Overall Bipartisanship Improved for Third Congress; Rankings Reflect Continued Dramatic Shifts in the Senate
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WASHINGTON, DC — The Lugar Center, led by former U.S. Senator Richard Lugar, and the McCourt School of Public Policy at Georgetown University today jointly released their new Bipartisan Index rankings of members of Congress, completing the picture of the 115th Congress (2017-2018). The non-partisan tool measures the degree to which Senators and Representatives work across party lines.

“Despite serious failures of governance during the 115th Congress, including two government shutdowns, Congress experienced an undercurrent of bipartisan cooperation surrounding bill introduction,” said Lugar Center President Richard G. Lugar, who served for 36 years as a Republican senator from Indiana. “Overall Bipartisan Index scores improved for the third straight Congress after bottoming out in 2011-2012. The new Index scores show that even as the rhetoric and overall atmosphere in Washington remains partisan, there is an appetite among many lawmakers for bipartisan problem solving."

The Bipartisan Index has now covered 13 Congresses, beginning with the 103rd Congress in 1993. The rankings for the 115th Congress are based on bill sponsorships and co-sponsorships. According to the new figures, the average Senate score rose above the historic average for the first time since 2008. The average House score improved from the previous Congress but remained slightly below the historical average.

“In today’s polarized political environment, it can often seem like our lawmakers are working against one another, rather than for their constituents,” said Maria Cancian, the new dean of Georgetown’s McCourt School of Public Policy. “And yet our latest Bipartisan Index—a non-partisan and data-driven tool—points to more cooperation among lawmakers. That is promising news for the American people, who depend on our government to work for the common good.”
The Bipartisan Index allows voters to see how willing individual senators and representatives have been to work across party lines. Based on the scores, Senator Susan Collins (R, ME) was the most bipartisan senator. This is the third consecutive Congress in which Senator Collins finished with the top Senate ranking. Her score of 3.166 in the 115th Congress is the highest Bipartisan Index score ever recorded by a member of Congress.

Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R, FL), who is now retired, had the highest score among House members: 2.333. In the previous two Congresses she had placed in the top 15 among House members. Rep. Brian Fitzpatrick (R, PA), who finished second to Ros-Lehtinen, had the highest score among House members currently serving in the 116th Congress.

In the 115th, 53 senators were above zero, and therefore judged to be “bipartisan,” meaning they scored better than the average senator in their circumstances during the 20-year baseline period (1993-2013). This is an improvement from the 114th when 45 senators scored above zero. Meanwhile, 163 House members scored above the historical average, a slight improvement over the 152 members who were above zero in the 114th Congress.

For the second Congress in a row, Republican Senators far outpaced the scores of their Democratic counterparts. House Republicans scored higher than House Democrats, but by a narrower margin. For more analysis, please view the Lugar Center blog.

The Bipartisan Index measures how often a member of Congress introduced bills that succeed in attracting co-sponsors from members of the other party, and how often they in turn co-sponsor a bill introduced from across the aisle. The Index excludes non-binding resolutions and ceremonial bills. It is based on a formula applied uniformly to all members. No subjective judgments are made about individual members or bills. The Index serves as a critical resource for voters and the media and, its sponsors hope, encourages lawmakers to be more bipartisan when writing or co-sponsoring legislation.

The scores released today update interim scores released last year for the calendar year 2017, the first session of the 115th Congress. Bipartisan Index scores tend to rise modestly during the second year of a Congress due to Index components that benefit from the accumulation of bipartisan bills and co-sponsorships.

Nine current Democratic presidential candidates received Bipartisan Index scores for their performance in the 115th Congress. The three candidates who served in the House, former Rep. John Delaney of Maryland, former Rep. Beto O’Rourke of Texas, and current Rep. Tulsi Gabbard of Hawaii, all received positive bipartisan scores. Delaney topped all nine candidates with a 1.093 score, which placed him in 36th place out of 436 House members. O’Rourke earned a .333 score, which placed him 100th in the House and Gabbard earned a .323 score which placed her 102nd in the House.
Among the six Democratic presidential candidates serving in the Senate, only Amy Klobuchar of Minnesota was rated as bipartisan. She earned a .760, which ranked her as the 23rd most bipartisan senator out of the 100 who were scored.

The other five Senate Democratic candidates were well below the historical average of 0.00. They ranked as follows: Elizabeth Warren (MA) 68th, -0.356; Kirsten Gillibrand (NY) 84th, -0.811; Corey Booker (NJ) 88th, -0.879; Kamala Harris (CA) 95th, -1.298; and Bernie Sanders (VT) 100th, -2.032. This is the second consecutive Congress in which Senator Sanders has had the lowest Bipartisan Index score in the Senate.

To see current and previous Bipartisan Index rankings, click here.

About the Lugar Center:

Under the leadership of former U.S. Senator Richard Lugar, the non-profit Lugar Center is a platform for informed debate and analysis of global issues, including nonproliferation of weapons of mass destruction, global food security, foreign assistance effectiveness and global development, energy security, and enhancing bipartisan governance. http://www.thelugarcenter.org

About the McCourt School of Public Policy:

Founded in 1996 as the Georgetown Public Policy Institute, the McCourt School of Public Policy at Georgetown University is a top-ranked graduate school located at the center of the policy world in Washington, D.C. Our mission is to give our students the rigorous quantitative and analytic skills needed to design, implement and evaluate smart policies and to conduct policy research and recommend effective solutions on today’s most critical topics. http://mccourt.georgetown.edu