

## **WASHINGTON WEEKLY REPORT FEBRUARY 24 – FEBRUARY 28, 2014**

**(The following is an overview of D.C. activities concerning Miami-Dade County, the Office of Intergovernmental Affairs, the County's Congressional Delegation & the Administration)**

*THE SENATE WAS IN SESSION*

*THE HOUSE WAS IN SESSION*

### **MIAMI-DADE CONGRESSIONAL DELEGATION CONTINUES TO EXPRESS STRONG SUPPORT FOR THE PEOPLE OF VENEZUELA**

This week, Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, Chairman of the Middle East and North Africa Subcommittee, introduced H. Res. 488, expressing solidarity with the democratic aspirations of the people of Venezuela.

H. Res. 488, Supporting the people of Venezuela as they protest peacefully for democratic change and calling to end the violence is important legislation that:

- Supports the people of Venezuela in their pursuit of freedom of expression and freedom of assembly to promote democratic principles in Venezuela;
- Deplores the inexcusable violence perpetrated against opposition leaders and protesters in Venezuela, and the growing efforts to use politically-motivated criminal charges to intimidate the country's political opposition;
- Urges responsible nations throughout the international community to stand in solidarity with the people of Venezuela and to actively encourage a process of dialogue between the Government of Venezuela and the political opposition to end the violence; and
- Urges the Organization of American States to immediately convene the Permanent Council to seek the most effective way to expeditiously end the violence in Venezuela in accordance with the Inter-American Democratic Charter.

Rep. Ros-Lehtinen issued the following statement upon the introduction of the resolution:

*"With at least over a dozen dead and more than 100 injured in countrywide protests against the Maduro regime, the United States has a moral obligation to take a clear stand in support of the Venezuelan people. My resolution expressing solidarity with the people of Venezuela will send a clear message to Maduro and his thugs: we are watching how they treat their citizens, and their abusive actions*

*will not go without consequences. I urge the Administration to keep the pressure on the leaders of Venezuela to end the violence and respect their citizens' dignity, and I urge my colleagues in Congress to support me in this fight."*

Congresswoman Ros-Lehtinen also made remarks on the House floor regarding the unjust arrest of Leopoldo Lopez:

*"It is right and fitting for the U.S. House of Representatives to pay attention to the case of Venezuelan opposition leader Leopoldo Lopez, who has been unjustly imprisoned by the puppet regime of Nicolas Maduro.*

*"Leopoldo is a grassroots leader and founder of the political party Voluntad Popular. He has been wrongfully accused of criminal incitement, conspiracy, arson and intent to damage property. Leopoldo is being held in a military prison and his proceedings have been kept secret from the public. We cannot stand idly by while democracy and due process are trampled on in our own hemisphere.*

*"Being silent is not an option. Venezuelan students have been peacefully demonstrating against a regime that has no qualms with repressing protests with live ammunition and shock groups whose tactics are extremely violent. Those of us who advocate for freedom have a moral responsibility to support the students in Caracas, Merida, San Cristobal, Valencia and throughout Venezuela, who through peaceful means seek the way to create a more perfect union, with democracy and freedom as their guide."*

Congressman Mario Diaz-Balart, along with the entire Miami-Dade County Congressional delegation, are original cosponsors of the resolution introduced by Congresswoman Ros-Lehtinen. The Congressman issued the following statement:

*"For over two weeks, the people of Venezuela have been peacefully protesting corruption, soaring crime rates, food shortages, unemployment, and the alarming attack on democracy and human rights, yet all they have received in return are serious acts of violence and aggression by Maduro's totalitarian government. Their basic rights and freedoms are under extreme assault, and this resolution affirms Congress' commitment to the Venezuelan people who simply want to live free from oppression, violence, and political intimidation. The Venezuelan people must know that we stand firmly with them in their battle for democracy. The best friend of tyranny is silence, and the United States Congress will not remain silent."*

Congressman Joe Garcia called on President Obama to take action regarding the situation in Venezuela. At a press conference with Venezuelan community leaders based in South Florida, Rep. Garcia asked the President to take executive action:

*"As the Venezuelan people continue to face the harsh and unjust mistreatment by Maduro and his regime, it is critical we find meaningful, concrete measures to*

*help those trying to escape, or fearful of returning to their crisis-stricken country”* said Garcia.

