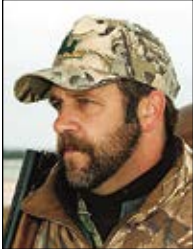


CAPITOL COMMENTS



Steven Williams, Ph.D.
PROFESSIONAL MEMBER
Boone and Crockett Club
PRESIDENT
Wildlife Management
Institute

Upset? Yeah You Might Say

As I write this column, the bitter taste of partisan, election-year politics is still in my mouth. Prior to the summer recess, the Senate rejected the Bipartisan Sportsmen's Act (Act) despite its 46 bipartisan, co-sponsors. The original Act had 14 provisions to

enhance hunting and fishing across the nation. These provisions included: easing state fish and wildlife agencies' ability to finance shooting ranges; improving opportunities for hunting and fishing on federal lands; exempting lead ammunition and fishing tackle from control under the Toxic Substances Control Act; providing a portion of the Land and Water Conservation Fund for increased access to landlocked public lands; creating an electronic Federal Duck Stamp; and reauthorizing both the North American Wetlands Conservation Act and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. The House had previously passed a similar bill (the Sportsmen's Heritage and Recreational Enhancement Act) that would have allowed the two houses to hold a conference to work out differences and then pass the bill to the president's desk for signing.

Not surprisingly, this potentially historic bill that would improve hunting and fishing opportunities and access, enjoyed strong support from dozens of national hunter-conservation organizations. The Congressional Sportsmen Foundation, Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership, Safari Club International, and other organizations, over the course of years, spent countless hours in both House and Senate offices explaining the importance of the Act to members and their staff. Individual phone calls expressing support for the legislation poured into Washington. Co-sponsors from both political parties recognized the constituent support they might garner by sponsoring the legislature in a mid-term election year. I believe it was safe to say that many of us expected to celebrate a major political victory for sportsmen and sportswomen. Once and for all, we

would demonstrate the political influence and momentum of some 40 million hunters and anglers. Then, our hopes all dissolved on July 10 when the Senate failed to pass a cloture vote to end debate on the bill—the death knell for the bill.

The lack of passage in the Senate would have been frustrating enough if there had been simple and honest disagreements on the 14 provisions by one party or another. However, there was bipartisan support for the original bill, and co-sponsors expressed strong optimism. In the end, according to the website *congress.gov*, there were 34 Senate actions on the bill and 97 proposed amend-

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ments. Amendments are a legitimate and routine legislative procedure, used since our founding fathers set up this republic. However, in this case, many of the amendments were obviously political schemes from both parties to force votes on issues thought to embarrass one another in an election year. Consider a sampling of the proposed amendments: to prevent EPA from finishing Clean Water Act guidance; to plan for motorized vehicles on the Ozark National Scenic Riverways; to address management of the Gulf of Mexico's red snapper fishery; to further control gun ownership and use; to ensure gun access on Army Corps of Engineers' lands; to delete the bill's provisions on ammunition and fishing tackle... and so on. Finding the wording of all 97 amendments is next to impossible on government websites. Consequently, constituents would have a hard time finding out what their senator did or did not do to kill the bill. I am making the assumption that constituents had the time and desire to find out what their

representatives actually say about hunting and fishing and how they actually vote on those issues.

I respect the legitimacy to offer amendments to any bill providing those amendments are germane to the bill's original purpose. Each provision deserves a fair and open debate. What is breathtakingly obvious was the fact that some senators used the amendment process to kill this bipartisan-supported bill that would enhance our hunting and fishing opportunities and access. What could have become an historic legislative victory for hunters and anglers became an ideological vehicle for senators to improve their reelection opportunities and try to embarrass the other political party—all at the expense of the American hunter and angler.

"Welcome to hardball Washington politics," you might say. And you would be right. As a hunter and angler, I say that trading the enhanced hunting and fishing opportunities of 40 million Americans for the political opportunities of 100 senators is 100 percent pure, unadulterated bull manure. That would explain the taste in my mouth. We owe a debt of gratitude to the organizations and individuals that fought so diligently for the rights of sportsmen and sportswomen. They will continue their efforts to improve hunting, fishing, and conservation in spite of the kick in the teeth they received on July 10. We owe them our respect. Congress owes us an honest explanation for their blatant disregard of our values. ■

