



washington dc update

What a Difference a Year Makes

September 29, 2010

Today and tomorrow the House and Senate are voting on a whole series of bills, most notably a continuing resolution that will keep the government open after mid-night on Thursday and the official start of FY11. There is little danger that this legislation won't be cleared by the Congress and signed into law by President Obama in a timely fashion. Once that is accomplished, the Congress will adjourn for the next two months.

It is interesting to contemplate the difference between today and one year ago. At that point, WESTCAS was focused on environmental legislation that was making its way through Congress and on how the water resources community could best address these bills in the second year of the 111th Congress. Today virtually all of this legislation is stalled and will likely die later this year.

A year ago, the full impact of the Stimulus was just beginning to be felt including billions of new dollars for water and sewer projects through the USEPA along with hundreds of millions of additional funding from the Bureau of Reclamation and the Army Corps of Engineers. Today, there is serious talk about reducing future Federal budgets back to the FY08 level of spending. There can be no doubt that much of this burden would fall on domestic discretionary spending including Federal support for water infrastructure.

The only thing certain is that WESTCAS member agencies are going to have to live and work in this "new world" that has emerged over the past 12 months. Among the items that you need to consider:

- Can the Federal government continue to pump out regulations and burdens on local governments while at the same time drastically cutting funding support to help pay for them?
- Will new funding concepts emerge such as a Federal Infrastructure Bank that will supplant much of the traditional authorization/appropriations approach and the involvement of the Legislative Branch of government in funding infrastructure?
- Will the Obama Administration grow tired of Congressional stalemate and begin issuing Executive Orders to secure its environmental agenda?

Stay tuned because we'll begin to know the answers in the coming months and you, as a WESTCAS member, are going to be very much a part of this show.

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