Congressman Garcia issued a letter urging the Obama administration to take immediate action. The letter asked that the administration grant asylum to those seeking to escape the ongoing violence and expedite pending applications.

As Congressman Garcia addressed Venezuelan’s currently living in the U.S., he reminded the public:

*“These people not only have a legitimate fear of persecution, they’ve also become a part of our community. No responsible nation should remain silent on this matter. This is not democracy and the people of Venezuela deserve better than this!”*

In early 2013, Congressman Garcia introduced the *Venezuelan Liberty Act* – legislation that would allow Venezuelans who came to the United States after Chavez’s rise to power, to obtain green cards, regardless of their current immigration status.

Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Bob Menendez (D-NJ) and Senators Marco Rubio and Dick Durbin (D-IL) introduced a Senate Resolution (S. Res. 365) deploring the violent repression of peaceful demonstrations in Venezuela, calling for full accountability for human rights violations, and supporting the right of the Venezuelan people to live freely and democratically.

*“This action sends an unequivocal message by condemning the violence perpetrated against innocent Venezuelans by President Maduro, Venezuelan security forces, and armed pro-government supporters,”* said Chairman Robert Menendez. *“Now is the time to pursue a course of targeted sanctions by denying and revoking visas, and freezing the assets of Venezuelan officials complicit in the deaths of peaceful protestors. Human rights violators should be held accountable for the crimes they committed and their presence should not be welcome in our nation. Venezuelans today are denied basic rights, freedoms, and the ability to peacefully protest the dire economic circumstances caused by President Maduro and his government. We stand with the Venezuelan people and the brave opposition leaders in their pursuit to build a more hopeful Venezuela that embraces a bright future while discarding a failed past.”*

*“With the Venezuelan people struggling and sacrificing for freedom, liberty and human rights, they deserve to have their voices be heard, and they deserve the world’s leading defender of human rights to be on their side,”* Rubio said. *“Nicolás Maduro and his thugs must be held accountable for the atrocities committed against the people of Venezuela, including unjust incarcerations, violent repression and killing of innocent protestors.”*

*“This Resolution urges President Obama to immediately impose targeted sanctions that are already possible under existing law and encourage a process of dialogue between Venezuela’s government and the political opposition,”* Rubio

*added. "It is time for the United States to support the Venezuelan people's pursuit of a safe and democratic way of life, as guaranteed under their constitution."*

On Friday, Senator Marco Rubio was joined by Florida Governor Rick Scott and Lieutenant Governor Carlos Lopez-Cantera at a rally with the Venezuelan community in Doral to discuss the ongoing crisis in Venezuela.

## **PRESIDENT OBAMA & USDOT SECRETARY FOXX ANNOUNCE \$600 MILLION IN FEDERAL FUNDING FOR TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS – SIXTH ROUND OF TIGER GRANTS**

President Barack Obama, joined by U.S. Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx, announced on Wednesday that \$600 million will be made available to fund transportation projects across the country under a sixth round of the U.S. Department of Transportation's highly successful Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) competitive grant program.

*"President Obama knows that transportation means opportunity for so many Americans," said U.S. Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx. "TIGER investments answer the President's challenge to expand opportunity through a strong transportation system that connects Americans with a better way of life."*

The TIGER 2014 grant program will place an emphasis on projects that support reliable, safe and affordable transportation options that improve connections for both urban and rural communities, making it easier for their residents to reach work, school and other ladders of opportunity. While continuing to support projects of all types, DOT will prioritize applications for capital projects that better connect people to jobs, training and other opportunities, promote neighborhood redevelopment and reconnect neighborhoods divided by physical barriers, such as highways and railroads.

The highly competitive TIGER program, which began as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, offers one of the only federal funding possibilities for large, game-changing multi-modal projects. These federal funds leverage money from private sector partners, states, local governments, metropolitan planning organizations and transit agencies. The \$474 million 2013 TIGER round alone supported \$1.8 billion in overall project investments.

