



February 2019 Insights

Committee/Subcommittee Assignments and Staff Changes

Assignments and staff changes are a work in progress. The significant changes in the House (Democrats gained 40 seats) will result in significant changes in committee assignments and in the ratio of Democrat and Republican members on the committees. Even the Senate with less dramatic changes (Republicans gained 2 seats) will result in a ratio change for the committees – either adding one Republican or subtracting one Democrat. While chairs have been selected for the committees, committee and subcommittee assignments have not been finalized. Also, there will be significant staff shuffles and changes for a while, as Republican Members have to reduce staff and Democrat Members have to add new staff.

Congressional Priorities

The top three priorities identified by the House Democrats are ethics reform, immigration and infrastructure. Top three priorities identified by the Senate Republicans are health care reform, middle American tax reform and infrastructure.

Infrastructure

Last week twenty high-ranking Trump Administration officials met with the President last week to discuss a potential infrastructure plan. Apparently, the Administration is now considering a 13-year program but has not settled on key issues, including whether it will propose new ways to pay for increased spending. The 13-year aspect would mirror the longest ever highway funding bill, from 1957 to 1969. In Congress, House Democrats are working on a plan of their own, led by Rep. Peter DeFazio (D-Ore.) which will likely be very different from what Trump ultimately proposes. It's not clear if any Senate Republicans are working on legislative language too, but some expect that they'll wait to see what DeFazio puts out first and work from there. DeFazio's approach has been to call for a gradual gas and diesel tax increase, and while that's not necessarily dead on arrival, it's a tricky political issue for many Republicans and even some Democrats. "If the president will make it a priority or mention it in his State of the Union, that's going to jump start it," said Rep. Sam Graves, R-Mo., the new Ranking Member on the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. "He has to get behind it for this thing to become a reality." On February 7, the House Transportation and Infrastructure will hold a hearing on "The Cost of Doing Nothing: Why Investing in Our Nation's Infrastructure Cannot wait." The hearing will examine the current state of the Nation's infrastructure, the backlog of maintenance and repair needs, and the increasing cost of Federal inaction.

Coalition Hill Contact Database

The Coalition is developing two 116th Congress organizational databases. The first is CWCC Hill contacts, which will identify a contact from each Coalition member agency, and then the member agency's Representative(s), and that Representative's contact information, Legislative Assistant for water issues, and email addresses. The second will identify the Democrat and Republican staffs for the Coalition's key committees and those Members of Congress who may not be associated with a CWCC member.

Coalition 2019 Priorities

The Coalition's priorities include supporting a mega-infrastructure bill with robust funding for water; reauthorizing the WIIN Grant program with an increased program authorization; supporting Clean Water Act reauthorization; supporting earmarks for water projects; and, advocating for increased CWSRF and SDWSRF funding and water funding in general in the FY 20 appropriations process.

Blumenauer

Congressman Blumenauer's push to create an infrastructure subcommittee on Ways and Means was shot down by Democratic leaders, who did not include an exemption for the subcommittee cap in their rules package. A Ways and Means spokesperson said infrastructure issues will remain under the tax policy subcommittee. "Creating an additional subcommittee is not simple. But I received assurances that we will be focusing on [infrastructure financing] early out of the box," he said. Blumenauer said he had talked to Democratic leadership and 50 individual members in lobbying for the new subpanel. "I think there's merit to the concept and I hope we'll be able to keep the spirit moving forward," he said. A Ways and Means Task Force on the issue is still a possibility. Also, Blumenauer is working on legislation that would raise the federal gas tax by five cents a year starting in 2020. Raising the gas tax is not a new idea for the Oregon Democrat; it's part of a package of infrastructure ideas he's pushed repeatedly over the years. But it carries new significance now that Democrats are in charge of the House. Blumenauer, who's on Ways and Means, said that the first step before introducing legislation will be "listening to what the American public wants," which he said Republicans failed to do while they were in charge. He also said that while Republicans might not come out loudly in favor of a gas tax hike but "there's always been Republican support privately."

Federal Funding

The partial government shutdown agencies are currently funded through Feb. 15. Roughly 75% of the government is funded as their appropriation bills were passed. The approximate 25% shutdown agencies include the Department of Interior, but not the Bureau of Reclamation, as they are primarily funded out of the Energy & Water Appropriations bill that was enacted, and the Department of Transportation.

FY19 Interior Appropriations Bill

This bill is still pending. It includes funding for the CWSRF and SDWSRF.

FY19 Energy and Water Appropriations Bill

This bill was enacted and included an appropriation of the final \$20 M authorized funding for the WIIN Act recycled water grant program.

