

Monday Morning Washington Update – November 17, 2008

There is much going on in and around Washington this week – from the reconvening of the Senate portion of the 110th Congress and the beginning of orientation for those newly-elected to the 111th Congress (even as we still await final results in Alaska, Georgia and Minnesota) to the start-up of a very large juggernaut – the official Presidential Transition Office, which is expected to have 450 employees at work by week's end. You are reading very interesting reports of potential Cabinet appointments for Hillary Clinton and New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson and more – no need to report on those, since we have no real insider knowledge.

But we do have news to share regarding efforts which will influence the marketplace for recreation products and the management of America's Great Outdoors for recreation.

Recreation leaders gathered in Washington last week and discussed the situation facing the industry, including the boat and RV manufacturing and retail businesses. They took part in sessions with senior Washington figures long active on issues key to recreation.

The ARC board outlined several key steps needed immediately. The first was to develop a clear report on the challenges now facing many recreation businesses, primarily arising from very low consumer confidence – hardly surprising after 90 days of both Presidential candidates touting their commitment to rescuing the nation from economic problems – and from the changes in credit markets, both for consumers and for businesses. The auto industry has prepared its report on the dire consequences of today's climate on the "Big Three" and has reinforced traditional Congressional supporters with surprising new advocates, including House Financial Services Committee Chair Barney Frank (D-MA).

The second step is to develop an assessment of grass-roots capabilities, which will focus on those Members of Congress most likely to be interested in addressing recreation industry needs and on our capabilities to reach motivated constituents of those Members – including those whose jobs are clearly on the line.

A third step is to compile a list of actions which would be of clear help to the recreation industry, including those of benefit to small businesses generally, as well as those specifically targeted at the recreation industry's needs and special circumstances. ARC leaders also agreed that real economic recovery isn't likely until consumer confidence rebounds – but that now is the time to act to prevent any barriers that would hamper sales when the rebound comes.

One of our targets is the outgoing Administration. Treasury Secretary Paulson articulated a key change in the Bush Administration's strategy last week, talking about re-energizing consumer lending for cars, education and supporting credit card programs. We are working to make certain that purchases of American-built recreation products, in particular, are a concern to the Secretary.

Recreation leaders also heard four influential Washington figures – who are now in the private sector but who have held key government posts in past Administrations (and may even reappear in the Obama Administration!). The four were unanimous in telling the recreation community that the stakes are indeed high, with huge challenges and huge opportunities. They urged recreation leaders to relate recreation to jobs and the

economy, to innovative healthcare advances and to “going green” – the key interests of the Obama Administration. Doing so will unlock resources for recreation when traditional budget initiatives will be tremendously constrained by spending on economic stimulus and war costs in the Middle East. For a full report on the advice from these Washington leaders, see www.funoutdoors.com.

The Obama Transition Team for America’s Great Outdoors, now largely in place, includes familiar faces. David Hayes, who served as Deputy Secretary at Interior during the Clinton years, will run the transition efforts for EPA, Interior, Energy, and Agriculture. Areas of special interest to recreation in the Transition, including parks and public lands, will be the focus of two other well known people: John Leshy, former Interior Solicitor, and Don Barry, former Interior Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks.

It is important to note that participation in the Transition Office does not guarantee a role in the new Administration. In fact, we are being told that the President-elect is specifically committed to bringing new faces to Washington to mix with those with real Washington experience.

Also of note last week was the meeting of the Outdoor Resources Review Group, assembled at the suggestion of Senators Lamar Alexander (R-TN) – who enjoyed a very big re-election victory on November 4 – and Jeff Bingaman (D-NM). The 17-member group, which also includes two key governors, is focusing on developing its message to the new Administration and Congress and is likely to move beyond advocacy of land protection to a more comprehensive advocacy of recreation programs as key to healthy people, communities and environment. One of the key facets of this week’s meeting was redefining infrastructure beyond just roads and dams to include parks and the structure of a new “green economy.”

And two final “good-news” topics: First, we can report broad and growing support for an exciting new national-service campaign that could put 100,000 youth – or more – to work on public lands and reward a year of effort with sizeable educational benefits for them, while also producing significant benefits to parks and other public lands and building new enthusiasm for active outdoor lifestyles.

And second, House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Chairman Jim Oberstar (D-MN) is playing an active role in championing infrastructure investments as a key component of economic-recovery efforts, including investments in parks and other public lands. He has outlined a new framework for the next surface transportation law, a five-year effort due by year end, that would involve federal spending of as much as \$500 billion, continue scenic byways and trail efforts, and articulate a new goal for transportation agencies as keystones of “livability.”

Over the next few weeks, I'll share information about the new Congress and about other opportunities to improve future prospects for recreation in America. Until then, think jobs, health and being "green."

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