

Politics 101: Lame Duck and Omnibus Bill

This is the time when you will hear the terms "lame duck" and "omnibus bill" used often in the political world. What do they mean and what effect do they have on our industry?

Lame Duck

The lame ducks are the elected officials who are approaching the end of their tenure. After the election, the officials that lost the re-election bid or are retiring still have their duties to fulfill until the end of the year. Because they do not have to go through future elections, the lame ducks are in a peculiar position to make decisions and not face the consequences of those actions. They may be more likely to sign on to a bill. Or even push through a controversial bill. If you'll recall, one of the most famous lame duck actions was taken by former President Clinton when he issued 140 pardons and other acts of executive clemency on his last day in office. Two pardons were given to former colleagues and one to his half-brother.

Omnibus Bill

At the end of the year, Congress must pass bills that appropriate money for government spending. This is called an omnibus spending bill. An omnibus bill is a proposed law that covers a number of unrelated items. It is a single document that is accepted in a single vote by legislature but packages together several measures into one. Because of its large size and scope, omnibus bills limit opportunities for debate and scrutiny. Omnibus bills can be used to pass controversial amendments. Routinely the U.S. uses omnibus bills to group together budgets of all departments in one year in an omnibus spending bill.

What affect do lame duck sessions and omnibus bills have on HME industry?

Currently the HME industry has two bills we are hoping to get passed, [HR 5083](#) and [HR 4920](#). The lame duck session will be after the elections (Nov. 4) until the end of the year. This is likely when the committees will gather to develop their omnibus spending bill for 2015. Our congressional friends will decide what gets added to the omnibus bill. Hopefully we've educated our representatives on the devastating effects competitive bidding and the Medicare audit process have had on the medical industry and Medicare beneficiaries. And we hope they remember to add our language to the omnibus bill.