Congressional Outlook

Week of September 29th

The House and Senate are in recess until November 12.

Week in Review

Attorney General Eric Holder Resigns

Last Thursday, Attorney General Eric Holder announced his resignation. He holds the designation of the first African American attorney general and the fourth longest-serving attorney general in our nation's history. Holder will serve until his successor is confirmed. Read more...

Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) Administrator Resigns

PHMSA Administrator Cynthia Quarterman announced last week that she will step down October 3rd, leaving the Department of Transportation without a key official in the final stage of a closely watched push to strengthen safety standards for oil trains. Quarterman has led PHMSA since 2009, which has seen turbulent times as the Keystone XL debate and a series of high-profile pipeline accidents pushed the agency into the headlines. A replacement has not yet been named.
EPA's Local Government Outreach on Environmental Issues

Last Wednesday, the EPA announced in the Federal Register that its Small Communities Advisory Subcommittee and Local Government Advisory Committee will each meet via teleconference on Friday, October 10, 2014 to discuss recommendations regarding environmental issues affecting local communities. The conference calls will focus on the Clean Water Act's Waters of the U.S. Proposed Rule, as well as other environmental issues. These are open meetings and all interested persons are invited to participate.

EPA Withdraws Appeal of Decision in CWA Farm Dust Litigation

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is dropping its appeal in Lois Alt, et al. v. EPA, et al., a U.S. District Court case that held that the EPA rule exempting “agricultural stormwater” also exempts any airborne farmyard particles, such as dust, feathers, and the like that can be carried in the stormwater to jurisdictional waters. EPA officials have determined that spending resources on this litigation takes away from other more serious pollution across the country, according to an EPA blog post. Environmental groups that intervened in support of EPA are considering their options now that EPA has moved to dismiss its own appeal of the decision.

House Panel Releases Report on Public-Private Water Projects

A special panel of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee has released its report on the use of public-private partnerships (P3s) to finance infrastructure projects across the country. Their findings show that P3s can provide significant benefits for some public infrastructure projects, but did not find enough data to specifically determine how they can be successfully used to finance water projects. While one of the report's recommendations was that P3s should not be considered a solution to all of the nation's infrastructure funding challenges, it also recommended that Congress remove barriers to the use of P3s in meeting some public infrastructure needs, such as increasing or eliminating the volume cap on the use of tax-exempt Private Activity Bonds (PABs). The report covered many types of P3s in infrastructure, including surface transportation; aviation; public buildings and economic development; ports and inland waterways; and water systems and water treatment. The House T&I Committee's P3 report can be found here.

Congressional Schedule

There are no hearings as Congress is currently in recess.