What Happened?

As anticipated, Republicans took back the majority in the House of Representatives and made considerable gains in the Senate on November 2. Although a number of races are still too close to call, Republicans will pick up between 64 and 66 seats in the House, at least 25 more than the 39 they needed to reclaim control of the chamber for the first time since 2006. Republicans won approximately 10 more seats than the 55 expected by most political forecasters, even defeating several powerful Democratic members such as Armed Services Committee Chairman Ike Skelton (D-MO), Budget Committee Chairman John Spratt (D-SC), and Transportation and Infrastructure Chairman James Oberstar (D-MN). In the Senate, Republicans did not win the ten seats needed for a majority, but significantly cut into the Democratic advantage in the upper chamber, claiming at least six Democratic seats.

Widespread Republican gains had been forecast by political handicappers for months amid rising public anger over the economy, jobs, and the deficit. Voters directed their anger towards the party in power and in the process dealt a blow to the agenda of President Obama.

What Does it Mean?

With a Republican-controlled House and a narrow Democratic majority in the Senate, much of the 112th Congress will likely be consumed by partisan gridlock. Republican Leader John Boehner (R-OH), who is in line to become Speaker of the House when the new Congress is sworn-in this January, has proposed reducing federal non-defense domestic discretionary spending to fiscal year (FY) 2008 levels, and many conservative candidates advocate for even further reductions. The rest of the House agenda is likely to be driven by the concerns of the business and finance communities, including a push to “repeal and replace” parts of the healthcare reform bill, decrease regulations, and increase oversight of the Administration through a series of hearings and investigations.

Despite retaining a slim majority, Senate Democrats will be hard-pressed to garner the 60 votes necessary to overcome a filibuster of any legislation. Having experienced the difficulty of this task with a caucus of 59, expect Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV), who himself narrowly survived a tight reelection contest, to be more selective about bringing legislation to the floor. While the research and education communities are not dependent on the passage of new legislation -- with the exception of appropriations -- the function of the federal government depends on some cooperation to move new initiatives forward and pass routine bills.
The 111th Congress will return for a “lame duck” session in mid-November to consider key legislation, including an extension of the Bush-era tax cuts, completion of the FY 2011 appropriations process, and possible ratification of the new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START). Even in the lame duck, Democrats will have difficulty passing legislation, as Republican Senate winner Mark Kirk (R-IL) will be seated immediately\(^1\), reducing the Democratic majority to 58.

With this in mind, it is likely that the current continuing resolution (CR) which keeps the government running at FY 2010 levels through December 3\(^{rd}\) will be extended into 2011. The fate of Congressionally-directed projects in the FY 2011 bills also remains unknown, as House Republicans adopted a year-long moratorium on earmarks and may push to strip Democratic projects, especially those championed by retiring or defeated members. The next Congress may also extend the current CR for an entire year if it cannot come to a resolution, a move that would also result in the exclusion of earmarks and congressionally designated programmatic increases.

A Congress that is likely to be gridlocked and largely concerned with fiscal responsibility will force the research and education communities to be more strategic in advocacy efforts, aggressive in their recruitment of new champions, and willing to accept a series of small victories in place of large initiatives. Opportunities to advocate on behalf of community priorities and influence policy in key areas of interest will arise as Congress works on the few big ticket items which could pass with bipartisan support, including the transportation authorization (highway) bill, reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, and the annual defense authorization bill. Individual institutions and the research and education communities must be prepared to capitalize on these limited opportunities and be willing to emphasize certain priorities over others as Congress considers how to allocate limited resources during a constrained budgetary environment.

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\(^1\) As the winner of a special election for President Obama’s Senate seat, Mr. Kirk can be seated immediately rather than having to wait until January.
Appendix: Changes to Congressional Committees

Appropriations Committees

Before the 112th Congress convenes in January, the lame duck Congress must address the FY 2011 appropriations bills. The entire federal government is currently funded under a Continuing Resolution (CR) at mostly the FY 2010 enacted levels (excluding Recovery Act funding) through December 3. At least one extension of the CR will be needed as the end-game strategy is devised by the current Congress. The Democrats have positioned themselves to try to enact an omnibus appropriations bill, but with the significant Republican gains in the House of Representatives and the Senate, a more likely scenario is the extension of the CR into next year so that the new Congress can write the final chapter on the FY 2011 appropriations process.

