

WEEKLY LEGISLATIVE SUMMARY FOR:

October 2, 2000

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LAST WEEK:

FY 2001 APPROPRIATIONS – The Congress has yet to complete work on 11 of the 13 spending bills for FY 2001, including H.R. 4461, the Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act of 2001. Because the current fiscal year will come to an end before work will be completed on a majority of spending bills the Congress has acted to pass a Continuing Resolution, H.J. Res. 109. A Continuing Resolution bill permits budget authority to Federal Departments and programs until regular appropriations acts are enacted. H.J. Res. 109 passed the House of Representatives on September 26, 2000 (415-2) and passed the Senate on September 28, 2000 (96-0). The President is expected to sign the bill into law before midnight on September 30, 2000. The signing of H.J. Res. 109 into law will provide the Congress an additional week in which to work on the FY 2001 spending bills. NRCS Legislative Affairs staff will provide updates on the appropriations process as the details become available.

USDA FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTABILITY HEARING – On Wednesday, September 27, the Senate Research, Nutrition and Legislation Subcommittee (Chairman Fitzgerald, R-IL) held an oversight hearing regarding USDA financial management accountability. The witnesses included USDA Inspector General Roger Viadero, USDA Chief Financial Officer Sally Thompson, and Linda Calbon, Director of Financial Management and Assurance for the General Accounting Office. Chairman Fitzgerald was the only Senator present.

Although the hearing covered several USDA financial management issues, a significant amount of time was spent discussing the USDA Office of the Inspector General (OIG) Urban Resources Partnership (URP) audit. Chairman Fitzgerald's questioned how funds appropriated by the Congress for soil conservation could be spent by USDA for certain activities, and if the USDA General Council's Office (OGC) approved using the funds for URP. Mr. Viadero explained the findings in the OIG report. The Chairman stated that the Committee would look further into the issues.

AGRICULTURE RISK PROTECTION – The House Agriculture Committee (Chairman Combest, R-TX) held a hearing on September 27, 2000 to review the implementation of the Agriculture Risk Protection Act of 2000. Witnesses included Sec. Dan Glickman along with representatives of the insurance industry. Sec. Glickman discussed the progress of the crop insurance aspects of this new law. He responded to a question regarding the Common Computing Environment. He told the committee that although there was progress regarding CCE, it was going to be a very big challenge for the next Administration to achieve. Another question was raised about USDA co-locations, which are prevented from moving forward by a provision in the law.

SNAKE RIVER WATERSHED PROJECT RECIVES HOUSE APPROVAL – On Wednesday, the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee (Chairmen Shuster, R-PA) passed a resolution approving the plan for the Snake River Watershed Project near Warren, Minnesota. A similar resolution was approved earlier this year by the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee. The project is now officially authorized under the NRCS small watershed program.

HOUSE CONFEREES TO THE AGRICULTURE APPROPRIATIONS NAMED
Conferees were named on September 28 and will meet on legislation making fiscal 2001 appropriations for programs of the Agriculture Department. The time, date and room number will be announced at a later date. The Senate conferees had been named in July. The House members are as follows:

Joe Skeen (R-NM)
James Walsh (R-NY)
Jay Dickey (R-AR)
Jack Kingston (R-GA)
George Nethercutt (R-WA)
Henry Bonilla (R-TX)
Tom Latham (R-IA)
Jo Ann Emerson (R-MO)
Bill Young (R-FL)

Marcy Kaptur (D-OH)
Rosa DeLauro (D-CT)
Maurice Hinchey (D-NY)
Sam Farr (D-CA)
Allen Boyd (D-FL)
David Obey (D-WI)

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