

Farm Bills: Major Legislative Actions, 1965-2023

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SUMMARY

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Farm Bills: Major Legislative Actions, 1965-2023

The farm bill provides an opportunity for Congress to address agricultural and food issues comprehensively about every five years. Over time, farm bills have tended to become more complicated and politically sensitive. As a result, the timeline for reauthorization has become less certain. Beginning in 2008, farm bills have been subject to various developments that have delayed enactment, such as insufficient votes to pass the House floor, presidential vetoes, and extensions.

On November 19, 2023, Congress enacted a one-year extension (P.L. 118-22, Division B, §102) of the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (P.L. 115-334), often called the "2018 farm bill." The 2018 farm bill expired on September 30, 2023, and with the 2023 crop year (crops harvested in 2023). The extension continues authorizations until September 30, 2024, and for the 2024 crop year.

In 2023, no markups or legislative action occurred to reauthorize the farm bill besides the extension. The 2018 farm bill took eight months from introduction to passage and failed initially by vote in the House. By comparison, the 2014 farm bill took more than 21 months from introduction to enactment, failed by vote in the House, and spanned the 112th and 113th Congresses, including a one-year extension. The 2008 farm bill took more than a year to enact and was complicated by revenue provisions from another committee of jurisdiction, temporary extensions, and vetoes.

Most farm bills have been introduced in the first session of a two-year Congress (the odd-numbered year). Three of the farm bills that were introduced in the second session—the 1970, 1990, and 2018 farm bills—were enacted during a lame duck Congress of the same year. The 2014 farm bill was the first farm bill to start in one Congress (2012), remain unfinished, and require reintroduction in a subsequent Congress.

This report examines the major legislative milestones for the last 12 farm bills covering 58 years.

Contents

Timelines for Enactment, Extension, and Vetoes	. I
Timeline Relative to Fiscal Years	. 2
Timeline Relative to Calendar Years	. 3
Timeline Relative to the Two-Year Congressional Term	. 3
House or Senate Action First	
Short-Term Extensions	
Presidential Vetoes	
Implications for Congress	. 5
Figures	
Figure 1. Major Legislative Actions on Farm Bills, 1965-2023	. 2
Tables	
Table 1. Major Legislative Actions on Farm Bills, 2018-1965	. 5
Contacts	
Author Information	. 9

The farm bill provides an opportunity for Congress to address agricultural and food issues comprehensively about every five years. Over time, farm bills have tended to become . more complicated and politically sensitive. This has made the timeline for reauthorization less certain. Recent farm bills have been subject to developments that have delayed enactment, such as insufficient votes to pass the House floor, presidential vetoes, and extensions.

On November 19, 2023, Congress enacted a one-year extension (P.L. 118-22, Division B, §102) of the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (P.L. 115-334), often called the "2018 farm bill." The 2018 farm bill expired on September 30, 2023, and with the 2023 crop year (crops harvested in 2023).2 The extension continues authorizations in the 2018 farm bill that were in effect on September 30, 2023, until September 30, 2024, and for the 2024 crop year.

In 2023, legislative action for reauthorization of the farm bill began with the one-year farm bill extension. No committee markups were held.

In 2018, the legislative timeline began with markup in the House Agriculture Committee in April 2018. An initial floor vote in May failed by 198-213, but procedures allowed that vote to be reconsidered (H.Res. 905). The House passed its bill in a second vote of 213-211 in June 2018. In the Senate, the Agriculture Committee reported its bill in June 2018. The Senate passed its bill by a vote of 86-11 in June. Conference proceedings officially began in September and concluded in December 2018.

The shortest farm bill debate in the past six decades was related to the 1973 farm bill, which was enacted less than three months after being introduced. In contrast, the 2014 farm bill took more than 21 months from introduction to enactment, spanning two Congresses.³ The House initially rejected a farm bill in 2013 and then passed separate farm and nutrition assistance components the first time a chamber-passed farm bill did not include a nutrition title since 1973. The House later procedurally recombined them for conference with the Senate.

Both the 2002 and 2008 farm bills had expired for about three months (from October through December in 2007 and 2012) before extensions were enacted. In each case, like in 2023, the fiscal year began under a continuing resolution for appropriations. The extensions of the 2002 farm bill were for relatively short periods totaling about five months during final House-Senate negotiations. The extensions of the 2008 farm bill, effective in 2013, and the 2018 farm bill, effective in 2024, were for a full year.

