

# One Hundred and Eleventh Congress

Jan. 6, 2009-Dec. 29, 2010

## First Administration of Barack H. Obama

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### Historical Background

When President Barack H. Obama took office, the economy was in a deep recession. After a campaign which stressed his commitment to economic reform and backed with a Democratic majority in both houses of Congress, President Obama began his Presidency with a mandate for strong action to jump start the economy. Congress set immediately to work and on February 17, 2009 enacted the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, which authorized an ambitious series of programs to provide tax relief, extend unemployment benefits, and jump start the economy.

In his first address before a joint session of Congress, delivered February 24, 2011, President Obama spoke about the impact of the ongoing recession on individuals and the need for policies to address the underlying causes of the economic decline, including dependence on foreign oil and the high cost of health care. He spoke optimistically about the ability of the Recovery Act to create jobs in energy and public infrastructure areas, provide tax relief and stimulate the economy, extend relief for the unemployed and provide incentives for students to attend college. He supported proposals to help individuals refinance home mortgages, provide the troubled U.S. auto industry with assistance, enact comprehensive health care reform, and ensure that students get the education needed to compete in a global economy. He pledged to cut the deficit in half by the end of his first term in office and promised that he would not support tax increases for families making more than \$250,000.

During the second year of his administration, President Obama realized a long-cherished goal of his Democratic Party when, on March 23, 2010, he signed the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, delivering on a campaign promise to enact comprehensive health care reform to ensure millions of uninsured Americans, prohibit denying insurance to individuals



Barack H. Obama  
*President of the United States*

President  
Barack H. Obama

House	Senate
Majority Party: Democrat (257 seats)	Majority Party: Democrat (57 seats)
Minority Party: Republican (178 seats)	Minority Party: Republican (41 seats)
Other Parties: none	Other Parties: Independent (1 seat); Independent Democrat (1 seat)
Speaker of the House: Nancy Pelosi	Majority Leader: Harry M. Reid

on the basis of pre-existing conditions, and mandating insurance coverage for all Americans. Proponents asserted that in the program would not only help consumers but in the long-run reduce overall healthcare costs, while opponents asserted that the law was unconstitutional because it required individuals to purchase health insurance coverage. Other notable pieces of legislation dealt with financial system regulatory reform and consumer protections for credit card holders. Although the economy continued to improve, structural problems in the economy remained for which there was no simple solution. Economic turmoil in Europe also continued.

The mid-term elections in November 2010 saw the balance of party power shift in the House to the Republicans, while the Democratic majority in the Senate narrowed.

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## War or Peace?

### Military Operations in Iraq and Afghanistan

Upon taking office, President Barack H. Obama inherited two major military conflicts which had grown out of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. During the election campaign, then-Senator Obama argued that the invasion of Iraq, predicated on the unacceptable risk posed by stores of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction (WMD) which never materialized, was a distraction from the true mission of the global war on terror, which is to prosecute and destroy the terrorists responsible for the 9/11 attacks and their allies in Afghanistan. Thus, upon taking office, President Obama announced that U.S. combat forces would vacate Iraq by August 2010, leaving behind a contingent of 35-50,000 personnel in a training and advisory capacity. Prior to the end of his second term, President George W. Bush negotiated the U.S.-Iraq Status of Forces Agreement, which called for the complete removal of all U.S. forces from Iraq by December 31, 2011. While President Obama was keen to wrap up the U.S. mission in Iraq as quickly as would be prudent, he harbored persistent doubts about the Iraqi government's ability to prepare to fully assume responsibility for security arrangements in the country in time for the December 2011 deadline. The President thus conducted negotiations with his Iraqi counterparts on the issue of maintaining a limited U.S. military presence in Iraq beyond the 2011 deadline.

Iraqis, however, were even more keen to see the end of the U.S. military occupation and were, therefore, reluctant to extend it any further than was deemed necessary. Negotiations stalled, and the Obama Administration continued its planning for the inevitable U.S. drawdown in Iraq. As of August



Senate Majority Leader  
Harry M. Reid



Nancy Pelosi  
*Speaker of the House of Representatives*

Speaker of the House  
Nancy Pelosi

31, 2010 the U.S. had withdrawn its last major combat unit, allowing Iraq to officially take over combat operations within the country, The post-combat phase of operations, Operation New Dawn, included the presence of approximately 50,000 U.S. troops advising, assisting and training Iraqi security forces.

