Weekly Legislative Update
Week of January 26, 2015

Congressional Outlook

Week of January 26

The House and Senate are in session this week, but the schedule is tenuous with the impending blizzard in the Northeast. Monday night votes have been canceled. The House is expected to consider a number bills to address human trafficking, as well as legislation to streamline the permitting process for natural gas pipelines. House leadership planned to have a controversial border security bill on the floor Wednesday, but decided earlier today to pull it from the schedule. H.R. 399 would beef up surveillance and protection of the nation's southern and northern borders, including the deployment of more unmanned aerial vehicles. In addition to requiring "100 percent operational control" within five years of the entire border with Mexico, "high traffic" areas of both borders would be required within two years. The bill would authorize $1 billion a year from FY 2016 through 2025. The House Homeland Security Committee approved the measure last week by a vote of 18-12. The measure faces opposition from conservatives who are concerned that the bill doesn't go far enough in terms of interior enforcement, while others are suspicious that it is a ruse meant to ease passage of a Homeland Security Department funding bill without measures targeting the President's relaxed immigration enforcement directives.

The Senate will continue debate on the Keystone XL Pipeline bill with a final vote possibly as early as Wednesday. House Democrats host their party retreat in Philadelphia on Thursday and Friday.

Week in Review

No Federal Funds to Pay for Abortion

Last week, the House passed H.R. 7 on the anniversary of the Supreme Court's 1973 Roe v. Wade decision that legalized abortion. The measure prohibits federal funds to be used to pay for abortions, except in cases of rape, incest or when a mother's life is endangered. House leaders abruptly called off a vote on legislation that would ban abortions after 20 weeks of pregnancy,
following objections from many rank-and-file Republicans. Party members say, however, action on the ban is not over, but tabled for now

**Secretary Foxx Challenges Mayors on Safety**

On January 22, U.S. Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx launched the "Mayor's Challenge for Safer People and Safer Streets," which invites mayors and local elected officials to attend a Safer People, Safer Streets Summit in March 2015 in DC and then take significant action over the next year to improve pedestrian and bicycle transportation safety. The Mayor's Challenge will showcase effective local actions to improve safety, empower local leaders to take action, and promote partnerships to advance pedestrian and bicycle safety. The seven Challenge activities are drawn from the recommended actions stated in the 2010 USDOT Policy Statement on Bicycle and Pedestrian Accommodation Regulations and Recommendations. For example, recommended actions in the policy statement include gathering and tracking local data on biking and walking and ensuring street designs are appropriate for pedestrian and bicycle safety. Attendees at the Summit will work with USDOT staff to identify new Departmental resources they can use during the challenge and will network with their peers. [Click here](#) for more information.

**SEC Targets Standard & Poor's**

Last week, the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) banned Standard & Poor's from providing credit ratings for 1 year for commercial mortgage-backed securities, finding that the credit rating agency had loosened its rating criteria for the securities for its own benefit and then had tried to hide the changes. Accompanied by a $58 million fine, this is the first time the SEC has penalized a credit rating agency.

**Hatch Contra to President on Tax Reform**

Senate Finance Committee Chairman Orrin Hatch (R-UT) plans to push a tax reform agenda in 2015 that differs in several key ways from the President's recent proposals. The President's plan involves increasing the tax credits available to lower and middle income households and increasing taxes on capital gains, while Hatch's agenda focuses on changing tax incentives through revenue-neutral reforms to the corporate and capital gains tax. Hatch has denounced increases in taxes on savings, including the President's proposals to tax gains on 529 accounts, tax-free education savings plans that are primarily utilized by upper-middle and high income families, and taxing capital gains on death, a proposal that Hatch opposes without a reduction in the capital gains tax rate or corporate income tax rate to avoid an increase in the overall tax on savings. The Senator has also suggested a repeal of the medical device tax and the employer mandate, two provisions of the Affordable Care Act, and is not sanguine towards an increase in the gas tax. [Read more...](#)
- House Budget Full Committee hearing on the Congressional Budget Office's Budget and Economic Outlook.
- House Transportation and Infrastructure Full Committee organizational meeting and markup of the oversight plan.
- House Financial Services Full Committee hearing on "Sustainable Housing Finance: An Update from the Director of the Federal Housing Finance Agency."
- House Energy and Commerce Committee Subcommittee on Health hearing on "Examining Public Health Legislation to Help Patients and Local Communities."
- House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management hearing on "Rebuilding after the Storm: Lessening Impacts and Speeding Recovery."
- Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Full Committee hearing to examine No Child Left Behind, focusing on supporting teachers and school leaders.

**Wednesday, January 28**

- House Appropriations Full Committee organizational meeting for the 114th Congress.
- Senate Environment and Public Works hearing to examine MAP-21 reauthorization, focusing on federal and state perspectives.
- Senate Budget Full Committee hearing to examine the Congressional Budget Office’s Budget and Economic Outlook for fiscal years 2015-2025.
- Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Full Committee hearing to examine freight rail transportation, focusing on enhancing safety, efficiency, and commerce.
- Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Full Committee hearing to examine protecting America from cyberattacks, focusing on the importance of information sharing.

**Thursday, January 29**

- Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee Subcommittee on Surface Transportation and Merchant Marine Infrastructure, Safety and Security hearing to examine improving the performance of transportation networks, focusing on stakeholder perspectives.
- Senate Energy and Natural Resources Full Committee hearing to examine S. 33, to provide certainty with respect to the timing of Department of Energy decisions to approve or deny applications to export natural gas.
- Senate Judiciary Full Committee hearing to examine the nomination of the Attorney General.