The new Congress is expected to focus on reducing federal spending and tackling federal deficits now in excess of $1 trillion annually. The pending FY 2011 appropriations bills written by the House and Senate Appropriations Committees treat agencies and programs important to the research and education community relatively well. The new Congress can rewrite the pending bills at reduced funding levels; pass the existing bills with a formula to reduce overall spending, such as with across-the-board reductions; or continue to fund the government by CR at the FY 2010 level with increases for only a few key initiatives. If this latter scenario occurs, funding increases proposed by agencies important to the research community might be in danger despite broad bipartisan support. Under an extended CR, Congressionally-directed spending (more commonly called earmarks) in the pending FY 2011 bills would not be funded. Either way, pending earmarks for retiring or defeated members could be removed when the FY 2011 appropriations process is finalized.

The strengthened Republican numbers in Congress are also likely to affect the approach to reining in federal spending. The Administration and Secretary of Defense Robert Gates are poised to propose significant reductions in defense spending. The departure of many strong Appropriations Committee supporters of the Defense Department offered the opportunity for a critical review of the existing defense strategy and funding; however, the return of Republicans to the majority in the House may derail that effort, continuing the spending squeeze on domestic discretionary programs.

The significant changes to both the House and Senate Appropriations Committees signal the loss of long-time champions for research and education programs. Two steadfast supporters of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) will not be returning to Congress due to retirement (Rep. Dave Obey (D-WI)), or defeat in a primary (Senator Arlen Specter (D-PA)). Rep. Obey serves as Chairman of the full House Appropriations Committee and of the Labor, Health and Human Services and Education (LHHS) Subcommittee, which funds NIH. Senator Specter switched from Republican to Democrat in the hopes of keeping his Senate seat, sacrificing his Ranking Member position on the Senate LHHS Appropriations Subcommittee; however, he has continued to be a strong advocate for increased NIH funding. Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA), who chairs the Senate LHHS Subcommittee, is the remaining NIH advocate of this trio.
Rep. Jerry Lewis (R-CA) is expected to secure a waiver from Republican term limits on serving as chairs or ranking members and take the chairmanship of the full House Appropriations Committee. To solidify his bid to retain the top spot, Rep. Lewis recently called for an extension of the House Republican self-imposed ban on congressional earmarks. Rep. Harold Rogers (R-KY), who is third in seniority behind Rep. Bill Young (R-FL), has been rumored as a possible challenger to Rep. Lewis for the chairmanship, but Rep. Lewis is well positioned to become Chairman. Rep. Young is expected to take the Chair of the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee.

Current Ranking Member of the Commerce, Justice, and Science Subcommittee (CJS) and longtime research champion Frank Wolf (R-VA) is poised to become Chair of the CJS Subcommittee, which oversees funding for the National Science Foundation, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and National Aeronautics and Space Administration. He will replace current Chair Alan Mollohan (D-WV), another research champion, who was defeated in a primary. Rep. Wolf has indicated that he will hold hearings on the importance of competitiveness and innovation. In addition to Rep. Mollohan, six other Democratic appropriators were defeated in their re-election bids. They are Chet Edwards (D-TX), Ciro Rodriguez (D-TX), Allen Boyd (D-FL), Lincoln Davis (D-TN), John Salazar (D-CO), and Patrick Murphy (D-PA).

No changes are expected at the top of the Senate Appropriations Committee. Senator Daniel Inouye (D-HI) was handily re-elected and is secure in the chairmanship. Senator Thad Cochran (R-MS) is expected to continue as Ranking Member. The at-risk Democrat on the Committee, Senator Patty Murray (D-WA), current Chair of the Transportation and Housing and Urban Development Subcommittee, has a slight lead in her race for re-election, which is currently too close to call. In addition, Senator Byron Dorgan (D-ND), Chair of the Energy and Water Development Subcommittee, is retiring, leaving an opening at the helm of the Subcommittee. There will be a significant change in the Senate Appropriations Committee membership, as nearly half of the Republicans serving on the Committee are retiring or have been defeated in their re-election bids. These departures will result in new leadership on Subcommittees that fund federal research agencies. Republican vacancies will occur on the Agriculture, Energy-Water, Homeland Security, LHHS, State/Foreign Operations, and Transportation and Housing and Urban Development Subcommittees.

**Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee**

With Democrats retaining a majority in the Senate, Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA) is expected to retain his chairmanship on the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee. Looking forward, the Committee is expected to continue efforts towards the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA/No Child Left Behind) during the 112th Congress. In the 111th Congress, both the Senate and House held a series of hearings to lay the groundwork for ESEA reauthorization, but no legislation was introduced. Reauthorization of ESEA continues to be a priority for the Obama Administration, but it is unclear how much the Republicans will be willing to support the Administration’s priorities. The Committee, and Chairman Harkin in particular, will likely continue to place a priority on addressing issues of program integrity and abuses of federal financial aid programs. Over the
past year, Senator Harkin held a series of increasingly partisan hearings regarding abuse of the federal student aid system by for-profit institutions. Minority members, including Ranking Member Michael Enzi (R-WY), became frustrated with the majority’s focus solely on the for-profits, and will continue to push for inclusion of the non-profits during any future hearings or legislation.

There is expected to be a reshuffling of Committee membership, as several major education supporters will not be returning to the Committee due to retirement or loss in an election. Senators Christopher Dodd (D-CT) and Judd Gregg (R-NH), both of whom championed higher education causes, will vacate their positions on the Committee. In addition, Senator Sherrod Brown (D-OH) recently gave up his seat on the HELP Committee to join the Committee on Appropriations. The winners of three Senate races have yet to be determined, and all three incumbents sit on the HELP Committee. It is not yet clear whether Senators Patty Murray (D-WA) and Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) will retain their seats or not.

Senators Lamar Alexander (R-TN), Al Franken (D-MN), and John McCain (R-AZ) are expected to continue their active roles on the Committee as well. Alexander, a former Governor and university president, led the charge in past years against increased reporting requirements for universities and has been a leading advocate for research and education.

During the last Congress, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) and Majority Whip Dick Durbin (D-IL) placed a priority on the Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act, which would allow pathways to citizenship for young, undocumented immigrants of good standing who enroll in postsecondary education or join the military. However, with a divided Congress there may not be the will to advance this legislation next year.

House Education and Labor Committee

Under a newly garnered Republican majority, George Miller (D-CA), the current Chairman of the House Education and Labor Committee, is expected to become the Ranking Member and John Kline (R-MN), the current Ranking Member, is expected to become Chairman. Rep. Kline succeeded Rep. Howard “Buck” McKeon (R-CA), who left the Education and Labor Committee to become the Ranking Member on the House Committee on Armed Services. Speaker-elect John Boehner (R-OH) was Chair of the Education and Labor Committee before Rep. McKeon. Both Reps. McKeon and Boehner supported for-profit student loan lenders and resisted efforts to expand the federal direct student loan program through legislation that was enacted earlier this year. In the 112th Congress, Republicans on the Committee are expected to advance new legislation which would block the Obama Administration’s efforts to increase oversight on for-profit institutions through proposed rules on “gainful employment.” Like the Senate HELP Committee, Education and Labor is expected to examine ESEA reauthorization, but is unlikely to support many of the Administration’s priorities, including authorization of new programs such as Race to the Top, Promise Neighborhoods, and Investing in Innovation (i3) funds. These programs have been funded, but are not yet authorized.

In an effort to reduce the federal deficit, the House may also seriously examine the structure of the popular Pell Grant program. This program has suffered several funding shortfalls in previous
years equaling billions of dollars. The Republican majority will most likely rein in spending on this program and may examine how to restructure the program to limit future spending shortfalls by reducing the maximum amount of the grant, or restructuring income eligibility requirements.

