

Washington Monitor

Appropriations Update: Continuing Resolution Likely

It has become a familiar game in Washington in recent years – as the federal fiscal year comes to a close on September 30, Congress scrambles to pass a continuing funding resolution (CR) to keep the government in operation. The CRs, of course, are necessary because of the failure to complete all of the 13 annual appropriations bills that fund federal programs. Predictably, fiscal year 2009 is proving to be no exception. As of the time of writing, it appears that only a few of the 13 bills will be enacted by October 1.

The bill most likely to be finished is on time is the Defense appropriations bill – a key priority for the Bush Administration given the ongoing war in Iraq. Congressional Democrats are using this to their advantage by seeking a favorable CR with increases to several key programs of interest to geographers and the science community. The thought goes that the Democrats would agree to certain provisions and funding levels the Administration is seeking in the Defense bill in return for key concessions in the continuing resolution. This could also happen with the Homeland Security and Veterans Affairs bills.

Ultimately, the Democrats may seek to extend the CR through January 20th – Inauguration Day – so that they can finalize the remaining appropriations bills with the new president. This could prove to be of enormous benefit to Democratic priorities – especially if Senator Obama is elected. The delay would also be advantageous given the election year calendar – Congress is slated to adjourn on September 26th in order to hit the campaign trail. The possibility exists, however, that Congress will return to Washington after the election to finish critical business in a lame-duck session.

So how will research accounts ultimately fare in the appropriations process? The National Science Foundation has received promising increases of about 13-14 percent in both the House and Senate appropriations committees. This would amount to approximately \$800 million in new funding – on top of the increases that occurred in the war supplemental bill. The National Institutes of Health and other research agencies – especially the energy sciences – also stand to

receive funding increases once all is said and done. Stay tuned!

The Geography of Election 2008

As we enter the homestretch of campaign 2008, the presidential election appears to be as close as the 2000 and 2004 elections were. As happened in those years, the election will likely turn on the results in a few critical “swing states”. To this end, I wanted to play pundit and share with you the geography of election 2008 – including my bold predictions.

To begin with, the states that appear to be safe for one candidate or the other are as follows – Obama States: California, Hawaii, Washington, Illinois, New York, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, Maryland, Delaware, and the District of Columbia; McCain States: Alaska, Idaho, Utah, Arizona, Montana, Wyoming, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, Louisiana, Kentucky, Tennessee, Mississippi, Alabama, and South Carolina.

States that are likely to go to one candidate, but could be the site of a surprise – Obama States: Oregon, New Mexico, Minnesota, Iowa, Wisconsin, Maine, and New Jersey; McCain States: Arkansas, Indiana, West Virginia, North Carolina, and Georgia.

The swing states – and my analysis of each: **Nevada** – McCain, of course, is from neighboring Arizona. But the Obama campaign has made a real western push. Couple that with some demographic trends towards the Democrats, and I believe Obama will win the state. **Colorado** – I’ll follow my analysis on Nevada here. Plus, the Democratic convention site of Denver is a boost for Obama. Again, an Obama win. **Missouri** – Senator Claire McCaskill (D) is a rising star and a major Obama backer. But my gut tells me McCain will make a push here in the last few days. A McCain state. **Michigan** – Mitt Romney could have really helped McCain in his native state if he had been added to the ticket. But Michigan has been hit hard by the economy – the issue Obama polls the best on. An Obama win. **Ohio** – The Buckeye State decided the 2004 election in favor of President Bush. But like Michigan, I think the economy is the top issue here. Another Obama state.

Pennsylvania – The Keystone State went for the Democrats in 2000 and 2004. But

Obama has had a tough time connecting with the state’s working class voters. Nonetheless, I think he’ll do enough to hang on. An Obama win. **Florida** – Now that the Obama/Clinton rift appears to be over, the Democrats will dispatch the Clintons heavily throughout Florida. But popular Governor Charlie Crist (R) is a real asset to McCain. The closest state in 2000 won’t be again this year. McCain wins by 4-6 percentage points. **New Hampshire** – The Granite State switched from red to blue in 2004 and the election of 2006 cemented the trend. While McCain’s maverick image has always been popular here, I think Obama will notch a win. **Virginia** – As a lifelong resident of the Old Dominion, I have watched in amazement as the Democrats have broken through in this once-reliably Republican bastion. But still, no Democratic presidential nominee has won Virginia since 1964. Though Governor Tim Kaine (D) is a major Obama booster, my gut tells me McCain will win Virginia by less than a percentage point in the closest race in the country.

So what does that all mean, you ask? If my predictions prove correct – and I’m almost certain they won’t – Barack Obama will win the election with 291 electoral votes to 247 for John McCain. But what would be the consequences for geography of a victory by either candidate? President Bush has been regarded in some quarters as an anti-science President and most experts believe that Senator McCain would do more to promote science than the Bush Administration has. But McCain has not gone as far as Senator Obama in promoting research. Obama specifically cited a need to invest in science and technology in his acceptance speech on August 28 – a theme he has repeated elsewhere on the trail and highlights on his website. It is also worth mentioning that while neither candidate is a sponsor of the Teaching Geography is Fundamental Act, the change in Administrations will likely offer an opportunity for some structural changes in a reauthorized version of No Child Left Behind – potentially including funding authorizations for geography education programs. Regardless of the outcome, it should be an exciting fall – enjoy it! ■

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