

Digging out in DC – with snow giving Congress more excuses for more delays

By Jon H. Harsch

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Washington, Feb. 11 – For those determined to slow the wheels of “big government,” the two heavy snowfalls which closed down the federal government for the past four days couldn’t have come at a better time. They’re even looking forward to the next snowfall, expected Monday.

Just when the Obama administration and the House and Senate Democratic leadership were focused on passing jobs legislation ASAP and getting stalled climate change and financial reform legislation back on track, everything came to a snowy halt – except for Sen. Kent Conrad (D-ND) and a handful of his determined colleagues. The federal government was shut down but Conrad opened a postponed, near-empty Senate Budget Committee hearing Thursday by saying that after some early morning shoveling, “those of us from North Dakota feel right at home with these conditions.”



Two feet of snow & Jon H. Harsch both covering Capitol Hill this week. Photo: Agri-Pulse.

Thanks to cell phones and laptops, much of the negotiating over the backlogged bills has continued despite the snow. And Thursday began with Sens. Max Baucus (D-MT) and Chuck Grassley (R-IA) unveiling their 361-page draft “Hiring Incentives to Restore Employment Act” (HIRE Act) – only to have their bill immediately shot down by Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) as overly generous to Republicans. But not only were areas schools closed this week, but those of us too old for school were enjoying the liberating no-school-today

feeling as we marveled at how much snow there was everywhere – and how cold it was with 55 MPH winds making any snow shoveling and road plowing very impermanent.

Another impressive aspect of this record-breaking winter in Washington was to see National Guard troops zipping around the city's empty streets in their Humvees, rushing doctors, nurses and patients to where they needed to be. One Guardsman commented that he'd been prepared well for this unexpected duty – because not only was the snow just as deep as he'd dealt with in Afghanistan, but he said pedestrians here seem just as careless about stepping in front of speeding Humvees as the Afghans were.

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