

WASHINGTON WEEKLY REPORT

APRIL 7 – APRIL 11, 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

REPS. ROS-LEHTINEN, WILSON, AND DIAZ-BALART PEN MIAMI HERALD OP-ED

Progress report on Haiti from South Florida Members of Congress

Two weeks ago, we returned from a bipartisan congressional delegation trip to Haiti. We met with Haitian officials and U.S. personnel to examine the ongoing reconstruction efforts there after the devastating earthquake in January 2010 and receive an update on a Government Accountability Office (GAO) report that illustrated the deficiencies in U.S. taxpayer dollars going to Haiti.

We also raised the issue of Cuba and Venezuela to President Michel Martelly and Prime Minister Laurent Lamothe and asked for Haiti to reaffirm its commitment to democracy and respect for human rights by supporting the calls for freedom occurring in both countries.

The Haitian government is more than two years behind on holding elections for the Senate, local municipal councils, mayors, town delegates, and other posts. Elections are essential for a democratic country, but governing democratically is equally as important to ensure a more inclusive society and a respect for human rights.

We are comforted that key components of the "El Rancho" accord have been respected, as promised to us during our trip. Last week, the Chamber of Deputies passed an electoral law and the executive branch changed the cabinet. We commend all parties, including the Catholic Church, for working together to get consensus on a positive path forward for elections to be held in October. We urge the Haitian Senate to now swiftly pass the necessary elections legislation.

However, to conduct a safe election, the security situation in Haiti must be examined. The Haitian National Police (HNP) force, with our support, has reached 11,000 officers and is on its way to reaching its goal of 15,000 personnel by 2016 to better secure their own country.

With the support of Assistant Secretary William Brownfield from the State Department's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, our very own Miami-Dade Police Department has trained approximately 77 HNP officers, with hopefully more to come. We also witnessed firsthand the capabilities of the DEA to support Haiti's counter-narcotics unit and encourage more vetted units to be used to combat drug traffickers that try to use Haiti as a transit point for cocaine shipments from Venezuela and elsewhere.

A misconception that must be addressed is the homicide rate in Haiti. The truth of the matter is that according to the U.N. 2011 Global Study on Homicide, Haiti's homicide rate is in fact low compared to other Caribbean countries.

Jamaica has the highest homicide rate (per 100,000 population) in the Caribbean at 52, the Dominican Republic is at 24, and Haiti barely reaches 7. In addition, Haiti's trained anti-kidnapping unit, with the support of the U.S., has been extremely successful. Over the past 11 months, the number of kidnappings has substantially diminished and no American citizens were among the victims.

Last summer, Congress requested GAO to investigate reconstruction efforts in Haiti and we learned that a majority of the funds for Haiti had not been disbursed. USAID spent years studying if we could build a port in northern Haiti, but instead now, it will be looking at making infrastructure improvements at the existing port in Cap-Haitien.

We commend the new change of strategy, but unfortunately, we lost many years in the process. It is also discouraging that USAID decreased the projected number of houses built, which resulted in less people being helped. In other sectors, many improvements are visible with new roads and government buildings being constructed. However, the government is still facing challenges resulting from the earthquake and other natural disasters, with droughts causing food shortages in the northwestern part of the country.

More actions are needed to root out corruption and improve transparency and accountability to help attract more private sector investment. In order to improve the Haitian economy, more educational opportunities that lead to jobs need to be created to foster economic development. The surcharges from money transfers from our South Florida community and on phone calls to Haiti have significantly helped to fund Haiti's tuition-free program which, according to the Haitian government, enables thousands of Haitian children to go to school.

As Members of Congress representing South Florida, we believe that our local community can play a key role in helping to identify different investment sectors in Haiti and in bridging those gaps to foster the economic prosperity that we all wish to see. We

are honored to represent our vibrant Haitian-American constituents who have played a key role in improving our community.

NOTE: Commissioner Jean Monestime participated in the delegation trip to Haiti.

COMMISSIONER DIAZ REAPPOINTED TO INTERGOVERNMENTAL POLICY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Miami-Dade County Commissioner Jose “Pepe” Diaz has been reappointed to the Intergovernmental Policy Advisory Committee (IGPAC) as a representative of Miami-Dade County.

Commissioner Diaz, who has served on the IGPAC since 2010, was reappointed by U.S. Ambassador Michael Froman on April 10.

The IGPAC provides policy advice to the Office of the United States Trade Representative on trade policy matters that have a significant relationship to the affairs of state and local governments within the jurisdiction of the United States.

“I’m honored to be reappointed to the IGPAC to help ensure that Miami-Dade County’s commercial interests continue to be promoted as part of our nation’s trade policy,” Commissioner Diaz said.

On the international level, Commissioner Diaz also serves as Chairman of the International Trade Consortium Board and is an advocate for trade and for forging partnerships with other nations.