On the Republican side, several supporters of higher education will not be returning to the Committee due to retirement or loss in elections. This includes Rep. Vern Ehlers (R-MI), a retiring Member who has been a tireless supporter of research universities; Rep. Pete Hoekstra (R-MI); and Rep. Michael Castle (R-DE), a moderate Republican who was a leading advocate for stem cell research and education issues. However, several active members will be returning, including Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers (R-WA), who has been a supporter of the Perkins Loan program and is expected to continue to rise within the Committee; Rep. Thomas Petri (R-WI), a strong supporter of student loan and grant programs; Rep. Tim Bishop (D-NY), a supporter of nonprofit higher education; and Rep. Dave Loebsack (D-IA), a champion for the federal student aid programs.

**Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee**

One of the committees facing unfinished business in the current Congress is the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee. With the collapse of efforts in the Senate to consider energy and climate-related legislation earlier this fall, Chairman Jeff Bingaman (D-NM) is expected to renew his efforts to pass comprehensive energy legislation in the new Congress (note: the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee has primary jurisdiction over climate change issues).

The Energy and Natural Resources Committee operated on a bipartisan basis in 2009 to report energy legislation to the full Senate. It is uncertain whether the Ranking Republican on the Committee, Senator Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), will be successful in her write-in campaign to keep her Senate seat after losing the primary to Republican candidate, Joe Miller. It is also unclear whether she might return to the Senate as a Republican, if successful in her election, thus retaining her seniority and senior position on the Committee, or if she will be serving as an Independent. In her absence, either Senator Richard Burr (R-NC) or Senator John Barrasso (R-WY) is likely to serve as the Ranking Republican on the Committee. If so, ranking positions will open on either the National Parks Subcommittee (Senator Burr) or on the Public Lands and Forests Subcommittee (Senator Barrasso).

Chairman Bingaman will have new Democratic members on the Committee to replace retiring Senator Byron Dorgan (D-ND) and Senator Blanche Lincoln (D-AR), who was defeated in her re-election bid. There are at least three open Republican slots on the Energy and Natural Resources Committee with the retirements of Senators Sam Brownback (R-KS) and Senator Jim Bunning (R-KY), and the defeat of Senator Robert Bennett (R-UT) in his primary. Senator Brownback will be replaced as the Ranking Member of the Subcommittee on Water and Power.
House Energy and Commerce Committee

The House Committee on Energy and Commerce maintains principal responsibility for legislative oversight relating to biomedical research, telecommunications, consumer protection, food and drug safety, public health, air quality and environmental health, the supply and delivery of energy, and interstate and foreign commerce in general. This jurisdiction extends over five Cabinet-level departments and seven independent agencies including the Department of Energy, Department of Health and Human Services, and Department of Transportation, Federal Trade Commission, Food and Drug Administration, and the Federal Communications Commission. In the 111th Congress, Democrats held a 36-23 advantage in the Committee on Energy and Commerce. There will be many new Republican Members added to the Committee with several Democrats cut, as it is anticipated that Republicans will seek to institute a similar majority.

There is uncertainty about who will now chair the Committee on Energy and Commerce. Current Ranking Member Joe Barton (R-TX) chaired the Committee on Energy and Commerce during the 108th and 109th Congresses and is publicly campaigning to receive a waiver from the Republican-imposed rule that limits committee chairs to three terms. However, many observers expect that he will not receive it due to his poor relationship with likely Speaker of the House John Boehner (R-OH), and his gaffe during the Gulf oil spill hearings when he apologized to the BP leadership. If the Republican leadership does not grant Rep. Barton the waiver, chairmanship of this high profile panel is expected to be a battle between Rep. Fred Upton of Michigan, Rep. Cliff Stearns of Florida, and Rep. John Shimkus of Illinois, with Rep. Upton as the likely frontrunner. Rep. Henry Waxman (D-CA), the current Chair of Energy and Commerce, likely will serve as Ranking Member in the 112th Congress.

