



Washington Scene

Coordinated by Joe L. Outlaw, Co-Editor, *Choices*

Congress is currently trying to wrap up loose ends on several key pieces of legislation before their summer recess, which encompasses most of August and the early part of September. The Farm Bill, a new Energy Bill, and immigration reform, among other issues such as appropriations bills, have been on their agenda.

Farm Bill

Thus far, the House and Senate Agricultural Committees are each moving forward at their own pace. The House has held subcommittee hearings to debate almost all of the titles of the Farm Bill. The Subcommittee on General Commodities and Risk Management voted 18-0 to use the 2002 Farm Bill as their bill for Title I. That doesn't mean there won't be changes in full committee, but that at least the subcommittee intends for the basic structure of the 2007 Farm Bill to look much like the 2002 Farm Bill. Full committee markup in the House has been postponed, but would still happen in time for the scheduled debate in the entire House of Representatives in late July.

Mr. Harkin, the Senate Agriculture Committee Chair, has been working through all of the requests from interest groups to develop his proposal (generally referred to as the Chairman's mark). To date, there has not been any floor time scheduled to debate the farm bill in the Senate. Observers of the farm bill process over the past 20 years will say that the Senate tends to move through the process slower than the House of Representatives, so a slower pace isn't unexpected.

When a bill is finally passed, what is it going to look like? At this point, most farm policy observers would say that either an extension of the 2002 Farm Bill or a slightly modified 2002 Farm Bill are the two most likely outcomes for Title I. Does this mean that there wouldn't be any changes? No, there will likely be modest changes in com-

modity programs, along with increased financial support in many areas such as food, conservation, and energy programs to name a few. However, the wholesale changes in the commodity program are less likely than some want because there isn't enough money available to change the commodity programs and provide a safety net that works as well as the current one.

Doha Round

Only a week after WTO Director-General Pascal Lamy reported modestly high hopes for gaining an agreement within the next six months, negotiators from the G4 (European Union, United States, Brazil, and India) failed to move forward at their meeting in Potsdam. What next? Trade Promotion Authority (TPA) expires on June 30th. Based on comments from members of Congress, it isn't clear whether a Doha Round agreement would have survived the up or down vote with TPA. Without TPA, the chances of the Congress passing (without amendment) any Doha Round agreement seem highly unlikely.

Energy

The Senate has been debating a new energy bill (HR 6) that was passed on June 22nd. In order to gain passage, a compromise was made on corporate average fuel economy (CAFE) standard increases – lowering the mandated increase to a fleetwide average of 35 miles per gallon. The bill would mandate 36 billion gallons of renewable fuel by 2022, increase efficiency standards for appliances and federal buildings, promote new energy technologies, and provide federal grants and loan guarantees for research into fuel-efficient vehicles.

The House has not cleared their version of the Energy Bill.

