

## **WASHINGTON WEEKLY REPORT**

### **December 5TH – December 9TH, 2011**

**Below is an informal overview of the Washington D.C. activities of the Office of Intergovernmental Affairs:**

*THE SENATE WAS IN SESSION THIS WEEK*

*THE HOUSE WAS IN SESSION THIS WEEK*

### **FLOOD INSURANCE PROGRAM EXTENSION PASSES IN SENATE**

On Wednesday, the Senate passed legislation that would extend the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) until the end of May. The House now must act on a stand-alone bill to prevent the program from lapsing on December 16. It's possible that the program could be folded into an omnibus appropriations package that Congress is putting together to wrap up the FY12 appropriations work (*see detailed analysis under item, "...FY2012 APPROPRIATIONS ENDGAME..."*).

The passage of the Senate bill will theoretically give the Senate bill writers more time to finish its comprehensive reauthorization legislation and then work with the House to reconcile the differences between the two bills, thus setting the stage for final passage. The House passed the Flood Insurance Reform Act of 2011 (HR 1309) in July, 2011 and the Senate Banking Committee passed the Flood Insurance Reform and Modernization Act of 2011 (S 1940) in September, 2011. The legislation calls for a cap on premium rate increases from 10 to 15 percent in the Senate bill and the House bill increases the cap from 10 to 20 percent. The legislation was designed to help homeowners living in areas vulnerable to flooding. Sen. Vitter of Louisiana has pushed for this legislation to be passed and asked Senate Majority Leader Reid for a stand-alone extension before the deadline.

### **A RACE TO THE FINISH: FY2012 APPROPRIATIONS ENDGAME, A PAYROLL TAX CUT EXTENSION AND UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE DEBATE**

The first session of the 112<sup>th</sup> Congress is winding down and a targeted adjournment date of December 16<sup>th</sup> has been reported. However, before the House and Senate can wrap up their work and leave D.C. for 2012, they will need to take action on the remaining FY12 appropriations bills and a few other fiscal matters.

*To put the current environment into context:*

- The federal fiscal year starts on October 1<sup>st</sup>;
- Before that date, Congress should have passed twelve appropriations bills that, taken together, make up the entirety of federal spending for the year;

- This year, as has recently become custom, none of the twelve bills had passed before the start of the fiscal year;
- Congress passed a Continuing Resolution (CR) to keep the government operating until mid-November;
- When that deadline was reached, Congress passed another CR to keep the government running until December 16th.

Last month, Congress combined three of the twelve appropriations bills into one larger bill (“minibus”). That minibus combined the bills funding the Agriculture Department, the Departments of Commerce and Justice and the Departments of Transportation and Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The minibus totaled \$128 billion in federal funding. It passed both the House and the Senate and was signed into law by the President. Thus, there are now nine federal pending bills remaining, which need to be passed prior to the existing CR expiring on December 16<sup>th</sup>.

With time running out, Congressional leadership is now trying to write a massive omnibus appropriations bill that includes the remaining nine regular appropriations bills.

#### *Will the omnibus succeed?*

It is hard to predict, but the most likely scenario is another CR being passed to avert a government shutdown and kick the can down the road again. The vast majority of members in both Houses have indicated a desire to wrap things up before adjourning. There is an agreement on the overall spending levels in the bill. However there are still a number of conservative members in both chambers who think the spending levels are too high and may vote against the final package. There are also serious disagreements about some of the specific policy provisions in the bill. For example, the House version of the bill would prohibit the Obama Administration from administering its health care reform bill. Obviously, the White House and Senate Democrats would oppose such a provision.

If the disputes cannot be resolved before the 16th, Congress will need to pass another CR to keep the government operating. However, more time will not make the decisions easier for Congress. For that reason, there is a slight chance that an omnibus spending bill passes before the 16<sup>th</sup>, if not a day or two later.

#### *Payroll Tax Cut*

Also over the next few weeks, Congress must address three other major funding issues. First and foremost is the payroll tax issue. Last year Congress reduced the Social Security payroll tax for every American from 6.2% to 4.2%. That tax cut expires on December 31, 2011. The President has called on Congress to extend the cut for another year. Congressional leaders in both parties agree. But the concern holding up action on the extension echoes a common refrain heard in Washington these days, “how do we pay for it!?”

The cost of the tax extension is about \$120 billion. Both sides are completely averse to increasing the countries already high deficit by that amount. Both sides have floated ideas on how to cover the cost, but so far there has been no agreement.

