Congressional Outlook

Week of December 15th

The Senate is in session for the first part of this week and is expected to adjourn for the year by Wednesday. Before adjourning, Senate leaders plan to vote on legislation reviving expired tax breaks and on an extension of the terrorism-insurance backstop set up after the 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon. There is also a slate of presidential nominees awaiting confirmation.

Week in Review

Congress Avoids Another Federal Government Shutdown; Sends FY 2015 Spending Bill to President

Hours before the December 11 midnight deadline, the House passed the fiscal year 2015 "CROmnibus" appropriations bill, funding all federal agencies through September 30, 2015 (except the Department of Homeland Security, which is funded at current levels through February 2015). The House then passed two separate continuing resolutions to give the Senate time to pass the measure. Late Saturday night, the Senate passed the bill after a rare Saturday work day. Liberal Democrats opposed the bill because of provisions changing Dodd-Frank Wall Street reform laws and allowing increased political donations, while GOP conservatives argued the bill didn't go far enough to stop the immigration executive order or to cut overall government spending. In the end, the House passed the bill by a slim margin of 219 to 206 (with 67 Republicans and 139 Democrats voting against it), and the Senate approved the measure with a
56 to 40 vote (18 Republicans, 21 Democrats and 1 Independent voting against it).

For highlights of the $1.1 trillion spending bill, see the links below.

Agriculture-FDA
Commerce-Justice-Science
Defense
Energy & Water
Financial Services
Interior & EPA
Labor-HHS-Education
Military Construction-VA
State & Foreign Aid
Transportation-HUD
Highlights of Non-Funding Policy Riders Included in the Bill

Senate Clears National Defense Authorization; Includes Public Lands Package

The U.S. Senate passed the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) Friday, authorizing $585 billion for the military in 2015. The measure was passed by the House on December 4th. The resolution, which passed by a vote of 89-11, allocates $521.3 billion to fund the base Pentagon budget, and another $63.7 billion is dedicated to military commitments in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Senate passed it ahead of schedule for the 53rd straight year despite some last-minute hurdles and partisan disagreements and concerns about a potential government shutdown. In addition to paying troops, funding military operations, building weapons and air and naval craft and paying for the ongoing conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, the NDAA also authorizes the provision of $5 billion to train Iraqis to fight against the Islamic State terror group, also known as ISIS or ISIL.

Charity Tax Break Extension Fails in House

H.R. 5806, a bill to permanently extend three expired charity-related tax breaks failed to pass a suspension vote in the House on Thursday. The bill, introduced by Dave Camp (R-MI) would have extended tax deductions for donations from individual retirement accounts, donations of conservation easements, and donations of food inventory. President Obama had promised to veto this bill if it passed because it is projected to increase the national debt by $11 billion. All three provisions are included in the tax extenders bill that retroactively applies the tax breaks to 2014; that bill has passed the house, and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) has indicated that the Senate will vote on the tax extenders before the lame duck session ends.

President Makes Manufacturing Headlines

Last Thursday President Obama announced $290 million in public-private investment for two new Manufacturing Innovation Hub competitions, which fulfills the President's 2014 State of the Union pledge to launch four new institutes this year, for a total of eight institutes launched so far, and puts the Administration past the halfway mark on the President's original goal of creating 15 manufacturing innovation institutes supported through executive action. In addition, the President announced $100 million to expand apprenticeships for American workers.

Congressional Schedule
Wednesday, December 17

- Senate Environment and Public Works Committee Subcommittee on Clean Air and Nuclear Safety oversight hearing to examine the EPA’s proposed National Ambient Air Quality Standards for ozone.