On Friday, September 28, President Obama signed into law a six-month Continuing Resolution (CR) for Fiscal Year 2013 (FY13) appropriations, providing stopgap funding for the federal government through March 27, 2013. The President's signature followed Senate passage of the bill on Sept. 22 and House passage on Sept. 13.

The CR sets FY13 discretionary spending at the $1.047 trillion cap established in last year’s debt limit law, the Budget Control Act of 2011. This $1.047 trillion spending level is about $8 billion more than the Fiscal Year 2012 level and will mean a 0.6 percent funding increase for most federal agencies and programs. However, a perfect storm of financial uncertainty about when and at what level final FY13 appropriations levels will be set, as well as the impact of automatic sequestrations set to impose 8.2 percent across-the-board cuts to all discretionary federal agencies and programs on Jan. 2, is causing agencies to allocate and spend FY13 funds conservatively as the fiscal year begins.

Appropriators in both the House and Senate would like to finalize FY13 appropriations during the lame-duck session, after the November elections, by passing an omnibus package that includes all twelve appropriations bills. However, funding under the CR is guaranteed for federal programs through late March, so leaders in Congress and the White House may opt to delay and instead focus on dealing with expiring Bush-era tax cuts and the automatic across-the-board spending cuts due to kick in Jan. 2.

About three dozen exceptions, or anomalies, were included in the CR to address pressing needs. Of note to our community, the CR allows NOAA to reprogram funds for its two satellite systems under development, the Joint Polar Satellite System (JPSS) and the Geostationary Operational Environmental Satellite - R Series (GOES-R). This provision ensures NOAA can continue to advance and fund its weather satellite programs at the necessary levels in FY13.

The CR had bipartisan support in both chambers. The Senate cleared it 62-30, while the House passed it 329-91.