Congressional Outlook

Week of December 1st

Congress comes back to Washington today after the Thanksgiving break with only ten days to pass a bill funding the government after December 11, when the current temporary continuing resolution (CR) expires. At the same time, Republicans are still trying to reach consensus on what to do to counter President Obama's executive action on immigration intended to ease the threat of deportation for almost 5 million illegal immigrants in the U.S. Some conservative members want to defund the executive action through any new must-pass spending bill, but that could prove more complicated than it sounds. Additionally, the Administration expects legislators to attempt to undermine some of their environmental efforts in a year-end funding package, but the White House says it's confident it could defeat such environmental riders.

Week in Review

Veto Threat to Tax Extenders Package

Last Tuesday, President Obama said that he would veto the $450 billion tax extenders package being negotiated by Republican and Democratic leaders in the Senate because it does not adequately benefit the middle class. Senate leaders have been working on this package that would extend or make permanent a number of tax cuts that expired in January. Read more...

Congressional Response to Ferguson Decision
In the wake of renewed rioting in Ferguson, MO, Senator Richard Durbin (D-IL) announced Tuesday that he intends to hold a hearing on the state of civil and human rights in the United States. Read more...

**EPA Releases Affordability Policy for CWA Compliance**

Last week, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) released its plan for assessing the affordability thresholds for communities dealing with expensive mandated Clean Water Act (CWA) water infrastructure upgrades. Communities that have been required to make upgrades to old sewer and stormwater systems have been critical of the agency's 1997 affordability guidance used to calculate how quickly a community can afford to make these expensive investments.

The newly released affordability framework, however, still relies on the formulas laid out in the 1997 guidance, which calculate the impact on residential customers based on adjusted medium household income and the financial capability of a town or utility by looking at things such as bond rating, debt and property tax revenue collection. But it does allow for communities to bring additional information to the table during negotiations about affordability, such as data on income inequality in certain areas of a community that would be hit much harder by rate increases than other more affluent areas. It remains to be seen how EPA will actually implement their new framework, much like the agency's Integrated Planning and Permitting Framework which is still in its early stages of implementation after two years.

**Congressional Schedule**

**Tuesday, December 2**

- House Foreign Affairs Committee Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade hearing on "ISIS and the Threat from Foreign Fighters."
- House Judiciary Full Committee hearing on "President Obama's Executive Overreach on Immigration."
- Senate Environment and Public Works Full Committee legislative hearing on S. 2911, the Super Pollutants Act of 2014.
- Senate Environment and Public Works Committee Subcommittee on Water and Wildlife hearing on "Innovation and the Utilities of the Future: How Local Water Treatment Facilities are Leading the Way to Better Manage Wastewater and Water Supplies."

**Wednesday, December 3**

- House Energy and Commerce Committee Subcommittee on Commerce, Manufacturing, and Trade hearing on "Takata Airbag Ruptures and Recalls."
- House Energy and Commerce Committee Subcommittee on Health hearing on "The Future of the Children's Health Insurance Program."
- Senate Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Full Committee hearing hearing on "Farmers and Fresh Water: Voluntary Conservation to Protect our Land and Waters."