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WASHINGTON REPORT

Western Skies Strategies, November 2009

Western Skies Strategies (WSS) is a full-service bipartisan government relations and public affairs firm dedicated to representing agricultural, rural, and Native American interests in our nation's capital. WSS is a unique presence on the national scene, because it follows the code of the West—where a reputation is based on your handshake, hardy work ethic, and good word....

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■ BAUCUS BILL PASSES WITH BI-PARTISAN SUPPORT THROUGH SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE, PELOSI PLEDGES "PUBLIC OPTION" IN HOUSE VERSION OF REFORM

The United States Senate made its opening move on national health reform with a 14-9 vote in the powerful Senate Finance Committee, passing the "Baucus Plan", which would require almost all people currently uninsured to obtain coverage, bar insurers from denying coverage because of pre-existing conditions, and offer financial incentives for low income Americans to get coverage. According to the Congressional Budget Office, the plan would cost an estimated \$829 billion over 10 years and be paid for by taxes, fees and reductions in Medicare costs. Thirteen Democrats and one Republican, Maine's Olympia Snowe, voted to push the Baucus Plan through the Senate Finance Committee. Sen. Baucus, described the passage as "Our opportunity to make history."

In order for the "Baucus Bill" to become law, it would need to garner 60 votes in the Senate, and perhaps even more difficult, pass the House, where many Democratic leaders are standing firm in their commitment to reject any bill that does not offer a public health insurance option, which the Baucus bill does not. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi recently said that a public insurance option is "imperative to help middle-class families afford insurance — and will be included in the strongest form possible in the House's health care bill."

On a recent conference call with reporters, Sen. Baucus stressed that the public insurance option is still very much "alive". Baucus went on to say that Senate Democrats are deliberating over several different public option scenarios, including "Medicare-light", an option that would put the government on an "even playing field" with private insurers, and a government plan that states could opt in or out of. Additionally the Baucus plan is coming under fire from leading

Senate Democrats such as Kerry, Schumer, and Stabenow over the 40% proposed tax on high-end private health insurance plans known as "Cadillac plans." The House is scheduled to pass their version of a Health Reform bill early next month.

At the time this Newsletter is going to print, Senate democrats sealed the 60-vote majority it needed to advance the health care legislation.

CLIMATE CHANGE BILL FACES MANY CHALLENGES IN SENATE

Democratic Senator John Kerry, one of the key sponsors of a sweeping Climate Change bill sponsored by his colleague Barbara Boxer and backed by the White House, is scheduled to sit down with Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid in the coming days to set a timeline for committees to finish up their work on climate legislation, which could wrap-up as soon as Thanksgiving. However, despite enjoying bipartisan support in the Senate and strong support from President Obama, the climate bill continues to face an uphill battle in for passage in the full Senate, where 60 votes are needed to prevent a filibuster of the bill, and many moderate Democrats are maintaining their opposition.

Senator Barbara Boxer, (D-CA) who sponsored the bill, has been working to detail provisions in it that are aimed at helping the coal industry adapt to the new system, key to getting support from coal state Democrats. However, Sen. Jay Rockefeller (D-WV) indicated that the existing provisions will not be enough to gain his support." There is no deal on coal" Rockefeller was recently quoted as saying. The legislation rests on the implementation of a controversial "cap and trade" provision, which would put stricter limits on emissions, combined with a carbon market where companies can buy and sell emissions. It is this key piece of the climate bill which is the most troublesome for moderate Democrats.

A number of moderate Republicans have suggested that it would be easier to secure passage of significant climate legislation if provisions were added in for support for coal, offshore oil exploration, as well as nuclear storage, recycling, and power plants. John McCain, who authored a 2005 bill climate change bill was recently quoted saying “I can’t negotiate without a robust nuclear provision. You cannot significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions without nuclear power; that’s my position.”

Despite the difficulty in getting support from Republicans and moderate Democrats, Democratic leaders are continuing to forge ahead, hoping to quickly get climate change legislation ready for passage. Another roadblock facing the legislation is that so far, of the six committees involved in shaping the bill, five of them, Foreign Relations, Commerce, Environment and Public Works, Finance, and Agriculture have yet to take it up. Sen. Boxer recently announced that she is planning to mark-up the bill in early November, and in the coming weeks her committee will be hosting three days of hearings which will include testimony from a variety of experts, including White House cabinet officials.

