**What’s Happening in Congress…**

We all can agree these are strange times we live in, and things are subject to change minute by minute. The post below reflects a view into DC after the election, although some things may already have changed by the time you read this. I think most of you know I am a volunteer legislative advisor for several advocacy groups — TCF, WELCO, CANA, IDA, Safe Foods Safe Horses and COWHC and a government employee in my day job. I see things from another lens and waited until I could see what information might be of interest to you folks.

After 2 years of turmoil in the White House and the Congress, stakes were high for this mid-term election and voters turned out in record numbers. The results were heartening… members representing cultural diversity, more women, younger members, schoolteachers and veterans were elected to Congressional seats, as well as Govern positions. Democrats won big in the House of Representatives and will have a strong influence on investigations and accountability going forward.   Republicans won a larger majority in the US Senate. This election split the balance of power and hopefully will enable more balance and bi-partisanship.

**For now…**

* *Committee Leadership-* will not be fully decided until January. The ***attached document***is a point in time and reflects changes to the House committees with jurisdiction over energy, natural resources, public lands, environment, transportation, and tax policies.
* *Appropriations-* Both the House and Senate need to finalize appropriations bills for Fiscal Year 2019 before the Dec. 7 Continuing Resolution (CR) expires in addition to making preparations for a new Congress in January.  While in town, each party will begin separate leadership elections and orientations for newly elected Members of Congress.  These intra-party elections are a signal of what to expect once the newly elected 116th Congress convenes in January when the House of Representatives and Senate will formally elect a Speaker and Majority Leader.
* ***Democrat Leadership Elections:***Democrats nominated Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi to serve as the next speaker of the House and the full House will vote Jan. 3rd. Senate Democrats are likely to reaffirm their current leadership team as no contested leadership elections are expected within the Democratic Caucus.
* *House Democrats:*Having won the Majority, Democrats will have more leadership positions to fill now that they are no longer the minority party.  Democrats in the House will also vote to elect their party Majority Whip, Assistant Leader and Caucus Chair.  Congressman Steny Hoyer (D-MD), the current Democratic Whip, is expected to ascend to Majority Leader, and Congressman James Clyburn, the current Assistant Democratic Leader, is likely to assume the role of Majority Whip.  There is an expected leadership vacancy within the Democratic Leadership as a result of Congressman Joe Crowley having lost his primary.  Rep. Nita Lowey (D-NY) will be the Appropriations Committee Chair and Rep. Betty McCollum should assume the Chairmanship of the [Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies](https://www.govtrack.us/congress/committees/None).
* *Senate Democrats:*No changes are expected within the party leadership. Current Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer (D-NY) is expected to continue to lead his caucus with the Democrats in leadership positions remaining in place.

Senate Democrats will have a number of Committee slots to fill as Senators replace departed Democrats on key Committees, a process that will likely have an impact on all major Committees.  For example, Senator Bill Nelson (D-FL) lost his re-election contest so Senator Maria Cantwell (D-WA) will likely have a choice to continue serving as Ranking Member of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee or shift to the Ranking Member role on the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee.  Senator Debbie Stabenow (D-MI) and Senator Joe Manchin (D-WV) are the likely Democrats to take over as the Ranking Member at the Energy and Natural Resources Committee.

* ***Republican Leadership Elections:***both the House and Senate Republicans will decide House Committee leadership sometime after Thanksgiving.
* *House Republicans:*There will be Committee leadership changes for Republicans due to party-imposed term limits, retirements, and the loss of their majority.  Speaker Paul Ryan (R-WI) is retiring; the new minority leader is Rep McCarthy;  Rep. Steve Scalise will serve as minority whip; Rep. Liz Cheney will be the next Republican conference chair.

With Democrats taking over the House, Bishop lost his chairmanship of the House Natural Resources Committee to Rep. Grijalva. However, given Bishop’s seniority, he's likely to become the committee's minority ranking member. Bishop is no fan of our wild horses. During this lame duck session, we need to watch Bishop as he has been quoted as saying “he'll try to get a package of public lands legislation through Congress focused on transferring federal facilities such as a fish hatchery to the states. It remains to be seen whether that legislation would deal at all with the Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante national monuments, slashed in size last year by President Trump”.