### Unemployment Insurance and Doc Fix Extension

At the same time, there is a need to extend jobless benefits for the unemployed. Finally, on January 1, the reimbursement rates for doctors that serve Medicare patients will drop significantly. Doctors say they will refuse to serve Medicare patients if the reimbursements decline. To hold the rates at current levels for one year will cost \$20 billion. The cost of the jobless benefits is about \$50 billion.

The total of these three programs is \$190 billion. Again, both parties agree on the need to pass legislation to preserve these desired programs. There is no agreement on how to pay for them.

OIA and the Federal Lobbying Team will continue to monitor these issues and report back with status updates. *(Prepared by Akerman Senterfitt Lobbying Team and OIA)*

### **CONGRESSWOMAN WILSON FIGHTS TO SAFEGUARD HOLIDAY TRAVEL FOR FMU INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS**

On Monday, Rep. Wilson issued a statement on the status of international visas for students attending Florida Memorial University. The Congresswoman said,

*“At the request of Florida Memorial University and President Lewis, my office worked closely with federal immigration authorities to ensure that the more than 250 international students who attend FMU will not have their holiday travel disrupted. The problem is now resolved and international students can now travel over their holiday break without worry. After an unfortunate oversight of federal paperwork during a routine recertification process, FMU will soon return back to ‘active’ status and comply with all federal immigration regulations. My office has contacted U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement to fast track FMU’s application and ensure that student visas will remain unchanged and there is absolutely no risk of deportation.”*

Florida Memorial University (FMU), located in Rep. Wilson’s district, is a private four-year, co-educational liberal arts institution and a renowned Historically Black College and University (HBCU). FMU ranks ninth in the nation in the number of African American graduates who enter the workforce to become teachers.

### **SENATOR RUBIO HOLDS HUMAN TRAFFICKING AWARENESS BRIEFING IN MIAMI**

Last Friday, Sen. Marco Rubio held a human trafficking awareness briefing in Miami. The event took place in Kristi House, a child victim’s assistance center. The purpose of the hearing was to raise awareness about the human trafficking problem in Florida and

urge immediate passage of the bipartisan Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act. Sen. Rubio is a co-sponsor of the legislation, which is currently pending in the Senate Judiciary Committee.

In remarks at the hearing, Senator Rubio stated that *“Florida is particularly impacted by this atrocious practice of modern day slavery, as traffickers prey on the large number of teenage runaways here,”* *“We must continue doing everything we can to raise public awareness of a problem that is right under our noses, and also enact public policies to support law enforcement, better coordinate their efforts at all levels, assist victims and combat this horrendous crime at home and abroad.”*

## **CONGRESSWOMAN WILSON INTRODUCES MANDATORY FORECLOSURE MEDIATION ACT**

Rep. Wilson on Thursday introduced H.R. 3595, the Mandatory Foreclosure Mediation Act. The legislation would keep Florida families in their homes and would establish a mandatory mediation process for servicers of residential mortgages and borrowers.

According to Rep. Wilson’s office, the legislation would require loan servicers to initiate mediation proceedings with borrowers before any foreclosure action is taken, as well as suspend all current foreclosures until mediations occur. The bill would also mandate that the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development create regulations outlining the mediation process and a system for determining whether homeowners qualify for loan modifications or foreclosure alternatives, with the goal of reducing mortgage principals. If a loan servicer violates these requirements, the legislation would immediately bar foreclosure on a home. The Congresswoman released the following statement upon the bill’s introduction:

*“Florida families have been ravaged by the foreclosure epidemic across our state, and it is time to take action against predatory lenders who have taken advantage of innocent homeowners.”* *“This legislation will take on predatory lenders and the Big Banks by requiring mediation with at risk homeowners before foreclosing on a home. At a time when so many Floridians are struggling to make ends meet, it is time we leveled the playing field and made it easier for working families to stay in their homes and provide for their children.”*

## **CONGRESSWOMAN ROS-LEHTINEN ASKS SEC. NAPOLITANO TO RECONSIDER MOVING DHS FACILITY TO TAVERNIER**

On Wednesday, Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen wrote a letter to the Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Janet Napolitano, asking the agency head to reconsider plans to move a DHS facility to the building of the former Florida Keys Electric Cooperative in Tavernier, Florida. The plans of DHS to move into Tavernier have caused opposition from many residents of the area who worry that a detention center in the proposed facility would have a negative effect on their historic community.