Given the Committee chairmanship uncertainty, it is also unknown who will chair the subcommittees. If he does not assume chairmanship of the full Energy and Commerce Committee, Rep. Shimkus, current Ranking Member of the Subcommittee on Health, likely will be interested in chairing the Subcommittee, which has oversight of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and likely will be investigating the impact of the health care reform law. Current Chair Rep. Frank Pallone (D-NJ), is expected to continue as ranking Democrat on this Subcommittee.

Some reports indicate that if Rep. Barton is denied chairmanship of the full Committee, he may be offered the chairmanship of the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, which would provide him a platform to investigate Obama Administration policies ranging from energy initiatives to air pollution rules. This Subcommittee has also conducted several hearings on intramural conflicts of interest at NIH. However, to take over as Chair of this Subcommittee, Rep. Barton would need to step over current Subcommittee Ranking Member and physician Rep. Michael Burgess (R-TX) who is expected to want to assume control of the panel. With the retirement of Rep. Bart Stupak (D-MI), who currently chairs the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, it is uncertain who will be the ranking Democrat on the Subcommittee, but Reps. Edward Markey (D-MA) and Diana DeGette (D-CO) are likely in the running.

Another possibility is that Rep. Barton could chair the Energy and Environment Subcommittee. However, Republican leadership may want to install a closer ally such as Reps. Stearns or
Shimkus. It is anticipated that Republicans will use the Energy and Environment Subcommittee to scrutinize the Obama Administration’s energy and environmental policies. Another possibility to appease Rep. Barton is to grant him “Chairman Emeritus” status of the full Committee, which is what longtime chair Rep. John Dingell (D-MI) was named by Democratic leadership when he was ousted by Rep. Waxman as chair in 2008.

**Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee**

The Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee is not expected to experience significant changes in the 112th Congress. Senator John D. Rockefeller (D-WV) is expected to remain Chairman of the full Committee, and Ranking Member Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-TX) is also likely to retain her leadership position on the Committee. There will be some changes at the Subcommittee level. Senator Daniel Inouye (D-HI) is expected to replace retiring Senator Byron Dorgan (D-ND) as Chairman of the Subcommittee on Aviation Operations, Safety and Security. Senator George LeMieux (R-FL), who was appointed to replace Senator Mel Martinez (R-FL) when he announced his retirement during the current term, will leave after finishing his appointment, freeing up his position as Ranking Member of the Subcommittee on Competitiveness, Innovation, and Export Promotion. Also retiring is Senator Sam Brownback (R-KS), who does not hold a leadership position on the Committee.

The Committee has jurisdiction over science agencies such as the National Science Foundation, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, as well as the Department of Transportation. Looking to the 112th Congress, the Committee will likely consider the reauthorization of the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users. This bill, which initially passed in 2005 under President Bush, provides federal funding for highway and surface transportation projects across the country. Additionally, the Committee will likely reconsider other bills that were reported out of the Committee but have not been enacted this year, such as the America COMPETES Act and the Cyber Security Act of 2010. The Committee is also expected to reconsider the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) reauthorization bill, which passed out of the Committee but has since stalled. The current FAA authorization expired in 2007 and provisions of the bill have been extended sixteen times through short-term extensions.

The Committee may also consider legislation to establish a national interoperable wireless broadband network for public safety workers, as well as legislation to improve oil spill response and restoration efforts.

**House Science and Technology Committee**

With the change in party leadership coupled with several prominent retirements, the House Science and Technology Committee will likely look much different in the 112th Congress. The new Chairman is expected to be Rep. Ralph Hall (R-TX) who has served as Ranking Member during the 111th Congress; however, because Congressman Hall switched parties in 2004, there are some that think he should not be allowed to be a Chairman. If Congressman Hall is not appointed Chair, James Sensenbrenner (R-WI) could take the position, especially if Republicans eliminate the Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming, where he is
currently the Ranking Member. Bart Gordon (D-TN), current Chairman and one of the research community’s most vocal supporters in Congress, is retiring at the end of the 111th Congress. With his departure, Rep. Jerry Costello (D-IL), the Committee’s second-ranking Democrat, is expected to serve as Ranking Member.

