

A Historic Election

Now that Republicans have regained control of Congress, NCBA outlines issues to be addressed during the next year.

by *Stephanie Veldman*

The day after the Nov. 5 elections, Chandler Keys, National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) vice president of public policy, spoke with agricultural trade media on how the outcome of the election will affect the agriculture industry during the next few years.

As of press time, the latest Senate tally showed 51 Republicans, 47 Democrats, one Independent and one outstanding race. Louisiana was scheduled to have a runoff vote on Dec. 7.

"I believe this is a very historic election," Keys said. "Usually what happens in these types of off-year elections is the party that controls the White House goes through a loss. For the president's party, the Republicans, to hold the House and regain the Senate, that is very historical."

The latest outcome from the House of Representatives showed 228 Republicans, 205 Democrats, one Independent and one

pending runoff. It takes 218 votes to control the House.

Because the Republicans hold the majority vote in Congress, Keys said that the NCBA will be pushing some of their agenda items very aggressively next year. "One of the things we are looking at right off the bat is making the estate tax repeal permanent," Keys said.

"I think this issue was used in a lot of elections, particularly in some key Senate elections," he added. "I think it really resonates with a lot of rural voters."

Keys said he expects Congress to focus more on regulatory issues than on legislative items.

"We will spend a lot of time and effort with the administration next year on

regulatory changes and management issues that will make some of the onerous activities that are going out on agricultural land a little bit more palatable to us," Keys said.

A change in rank

With the Republicans claiming majority

in the Senate, a new Senate majority leader is also appointed. Trent Lott (R-Miss.) will replace Tom Daschle (D-S.D.).

When asked how the change in leadership was going to affect the cattle industry, Keys said, "I think it is more of a philosophical shift that you are going to see. I think that American agriculture is going to be served well, regardless of who's in charge, because both of these gentlemen do come from very strong ag states."


One change that will affect farmers and ranchers is the change of leadership in the Senate Agricultural Committee. Former Ag Committee leader Sen. Tom Harkin (D-Iowa) will go back to chairing the Finance Committee and Sen. Thad Cochran (R-Miss.) will chair the Agriculture Committee.

Keys said that one of the main things the Agriculture Committee will be working on is the implementation of the Farm Bill in 2003. There will also be many other issues to be discussed, such as food safety.

"There will be a lot more coordination between the committee and the administration now," Keys said. "The fact of having the same party there — there will be a lot more coordination between the White House, the USDA (U.S. Department of Agriculture), and the committee."

The House Agriculture Committee chair is in the process of being determined. In November, Larry Combest (R-Texas), the current Ag Committee chair, announced his resignation from Congress, effective May 31. There are no speculations yet about either Republican or Democrat candidates to fill his position.

Keys said the NCBA plans to spend a lot of time with the administration. He said that he hopes the president will recognize the support that came from rural areas for the Republicans.

"At the end of the day, I think this election is a win for rural America. I think that people came out and voted strongly for the president, and I think the president will recognize that," Keys said. "The voter turnout, particularly in the heavily contested states was very large for an off-year election. If you look at those precincts, particularly the rural precincts, you see a 70%-80% turnout for eligible voters — that is unique." 



"The voter turnout, particularly in the heavily contested states was very large for an off-year election."

— *Chandler Keys*