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Pollsters, Pundits, Press Go Zero for Three on White House, House, Senate Election Outcomes

For nearly a 18 months, through 16 primaries, a national party convention and a dog fight of a general election race, pollsters, pundits and the press all contended it couldn't, shouldn't, wouldn't happen, but when the dust cleared early on November 9, Donald Trump was the 45th president-elect of the U.S., handily defeating Democrat Hillary Clinton.

These same experts also issued dire warnings of a Senate retaken by Democrats or at best in a 50-50 split, along with the possibility of a Democrat-controlled House, and in the end, Congress remains GOP controlled with only a few seats lost.

House Speaker Paul Ryan (R, WI), who has to be thanking the election gods for the unexpected Trump coattails effect that helped him keep his job, said of the Republican victories, "Donald Trump heard a voice in the country no one else heard. He has turned U.S. politics on its head."

Trump garnered 290 electoral votes to Clintons 228 to clinch the White House, while Clinton held a less than 1% edge in the popular vote. Analysts credit Trump's expansion and turnout of rural voters as a critical factor in his win. These numbers, along with party splits in the House and Senate, will shift as too-close-to-call races are resolved and final state vote totals are certified.

The American Farm Bureau Federation (ABFB) said in a post-election statement, "Farmers and ranchers understand their businesses and families have too much at stake to take a back seat on Election Day, and rural American clearly made a difference in this election. Now it's time for our newly elected leaders to turn up for rural America and keep their campaign promises by addressing the issues that matter to the people who sent them to Washington."

In the Senate, the split is now likely 52 Republicans to 48 Democrats, the latter number including two Independents who caucus with the Democrats. The Democrats, who had hoped to pick up as many as eight GOP seats to retake control, picked up two seats – Rep. Tammy Duckworth (D) unseated incumbent Sen. Mark Kirk (R) in Illinois, while New Hampshire Gov. Maggie Hassan (D) defeated Sen. Kelly Ayotte (R) by just over 1,200 votes. Ayotte was considered one of the rising stars of the national GOP, and may wind up with a job in the Trump administration. The Senate race in Louisiana, generally considered to be an easy win for John Kennedy (R), will be held December 10 as neither he nor Democrat Foster Campbell garnered 50% of the total votes cast.

Despite House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi's (D, CA) pre-election prediction House control could flip, House Republicans surrendered only six seats – with nine races still too close to call – setting the preliminary party split at 239 Republicans and 192 Democrats.

Neither Ryan or Pelosi are expected to lose their leadership positions.

On the Hill, all major agriculture leaders remain in place. Sen. Pat Roberts (R, KS) is expected to retain the Agriculture Committee gavel, with Sen. Debbie Stabenow (D, MI) remaining as ranking minority. Rep. Mike Conaway (R, TX) remains chair of the House Agriculture Committee, with Rep. Collin Peterson (D, MN), who survived a contentious race, firmly in place as the ranking member.

Six Senate Agriculture Committee members were up for reelection and all held their seats; only Rep. Brad Ashford (D, NE) lost reelection and his seat on the House Agriculture Committee. Right now, it looks as if there will be three new GOP committee members on the House ag panel, along with three new Democrats.

Largely unaffected by the elections' outcomes were the memberships of the House Energy & Commerce Committee and the Senate Health, Education, Labor & Pensions (HELP) Committee. When the 115th Congress organizes in January, 2017, it's new faces will appear on all four panels due to retirements and committee reassignments. The Energy & Commerce Committee is getting a new chair, generally thought to be Rep. John Shimkus (R, IL).

Who Will Help Trump Transition? Who's Up for Ag Secretary, HHS, Labor?

President-elect Donald Trump has his transition team in place, complete with an "agency action" chain of command, the transition gang subdividing into defense, national security, economic issues, domestic issues (where agriculture resides), management and budget, and "agency transformation and innovation." Nearly the entire administration fits into one of six silos.

As the process of transition begins, the list of prospective cabinet members, agency heads and key White House personnel swells.

Mike Torrey, principal in Michael Torrey Associates, a food/agriculture lobbying firm, will head up the agriculture transition team. A 25-year Washington, DC veteran, Torrey started his lobbying career with Kansas Grain & Feed Assn., then moved to Washington to work for Sen. Bob Dole on the agriculture committee. He was also former Agriculture Secretary Anne Veneman's deputy chief of staff during President George W. Bush's first term, and worked at the Commodity Futures Trading Commission (CFTC).

The Trump campaign circulated few names of prospective cabinet picks during the campaign, and the media, figuring Hillary Clinton would win, focused on handicapping her cabinet selections. Trump's challenge is to surround himself with smart, experienced people, wise to the operation of government from the inside, and with a talent for working with Congress.

