Ceremony, Rules and Organization

The 112th Congress convened on January 5th with many ceremonial flourishes, followed by voting in the House on rules to govern procedures and some announcements of committee and subcommittee memberships and chairmanships.

The Senate has recessed until January 25th with floor consideration of rules changes, particularly affecting parliamentary procedures surrounding the filibuster, expected to dominate at that time. The House will remain in session throughout the month.

Rules

The House adopted a package of rules changes (H.Res.5) designed to enhance transparency and to facilitate budget cutting. New rules require any newly introduced legislative proposals to be accompanied by a citation of the relevant Constitutional authority.

The Chairman of the Budget Committee (Rep. Paul Ryan, R-WI) will have the unprecedented authority to publish a discretionary spending limit for the rest of FY 2011 without a committee or floor vote. The “pay-as-you-go” rule adopted in the previous Congress has been replaced with a “cut-as-you-go” rule. The former required budget offsets to both mandatory spending increases and tax cuts and allowed tax increases or mandatory spending reductions to be used as offsets. The new rule applies only to mandatory spending increases and allows only mandatory spending reductions as offsets. New rules require that bills be available online for three days before a House floor vote and require committees to post their rules, legislation and votes online. Six year term limits are imposed for committee chairmanships.

Committees

Most of the committee announcements came from new House Republican leadership and committee chairs. Decisions have not been finalized on House Democratic committee memberships and Ranking Minority Members. Very few announcements have been made on the Senate side, particularly with regard to Subcommittee Chairs and Ranking Minority Members. Since the Majority party did not change in the Senate, there will be many fewer changes.

New Speaker John Boehner has announced that there will be a 5% cutback in administrative costs of the House of Representatives. This applies to each Member’s staff and office allowances as well as to committee staffs
and leadership offices. Further, the Speaker has directed that committee memberships be slightly reduced overall so that Members will presumably have fewer assignments and be better able to focus on their committee work.

The following are the new Chairmen in the House committees with jurisdiction over issues and programs of particular interest to floodplain managers:

- Appropriations: Rep. Harold Rogers (R-KY)
- Financial Services: Rep. Spencer Bachus (R-AL)
- Natural Resources: Rep. Doc Hastings (R-WA)
- Transportation and Infrastructure: Rep. Dan Mica (R-FL)

**Projected Agendas**

The new leadership has not given indication as to plans for House floor activity except for a vote scheduled for January 12th on repeal of the health care legislation passed in the previous Congress last spring.

The Continuing Resolution funding the federal government will expire on March 4th, so the Appropriations Committee and leadership will have to focus on passage of some form of appropriations legislation to complete funding for FY 2011. Initial projections of how much the budget can be reduced have been reduced due to recognition that half of the fiscal year will have elapsed by March 4th.

It has already been announced that there will be a delay in the usual early February release of the President’s budget request for FY 2012 until later in the month. This is at least partially due to the many delays last summer and fall in Senate action to confirm the new Director of the Office of Management and Budget. Once the budget is released, the Appropriations Committees will begin their regular series of hearings to examine the budget justifications of the departments and agencies.

The Financial Services Committee has announced plans for early action to rein in government-sponsored enterprises and to revamp portions of the Dodd-Frank financial regulatory reform legislation, particularly the new Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. There has been some realignment of subcommittee jurisdictions. The former Subcommittee on Housing and Community Opportunity will assume jurisdiction over all insurance issues, becoming the Subcommittee on Insurance, Housing and Community Opportunity. That subcommittee has jurisdiction over the National Flood Insurance Program. New Chair, Rep. Judy Biggert (R-IL), has announced an ambitious agenda to include examination of property and casualty insurance, mortgage servicing, the programs of the Department of Housing and Urban Development, terrorism risk insurance, the Community Reinvestment Act and flood insurance.

The Transportation and Infrastructure Committee has announced that the Water Resources Subcommittee will work to develop a new Water Resources Development Act (WRDA). On the subject of levees, the subcommittee will look “at ways to provide cities and towns the time and the means to get their levees investigated and, if necessary, repaired.” A new subcommittee chair has not yet been announced.

**Pre-Disaster Mitigation**

Legislation reauthorizing the Pre-Disaster Mitigation grant program for three years was passed in the very final days of the 111th Congress. The bill codifies the program as a competitive program and specifically prohibits earmarks. The measure, H.R. 1746, has now been signed by the President and is Public Law 111-351.

*All referenced legislation can be reviewed by going to: [http://thomas.loc.gov](http://thomas.loc.gov) and typing in the bill number or title.*