

## **WEEKLY WASHINGTON JANUARY 24TH - JANUARY 28TH, 2011**

**Below is an informal overview of the Weekly Washington activities of the Office of Intergovernmental Affairs.**

### **CONGRESSIONAL MEETINGS**

OIA Director Joe Rasco was in Washington, DC this week to meet with Members of Congress and their staff to discuss several issues of importance including the Port of Miami's deep dredge. This was an opportunity for OIA to reiterate Miami-Dade County's goals and issues of importance for the 112<sup>th</sup> Congress with existing staff and to introduce the county to the new members and their offices. OIA met directly with Congresswoman Frederica Wilson to request that she continue to urge the Office of Management and Budget to include a nominal amount of construction funds in the Army Corps 2012 budget for the Port of Miami deep dredge project. OIA also discussed with the Congresswoman Haitian relief efforts, the agriculture freeze and the Miami Intermodal Center among many other issues. OIA also met with the staff of Representatives Ileana Ros-Lehtinen and Debbie Wasserman Schultz. Director Rasco and OIA also took this opportunity to familiarize the staff of newly elected Senator Marco Rubio and Rep. David Rivera on the issues of critical importance to the county.

Additionally, OIA met with the Federal lobbyists from Cardenas Partners LLC, Thurman Gould, LLC, Greenberg Traurig LLP and Alcalde & Fay to review the 2010 legislative accomplishments and to begin formulating and implementing the 2011 strategy. Included in these discussions were the Port of Miami's deep dredge, repealing the 3% withholding law and several additional county related topics.

### **PORT OF MIAMI DEEP DREDGE**

Port of Miami Director Bill Johnson placed an ad in the Wednesday addition of *Roll Call* newspaper in the form of a letter addressed to President Obama. The letter was in response to the President's State of the Union address calling for investments in the nation's transportation infrastructure to support the creation of thousands of new jobs. The published letter asks the President to include funding in his 2012 budget request that will allow the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to complete the 50 foot deep dredge in time for the expansion of the Panama Canal in 2014. The deep dredge will allow cargo to double, create 33,00 new jobs and increase trade critical to the nation's economic recovery.

### **USDA DISASTER DESIGNATION**

The United States Department of Agriculture has notified Governor Rick Scott that they determined that there were sufficient production losses to 34 counties in the state to warrant Secretarial disaster designation. The USDA designated Miami-Dade County as one such county as a result of the frosts and freezes that occurred during the period of November 5, through December 17, 2010. This designation makes farm operators eligible to be considered for assistance from the Farm Service Agency (FSA), provided eligibility requirements are met. This assistance as outlined by the USDA includes FSA emergency loans and the Supplemental

Revenue Assistance Payments Program. Each emergency loan application will be reviewed by the FSA and taken into consideration on its own merits based on production losses, security available and repayment ability.

## **THE STATE OF THE UNION**

President Obama gave his annual State of the Union address on Tuesday focusing on the need to maintain America's global leadership that the economy can be competitive. The President is putting forward a plan to help the United States "win the future" by out-innovating, out-educating, and out-building global competition. President Obama highlighted the need for new investments in American innovation by issuing a budget that will help increase the nation's R&D investments, as a share of GDP, to its highest levels since President Kennedy. The President also discussed the need to restore America's global leadership in higher education by strengthening the Pell Grant program and calling on Congress to make permanent his American Opportunity Tax Credit. Additionally, the President wants to improve and rebuild infrastructure through airport and high-speed rail efforts and expand wireless capabilities to ensure the expedited sharing of information. President Obama also called for reforms on government so that regulations and standards are improved that will help merge, consolidate and reorganize federal agencies to make America more competitive while also reforming the U.S. corporate tax system, eliminating loopholes and lowering the corporate rate without adding to the deficit. Finally, the President also called on Congress to come together to reduce the deficits by calling for a five-year freeze on all spending outside of security, Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security. The President also called for a bipartisan effort to strengthen Social Security to safeguard it for future generations. The President addressed free trade by indicating he would enforce trade agreements, and that he would only sign deals that keep faith with American workers, and promote American jobs. The President referenced past work with Korea, and future plans to do so with Panama, Colombia, and Asia Pacific and in global trade talks.

## **REPEAL OF 3% WITHOLDING LAW**

Two bills were introduced this week with the goal of repealing the imposition of a 3% withholding on certain payments made to vendors by government entities. S. 89 was introduced by Senator Vitter (LA) and co-sponsored by Senators Richard Burr (NC), James Inhofe (OK), Johnny Isakson (GA) and Roger Wicker (MS). S. 164 was introduced in the Senate by Scott Brown (MA) and co-sponsored by Olympia Snowe (ME). Sen. Amy Klobuchar (MN) will be the lead Democrat on the bill. It's also possible the repeal will be included in the 1099 repeal bill because it has significant support and is likely to move in the Senate. In the House, Rep. Wally Herger (CA) and Rep. Earl Blumenauer (OR) plan to introduce companion legislation the week of February 7<sup>th</sup>. OIA is working with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce on this issue and will continue to monitor any new developments.

## **OIL SPILL LEGISLATION**

Democrats in both chambers vowed to make oil spill legislation a top priority for the 112th Congress, with two bills introduced in the House and legislation coming from the Senate in the next few weeks. The legislation seeks to establish new safety standards and improve oversight

of the offshore oil industry. The Democrat sponsored legislation incorporates into their bill recommendations from the National Commission on the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and Offshore Drilling, which President Obama established to investigate, last April's Gulf of Mexico oil disaster. The bill was proposed by Rep. Edward Markey (MA), the ranking member on the Natural Resources Committee, and Rep. Henry Waxman (CA), the lead Democrat on the Energy and Commerce panel. The legislation aims to strengthen federal oversight of the oil industry and remove the cap on a company's liability for losses related to a spill. Rep. Rush Holt (NJ) introduced similar legislation as well. House Republicans have opposed Democratic proposals to impose unlimited liability on oil companies involved in offshore drilling accidents but House Natural Resources Chairman Doc Hastings (WA) has indicated he might be willing to consider oil spill legislation as long the White House agrees to allow new offshore oil drilling. The White House imposed a ban on off shore drilling following the BP oil disaster last year.

## **PUBLIC FUNDING OF PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGNS**

The House passed a measure by a vote of 239-160 to end the program that provides public funding during presidential elections. The bill would eliminate the Presidential Election Campaign Fund. The Congressional Budget Office estimates the move would reduce mandatory spending by \$617 million over 10 years. Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell (KY) introduced a companion bill on Wednesday. In the 2008 election cycle nearly \$136 million was spent from public funding. Democrats David Price (NC) and Chris Van Hollen (MD) also introduced legislation that would overhaul the public financing system.

## **CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS**

Senator Bill Nelson - Select Committee on Intelligence, Special Committee on Aging, Committee on the Budget, Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, Committee on Finance

Senator Marco Rubio - Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation, Committee on Foreign Relations, Select Committee on Intelligence, and Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship

Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen - Chair, Committee on Foreign Affairs

Rep. Mario Diaz-Balart - Committee on Appropriations

Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz - Committee on the Budget, Committee on the Judiciary

Rep. David Rivera - Committee on Foreign Affairs, Committee on Natural Resources

Rep. Frederica Wilson - Committee on Foreign Affairs, Committee on Science, Space, and Technology

## **CONGRESSIONAL CALENDAR**

The House stands in recess until February 8<sup>th</sup> as members return home for a constituent work week in their districts. The Senate is scheduled to return on Monday, January 31<sup>st</sup>.