

## Lobbyists Frame September Agenda

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The mission for Christopher Wenk, senior director of international policy for the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, is to somehow get a Democratic-controlled Congress to turn its attention to — and take some action on — the issues he gets paid to care about: free-trade agreements.

To keep the pressure on Members, Wenk said, his group plans to beef up its grass-roots campaigns and reach out to newspaper editorial boards in key Members' districts, in addition to stepping up direct lobbying visits. "We're going to do whatever we have to do to see that all four agreements are voted on by the end of the 110th Congress," Wenk said, referring to pacts with Peru, Panama, Korea and Colombia.

Wenk doesn't just have to convince skeptical Democrats to vote for free-trade agreements, he and other lobbyists pushing for a variety of business issues also will have to contend this month with a Congress fixated on Iraq and new priorities in the mortgage industry, among others. Top issues lobbyists say they are pushing this month include patent reform, a fight over the reauthorization of the State Children's Health Insurance Program, appropriations and energy matters and an effort to stop changes to the tax rate paid by private equity funds. Still, many K Streeters are expecting a season of discontent.

"September and early October will be overshadowed by reaction to the various report updates on the Iraq War and the spending showdown heading toward the beginning of the new fiscal year on Oct. 1," said longtime GOP lobbyist Dan Mattoon, who runs Mattoon & Associates. "It is going to be a long, tumultuous fall which will pick up from the bitterness of the last week of the session before the recess in the House."

Wenk agreed it will be tough.

"The problem with just the fall in general is, are we going to be able to fit all that we want to do in such a short time frame? The foot is going to be bigger than the shoe," he said. He added that the agreement with Peru looks promising with the committee process likely to begin within days.

The Securities Industry and Financial Markets Association wrapped up its August recess by putting the final touches on a letter it sent today to Members regarding the mortgage business, which has come under increasing scrutiny. "Problems began late last year when home buyers who took sub-prime mortgages started to default at higher than expected rates, due in part to rising interest rates and a slowing in the housing market," the group's letter

stated.

But perhaps the most pitched, and public, lobbying battle this month will focus on renewing SCHIP. America's Health Insurance Plans, which started running national TV ads in August, plans to continue that costly effort to urge seniors to contact their Members, said spokesman Mohit Ghose. AHIP, and — the group hopes — seniors, are upset with a plan to help pay for SCHIP with cuts to Medicare Advantage. “We are going to be doing a full outreach,” Ghose said. “We are also going to be doing outreach to the editorial boards in the most affected states.”

On the other side, the American Medical Association and seniors lobby AARP plan to launch an ad campaign, according to a spokeswoman, and will be activating their grass-roots networks against AHIP.

On patent reform, Democratic lobbyist Steve Elmendorf, who runs Elmendorf Strategies, expects the bill to hit the House floor perhaps as early as this week and it could make it to the Senate floor later this fall. Elmendorf runs the Coalition for Patent Fairness, which supports patent reform bills in the House and Senate.

“You’ll see a lot of letters of support going up to the Hill,” Elmendorf said. “We’ll have company executives coming from out of town to lobby.” Unlike the SCHIP matter, where groups on both sides are organizing seniors and other voters, Elmendorf said patent reform calls for a more insider strategy. “This is really an issue you have to build from the inside out, meeting with key people on the committees,” he explained.

Elmendorf’s message won’t go unanswered by opponents.

Bill Mashek is working on behalf of a rival outfit called the Coalition for 21st Century Patent Reform, which wants sweeping changes to the bills at issue. Last week, that coalition was touting a letter sent by House Minority Leader John Boehner (R-Ohio) and House Minority Whip Roy Blunt (R-Mo.) to Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) expressing their “concerns” over the patent bill and trying to put the brakes on its speedy consideration by the full House.

Diane Blagman, a Democratic appropriations lobbyist with Greenberg Traurig, said this month will be a flurry of activity for her sector: more meetings with Members and staff to make sure their funding priorities remain priorities. “We have to make sure those Members and Senators are watching over their particular projects in the bill,” she said. “I absolutely think that it will not be like any other year. Usually I’m optimistic, but I’m not optimistic.”

**Cassidy & Associates lobbyist Todd Boulanger, who is monitoring proposals to change the taxes on hedge funds and private equity firms, said this week the issue already will be taking center stage with hearings in both the House Ways and Means and Senate Finance committees. “Carried interest and offshore financial arrangements issues are shaping up to be the tax fights this session,” he said.**

**His colleague, Democratic lobbyist Kai Anderson, who leads the environmental practice at Cassidy & Associates, said he and his team are gearing up for action in both chambers on energy bills. Even if Congress doesn't get to his clients' priorities this fall, Anderson said it's all about the long haul.**

**“There may not be a climate bill this Congress, but if you fail to anticipate where Congress is going — and work now to articulate your position and help shape what happens this Congress — you're not doing your work because the next Congress, they're not just going to start from scratch,” said Anderson, a former aide to Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.).**

**Complicating lobbyists' to-do list, Anderson said, is Congress' reaction to recent crises like in the mortgage industry, mining safety, the safety of bridges and transportation systems as well as product safety after recalls of items made in China. “From a lobbying perspective, people that have transportation projects within the scope of discussion should be preparing,” Anderson said, referring to increased attention on the issue after the Minnesota bridge collapse this summer.**

Tom Hogan, whose lobbying firm F/S Capitol Consulting represents renewable energy client Covanta Energy, said the energy legislation headed to a House-Senate conference will be off to a tough start. Because of that, he spent the August recess laying the groundwork for this month.

“The way the energy bill is positioned, it's the most polarizing starting point to be in,” he said. The Senate passed a bill with increased fuel economy standards but not a renewable portfolio standard, he said, while the House did just the reverse.

“We've got meetings lined up the first three weeks of September, in both the House and Senate,” Hogan said. “It's a hurry-up-and-wait situation, like firefighters. We're being told to keep the pressure on, keep up the meetings. You have to be ready to slide down the pole when your issue comes up.”