FY19 Transportation Appropriations Bills

Even though the final bill has not been passed, funding levels in both are not far apart.

FY20 President's Budget

By law, the President's budget is supposed to be submitted by the first Monday in February. We continue to keep in touch with OMB on budget issues, but additional funding is always a tough sell with them and they tend to keep information to themselves.

FY20 Congressional Budget Resolution

Congress has an April 15 deadline to pass a Congressional Budget Resolution. A budget resolution is in the form of a concurrent resolution – passed by both House and Senate – but does not have the force of law. It does not go to the President for signature (in contrast to appropriation bills which must be signed into law). A budget resolution sets upper limits for spending under major functions, which serves as the basis for allocating funding levels to the appropriations subcommittees.

Earmarks

This is the latest on the earmarks issue. Congressional earmarks reached their peak in the middle of Bush's administration, when the fiscal 2005 defense spending bill included 2,506 earmarks worth \$9 billion and the energy and water development bill included 2,313 earmarks worth \$4.9 billion, according to the Congressional Research Service. The practice came to a screeching halt in November 2010, after Republicans took control of the House in the Tea Party revolution and Speaker John Boehner (R-Ohio) imposed a ban. However, opponents such as Boehner and former Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.), who died last year, are no longer in Congress to fight the return of earmarks. Other senior Republicans such as Senate Appropriations Committee Chairman Richard Shelby (Ala.) and Senate Rules Committee Chairman Roy Blunt (Mo.) have voiced support for allowing Congress to earmark funds again. They think that if individual members of Congress have more power to direct federal resources back to their home states and districts, they are more likely to agree to bipartisan compromises and pass bills. A spokeswoman for Shelby noted that the rules package passed by the new House Democratic majority did not include a prohibition on congressionally directed spending. "I think it's not coincidental that the appropriations system and other legislative [process] dramatically deteriorated in their ability to produce a result at the same time that the Congress stopped directing the administration as to how money should be spent," said Blunt, who also chairs the Senate Republican Policy

Committee. One of the strongest proponents of earmarks is House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-Md.), who like Pelosi served as a member of the House Appropriations Committee. Hoyer says earmarks or congressionally directed spending should be allowed, albeit with reforms to make it tougher to secure shady deals for lobbyists or lawmakers' personal gain. "I strongly support restoring Congressionally directed spending with the reforms that Democrats put in place when we previously had the majority to ensure transparency and accountability." Hoyer noted that when Democrats controlled the House from 2007 to 2010 they adopted earmark reforms. Those reforms included eliminating projects going to for-profit entities, requiring members to certify that they had no financial interest in their requests, and ensuring that members post all of their requests along with a justification for each project on their congressional websites. Hoyer said he and his Democratic colleagues will be "discussing a path forward" in the weeks ahead. House Appropriations Committee Chairwoman Nita Lowey (D-N.Y.) said she supports congressionally directed spending in line with Congress's Article I powers.

Introduced Bills

With the new Congress starts a new bill cycle process. Bills not passed last year die. Some Members may choose to reintroduce their bills. We will continue to monitor this process to identify bills of interest.

Bill Tracking

Summaries not yet available.San

[H.R.658](#) — 116th Congress (2019-2020)**To facilitate efficient investments and financing of infrastructure projects and new job creation through the establishment of a National Infrastructure Development Bank, and for other purposes.** Sponsor: [Rep. DeLauro, Rosa L. \[D-CT-3\]](#) (Introduced 01/17/2019) Cosponsors: (58) Committees: House - Energy and Commerce, Transportation and Infrastructure, Financial Services, Ways and Means Latest Action: House - 01/17/2019 Referred to the Committees on Energy and Commerce, Transportation and Infrastructure, Financial Services, and Ways and Means.

[H.R.228](#) — 116th Congress (2019-2020)**To authorize programs and activities to support transportation options in areas that are undergoing extensive repair or reconstruction of transportation infrastructure, and for other purposes.** Sponsor: [Rep. Velazquez, Nydia M. \[D-NY-7\]](#) (Introduced 01/03/2019) Cosponsors: (2) Committees: House - Transportation and Infrastructure Latest Action: House - 01/03/2019 Referred to the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure.

[H.R.180](#) — 116th Congress (2019-2020)**Build America Act of 2019** Sponsor: [Rep. Hastings, Alcee L. \[D-FL-20\]](#) (Introduced 01/03/2019) Cosponsors: (5) Committees: House - Transportation and Infrastructure, Ways and Means Latest Action: House - 01/03/2019 Referred to the Committees on Transportation and Infrastructure and Ways and Means.