

Sixty-Second Congress

Apr. 4, 1911 – Mar. 3, 1913

Administration of William Howard Taft

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Historical Background

The Republican Party of President William H. Taft was deeply divided going into the election of 1910. Already split between conservative and progressive factions, the controversial Payne-Aldrich Tariff Act of 1909 and Taft's rule of law governing style alienated Republicans on both sides of the ideological divide. The upshot was Democrats managed to secure a majority in the House of Representatives for the first time in 15 years, in addition to making gains in the Senate. They had no time to rest on their laurels, however, as a raft of unfinished business from the 61st Congress, including votes on the accession of Arizona and New Mexico as the newest States in the Union and the associated reapportionment of seats in the House, and a reciprocal free trade agreement with Canada, led the President to call a special session of the 62nd Congress on April 4, 1911.

Ideological divisions notwithstanding, the 62nd Congress enacted a series of important reforms. Not the least of which was the ratification of the Seventeenth Amendment to the Constitution, which provided for the popular election of Senators. This was an important priority for reformers across the political spectrum, who viewed the previous system of appointment of Senators as antidemocratic and tilted in favor of entrenched political machines and other powerful interests.

Responding to increased prohibitionist sentiment, Congress also passed the Webb-Kenyon Interstate Liquor Act of 1913, forbidding interstate shipment of liquor into States in which the sale of it was illegal. The bill was vetoed by President Taft but passed over his veto and marked the first nationwide victory for the Anti-Saloon League. Other progressive legislation included

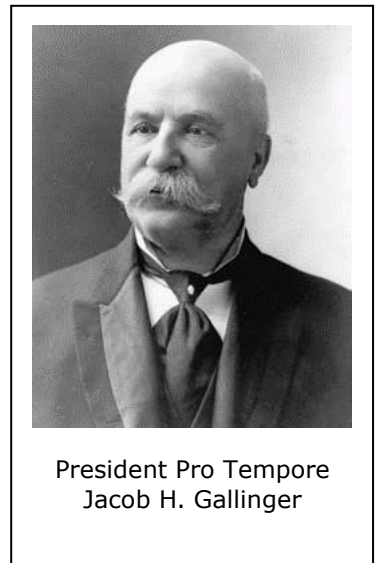
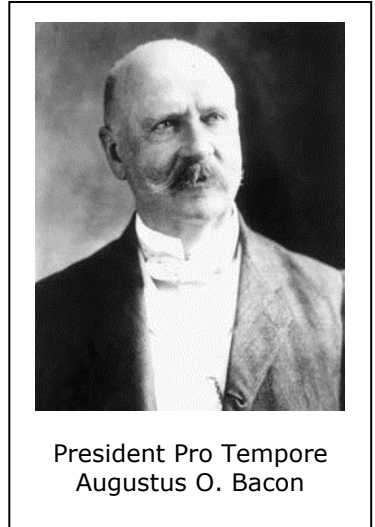
House	Senate
Majority Party: Democrat (230 seats)	Majority Party: Republican (52 seats)
Minority Party: Republican (162 seats)	Minority Party: Democrat (44 seats)
Other Parties: Progressive Republican (1 seat) Socialist (1 seat)	Other Parties: None
Speaker of the House: James Beauchamp "Champ" Clark	President Pro Tempore: Augustus O. Bacon; Jacob H. Gallinger

“just cause” standards for removal of civil servants, a Children’s Bureau within the Department of Labor, and an eight-hour workday required for all Federal contractors. Congress also undertook several extended investigations on money trusts, U.S. Steel Corporation, and the revolutions in Mexico.

The culmination of the drive by labor unions for labor representation in the Government also came in 1913, when the Department of Labor was separated from Commerce and given Cabinet status. President Taft signed the bill as one of his last official acts as President on March 4th. That same March, the Interstate Commerce Commission was given authority to use the physical valuation of railroads as a basis for rate-making. President Taft during his last year in the White House also signed a bill creating the Territory of Alaska.

Near the end of the 62nd Congress, former President Theodore Roosevelt and Senator Robert LaFollette both actively challenged President Taft for the Republican presidential nomination in the 1912 elections, further splitting the party. In the end, the schism proved too wide to repair and Taft was overwhelmingly defeated by Democratic candidate Woodrow Wilson.

