

Monthly Briefing

A Summary of the Alliance's Recent and Upcoming Activities and Important Water News

The Big D.C. Change

Democratic Congressional Control Will Overhaul Face Of Western Water Issues In Washington

Democratic control of the House and Senate will result in significant changes to the makeup and agendas of the committees that oversee Western water policy and the federal natural resources agencies but the exact nature and extent of those changes won't be fully known for several weeks.

Some reports suggest the Democratically-controlled Congress may focus on key water issues but whether those might include those of greatest importance to users of Western Reclamation projects remains to be seen over the next two years.

Others feel the Democratic-controlled committees of the 110th Congress are likely to focus less on new legislative initiatives than on conducting aggressive oversight of Bush Administration policies and actions.

THE NEW DEMOCRATIC House committee chairs will develop specific policy goals and agendas over the next several weeks.

Democratic environmental and natural resources initiatives may be previewed in the 110th Congress, but a serious effort to move them forward will probably not be seen until after the 2008 presidential election.

After being on the defensive during 12 years of Republican control of the

House, environmental organizations will likely move aggressively to influence the agendas of the natural resources committees.

However, their efforts will be hampered, at least in the short term, by the Bush Administration and by the relatively small Democratic majority in the House and a nearly evenly divided Senate.

DEMOCRATIC CONTROL of the Congress will have a significant effect on the Administration's regulatory and policy agenda, which will be subject to oversight and perhaps investigation by Democratic committee leaders who also control the appropriations process.

Bush Administration initiatives, such as Endangered Species Act regulatory

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Lame-Duck GOP Session Under Way

The Republican-controlled 109th Congress returned to work on Monday, November 13, to finish up fiscal year 2007 appropriations bills and other matters in a lame-duck session.

The federal government is currently operating under a temporary funding authority ("continuing resolution") that expires November 17. "Congress must either enact regular appropriations bills, and 10 remain to be done; package all the remaining funding measures into a single omnibus bill; or extend the continuing resolution until next year," said the Family Farm Alliance's Washington representative, Joe Raeder.

THE REPUBLICAN leadership in the House and Senate said before the elections that they planned for Congress to be in session during the week of Nov. 13, adjourn for Thanksgiving and then return in early December to finish remaining appropriations bills and other business.

The day after the election, however, with Democrats getting set to take control of both houses in the new Congress, it was unclear if that plan is still viable. "Following such a hard-fought election, it is possible that neither Republicans nor Democrats will have any interest in remaining in Washington until December," said Raeder.

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From One Washington To The Other

Family Farm Alliance President Carries Water Supply Message

How We Assess The Real State Of Irrigated Farming

Conclusions From A White Paper, "A View From Ground Zero," Prepared by the Family Farm Alliance

A "politically correct" mindset seems to have become fashionable when it comes to Western water policy.

That mindset assumes that the policies of the past, the policies that enabled the West to be settled and to flourish, have now outlived their usefulness and practicality. It is a belief that we no longer need to manage Western water resources in a manner that continues to encourage investment in agricultural production. And many times, it is also a mindset that believes that the continued development and use of Western water resources for agriculture is inconsistent with the nation's goals to protect and steward the environment.

WESTERN WATER POLICY, over the past one hundred years, is one of the great success stories of the modern era. There are over 180 federal water projects in the 17 Western states, which provide water to more than 31 million people, and provide 140,000 farmers with irrigation water on 10 million acres of farmland. These lands produce 60% of the nation's vegetables and 25% of its fruits and nuts. Millions of acres of arid Western desert have been transformed into the most efficient and productive agricultural system in the world.

Irrigated agriculture isn't a good investment, it is an incredible investment. It continues to be a leading economic driver in the West. However, the successes of the past have not come without a cost. The incredible expansion of the population, physical modifications made to rivers and streams, and agricultural practices themselves have impacted the environment. It is these impacts that are now causing many to question the policies of the past.

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In the span of one week in October, Family Farm Alliance President Pat O'Toole traveled from Washington state to Washington (D.C.) advocating for supply certainty in Western irrigated agriculture.

On October 24, he spoke to the National Agricultural Research, Extension, Education, and Economics Advisory Board (Board) about priority agricultural research needs. The Alliance prepared a white paper for this meeting, which formed the basis for O'Toole's presentation. The Alliance white paper (*please see inset at left*) includes a call for a West-wide assessment of cumulative impacts to irrigated agriculture, promulgating research recommendations associated with a National Academy of Sciences review of federal watershed management actions, and recommends a public survey of attitudes towards irrigated agriculture.

