

Out of Control Policy Blog

Transportation Policy Implications of a Republican Resurgence in November



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C. Kenneth Orski's recent issue of *Innovation Briefs* (Vol. 21, No. 15, July 16) provides interesting speculation on the effects of a Republican resurgence in Congress after the November 2010 elections. Those hoping for an increase in the gas tax would certainly see their hopes dashed. Other priorities would likely swamp any meaningful attempts at getting a long-term transportation reauthorization bill completed as well.

As Ken writes:

"A Republican takeover of the House would add to the already significant political uncertainties surrounding the future of the multi-year surface transportation legislation. A Republican victory would mean almost certain congressional opposition to raising the gas tax in the next Congress. According to Grover Norquist, head of Americans for Tax Reform, a total of 173 members of the U.S. House and 412 candidates for House seats as well as 33 sitting senators and 70 candidates for the Senate have signed the so-called Taxpayer Protection Pledge. The Pledge commits them to oppose and vote against any and all tax hikes if elected or re-elected, and promise to focus on spending restraint rather than increasing taxes to pay for new spending. Unlike other similar promises this one is in writing, with a signature and two witnesses.

"A Republican victory in the House would also mean an organizational realignment in the House congressional committees. The coveted chairmanship of the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee would pass to Rep. John Mica (R-FL) who has already gone on record as saying that "the gas tax is dead" (see our NewsBrief of June 3, "Some Frank and Unscripted Comments from Capitol Hill.") Nor would Rep. James Oberstar's (D-MN) ambitious dream of a \$500 billion six-year surface transportation bill necessarily remain intact under Republican House leadership, which would be anxious to distance itself from free-spending Democrats and may not fully share current transportation policy priorities of the Obama Administration .

"Strengthening Republican resolve to avoid a fuel tax increase in the next Congress would be the projections by the Congressional Budget Office indicating that the surface transportation program is assured of adequate funding (i.e. at the levels authorized for FY 2009) at least through the end of Fiscal Year 2012. With assured funding possibly as long as mid-2013 (if our reading of the CBO projections is correct), a Republican Congress might well decide to postpone consideration of a multi-year bill until after the presidential election of 2012 when a program of infrastructure investment can be considered in an environment less colored by electoral politics."

A Republican resurgence would make these interesting times for transportation policy even more interesting!