A curiosity of the 62nd Congress was instigated by the illness and death of the Republicans’ long-term Senate President Pro Tempore William P. Frye in 1911. At this time the Republican Party had developed competing progressive and conservative factions, each of which had its own preferred candidate to succeed Frye. The party conference approved the nomination of Jacob H. Gallinger of New Hampshire, the conservatives’ choice for the office. Progressive Republicans refused to support Gallinger when the nomination came before the full Senate and instead nominated Minnesota Senator Moses Clapp. Between these candidates and the Democrats’ choice of the Georgia Senator Augustus O. Bacon, no candidate was able to achieve a majority of the votes. Due to the ill health of Vice President James Schoolcraft Sherman, Senators from the two parties agreed on a compromise in which the Republican Jacob H. Gallinger and the Democrat Augustus O. Bacon would preside over the body on alternate days, with three other Republicans, Charles Curtis, Henry Cabot Lodge, and Frank Brandegee, serving for short periods as needed.



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Dell, Christopher and Stephen W. Stathis. [*Major Acts of Congress and Treaties Approved by the Senate, 1789-1980*](#). Government Division (CRS), Sept. 1, 1982. 97th Congress, 2nd Session, 82-156 GOV. ProQuest Congressional, CRS-1982-GOV-0005

Erickson, Nancy [ed.], [*Pro Term: Presidents Pro Tempore of the U.S. Senate Since 1789*](#), Senate Historical Office, Jan. 1, 2008, 110th Congress, 2nd Session, S942-2 (Y1.3:S.PUB.110-18). ProQuest Congressional, CMP-2008-SEN-0004

War or Peace?

The Mexican Revolution

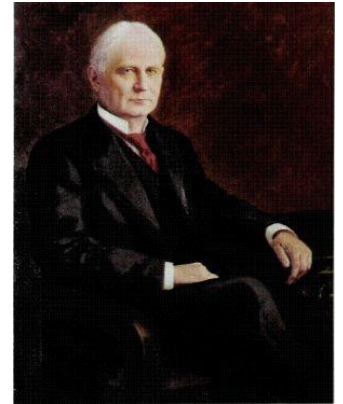
As revolutionary activity against the government of Mexico increased in early 1911, President Taft was warned of deteriorating conditions along the Mexico-U.S. border. Taft followed a non-interventionist policy at the time, generally supporting the established government in Mexico, while reinforcing the security apparatus at the border to prevent the conflict from spilling over. In March that year, Taft ordered a substantial military buildup along the border. The Navy also ordered 15 ships from the Atlantic Fleet to the Texas coast, including four armored cruisers. In addition, 2,000 U.S. Marines had been ordered to assemble at the Guantanamo Bay naval base in Cuba. The operation, initiated in secret, was to be a deterrent for Mexican insurgent aggression. Despite insurgent attacks involving American citizens, President Taft scrupulously maintained Federal neutrality and continued to diplomatically support the Mexican government. However, due to the deteriorating security situation in Mexico, Taft issued a proclamation on March 12, 1912 warning American citizens to avoid visiting Mexico and advising those who were living there to be prepared to leave.

Occupation of Nicaragua

After the change in government instigated by Estrada's Rebellion in 1909, tensions between the Conservative and Liberal parties in the Nicaragua continued to build. The Federal government had a keen interest in the security situation in Nicaragua due to substantial U.S. economic interests in the country, as well as the project to construct a canal across the Panamanian Isthmus. Moreover, the Nicaraguan government's practice of borrowing from American banks afforded the U.S. substantial influence over the Central American state's finances. As tensions between the factions in Nicaragua increased, President Juan José Estrada was forced out by his Minister of War and was replaced by his Vice President, Adolfo Diaz. Diaz, however, was quickly perceived by nationalist elements in the country as irreparably compromised by his connections to U.S. interests. Up against the wall, Diaz turned to the U.S. for support, citing his inability to protect U.S. citizens and property in the country. As the situation deteriorated in August 1912, the U.S. ordered a series of Navy ships and forces totaling 2,500 to Nicaragua, beginning an occupation that would periodically wax and wane over the proceeding 25 years.

Dollar Diplomacy and Revolution in China

Throughout the 62nd Congress, the Taft administration continued its "Dollar Diplomacy" strategy, specifically within South America and China with the expansion of development loans. This was complicated by the Chinese Revolution of 1911 and subsequent removal of the imperial government by the new republican government. In a multinational agreement, it was decided all loans and future treaties would be put on hold in the interest of easing the conflict. Civil unrest in South America, specifically in Nicaragua, Ecuador, and Cuba, resulted in the landing of U.S. troops in those countries in efforts to maintain order and protect American citizens.