Other significant losses to the House Science and Technology Committee include: current Chair of the Energy and Environment Subcommittee Brian Baird (D-WA)--retiring; current Ranking Member of the Research and Science Education Subcommittee Rep. Vern Ehlers (R-MI)--retiring; and current Ranking Member of the Energy and Environment Subcommittee Rep. Bob Inglis (R-SC)--lost in primary. Current Chair of the Space and Aeronautics Subcommittee Gabrielle Giffords (D-AZ) is also in danger of losing her seat, as she currently holds a slim lead in a race that is too close to call. These losses will compel the research community to do significant outreach to new Members and new House Science and Technology Committee leadership to cultivate new champions on both sides of the aisle.

The House Science and Technology Committee has jurisdiction over non-defense federal scientific research and development at the National Aeronautics and Atmospheric Administration, the National Science Foundation, the Departments of Energy and Transportation, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) among others. With regard to most NOAA issues, the Science and Technology Committee shares jurisdiction with the House Natural Resources Committee.

In the next Congress, the Committee may move on "unfinished business" such as reauthorization of the America COMPETES Act (if not passed during the lame duck session of Congress) and the multi-agency National Earthquake Hazards Reduction Program. Other possibilities include issues relating to the reauthorization of the Highway bill (the R&D piece), international science and education, and nanotechnology. There has been little indication by Republican leadership as to what issues will be on the agenda for the 112th Congress.

House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

With the Republicans now in the majority in the House of Representatives, the new Chairman of the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure is expected to be current Ranking Member, John Mica (R-FL). Rep. Mica supports high speed rail and has been critical of the bureaucratic process and delays in approving federal infrastructure projects. He has been quoted as stating that if he becomes Chairman of the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure he will focus on cutting government red tape and getting projects built more quickly. The current Chairman of the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, James Oberstar (D-MN), lost his re-election bid. The current Vice Chair of the Committee is Nick Rahall (D-WV), who is also the current Chairman of the House Committee on Natural Resources. Depending on the committee assignments, he could decide to relinquish his position on the Natural Resources Committee to become the new Ranking Member on the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee.

The House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure will likely revisit several issues that were left pending in the 111th Congress including the reauthorization of the Surface
Transportation Bill, the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users, the FAA reauthorization, and the reauthorization of the National Transportation Safety Board.

Senate Environment and Public Works (EPW) Committee

In one of the country’s most watched races, Senator Barbara Boxer (D-CA), who served as Chair of the Senate EPW Committee in 110th and 111th Congresses, defeated Carly Fiorina (R) in the California Senate race. She is expected to retain the chairmanship of the Committee in the 112th Congress. Chairwoman Boxer will have her work cut out for her in the next Congress as the Committee revisits its strategy to address climate change and other environmental issues. As you may recall, the EPW Committee reported out cap and trade legislation earlier this year, the Clean Energy Jobs and American Power Act of 2009 (S. 1733), but further action was stalled in the Senate. Now that the Republicans have made significant gains in the Senate and have achieved the majority in the House, the outlook for climate legislation in the Senate is even dimmer than it was in the 111th Congress. President Obama has expressed his interest in tackling climate and energy policy in “chunks” next year, recognizing that Congress, especially now, does not have the stomach for sweeping legislation.

Senator James Inhofe (R-OK), known climate skeptic and one of Sen. Boxer’s fiercest challengers on climate issues (once calling global warming “the greatest hoax ever perpetrated on the American people”), will likely stay on as Ranking Member of EPW. Additionally, a number of vacancies will need to be filled in the ranks of the Committee, including the seats of Arlen Specter (D-PA), who was defeated in his primary, and George Voinovich (R-OH) and Kit Bond (R-MO), who are retiring this year.

House Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming

The Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming, chaired by Rep. Edward Markey (D-MA), was created in 2007 by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA). The Select Committee does not have legislative jurisdiction and is only allowed to investigate, study, make findings, and develop recommendations on policies. Now that the Republicans have taken the House, debate will turn to whether to keep the Select Committee. Rep. Fred Upton (R-MI), who is among the contenders to become chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, has stated his preference to disband the Select Committee, saying recently in an op-ed that it has, “needlessly spent nearly $8 million in taxpayer money, and that does not account for the countless dollars spent on so-called ‘fact finding’ missions.” Should the Select Committee continue in the 112th Congress, likely Chairman James Sensenbrenner (R-WI), an outspoken climate skeptic, is expected to use the Committee as a platform for Republican investigation of EPA and other Obama Administration officials on executive climate change activities and stalled climate change legislation.
House Natural Resources Committee

Now that the Republicans have attained a majority in the House, Rep. Doc Hastings (R-WA) is poised to take the chairmanship of the House Natural Resources Committee, on which he currently serves as Ranking Member. Rep. Nick Rahall (D-WV) is the current chairman of the Committee; he may stay on as Ranking Member of the Committee or choose to become Ranking Member on the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, where he is also a senior member. In a recent interview, Rep. Hastings expressed his intent to hold a number of oversight hearings in the 112th Congress, particularly with Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar and other Obama Administration officials, in which he will question officials about their “de facto moratorium on shallow and deepwater offshore drilling, conspiring to unilaterally block development on millions of acres of public lands by creating ‘secret monuments,’ and weakening national security by subjecting U.S. Border Patrol agents to overly onerous restrictions on Southwestern wilderness.” Additionally, Rep. Hastings and his Republican colleagues plan to advocate for an “all of the above” energy plan, which would include oil and gas drilling, coal and uranium mining, biofuels, hydroelectric power, and new exploration off Alaska’s coast.

In an effort to preserve some of the momentum that was made in the 111th Congress, Democrats on the Committee plan to continue pushing for legislation that would help prepare public lands for climate change, including language that was included in both House and Senate versions of cap and trade legislation calling for public lands adaptation planning and additional resources. These specific provisions in the otherwise controversial bills had somewhat bipartisan support in the 111th Congress.

Senate Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Committee

While Democrats maintained their majority in the Senate, Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Committee Chairwoman Blanche Lincoln (D-AR) lost her re-election bid. Due to committee assignments and seniority of other members, Senator Debbie Stabenow (D-MI) is in line for the chairmanship. However, there is speculation that Senator Ben Nelson (D-NE) may receive the chairmanship to keep him aligned with his party. There have been fears that Senator Nelson could declare himself an independent and potentially caucus with Republicans, although the possibility is less likely now that Democrats have at least a 52-seat majority that would not be lost even with the defections of Senator Nelson and Democratically-aligned independent Joe Lieberman (I-CT). Senator Saxby Chambliss (R-GA) is expected to remain the Committee’s Ranking Member and the Committee’s general membership is not expected to change substantially because many members did not face re-election.

The Senate Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Committee holds primary legislative responsibility for a wide range of agriculture-related issues, including the research programs of the Department of Agriculture (USDA). In the 112th Congress, the Committee will focus on the reauthorization of the Farm Bill in 2012. The Farm Bill authorizes numerous agriculture programs and initiatives and will greatly influence the USDA’s new emerging focus on research. The Committee is expected to hold preliminary hearings and briefings for the new Farm Bill legislation during 2011. Other business before the Committee in the next Congress includes reauthorization of the USDA nutrition programs.
House Agriculture Committee

Because the Democrats lost their majority in the House of Representatives, Ranking Member Frank Lucas (R-OK) is expected to become Chairman of the Committee and current Chairman Collin Peterson (D-MN) will likely become Ranking Member. The composition of the Committee’s general membership is expected to change substantially as other committee assignments are reorganized, defeated members retire, and new members join the Congress.

Like the Senate Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Committee, the House Committee on Agriculture is the primary legislative oversight body for a wide range of agriculture issues, including the research programs of the Department of Agriculture (USDA). In the 112th Congress, the Committee’s agenda will be driven by the reauthorization of the Farm Bill in 2012. The Farm Bill authorizes numerous agriculture programs and initiatives and will greatly influence the USDA’s new emerging emphasis on research. The Committee is expected to hold preliminary hearings and briefings regarding the Farm Bill during 2011. Other unfinished business carrying over into the new Congress is the reauthorization of the USDA nutrition programs.