

# Coastal Connection

Published by Marlowe & Company, LLC  
Washington, DC

July 17, 2006  
Volume 4, Issue 16



## Current Issues in Washington

The Senate is scheduled to consider stem cell research legislation, as well as the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA), this week.

The House of Representatives will debate a constitutional amendment regarding marriage and a bill aimed at protecting the Pledge of Allegiance from certain challenges in court.

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The Coastal Connection is published weekly when Congress is in session, or as events warrant.

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## WRDA Scheduled for Senate Debate This Week

The Senate will consider the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) this Tuesday.

On Friday, Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist (R-TN) secured unanimous consent to bring WRDA up for debate after the Senate completes action related to stem cell legislation on July 18.

Senators are expected to vote on final passage of the bill on Wednesday.

The House of Representatives passed its version of WRDA last year by a vote of 406 to 14.

The Senate bill was approved by the Environment and Public Works Committee in April 2005.

Earlier this year, approximately 80 Senators signed a letter urging Senate leaders to bring the WRDA bill up for debate.

This week's scheduled debate is a

significant step forward. However, a final version of the bill will still need to be negotiated between the House and the Senate and approved by both chambers before it can be sent to the President for his signature.

The bill authorizes several projects and studies for the Corps of Engineers. It also provides policy guidance for the agency.

Opponents of the bill have blocked action for years because of concerns about the Corps' internal policies and project justifications. As part of the agreement to bring the bill up for debate, several "Corps reform" amendments will be offered.

WRDA bills are supposed to be passed by Congress on a two-year cycle. The last WRDA was approved in 2000.

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## Senate Approves FEMA Transformation

Last week, Senators approved a provision that would create a new agency under the jurisdiction of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to handle national crisis situations.

Under the proposed change, the

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) would be replaced by the U.S. Emergency Management Authority.

The provision faces an uncertain fate in the House of Representatives.

## Appropriations: Much Work Remains; Limited Time Available

With less than 40 scheduled days left in this legislative session, Congress still has a significant amount of work to complete on the annual appropriations bills.

While the House has passed 10 of its 11 spending bills, the Senate has only taken up and passed one.

As of today, only the Homeland Security Appropriations Act has passed both chambers.

While the outlook for appropriation measures moving to the Senate floor is uncertain, Senate Appropriations Committee Chairman Cochran (R-MS) plans to complete Committee action on the remaining FY 2007 bills this week. De-

fense; Labor-HHS-Education; Military Construction; and the Transportation-Treasury-Housing bills will be considered at a mark up scheduled for Thursday, July 20 at 2 p.m.

The Defense Appropriations bill is expected to clear the full Senate prior to the month-long August recess.

Complicating the schedule even more is the upcoming mid-term election and the desire of the Republican and Democratic leadership to allow Members to spend the maximum amount of time in their districts leading up to Election Day.

Many of the smaller and normally

less-controversial bills are being held up because of funding battles that have divided the Republican Party between fiscal conservatives and moderates. In addition, progress may be limited as both parties offer contentious amendments aimed at shoring up support within their respective political bases (i.e., raising the minimum wage).

Defense and Homeland Security have the greatest chances of being cleared for the President's signature prior to the fall elections.

For more information about the status of the FY 2007 Appropriations bills, please refer to the chart on page 3.

## Coastal News Briefs

- The Senate Appropriations Committee approved \$4.43 billion for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), \$753 million over the President's budget request and \$1.04 billion above the House-passed funding level. The bill also includes \$630.5 million for the National Ocean Service.
- A deal was struck between several Senators last week that would open up parts of the Gulf of Mexico to expanded oil and gas drilling. The plan would also increase revenue sharing with Gulf Coast states. Senate leaders may try to schedule floor debate on offshore energy production sometime later this month.



- Multiple press reports over the past week have focused on the skyrocketing insurance rates in coastal markets. Florida Governor Jeb Bush told WESH-TV that the availability and cost of insurance is the state's "number one short-term challenge."
- The House of Representatives will consider the reauthorization of the Marine Mammals Protection Act this week. The bill includes a provision to reduce the accidental catch of marine mammals by commercial fishermen.

Bill	House Subcommittee	House Committee	House Floor	Senate Subcommittee	Senate Committee	Senate Floor	Conference Version Approved	President
Agriculture	5/3/06	5/9/06	5/23/06	6/20/06	6/22/06			
Science-State-Justice-Commerce (House)	6/14/06	6/20/06	6/29/06	_____	_____	_____		
Commerce-Justice-Science (Senate)	_____	_____	_____	7/11/06	7/13/06			
Defense	6/7/06	6/13/06	6/20/06					
DC (Senate)	_____	_____	_____	_____	7/13/06			
Energy & Water	5/11/06	5/17/06	5/24/06	6/27/06	6/29/06			
Foreign Ops (House)	5/19/06	5/25/06	6/9/06	_____	_____	_____		
State & Foreign Ops (Senate)	_____	_____	_____	_____	6/29/06			
Homeland Security	5/11/06	5/17/06	6/6/06	6/27/06	6/29/06	7/13/06		
Interior	5/4/06	5/10/06	5/18/06	6/27/06	6/29/06			
Labor-HHS-Education	6/7/06	6/13/06						
Leg Branch	_____	5/25/06	6/7/06	_____	6/22/06			
MQL-VA (House)	5/4/06	5/10/06	5/19/06	_____	_____	_____		
Mil Con & VA (Senate)	_____	_____	_____					
Transportation-Treasury-HUD-Judiciary-DC (House)	5/25/06	6/6/06	6/14/06	_____	_____	_____		
Transportation-Treasury-Judiciary-HUD (Senate)	_____	_____	_____					