In Afghanistan, on the contrary, President Obama was keen to increase the U.S. military presence in the country in order to hang on to the gains made in the immediate aftermath of the invasion in late-2001. Shortly after taking office, the President announced his intention to bolster the 30,000 U.S. military personnel in the country with an additional 17,000 troops by that summer. During 2011 and 2012, U.S. officials and their Afghan counterparts began negotiations towards a new U.S.-Afghan strategic partnership that would outline the relations between the countries after 2014, when all international forces were scheduled to vacate the country. A draft text was finalized in April 2012, which then had to be approved by the governments of each country. On May 1, 2012, President Obama and Afghan President Hamid Karzai signed the Enduring Strategic Partnership Agreement between the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the United States of America. The Agreement included U.S. commitments to supporting Afghanistan's development and security for an additional ten years, commitments on progress on the part of the government of Afghanistan to continue to work to support democracy and protect the human rights of Afghans, continuing access to Afghan military facilities beyond 2014, and a commitment that the U.S. President would continue to request that Congress authorize military and economic assistance to Afghanistan.

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[Iraq: Key Issues for Congressional Oversight](#). Government Accountability Office, Mar. 1, 2009. 111<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, GAO-09-294SP. ProQuest Congressional, CMP-2009-GAO-0092

Katzman, Kenneth. [Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy](#). Foreign Affairs, Defense, and Trade Division (CRS), Nov. 19, 2010. 111<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, RL30588. ProQuest Congressional, CRS-2010-FDT-0936

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## **Economic Trends and Conditions**

At the beginning of 2009, the economy was in the midst of the deepest recession since the Great Depression. Government interventionist policies sought to stimulate the economy, provide relief to individuals, and stabilize markets. In February 2009 labor markets began to improve and continued to do so consistently through 2010. Output began to rise by the middle of 2009. Although unemployment peaked at 10.1% in Feb 2009, the fact remained that in the period between the start of the recession in December 2007 and December 2009 eight and a half million jobs had been lost.

During 2010 finance markets eased somewhat, the stock market gained 13%, and the economy added 1.1 million jobs. By the end of 2010 housing prices had stabilized, but construction activity and most aspects of the housing market remained weak, with one-quarter of all mortgages showing loan amounts greater than the value of the mortgaged property. Foreclosure rates remained high. At the close of the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress the economy appeared to be slowly recovering from the recession, but the need remained for the development of strategies to replace the boom and bust cycles of the recent past with long-term sustainable economic growth. The prolonged recession had a negative impact on the long-term budget outlook and the need remained to address long-term budget deficit concerns.

President Barack H. Obama was elected with a mandate to take ambitious actions to curb the economic recession engendered by the 2008 financial crisis and address issues of economic inequality. With his Democratic Party enjoying majorities in both houses of Congress during the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress, the President got to work immediately on enacting economic programs to address the country's difficulties. After passage of the President's ambitious stimulus package in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, the President moved to enact laws including the Fraud Enforcement and Recovery Act of 2009, which authorized new funding to investigate and combat various forms of financial fraud, the Credit Card Accountability, Responsibility, and the Disclosure Act of 2009, which authorized new protections for credit card holders, and Tax Relief, Unemployment Insurance Reauthorization, and Job Creation Act of 2010, which extended certain tax cuts enacted during the Bush Administration and expanded eligibility for the alternative minimum tax.

In March 2010 Congress enacted the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. The Act represented the most substantial reform of the health care system in the United States since the creation of Medicare and created a new mandate requiring taxpayers to provide proof of health insurance or face tax penalties. The Act also provided for the creation of health care marketplaces and authorized new subsidies to help certain taxpayers afford health care coverage. Dubbed "Obamacare" by critics, the act was highly controversial, especially among members of the opposition Republican Party, who would make repeal of the Act the signature plank of their electoral platform.

In July 2010, Congress enacted major reforms of the financial sector and new enforcement mechanisms with the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act. Enacted in response to the events leading to the 2008 financial crisis, the Act established the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) as an independent agency charged with consumer protection in the financial sector.