Speaker of the House
James Beauchamp
"Champ" Clark

Conflict also loomed in the Middle East during this period. Throughout the 62nd Congress, European powers were in conflict over their competing imperial designs for territories in the region. The U.S., despite European tensions, maintained economic ties to several Middle Eastern countries including Ottoman Turkey. During the Italian war with the Ottoman Empire, the U.S. supplied relief through the Red Cross and sent in cruisers to protect American citizens.

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Economic Trends and Conditions

With the passage of the Payne-Aldrich Tariff Act of 1909, tariffs were lowered and exports increased from 1909 to 1911. As President Taft reported in his 1911 Message on Foreign Relations, exports for the year were valued in excess of \$2 billion, an increase of \$300 million over the preceding year. At that time, this was the highest record year for American export goods. The trend was maintained through 1912. However, the United States' agriculture industry faced stagnation and decline in the wake of industrialization. Congress appointed a commission to conduct an extensive investigation on European agricultural credits to find new ways to reinvigorate the struggling agriculture industry.

The Congress and the administration continued their work toward developing a plan to streamline the nation's financial system. The National Monetary Commission, which was established by the Aldrich-Vreeland Act of 1908, was tasked with studying the financial systems of major European capitals to generate ideas for improving the efficiency of U.S. financial policy. The Commission was chaired by Republican Senator Aldrich, who authored the body's reports and ultimately introduced a bill that would establish a central bank overseen by bankers from the private sector. Progressives within his own party were opposed to the idea of bankers overseeing national financial policy and proposed instead a system that would be overseen by a governmental regulatory body. The question became moot with the election of 1912, in which the Democratic Party swept both houses of Congress as well as the Presidency.

President Taft continued Roosevelt's campaign to regulate and dismantle trusts under the authorities of the Sherman Antitrust Act. Several suits brought against corporations under the Sherman Act were decided in the government's favor by the Supreme Court during the 62nd Congress. These

included the American Tobacco Company, which was devolved into R.J. Reynolds, Liggett & Myers, and Lorillard Tobacco Companies, and the Standard Oil Company, which the Supreme Court ordered to be broken up into 34 separate companies, including Exxon, Standard Oil of New Jersey, and Standard Oil of New York. On the other hand, the Federal government launched an investigation into U.S. Steel for violations of the Sherman Act in 1911. During Roosevelt's administration U.S. Steel had expanded by acquiring the Tennessee Coal, Iron, and Railroad Company with the support of the President, as well as his Secretary of War William H. Taft, who hoped that the merger would help to stanch the economic consequences of the Panic of 1907. In hindsight, however, there were those who thought that U.S. Steel had been deceptive in presenting their case to the President and thus Taft's administration sued the company for violations of the Sherman Antitrust Act. The courts, however, disagreed with the government's case and allowed U.S. Steel to continue operating in its present form.

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Taft, William H. [*Message of the President of the United States on Foreign Relations*](#), Committee on Foreign Relations. House, Dec. 7, 1911, 62nd Congress, 2nd Session. H.Doc. 248, ProQuest Congressional, 6321 H.doc.248

Taft, William H. [*Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States*](#), House, Dec. 3, 1912, 62nd Congress, 3rd Session. H.Doc. 1492/1. ProQuest Congressional, 6367 H.doc.1492/1

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Major Treaties

North Pacific Fur Seal Convention of 1911, designed to manage the commercial harvest of fur bearing mammals and outlawed open-water seal hunting. Signed on July 7, 1911 and ratified on Nov. 24, 1911. ([37 Stat. 1542](#))

International Opium Convention, provided for the control of the international opium trade. Signed on Jan. 23, 1912 ([38 Stat. 1912](#))

Sources:

Dell, Christopher and Stephen W. Stathis. [*Major Acts of Congress and Treaties Approved by the Senate, 1789-1980*](#), Government Division (CRS), Sept. 1, 1982. 97th Congress, 2nd Session, 82-156 GOV. ProQuest Congressional, CRS-1982-GOV-0005

["International convention for suppressing abuse of opium, etc. Signed at The Hague January 23, 1912, and July 9, 1913; proclaimed March 3, 1915"](#) (38 Stat. 1912; Jan. 23, 1912) ProQuest Congressional

["International convention for protection of fur seals. Signed at Washington July 7, 1911; proclaimed December 14, 1911"](#) (37 Stat. 1542; July 7, 1911) ProQuest Congressional

Constitutional Amendments

Seventeenth Amendment. Provided that Senators were to be elected by direct popular vote, and that State legislatures could empower the chief executive of the State to fill vacancies pending a new election. Approved May 13, 1912. ([37 Stat. 646](#)) Ratified by the requisite number of States Apr. 8, 1913.