CONGRESSIONAL DELEGATION SENDS SUPPORT LETTER TO DOJ

Congresswoman Wilson led an effort this week in sending a letter of support to the Department of Justice on behalf of the Miami-Dade Police Department’s (MDPD) concept paper for the FY 2014 Justice Information Sharing Solutions Implementation grant. The project will study a cloud-based evidence sharing solution that connects to body-worn video camera systems. If MDPD’s concept paper is selected, they’ll be invited to submit their full-application.

Representatives Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, Debbie Wasserman Schultz, Mario Diaz-Balart and Joe Garcia all signed on to the letter at the Congresswoman’s urging.

The text of the letter:

*The Honorable Denise E. O'Donnell
Director
Bureau of Justice Assistance
Office of Justice Programs
U.S. Department of Justice
810 Seventh Street NW
Washington, DC 20531*

Dear Director O'Donnell:

We write to express our strong support for the Miami-Dade County Police Department's (MDPD) concept paper for funding under the FY 2014 Justice Information Sharing Solutions Implementation Program. The project will study a cloud-based evidence sharing solution that connects to body-worn video camera systems (BWVs) being used by police officers throughout Miami-Dade County, Florida.

The project demonstrates that the MDPD uses the newest, most innovative technology, BWVs, and notably, takes a responsible path of testing the scope of capabilities to determine the best way to implement the technology. This process allows the MDPD to develop best practices for maximum benefit to the entire criminal justice system and promotes information sharing across agencies, jurisdictions, and boundaries. Furthermore, the cultural diversity of the Miami-Dade community provides an opportunity to share the findings of this project with many communities around the country who can achieve similar results and benefits.

We believe that the MDPD's concept paper is innovative and selection to compete for funding is vitally important to support evidence-based crime-fighting strategies. Within all applicable rules and regulations, we respectfully request your full and fair consideration of the Miami-Dade Police Department's concept paper. We thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

SENATOR NELSON SAYS MEDICAID EXPANSION STILL POSSIBLE

The hope of Medicaid expansion in Florida moved a small step closer to becoming a real possibility this week as federal health officials said they're "ready and willing" to allow Florida to craft its own alternative expansion plan.

Sen. Bill Nelson and others have in recent weeks started advocating for one such an alternative that would involve some of the state's hospitals putting up a piece of their indigent-care money as the 10-percent state match of federal funding.

Clear word of the feds' open-mindedness came in the form of a letter Senator Nelson received from a key health care official who wrote that the federal government stands "ready and willing"

to seriously consider the state expanding Medicaid in an innovative or alternative fashion to the traditional government-run program.

"I believe this leaves the door wide open for Florida to get this done," Nelson said in a letter to state legislative leaders today.

Nelson previously wrote to Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) Administrator Marilyn Tavenner asking that she be receptive to an alternative plan for Medicaid expansion if Florida presents one - such as using what's known as an intergovernmental transfer of funds, or in this case, relying on public hospitals for the state's share of the cost of Medicaid expansion.

Responding to Nelson's request, Tavenner wrote in a letter that arrived earlier this week that CMS is "ready and willing" to work directly with state leaders on "a Florida-designed approach" to Medicaid expansion.

Florida is one of a number of states still refusing to expand Medicaid. At least eight of those that had initially objected to expanding the program have changed their minds.

Various studies have found that Medicaid expansion would mean coverage for an estimated 1.2 million low-income Floridians – some of whom have been contacting Nelson's office for help.

Besides helping as many as 1.2 million people, Medicaid expansion would bring some \$51 billion in federal dollars back into the state over the next decade, it would create jobs and it would reduce the burden on taxpayers who pick up the tab when higher-cost emergency rooms are used to treat people in need of only primary care.

Following is the text of Nelson's letter to state leaders:

April 11, 2014

The Honorable Will Weatherford

Speaker

The Florida Legislature

420 The Capitol

402 South Monroe Street

Tallahassee, FL 32399

The Honorable Don Gaetz

President

The Florida Senate

212 Senate Office Building

404 South Monroe Street

Tallahassee, FL 32399

Dear Speaker Weatherford and President Gaetz:

Three weeks ago I shared with you that I had contacted Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) Administrator Marilyn Tavenner regarding a potential plan to expand Medicaid in Florida. Today I write because she has responded by stating her agency is "ready and willing to work directly with Florida on a Florida-designed approach."

A key to her commitment as described in the letter is flexibility to find a "Florida-designed approach." This is important because we know that CMS has provided flexibility to other states such as Arkansas, Iowa, Michigan, and others. Arizona Governor Jan Brewer not only pushed for Medicaid expansion in her state, she stood up and vetoed all legislation that crossed her desk until it occurred, fighting with her pen for the 300,000 Arizonans who now have Medicaid coverage.

