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NIOSH AIHA Occupational
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HAPPENINGS FROM THE HILL

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New Congress Convenes – But Don't Expect Many Changes

The 109th Session of Congress convened in early January with a few new faces, but is generally looked upon as “more of the same”. With Republicans increasing their slim majority by a small number, most believe that three major issues – tax reform, tort reform and social security, will dominate the first year of this session. Add to this the continuing situation in Iraq and most do not expect issues like occupational health and safety to receive much attention.

The administration has already hinted that the fiscal year '06 budget will be very tight. Early talk is that most program will be level-funded and many others will actually receive a decrease. What will happen with OSHA and NIOSH remains to be seen, but after both received respectable increases in '05, AIHA doesn't feel there will be many additional dollars put forth.

Occupational Health and Safety

As to who will be controlling the agenda for occupational health and safety, it may be a little early to tell. What we do know is that Senator Michael Enzi (R-WY) has moved up from subcommittee chairman to full committee chair of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee. While we hoped this would mean even more of a focus on issues of importance to AIHA, it now looks as if this may not be the case. Most believe the full committee will have a full plate dealing with the issue of pensions. And some say that Senator Enzi will not move forward with his previous offerings of the “SAFE Act”. As for the subcommittee chairmanship, the committee has yet to meet to determine who will chair this subcommittee. The top name being talked about at this time is Senator John Ensign (R-NV). Senator Ensign has not shown a particular interest in OSHA issues in the past, so will just have to wait and see what transpires.

In the House, few changes are coming. Rep. Charlie Norwood (R-GA) will still lead the subcommittee overseeing OSHA. Rep. Norwood has indicated he will move his OSHA reform bills through the House as soon as possible. In the last session, Rep. Norwood saw his bills easily pass the House, only to be stopped cold in the Senate with no one taking the lead. Unfortunately for Rep. Norwood, the same could hold true this time around.

Changes at the Agencies

The most awaited change in federal agencies will be who will replace John Henshaw at OSHA. At this time, it looks like three names continue to be discussed as the leading candidates. The three are Dr. John Howard, currently the head of NIOSH; Jim Thornton, Director of Environmental, Health and Safety and Northrop Grumman in Newport News; and Horace (Topper) Thompson, a lawyer. Of course, as most know, Jim Thornton is a past president of AIHA and is the current president of the Academy of Industrial Hygiene. Notwithstanding the fact that Jim's name is on the "short list", Jim has not indicated whether or not he is seriously interested. No word on when the appointment will be made.

Over at NIOSH, much will depend on whether Dr. Howard is named to head OSHA. And no word yet on who might take over at the EPA, since Mike Leavitt resigned to become Secretary of HHS.

State Legislatures Begin With Flurry of Bill Introduced

Nearly all of the state legislatures have convened for the year and the number of bills introduced continues to grow each day. Early checks find about 50 to 100 bills being introduced each day that AIHA is reviewing for possible interest. Some involve mold, others involve the reporting of health and safety violations and still others cover general interest in the issue of OH&S.

Federal and State Legislative Action Centers

Visit the AIHA Federal Legislative Action Center to stay abreast of national issues important to occupational health and safety. The center can be found within the members-only section of the AIHA web page.

The State Center offers AIHA members the opportunity to monitor all state legislative sites, scan IH professional recognition/title protection laws in states where adopted, and even review and follow all state legislation being monitored in the state legislatures throughout the year. Included under each state site is access to the various state agencies, including the Governor's office and OSHA state plan sites. If professional recognition/title protection legislation has been enacted in a particular state, this law can also be found.

Another important feature is member access to each of the weekly legislative/regulatory reports sent to each state. With this access, members can follow any piece of legislation that may be of interest.

For information on any of the items in this report, please contact Aaron Tripler.