



washington dc update

A Change of Seasons in Washington

March 24, 2016

Spring has made its appearance in Washington with the period of peak bloom for the cherry blossoms. **Both Houses of Congress are in recess with the House not scheduled to return until April 12.** Most of the Congressional hearings over the President's proposed FY17 budget have now concluded. The next step in the process will be for Congressional Appropriators to learn exactly how much they will have to spend for the next fiscal year. This will allow them to begin FY17 markups soon after their return from Easter break. Energy and Water Appropriators are hoping to make their bill one of the first to advance. The House T&I Committee is planning to mark up its Water Resources Development Act [WRDA] bill on or about April 21 with the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee planning action soon afterwards.

Blooming cherry blossoms and progress on appropriations and authorization legislation are signs of a change of seasons in Washington. But a much more rare "change of seasons" is currently underway. Much like an exotic plant that blooms only once every several years, this "change of seasons" most notable characteristic is how infrequently it occurs. We are referring to the final year of a two-term presidency, accompanied by the emergence of a new President and their Administration. In fact, there have only been four such events in the past 28 years including Reagan/Bush to Clinton; Clinton to Bush-43; Bush to Obama; and now Obama to whoever will be elected President on November 8. That is four times in an entire generation and a reminder of why we should pay such close attention to the process. The change of seasons with regard to Presidents moves to a different rhythm than the normal political year. For example, we have already reported to the WESTCAS membership when the Congress will be



in session for the remainder of the year, including long recesses in July for the Republican and Democratic Party conventions and all of August for the run-up to the final stretch of the campaign. **Indeed, there are fewer than 40 legislative days remaining between now and Thanksgiving when the House will be in session for a full day.** After that, there is the post-election "lame duck" session of Congress.

Regardless of their party affiliation, Presidents try to project a sense of "we're still in charge" during their final year in office and while the legislative branch of government goes about its business. That should be possible for the Obama Administration for the next three months. But beginning with the Republican convention the third week of July, followed the next week by the Democratic convention, the focus will change to the personalities running to succeed President Obama. This will intensify when the nominees of both parties are selected and when the full campaign gets under way in the fall. Once the voters have determined who will be President and which party has the majority in the House and the Senate, attention only intensifies concerning "who's on first" as the new Administration and a new Congress comes to town.

With regard to water resources, including those in the Arid West, everyone can agree that the challenges far outstrip the financial means to meet them and that wise regulations are very difficult to secure. **As we enter into one of these rare "once every eight years" periods, WESTCAS and its membership need to reflect on how we will work with the incoming administration to help forge a water future for the Arid West.** While you are doing this, you might want to remember that the period we currently find ourselves in is indeed a rare moment in the history of the country. A period of peril but also one of great potential.

