Rural County Representatives of California Reports Senate Majority Leader McConnell Believes the Shutdown Could Last for Weeks and Republicans Will Not Consider a Proposal Without Border Wall Funding

January 5, 2019 - The 116th Congress has commenced, and the federal government remains partially shut down. Until President Trump reaches an agreement with Congress on border wall funding, key programs for rural counties, including the Federal Payments in Lieu of Taxes (PILT), Secure Rural Schools, and e-Connectivity rural broadband will be suspended.

Last Thursday, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-San Francisco) brought to the House Floor two separate spending bills that would reopen the government and end the current partial shutdown. House Joint Resolution 1, Homeland Security Continuing Resolution, would extend temporary stopgap funding for the Homeland Security Department through February 8, 2019. The continuing resolution would buy House Democrats time to continue their negotiations with Republicans for border wall funding. HR 21, Consolidated Appropriations for Fiscal 2019, is a six-bill "minibus" that would fund the remainder of the federal government through the fiscal year. The minibus would provide funding for several federal agencies that are critical to rural California, particularly the Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Department of Interior (DOI).

House Joint Resolution 1 and HR 21 offer a first glimpse into the budget priorities of House Democrats. HR 21 bill provides USDA with $23.2 billion in net discretionary spending, a $225 million increase from Fiscal 2018 levels. Despite an increase in overall discretionary funding at USDA, the minibus would reduce funding for the e-Connectivity rural broadband program at the Rural Utilities Service from $600 million in Fiscal 2018 to $425 million in Fiscal 2019.

HR 21 would increase spending for the Interior-Environment appropriations bill from $35.6 billion in Fiscal 2018 to $35.9 billion in Fiscal 2019. The bill retains Fiscal 2018 funding levels for critical water programs and rejects the Trump Administration's requested cuts to the Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act program, the Clean Water State Revolving Fund, and the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund.

HR 21 would provide a total of $13.2 billion in discretionary funding for DOI and related agencies, a $56 million increase from Fiscal 2018 levels. The bill would appropriate $1.1 billion for fire management programs at DOI, a $168 million increase from Fiscal 2018 levels. HR 21 would also allocate $4.3 billion to the U.S. Forest Service for fighting wildfires on public lands. The authors say the combined funding for the wildfire fighting activities at DOI and the U.S. Forest Service is $900 million more than the 10-year funding average. The measure includes $3.1 billion for core (non-wildfire) Forest Service activities — $14 million more than comparable Fiscal 2018 funding, and $851 million more than what was requested by the Trump Administration.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Kentucky) was quick to criticize House Democrats after the texts for House Joint Resolution 1 and HR 21 were released. He signaled that Republicans will not consider a proposal without border wall funding, and that House Joint Resolution 1 and HR 21 are nonstarters until wall funding is agreed to. Majority Leader McConnell believes the shutdown could last for weeks, and that no significant progress has been made over the border wall issue. It is possible, if not probable, that Republicans reject the Democrats' combined proposal, but HR 21 provides a new baseline for what to expect from Democrat appropriators as negotiations move forward.

Source: Rural County Representatives of California

https://goldrushcam.com/sierrasuntimes/index.php/news/local-news/17018-rural-county-representatives-of-california-reports-senate-majority-leader-mcconnell-believes-the-shutdown-could-last-for-weeks-and-republicans-will-not-consider-a-proposal-without-border-wall-funding