

Hicks-Ray Associates

Implementing Strategies, Achieving Success



September 5, 2019

TO: WESTCAS Membership

FROM: Hicks-Ray Associates

SUBJECT: Congress Returns to Session Next Week

Congress returns to session next Tuesday but there are real concerns over whether it will be able to get much done. The headlines say that the House of Representatives will be in session for 13 days in September but that is misleading. The fact is that 6 of these 13 days are short ones including 3 when first votes don't occur until 6:30 PM. Pretty hard to find time for floor action on such days other than debating bills that are being considered under Unanimous Consent.

Senate Appropriators will reportedly begin considering FY2020 bills next Thursday and there is speculation that the Defense, Labor/Education/HHS, and Energy and Water Appropriations bills could be packaged together in a minibus in order to move them forward. However, that is only Senate action and not House/Senate conference. A conference will be necessary to ensure that the bills reflect the budget numbers mandated by the Bipartisan Budget Act that became law on August 2 which is approximately two months after the House's FY2020 Appropriations bills were marked up. The result is that the House funding levels will have to be reconciled with the Bipartisan Budget Act numbers.

Because of the very limited timeframe and the small number of full legislative days available, a Continuing Resolution is all but inevitable. Nobody including the President wants to see another government shutdown after September 30 so the CR process could be a fairly smooth one. One point of contention might be the length of the agreement with most speculation centering on 60 days. However, a brief glance at the Congressional calendar shows that November 30 falls on a Saturday, two days after Thanksgiving. Most of the players don't want to see the Federal government shut down over Thanksgiving weekend so another short-term CR would likely be necessary before the Congress adjourns for Thanksgiving on November 21.

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We will have a better idea for how the Appropriations process, including water resources funding, will move forward once we get a peek at the Senate FY2020 Appropriations bills that should be available starting next week. Between now and Christmas the only certainty with the Congress is uncertainty. The status of the Appropriations cycle will be thoroughly discussed during the WESTCAS Fall conference October 23-24 in Tucson. We hope to see you there!

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