

Why Bother Lobbying This Year? 2027 Wins Hinge on Actions Today

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It's been said that Congress does two things well: nothing or overreacts. Nothing substantial is likely to make it to the president's desk in 2026— beyond the National Defense Authorization, which may carry some additional extraneous measures with strong bipartisan support.

With the House Republicans' slim majority and the opposition of a few rebels such as Rep. Thomas Massie, Speaker Mike Johnson will be unable to sweet-talk his way to passage of significant legislative measures. Even the prospect of the majority wielding the reconciliation budget procedure that precludes the need for Democratic support is unlikely since there's no Damoclean sword of an automatic tax hike that motivated lawmakers in 2025.

Don't count on completing the 2027 fiscal year appropriations process until the first quarter of next year, especially if an incoming Democratic majority punts on striking deals until it has better field position in the new Congress.

Does that mean engaging with Congress in 2026 is pointless? On the contrary, the second half of the 119th Congress is an excellent time to prepare for what could be a very productive 120th. President Donald Trump will be a lame duck and, if historic trends hold up, Congress could be divided between a Republican Senate and a Democratic House.

Trump Legacy

Trump may want to cut deals to secure his legislative legacy. He's already demonstrated a proclivity to challenge conventional Republican orthodoxy on everything from price controls to tariffs to credit card fees.

Faced with an otherwise unproductive Congress, watch for the president to reach across the aisle to pass some potentially historic legislation that unites a cross-section of both parties. He has shown his ideological flexibility and that he's not limited by traditional conservative principles.

If I'm right, then 2026 is a perfect time to set the predicate for legislating in the ensuing two years. Things are likely to remain relatively quiet legislatively, freeing up members of Congress

and their staff to focus on long-term issues. Plus, few legislative initiatives begin and end their journeys in one Congress.

Looking to 2027

I recommend four steps to pursue now with an eye to next year:

Cultivate legislative champions. When Congress is frenetically processing major issues, lawmakers have trouble concentrating on what seem like tangential matters.

During the drafting of the 2025 tax bill, every (Republican) member was jockeying for position to get their pet initiative included. This year, members have time to pause and reflect and strategize. Getting meetings with congressional offices will be more viable. Find your legislative champions now.

Get bills introduced as soon as possible, giving you time to round up bipartisan cosponsors. During my nearly two decades on the Hill, my bosses were prone to quickly re-up their co-sponsorships from one Congress to the next as those bills had already been vetted. Make it easier to get co-sponsors next year when it might really matter by lining up supporters now.

Focus on Democrats. The minority party is often neglected during hegemonic sessions like this one when Republicans have (putative) control of both ends of Pennsylvania Avenue. Next year, many of today's lesser-known Democrats might be holding gavels. Get to them now, win their hearts and their minds, and see how it pays off when they're in control.

Build coalitions. With the presently light legislative season, many trade associations, think tanks, and activist organizations have time to breathe. It's a perfect time to meet with them and get them drafting supportive statements, white papers, blogposts, and tweets about your legislative goal. Few legislative initiatives can advance without a robust coalition of supporters. Build the coalition now and be clear on what you want to see done.

Politics is a long game. Waiting for times of high legislative activity may mean you'll be too late for when the sausage is being made. Use this quiet season heading into the mid-term elections to lay the groundwork for what holds the potential to be a surprisingly productive 2027.

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