

House Members Assigned to Committees; California Republicans Will Lead Three Panels, Including Homeland Security

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House Republican and Democratic leaders doled out plum committee assignments this week, rewarding loyal allies and distributing power among key interest groups.

Californians reaped the greatest gains on the Republican side, taking the helms of three committees: Resources, Armed Services and Homeland Security.

Rep. Christopher Cox, a senior Republican with expertise in international affairs, will head the new Homeland Security Committee. Cox, who in 1998 headed a select committee probe into whether China stole U.S. nuclear and military technology, said he is eager to oversee a large department that includes the Customs Service, the Immigration and Naturalization Service and the Coast Guard. "I will work to make the government more efficient in the war against terrorism," he said. "I will ensure that it is done sufficiently, and that Congress and the federal government work together toward this common goal."

House leaders skipped over several more senior members to tap Richard W. Pombo (R-Calif.), an ardent proponent of property rights, as head of the Resources Committee. Chuck Cushman of the American Land Rights Association said Pombo "has been there for us time and time again in Congress, from adding common sense to the Endangered Species Act to stopping attempted land-grab legislation to promoting multiple use of federal lands."

Environmentalists were less pleased. "It's very disturbing that one of the most anti-environmental voices in Congress has been chosen to lead the committee charged with protection of our wildlife, public lands and forests," said Susan Holmes, legislative advocate for Earthjustice.

The League of Conservation Voters gave Pombo a score of 9 out of 100 during the last Congress because of his votes against environmental measures.

On the Democratic side, House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (Calif.) distributed coveted committee seats to members who supported her leadership bid last year. Rep. Jane Harman (Calif.), the top Democrat on the Intelligence subcommittee on terrorism and homeland security, succeeds Pelosi as the full committee's ranking Democrat.

Democratic leaders placed Reps. Marion Berry (Ark.) and Sanford Bishop (Ga.) on the Appropriations Committee, and Stephanie Tubbs Jones (Ohio) and Max Sandlin (Tex.) on the Ways and Means Committee. They also installed Reps. Tom Allen (Maine), Jim Davis (Fla.), Hilda L. Solis (Calif.) and Janice D. Schakowsky (Ill.) on the Energy and Commerce Committee.

Leaders of the two parties clashed yesterday after Democrats named Tubbs Jones to Ways and Means. House Majority Leader Tom DeLay (R-Tex.) told Pelosi that Republicans planned to eliminate a seat on both sides of the panel. Democrats said the move would prevent Tubbs Jones from becoming the first black woman to serve on the committee.

Ultimately, the committee was kept at its current size.