

WEEKLY WASHINGTON JANUARY 17TH - JANUARY 21ST, 2011

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

PORT OF MIAMI

OIA and Port of Miami Director Bill Johnson held more meetings this week to discuss the Port's deep dredge. We met with several other Congressional Members of the Florida delegation requesting that they urge the Office of Management and Budget to include a nominal amount of construction funds, such as \$100,000, in the Army Corps 2012 budget for the Port of Miami deep dredge project. The Port of Miami is the only Port south of Norfolk, VA with an authorized 50 foot depth which is "ready to go" and can be completed by 2014 at the time of the opening of the expanded Panama Canal. The deep dredge is authorized, preconstruction work is ongoing and a construction contract can be advertised by late 2011. Completion of the deep dredge will create additional jobs for Miami-Dade County and the rest of Florida and assure that those jobs are not lost to foreign transshipment hubs. OIA and the Port of Miami are continuing to strongly push the administration to include the Port of Miami into the President's budget.

HEALTH CARE REPEAL LEGISLATION PASSES HOUSE

A vote to repeal the health care overhaul law has passed the House of Representatives this week by a vote of 245-189. The bill, the Repealing the Job-Killing Health Care Law Act, was agreed upon by all the Republicans in the House and three Democrats. The bill would outright repeal the health care law, a signature legislative achievement of the Obama administration, but it is not expected to be considered in the Senate under Democratic leadership. House GOP lawmakers also are planning to craft alternative policy to the health reform law. Lawmakers say they favor policy such as allowing individuals to purchase health care coverage across state lines and reforming the medical malpractice system. The House also passed a resolution instructing committees with jurisdiction over health care to begin crafting alternative policy to the reform law. Each committee is suppose to develop and report out legislation that would: foster economic growth and private sector job creation by eliminating job-killing policies and regulations, lower health care premiums through increased competition and choice; preserve a patient's ability to keep his or her health plan if he or she likes it, provide people with pre-existing conditions access to affordable health coverage, and reform the medical liability system to reduce unnecessary and wasteful health care spending. In addition, lawmakers are advocating to increase the number of insured Americans, protect the doctor-patient relationship, provide the States greater flexibility to administer Medicaid programs, expand incentives to encourage personal responsibility for health care coverage and costs, prohibit taxpayer funding of abortions and provide conscience protections for health care providers and to include a permanent fix to the Medicare physician payment formula.

HIGH SPEED RAIL

Senator Bill Nelson encouraged Governor Rick Scott to support the state's effort for a high speed rail connecting Tampa and Orlando, particularly since the federal government has offered to pay

90 percent of the cost. Senator Nelson urged Governor Scott to accept the \$2.4 billion for high speed rail, unlike new Republican governors in Ohio and Wisconsin. Those governors said no to similar offers for high speed rail money. Senator Nelson said, "We've been able to get more than \$2.4 billion on the table for a high speed rail system. When you look at areas between Tampa and Orlando, you cannot build enough lanes on I-4 to accommodate the projected traffic increases over the next 30 years and there is no parallel road." Governor Scott commented that he also met with Congressman John Mica, Chairman of the House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee. The Governor said, "I want to see the ridership study. I want to see whether it's going to be profitable or not. It appears that there's a lot of interest in the private sector to fund that project. I want to understand whether they're going to fund it and what the terms of that are going to be."

SENATE RETIREMENTS

Sens. Kent Conrad (D-N.D.) and Joe Lieberman (I-Conn.) have both announced their intention to retire from the Senate at the conclusion of their current terms. Conrad and Lieberman join Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-Texas) as members who will not seek reelection in 2012. The retirements put control of the Senate in play as Lieberman, an Independent, caucuses with Democrats. Democrats have to defend 23 Senate seats next year, while the GOP only has 10 seats to protect. Republicans need a net gain of at least three seats to take control of the upper chamber. Lieberman and Conrad's departure will also create a void in chairmanships on two of the Senate's most important committees; the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs and the Committee on the Budget respectively. Conrad, a five-term member of the Senate was first elected in 1986. First elected in 1988, Lieberman ran for Vice President on Al Gore's ticket in 2000. Members from both parties have already begun jockeying for position to run for these soon-to-be vacated seats. Rep. Chris Murphy (D-Conn.) and former Connecticut Secretary of State Susan Bysiewicz (D) have both declared their candidacy.

CHINESE PRESIDENT HU JINTAO U.S. VISIT

Chinese President Hu Jintao was in Washington this week to meet with President Obama and lawmakers. The White House hosted and honored Hu with a state dinner, the first for China in 13 years. The administration has been criticized for meeting with Hu in response to human rights issues as well as China's handling of Tibet and political dissidents such as Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Liu Xiaobo, who remains in prison. Obama administration officials highlighted the economic progress between the two countries, as they announced Beijing's approval of \$45 billion in new contracts for U.S. companies to export goods to China which will support an estimated 235,000 American jobs. Hu also met with members of Congress on Thursday many of whom have been critical of Chinese policies. Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, attended a bi-partisan Congressional meeting with Chinese leader Hu Jintao. Congresswoman Ros-Lehtinen handed Mr. Hu a copy of the letter she sent to President Obama highlighting her grave concerns regarding the Chinese regime's deplorable human rights record and detention of a U.S. citizen; its economic policies, such as currency manipulation, and its aggressive and irresponsible behavior which threatens U.S. security interests and global stability.

WHITE HOUSE ECONOMIC COUNCIL

On Friday, the White House announced the creation of a new economic advisory council that will be headed by Jeffrey Immelt, the CEO and chairman of General Electric. President Obama signed a new Executive Order creating the new board, the President's Council on Jobs and Competitiveness, will focus on finding new ways to promote growth by investing in American business to encourage hiring, to educate and train workers to compete globally, and to attract jobs and businesses to the United States. The new council replaces the Economic Recovery Advisory Board, which was headed by Former Federal Reserve Chairman Paul Volcker. The signing of the Executive Order is the latest a series of changes initiated by the administration to help aid in the economic recovery. Recently, Gene Sperling was appointed the new director of the National Economic Council where he succeeds economist Larry Summers.

REPUBLICANS PROPOSE \$2.5 TRILLION IN CUTS

The House Republican Study Committee released a plan to cut federal spending over the next ten years by a total of \$2.5 trillion. The cuts target 55 different agencies and programs, including public housing, benefits for federal employees, funding for the arts and humanities, international aid and changes to Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac as well as changes to Amtrak funding. The proposed cuts are directed at funding that Republicans have long sought to alter like National Endowment for the Arts and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. The cuts also include projects for energy and environmental programs, federal employee unions and limiting subsidies for the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority. The list of cuts however doesn't include entitlements and defense spending.

STATE OF THE UNION 2011

On Tuesday, January 25, 2011, the President of the United States will deliver his State of the Union to Congress. According to sources, President Barack Obama plans to mark the beginning of a politically divided Congress with a State of the Union speech stressing shared responsibility for reining in the deficit and boosting the country's capacity to compete with foreign economic rivals. The President will also call for investment in innovation, education and infrastructure and is likely to cite funding for high-speed rail. The State of the Union comes as the White House looks to complete the FY2012 Budget request, as many of the principle elements are already in place. The President will send the budget request to Congress the first week in February.