This report examines the major legislative milestones for the last 12 farm bills over 58 years, a period representing modern farm bills with growing complexity.

Table 1 contains a history of major legislative action on farm bills since 1965. **Figure 1** shows the major dates on a timeline.

Timelines for Enactment, Extension, and Vetoes

Different parts of a farm bill are authorized for different periods of time. Fiscal years, calendar years, and crop years can be important to different programs. Programs authorized by the 2018 farm bill (P.L. 115-334), as extended (P.L. 118-22, Division B, §102), now generally expire

¹ See CRS In Focus IF12047, Farm Bill Primer: What Is the Farm Bill?.

² See CRS Report R47659, Expiration of the Farm Bill.

³ These dates span only the official introduction of a bill marked up by committee until the President signed the bill. They do not include background hearings before committee markup, which would extend the timeline.

Figure 1. Major Legislative Actions on Farm Bills, 1965-2023 ♦ Senate Cmte. OHouse Cmte. House Floor ◆ Senate Floor Extension X Fail on floor ▲ Veto ■ Enacted Oct Jan Apr Jul Jan Apr Jul Oct Jan Apr +2023 ○ × 2018 2018 2012 2014 0 2007 0 2001 2002 1995 0 1990 0 1990 0 1985 1981 1981 1977 1977 1973 1970 1970

either at the end of FY2024 (September 30, 2024) or after the 2024 crop year, which varies among crops.⁴

Source: Figure created by CRS using Congress.gov, http://www.congress.gov.

1965

Timeline Relative to Fiscal Years

Enacting farm bills after the end of the final fiscal year for which programs have been authorized has been a common occurrence. In the past 42 years covering the nine farm bills since 1976—when the federal government began using a fiscal year that began on October 1⁵—only the 1977 and 2002 farm bills were enacted before the September 30 expiration date for programs that would have been affected by the fiscal year.⁶

1965

⁴ A primary exception to expiration in 2024 is the parts of the conservation title that were extended to 2031 in P.L. 117-169, commonly known as the Inflation Reduction Act. See the "Conservation Programs" heading in CRS Report R47659, *Expiration of the Farm Bill*.

⁵ The federal fiscal year changed in 1976. A "transition quarter" was added to move the beginning of the fiscal year from July 1 to October 1. See Office of Management and Budget, *Historical Tables: Budget of the U.S. Government*.

⁶ Before the 1973 farm bill, which was the first to incorporate reauthorization of the food stamp program that had a fiscal year expiration, the focus of the farm bill was the farm commodity programs that operated by crop years.

The 1981, 1985, 1990, and 2018 farm bills were enacted within three months after the final fiscal year for which programs were authorized ended. The 1996 farm bill was enacted in April 1996 following the September 30, 1995, expiration of some of the authorizations in the 1990 farm bill. The 2008 and 2014 farm bills were enacted well after their original September 30 expirations and following the enactment of extensions.

Expiration at the end of a fiscal year (September 30) matters for programs with fiscal year authorizations. These programs include certain nutrition, conservation, and trade programs; various agricultural programs, excluding the Title I commodity programs; and many authorizations for discretionary appropriations. The consequences of expiration of a farm bill are discussed in other CRS reports.⁸

Timeline Relative to Calendar Years

Ten of the thirteen farm bills since 1965 were enacted before December 31 in the year of their expirations. The exceptions were extensions enacted for 2008, 2013, and 2024 because action had not been completed the previous year (see "Short-Term Extensions" below). The 2018 farm bill was the first time since before 1965 that both chambers completed floor action before the end of June.

Expiration at the end of a calendar year matters mostly for the dairy program, one of the farm commodity programs in Title I of recent farm bills. The farm commodity programs are tied to crop years—that is, the year in which a crop is harvested—and dairy is the first commodity that would be affected by reverting to "permanent law," since its crop year begins on January 1 after the year of expiration. ¹⁰

Timeline Relative to the Two-Year Congressional Term

Since 1965, 8 out of 12 enacted farm bills were introduced in the first session of a two-year Congress (the odd-numbered year). The other four (1970, 1990, 2014, and 2018) were introduced in the second session of a two-year Congress (the even-numbered year).¹¹

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⁷ While the 1996 farm bill was not pressured by the expiration of farm commodity programs in the 1990 farm bill—since budget reconciliation in 1993 had extended them through the 1996 and 1997 crop years—some of the original FY1995 expiration dates for food stamps, certain conservation programs, and various authorizations of appropriations continued unchanged and had not been extended by the reconciliation act.