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Landmark U.S. Supreme Court Decisions

Bailey v. Alabama, held that the personal rights of a farm worker were restricted under the Thirteenth Amendment when he left employment, did not return his advanced payment, and was sentenced to hard labor under an Alabama peonage law, 219 U.S. 219 (1911)

Standard Oil Co. of New Jersey v. United States, found Standard Oil guilty of monopolizing the petroleum industry under the Sherman Act through a series of abusive, anticompetitive actions, and ordered the company to be divided into several geographically separate and competing firms, 221 U.S. 1 (1911)

United States v. American Tobacco Company, holding that the restraint of trade and attempting to monopolize the business of tobacco in interstate commerce is within the prohibitions of the Sherman Antitrust Act, 221 U.S. 106 (1911)

Flint v. Stone Tracy Co., validated the federal income tax on corporations. Challenger argued the privilege of incorporation was a state function and that the states should exclusively tax corporations. The court ruled the privilege of operating in corporate form is valuable and justifies imposition of a federal income tax, 220 U.S. 107 (1911)

Sources:

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1911 Events

- **Jan. 4:** The 7.7 magnitude Kebin Earthquake struck Almaty in the Russian Empire, killing more than 450 people
- **Mar. 19:** International Women's Day is celebrated for the first time

- **Apr. 27:** [Following the death of William P. Frye a compromise is reached in the Senate to rotate the office of President Pro Tempore](#)
- **Apr. 30:** [The Great Fire of 1911 burned 285 residences, 100 businesses, and 6 churches in the town of Bangor, Maine](#)
- **May 15:** [Supreme Court rules that Standard Oil violates the Sherman Antitrust Act ordering it to be dissolved into 34 separate companies](#)
- **May 25:** Revolution in Mexico overthrows President Jose Porfirio Diaz
- **May 30:** [The very first Indianapolis 500 took place](#)
- **June 22:** George V was crowned King of the United Kingdom and the British Dominions
- **July 24:** Hiram Bingham rediscovered Machu Picchu in Peru
- **Aug. 21:** Leonardo da Vinci's famed Mona Lisa was found stolen from the Louvre; it was later returned in 1913
- **Sept. 29:** *Italo-Turkish War* - Italy declared war on the Ottoman Empire and the Italo-Turkish War begins
- **Oct. 10:** [The Wuchang Uprising started the Xinhai Revolution that would later lead to the founding of the Republic of China](#)
- **Nov. 10:** [Andrew Carnegie forms Carnegie Corporation for scholarly and charitable works](#)
- **Dec. 14:** [Explorer Roald Amundsen's expedition becomes the first to reach the South Pole](#)
- **Dec. 29:** Mongolia gains its independence from the Qing Dynasty
- **Dec. 31:** [Marie Curie receives her 2nd Nobel Prize](#)

1912 Events

- **Jan. 1:** [The Republic of China is proclaimed](#)
- **Jan. 5:** [Vladimir Lenin and the Bolshevik Party broke away from the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party](#)
- **Jan. 6:** [New Mexico was admitted to the Union as the 47th State](#)
- **Jan. 8:** The African National Congress is founded as the South African Native National Congress
- **Jan. 11:** *Lawrence Textile Strike* - [Immigrant workers in a Lawrence, Massachusetts textile mill go on strike when they discover that their employer, responding to a new law that reduced the work week from 56 to 54 hours, reduced their wages](#)
- **Jan. 23:** The International Opium Convention is signed at The Hague
- **Feb. 12:** Emperor Puyi abdicates as the last emperor of China
- **Feb. 14:** [Arizona was admitted to the Union as the 48th State](#)
- **Feb. 18:** The 13th Dalai Lama declared Tibet independent of the Republic of China. The Buddhist kingdom would resist several invasions until being conquered in 1959
- **Feb. 24:** *Italo-Turkish War* -Italy makes a surprise attack on the Ottoman port of Beirut in the Battle of Beirut
- **Mar. 5:** *Italo-Turkish War* -Airships are used for the first time for military purposes when Italian forces use them for reconnaissance behind Turkish lines west of Tripoli, Libya
- **Mar. 12:** Girl Guides (Girl Scouts) is formed by Juliette Gordon Low

