

WEEKLY WASHINGTON FEBRUARY 28TH – MARCH 4TH, 2011

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

CHAIRMAN MICA VISITS MIAMI

On Friday, March 4, Chairman of the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure John Mica held a “listening session” at Miami International Airport. Miami-Dade County Board of County Commissioners Chairman of the Regional Transportation Committee, Bruno Barreiro, along with OIA, assisted Miami International Airport and participated in the briefing. This listening session, and other similar meetings held around the country, helped to inform the Committee's work on a long-term reauthorization of the nation's surface transportation programs. The Chairman, along with county and state officials, participated in a briefing and tour of Miami-Dade County. The briefing focused on issues of importance concerning Miami International Airport, the Miami Intermodal Center, Earlington Heights Metrorail Station, the Port of Miami Tunnel and Deep Dredge Project and the I-95 Express Lane. Following the briefing by county officials, the Chairman and his guests took part in a tour of Miami International Airport and the Miami Intermodal Center as well as a windshield tour of the Port of Miami Tunnel and the location of the proposed Deep Dredge Project.

SEAPORT

Florida Governor Rick Scott announced Friday during an event at the Port of Miami that the State Department of Transportation has been ordered to reorganize their work priorities to put \$77 million towards dredging the Port of Miami. The Panama Canal is expanding to move larger ships by 2014 and deepening the port to a depth of 50 feet to accommodate these ships could create up to 30,000 more jobs.

PRESIDENT OBAMA VISITS MIAMI

President Barack Obama was in Miami on Friday to tour a school in Rep. Frederica Wilson's district along with former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush, Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz and Education Secretary Arne Duncan. Last year, the Miami-Dade School District received nearly \$14 million to turn around its 19 persistently lowest achieving schools as part of the Department of Education's \$3.5 billion School Improvement Grants. Miami Central Senior High School was awarded \$784,700. The President spoke about improvements the school and county have made, which are credited with helping boost the school's graduation rate during the past 5 years from 36 to 63 percent.

HIGH-SPEED RAIL

Republican Governor Rick Scott refused to sign off on a Tampa-Orlando high-speed rail project despite an extension by Department of Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood to reconsider. Florida State Senators filed a lawsuit earlier this week against the Governor in an effort to force the state to accept the funding. The Florida Supreme Court on Friday ruled that the "petitions

have not clearly demonstrated entitlement" to their request and thus the Governor's refusal to accept Federal funding for the high-speed rail project was upheld. As a result Secretary LaHood said he will give the money to other states.

SENATOR NELSON FILES BILL FOR HOLOCAUST VICTIMS

Senator Bill Nelson filed legislation this week to give hundreds of Holocaust victims the right to sue European companies for millions of dollars in unpaid life insurance claims. Members of the Miami-based Holocaust Survivors' Foundation-USA have been lobbying the senator since 2008. In the House, Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen filed similar legislation, which will likely gain momentum now that it has a counterpart in the Senate. Attorney Samuel Dubbin, who represents the South Florida survivors' group, said that Allianz, Generali and other companies sold a total of 879,000 life insurance policies to Eastern European Jews that now have a present value of about \$18 billion.

EPA WATER REGULATIONS IN FLORIDA

Aides to Senator Marco Rubio have said that he is planning to insert a measure in the upcoming budget resolution that would ban the Environmental Protection Agency from implementing new water pollution rules. The move would be mirrored in the house by Rep. Tom Rooney. The new rules are the result of a legal battle in Florida in which the EPA announced it would set new limits on how much nutrient pollution is allowed into Florida's waterways.

WEEKLY CLIMATE COMMUNITIES CALL

OIA participated in a webinar to discuss the Environmental Protection Agency program "Creating Sustainable Places" on Thursday, to addressing growth and development issues and create more sustainable regions. Economic development and city planners from Salt Lake County, Utah, talked about how the grant is helping them to add a street-car line to the Salt Lake City urban area. To manage that growth, they are looking into ways to use planning and zoning to develop centers along their transportation routes, situated mostly in suburban areas. These centers would focus on creating jobs and services that are within 20 minutes walking distance from where people live. In addition, businesses would benefit from improved rail coordination. Officials with the EPA acknowledged that not all applicant communities will be approved for the "Creating Sustainable Places" grant; however, all planning agencies are welcome to "borrow" from the findings and use the solutions in their own community. President Obama has requested a second round of funding for this program in his FY2012 Budget request.

LEAVING CONGRESS

Hawaiian Democratic Senator Daniel K. Akaka announced Wednesday that he won't seek re-election in 2012. Akaka has served in the senate since 1990, and was a House representative 14 years prior. His seat will likely be targeted by Republicans who are a 47 to 53 minority against Democrats and Independents in the Senate. Also not seeking re-election are Senators Jim Webb of Virginia, John Kyl of Arizona, Kent Conrad of North Dakota, Joe Lieberman of Connecticut and Kay Bailey Hutchinson of Texas.

CALENDAR - NACo LEGISLATIVE CONFERENCE & WASHINGTON DC TRIP

OIA and Miami-Dade County Commissioner Sally Heyman and Vice Chairwoman Audrey Edmonson will participate in the annual NACo Legislative Conference set to begin on Saturday, March 5 in Washington, D.C. The Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce will travel to Washington D.C. March 9-10 for a fly-in and a series of meetings with Members of Congress as well as with Administration and Department officials. Joining the Chamber in Washington are Miami-Dade County Commissioners Rebeca Sosa, Lynda Bell, Jean Monestime and Vice Chairwoman Audrey Edmonson, along with Port of Miami Director Bill Johnson.