In addition to supporting capital grants, Congress has provided USDOT with the flexibility to use up to \$35 million of TIGER funds for planning grants, the first time since the 2010 round. In addition to supporting the planning of innovative transportation, these funds can support regional transportation planning, freight and port planning and programmatic mitigation approaches that increase efficiency and improve outcomes for communities and the environment.

Since 2009, the TIGER program has awarded \$3.5 billion to 270 projects in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico – including 100 projects to support rural communities. Demand has been overwhelming, and during the previous five rounds, the Department of Transportation received more than 5,300 applications requesting nearly \$115 billion for transportation across the country.

Miami-Dade County and PortMiami was a recipient of a TIGER grant in 2010 in the amount of \$22.7 million for Intermodal/Freight Rail Restoration project. The project is a partnership between PortMiami, the Florida East Coast Railway, the US Department of Transportation and the State of Florida, to connect the Port with the improved Hialeah intermodal rail yard and other rail connections. Restoration of this service will re-connect the Port with the national rail system and expedite the movement of goods throughout Florida and into the continental US.

OIA and County Departments will work with the congressional delegation and federal lobbying teams in an attempt to secure federal funding for this round of TIGER funding for Miami-Dade County.

## **HOUSE HOLDS HEARING ON HUMAN TRAFFICKING PREVENTION**

On Wednesday, the Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies Subcommittee of House Appropriations Committee held an oversight hearing on the state of efforts to stop human trafficking.

This comes on the heels of the Miami-Dade County Commission approving a resolution last week sponsored by Commissioner Jose “Pepe” Diaz urging Congress to pass the “Strengthening the Child Welfare Response to Human Trafficking” bill sponsored by Sen. Marco Rubio. The legislation would require the development of national rules and guidelines to better track and serve child trafficking victims, including those in foster care.

“We need to take steps to protect these most vulnerable young victims from this most heinous of crimes, and I urge Congress to take action as soon as possible,” said Commissioner Diaz.

Commissioner Diaz has been a staunch advocate of tougher laws to prevent and break up sex trafficking rings in South Florida. In 2012, he sponsored legislation urging the State Legislature to toughen penalties on those convicted of human and sex trafficking. At the local level, Commissioner Diaz spearheaded a training program, which also included a Public Service Announcement, at both Miami International Airport and PortMiami for employees to identify and respond to suspected victims of trafficking.

OIA and the Federal contract lobbyists will report on the hearing and continue to update the county on the legislation’s progress.

## **FLOTUS IN MIAMI TO CELEBRATE FOURTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE POPULAR “LET’S MOVE!” INITIATIVE**

On Tuesday, following a *Let’s Move!* School Wellness Event in Washington, First Lady Michelle Obama traveled to Miami where she visited a county parks and recreation center to make a major announcement about healthy out-of-school time.

Last week, the First Lady kicked off a celebration around the fourth anniversary of *Let’s Move!*, her initiative to ensure that all children grow up healthy and reach their full potential.

Mrs. Obama launched *Let’s Move!* on February 9, 2010 to unite the country around kids’ health and create real support for families to live healthier lives. Since then, parents, business leaders, educators, elected officials, military leaders, chefs, physicians, athletes, childcare providers, community and faith leaders, and kids themselves have stepped up to improve the health of the nation’s children.

More Americans now have access to healthy, affordable food closer to home, school health environments are changing, healthier foods are being marketed to kids, and making healthy choices is becoming easier for families. A CDC report released last year showed that obesity among low-income pre-schoolers declined in 19 states over the past couple of years.

## **SENATE VERSION OF REP. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ TAX RETURN THEFT LEGISLATION ADVANCES**

On Thursday, the Senate Judiciary Committee passed a companion version of legislation written by Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz that would make the prosecution of tax return identify theft a greater priority and strengthen penalties against identify thieves. In the last two years alone tax return thieves have stolen more than \$9 billion from American taxpayers and the U.S. Treasury, while wreaking havoc on the unsuspecting taxpayers who fall victim to this crime.