However, running as an "outsider" constricts his slate of potential cabinet members and agency heads. He's expected to pick business and industry types, along with recognized conservative notables, to staff his administration. Some speculate that campaign remarks and allegations considered demeaning to women will cut the number of women willing to serve in a Trump cabinet, but former Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin, who was Sen. John McCain's (R, AZ) running mate, has made no secret of her desire to enter the Trump cabinet and he's said he'd like to appoint her to a cabinet job, according to reports. Several women sitting as governors or current or former members of Congress have also indicated a willingness to serve in a Trump administration.

His inner circle of advisors includes seasoned political veterans, including former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani, New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie, and former House Speaker Newt Gingrich. His congressional allies are few and far between as only a couple of Senators – Bob Corker (R, TN) and Jeff Sessions (R, AL) – came out publicly to support Trump during the campaign. However, Trump's latest membership list for his national agriculture advisory committee now has 70 names on it, many of sitting members of the House and Senate.

For secretary of agriculture, a slot most often awarded to a Farm Belt governor, names mentioned include Texas Commissioner of Agriculture Sid Miller, who's campaigning for the slot; Kansas Gov. Sam Brownback; former Nebraska Gov. Dave Heinemann; former Georgia Gov. Sonny Perdue, and former Texas Gov. Rick Perry, who chased the GOP presidential nomination early on. Millionaire Charles Herbster, Nebraska Angus breeder and business tycoon, who chairs the Trump ag advisory committee, is also mentioned, along with Chuck Conner, president of the National Council of Farmer Cooperatives (NCFC), who was President George W. Bush's special assistant for food and agriculture, as well as deputy secretary of agriculture in Bush's second term. Bruce Rastetter, an Iowa ethanol executive and major donor, is also discussed for the ag slot.

For secretary of Health & Human Services (HHS), which oversees all things FDA, the short list currently includes former presidential hopeful Dr. Ben Carson and Florida Gov. Rick Scott. Over at the Department of Energy, Oklahoma billionaire and long-time Trump friend Harold G. Hamm, CEO of Continental Resources, leads the list, and for Labor, the top of the prospect list is occupied by Victoria Lipnic, commissioner of the Equal Opportunity Commission (EOC), and a former assistant secretary of labor from 2002-2009.

Gingrich is often mentioned as a logical secretary of state nominee, as is Corker, who chairs the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Former UN Ambassador John Bolton is also on the short list for state. Steve Mnuchin, a veteran of Goldman Sachs and Trump's campaign finance chair, is seen as a logical Treasury secretary choice, but Jamie Dimon, CEO of JP Morgan, has also been talked about. Giuliani is seen leading the pack for attorney general, with Christie as a possible. Giuliani's name also makes the short list for secretary of homeland security.

Forest Lucas, co-founder of Lucas Oil and primary underwriter of anti-activist group Protect the Harvest, is considered a leading contender for interior secretary, though Trump's son, Donald Trump, Jr., is rumored to be eyeing the job. However, Trump has said none of his children will be part of his administration.

Canada, Mexico Says They'll Talk NAFTA with Trump White House

Calling it the "worst trade agreement the U.S. ever signed," President-elect Donald Trump made the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) a key part of his anti-globalism campaign rhetoric, vowing to renegotiate the 22-year-old deal or scrap it altogether. Based on statements this week from Canadian and Mexican leaders, the new president may get his chance to at least talk about U.S. frustration with the treaty.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, a free trade supporter, said in a press conference at which he acknowledged calling Trump to congratulate him, "I think it's important that we be open to talking about trade deals. If the Americans want to talk about NAFTA, I'm more than happy to talk about it." He said periodic reassessment of treaties signed by Canada makes sense to ensure the benefits of the original deal continue.

Mexican officials were less open, saying they're willing to "discuss" NAFTA, explain the strategic importance of the treaty to Trump, but not reopen the pact. "We're ready to talk so we can explain the strategic importance of NAFTA to the region," said Mexico's Economy Minister Ildefonso Guajardo. "Here we're not talking about renegotiating it, we're simply talking about dialogue." Another official

said Mexico is willing to talk about “modernizing” the trade treaty, but said there will be no renegotiation.

Trump, who during the presidential campaign, visited Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto, will come back to Mexico, Nieto said, possibly before Trump’s inauguration on January 20, 2017.

Trump Win Puts Budget, Spending Back in Play; CR Until Spring, 2017 Possible

While just a few weeks ago the mere mention of a continuing resolution (CR) that would keep the government funded into the first quarter of 2017 was considered a non-starter on both sides of the Hill, this week the post-Trump victory mindset of GOP leaders is reevaluating that option to avoid handing President Obama any policy victories in the last weeks of his administration.

The strategy being discussed now would include a CR running through March or April next year, and one that would carry no unrelated and/or controversial policy riders. This would avoid wrangling among members, preclude a battle over the federal debt ceiling, but would also foreclose on Obama putting his stamp on policy issues.

