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Name That Bill!

Jacob Sullum | August 11, 2010

Yesterday Katherine Mangu-Ward and Peter Suderman noted freshly approved legislation that creates an "Education Jobs Fund," paying for it partly by cutting back on food stamp spending. The bill, HR 1586, also includes provisions dealing with Medicaid and various tax issues, all apparently aimed at providing "revenue offsets" to fund the subsidies for teachers. But here is the most striking thing about the bill: Members of Congress were in such a hurry to curry favor with teachers unions that they forgot to give it a name. The version that Thomas calls "Final as Passed Both House and Senate" says, "This Act may be cited as the 'XXXXXX Act of XXXX.'" At *Washington Watch*, Jim Harper notes that the official name is actually the "_____ Act of _____"; Thomas seems to have automatically replaced the blanks with Xs. On Sunday, Harper explained what was going on:

This is a "shell bill." It was introduced as one thing (TARP taxes), became another thing (an aviation bill), and is now a batch of spending policies....

The most recent version of the bill was produced when the Senate passed a "substitute amendment." That's an amendment that clips out everything in the bill and puts in all new text.

In the House and Senate, they often publish amendments ahead of time, and it looks like someone was in a rush to get the amendment together, because they left blank lines where the new name of the bill should have been....

And that's the way it might be signed into law.

You see, the Constitution requires both Houses of Congress to pass identical bills before they can be sent to the president and signed into law. The Senate has left town for the rest of August, and the House is coming back next week to put its stamp of approval on the bill.

President Obama wants to sign it quickly—the bill is already up on the Whitehouse.gov "pending legislation" page....So the House has to approve *this* bill, with the name "_____ Act of _____."

The only other alternative is for the House to change the name and have the Senate come back for

another vote.

Won't someone please give this poor bill a name?

Addendum: John Boehner has some suggestions.

[Thanks to Johnny Longtorso for the tip.]