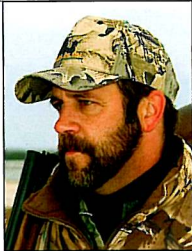


# CAPITOL COMMENTS

## The More Things Change



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In the months following the 2006 elections, Washington has been abuzz about the change in leadership in both the House and Senate. Immediately following the start of the 110th Congress,

Democrats and Republicans alike extolled the virtues of bipartisanship, pledged to work closely together, and promised to do the peoples' work. Well, that lasted about as long as it took you to read these few sentences. Even an historic election and change of leadership doesn't seem to have taught the Washington crowd anything. It appears that we are back to business as usual.

It is too early to predict what impact a Democratic-controlled Congress will have on conservation. What we do know is that changes in committee leadership may shift the attention and direction of those committees on issues that should concern most sportsmen.

In the Senate, there are four primary committees that deal with sportsmen's interests: Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry; Energy and Natural Resources; Environment and Public Works; and Appropriations.

In the House, the Committees on Agriculture, Natural Resources, Energy and Commerce, and Appropriations deal directly with our issues.

Although other committees weigh in on topics of interest, these committees will deal directly with public-land management, energy issues, climate change, and funding for conservation.

Changes in committee leadership result in a shift in oversight, debate, and policy. Perhaps the most visible example of this change is found in the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works. The incoming chair is a proponent of addressing climate change, while the outgoing chair called climate change a hoax. Another example is the House Committee on Natural Resources' "110th Congress Agenda of American Values." This document will bring both smiles and raised eyebrows to those concerned about conservation and hunting. An unresolved budget and Farm Bill demand our heightened awareness of this new congressional composition.

These shifts in leadership, direction, interests, funding, and policy have occurred in every committee in Congress. Further, lobbyists and interest groups' influence will have a dramatic effect on the issues addressed by Congress. As a result of this influence and the upcoming 2008 presidential election, many of us fear that

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the next two years will see little change in the partisan gridlock that we suffered during the past few years. The political influence that hunters and anglers have earned will be tested by the change in congressional control. Our relationship with the current administration, one forged with a Republican-majority congress, may be altered. However, if we continue to demand science-based management and policy, welcome the opportunity to work with all members of Congress, and maintain a coalition

of respected national conservation groups, we should continue to be an effective voice and force for conservation.

Critical issues such as energy development's effect on fish and wildlife habitat, Farm Bill conservation programs, funding for federal land-management agencies, funding for state fish and wildlife conservation, tax incentives for conservation efforts, access to public and private land for hunting, and potential climate-change impacts on our natural resources will undoubtedly require the attention of current and future sessions of Congress. All of these issues affect hunters and conservationists. How these issues will fare in the national debate depends in large part on our ability to work cooperatively and productively. I cannot adequately stress the importance of that effort.

What is most important is that conservation by its very nature requires more than a two-, four-, or six-year political commitment. Although most in Congress measure their success by reelection results, our work is never truly finished, and success is measured each and every day, now and into the future. No one political party can adequately represent all the interests of conservation-minded citizens. Politics and conservation operate on different time scales. Conservation is focused on providing long-term sustainability of resources for the public. Pinchot, borrowing Bentham's quote, defined conservation as, "the greatest good for the greatest number in the long run."

Organizations like the Boone and Crockett Club should approach "long run" conservation advocacy with that view in mind. A bipartisan approach to dealing with issues sometimes seems counterproductive to political expediency. On issues that matter to us, we have supporters and non-supporters on both sides of the aisle. The change in the control of Congress should remind us that neither political party will remain in control forever. However, our commitment to conservation must. ■

