



Memorandum

TO: Miami-Dade Board of County Commissioners

FROM: Greenberg Traurig

DATE: March 6, 2012

RE: February Report to the Board of County Commissioners

Below please find a summary of Greenberg Traurig's efforts on behalf of Miami-Dade County in February.

Overview of Legislative Activity in February

Congress focused most of February on the federal budget. In February, President Barack Obama released his budget for the fiscal year 2013. The President based his budget upon the thresholds established in the Budget Control Act of 2011, which was passed in August of last year. Under Obama's budget, the President paired short-term job creation measures with longer-term deficit reductions. He also sought to increase taxes on the wealthy by allowing the upper-bracket tax cuts to expire. The President proposed increased spending on job creation, transportation and infrastructure projects, education, civilian research, and green energy. The plan was immediately criticized by conservatives for not going far enough on deficit reductions. Although the deal reached under the Budget Control Act would significantly cut the federal budget, House Republicans want to go further. In addition to the President's budget, Congress reached a deal on extending the payroll tax cuts. Under the legislation that extended the tax break, the Social Security payroll tax paid by employees would continue at its reduced rate of 4.2 percent through December. Long-term jobless benefits were also renewed through January 2013, although they will be scaled back in three stages.

Aviation

During February, GT continued to monitor the ongoing transportation reauthorization discussions and legislative action. The legislation contains important sources of funding for the nation's airports. The Senate continues to work towards a short-term reauthorization, while the House attempts to pass a full five-year reauthorization at significantly reduced levels over the last reauthorization. The Senate took the first major step by bringing its bill to the floor. The Democratic leadership was forced to entertain several non-germane amendments. For instance, a vote was called for on contraception.

The amendment sought to allow health plans to decline coverage of an item if it is against the issuer's religious beliefs. The amendment was in response to the Obama administration's decision to require health insurers not affiliated with religious institutions to provide free contraceptive coverage in their benefit packages. The amendment failed, but provides some insight into the increasingly political nature of a bill that is typically bipartisan. GT continues to follow the progress of the this bill and will report to the County as issues arises.

Visa Waiver Program

GT continues to work with OIA to find a way to expand the visa waiver program (VWP). Outreach continues to members of the Dade delegation and others in Congress. Legislation has been introduced that would expand the program. In February, GT notified OIA of a new bill to expand the VWP. US Senators Barbara Mikulski (D-MD) and Mark Kirk (R-IL) introduced the *Visa Waiver Program Enhanced Security and Reform Act*. The bipartisan bill encourages travel and tourism to the United States which creates and sustains jobs. At the same time, the bill updates the Visa Waiver Program (VWP) framework to reflect improved capabilities to track travelers entering the United States and improves annual reporting to increase oversight and transparency. The Senate bill is cosponsored by Senator Ben Cardin (D-MD). Companion legislation is led by Representative Mike Quigley (D-IL) in the House.

Media Updates

GT continues to send media updates on legislative and political issues to the County in order to ensure that the Commission and staff remain up-to-date on developments within the Beltway. Our team has continued to send those interested individuals information regarding issues such as the reauthorization of the surface transportation bill, appropriations and immigration, among others. We will continue to monitor the issues most relevant to the County and provide timely and accurate information in order to make certain that the County is aware of any developments which may provide an opportunity to accomplish established legislative goals.

If you have any questions, or we can be of any further assistance, please let us know.