⁸ For example, see explanations in CRS Report R47659, Expiration of the Farm Bill.

⁹ The 1965 farm bill was extended for one year, but that extension occurred more than a year before expiration and before the reauthorization process had begun in 1970. The 1996 and 2002 farm bills may appear to have been delayed by being reintroduced (1996) or going through the new year into May (2002), but their predecessors did not require extensions. The 1990 farm bill's original expiration date of the end of the 1995 crop year had less of an effect on the 1996 farm bill's timeline because budget reconciliation in 1993 had extended the farm commodity programs through at least 1996 and, in some cases, the 1997 crops. The 2002 farm bill was enacted before the 1996 farm bill expired on September 30, 2002, and before the 2002 crop year ended. In fact, the 2002 farm bill superseded the last year of the 1996 farm bill by beginning with the 2002 crop year.

¹⁰ Permanent law refers to non-expiring farm commodity programs that are generally from the 1938 and 1949 farm bills. The temporary suspension of permanent law is included as a section in all recent farm bills. If the suspension of permanent law were to expire at the end of a crop year, the permanent law provisions would take effect unless a new farm bill, or an extension of the most recent bill, continues the suspension. For more details about permanent law and its consequences, see the heading on permanent law in CRS Report R47659, Expiration of the Farm Bill.

¹¹ This counts 2012 as the introduction of what became the 2014 farm bill. Technically, the bill that became the 2014 farm bill (H.R. 2642) was introduced in 2013 (the first session of the 113th Congress), but many consider it a reintroduction of the bills started in 2012 (the second session of the 112th Congress).

Of the four farm bills introduced in a second session, three (the 1970, 1990, and 2018 farm bills) were enacted during a lame duck Congress (after an election) in November and December of the same year. The 2014 farm bill, which was introduced in 2012, was the first farm bill to start in one Congress, remain unfinished, and require reintroduction in a subsequent Congress.

House or Senate Action First

There is no rule dictating which chamber initiates farm bill action. Since 1965, the Senate was first to mark up farm bills in 1973, 1977, 1981, 2012, and 2013. The House was first to mark up bills in 1965, 1970, 1985, 1990, 1995 (and 1996), 2001, 2007, and 2018.

Short-Term Extensions

Extensions of a prior farm bill while its successor is being written had been atypical but are now common in three of the past four reauthorizations (extensions during 2008, 2013, and 2024). Only the 2002, 2008, and 2018 farm bills have required extensions.

When the 2002 farm bill expired, portions of it were extended six times for less than a year total beginning in December 2007 (**Figure 1**,

Table 1). ¹² When the 2008 farm bill expired, the entire farm bill was extended in January 2013 for all of FY2013 and the 2013 crop year. ¹³ While the 2014 farm bill was expired from October 1 until the 2018 farm bill was enacted, the continuing resolution for appropriations continued many operations, though some new program activity ceased. ¹⁴ Because no markups or floor action occurred during 2023 to reauthorize the farm bill, Congress enacted a one-year extension in November 2023.

Presidential Vetoes

Presidential vetoes of farm bills are not common. Since 1965, only the 2008 farm bill has been vetoed as stand-alone measure; it was vetoed twice. A 1995 farm bill was vetoed as part of a larger budget reconciliation package.

President George W. Bush vetoed the 2008 farm bill (H.R. 2419). When Congress overrode the veto to enact P.L. 110-234, it accidentally enrolled the law without Title III (the trade title). Congress immediately reintroduced the same bill with the trade title (H.R. 6124). President Bush vetoed this version as well, and Congress again overrode the veto to enact P.L. 110-246, a complete 2008 farm bill that included the trade title. The overrides in 2008 were the only time that a farm bill was enacted as a result of a veto override.

President Clinton vetoed a 1995 budget reconciliation package that included the first version of what became the 1996 farm bill, but the veto was not due to the farm bill itself but rather the controversial nature of the reconciliation bill in which the farm bill was embedded.