The Board provides advice to the Secretary of Agriculture and land-grant colleges and universities on top priorities and policies for food and agricultural research, education, extension and economics. The Advisory Board also, by mandate, consults with appropriate agricultural committees of Congress. The Advisory Board's Water Subcommittee met to explore issues related to water quantity, quality and the environment factors related to them, with the goal of developing recommendations that need research, extension, education and economics work. The Advisory Board will then discuss possible recommendations that will form the basis for its report to the Secretary and Congress.

WHILE IN WASHINGTON, O'Toole and Alliance D.C. representative Joe Raeder also advised Congressional committee staff of the need to take a look at the problem of rapid urban development and associated impacts to agricultural lands and water.

"We received positive commitment from both sides of the House Resources Committee staff that this is a giant issue in the West," said O'Toole. "They agree that it needs to be examined by appropriate congressional committees." O'Toole and Raeder also continued to advocate for regulatory streamlining in their meetings, particularly when they met with White House Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) staff.

IN A RELATED matter, O'Toole met the previous week with the Western Urban Water Coalition (WUWC) in Seattle (WASHINGTON), where this topic was discussed with urban water users like Metropolitan Water District of Southern California and the City of Denver.

"The urban interests are particularly interested in developing principles relating to ag-urban water transfers, as well as looking for ways to streamline the regulatory process associated with enhancing water supplies," said O'Toole. "Irrigators and municipal water users have some areas of mutual concern that we can tackle together." For his part, O'Toole "clearly raised interest on the part of our members," said Jeffrey Kightlinger, of Metropolitan Water District of Southern California, who chairs the WUWC.

Third Managing for Excellence Forum Is Held in Sacramento

A third public forum to allow U.S. Bureau of Reclamation customers and stakeholders input into development of a 21st Century action plan was held in Sacramento (CALIFORNIA) November 13 and 14.

Several Family Farm Alliance Advisory Committee members attended the Sacramento meeting, as did Alliance Executive Director Dan Keppen.

The Alliance continues to coordinate with other national water and power customer organizations in this process, which provides an important opportunity for Western water users to find further ways to improve transparency in Reclamation decision-making and make the organization as efficient as possible.

"Managing for Excellence" is Reclamation's response to *Managing Construction and Infrastructure in the 21st Century Bureau of Reclamation*, a comprehensive report completed earlier this year by the National Research Council (NRC) of the National Academy of Sciences (NAS).

"Executing the action plan is a primary initiative for Reclamation this year," said Keppen. The two day Sacramento session focused on workload evaluation, policy gaps, alternative management scenarios, engineering standards, reimbursability issues, revenues and the Reclamation Fund, major repairs, effective operation and maintenance planning, financial reporting, project management, Reclamation labs, title transfer, and customer relationships.

The agenda, presentations, and handouts can be downloaded at <http://www.usbr.gov/excellence/events/sacpm.html>. New draft products for action items relating to major repair projects and project management are available at <http://www.usbr.gov/excellence/results/draftproducts.html>. All are "draft decision documents" with comments due November 30.

Family Farm Alliance's Directors Give Support To Revised Rural Water Supply Act

After over a year of negotiations with Congressional water committee staffers and Interior Department policy makers, an amended version of the Rural Water Supply Act of 2005 has gained formal support of Family Farm Alliance directors.

The Rural Water Supply Act (S. 895), sponsored by Senate Energy Committee Chairman Pete Domenici (R-NEW MEXICO), passed the Senate one year ago. It would authorize the Bureau of Reclamation to build rural domestic water supply projects that meet certain engineering and feasibility criteria. The Bush Administration strongly supports the bill because it believes the measure would help Reclamation keep resources focused on its core missions. Currently, Congress authorizes rural water supply projects on an ad-hoc basis, adding large construction obligations to Reclamation's already strained budget. The bill also would authorize a new federal loan guarantee program to help irrigations districts finance major operation and maintenance costs.

Lame-Duck Congressional Session Under Way

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Instead, they may return to extend the continuing resolution into next year and adjourn. On the other hand, a number of energy, tax and health care issues of interest to both parties await final action, and some members are known to want time to finish them. At the time MONTHLY BRIEFING went to press, an agenda and schedule for the lame duck session was not forthcoming, but was expected within a week after members returned to work.

Our View Of Irrigated Agriculture

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Resolving these issues without destroying what we worked so hard to achieve is the challenge that we all face.

But to be successful, we must face them together. No resolution will be found unless we find a way to balance all competing needs in a way that supports continued growth of irrigated agriculture.

WESTERN irrigated agriculture is a strategic national resource, and the role of the federal government in the 21st Century should be to protect and enhance that resource.

