

ROLL CALL

McKeon Earns Gavel; DeLay Joins Approps

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Roll Call Staff

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As expected, the House Republican Steering Committee tapped Rep. Howard McKeon (R-Calif.) to become chairman of the Education and the Workforce Committee on Wednesday and also awarded a coveted Appropriations panel slot to former Majority Leader Tom DeLay (R-Texas).

While the assignments must still be approved by the full Republican Conference — a vote could occur as early as today during the House GOP retreat — the selections are expected to be confirmed.

McKeon will take over the Education panel in the wake of Majority Leader John Boehner's (R-Ohio) ascension to the No. 2 leadership spot last week. Under House rules, members of leadership are barred from holding a full committee gavel.

"This is something that I had been working on for about a year, but I was planning on it happening a year from now," McKeon said Wednesday, referring to the fact that Boehner would have been term-limited out of the chairmanship in 2007 under Conference rules.

McKeon waged a solitary campaign for the post after announcing his intentions on Friday. Although Rep. Mike Castle, also a senior member of Education, had expressed interest in seeking the chairmanship in the 110th Congress, the Delaware Republican did not make a formal bid for the post. In addition, Rep. Tom Petri (R-Wis.), who vied for the post in 2001, announced that he was not interested in the position and would instead focus his energies on a bid for the Transportation and Infrastructure chairmanship next year.

"I'm pleased with the selection of my good friend and colleague, Buck McKeon, for the chairmanship of the Education & the Workforce Committee," Boehner said in a statement. "We worked closely together during my tenure as Chairman, and I have seen firsthand his ability to lead on key education and competitiveness issues."

Rules Chairman David Dreier (R), who nominated McKeon, a fellow Californian, for the post during the Steering panel meeting, also offered praise.

"He's going to be a great chairman and we're excited," Dreier said. McKeon will become the sixth Golden State lawmaker to chair a full panel in the 109th Congress.

Although McKeon will need to select a replacement to take over the Education subcommittee on 21st century competitiveness, which he had chaired since

1995, he said he will not make that decision until his appointment is approved by the full Conference.

With his assignment to the Appropriations panel, DeLay will reclaim the seat from which he took a leave of absence when he won the Majority Leader's post in 2002. The Texan will fill a vacancy created when ex-Rep. Duke Cunningham (R-Calif.) resigned from the House in December.

"It's great to be back," DeLay said in a statement. "The Appropriations Committee's agenda touches on every challenge now facing the people of the 22nd district, and my votes will reflect Texas values."

Although DeLay will retain his seniority on the panel, placing him sixth among the current membership, he will not take on leadership of a subcommittee.

Appropriations Chairman Jerry Lewis (R-Calif.) announced Wednesday that DeLay will be assigned to the subcommittees on Science, State, Justice and Commerce as well as Homeland Security.

"On these subcommittees, I'll directly oversee funding priorities for NASA and our border/homeland security infrastructure, both critical assets to the Houston region," DeLay said. "My priorities are clear: fully funding NASA's budget and protecting Houston's security vulnerabilities."

In addition, Lewis named Rep. Ray LaHood (R-Ill.) to the Appropriations subcommittee on Defense, removing him from the two subcommittee posts given to DeLay.

Rep. Mike Simpson (R-Idaho) will also shift to the subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, while giving up a seat on the subcommittee on military quality of life and Veterans Affairs that will be filled by Rep. Rodney Alexander (R-La.).

In other Steering developments, the panel doled out committee assignments to Rep. John Campbell (R-Calif.), who won a December special election to fill the seat vacated by Rep. Christopher Cox (R), now chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission.

Campbell will become a member of the Financial Services, Budget and Veterans Affairs panels.

To make room for the Californian on the Budget panel, Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-Fla.) informed the House on Wednesday that she would forgo her seat on the committee.

"She knew that the new Member wanted to be on Budget, and there are no vacancies available, so she reminded leadership that she would be willing to help out," said Ros-Lehtinen's deputy administrative assistant, Christine del Portillo.

Although Ros-Lehtinen is considered a contender for the International Relations Committee gavel in the 110th Congress, after Chairman Henry Hyde (R-Ill.) retires, del Portillo said that did not factor into the lawmaker's actions.

"Her decision has nothing to do with any other factors," del Portillo said.

No shifts were required for Campbell to join Veterans Affairs, but Homeland Security Chairman Peter King (R-N.Y.) will take a leave of absence from the Financial Services panel to create space for the freshman lawmaker.