



## Congressional Update

By Roxanne Perugino with Contribution from Research Intern Sara Lobo  
October 11, 2016

Congress remains adjourned until mid-November when it will return to face a crowded legislative agenda. The House will return on Monday, November 14 with the Senate returning the following day.

### I. Election 2016: Republicans Distance Themselves from Donald Trump

Donald Trump had a bad week last week. First the story came out that Trump may not have paid taxes following a staggering \$916 billion loss in 1995. On Friday, October 7, a video surfaced of Trump discussing women in extremely lewd and insulting language, leading prominent Republicans to either distance themselves from Trump or call on him to step down. Trump's remarks were the latest in a string of ill-advised comments about immigrants, Hispanics, African-Americans, the disabled, and Muslims and proved too much for many members of Congress.

According to *RealClearPolitics.com* the National Republican Senatorial Committee advised candidates to disavow and repudiate Trump's comments, and left it was up to individual candidates to decide whether they want to rescind their endorsements. While Trump did better in Sunday's debate than expected, he did little to convince voters outside his support base, who will not desert him no matter what he says or does. Never has the GOP been so fractured less than a month from the election. (Note: A longer analytical piece by Arab Center Washington DC on the damage Trump has done to the GOP is forthcoming.)

**House Leadership Nervous:** On Monday October 10, House Speaker Paul Ryan (R-Wisconsin), urged his fellow Republicans not to defend Trump and to focus on their House races. Ryan did not go so far as to drop his endorsement of Trump but is under pressure to do so. Clearly, Ryan is worried about the down-ballot effect of Trump at the top of the ticket and the possibility of losing seats in the House. It is unlikely that the Democrats will take back control of the House, but Ryan is taking no chances.

The ever-predictable and mercurial Trump now has Speaker Ryan in his sights, excoriating the Speaker as a "weak and ineffective" leader, causing further divisions within the Republican Party a month before the election. Ryan's call incensed Trump and his supporters in Congress who have criticized

Ryan for not being loyal to Trump. Trump issued a string of tweets – his favorite mode of communication – saying he will attack Ryan and any Republican leaders with the same enthusiasm with which he is attacking Clinton.

Many observers believe Trump's support is spiraling down. National polls show him trailing Clinton by double-digits. Ryan and other congressional leaders, including House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-California) are panicked that Trump could cost the GOP its majorities in the House and Senate. Democrats need a net pick-up of 30 seats to regain control of the House and despite the panic among some members, it is unlikely Democrats will regain control of the House. Democrats, however, have a good chance of reclaiming the Senate.

**Former Members of Congress Oppose Trump:** Last Thursday, well before the release of the tape and the dismal Clinton-Trump debate, more than 30 former Republican members of Congress issued a scathing open letter announcing their opposition to Donald Trump and urging fellow Republicans to deny him the White House. The group cited Trump's long list of insults and "lies," and said his "disgraceful candidacy is indefensible." The letter goes on to state:

"As Republican members of Congress, we took pride in representing a political party that stood for honest and principled public leadership in which the American people could place their trust," they wrote in an open letter.

"Sadly, our party's nominee this year is a man who makes a mockery of the principles and values we have cherished and which we sought to represent in Congress."

"In nominating Donald Trump, the Republican Party has asked the people of the United States to entrust their future to a man who insults women, mocks the handicapped, urges that dissent be met with violence, seeks to impose religious tests for entry into the United States, and applies a de facto ethnicity test to judges," they wrote.

"He offends our allies and praises dictators. His statements are peppered with lies. He belittles our heroes and insults the parents of men who have died serving our country. Every day brings a fresh revelation that highlights the unacceptable danger in electing him to lead our nation."

The group includes former committee chairmen, lawmakers from swing states with decades of experience on Capitol Hill, one of the first openly gay members of Congress, and one member who led

investigations on Capitol Hill into scandals involving the Clintons. The effort was spearheaded by former Representatives Mickey Edwards (R-Oklahoma) and Tom Coleman (R-Missouri.). The full list of signatories follows:

Steve Bartlett (Texas)

Bob Bauman (Maryland)

Sherwood Boehlert (New York)

Jack Buechner (Missouri)

Tom Campbell (California)

Bill Clinger (Pennsylvania)

Tom Coleman (Missouri)

Geoff Davis (Kentucky)

Mickey Edwards (Oklahoma)

Harris Fawell (Illinois)

Ed Foreman (Texas and New Mexico)

Amo Houghton, Jr. (New York)

Gordon Humphrey (New Hampshire)

Bob Inglis (South Carolina)

Jim Kolbe (Arizona)

Steve Kuykendall (California)

Jim Leach (Iowa)

Pete McCloskey (California)

Connie Morella (Maryland)

Mike Parker (Mississippi)

Tom Petri (Wisconsin)

John Porter (Illinois)

Claudine Schneider (Rhode Island)

John “Joe” Schwarz (Michigan)

Chris Shays (Connecticut)

Peter Smith (Vermont)

Edward Weber (Ohio)

## II. Senate Election Update

**Senate Within reach of the Democrats:** Pollsters have been predicting that Democrats would gain four to six seats in the Senate, taking back control. With the most recent implosion of the Trump campaign, the GOP is extremely nervous that Democrats will regain the Senate. Republican Senators facing tough re-election campaigns rushed to distance themselves from Trump. An NBC News/Wall Street Journal poll released Monday October 10 shows that voters now favor Democrats over Republicans for Congress by 7 percentage points — the Democrats' biggest lead in that metric since the October 2013 government shutdown that most voters blamed on the Republicans. The new poll was taken after the Trump tape became public, but before Sunday night's debate between Trump and Clinton. Priorities USA, a pro-Clinton super PAC is reportedly preparing to expand beyond the presidential race and run television ads focused on a number of competitive races in North Carolina, Nevada, New Hampshire and Pennsylvania. Republican incumbents have very narrow leads in these states, which could swing either way. Republicans have ceded the Republican-held seats in Illinois and Wisconsin, to the Democrats.