The background information accompanying the agenda for the October meeting focuses on perceived negative aspects of agriculture, and the proposed areas of investigation could possibly lead to white papers that will provide further ammunition for critics of irrigated agriculture.

The USDA is viewed by many of the farmers on the ground as one of the few remaining government agencies that actually champion agriculture.

It is possible that well-earned reputation will be diminished if the Advisory Board chooses to focus its priorities on perceived negative water quality and quantity impacts caused by agriculture.

BY RECOGNIZING the value of irrigated agriculture; by understanding the current and future role of irrigated agriculture in the West, by ensuring that federal watersheds are properly managed, and by encouraging federal agencies to work with the agricultural community to solve local water challenges, the Advisory Board can play a truly important role in helping to solve the water issues that today seem so insurmountable.

Big Congressional Changes Are Looming In Election's Wake

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reform, may be blocked or driven off the agenda.

Environmental organizations are touting the defeat of Resources Committee Chairman Richard Pombo (R-CALIFORNIA) as a major victory, and they are holding it out as a warning to other members not to attempt legislative overhauls of major environmental laws such as the ESA, NEPA and the Clean Water Act.

Members of Congress elected November 7 won't take office until January, when the 110th Congress convenes with a narrow Democratic majority in the House and a razor-thin majority in the Senate.

ALONG WITH CONTROL of the House, Democrats will claim the chairmanship of committees and subcommittees and enlarge their membership on those panels. Former Republican chairs will move into the "Ranking Minority Member" positions, and some GOP members will be bumped off their committees as the number of Republican positions is reduced.

At this point, it's not possible to say with certainty who the new Democratic committee chairs will be.

"Chairmanships and assignments are determined in large part by seniority, but that is not the only factor taken into consideration," said Joe Raeder, Family Farm Alliance Washington representative. "Also, some members may choose to switch to other committees when the new Congress convenes."

Aside from choosing chairmen, House Democrats may rename and rearrange committees and their jurisdictions, as did the Republicans when they took over in 1995.

"Typically, it takes both parties until the end of January to complete the organization of their committee assignments for a new Congress," Raeder said.

With that in mind, the following breakdown of presumed House Democratic chairmanships and Republican Ranking Member assignments on key natural resources committees should be considered preliminary.

- **House Resources:** Ranking Democrat Nick Rahall (WEST VIRGINIA) is expected to take over the Chairmanship from outgoing Chair Richard Pombo (CALIFORNIA), who was defeated. The likely senior Republican will be either Jim Saxton (CALIFORNIA), a proponent of wildlife protection, or Elton Gallegly (CALIFORNIA). The **Water and Power Subcommittee** Chair will likely be Grace Napolitano of Los Angeles, with former Chairman George Radanovich (CALIFORNIA) moving over to be the Ranking Republican
- **House Transportation and Infrastructure:** This committee has jurisdiction over the Corps of Engineers and the Clean Water Act. Senior Democrat James Oberstar (MINNESOTA) is likely to be the Chairman, with outgoing Republican Chairman Don Young (ALASKA) becoming the Ranking Minority Member.
- **House Appropriations:** Dave Obey (WISCONSIN) is expected to assume the Chairmanship, with outgoing Chairman Jerry Lewis (CALIFORNIA) becoming the Ranking Republican. On the **Energy and Water Development Subcommittee**, which funds the Bureau of Reclamation and the Corps, the likely Chairman is Peter Visclosky (INDIANA). Outgoing Chairman David Hobson (OHIO) would be the presumed Ranking Member.

WITH DEMOCRATS also controlling the Senate, here is how the leadership of a few key natural resources committees may look:

- **Senate Energy and Natural Resources:** New Mexico Republican Pete Domenici would cede the Chairmanship to fellow New Mexico Senator Jeff Bingaman. The Chairmanship of the **Water and Power Subcommittee** could be expected to move to Byron Dorgan (NORTH DAKOTA), with outgoing Chair Lisa Murkowski (ALASKA) moving to the Ranking Member slot.
- **Senate Environment and Public Works:** This committee has jurisdiction over the Corps and major environmental laws, including the Clean Water Act and the Endangered Species Act. Republican James Inhofe (OKLAHOMA) will be replaced by Barbara Boxer (CALIFORNIA). Senator Hillary Clinton (NEW YORK) is expected to Chair the **Fisheries, Wildlife and Water Subcommittee** currently led by Lincoln Chafee (RHODE ISLAND), who was defeated.
- **Senate Appropriations:** Ranking Democrat Robert Byrd (WEST VIRGINIA) will move into the Chairmanship, assuming control from Thad Cochran (MISSISSIPPI). The new **Energy and Water Development Subcommittee** chair is expected to be Harry Reid (NEVADA).

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