

LEGISLATIVE SUMMARY FOR:**January 22, 2001**

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LAST WEEK

INAUGURATION-On January 20, 2001, George W. Bush was sworn in as the 43rd President of the United States.

AGRICULTURE SECRETARY CONFIRMATION – On Saturday, January 20, 2001, the Senate Confirmed the nomination of Anne Veneman to become Secretary of Agriculture. The Senate Agriculture Committee (Chairman, Sen. Harkin, D-IA) held previously held a confirmation hearing on January 18, 2001. Miss Veneman stressed in her opening remarks that she would focus on market opportunities for products, research, and helping farmers adapt to changing environmental demands. Her management will be cooperative and foster collaborative solutions. The Committee members posed many questions ranging from trade issues, conservation, food stamps, and energy.

The Committee asked her thoughts on the need to continue to support increases in WRP and WHIP. Miss Veneman stated that the administration will stress voluntary, incentive-based programs and committed to working with the Committee on the issues. She was asked about her approach for solving the concerns of farmers who come for assistance and have to deal with personnel who aren't knowledgeable of all available programs. Miss Veneman stated a belief in cross-training employees in the delivery of multiple services. She was also asked about her method for dealing with environmental impacts such as TMDL and feedlots impacts on clean water to which she stated she would employee science based technology and encourage a close working relationship with EPA to solve any environmental issues that may arise. In regards to a question on CRP expansion, she stated that she is aware of the high demand for the program. Miss Veneman expressed a desire to work towards a USDA common accounting system in an effort to resolve accountability issues outlined in GAO audits.

Sen. Harkin closed the hearing by mentioning the Conservation Security Act that he and others intend to reintroduce this Session. He stressed the value and the importance of a bipartisan effort to provide a safety net for farmers that will help those that are the best stewards of the land and encourages others to become better stewards. He also stated a desire that a hearing be scheduled this Spring on conservation in order to get that part of the farm bill re-authorized.

EPA ADMINISTRATOR CONFIRMATION HEARING-The Senate Environment and Public Works Committee (Chairman, Sen. Reid D-NV) held a confirmation hearing on January 17, 2000 for Gov. Christie Todd Whitman who was nominated by President Bush to become the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency. The hearing lasted less than two hours. Gov. Whitman set forth the priorities for the incoming administration including expanding the Brownfields program, air quality standards, and non-point source pollution. The one aspect of non point source pollution that was emphasized was the combined storm/sewer overflow problem.

Sen. Voinovich (R-OH) stressed the importance of keeping a cadre of qualified scientists and lawyers working for EPA as the massive retirements among federal employees begin to occur in the next 4 years, as well as continuing to ask for needed funding for environmental infrastructure projects. Gov. Whitman assured the Committee that under her leadership EPA would rigorously enforce the existing laws, but would emphasize incentives to encourage people and businesses to comply with existing regulations providing the states and local governments flexibility to make environmental regulations fit the community needs. Other questions ranged from interstate flow of waste, the role of EPA to promote environmental justice, to a proposed river dredging in the Hudson River. Sen. Hillary Clinton (D-NY) stressed the importance of the Hudson River as one of the American Heritage Rivers. Without exception, the Committee provided positive comments regarding Whitman's nomination.

SENATE CONFIRMATION HEARINGS-On January 18, 2001 confirmation hearings were also held for Secretary of Energy-designate, Spencer Abraham and Secretary of Interior-Designate, Gale Norton.

LEGISLATION OF NOTE – The following legislation pertinent to NRCS was introduced in the past week:

Bill Number	Sponsor	Purpose
H.R. 34	Rep. Bereuter	Would amend the Agricultural Market Transition Act to provide for the payment of special loan deficiency payments to producers who are eligible for loan deficiency payments, but who suffered yield losses due to damaging weather or related condition in a federally declared disaster area.
H.R. 56	Rep. Condit	Would amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to allow a credit against income tax for the purchase and installation of agricultural water conservation systems.
H.R. 110	Rep. Hefley	Would amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to provide a credit against income tax for certain charitable conservation contributions of land by small farmers and ranchers.

THIS WEEK

GLOBAL CLIMATE CHANGE BRIEFING – On Friday, January 26, Dr. Joel Brown will conduct briefings for House and Senate staff regarding Global Climate Change research/ issues and the Natural Resources Conservation Service. The briefings will be conducted for committee staff as well as agriculture legislative aides.

January 26	9:00am	1300 Longworth Bldg.
January 26	10:30am	647 Dirksen Bldg.

LOOKING AHEAD

SENATE FARM BILL HEARING – The Senate Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Committee (Chairman Lugar, R-In.) will hold an oversight hearing on the report of the Commission on 21st Century Production Agriculture. The Commission was established by the 1996 Farm Bill to review farm programs and make recommendations for revisions.

January 30	9:00am	332 Russell Bldg.
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