Going into the election – when popular “wisdom” expected a Hillary Clinton victory and perhaps significant losses for Republicans in Congress – House Speaker Paul Ryan (R, WI) said he favored passing a series of “mini-buses,” abbreviated spending measures that would be consolidated into a single package to fund the government for FY2017. Both House and Senate appropriators favored a massive FY2017 omnibus spending package, as was passed last year. The notion of a long-term CR, an idea popular with conservative House Republicans, was rejected by Senate Democrats altogether.

Sen. Pat Roberts (R, KS) told reporters this week congressional leaders were favoring a long-term CR because enacting an omnibus spending bill before December 9, when the current CR runs out, looked less and less possible. Part of the incentive to pass a long-term CR instead of an omnibus spending package is the difficulty in keeping unrelated policy riders off the omnibus bill.

Mass. Voters Okay Anti-Farming Ballot Question; Oklahoma Voter Reject ‘Right-to-Farm’ Item

A Massachusetts ballot question that would make illegal in the commonwealth the sale of eggs, veal and pork if the animals were raised in “tight confinement” was overwhelmingly approved this week, while a ballot item in Oklahoma to bar the state from limiting farmers’ use of technology or setting standards for livestock production was rejected.

The Massachusetts ballot item, similar to Question 2 passed in California in 2008, would require egg laying hens, veal calves and swine to be raised in housing systems which “guaranteed” the animals could stand up, lie down, turn around and fully extend their wings and/or limbs. While only one poultry farm operates in the Bay State, the measure prohibits the sales of meat items from other states that don’t meet the Massachusetts standard.

The Humane Society of the U.S. (HSUS) donated \$2.4 million of the \$2.6 million spent by supporters of the measure, according to Politico; opponents, who organized very late in the game, spent about \$302,000, with the biggest donation -- \$195,000 – coming from Forrest Lucas, head of Lucas Petroleum and founder of Protect the Harvest. The National Pork Producers Council (NPPC) contributed \$100,000.

In Oklahoma, voters rejected the so-called “right-to-farm” ballot item that sought to amend the state’s constitution with the language protecting production practices and use of technology. Supporters said the protections were necessary to thwart well-financed animal rights groups. Opponents argued the constitutional changes would benefit only large-scale production facilities and would limit environmental protections.

Oklahoma supporters raised about \$1.4 million, while opponents raised about half that amount. Top donors were the Oklahoma Farm Bureau and the Oklahoma Pork Council. HSUS contributed \$154,000 to defeat the measure, reports indicate.

Obama Push on TPP Vote during Lame Duck Falling on Deaf Ears; NFU says Public Opposes Deal

With the post-election lame duck session of Congress set to begin next week – and in earnest the first or second week in December – the only action likely to occur is funding the federal government for all or part of FY2017. This means the 11th-hour call by President Obama and industry to get a ratification vote on the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade treaty is largely falling on deaf ears.

This no doubt pleases the National Farmers Union (NFU) which this week released the results of a poll taken by the Wisconsin Farmers Union (WFO) of its members, 80% of whom steadfastly oppose TPP, not trusting the 12-nation treaty’s promised benefits will accrue to farmers, particularly dairy producers.

The White House began releasing state-by-state TPP benefit statistics, relying on USDA and the U.S. Special Trade Representative’s Office to compile the data.

“In the case of TPP, we will be opening our borders to a flood of low-cost (dairy) imports from New Zealand, displacing Wisconsin milk in cheese production,” said the WFO. “This loss will supposedly be offset by giving U.S. dairy producers access to the Japanese market, but that access will evaporate” given suspicions the Japanese will manipulate their currency to make imports more expensive. WFO said the treaty needs to be sidelined until it includes strong currency manipulation penalties.

Corn Crop Pushes Higher, Ethanol Use Rises

A record 15.226-billion-bushel corn crop is forecast by USDA this year, higher than the department estimate a month ago. Yields are up, USDA said in its November 9, World Agricultural Supply & Demand Estimates report, expected to be 175.3 bushels per acre, compared to 173.4 bushels per acre predicted in October.

Corn for ethanol in 2016-2017 is predicted to be about 5.3 billion bushels, up nearly 100 million bushels from last month’s projection. Corn exports are seen hitting 2.225 billion bushels, up from last year’s 1.9 billion. USDA says cash corn prices will average about \$3.30 a bushel, down from \$3.61 per bushel last year.

Soybean production is expected to reach 4.361 billion bushels, up 92 million from last month’s report, and based on record average yield of 52.5 bushels per acre. Projected 2016-2017 ending wheat stocks are pegged at 1.143 billion bushels, up 5 million bushels from October based on an expected drop in food use.