The Stopping Tax Offenders and Prosecuting Identity Theft Act (STOP Identity Theft Act (S.149/H.R. 744)) would also expand the definition of an identity theft victim to include not only individuals, but also businesses and organizations that have had their identities stolen for phishing schemes in an attempt to get sensitive information from consumers.

S. 149 now advances to the Senate floor for full consideration.

*“Each year, millions of hard-working Americans who file their tax returns in the hope of paying bills, creating savings, or even taking a vacation instead discover that it has already been filed and the refund claimed,” said Congresswoman Wasserman Schultz. “Florida leads the nation in identity theft from stolen tax returns, and this legislation is imperative to better protect filers and penalize criminals in my home state and nationwide. I thank Senator Klobuchar and the*

*Senate Judiciary Committee for their leadership, and I will continue to work with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to pass this legislation in the House of Representatives.”*

Commissioner Sally Heyman has been a staunch supporter of this issue. She introduced and passed a resolution last year supporting the passage of legislation at last year’s NACo conference. As the bill moves through the Senate, and hopefully the House, OIA will update the county on the status of the measure.

## **REP. WILSON JOINED BY MIAMI-DADE SCHOOLS SUPERINTENDENT CARVALHO AT THE WHITE HOUSE**

Congresswoman Frederica Wilson invited Miami-Dade County Public Schools Superintendent Alberto Carvalho and 5000 Role Models of Excellence Project Administrator Dr. Theron Clark to join her at the White House for President Obama’s roll-out of his “My Brother’s Keeper” initiative to help young men of color. The event was held on Thursday, in the East Room of the White House.

President Obama is collaborating with foundations, businesses, and community leaders to make sure that every young man of color who is willing to work hard and lift himself up has an opportunity to get ahead and reach his full potential.

Congresswoman Wilson founded the successful 5000 Role Models of Excellence Project, a comprehensive drop-out prevention, scholarship and mentoring program, for at-risk boys in Miami-Dade County Public Schools.

*“I am honored to be a part of President Obama’s “My Brother’s Keeper” initiative. It is a step in the right direction toward improving the outcomes for young men of color.*

*Only through unified efforts and proven programs designed to meet the needs of at-risk boys and young men of color will we succeed in ending the school to prison pipeline and high unemployment.*

*Through the 5000 Role Models of Excellence Project, I have seen, firsthand, that providing structure, discipline and role models can make a difference in the lives of young men of color and improve their odds of getting an education to become productive citizens. There have been thousands of success stories since the Role Models program was founded 21 years ago.*

*It is a proven program that works and I am ready to get to work with the President to launch initiatives nationwide that provide opportunity for young men of color facing tough circumstances.”* said Congresswoman Wilson.

## **NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES LEGISLATIVE CONFERENCE IN DC THIS WEEKEND**

This weekend Vice Chair Lynda Bell and Commissioner Sally Heyman, along with OIA will participate in the annual NACo Legislative Conference in Washington, DC. This meeting brings over 2,000 elected and appointed county officials from across the country to focus on legislative issues facing county government. Attendees hear from key Administration officials and members of Congress and are offered a myriad of additional educational opportunities addressing current and hot topic issues. A day of lobbying on Capitol Hill the last day rounds out an information-packed conference.

Speakers at the conference will include, U.S. Department of Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx, U.S. Department of the Interior Secretary Sally Jewell, former Utah Governor Jon Huntsman and former Senator Evan Bayh of Indiana, among others.

## **STATEMENT BY CONGRESSMAN JOE GARCIA ON CHILE VISA WAIVER PROGRAM**

Congressman Joe Garcia released a statement in response to the Department of Homeland Security's decision to add Chile to the Visa Waiver Program:

*"I applaud Secretary Johnson's decision to add Chile into the Visa Waiver Program, which will boost South Florida's tourism economy. This new designation, the first for a Latin American country, helps streamline travel for thousands of Chilean passport holders and maintains our strong security standards. Miami is home to one of the largest Chilean populations in the United States, and thousands of my constituents have friends or family living in Chile. I look forward to welcoming these new visitors to our South Florida community, and hope other Latin American countries will be able to join the program soon."*

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## **LOOKING AHEAD**

*March 3 – March 7, 2014:*

- The House will be in session
- The Senate will be in session

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