U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE REPORTS RECORD SPENDING ON LOBBYING IN 2009

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce spent a record \$34.7 million to lobby the government in July, August and September, according to their recent lobbying disclosure report. The Chamber’s expenditures on lobbying were 68% higher than what the group spent during the same period in 2008. A Chamber of Commerce spokesperson said the group has spent so much on lobbying because “Congress has taken on the most complex and significant issues that our country faces, including health care, climate change, and new regulations on Wall Street. We felt we needed to make our voice heard.”

OBAMA ADMINISTRATION RE-DIRECTS TARP MONEY TO SMALL BUSINESSES

The Fed's Troubled Assets Relief Program, or "TARP", has fallen under scrutiny from both the media and politicians, not only because of its massive, tax-payer funded \$700 billion price-tag, but also because most of the TARP money has fallen into the hands of troubled "big banks," whose loose lending and investment practices many hold accountable for the nation's current economic woes.

However, under Obama's newly announced TARP plan, small businesses will have an opportunity to apply for low-interest loans through local banks, which must possess less than \$1 billion in assets to qualify for the plan. Small businesses will be able to borrow money at a 3 percent rate, lower than the usual 5 percent though the new program. Community development financial institutions, which provide credit to low-income urban and rural areas, will be able to borrow money from TARP at a rate of just 2 percent. These banks will be required to submit plans on lending to small businesses, as well as present quarterly progress reports to the federal government.

From the President's Desk

Howdy Friends,

It's been an exciting fall season here at Western Skies Strategies (WSS). We are pleased at the level of success that our groups are achieving here in Washington, D.C. The U.S. Cattlemen's Association just wrapped up its fourth fly-in. WSS arranged and organized all four of the fly-ins and we were pleased with the successes that resulted from participant's involvement in these events.

WSS assisted the Society for Range Management (SRM) on its fall fly-in. This was the first time that SRM had Washington assistance on a fly-in. WSS helped set up meetings and sat in on key agency meetings. We are hoping to build on the work and involvement with SRM on the upcoming fly-ins. Fortunately SRM has an impressive staff and group of knowledgeable and veteran leaders that know the federal agency process. The SRM delegation did a fine job of communicating the concerns and goals that SRM has for 2009 and 2010.

A look at the current political and policy setting here in Washington is a lot like flying over the forest and trying to spot a flower. That is certainly the case if you are working on a specific issue that does not involve healthcare or climate change. Granted appropriations bills are advancing and several have been signed by the President, the bulk of standalone bills and projects are on hold as the Members in both the House and Senate hammer out health care goals and concerns. If you are looking to advance your organization's issue now is the critical time to prepare for the 2nd Session of the 111th Congress. Give Western Skies Strategies a call, and we'll walk you through the upcoming calendar and how you can deliver the policies that benefit your organization, business or educational institution.

To all the WSS newsletter followers that are interested in grants, I am proud to say that

during these past few months WSS has kicked it into overdrive on grant writing and research on grant opportunities. 2010 will be a big year for the WSS clients who are seeking grant dollars. If you are in need of grant dollars you need to contact WSS today as we will be submitting grant proposals right out of the chutes here in the New Year.

On the staff front, WSS is pleased to announce that Shawna Croft has been named the Director of Client Relations! Shawna has assisted WSS from the start in 2007. As 2009 winds down and the new year of 2010 fires up, Shawna will be playing a more involved role in a host of issues. Shawna is a native Montanan and first generation descendent of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes. If you have the opportunity to work with Shawna, you'll know right away why we consider her the pride of Montana and WSS!

Friends, the Holidays are fast approaching. Please take some time and slow down. Find the time you didn't think you had and just "be" with family and friends. Nearly a year ago I lost my Uncle Lee to brain cancer. My uncle lived life to the fullest with family and friends, yet his years were cut way short. Our family has such fond memories of Lee and how he made time for family. Looking back over this past year, the road has been long and the emails, never-ending; however, in honor of Lee I tried to made time to be with family and friends. Admittedly I fell short, and I hope to work harder in the New Year to establish that heralded balance of work and time spent with family and friends. To each and every one of you, the best advice I can give to finding success with your organization, business, or educational institution is to strive for the proper balance in work and with your personal time!

Ride Tall,
Jess Peterson, President and Founder