Rep. Ros-Lehtinen argues, *“This is a bad bureaucratic plan that does not take into account the uniqueness of this island chain community and its historic character. Many constituents have sought my help in this matter because they are worried over the effects this possible move could have on their small community. Secretary Napolitano has the power to fix this and stop this move. There are many other locations in South Florida where DHS would not have such a large impact and I urge them to look into these options.”*

## **CONGRESSMAN RIVERA, COLLEAGUES CALL FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE OF ALAN GROSS**

Rep. Rivera joined a bipartisan letter to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton calling for the State Department to demand the immediate release of Alan Gross, an American citizen arrested by the Castro regime on December 3, 2009 and sentenced to 15 years in prison for providing phones, internet and other telecommunication equipment to Cuba’s Jewish Community.

In a statement from the Congressman’s office: *“Two years have now passed since Mr. Gross was arrested in Havana on December 3, 2009. We understand that Mr. Gross has endured a great deal during his incarceration, having lost 100 pounds and suffering numerous medical conditions. We also understand that Mr. Gross’s daughter and mother are both fighting cancer. Mr. Gross must be released immediately, and be allowed to reunite with his loved ones.”*

Along with Rep. Rivera, Miami-Dade Congressional Delegation members Mario Diaz-Balart and Debbie Wasserman Schultz were joined in this effort by Congresswoman Shelley Berkley (NV), Congresswoman, Congressman Albio Sires (NJ), Congressman Steven Rothman (NJ), Congressman, Congressman Dan Burton (IN), and Congressman Scott Rigell (VA).

Rep. Rivera has been a vocal advocate for Gross’s release, calling on President Obama to suspend all licensing of trade, travel and remittances to Cuba while the Castro dictatorship holds an American citizen hostage.

## **REP. WILSON TO INTRODUCE LEGISLATION TO PROTECT FOSTER CHILDREN**

Congresswoman Wilson will introduce “The Rilya Wilson Act”, named after a little girl in Congresswoman’s district (no relation), who went missing from foster care over a decade ago. At the time, it took authorities 15 months to realize Rilya was missing. This legislation would standardize reporting requirements for missing foster children from state to state.

The Congresswoman plans to introduce the bill in early 2012. The legislation would require state welfare agencies to report the abduction of foster children to authorities immediately. In the case of Rilya Wilson, government officials didn’t know she was

missing for some time and once informed inexplicably delayed notification. Rilya's foster mother is set to go on trial in March of next year.

## **HAITI RECONSTRUCTION FORUM**

OIA, along with Mayor Carlos Gimenez, Vice-Chair Audrey Edmonson, Commissioner Jean Monestime, and representatives from various other county departments, participated this week in the Haiti Reconstruction Forum, hosted by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), Enterprise Florida, and Miami-Dade County.

The program included an overview of IDB's activities in Haiti, USAID and State Department projects in Haiti, a panel on private sector business and investment opportunities, and a procurement workshop.

More information can be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/dxkuzeh>

## **CLIMATE COMMUNITIES**

This week's Climate Communities webinar, "Funding Opportunity - EPA Grants Available for Community Water Quality Projects" discussed the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) expected award of up to \$3.8 million in grants for projects that contribute to improved water quality and community revitalization. According to Climate Communities, "EPA's Urban Waters Small Grants can fund research, studies, training and demonstration projects that advance the restoration of urban waters. EPA seeks to support projects that involve community members in the design, planning and performance of water quality restoration activities. Examples of eligible projects include planning activities, educational campaigns and water quality monitoring programs." Climate Communities staff provided an overview of the Urban Waters Small Grants opportunity, highlighting examples of eligible projects and provided tips to be competitive for this funding. The deadline for applications is January 23, 2012.

## **GOP PRESIDENTIAL FIELD 2012**

Michele Bachmann – U.S. Rep. from Minnesota  
Newt Gingrich – former Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives  
Jon Huntsman – former Gov. of Utah & former Ambassador to China  
Gary Johnson – former Gov. of New Hampshire  
Ron Paul – U.S. Rep. from Texas  
Rick Perry – Gov. of Texas  
Buddy Roemer – former Gov. of Louisiana\*  
Mitt Romney – former Gov. of Massachusetts  
Rick Santorum – former Sen. from Pennsylvania

*(\*will not be on FL primary ballot)*

*Herman Cain, former CEO of Godfather's Pizza suspended his campaign*

## **FEDERAL LOBBYIST REPORTS**

Please use the following link to access the monthly lobbyist reports for the Washington D.C. lobbying team [http://www.miamidade.gov/intergov/federal\\_lobbyist.asp](http://www.miamidade.gov/intergov/federal_lobbyist.asp)

## **NEXT WEEK'S CALENDAR: DECEMBER 12TH – DECEMBER 16TH**

*The House and Senate will be in session next week.*