Sources:

[2010 Joint Economic Report](#). Joint Economic Committee, July 15, 2010. 111<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, H. Rpt. 111-545 (Y1.1/8:111-545). ProQuest Congressional, H.rp.111-545

## Landmark U.S. Supreme Court Decisions

*Carcieri v. Salazar*, holding that the Secretary of the Interior lacks authority to take lands into trust for Indian tribes that were not officially recognized at the time of enactment of the Indian Reorganization Act in 1934, [555 U.S. 379](#) (2009)

*Safford Unified School District No. 1 v. April Redding*, holding that a strip search of a 13-year-old middle school student in an attempt to find prescription drugs was an unconstitutional violation of the girl's privacy, [557 U.S. 364](#) (2009)

*Citizens United v Federal Election Commission*, holding that corporate funding of independent political broadcasts in candidate elections are protected under the First Amendment and cannot be limited, [558 U.S. 310](#) (2009)

*U.S. v. Stevens*, striking down as overly broad a 1999 law that criminalizes the creation or sale of videos or other depictions of animal cruelty, [559 U.S. 460](#) (2009)

*U.S. v. Comstock*, holding that the Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act did not violate the Constitution because the Federal government has the authority under the Necessary and Proper clause to require the civil commitment of offenders already in Federal custody, [560 U.S. 126](#) (2009)

*Graham v. Florida*, holding that sentencing juvenile offenders to life without the possibility of parole for non-homicide offenses violates the Constitution's protection against cruel and unusual punishment, [560 U.S. 48](#) (2009)

*Holder v. Humanitarian Law Project*, holding that a non-governmental organization seeking to train the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK) in Turkey and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (Tamil Tigers) in Sri Lanka, both designated terrorist organizations by the U.S. State Department, in techniques for avoiding violent conflict was in violation of the USA PATRIOT Act's prohibition against providing material support to terrorist organizations, [560 U.S. 1](#) (2009)

*Free Enterprise Fund v. Public Company Accounting Oversight Bd.*, holding that the dual for-cause limitations on the removal of members of the Public Company Accounting Oversight Board contained in the Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002 violated the Constitution's separation of powers, [561 U.S. 477](#) (2009)

*Christian Legal Society v. Martinez*, holding that the University of California Hastings College of Law policy governing recognition of student groups, which required groups to accept all students regardless of their status or beliefs in order to gain recognition, did not violate the First Amendment's protection of speech, [561 U.S. 661](#) (2009)

*McDonald v. Chicago*, holding that the right of an individual to keep and bear arms under the Second Amendment applies to States. This decision overturned a lower court decision that upheld a Chicago ordinance banning handguns and regulating rifles and shotguns, [561 U.S. 742](#) (2009)

*Doe v. Reed*, holding that the disclosure of signatures on a referendum does not violate the First Amendment's petitions clause, [561 U.S. 186](#) (2010)

*Michigan v. Bryant*, holding in a particular criminal case that a murder victim's deathbed identification of the person who shot him was not testimonial and therefore eligible for admission during trial, [562 U.S. 344](#) (2010)

*Snyder v. Phelps*, holding that speech concerning a matter of public interest conducted on the street is protected and cannot be used as the basis for liability for a tort of emotional distress, [562 U.S. 443](#) (2010)

*Arizona Christian Sch. Tuition Org. v. Winn*, holding that a group of Arizona taxpayers challenging a state law that provides tax credits for donations to organizations that provide academic scholarships for students attending religious schools on Constitutional grounds do not have standing to challenge the law, [563 U.S. 125](#) (2010)

*Brown v. Plata*, upholding the decision of a three-judge panel ordering a population reduction to 137.5% of facility design capacity to remedy a violation of prisoners' rights under the Eighth Amendment, [563 U.S. 493](#) (2010)

*Connick v. Thompson*, holding that a prosecutor cannot be held liable for a Brady violation in a case where exculpatory evidence was suppressed at trial leading to the wrongful conviction of the defendant, [563 U.S. 51](#) (2010)

*Ashcroft v. al-Kidd*, holding that then-Attorney General John Ashcroft could not be held personally liable for his involvement in the detention of a U.S. citizen in the wake of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, [563 U.S. 731](#) (2010)

*Sorrell v. IMS Health Inc.*, holding that a Vermont law prohibiting the use of a physician's prescribing practices for marketing purposes without the consent of the physician violates the First Amendment's protection of speech, [564 U.S. 552](#) (2010)

*Arizona Free Enterprise Club PAC v. Bennett*, holding that the Arizona Clean Elections Act provision that provided additional matching funds to participants in the state's public financing who are outspent by non-participating candidates is unconstitutional, [564 U.S. 721](#) (2010)

*Brown v. Entertainment Merchants Association*, holding that a California law restricting the sale of certain violent videogames to children without parental supervision violates the First Amendment's speech protections, [564 U.S. 786](#) (2010)



