, whose blog WashingtonWatch.com tracks legislation.

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