Prior to 1965, the first veto of a farm bill was in 1956, when President Eisenhower vetoed H.R. 12 (84th Congress), the first version of the Agricultural Act of 1956.

¹² CRS Report RL34154, Possible Expiration (or Extension) of the 2002 Farm Bill.

¹³ CRS Report R42442, Expiration and Extension of the 2008 Farm Bill.

¹⁴ CRS Report R45341, Expiration of the 2014 Farm Bill.

Implications for Congress

Farm bill reauthorization has tended to become more complex and engender greater political sensitivity. The process of enacting a new farm bill prior to the expiration of the existing law has become more difficult. As stakeholders in the farm bill have become more diverse, more people are affected by the legislative uncertainty around the farm bill process. This lack of certainty may compound questions about the availability of future program benefits.

Table I. Major Legislative Actions on Farm Bills, 2018-1965

	House		Sen	Senate		Conference Report Approval		
	Cmte.	Passage	Cmte.	Passage	Conf. Report	House Passage	Senate Passage	Public Law
One-year extension of the 2018 farm bill Covers 2024 crop or until 9/30/2024	One-year extension until 9/30/2024 and for the 2024 crop year (dairy price support extended until 12/31/2024). Provided \$177 million of mandatory funding for 19 of the programs without mandatory baseline with an offset.							
2018 farm bill Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 Covers 2019-2023	4/18/2018 H.R. 2 Vote of 26-20 5/3/2018	5/18/2018 H.R. 2 Initial vote failed by 198-213 6/21/2018 Reconsidered	6/13/2018 S. 3042 Vote of 20-1	6/28/2018 H.R. 2 Vote of 86-11	12/10/2018 H.Rept. 115-1072	H.R. 2 Vote of 369-47	12/11/2018 H.R. 2 Vote of 87-13	12/20/2018 P.L. 115-334
crops or until 9/30/2023	H.Rept. 115-661	under H.Res. 905 Passed by vote of 213-211						
2014 farm bill	5/15/2013	6/20/2013	5/14/2013	6/10/2013	1/27/2014	1/29/2014	2/4/2014	2/7/2014
Agricultural Act of 2014 (113th Congress)	H.R. 1947 Vote of 36-10	H.R. 1947 Failed by vote 195-234	S. 954 Vote of 15-5 9/4/2013	S. 954 Vote of 66-27	H.Rept. 113-333	H.R. 2642 Vote of 251-166	H.R. 2642 Vote of 68-32	P.L. 113-79
Covers 2014-2018 crops or until 9/30/2018	5/29/2013 H.Rept. 113-92	7/11/2013 H.R. 2642 Farm portion vote of 216-208 9/19/2013 H.R. 3102 Nutrition part	S.Rept. 113- 88					
		yote of 217-210 9/28/2013 H.Res. 361 combined House bills						
One-year extension of the 2008 farm bill Covers 2013 crop or until 9/30/2013	until 12/31/2013, and the Milk Income Loss Contract program extended until 9/30/2013). Did not provide funding for programs without mandatory baseline.							1/2/2013 P.L. 112-240 Title VII

