

LEGISLATIVE SUMMARY FOR:**June 28, 1999**

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LAST WEEK -

AGRICULTURE APPROPRIATIONS BILL YIELDS GRIDLOCK - The Senate's effort to pass a flurry of fiscal 2000 spending bills before the Fourth of July recess remains blocked by a partisan dispute over managed care health plans. The Senate Appropriation Committee spent Thursday afternoon preparing three more spending bills for floor action. These actions made it impossible the agriculture appropriation measure, S. 1233, to be completed by the end of the week. Senate leaders have been unable to agree on how to separate the managed care debate from consideration of farm spending. Republicans are likely to offer as an amendment a proposal by Bill Frist, (R-TN), which would reauthorize a health policy research agency. That would allow GOP members to strip the agriculture bill of both amendments and begin the process again.

BRIEFING ON URBAN SPRAWL - On Monday, June 21, 1999, The Environmental and Energy Study Institute and the Senate and House Northeast-Midwest Coalitions sponsored a briefing on the reasons why US cities have been more prone to sprawl than their European counterparts. The briefing featured two authors of recent books on sprawl: *Laws of the Landscape: How Policies Shape Cities in Europe and America*, by Pietro S. Nivola, and *Once there Were Greenfields: How Urban Sprawl is Undermining America's Environment, Economy and Social Fabric*, by Don Chen and Kaid Benfield, directors of the Smart Growth programs at the Surface Transportation Policy Project (STTP) and the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), respectively.

In contrasting U.S. and European metropolitan development, Nivola examined the effectiveness of traditional urban programs, such as core area reconstruction, mass transit investments, urban growth controls, and metropolitan organizational rearrangements, in controlling sprawl. Chen and Benfield also discussed the extent to which sprawl has occurred in major U.S. metropolitan areas, the reasons for it, and its environmental, economic, fiscal and social effects, including overall quality of life. They also make

policy recommendations to promote smarter growth and cite models in the U. S. as well as the European experience.

CLEAN WATER INFRASTRUCTURE HEARING - On Tuesday, June 22, 1999 the Water Resources and Environment Subcommittee (Chairman Boehlert, R-NY) of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee held a hearing on clean water infrastructure and the importance of Clean Water Act funding. The hearing was held to discuss H.R. 828, a bill that would amend the Federal Water Pollution Control Act to require that discharges from combined storm and sanitary sewers conform to the Combined Sewer Overflow Control Policy of EPA. J. Charles Fox, Assistant Administrator for Water testified for the EPA that the Nation's sewage treatment facilities remove about 7.5 million metric tons (16 billion pounds) of oxygen depleting chemicals from wastewater each year. The economic and social benefits of water infrastructure projects can be seen in many urban water front cities. He stated that this dramatic improvement in sewage treatment over the past quarter century is a national success story and a compelling example of the good that can come from cooperative efforts of Federal, State, and local governments. Over ten years ago, Congress amended the Clean Water Act to create the Clean Water State Revolving Fund (SRF) program to replace wastewater construction grants program. EPA has several major objections to H.R. 828 and believes it would reduce their ability to continue the effective implementation of the Combined Sewer Overflow Policy.

NOXIOUS WEEDS AND INVASIVE PLANTS HEARING - On Thursday, June 24, the Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands (Chairman Hansen, R-UT) of the House Resources Committee held a hearing on noxious weeds and invasive plants. Chairman Hansen stated that the purpose of the hearing was to raise awareness about the severe problems associated with noxious weeds and invasive plants on federal lands and to suggest some possible ways to address the issue.

Two of the witnesses were Henri Bisson, Assistant Director for the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Department of Interior, and Dr. Robert Lewis, Deputy Chief for Research and Development, Forest Service, USDA. Mr. Bisson testified that weed infestations from non-native plants are spreading at a high rate. He said they represent the most rapidly accelerating threat to the long-term health of our nation's public lands. He went on to say that non-native weeds have invaded approximately 17 million acres of public rangelands in the west and untreated, the rate of spread can increase exponentially. Mr. Bisson concluded by saying BLM is working with other federal, state, local and tribal governments and with private landowners to keep relatively uninfested land from becoming seriously infested. Dr. Lewis testified that the Forest Service work is enhanced by activities of USDA's sister agencies such as Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Agricultural Research Service, Cooperative State Research Education and Extension Service, Economic Research Service, Farm Services Agency and Natural Research Conservation Service. He said these activities include stopping new invasive species from entering the country, providing early detection and control, providing technical advice to states and private landowners, and ensuring the latest treatment information and technology is readily accessible and implemented.

LEGISLATION OF NOTE -

The following Bills of significance to NRCS and conservation have been introduced:

BILL	MEMBER	PURPOSE
S. 1038	Grassley, (IA)	Would amend the IRS Code of 1986 to exempt small issue bonds for agriculture from the state volume cap.
S. 1119	Breaux, (LA)	Would amend the Act of August 9, 1950, to continue funding of the Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection and Restoration Act.
S. 1177	Harkin, (IA)	Would amend the Food Security Act of 1985 to permit the harvesting of crops on land subject to conservation reserve contracts of recovery of biomass used energy production.
S. 1211	Bennett, (UT)	Would amend the Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Act to authorize additional measures to carry out the control of salinity upstream of Imperial Dam in a cost-effective manner.

LOOKING AHEAD

Following legislative business this week Congress will adjourn for the Independence Day recess.

