Congressional Outlook

**Week of September 15th**

The House and Senate are in session this week. As the end of the fiscal year approaches, Congress must address the situation of funding the federal government beyond September 30 given that no FY 2015 appropriations bills have been approved. Last week, Congress was expected to pass a continuing resolution (H.J. Res. 124) that would fund the government through December 11, ensuring the federal government does not shutdown at the end of the month. However, a request from the President for authorization to train and arm Syrian rebels to fight against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), delayed consideration of the CR. House Republican leadership and Senate Democratic leadership where initially ready to pass the Administration's request to fight ISIL in Syria as part of the CR, however, leaders have heard widespread opposition from both parties to this idea. Members have urged a separate vote on the ISIS issue because it involves an important military intervention that warrants separate debate. It is now expected that Congress will work on legislation ratifying President Obama's request, as well as the final CR, over the course of this week.

Behind the scenes House Appropriations Committee Chair Hal Rogers is quietly planning to assemble a FY 15 omnibus appropriations bill during the lame duck session. Success in this endeavor is obviously predicated on no changes to Senate leadership after the elections.

Lawmakers from both houses still hope to wrap up work by the end of the week to return home and campaign for re-election.
WOTUS Rule Passes House; EPA Counters with Social Media

Last Tuesday, the House passed H.R. 5078, the Waters of the United States Regulatory Overreach Protection Act, by a vote of 262-152. This legislation prohibits the Environmental Protection Agency and the Army Corps of Engineers from finalizing and enforcing a proposed rule that would redefine "Waters of the United States" under the Clean Water Act, or using the rule as a basis for future administrative actions. [Read more...]

US DOT Awards 72 TIGER Grants

Last week, the Department of Transportation (DOT) announced it would provide $600 million for 72 transportation projects in 46 states and the District of Columbia from its 2014 TIGER (Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery) program. This last TIGER round received 797 eligible applications from 49 states, U.S. territories and the District of Columbia, an increase from the 585 applications received in 2013. Overall, applicants requested 15 times the $600 million available for the program, or $9 billion for needed transportation projects. [Read more...]

House Amtrak Bill Enjoys Initial Bipartisan Support But 113th Passage Unlikely

On Thursday, September 11, the House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee Chairman Bud Shuster introduced H.R. 5449, the Passenger Rail Reform and Investment Act of 2014 (PRRIA 2014). While the bill would make significant cuts to Amtrak funding - including a 40% cut in construction funding - PRRIA 2014 appears to have attracted bipartisan support. It is unlikely the bill will see significant action in 2014 but could move forward relatively quickly when the new 114th Congress convenes in January. [Read more...]

Senate Holds Hearing on Equipment Transfer Programs for Local Law Enforcement

In the wake of events in Ferguson, Missouri last month, Congress is questioning government property transfer and purchasing programs such as the Department of Defense (DOD) 1033 Program and the Department of Justice (DOJ) Byrne Justice Assistance Grant Program (JAG). The Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs scrutinized DOD, DOJ, and Department of Homeland Security (DHS) programs for their lack of accountability and transparency in the transfer of government property, namely military grade equipment like Mine-Resistant Ambush Protected vehicles (MRAPs) and assault weapons.

Although the Committee was unanimously in favor of making changes to government property transfer and purchasing programs, what changes should be made are still in question. This hearing was focused on understanding how the programs are currently operating and the complexity of policing in regards to militarizing and equipment use. Senator Claire McCaskill (D-MO), the organizer of the hearing, said that subsequent hearings will be held on this issue, where hopefully more definitive conclusions can be made on how the programs in question need to be changed. [Click here](#) for a memo outlining key discussions and conclusions from the hearing.
Report: Water Utilities Will Support $524 Billion in Economic Activity over Next 10 Years

A report released on September 10 by the Water Research Foundation and Water Environment Research Foundation analyzed the capital and operating costs of public water, wastewater and stormwater services to 83 million people in the U.S. The study, which includes 30 municipal utilities that cover half of all large U.S. metropolitan areas, highlights the positive effects that water utilities have on the entire economy. The utilities in the study plan to spend $145 billion, over 40% of their total budgets, over the next 10 years on infrastructure investments, including improvements in water reuse and recycling capabilities that are critical for regions vulnerable to drought like California. Investment in water infrastructure supports economic activity in other sectors and has strong indirect employment effects; every $1 million spent in the water utilities sector is responsible for 16 jobs, and the utilities in this study alone have an annual employment impact of 290,000. The full report can be viewed here.