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## 2009 Events

- **Jan. 15:** [US Airways Flight 1549 loses power shortly after takeoff and has to make an emergency landing in the Hudson River; without any casualties, pilot Chesley "Sully" Sullenberger becomes a reluctant hero](#)
- **Jan. 20:** Barack Obama, the first African-American U.S. President, is sworn-in
- **Mar. 2:** [AIG is given an additional \\$30 billion bailout](#)
- **Mar. 7:** NASA launches Kepler spacecraft to conduct a photometric census of extra-solar planets in the habitable zones of stars similar to our sun
- **Mar. 15:** [AIG announces \\$450 million in bonuses for top executives, which is swiftly followed by public outcry](#)
- **Mar. 22:** Mount Redoubt in Alaska erupts after weeks of volcanic ash emission
- **Apr. 3:** [Iowa becomes the third state to allow same-sex marriage](#)
- **Apr. 7:** Vermont legalizes civil unions for same-sex couples
- **Apr. 8-12:** [Somali pirates hijack an American freighter and kidnap its captain when the engineers render the ship useless; Navy SEAL snipers overtake the hijackers following a standoff to recover the captain](#)
- **May 19:** Changing vehicle emissions and mileage requirements are estimated to reduce fuel use by 30% and carbon dioxide emissions by 33%
- **May 22:** [Credit Card Accountability Responsibility and Disclosure Act of 2009 requires greater terms transparency and reduces selected fees](#)
- **May 25:** [North Korea announces that it has conducted a successful nuclear weapons test](#)
- **June 12:** [The Federal Communications Commission requires television broadcasts to be sent digitally](#)
- **June 13:** [Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad reelected; supporters of defeated opposition candidate Mir Hossein Musavi engage in public protests](#)
- **June 22:** [Washington Metro train collision occurs during rush hour due to a faulty track circuit](#)
- **Aug. 8:** [Sonia Sotomayor becomes the first Hispanic Supreme Court judge](#)
- **Aug. 25:** Senator Ted Kennedy dies of brain cancer
- **Sept. 12:** The 9/12 Project protest occurs in Washington, D.C., amongst nationwide Tea Party protests
- **Oct. 28:** [President Obama signs the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act, which provides funding and federal jurisdiction for pursuing hate crime investigations, and allows for tracking of hate crimes based on gender and gender identity](#)

## 2010 Events

- **Jan. 12:** [A 7.0 magnitude earthquake occurs in Haiti resulting in widespread devastation in capital Port-au-Price and elsewhere on the island](#)
- **Mar. 23:** [President Barack H. Obama signs the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act into law](#)
- **Mar. 23-May 14:** Several States try to sue the federal government over the implementation of the Affordable Care Act
- **Apr. 20:** [BP-licensed Deepwater Horizon drilling rig explodes in the Gulf of Mexico resulting in a massive oil spill](#)
- **Apr. 23:** A controversial anti-illegal immigration law is passed in Arizona, and soon sparks national debate
- **May 2:** [Eurozone member states and the International Monetary Fund announce an unprecedented financial assistance package for Greece, following the down-grading of Greek bonds by two major credit rating agencies](#)
- **June 28:** Longest-serving Senator Robert Byrd dies
- **July 21:** [President Obama signs the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act into law](#)
- **July 25:** [Online media site WikiLeaks releases classified reports to the public, including documents about U.S. involvement in Afghanistan](#)
- **Aug. 4:** Proposition 8 in California, negating same-sex couples the right to marry, is ruled unconstitutional by the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California
- **Aug. 31:** [Combat operations in Iraq are declared over, following the removal of the last combat troops](#)
- **Sept. 19:** [BP finally succeeds in sealing the Deepwater Horizon oil leak in the Gulf of Mexico](#)
- **Oct. 19-20:** [Don't Ask, Don't Tell temporarily ends](#)
- **Nov. 23:** [North Korea shells South Korea's Yeonpyeong Island](#)
- **Nov. 28:** [WikiLeaks releases confidential diplomatic cables from U.S. embassies](#)

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Committee on Foreign Affairs. House. [Iran: Recent Developments and Implications for U.S. Policy](#). July 22, 2009. 111th Congress, 1st Session, Committee on Foreign Affairs Serial No. 111-31 (Y4.F76/1:111-31). ProQuest Congressional, HRG-2009-FOA-0031

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## Major Acts

**Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009.** Revised statute of limitations for filing equal pay lawsuits under the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Responded to Supreme Court decision in *Ledbetter v. Goodyear Tire and Rubber Co.*, 550 U.S. 618 (2007), which held that the claim by Lily Ledbetter was untimely because the initial period of discrimination occurred outside of the statute of limitations. Approved Jan. 29, 2009. ([123 Stat. 5, PL111-2](#)) ([Regulatory History](#))

