Weekly Legislative Update
Week of January 12, 2015

Congressional Outlook

Week of January 12

The House and Senate convene today for a short workweek, as party retreats are scheduled for Wednesday and Thursday. Congressional leaders will visit the White House tomorrow for their first meeting with President Obama since the convening of the new Congress.

Today, the House is scheduled to consider two bills under suspension of the rules, which limits debate to 40 minutes, bars amendments and requires a two-thirds majority for passage. One bill, H.R. 203, sponsored by Rep. Tim Walz (D-MN), would require the Veterans Affairs Department to provide additional transitional mental health and suicide prevention services for veterans. The same bill passed the House in December, but former Senator Tom Coburn blocked consideration in the Senate. The second bill, Protecting Volunteer Firefighters and Emergency Responders Act (H.R. 33) sponsored by Rep. Lou Barletta (R-PA), ensures that volunteer first responders are not counted as employees when determining if an employer must provide health insurance under the Affordable Care Act. That measure unanimously passed the House last year.

Also this week, the House will consider a measure that alters federal agency rulemaking procedures. The bill, H.R. 185, would require agencies to adopt the least-costly regulatory alternatives, publish advance notice of proposed rulemaking for high-impact rules, and require hearings on high-impact rules, which are those estimated to cost more than $1 billion. The same language was included in a measure passed in the House last September.

The House will also consider a bill to fund the Department of Homeland Security through the end of fiscal year 2015. The agency was funded through February in the major omnibus spending package passed by Congress in December. The $39.7 billion legislation would provide a $400 million increase over FY 2014. House Republican leaders have proposed to let lawmakers vote separately on the money needed to keep the Department of Homeland Security operating and the rollback of President Barack Obama's immigration policies.
A cloture vote is scheduled at 5:30 p.m. today in the Senate on the motion to proceed to S. 1, which would result in the approval of the Keystone XL Pipeline. Backers say the bill will get the 60 votes needed to advance. Sponsor John Hoeven (R-ND) said the procedural vote would be followed by debate on amendments that could last several weeks.

**Week in Review**

**Expect FY 2016 Proposed Budget "On Time"**

Last Wednesday, the White House Office of Management and Budget confirmed that the President's fiscal year 2016 budget request will be released on time on February 2. The budget request is often released well after the February deadline.

**President Announces Big Education Initiatives**

Last week, the President announced 2 major policy initiatives on education: (1) the "America's College Promise" proposal to make 2 years of community college free for responsible students, letting students earn the first half of a bachelor's degree and earn skills needed in the workforce at no cost (if all states participate, an estimated 9 million students could benefit and a full-time community college student could save an average of $3,800 in tuition per year); and (2) the "American Technical Training Fund" to expand innovative, high-quality technical training programs that meet employer needs and help prepare more Americans for better paying jobs.

**EPA 2015 Regulatory Agenda Includes CWA Jurisdiction, Water Quality Standard Setting Rules**

The Office of Water at the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is planning to work on several major rules this year. The most obvious rule is the finalization of the proposed Clean Water Act (CWA) rule changing the federal definition and ultimate jurisdiction over "waters of the U.S.,” slated to be released in final form in April in conjunction with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Also, EPA is preparing a final rule governing how the states set water quality standards. The proposal is at the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) for review, and is set to be released this spring (May). The new rule will also identify the conditions when the federal government would set those standards if state standards are deemed inadequate under the CWA.

**Incoming Chairman Inhofe Announces Priorities for Senate EPW Committee**

Sen. James Inhofe (R-OK) last week laid out an aggressive schedule as he takes over as Chairman on the Senate Environment and Public Works (EPW) Committee. Top priorities include transportation legislation, oversight of EPA regulations, including the proposed "waters of the U.S." (WOTUS) rule, and reauthorization of toxic chemical regulatory policies. Chairman Inhofe, who received unanimous support for his new position, stated that he will use five basic principles in leading the Committee: effective bureaucracy, fiscally responsible policy, costs versus benefits, sound science, and on-the-ground impacts. Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-CA), formerly
Chairwoman of the EPW Committee in the 113th Congress, will now assume the role of ranking member for the 114th Congress.

**Keystone XL Pipeline Debate Set to Begin in Senate**

Last week, the President issued a veto threat for the bill approving construction of the Keystone XL Pipeline, citing among other things a Nebraska lawsuit over the eminent domain process that would have halted construction. On Friday, that lawsuit was dismissed, and later in the day, the House passed the pipeline approval bill, which the Senate will begin debate on later today. While the bill passed in the House, it did not receive enough votes to overcome a veto, and last estimates of yes-votes in the Senate place it at 63, four short of the veto-proof threshold. However, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell has committed to an open amendment process, and support in the Senate may change drastically over the next several weeks depending on the results. [Read more...]

**House Democrats Release Legislative Agenda**

House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) released a legislative agenda that House Democrats will use to draw a “sharp contrast” with Republicans heading into the new Congress. The package includes a bill to prevent corporations from relocating their headquarters overseas to avoid paying U.S. taxes and divert funds to infrastructure investment, as well as a suite of bills authored by Rep. Chris Van Hollen (D-MD) aimed at reducing income inequality. Van Hollen’s bills will focus on reforming the tax code to increase working and middle class incomes. Some of the major components include an increase of the Child Care Tax Credit from $3,000 to $8,000 per person, a $250 bonus for workers who save at least $500 in a year in a retirement or savings account, reduced tax penalties for dual-income married couples, and an additional $1,000 tax credit for workers earning under $100,000, or $2,000 for couples earning under $200,000. The measures would be funded through a 0.1% financial transaction tax. [Read more...]

**Congressional Schedule**

**Monday, January 12**


**Tuesday, January 13**

- House Financial Services Full Committee organizational meeting for the 114th Congress.
- House Ways and Means Full Committee hearing on “Moving American Forward: With a Focus on Economic Growth.”
- House Foreign Affairs Full Committee briefing on “The North Korean Threat: Nuclear Missiles and Cyber.”
- House Veterans Affairs Full Committee business meeting to formally organize the Veterans Affairs Committee of the 114th Congress.
- House Armed Services Full Committee organizations meeting for the 114th Congress.
• Senate Foreign Relations Full Committee hearing to examine articulating the case for American leadership in the world, focusing on the national interest.
• Senate Armed Services Full Committee hearing to examine global challenges and United States national security strategy.