Congressional Schedule

Monday, September 15
- Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee hearing to examine equality for the District of Columbia, focusing on discussing the implications of S. 132, to provide for the admission of the State of New Columbia into the Union.
- Senate Appropriations Committee Subcommittee on Defense markup of FY 2015 Defense bill.

Tuesday, September 16
- House Rules Full Committee business meeting on the following measures: H.R. ____, the American Energy Solutions for Lower Costs and More American Jobs Act; and H.R. ____, the Jobs for America Act.
- Senate Appropriations Committee Subcommittee on Department of Labor, Health and Human Services and Education and Related Agencies joint hearing with Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee Subcommittee on Departments of Labor, Health, and Human Services, and Education and Related Agencies to examine Ebola in West Africa, focusing on a global challenge and public health threat.
- Senate Armed Services Full Committee hearing to examine U.S. policy towards Iraq and Syria and the threat posed by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).

Wednesday, September 17
- House Agriculture Full Committee hearing to review the implementation of Section 4022 of the Agriculture Act of 2014: Pilot projects to reduce dependency and increase work requirements and work effort under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.
- House Science, Space and Technology Full Committee hearing on "The Administrations
Climate Plan: Failure by Design.

- House Small Business Full Committee hearing on "Is the FCC Responding to the Needs of Small business and Rural America?"
- House Natural Resources Committee Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources hearing on the following measures: H.R. 5066 (Benishek), to reauthorize the National Geological and Geophysical Data Preservation Program Act of 2005 through 2019. "Data Preservation Act of 2014;" and H.R. 5176 (Lujan), to authorize the Secretary of the Interior to retire coal preference right lease applications for which the Secretary has made an affirmative commercial quantities determination, and for other purposes.
- Senate Appropriations Full Committee markup of FY 2015 Defense bill.
- Senate Finance Full Committee hearing to examine reforming America’s outdated energy tax code.
- Senate Judiciary Full Committee hearing to examine why net neutrality matters, focusing on protecting consumers and competition through meaningful open Internet rules.
- Senate Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs Committee Subcommittee on Economic Policy hearing to examine the impact of rising inequality of the American economy.
- Senate Foreign Relations Full Committee hearing to examine the U.S. strategy to defeat ISIL.

Thursday, September 18

- House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence Full Committee hearing on the "Threat Posed by ISIL, al-Qa'ida, and other Islamic extremists."
- House Armed Services Full Committee hearing on the Administration's Strategy for ISIL.
- House Foreign Affairs Full Committee hearing on "The ISIS Threat: Weighing the Obama Administrations Response."
- House Agriculture Committee Subcommittee on Conservation, Energy, and Forestry hearing on the benefits of promoting soil health in agriculture and rural America.
- House Homeland Security Committee Subcommittee on Transportation Security hearing on "Safeguarding Privacy and Civil Liberties While Keeping our Skies Safe."
- House Foreign Affairs Committee Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere hearing on "Unaccompanied Alien Children: Pressing the Administration for a Strategy."
- Senate Judiciary Full Committee business meeting to consider: S. 1690, to reauthorize the Second Chance Act of 2007; S. 2646, to reauthorize the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act; and District Court nominations.

Friday, September 19

- House Foreign Affairs Committee Subcommittee on Europe, Eurasia, and Emerging Threats hearing on "Islamic Foreign Fighters Returning Home and the Threat to Europe."