Five states – Indiana, Missouri, Nevada, North Carolina and Pennsylvania remain “toss up” states. All five states are a virtual tie between the Democratic and Republican candidates. Respected pollster Charlie Cook has placed Florida in the toss-up column, but Rubio is ahead by only two points. However, Rubio along with Senators Roy Blunt (R-Missouri) and Richard Burr (R-North Carolina)

are still supporting Trump which could hurt them. Democrats are waving a white flag in Ohio, previously listed as a toss-up state, and seem divided about their prospects in Florida, two Republican-held seats that they were confident they could win.

### III. At the Think Tanks

On October 5, to help raise awareness and formulate international best practices to combat sexual violence under ISIS, the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) and the McCain Institute for International Leadership [hosted](#) an event titled *ISIS and Sex Slavery*. The event featured panelists Zainab Hawa Bangura, UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Mark Lagon, Distinguished Senior Scholar and Centennial Fellow at the School of Foreign Service at Georgetown, and Sarhang Hamasaeed, Senior Program Officer for Middle East Programs at USIP. The discussion was moderated by Elise Labott, Global Affairs Correspondent for CNN. The panelists were keen to discuss measures the international community could take to combat sexual violence in the region, all noting that the issue ought to be firmly integrated into all security and counterterror conversations about the Islamic State.

Sexual violence has long been an aspect of conflict, economic instability, and poverty. Perpetuated by non-state actors as well as governments, the use of women's bodies as tools to achieve political ends is too often a systemic part of warfare, yet is rarely included in security conversations or as a post-conflict priority. In recent years, Islamic State in Syria and Iraq has institutionalized sexual violence and sex slavery as a part of their political apparatus, where UN Special Representative on sexual violence and conflict Zainab Bangura [says](#) women and girls “get peddled like barrels of petrol.”

Sex slavery is part of the political economy of the Islamic State, with the sale and rape of women and girls justified through their interpretation of religious doctrine. The Yazidi minority is particularly at risk, with over 5,000 women and girls [abducted](#) in 2014 alone. Since the Yazidis do not practice Islam, ISIS doctrine states that the Quran gives fighters the right to buy, sell, and rape them. One of the only caveats for the rape of enslaved women and children is that they must be free of child, so ISIS has institutionalized the use of birth control and abortions. The “detailed bureaucracy of sex slavery” also includes an open slave bazaar in Raqqa, virtual marketplaces online, an infrastructure of warehouses where women and girls are held, and viewing rooms where they are [inspected](#) and priced. The use of religious doctrine to justify sex crimes is, as Hamasaeed stated, an effective cover, and one that has been used throughout history to justify violence against women.

Bangura noted that the United Nations has achieved recent success in integrating sexual violence into broader UN security agendas. Over the past few years, several UN Security Council resolutions have been passed to officially recognize sexual violence as a tactic of war, such as Resolution [2242](#) (2015), which integrates “women, peace, and security concerns across all country-specific situations on its agenda.” UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon commended this resolution, [stressing](#) that “at a time when armed extremist groups place the subordination of women at the top of their agenda, we must place women’s leadership and the protection of women’s rights at the top of ours.”

The UN has also been working closely with the Republic of Iraq, [signing](#) a Joint Communique to address conflict-related sexual violence in the country on September 23<sup>rd</sup>. The agreement outlines a series of steps the Iraqi government will take in collaborating with the UN, such as providing victim compensation, ensuring medical services and livelihood training for women survivors, and instituting robust evidence collecting and prosecutions to encourage women survivors to come forward.

In formulating this Communique, Bangura stressed the importance of ensuring medical support, psychosocial support, and livelihood support for women survivors. Often, reintegration for women and girls who leave or manage to escape is difficult, as their communities will not accept them - marking them as co-conspirators rather than as victims. This is not unique to the Islamic State, but affected the Tamil women of Sri Lanka during the civil war, and currently affects Nigerian women and girls under Boko Haram.

As all of the panelists noted, a multifaceted approach to combating sexual violence across the world must be employed while also working to combat sex slavery in ISIS-held territories. A USIP report [released](#) in 2015 underlines the importance of such a comprehensive approach, noting that sexual violence by violent extremist groups also resembles the use of sexual violence by state military forces and armed groups across the world, all of which have used violence against women as a political tool to incite fear and control populations. Bangura is well-aware of this, stressing that economic, political, and judicial responses with assistance from the international community must all be employed to help mitigate the global pervasiveness of sexual violence in conflict.