

TO: NCTR Members
FROM: Cindie Moore, Washington Counsel

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Returning the Portman-Cardin Pension Bill to its Bipartisan Roots

In Federal Update 2003-13, I described the unusual events that took place on July 18 during the House Ways and Means Committee's approval of HR 1776, the Portman-Cardin pension bill. The Committee approved HR 1776 in a highly charged partisan atmosphere, even though the bill itself enjoys strong support by Republicans and Democrats alike. In the aftermath of the events, both the House Republican leadership as well as pension lobbyists are working to restore a positive atmosphere.

Since the events took place, the Republican leadership has had a series of discussions that resulted in Rep. Bill Thomas (R-CA), Chairman of the Committee, apologizing July 23 on the House floor. He said he regretted calling the Capitol Police to remove the Democratic Committee members from a library near the committee hearing room. The chain of events began when the Democratic members objected at the beginning of the mark up of HR 1776. They said the Republicans had not given them adequate time to review a substitute version of the bill offered by Mr. Thomas. After making their objection, they departed for the library to discuss strategy. The apology will hopefully reduce the tension surrounding HR 1776 itself. It will not likely diminish the generally strained relations between House Republicans and Democrats, however.

The Retirement Savings Network (RSN), to which NCTR and other pension organizations belong, met on July 23 and will be reaching out to both Republican and Democratic Committee members and staff. The purpose is to reinforce the bipartisan nature of HR1776. RSN hopes its efforts will help dissipate the rancor and ensure that the bill can continue to work its way through Congress.