



What's ahead for Washington this week

By Jon H. Harsch

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Washington, Dec. 27 – This four-day week leading up to the New Year's Day holiday on Friday promises to be a quiet one, at least on the surface. Congress will be out of town, with "No events scheduled." Ditto for much of the federal government. But while Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) promises "to just sit back and watch my rabbits eat my cactus" for the next week or so, beneath the surface there will be plenty of hard work – and active horse-trading.

Now that the Senate has passed its own version of healthcare reform legislation, in Congress staffers and lobbyists will begin the challenging process of ironing out differences between the House and Senate versions. The Democrats' hope is to have a Senate/House conference committee agree on a final version which can be passed and signed into law early in 2010. Meanwhile, as promised by Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY), Republicans will continue their efforts to kill the bill.

On another front, the White House and USDA will continue their efforts to drum up support for cap-and-trade climate legislation as the best, most market-oriented approach to combating global warming. So even with Congress away, expect to hear more from Democrats like Sens. Ben Nelson (NE), Mary Landrieu (LA), Evan Bayh (IN), and Kent Conrad (ND) who call for scrapping the cap-and-trade system in favor of a less radical approach to allow for a more gradual transition to less polluting renewable energy.

Backroom maneuvering will also continue on two other White House priorities – crafting a jobs package and finalizing financial regulatory reform legislation. It's no coincidence that all of the top issues – healthcare reform, cap-and-trade, and financial reform are being promoted by Democrats as ways to add jobs to the still struggling U.S. economy. It's also no surprise to find Republicans united in charging that healthcare reform, cap-and-trade, and financial reform all will cost jobs and undermine the U.S. economy. Count on those contrasting world views to become even more in conflict as we move closer to November's mid-term elections.

Friday, Jan. 1, 2010

- Happy New Year to All!

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