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EDITORIAL

Infrastructure Negotiations Loom In Congress January 8, 2018

A series of negotiations in Congress are already underway on infrastructure issues.

In the House, retiring Rep. Bill Shuster has said he will devote his remaining time as chair of the House Transportation and Infrastructure committee to infrastructure, including getting a water resources development bill passed within the two-year window he wants to become a standard again.

In testimony before the Senate Subcommittee on Transportation and Infrastructure on December 22, Tim Parker, speaking as chairman of the board of directors of Waterways Council Inc., reiterated the importance of Congress taking action on lock and dam replacement and maintenance, as well as changing the cost-share for construction of deep-draft ports from a 50/50 federal-nonfederal split to a more equitable 75/25 split, which would speed up the work.

Of more immediate concern, though, is the next set of negotiations for a budget to fill out the rest of the fiscal year, since a stopgap budget measure expires January 19. A particular goal for the WCI here is making sure that \$10 million to keep the Navigation and Ecosystem Sustainability Program going is included.

Since President Donald Trump announced his infrastructure agenda in broad form last year, the makeup of Congress has changed. As noted in the Washington Waves column this issue, the election of Democrat Doug Jones to one of Alabama's Senate seats leaves the Republicans with 51 votes, versus 47 for Democrats and two independents who caucus with the Democrats. It usually takes at least 60 votes to pass significant legislation.

Infrastructure often is and should always be a bipartisan issue. Trump has promised to spend \$1 trillion on infrastructure, but experts say more is needed. More important, few in either party agree with Trump that private financing either can or should make up 80 percent of that spending.

Trump's infrastructure agenda faces many challenges. This may help explain why he is unveiling its details this month as a statement of principles rather than a specific legislative agenda. The former leaves more room for inevitable negotiations and compromise, and makes it easier to declare victory after compromise.

If that is true, it should be encouraging for infrastructure advocates who hope to preserve important programs and to make sure that spending is sufficient, equitable, reliable and public.

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