

Government Relations Update

What's happening in the 113th Congress and executive branch, and how does it affect you and the golf industry? GCSAA adviser Robert Helland, a former Senate staff member and current adviser with the law firm Reed Smith, offers his policy and political analysis on sequestration and immigration, and the impact these topics are expected to have on the industry. Full article can be found on gcsaa.org

Sequestration has begun

The latest showdown in Congress was triggered by the March 1 deadline negotiated last December (Public Law 112-240), and as a result of a failure of Congress and the president to reach an alternative agreement by this deadline, federal agencies have started the process of programmatic cuts and fur-

loughs necessary to cut \$85 billion from the federal budget for the current fiscal year.

What does this mean for golf?

No matter what, there will be a continued hunt for measures to reduce the federal debt, including those that impact golf courses. The industry should remain vigilant for any such measure. For example, the Obama administration proposed in its fiscal year 2013 budget to end the tax deduction golf courses receive when they donate a conservation easement on their courses, a proposal that would put \$593 million in the Treasury over 10 years. While this was not agreed to in the deal reached in December, it remains a possibility in each and every subsequent negotiation.

Comprehensive

immigration reform

Both Congress and the president have an incentive to reform the nation's immigration laws. The president wants this as part of his record of achievements for his second term. Republicans in Congress need this to address a lack of support among Latinos.

This is going to be a massive bill that will likely include a number of measures, including greater funds for border security, greater background checks by employers, and more visas for foreign workers coming to the United States. But the biggest issue by far will be what to do with the estimated 12 million people who now live in the United States illegally.

The amnesty question: The outlines of the coming immigration debate have been set, but

now lawmakers must hunker down and write legislation — and that could be a long process. There may not be movement on any of the ideas pre-

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sented until mid-March, the deadline that the eight senators who signed onto immigration reform principles have set to deliver a bill. However, many members of Congress opposed prior measures beyond those

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that improved border security, as there is no pressure for any attempt at legalization. They will be an obstacle to any comprehensive plan.

What does this mean for golf?

Everything mentioned above could affect golf. For examples, in exchange for an agreement on amnesty, some members in Congress might want to strengthen the E-Verify program, which confirms the validity of work documents submitted by new hires.

Right now, all federal agencies and companies that win a federal contract of more than \$100,000 and subcontractors with contracts of greater than \$3,000 must use E-verify for the newly hired. For all other private employers and employees, there is no requirement on the federal level that they participate in E-Verify, although a few states require it. That could change if an immigration reform measure is enacted into law during the 113th Congress.

In addition, another immigration-related measure that could change is the number of visas allowed under the H-2B visa program, which helps the golf

industry by providing workers for jobs that normally are unfilled. Currently, the number of available H-2B visas is capped at 66,000, with 33,000 allocated in the first half of the fiscal year (Oct.1 to March 31), and 33,000 allocated in the second half (April 1 to Sept.30). When immigration reform was considered in 2005, there was a proposal to include a raise in the cap. Unfortunately, this died with the overall reform measure, but there would be a chance to address temporary worker visas again in the 113th Congress.

Helping to advance GCSAA's interest on the federal level

Working together, GCSAA and Reed Smith will get before members of Congress and their staff, both early and often, to let them know:

- GCSAA members are employers working to meet a payroll
- GCSAA members are stewards of the environment
- Golf is an economic engine for the country generating tax revenue and creating millions of jobs

We work together to identify which decision-makers are most likely to have the biggest impact on the industry. Then, we make sure that those people know the facts. In Congress, this may mean meeting with members of the Senate Finance Committee when they draft legislation that helps employers recover from a natural disaster to ensure that golf course owners are included. But more in-

creasingly, in a grid-locked Congress it means also working with the unelected persons at the federal agency level who are responsible for the environmental or labor regulations that affect golf. All these people can have as much or more impact on a golf course's operations as those who use them.



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