

Hensarling to Head RSC; Kilpatrick Chairs CBC

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Roll Call

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House lawmakers on both sides of the aisle continued their preparations for the 110th Congress on Wednesday, electing new chairmen for a pair of Member groups and filling out some lower-level leadership slots.

Rep. Jeb Hensarling (Texas) was elected chairman of the Republican Study Committee, beating out Rep. Todd Tiahrt (Kan.) in the race to head the conservative group in the 110th Congress.

Hensarling defeated Tiahrt, 57-42, in a contest that drew a relatively large number of voters. The RSC officially has more than 100 members, but only about 50 regularly attend the group's meetings.

"I am humbled by the results of today's election and am honored to be chosen by my colleagues as RSC Chairman 110th Congress," Hensarling said in a statement. "The RSC has a deep bench of talented public servants that are committed to the principles of [former President] Ronald Regan and the Contract of America, and each will be essential in developing and communicating our conservative message."

Hensarling - who currently serves as the group's chief spokesman on budget issues - was endorsed by outgoing RSC Chairman Mike Pence (Ind.) and ex-Chairman John Shadegg (Ariz.)

as well as by Chief Deputy Majority Whip Eric Cantor (Va.) and many of the RSC's younger, more aggressive members. Tiahrt, meanwhile, had the backing of the group's founders, including GOP Reps. Dan Burton (Ind.), John Doolittle (Calif.) and Sam Johnson (Texas).

Meanwhile, moderate Republicans in the centrist Tuesday Group had been expected on Wednesday to approve the selection of Rep. Charlie Dent (Pa.) to succeed defeated Rep. Charles Bass (N.H.) as co-chairman. However, the group decided to wait until January to allow newly elected Members to participate, though Dent remains the only announced candidate.

Across the aisle, incoming House Majority Whip James Clyburn (D-S.C.) announced his slate of Chief Deputy Whips on Wednesday, largely retaining the members of the current whip team managed by Minority Whip Steny Hoyer (D-Md.) while adding two members, Reps. G.K. Butterfield (N.C.) and Debbie Wasserman Schultz (Fla.)

"I value the experience and perspective that Congressman Butterfield and Congresswoman Wasserman Schultz will bring to the team," Clyburn said in a statement, citing the lawmakers' memberships in the Congressional Black Caucus and the thirty-something Working Group, respectively. "Their unique insight ... will be key in working to advance an agenda that meets the needs of the American people, helps to maintain unity within our Caucus, and sustains a Democratic majority."

Clyburn, in consultation with incoming Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.), also has re-appointed Rep. John Lewis (Ga.), the senior Chief Deputy Whip, as well as Reps. Maxine Waters (Calif.), John Tanner (Tenn.), Ed Pastor (Ariz.), Jan Schakowsky (Ill.), Joe Crowley (N.Y.) and Diana DeGette (Colo.).

"I'm honored to be given the opportunity to continue serving as a member of the Democratic leadership team when we move into the Majority next year," Schakowsky said in a statement.

Although Rep. Ron Kind (D-Wis.) was not selected to serve another term, a Clyburn aide said the Wisconsin lawmaker will be asked to serve as a senior Whip. A Kind spokeswoman said the Wisconsin lawmaker will focus on other roles, including his vice chairmanship at the New Democrat Coalition.

Chief Deputy Whips also serve on the Democratic Steering and Policy Committee, which recommends committee chairmanships and assignments that must then be ratified by the full Caucus.

The Caucus confirmed five chairmen at a weekly meeting Wednesday, installing top Democrats at the four exclusive panels as well as the Rules Committee.

Current ranking members David Obey (Wis.), Charlie Rangel (N.Y.), Barney Frank (Mass.) and John Dingell (Mich.) were each elevated to chair their respective panels - Appropriations, Ways and Means, Financial Services and Energy and Commerce. Pelosi also tapped Rep. Louise Slaughter (N.Y.) to chair the Rules panel, where she currently is the ranking member.

Pelosi also announced the full Steering Committee roster Wednesday, which will include three freshman lawmakers, a first for the panel, as well as the elected leadership, the Chief Deputy Whips, and chairmen of the Appropriations, Budget, Energy and Commerce, Financial Services, Rules and Ways and Means committees.

The Steering panel on Wednesday recommended chairmen to six additional committees, similarly offering no surprises in its selections.

The current ranking members on the Education and the Workforce, Government Reform, Armed Services, International Relations, Agriculture and Homeland Security panels will take over the gavels for their respective panels.

The Steering panel is expected to continue the selection process today, and the full Caucus may convene later today to ratify those decisions.

Among the lawmakers slated to appear before the Steering panel today are Reps. Bob Filner (Calif.) and Mike Michaud (Maine), who are both vying for the Veterans' Affairs gavel in the only likely contest of the chairmanship process, as current ranking member Lane Evans (Ill.) will retire at the end of the 109th Congress.

Meanwhile, members of the Congressional Black Caucus on Wednesday elected Rep. Carolyn Cheeks Kilpatrick (D-Mich.) to lead the group when Congress convenes for the 110th Congress, succeeding current Chairman Mel Watt (D-N.C.).

In addition, CBC members selected Rep. Barbara Lee (D-Calif.) to serve as first vice chairwoman, Rep. Emanuel Cleaver (D-Mo.) as second vice chairman, Rep. Danny Davis (D-Ill.) as secretary and Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee (D-Texas) as the group's whip, her second term in that post.

At a press conference following the election, Watt praised his successor and the new leadership team, stating, "We are extremely blessed," he said. He later added, "Our leadership potential is deep and wide."

Kilpatrick said her agenda, titled "Changing Course, Confronting Crisis, Continuing the Legacy," will continue programs already under way such as the CBC's work to end the genocide in the Darfur region of Sudan as well as include new initiatives like reaching out to "young leaders" ages 18 to 40 and promoting alternative energy policy.

"We have our work cut out for us," said Kilpatrick, who noted that CBC members are expected to chair 25 full House committees or subcommittees next year, including Ways and Means, Judiciary and Homeland Security.

The Michigan lawmaker said the CBC will also seek another meeting with President Bush early next year, although the request has not been formally made.

Kilpatrick will be sworn in as CBC chairwoman in a ceremony at the Library of Congress on Jan. 4.