Congressional Outlook

Week of May 27th

The Senate is in recess this week, and the House will return on Wednesday for a three-day work week. Both the House and Senate will be in session next week. The House will consider the fiscal year (FY) 2015 Commerce-Justice-Science bill under an open rule, which means there is no cap on relevant amendments. The Appropriations Committee is scheduled to mark up the FY 2015 Agriculture-FDA spending bill, while one of its subcommittees is to consider the Homeland Security spending measure.

The House also will consider several bills dealing with accountability and executive performance at the Veterans Affairs Department, which has come under fire for delays at health-care facilities around the country.

Week in Review

Congress Sends Water Infrastructure Bill to the President

On May 22, the Senate passed the Water Resources Reform and Development Act of 2014 (WRRDA) by a vote of 91-7, sending the measure (HR 3080) to the President's desk for his signature. The Senate action followed House approval of the bill on May 20 by a vote of 412-4. The WRRDA 'conference report' (final House-Senate compromise version) authorizes new Corps of Engineers water projects for eventual funding, and provides policy guidance to the Corps. The last WRDA was enacted in 2007. WRRDA 2014 revises the process for authorizing new Corps projects and for 'de-authorizing' old projects that have not been funded. It also directs the Corps to revamp its levee safety standards, creates a new pilot program (WIFIA) for financing of non-federal water supply and wastewater projects, and streamlines environmental and economic review of proposed new Corps projects.
House Passes Defense Authorization Bill Amid Veto Threat

Last Thursday, the House passed H.R. 4435, the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for FY 2015, by a vote of 325-98, in defiance of a presidential veto threat. H.R. 4435 authorizes and prioritizes funding for the Department of Defense (DoD) and other select national security programs within the Department of Energy for FY 2015. The bill rejects a Pentagon request for base closures, and includes a 1.8-percent pay raise for troops, rather than the 1-percent cap suggested by the Pentagon.

Cabinet Shuffle

On Friday, President Obama announced that he chose San Antonio Mayor Julian Castro to be the next housing secretary. President Obama also announced that he picked Shaun Donovan, the current Housing and Urban Development secretary, to serve as his next budget director. Finally, the president asked his outgoing budget director, Sylvia Mathews Burwell, to lead the Department of Health and Human Services, succeeding Kathleen Sebelius, who oversaw the troubled rollout of the 2010 health-care law.

House Appropriations Committee Approves Spending Bill for Transportation and HUD

Last Wednesday, the House Appropriations Committee approved the FY 2015 Transportation, Housing and Urban Development (THUD) Appropriations bill by a vote of 28-21. The bill would provide $52 billion in discretionary spending for highways, transit, aviation, rail and housing programs, which is about $1.8 billion below the current level. A subcommittee approved the measure May 7.

The bill includes $100 million for an infrastructure grant program known as Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER). The committee defeated an amendment by Rep. David Price (D-NC) that would have boosted TIGER funding by $500 million, bringing funding in line with FY 2014 funding levels. The committee also opposed an effort by Rep. Betty McCollum (D-MN) to expand the definition of eligible projects. The bill specifically lists highway, bridge, port and freight rail projects as the only ones eligible for TIGER, purposefully excluding mass transit. Rep. Marcy Kaptur (D-OH) introduced an amendment that would increase funding for HUD's Community Development Block Grant by $300 million (up from the current $3 billion). That amendment also failed. The bill also cuts funds for the HOME investments block grant program, which provides funding to qualified local governments and nonprofits for rental aid to people, construction of low-income rental housing, homebuyer assistance and rehabilitation of owner-occupied housing. The House bill proposes $700 million for FY 2015, down from the FY 2014 enacted level of $1 billion.

Senate Appropriations Committee Approves Agriculture Spending Bill

The Senate Appropriations Committee approved a $20.6 billion Agriculture spending bill last Thursday that contains a carefully constructed compromise on enforcing school nutrition standards. At the markup, Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA) won support for delaying a 2017 requirement for lower sodium levels in school meals by requiring further study. Harkin’s plan reflects negotiations with GOP members, as it would study the sodium levels but not allow for waivers of other school nutrition standards as sought by House appropriators in their draft bill the previous week. On another closely watched issues, the measure does reflect the House bill.
adding white potatoes to the food eligible for the nearly $7 billion Women, Infants and Children nutrition program. The measure, approved 30-0, also included riders on perennial issues, including one that would essentially ban horse slaughter and another that would allow labeling of genetically modified salmon.

**Senate Tax Extender May Still Be In Play**

Last week, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) stated that he would return to the tax extenders bill if Republican senators bring a list of germane amendments. The previous week Republicans blocked the bill to extend dozens of lapsed tax breaks. Reid stated that so far the only amendment was a "poison pill" related to Obamacare.

**Congressional Schedule**

**Wednesday, May 28**

- House Energy and Commerce Committee's Health Subcommittee markup of H.R.4631, the "Combating Autism Reauthorization Act"; H.R.4299, the "Improving Regulatory Transparency for New Medical Therapies Act"; and H.R.4709, the "Ensuring Patient Access to Effective Drug Enforcement Act."
- House Veterans' Affairs Committee hearing on the Phoenix VA Health Care System wait list.

**Thursday, May 29**

- House Appropriations Committee markup of the FY2015 Agriculture Appropriations Bill.
- House Veterans' Affairs Committee's Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee hearing on "Assessing Inadequacies in VA Data Usage for and Services Provided to Visually-Impaired Veterans."
- House Natural Resources Committee markup of H.R.2175, the "World War II Memorial Prayer Act of 2013"; H.R.2569, the "Upper Missisquoi and Trout Wild and Scenic Rivers Act"; H.R.3606, the "Emigrant Wilderness Historical Use Preservation Act of 2013"; H.R.4296, to amend Public Law 94-241 with respect to the Northern Mariana Islands; H.R.4350, the "Northern Cheyenne Lands Act"; and H.R.4742. the "Strengthening Fishing Communities and Increasing Flexibility in Fisheries Management Act."
- House Veterans' Affairs Committee's Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs Subcommittee hearing on "Evaluating VA's Performance in the Servicemember Transition Process."
- House Small Business Committee hearing on "Will EPA's 'Waters of the United States' Rule Down Small Businesses?"
- House Homeland Security Committee's Transportation Security Subcommittee hearing on "Lessons from the LAX Shooting: Airport and Law Enforcement Perspectives."
- House Rules Committee meeting to formulate a rule on H.R.4681, the "Intelligence

Friday, May 30

- House Appropriations Committee Markup of the FY2015 Defense Appropriations Bill.
- House Energy and Commerce Committee’s Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee hearing on “Department of Energy Oversight: Status of Loan Programs.”