- **Mar. 27:** [Mayor Yukio Ozaki of Tokyo gave 3,000 cherry trees to be planted in Washington, D.C., to symbolize the friendship between the two countries](#)
- **Apr. 15:** [The RMS Titanic sank, resulting in the deaths of more than 1,500 people](#)
- **June 6:** The Novarupta volcano (290 miles southwest of Anchorage) erupted as the largest eruption in the 20th century
- **June 18:** [After Taft is selected for the Presidential candidate at the National Republic Convention, Theodore Roosevelt and progressive members for the Progressive Party](#)
- **July 30:** Emperor Meiji of Japan dies. He is succeeded by his son Yoshihito who became Emperor Taishō
- **Aug. 14:** [2,500 U.S. marines invade Nicaragua following unrest in South America](#)
- **Aug. 24:** [Alaska Territory created](#)
- **Oct. 8:** *First Balkan War* - [The First Balkan War begin when Montenegro declares war against the Ottoman Empire](#)
- **Oct. 14:** Theodore Roosevelt is shot in Milwaukee while campaigning on the Progressive ticket
- **Oct. 17:** *First Balkan War* – Bulgaria, Greece and Serbia declare war on Turkey
- **Oct. 18:** *Italo-Turkish War* - Italy and the Ottoman Empire sign a treaty ending the Italo-Turkish War
- **Nov. 5:** [Democratic candidate Woodrow Wilson defeated incumbent President William Howard Taft and Theodore Roosevelt in the presidential election of 1912](#)
- **Nov. 28:** Albania declared independence from the Ottoman Empire
- **Dec. 30:** *First Balkan War* - [The First Balkan War ends temporarily when Bulgaria, Greece, Montenegro, and Serbia \(the Balkan League countries\) signed an armistice with Turkey \(the Ottoman Empire\)](#)

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Major Acts

Apportionment Act of 1911. Increased the number of U.S. Representatives to the present day 435. Approved Aug. 8, 1911. ([7 Stat. 13, Chap. 5; PL62-5](#))

Eight Hour Law for Government Workers. Limited by statute the number of hours that any Federal government workers or contractors may work in a day to eight. Approved June 19, 1912. ([37 Stat. 137, Chap. 174; PL62-199](#))

Alaska Organic Act. Created the Territory of Alaska, granted American citizenship to its residents, and conferred legislative powers upon an elected legislative assembly for the territory. Also Provided that the Constitution and all the laws of the United States that were not locally inapplicable should have the same force and effect within the territory as elsewhere in the United States. By this act, the legal status of Alaska became that of an incorporated territory of the U.S. Approved Aug. 24, 1912. ([37 Stat. 512, Chap. 387; PL62-334](#))

Panama Canal Act. Established the extent of U.S. jurisdiction over the Panama Canal Zone and operation of the canal, according to the terms of the Hay-Bunau-Varilla Treaty of 1903 between the United States and Panama. Granted the President the authority to dissolve the Isthmian Canal Commission and appoint a governor to oversee the canal, and determine the rate of tolls for use of the canal. Approved Aug. 24, 1912. ([37 Stat. 560, Chap. 390; PL62-337](#))

Webb-Kenyon Interstate Liquor Act. Prohibited interstate shipping of liquor into States where its sale was illegal. Approved Mar. 1, 1913. ([37 Stat. 699, Chap. 90; PL62-398](#))

Physical Valuation Act. Empowered the Interstate Commerce Commission to make thorough investigations of property held or used by railroads under its jurisdiction and to establish cost and physical valuation as a basis for rate making and the fixing of a reasonable profit. Approved Mar. 1, 1913. ([37 Stat. 701, Chap. 92; PL62-400](#))

Establishment of the Department of Labor. Separated the Department of Commerce and Labor into two Cabinet level departments and established the U.S. Board of Mediation and Conciliation. Approved Mar. 4, 1913. ([37 Stat. 736, Chap. 141; PL62-426](#))

Sources:

Dell, Christopher and Stephen W. Stathis. [Major Acts of Congress and Treaties Approved by the Senate, 1789-1980](#). Government Division (CRS), Sept. 1, 1982. 97th Congress, 2nd Session, 82-156 GOV. ProQuest Congressional, CRS-1982-GOV-0005

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