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WATERLOG
NEW IDEAS IN COASTAL RESILIENCY

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With December 11th Deadline Looming, Congress Likely to Need Additional Stopgap

Congress must pass another CR or full-year bills to avoid a shutdown. One view is that Democrats, heading to majorities of at least 255 House seats and possibly 56 Senate seats, have little incentive to finish FY27 bills before they take control in January. On the other hand, Dems may just want to start the next fiscal year with a clean slate by getting all the current fiscal year's bills passed before they take over. What's clear is that another CR will be needed. Whether it goes to Christmas or next year remains to be seen. Meanwhile, Senate Appropriations Committee Republicans last week released four funding bills including the Energy and Water Development measure providing $10.585 billion for the Army Corps of Engineers. The bill contains about $80 million for Coastal Storm Risk Management (beach nourishment) projects. Democrats criticized the bill because most of its funding goes to nuclear weapons programs rather than measures to lower Americans' energy bills.

Committee Leadership Changes to Watch

While the new Congress has yet to get organized, some leadership positions will put new faces at the head of key committees and subcommittees. Tops on the list is the Senate Appropriations Committee where the top Republican, Susan Collins of Maine, lost her re-election bid. Stepping up to Chair will be the current senior Democrat, Patty Murray. She will probably continue the bipartisan nature in which this committee has operated, with Lisa Murkowski of Alaska taking over as the top Republican. Interestingly, the next two years will see Murray and Murkowski having more agreements than disagreements when it comes to pushing back against Trump spending priorities since Murkowski has been an outspoken critic of the president. There will be a new chair of the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works, with Jeff Merkley of Oregon likely to take the helm. On the House side, Rep. Rosa DeLauro of Connecticut wants to take over as Chair but that won't be decided until next month. Rep. Rick Larsen of Washington is the likely choice to chair the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. Rep. Dave Rouzer of North Carolina would be the likely ranking Republican, but his re-election race is yet to be called. Larsen reportedly feels that getting a FEMA reform bill passed and a 2028 WRDA bill are two priorities for the next Congress.

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Bipartisan Permitting Bill Advances in Senate

The Senate voted this week to advance the Bipartisan American Affordability and Jobs Act of 2026. The bill, which aims to overhaul permitting for construction of energy and other infrastructure projects, now awaits Senate negotiations. The bill has drawn major support for aiming to speed energy projects, promote renewable energy, and decrease ratepayer costs. However, the environmental community is split. Despite support from clean energy advocates, many environmental groups, tribes, and some Democratic lawmakers argue the deal could negatively impact tribal sovereignty, support fossil fuel projects, and limit environmental review regulations under NEPA and the Clean Water Act.

FEMA Head Wants to Reduce Federal Dependency

There is a shift taking pace at FEMA based on an October 15th memo from Administrator Cameron Hamilton. Its key sentence is this one: "A resilient Nation requires state, local, tribal and territorial partners that can prepare for, respond to, recover from and mitigate disasters using capabilities established before incidents occur." Hamilton sees Federal post-disaster assistance as "an important backstop that cannot replace sustained readiness and preparedness…at the state and local levels." FEMA's role is to support, coordinate, and supplement state and local efforts.

FEMA In the News

A report from the General Accountability Office (GAO) has concluded that "staff reductions and a Lack of Planning" are likely to impact FEMA's Mission Readiness. The congressional watchdog found that 17% of FEMA's workforce, more than 4300 employees, separated in 2025 without any thought about the agency's workforce needs…. A report in *Politico Pro* claims that FEMA's flood maps will undergo a transformation "to be more accurate and a detailed". The article says that the map changes are intended to better inform the public about their flood risks…. At the same time, the General Accountability Office has issued a report urging Congress to get FEMA to update its flood maps to include heavy rainfall risk as well as property-level flood risks…. Residents of communities participating in the National Flood Insurance Program can now purchase a NFIP policy online through floodsmart.gov…. A recent report in *The New York Times* says that the Trump administration is scaling back or stalling pre-disaster mitigation investments of federal funds such as elevating homes and home buyouts. Instead, federal funds may go toward hardening water, power, and communications systems from the impacts of disasters.

Corps Overhauls National Dredging Program

The Corps of Engineers has decided to stop treating each navigation dredging project as a single project and, instead, consider ways that the projects can avoid competing for limited dredging resources. Turning the focus from awarding contracts to maintaining navigation channels will be assisted through the new Enterprise Dredging Delivery Center (EDDC) which will help Corps districts manage dredging as an integrated national program. Hopefully the focus of the program will go

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beyond the dredging needs of navigation channels to those of beach nourishment and other coastal projects.

Coastal Legislative Update

With both the House and Senate back home campaigning for re-election, not much has changed since our report last month. The Senate unanimously passed the Weather Research and Forecasting Innovation Reauthorization Act of 2026 (Cantwell/Cruz) on Nov. 10. CBO estimates $2.9B over FY2027–2031, subject to appropriations, for an atmospheric-river program, next-generation radar and a NOAA workforce plan. It authorizes NOAA forecasting and storm-warning work coastal communities rely on; the money still has to come through CJS appropriations. The bill now goes to the House. We're now tracking 292 bills with both appropriations bills and WRDA legislation still awaiting final action. For the full list of tracked legislation, click here.

Thanks for reading WaterLog!

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