

Hicks-Ray Associates

Implementing Strategies, Achieving Success



August 3, 2017

TO: WESTCAS Membership

FROM: Hicks-Ray Associates

SUBJECT: Welcome to Summer

For most of the country “summer” begins with Memorial Day weekend. But for the President and Congress, “summer” traditionally starts with the Congressional recess in August lasting until shortly after Labor Day. The House of Representatives completed its work late last week and has adjourned.

The Senate remains in session to try and address the huge backlog of nominations submitted by the Trump Administration for the 500+ Executive Branch positions and more than 100 vacant Federal Judgeships that all require Senate confirmation. This includes positions of interest to the Arid West such as the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works at the Army Corps of Engineers, the Commissioner of the Bureau of Reclamation, and the Assistant Administrator for Water at the USEPA.

Progress in the Senate in addressing the nomination backlog has been painfully slow with Republican Senators frequently having to file “cloture” to end debate and order a vote on a particular individual. This tactic has been successfully implemented but Senate parliamentary procedures require lengthy debate on any closure motion that in turn slows actual voting on nominees. There are exceptions to this general rule such as when the Senate confirmed the new Director of the FBI by a vote of 95 to 5 earlier this week.

There are also hopeful signs with regard to progress on the FY18 Appropriations cycle with the House having passed four of the 12 Subcommittee bills last week including Defense, Military Construction/Veterans, Legislative Branch, and Energy and Water Appropriations. The remaining 8 House Subcommittee bills have now been passed through full Appropriations Committee and are awaiting action on the House floor. It is our understanding that the plan is bring these 8 bills before the full House in early September. Senate Appropriators have moved 6 of their 12 bills through full Appropriations Committee.

The whole process is headed to another Continuing Resolution passed in late September in order to keep the government open after the start of the new Federal fiscal year on October 1. The nature and duration of the CR will have to be determined. Hicks-Ray is conducting a line item review of the House and Senate provisions in the FY18 Energy and Water and Agriculture Appropriations bills as well as the provisions in the House Interior and Environment Appropriations bill. This review will help the WESTCAS Board to consider and approve letters to Appropriators advocating for water related spending in the Arid West.

When will the Senate finally adjourn for the summer? We suspect that date may be tied to the when President Trump and his inner circle have to vacate the West Wing of the White House for the two weeks it will take to install and update the air conditioning system. The President is reportedly heading for a sojourn at his golf club in New Jersey. It is hard to imagine that the Senate will remain in session with both the President and the House of Representatives out of town.

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