I believe this leaves the door wide open for Florida to get this done.

This is good news because it means there is a path forward to cover the 1.2 million people who would benefit from Medicaid expansion in the state of Florida. And it would finally provide an option to the 764,000 who fall below the poverty line and have no option for affordable health coverage.

It means that Floridians could reclaim the \$51 billion that, without action, will go to other states Medicaid programs – and is currently being lost at the rate of \$7 million a day. Even more importantly, it has the potential to create 120,000 jobs, which would touch all aspects of the economy in Florida. Medicaid expansion would also give businesses in the Sunshine state the peace of mind that they will not be subject to employer penalties if they cannot provide affordable insurance for low income workers.

While I have been focused on expansion, I have not forgotten about the need for timely, extension of the Medicaid 1115 waiver. I have spoken directly with senior officials at CMS and received a positive response. All parties are diligently working to resolve the specifics of a 1 year agreement and I am confident that they are negotiating with AHCA in good faith to find a solution that works for all stakeholders before the legislative session concludes.

I implore you to consider the toll continued inaction is taking on the people of Florida and work with our Governor to find a solution that will provide for those who need it most. I stand ready to help in any way I can.

Sincerely,

SEN RUBIO: U.S. SHOULD DO MORE TO PROMOTE INTERNET FREEDOM IN CUBA

Senator Rubio, a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, highlighted the importance of Internet freedom in Cuba, defending the United States Agency for International Development's (USAID) role in ZunZuneo, a social media network created for the Cuban people. During a Committee hearing, Senator Rubio questioned Rajiv Shah, the Administrator of the USAID, and stressed the need for programs that promote democracy, human rights and other goals of U.S. foreign policy.

Rubio: *"What do we need to do to start, not just this program, but expand it, so that people in Cuba can do what I just did? And that is speak freely to the world, and to each other, about the reality of Cuban life, and about anything else they want..."*

During the hearing, Senator Rubio illustrated the importance of freedom of speech in the 21st century by live-tweeting, demonstrating a basic freedom that is not allowed in Cuba and would result in imprisonment.

The Senator further discussed U.S. foreign policy on [CNN's "The Lead with Jake Tapper"](#) and on [FOX News' "America's Newsroom."](#)

REPS. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ AND WILSON RELEASE STATEMENT ON EQUAL PAY DAY

Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz issued the following statement on Tuesday, April 8th, National Equal Pay Day:

"Despite the leaps and bounds women have made in the American workforce over the last century, today they still work in a nation where on average women make 77 cents for every dollar earned by a man.

"This is unacceptable at a time when women make up half of the workforce and so many are the heads of their household. In my home state of Florida, eliminating the pay gap would earn a woman enough money to afford a year's worth of groceries.

"To significantly impact the economic inequality of women in America, Congress must move forward with a comprehensive legislative approach. First, we must immediately pass an extension of unemployment benefits, because the last thing women still struggling to find work need to be worrying about right now is losing their unemployment insurance. The Senate came together to pass a measure just last night, and I again call on Speaker Boehner to bring the bill to the House floor for an up or down vote without delay.

"With an eye toward the future, we must also pass the Paycheck Fairness Act to fight wage discrimination, the Fair Minimum Wage Act to provide all workers a living wage, and the FAMILY Act to extend paid family and medical leave for all women.

"Today, I'm looking forward to joining the President at the White House as he discusses the critical role women play in our economy. He will set an example for employers nationwide when he signs two executive orders for federal contractors that will help level the playing field in workplace compensation, underscoring that when women succeed, America succeeds.

"The battle for full pay equality continues, and as a representative of thousands of women and the mother of two young daughters, I will continue to be a tireless soldier in that endeavor."

Congresswoman Frederica Wilson introduced the Paycheck Fairness Act as an amendment during a U.S. House of Representatives Education and Workforce Committee hearing. The Paycheck Fairness Act provides women with the ability to fight wage discrimination and closes loopholes that have allowed employers to avoid taking responsibility for discriminatory pay. This bill demands equal pay for equal work.

"It is shameful that in this modern age, women are still not treated fairly. The issue of the wage gap is not just women's issues. It's a family issue. When women bring home less pay, their families suffer."

For African American women it's even worse. In the state of Florida, African American women are paid only 64 cents for every dollar paid to men. If the wage gap were eliminated, a working woman in Florida would have enough money for 1 years' worth of groceries, 5 more months of mortgage and utilities payments, 7 more months of rent or nearly 2000 additional gallons of gas."

Yesterday was Equal Pay Day, the day when women finally catch up to their male counterparts and earn the same amount of money as men made in the previous year. This day reminds us that unfortunately, women are not treated equally to men in the workplace," said Congresswoman Wilson.