Betty McCollum is expected to be the chair of the subcommittee on [Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies](https://www.govtrack.us/congress/committees/None). She will dethrone Rep. Calvert, as Chair and Rep. Stewart as Vice Chair, both who are in the pockets of the cattlemen’s association.

* *Senate Republicans:*The following changes in the Senate Republican Caucus are expected due to party-imposed leadership term limits:
* Senator John Cornyn (R-TX), the current Assistant Majority Leader and Majority Whip, is term-limited out of the Whip spot.
* Senator John Thune (R-SD) will become Majority Whip.
* Senator John Barrasso (R-WY) will replace Senator Thune as Republican Conference Chair.
* Senator Roy Blunt (R-MO) will replace Senator Barrasso as Republican Policy Committee Chair.
* The race to replace Senator Blunt as Vice-Conference Chair is currently the only contested leadership race.  Senators Joni Ernst (R-IA) and Deb Fischer (R-NE) are vying for the position.
* Lastly, it is expected Senator Todd Young (R-IN) will replace Senator Cory Gardner (R-CO) as Chair of the National Republican Senatorial Committee.

**NEXT Steps…**

Congress returned for a “Lame Duck” session since they only passed five appropriations bills for Fiscal Year 2019, leaving seven funding bills that expire on December 7th.  Included in the seven remaining funding bills are the Interior, Environment and Related Agencies bill which provides funding for the EPA, the Department of the Interior and other agencies. Congress may also take action on reauthorization of the Farm Bill, the Land and Water Conservation Fund, and the National Flood Insurance program. However…you never know with this Congress what they’ll do.

It is still possible a short term Continuing Resolution (CR) could go beyond Dec 7 for the 5 appropriations bills left to be passed or given Trump’s ire over funding for the wall he could refuse to sign any appropriations bills and shutdown the government. And now…given the passing of President Bush on Friday, there is speculation that a CR would be invoked and extend government funding for a few weeks longer. Word is the White House might want to avoid any shutdown drama associated with the funeral for President Bush and national mourning.

With this Lame Duck Congress you never know what stunts might take place given outgoing members may feel they have no accountability except of course to the people and history. Sadly, we’ve saw this happen with the Burn’s amendment and we know Rep. Stewart and Rep. Bishop are always poised to try.

This election will probably help us hold the line on the brazen acts by Sec of Interior, Zinke and Sec. of AG, Perdue and their band of BLM and FS lackey’s.  Rep. Grijalva has already called for Zinke’s resignation. However...while we want Zinke and Perdue out… we also need to remember that those next in line to take Secretarial positions may be even more dangerous to deal with given they will have new untested approaches to managing their Departments.

**What can you do right now…** is call, email or write your Congressional members to stop any amendments introduced into the FY 2019 Budget:

* **Call and/or fax your Congressional Representative and tell them**:

*"I live in your district and want you to contact Appropriations Colleague members and ask them to reject any amendment to the Fiscal Year 2019 spending legislation that would:*

* *Continue aggressive roundups of wild horses and burros*
* *allow BLM to destroy healthy wild horses and burros,*
* *allow unlimited sale authority (another name for slaughter); and,*
* *reject any language that allows for surgical sterilization.*

*The BLM needs to do their job managing their charges, not killing them to support special interests groups who make their money off our public lands and want wild horses and burros destroyed. My views represent 80% of Americans who want our wild horses and burros humanely managed, not destroyed."*

* **Find your representatives here:**[**http://govtrack.us**](http://govtrack.us/)**and/ or you can use the free Fax options:**
* House: [https://faxzero.com/ fax\_congress.php](https://faxzero.com/fax_congress.php)
* Senate: https://faxzero.com/fax\_senate.php

**In the New Year** …Once new members are sworn in and have staff, we can all begin the educational process, especially for new House members. Many of us are working to put together a list of key issues to be shared. With all of us working together we can stop the managed extinction of our wild horses and burros by BLM and FS, and the selling out of our public lands to private interests.

Stay strong and know this New Year offers a chance to reposition the conversation for our wild equines. And if you have questions…please don’t hesitate to send them and I’ll do my best to find answers.

For the wild ones...elise

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