	House		Senate		Conference Report Approval			·
	Cmte.	Passage	Cmte.	Passage	Conf. Report	House Passage	Senate Passage	Public Law
Agriculture Reform,	7/11/2012	_	4/26/2012	6/21/2012	_	_	_	_
Food, and Jobs Act	H.R. 6083		S. 3240	S. 3240				
(112 th Congress)	Vote of 35-11		Vote of 16-5	Vote of 64-35				
	9/13/2012 H.Rept. 112-669		8/28/2012 S.Rept. 112- 203					
Early partial extension of the 2008 farm bill	Conservation	Stewardship P	orograms throug rogram, Enviror Idlife Habitat Ind	mental Quali	ity Incentives F			11/18/2011 P.L. 112-55
2008 farm bill					,	6/18/2008	6/18/2008	6/18/2008
Food, Conservation,						H.R. 6124	H.R. 6124	P.L. 110-246
and Energy Act of						Passed	Passed	
2008 Covers 2008-2012						over veto 317-109	over veto 80-14	
crops or until 9/30/2012						317-107	00-14	
					Re-passed	5/22/2008	6/5/2008	6/18/2008
					as new bill	H.R. 6124	H.R. 6124	Vetoed
					with Title III	Vote of 306-110	Vote of 77-15	
						5/21/2008	5/22/2008	5/22/2008
						H.R. 2419	H.R. 2419	P.L. 110-234
						Passed over veto 316-108	Passed over veto 82-13	
	5/22/2007	7/27/2007	11/2/2007	12/14/2007	5/13/2008	5/14/2008	5/15/2008	5/21/2008
	H.R. 2419	H.R. 2419	S. 2302	Amdt. to	H.Rept.	H.R. 2419	H.R. 2419	Vetoed
	Introduced 7/23/2007 H.Rept. 110-256	Vote of 231-191	S.Rept. 110- 220	H.R. 2419 Vote of 79-14	110-627	Vote of 318-106	Vote of 81-15	Enrolling error omitted Title III
Short-term	Continued ex	tension until 5/	/23/2008.					5/18/2008
extension of the 2002 farm bill								P.L. 110-231
Short-term extension	Continued ex	tension until 5/	16/2008.					5/2/2008 P.L. 110-208
Short-term extension	Continued extension until 5/2/2008.							4/25/2008 P.L. 110-205
Short-term	Continued or	ctension until 4	25/2008					4/18/2008
extension	Continued ex	cension until 4/	23/2000.					P.L. 110-200
Short-term	Continued ex	tension until 4	18/2008 and ad	ded extension	n of suspensio	n of permane	nt law.	3/14/2008
extension								P.L. 110-196

		Passage	Conf. Report	House	Senate		
			Report	Passage	Passage Passage	Public Law	
Extended parts of the 2002 farm bill until 3/15/2008 but did not extend the direct and countercyclical farm commodity programs.							
nd two conse	lilk Income Los ervation progra m) until FY201	ams (Environi				2/8/2006 P.L. 109-171	
0/5/2001	11/27/2001	2/13/2002	5/1/2002	5/2/2002	5/8/2002	5/13/2002	
H.R. 2646	S. 1731	Amdt. to	H.Rept.	H.R. 2646	H.R. 2646	P.L. 107-171	
Vote of 291-120	12/7/2001 S.Rept. 107- 117	H.R. 2646 Vote of 58-40	107-424	Vote of 280-141	Vote of 64- 35		
2/29/1996	1/26/1996	2/7/1996	3/25/1996	3/29/1996	3/28/1996	4/4/1996	
H.R. 2854 Vote of 270-155	S. 1541 introduced	S. 1541 Vote of 64-32	H.Rept. 104-494	H.R. 2854 Vote of 318-89	H.R. 2854 Vote of 74-26	P.L. 104-127	
		3/12/1996 Amdt. to H.R. 2854 Voice vote					
0/26/1995	10/28/1995	10/28/1995	11/16/1995	11/20/1995	11/17/1995	12/6/1995	
. 2491 Vote f 227-203	S. 1357 includes Senate bill	Amdt. to H.R. 2491 Vote of 52-47	H.Rept. 104-347	H.R. 2491 Vote of 235-192	H.R. 2491 Vote of 52-47	Vetoed	
_	9/28/1995	_	_	_	_	_	
	unnumber- ed bill						
•	ation, extendens, cotton, rice		-			8/10/1993 P.L. 103-66	
8/1/1990	7/6/1990	7/27/1990	10/22/1990	10/23/1990	10/25/1990	11/28/1990	
H.R. 3950 Vote of 327-91	S. 2830 S.Rept. 101- 357	S. 2830 Vote of 70-21	H.Rept. 101-916	S. 2830 Vote of 318-102	S. 2830 Vote of 60-36	P.L. 101-624	
		H.R. 3950 S. 2830 Vote of S.Rept. 101-	H.R. 3950 S. 2830 S. 2830 Vote of S.Rept. 101- Vote of	H.R. 3950 S. 2830 S. 2830 H.Rept. Vote of S.Rept. 101- Vote of 101-916	H.R. 3950 S. 2830 S. 2830 H.Rept. S. 2830 Vote of S.Rept. 101- Vote of 101-916 Vote of	H.R. 3950 S. 2830 S. 2830 H.Rept. S. 2830 S. 2830 Vote of S.Rept. 101- Vote of 101-916 Vote of Vote of	