**American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009.** Established programs to facilitate the creation of jobs in energy and public infrastructure areas; provide tax relief and stimulate the economy; extend unemployment benefits; and provide incentives for students to attend college. Approved Feb. 17, 2009. ([123 Stat. 115, PL111-5](#)) ([Regulatory History](#))

**Fraud Enforcement and Recovery Act of 2009.** Authorized additional funding to combat various forms of fraud including mortgage fraud, securities and commodities fraud, financial institution fraud, and fraud related to federal assistance and relief programs. Approved May 20, 2009. ([123 Stat. 1617, PL111-21](#)) ([Regulatory History](#))

**Helping Families Save Their Homes Act of 2009; Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing Act of 2009.** Revised and established programs to reduce the incidence of mortgage foreclosure and increase availability of credit. Approved May 20, 2009. ([123 Stat. 1632, PL111-22](#)) ([Regulatory History](#))

**Credit Card Accountability Responsibility and Disclosure Act of 2009.** Established credit card company fair and transparent practice requirements to improve consumer protection for credit card holders. Approved May 22, 2009. ([123 Stat. 1734, PL111-24](#)) ([Regulatory History](#))

**Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act; Federal Retirement Reform Act of 2009.** Gave sweeping authority to the Food and Drug Administration to regulate tobacco products, standards, advertising,

warning label contents, and reviewing products before market introduction. Approved June 22, 2009. ([123 Stat. 1776, PL111-31](#)) ([Regulatory History](#))

**Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2009.** Included the Consumer Assistance To Recycle and Save Act of 2009, which established the so-called “cash for clunkers program” providing incentives for consumers to trade in cars with lower fuel-efficiency ratings and purchase new, more fuel-efficient cars. Approved June 24, 2009. ([123 Stat. 1859, PL111-32](#)) ([Regulatory History](#))

**Hiring Incentives to Restore Employment Act.** Created incentives for businesses to hire unemployed workers. Approved Mar. 18, 2010. ([124 Stat. 71, PL111-147](#)) ([Regulatory History](#))

**Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (Obama Care).** Established a comprehensive program to improve health care affordability and coverage. Approved Mar. 23, 2010. ([124 Stat. 119, PL111-148](#)) ([Regulatory History](#))

**Haiti Debt Relief and Earthquake Recovery Act of 2010.** Urged the Department of Treasury to take actions to encourage international lending institutions to cancel Haiti’s debts. Approved Apr. 26, 2010. ([124 Stat. 1121, PL111-158](#))

**Haiti Economic Lift Program of 2010.** Provided customs support services to Haiti. Approved May 24, 2010. ([124 Stat. 1194, PL111-171](#)) ([Regulatory History](#))

**Oil Spill Liability Trust Fund Advances for the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill.** Amended the Oil Pollution Act of 1990 to authorize certain advances to the Coast Guard from the Oil Spill Liability Trust Fund to respond to the massive oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico caused by Apr. 20, 2010 explosion on, and subsequent sinking of, Deepwater Horizon mobile offshore drilling rig leased by BP p.l.c. Approved June 15, 2010. ([124 Stat. 1278, PL111-191](#))

**Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act.** Revised financial system regulation to promote economic stability and improve consumer protection. Approved July 21, 2010. ([124 Stat. 1376, PL111-203](#)) ([Regulatory History](#))

**Tax Relief, Unemployment Insurance Reauthorization, and Job Creation Act of 2010.** Extended tax incentives enacted during the Bush Administration, expanded eligibility for exemption from the alternative minimum tax, extended unemployment benefits, and extended various tax incentives for businesses. Approved Dec. 17, 2010. ([124 Stat. 3296, PL111-312](#)) ([Regulatory History](#))

**Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell Repeal Act of 2010.** Repealed existing law barring homosexual persons from serving in the military. Extended certain military benefits and privileges to same-sex spouses. Approved Dec. 22, 2010. ([124 Stat. 3515, PL111-321](#))

**James Zadroga 9/11 Health and Compensation Act of 2010.** Amended the Public Health Services Act to extend and improve protections and services to individuals directly impacted by the terrorist attack on New York City on Sept. 11, 2001. Approved Jan. 2, 2011. ([124 Stat. 3623, PL111-347](#)) ([Regulatory History](#))

**FDA Food Safety Modernization Act.** Strengthened the food safety system by enabling the Federal Drug Administration greater prevention control, inspection and compliance authority, recall authority, and import certification and permission to deny entry. Approved June 4, 2011. ([124 Stat. 3885, PL111-353](#)) ([Regulatory History](#))

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