

Congress to Return Next Week to Deal With Remaining Legislation

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With the controversial presidential election still looming in the background, Congress is returning December 4 in an attempt to finish the remaining four Fiscal Year 2001 appropriations bills. It is unclear how they will resolve the remaining bills, and whether they will attempt to negotiate an end-of-the-year tax cut package. The latest continuing resolution (CR) that keeps the government operating expires at midnight on December 5. The Congress and President Clinton will need to at least sign another short-term CR to avoid a government shutdown. The two most likely scenarios are that Congress and President Clinton will pass a long-term CR, which will fund the government into the next Congress, or that they will be able to resolve the remaining issues in the next two weeks and adjourn for the year.

Reaching an agreement on the remaining issues is particularly difficult because partisanship is increasing as the presidential election remains contested. In addition to the presidential conflict, the Senate now appears likely to be split 50/50, Republican/Democrat in the next congress. Consequently, Senate Democrats are clamoring for a power-sharing operation, which is generating more partisan bickering. Once Congress finishes its remaining appropriations bills, either through a long-term CR or by reaching an agreement, AGC will send chapters an end-of-the-year summary of all the FY 2001 appropriations bills.

Congressional Races Finalized. The presidential recount may be receiving all the attention, but two congressional recounts are producing surprising results. One House and one Senate race have come down to the wire and appear to favor the underdog. In the Washington State Senate race, contrary to earlier reporting, challenger Maria Cantwell (D) has taken the lead from incumbent Sen. Slade Gorton (R). This race is important because it takes the Senate party breakdown to 50 Republicans and 50 Democrats. Cantwell leads Gorton by .08%, or 1,953 votes statewide. Official results of the recount will be released tomorrow.

In the House, challenger and former Representative Dick Zimmer (R) was the clear favorite to oust incumbent Representative Rush Holt (D) in New Jersey's 12th congressional district. In fact, both released statements the day after the election claiming to be the winner of the contest. However, after the ballots were recounted this week, Zimmer conceded the race to Holt yesterday. Holt won re-election by 746 votes. Two other House seats are still engaged in the recount process, but these recounts are not expected to overturn the current election results. They are MI-8 where Mike Rogers (R) was certified the winner with a 160-vote lead and MN-2 where Mark Kennedy (R) upset incumbent Representative David Minge (D) by 155 votes. Therefore, the House breakdown for the next Congress will be 223 for Republicans, 211 for Democrats, and 2 Independents.

Chances for Passage of Managed Care Reform Increases: Given the loss of Republican seats in the Senate, chances for passage of a Patients' Bill of Rights are growing. The House passed this bill by a wide margin earlier this year but it got bogged down in the Senate. With more Democrats in the 107th Congress, Senate bill supporters may finally reach the 60 votes needed to end a filibuster. Should the House-passed bill make it through the Senate next year, then employers could be held liable in lawsuits involving delayed or denied medical care for employees. AGC will continue to oppose inclusion of this lawsuit expansion.

Endangered Species Listings Halted: The Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) has announced that the listing of species will be halted until the next fiscal year. The reason, FWS has spent its annual appropriation on defending itself from lawsuits filed by environmental groups. Twenty-five species being considered for listing will have to wait. Instead, the Fish and Wildlife Service must look at critical habitat designations for the over 1200 species already protected.

Boise Air Agreement Being Considered: Boise, Idaho is the only area in the country operating without a particulate matter (PM) standard. In early 1999, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) placed Boise in attainment of PM 10, expecting to place Boise in nonattainment of a more stringent PM standard shortly thereafter. A court, however, struck down EPA's more stringent standard,

leaving Boise with no standard. Then, EPA proposed to place Boise in a pre-1997 standard that no longer existed. AGC wrote comments demonstrating EPA was not legally allowed to place Boise in this nonexistent standard. The agreement provides for emissions offsets and a maintenance plan. Without this agreement, highway funds could be in jeopardy for the Boise area. Utilize “Congress At Your Fingertips” Located in the Member’s Only Section at www.agc.org to contact your Congressional Representatives.

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