

Thursday, August 28th, 2008

Preview of September: Right now we are in the midst of the two weeks that comprise the quadrennial national conventions of both parties. These events will suck up all the political wind until the gavel falls to close the Republican convention in Minneapolis. Congress goes back into session on September 8th, which will begin a 3 week sprint until we go home again to campaign for the November elections. By the way, this is a normal recess date particularly during presidential election years.

So, what's going to be on the agenda for those 3 weeks? Not too much. The House could probably pass some stuff but the Senate will be the choke point. Since I have been in Congress, I have learned why so many things pass the House and then don't pass or are never taken up in the Senate, regardless of which party is in charge of either house. First of all, in order to become law, all bills must pass both the Senate and the House. That means that Senators must do the same work to pass the same number of bills that we do. But there are only 100 of them and there are 435 of us. This means, for example, that although I am on 2 committees (many House members serve on only one), Senators usually serve on 5 or 6. Secondly, the Senate is supposed to be the more "deliberative" body and think about things more. Thirdly, because of their "cloture rule," most bills require a supermajority of 60 votes to pass the Senate whereas the House works on a simple majority most of the time. And finally, each individual Senator has the power according to the rules of the Senate, to slow down or even stop legislation whereas only the Speaker and/or Chairmen of Committees have such power in the House. Furthermore, as of the date of this writing, at least 3 Senators will be running on a national ticket and will likely not be around to get those 60 votes needed for cloture.

Because of this, and the fact that much of the large or controversial legislation has already

failed or been pushed off until next year, we are likely to only deal with that which is on deadline. The main deadline issue is the federal budget which must see some legislation by October 1st. It is not expected that any of the 12 appropriations bills that fund the federal government will pass both houses by this deadline. So, we will move to pass a "Continuing Resolution" (CR) which will fund the government at last year's levels until after the new president is sworn into office in January, 2009. It is very unusual to have not passed a single appropriations bill on time but is not unusual to have some of them unfinished and thereby require a CR of some sort.

But there is a wrinkle this year which will make the CR passage more problematic. The executive ban on offshore drilling was lifted by President Bush in July. The Congressional ban is still in place. But it expires by its own terms on September 30th. So, if legislation is not passed to extend the ban, offshore drilling will be permitted everywhere (which some restrictions inside 25 miles) on October 1st. I think that would be a good thing. It is expected that the provision to extend it will be included in the CR. If it is and it passes, the president will likely veto it setting up another government shutdown standoff.

But another scenario which is becoming more likely is that Pelosi puts some sort of partial lifting of the ban on the floor for a vote which would also extend that ban in most places. Depending on how "partial" it is, expect this Congressman to oppose anything that doesn't really allow us to go get most if not all of the oil and gas reserves we have.

There has also been talk of the Senate bringing forth a "stimulus II" package that will include a lot of new government spending (and more deficits) disguised as economic stimulus. I didn't support stimulus I, so I am unlikely to support stimulus II. But since Senator Obama's economic package for 2009 has a big stimulus II in it, it is becoming more likely that Democratic leadership will not want to pre-empt their candidate's proposal. So, we may not see this either.

This period will have more activity as people who have much smaller and less controversial bills that have passed one house or the other, work to get those passed by the second house before they all die, the clock resets, and you have to start all over again in 2009.

But as they say in sports whenever someone confidently predicts the outcome of a contest, "that's why they play the game." And the Congressional "game playing" will recommence shortly.

I will keep you apprised of the score.

Until next time, I remain respectfully,

Congressman John Campbell