Congressional Outlook

Week of September 22

Members of Congress are on recess until after the November 4th elections, and will return, at the earliest, on November 12th. During this 6-week period, appropriations staff will be assembling a fiscal year 2015 omnibus appropriations bill that packages the 12 annual spending bills into one. However, passage of that omnibus bill - like many other bills - will largely depend on the outcome of the Senate elections. If the Republicans take over the Senate, there will not be much legislative activity, as they will wait to be in the majority before moving many bills. One bill, however, that will likely see action is the National Defense Authorization Act, which has passed each year for the past 52 years. The measure passed the House and awaits Senate and conference action, and few if any Senators want to see the NDAA streak end on their watch.

Week in Review

Congress Sends CR to President

Last Friday, Congress sent to the President a Continuing Resolution (CR) that funds federal government operations at the current funding level of $1.012 trillion through December 11, 2014. The measure also includes funds for Syrian rebels to fight against Islamic terror group ISIS/ISIL, and extends the Export-Import Bank charter through June 2015. The House passed H.J.Res. 124, by a vote of 319-108 on Wednesday, and the Senate also approved the measure with a 78-22 vote on Thursday.

Bill Would Give More Transportation Funding Authority to Local Governments

Last Thursday, Senators Cory Booker (D-NJ) and Roger Wicker (R-MS), along with Mark Begich (D-AK), Robert Casey (D-PA), and Thad Cochran (R-MS) introduced the Innovation in Surface Transportation Act of 2014 (S. 2891). The House companion to S. 2891 - H.R. 4726 - was introduced on May 22nd by Representative Rodney Davis (R-IL). This measure establishes a set-aside for merit-based grants to local communities. Grants would be awarded by a panel of representatives from local and state jurisdictions, "ensuring that funds go to well-conceived
projects with strong local support and potential for high return on investment." S. 2891 was referred to the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, and H.R. 4726 was referred to the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee's Highways and Transit Subcommittee.

**Movement on Amtrak Bill**

Last Wednesday, the House Transportation Committee unanimously approved a four-year Amtrak reauthorization. However, the bipartisan legislation is unlikely to see much more action this year. With time on the legislative calendar dwindling, and a companion draft not on the Senate's radar, the measure is all but certain to die this year as the 113th Congress comes to a close.

**House Passes Two Compilation Bills**

Last Thursday, the House passed H.R. 4, the Jobs for America Act, by a vote of 253-163. The bill, sponsored by Representative Dave Camp (R-MI), contains provisions of 15 other bills previously passed by the House, and was partially intended to demonstrate to voters the legislation that would pass a Republican-controlled Senate. The bill would permanently extend bonus depreciation of business expenses and the corporate research and development tax credit, change the definition of full-time work in the employer mandate of the Affordable Care Act from 30 hours to 40 hours a week, and repeal the medical device tax, among other things. Read More...

In a similar move, the House also passed H.R. 2, the American Energy Solutions for Lower Costs and More American Jobs Act, by a vote of 226-191. H.R. 2, which contains provisions from 14 other previously passed bills the Senate has not taken up, would approve the Keystone XL Pipeline, create an expedited approval process for oil and natural gas pipelines that cross U.S. borders with Canada or Mexico, require congressional approval for any EPA energy regulations with a projected cost of over $1 billion, and limit standards that the EPA can set on new power plants. The legislation was sponsored by Representative Lee Terry (R-NE). Read More...

**Congressional Schedule**

There are no hearings as Congress is currently in recess.