

Washington Watch - 113th Congress: Focus on the Republican House

Article By:

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When U.S. citizens went to the polls on November 6, 2012, they voted for the status quo: President Obama was reelected to a second term, Democrats built upon their majority in the Senate, and Republicans suffered a net loss of eight seats and held onto a comfortable majority in the House of Representatives.

House Speaker John Boehner (R-OH) has emerged from the election in a strengthened position, as his strategy to safeguard the GOP majority in the House was successful. As the final races are decided, Speaker Boehner's majority is expected to be 234 despite the redistricting efforts in several states—Illinois, California and Maryland—to make the map more favorable for Democrats.

As the Republican Conference gathered on November 14, 2012, to reelect its leaders, the top-tier leadership—Speaker Boehner, Majority Leader Eric Cantor (R-VA) and Majority Whip Kevin McCarthy (R-CA)—remained intact.

As lawmakers return to Washington, D.C., this week, House GOP leaders will finalize decisions on committee chairmanships for the 113th Congress. Chairmanship changes of note include the expected new chairmen of the House Judiciary Committee and the House Financial Services Committee, Congressmen Bob Goodlatte (R-VA) and Jeb Hensarling (R-TX), respectively.

Goodlatte is seen as more mild-mannered than outgoing Chairman Lamar Smith (R-TX), who will step down as a result of the Republican Conference's term limits on committee chairmen. While both Smith and Goodlatte are known as social and fiscal conservatives, Smith's committee leadership focused more on the traditional "God, Guts, Guns" mindset of previous conservative chairmen. As the incoming chairman, Goodlatte will likely focus more on issues of IP reform, patent protection and immigration matters. With regard to immigration, it is important to note that all such reform efforts will need to start in the Judiciary Committee, and that Goodlatte is on record opposing a lottery-based visa system in favor of one that would reserve visas for the high-tech/innovation field.

Regarding the Financial Services Committee, Hensarling is seen as less prone to bipartisan compromise than outgoing Chairman Spencer Bachus (R-AL), who has also reached his term limit. A less harmonious tone between the majority and minority committee leaders is possible—even likely—as the 113th Congress prepares to tackle banking, housing and mortgage matters. Further,

the continued implementation of Dodd-Frank (the comprehensive financial regulatory law) is likely to be met with ongoing resistance from the GOP-led committee.

As the Republican-led House continues to organize itself for the 113th Congress, attention must be paid concurrently to the lame duck session of the 112th Congress, particularly as House and Senate leaders of both parties renew negotiations amongst themselves and with the White House on the so-called “fiscal cliff” that is rapidly approaching. Please stay tuned for future McDermott publications that address the myriad of policy issues surrounding these crucial negotiations on tax rates, sequestration cuts, Medicare reimbursements and other budgetary matters.

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