At the same hearing, Congresswoman Wilson spoke on behalf of the rights of hard-working Americans from being fired, discriminated against, and denied opportunities simply because of who they love or how they express their gender by supporting The Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA).

"There is overwhelming support to end discrimination against our neighbors, friends, and family in the LGBT community."

Over two thirds of voters support ENDA, the Senate passed ENDA in a bipartisan manner, and there are over 200 cosponsors of ENDA in the House."

The United States must be a land of opportunity for anyone regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. I wholeheartedly support the immediate passage of ENDA," said Congresswoman Wilson.

REP GARCIA RELEASES STATEMENT ON CMS MEDICARE RULING

This week the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) announced they would not be moving forward with proposed cuts to Medicare Advantage. Congressman Joe Garcia provided the following statement –

"Today, I commend the administration for listening to the needs of our nation's seniors and deciding against the proposed cuts to Medicare – a vital program"

that provides them with the affordable, high quality health care they deserve. Over the past several weeks, I have been fighting alongside my colleagues to protect Medicare because our seniors deserve to keep what they have earned. They have worked hard for these benefits, and to take it away from them would be just wrong. ”

Over the past few weeks Rep. Garcia has spoken with the President personally to communicate his strong support for the program, as well as his strong opposition to any proposed cuts by CMS. Additionally, Garcia, along with colleagues on both sides of the aisle, issued a letter to the administration expressing concerns over the cuts to these vital services, urging them to find alternative solutions in an effort to protect our seniors.

SEN. RUBIO’S COMMERCIAL SPACE INDUSTRY BILL APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

On Wednesday, the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation approved S. 2140, legislation which would fix outdated laws to allow for more advancement in the commercial spaceflight industry. The legislation, introduced by Senators Marco Rubio, Martin Heinrich (D-NM), and Tom Udall (D-NM) last month, changes current laws that are slowing development and progress for the reusable launch vehicle industry to ensure space companies can continue to test and innovate their vehicles.

“Today’s vote reaffirms that encouraging innovation is key to America achieving its potential in the 21st century,” said Senator Rubio. “Innovative industries like commercial spaceflight are advancing rapidly, and we can’t allow outdated laws to stifle progress. Unfortunately that’s exactly what’s happening.

“These laws did not anticipate what commercial companies are now doing with vehicle testing and commercial spaceflights, and therefore have caused progress to slow,” added Rubio. “That’s why we need this bill to help update and streamline federal laws so they are more in line with today’s commercial spaceflight operations and can allow for this cutting edge industry to thrive. Removing outdated, burdensome federal laws will not only allow for further advancement in commercial spaceflights, but also encourage more innovation, job creation, and economic growth.”

REP. DIAZ-BALART: LETTER FROM MARIA CORINA IS WHY WE MUST CONTINUE TO SPEAK OUT

Congressman Mario Diaz-Balart released the following statement in response to a letter he received from Venezuelan opposition leader Maria Corina Machado.

“The heartfelt note my office received from Maria Corina is a simple reminder as to why I continue to speak out against the brutality of the Maduro regime. I am honored to be one of many speaking out on behalf of the Venezuelan

people. Until all Venezuelans are free of a corrupt government, have access to basic household supplies, food, and most importantly, their freedom of speech and assembly, we must all continue to join these brave folks who are peacefully protesting, yet are being aggressively attacked, injured, and killed. I stand by courageous leaders like Maria Corina, Leopoldo Lopez, and others who are risking their lives daily. I will do everything I can for the Venezuelan people as they struggle to regain democracy.”

The letter from Machado thanked Congressman Diaz-Balart and his staff for their efforts to help the Venezuelan community.

SEN RUBIO'S OFFICE TO HOST MOBILE OFFICE HOURS

The office of U.S. Senator Marco Rubio released a list of upcoming Mobile Office Hours throughout Florida, including Miami-Dade County. The Senator's staff offers a variety of constituent services including assisting people with a wide range of issues, including problems with Social Security, Medicare, Veterans Affairs, and more.

Tuesday, April 15, 2014

Miami-Dade County

10:00am – 12:00pm

Stephen P. Clark Government Center

111 NW 1st Street, Lobby

Miami, FL 33128

*Representatives from USCIS will be available to meet with attendees.

MIAMI PASSPORT AGENCY OPEN FOR SERVICE ON SATURDAY, APRIL 19, 2014

The U.S. Department of State, Miami Passport Agency will be open for passport services on Saturday, April 19, 2014. Passport services are limited to those who have already scheduled an appointment. Appointments will be available from 9:00am to 2:00pm. To schedule an appointment call the National Passport Information Center (NPIC) at their toll-free phone number 1-877-487-2778. For more information on U.S. passport application requirements, fees, and forms, please visit the agency website at www.travel.state.gov.

LOOKING AHEAD

April 14 – April 18, 2014:

- The House will not be in session
- The Senate will not be in session

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