

LEGISLATIVE SUMMARY FOR: MAY 19, 1997

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LAST WEEK:

SUPPLEMENTAL FUNDING BILL PASSES HOUSE-

On Thursday, May 15th, the House passed the supplemental appropriations bill, H.R. 1469 by a vote of 244-178. The bill had been held up in procedural motions and debate earlier in the week, including controversy over funding for the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) feeding program. Of note, a provision that would have capped enrollments in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) at 14 million acres was stripped from the bill by a procedural motion brought to the floor by Rep. Bob Smith (R-OR). Smith raised precedents of the House to argue that the language limiting enrollment in CRP was authorizing language that should not be contained in an appropriations measure. The point of order was sustained and the limitation language dropped from the bill. The supplemental bill will now go to conference to be reconciled with the Senate version of the bill. This action is expected to begin on Monday.

REDMOND WINS SEAT IN NEW MEXICO'S 3RD DISTRICT-

Republican Bill Redmond won a special election Tuesday to fill the only vacant seat in Congress. The 3rd Congressional District seat in the House of Representatives was left by Bill Richardson, who resigned in February to become the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations. Redmond was boosted significantly by strong third party support as Green Party candidate, Carol Miller, received 17 percent of the vote in an eight-candidate field. Redmond hails from the Los Alamos area and is a minister. This brings the current party ratio of Republicans to Democrats to 228-206, plus 1 Independent.

USDA PHONE AND COMPUTER SYSTEMS-

Department Operations, Nutrition and Foreign Agriculture Subcommittee (Chairman Goodlatte, R-Va.) of the House Agriculture Committee held a hearing on USDA's information technology (IT) procurement practices. The hearing focused on complaints about the Department's phone and computer systems. USDA Chief Information Officer, Anne Thomson Reed, was the primary witness. Chairman Goodlatte opened the hearing by stating that in IT purchases, USDA is building an assembly line without knowing what sort of product it wants to build. He said that one stop shopping doesn't function in USDA Service Centers if various agencies cannot communicate across computer platforms. Ms. Reed said that there has been a problem with interagency coordination. She said that the current moratorium on IT purchases would allow the Department to examine and coordinate future efforts. She said that the position of Chief Information Officer is fully empowered and responsible for ensuring the necessary interagency coordination.

Rep. Marion Berry (D-AR) said that during his tenure with the Department he had a telephone that didn't function. He said that he tried for six months to get someone to fix it but to no avail. He further stated that during a recent visit to USDA he stopped in to visit

his old office and found that the telephone still didn't work. Representative Charlie Stenholm (D-TX) emphasized the need to better establish how Service Centers will function and what role technology will play. He stated that part of the blame must be directed toward Congress for not giving more explicit direction in the 1996 Farm Bill. Rep. John Thune (R-SD) said that USDA should at least have an integrated E-mail system that will allow file transfer to all employees. Chairman Goodlatte closed the hearing by stating that the current unit cost of approximately \$11,000 per year for every USDA employee is far too high for what little gains are being made. He said that in times of tightening budgets, the Department must understand that time is up and that Congress will expect and demand better expenditure of IT funds in the future.

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THIS WEEK:

Beginning on Monday, House and Senate conferees will begin reconciling differences in the Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Bill. A comparison of each bill follows:

	House (H.R. 1469)	Senate (S. 672)
Emergency Watershed Program (EWP)	\$150.7 million	\$171 million ¹
Emergency Conservation Program (ECP)	\$65 million	\$77 million
Caps CRP enrollment	NO	NO
Exempts some flood prevention projects from ESA	NO	YES (Language has been narrowed in scope)
Floodplain Easements	Allows NRCS to fund up to \$10 million	Allows NRCS to fund up to \$20 million ¹
Prohibits funding of Salmon memorandum of understanding	YES	NO
Rescinds funding for WRP	YES (\$19 million)	NO
Rescinds funding for the Fund for Rural America	YES (\$20 million)	NO
Small Orchardists -- Tree Assistance Program	\$ 9 million	\$9.5 million

¹ Amendment number 234, Sen. Conrad

IN COMMITTEE-

TIMBER AND MINING LAND BUYOUTS-

Energy and Mineral Resources Subcommittee (Chairman Cubin, R-Wyo.) of the House Resources Committee will hold a hearing on the administration's proposal to buyout timber and mining lands using revenues from the Mineral Leasing Act. This would be the first time buyouts would be funded through this act rather than the Land and Water Conservation Fund.

May 29

1:30pm

1324 Longworth Building

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LOOKING AHEAD:

MEMORIAL DAY RECESS-

The Senate has tentatively set May 24-June 1 as its next congressional recess . The House has May 22-June 2 marked on its tentative schedule to be in recess.

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