	House		Sen	Senate		Conference Report Approval		
	Cmte.	Passage	Cmte.	Passage	Conf. Report	House Passage	Senate Passage	Public Law
1985 farm bill	4/17/1985	10/8/1985	9/30/1985	11/23/1985	12/17/1985	12/18/1985	12/18/1985	12/23/1985
Food Security Act of 1985	H.R. 2100 introduced	H.R. 2100 Vote of	S. 1714 S.Rept. 99-	H.R. 2100 Vote of	H.Rept. 99- 447	H.R. 2100 Vote of	H.R. 2100 Vote of	P.L. 99-198
Covers 1986-1990 crops or until 9/30/1990	9/13/1985 H.Rept. 99- 271	282-141	145	61-28		325-96	55-38	
1981 farm bill	5/18/1981	10/22/1981	4/7/1981	9/18/1981	12/9/1981	12/16/1981	12/10/1981	12/22/1981
Agriculture and Food Act of 1981 Covers 1982-1985 crops or until 9/30/1985	H.R. 3603 introduced 5/19/1981 H.Rept. 97- 106	S. 884 Vote of 192-160	S. 884 introduced 5/27/1981 S.Rept. 97- 126	S. 884 Vote of 49-32	H.Rept. 97- 377 12/10/1981 S.Rept. 97- 290	S. 884 Vote of 205-203	S. 884 Vote of 67-32	P.L. 97-98
		7/28/1977	1/18/1977	5/24/1977	9/9/1977	9/14/1977	9/9/1977	9/29/1977
1977 farm bill Food and Agriculture Act of 1977 Covers 1978-1981	5/13/1977 H.R. 7171 introduced 5/16/1977 H.Rept. 95-	7/28/19/7 Amdt. to S. 275 Vote of 294-114	S. 275 introduced 5/16/1977 S.Rept. 95-	S. 275 Vote of 69-18	9/9/1977 S.Rept. 95- 418	9/16/1977 S. 275 Vote of 283-107	S. 275 Vote of 63-8	9/29/19/7 P.L. 95-113
crops or until 9/30/1981	348		180					
1973 farm bill	6/20/1973	7/19/1973	5/23/1973	6/8/1973	7/31/1973	8/3/1973	7/31/1973	8/10/1973
Agriculture and Consumer Protection Act	H.R. 8860 introduced 6/27/1973	Amdt. to S. 1888 Vote of	S. 1888 introduced S.Rept. 93-	S. 1888 Vote of 78-9	H.Rept. 93- 427	S. 1888 Vote of 252-151	S. 1888 Vote of 85-7	P.L. 93-86
Covers 1974-1977 crops or until 6/30/1977	H.Rept. 93- 337	226-182	173	70-7		232-131	03-7	
1970 farm bill	7/23/1970	8/5/1970	9/4/1970	9/15/1970	10/9/1970	10/13/1970	11/19/1970	11/30/1970
Agricultural Act of 1970 Covers 1971-1973 crops	H.R. 18546 H.Rept. 91- 1329	H.R. 18546 Vote of 212-171	Amdt. to H.R. 18546 S.Rept. 91- 1154	Amdt. to H.R. 18546 Vote of 65-7	H.Rept. 91- 1594	H.R. 18546 Vote of 191-145	H.R. 18546 Vote of 48-35	P.L. 91-524
Early extension of the 1965 farm bill	More than a year before expiration, extended the farm bill for one-year until 12/31/1970.							10/11/1968 P.L. 90-559
1965 farm bill	7/20/1965	8/19/1965	9/7/1965	9/14/1965	10/6/1965	10/8/1965	10/12/1965	11/4/1965
Food and Agricultural Act	H.R. 9811 H.Rept. 89-	H.R. 9811 Vote of	Amdt. to H.R. 9811	Amdt. to H.R. 9811	H.Rept. 89-	H.R. 9811 Vote of	H.R. 9811 Voice vote	P.L. 89-321
Covers 1966-1969 crops	63 l	221-172	S.Rept. 89- 687	Vote of 72-22		219-150	roice vote	

Source: CRS.

Notes: Includes only major legislative actions. Excludes subsequent revisions, such as in budget reconciliation, except for extensions as noted. Rows are sorted by date of the Public Law column.

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