Congressional Outlook

Week of December 16th

The House is in recess until January 7th, but the Senate is still in session this week. Senate leaders are pushing to complete action on their last "must-dos" of the session, which include recently negotiated agreements on the budget and the annual Department of Defense authorization bill. The Senate is also expected to vote on a number of Presidential nominations, including Jeh Johnson to serve as secretary of the Department of Homeland Security, Janet Yellen to serve as the chairman of the Federal Reserve, and John Koskinen to be the commissioner of the Internal Revenue Service.

Week in Review

House Passes Two Year Budget Deal

The budget deal, which was struck last week between House Budget Committee Chairman Paul Ryan (R-WI) and Senate Budget Committee Chairwoman Patty Murray (D-WA), would increase federal spending over the next two years, mitigating the impact of "sequestration." The deal would be offset by a mix of fee increases and spending cuts. Appropriators now have until January 15, 2014 to write and enact an omnibus spending bill for the rest of FY 2014 before the current continuing resolution (CR) expires. Click here for more information on the budget deal.

No Final Vote on Farm Bill in 2013

Last week, farm bill conference committee negotiators conceded that they will not finish their work before Congress goes home for the year. The word is that they are close to a final deal and working toward floor action in early January. Senate leaders indicated that there would not be any short- or long-term extensions because of their confidence that a full farm bill could be finished in January.
Is Health Coverage for Volunteer First Responders Required Under the ACA?

Senator Mark Warner (D-VA) introduced a bill last week (S. 1798) to ensure that volunteer first responders are not counted as employees under the ACA's employer mandate provision. Representative Lou Barletta (R-PA) introduced a companion measure in the House (H.R. 3685). Senator Bob Casey, who is a member of the Senate Finance Committee's Taxation and IRS Oversight Subcommittee, secured a commitment from the nominee to be the next IRS Commissioner that this issue will be quickly addressed. NATaT first commented on this 2011, and alerted organizations like the National Volunteer Fire Council, that this may be an unintended consequence of the ACA.

Helping Recruit and Retain Volunteer First Responders

Last Thursday, Representatives John Larson (D-CT) and Tom Latham (R-IA) introduced a measure to provide small incentives to recruit and retain volunteer fire and EMS personnel (H.R. 3747). For more, click here. NATaT has worked on this issue since before the first bill was passed in 2007, and helped get this bill and its counterpart in the Senate reintroduced in this session of Congress.

Congress and Administration Continues ACA Tussle

Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius faced off with congressional critics of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) during a House Energy and Commerce Health Subcommittee hearing last Wednesday. For more, click here.

Nearing Anniversary of Newtown, Biden Announces Mental Health Grants

Last Tuesday, Vice President Joe Biden announced that the Department of Health and Human Services was making $100 million in new grants for improved mental health services. For more, click here.

Another Stab at Cybersecurity Legislation

The House Homeland Security Committee introduced new bipartisan legislation backed by the Committee's leadership that would address the nation's cybersecurity challenges. For more, click here.

Congressional Hearing Schedule

Tuesday, December 17
- Senate Judiciary Committee hearing on protecting small businesses and promoting innovation by limiting patent troll abuse.

Wednesday, December 18
- Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee meeting to mark up bill to improve and transform the Postal Service. Members will also mark up the
Cybersecurity Recruitment and Retention Act.
- Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee hearing on what information data brokers have on consumers and how they use it.