

WEEKLY WASHINGTON JUNE 20TH THROUGH JUNE 24TH, 2011

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

THE HOUSE & SENATE WAS IN SESSION THIS WEEK

CLIMATE COMMUNITIES WEEKLY CALL

This week's Climate Communities call began with a recap of the Local Clean Energy Leadership Summit, which OIA participated in and was held in Washington, D.C. last week. More than 100 attendees from 25 states held nearly 100 meetings on Capitol Hill. Among the topics under discussion was a push to fund a \$250 million competitive grant that will continue funding Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grants (EECBG). The Summit also involved a showcase of sustainable climate communities. During the call, the Green Block Residential Energy Efficiency pilot project was also discussed. The original plot for the Green Block project began with 90 homes in the City of Missoula as an EECBG strategy with an expanded scope. The project involves a partnership with local utilities: Northwestern Energy and Mountain Water Co. The project objective is to demonstrate the possibility of home energy savings, and bring significant energy-saving home improvements to residents in 300 Missoula homes free of charge. A comprehensive home energy audit was performed in the homes of each of the participating residents.

3% WITHHOLDING REPEAL

Senator Scott Brown's staff continues to push for a vote to be held on Amendment 405, which would repeal the imposition of withholding on certain payments made to vendors by government entities. The amendment is pending in the Senate and the Senator has no intention of withdrawing it. There is currently no date set for a vote on the measure. Additionally, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce ran an ad in *Roll Call* and *CQ Today* thanking members for their support on the bill. These include Sen. Marco Rubio, Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen and Rep. Mario Diaz-Balart who have all co-sponsored the repeal legislation. OIA continues to work to gain support from the other members of the Miami-Dade Congressional delegation. A link to the ad is below:

http://www.uschamber.com/sites/default/files/ads/061611_RollCall_FP_Ad_final.pdf

MIAMI-DADE PUBLIC HOUSING AGENCY

OIA continues to work with the Miami-Dade County Congressional delegation regarding funding discrepancies with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). At issue are provisions within the FY 2009 THUD Appropriations Act which required HUD to rescind \$750 million in unspent Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) funds from 2400 public housing authorities.

Earlier this year, MDPHA discovered that the \$43 million recaptured from MDPHA was the second largest recapture amount of the top ten programs experiencing recapture in the country. The amount was also disproportionate in relation to the size of the other PHA's respective HCV programs.

In May, Miami-Dade Board of County Commissioners Chairman Joe Martinez sent a letter to HUD requesting corrective action and an explanation for the disproportionate recapture amount. HUD's response letter did not provide an explanation regarding the recapture amount, nor did it indicate the agency would take corrective action to address this inequitable treatment. Director Gregg Fortner, OIA and the federal lobbying team will continue to seek an acceptable response and resolution from HUD.

PORT OF MIAMI DEEP DREDGE

OIA continues to work with Miami Seaport and Director Bill Johnson to obtain the necessary federal approvals for the next phase of the Deep Dredge Project, a construction advanced funds agreement. Last week, Director Johnson met with Sally Ericsson from the Office of Management and Budget in Sen. Nelson's office. OIA continues to work with the Florida Congressional Delegation, key members of the House and Senate Appropriations Committees and the Obama Administration, to complete this phase of the Port of Miami's deep dredge project.

MIAMI-DADE UASI HOMELAND SECURITY FUNDING

OIA continues to advocate for the county's inclusion under the Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) in the Senate's version of the FY 2012 House Department of Homeland Security Appropriations bill. An amendment was attached to the House version of the legislation that stripped language from the bill that would have restricted funding to only ten urban areas throughout the country. The entire Miami-Dade County Congressional Delegation strongly supported the amendment. This came in response to a May 18 letter, where Miami-Dade Board of County Commissioners Chairman Joe Martinez joined mayors from throughout the country, including Miami Mayor Tomas Regalado, in a letter to U.S. House Appropriations Chairman Hal Rogers (KY) which strongly opposed the restrictive language. Currently, Miami-Dade County and the City of Miami receive funding under this program; however, under the provisions of the House bill, they would have been removed from the funding list. Prior to the vote, OIA and the County's federal contract lobbyists worked with a broad coalition of cities and counties throughout Florida and the nation to advocate on behalf of the amendment and will now do so as the bill heads to the Senate for consideration.

NATIONAL FLOOD INSURANCE PROGRAM REAUTHORIZATION

Congress continues to work on the National Flood Insurance Program Reauthorization with the introduction of H.R.1309, the Flood Insurance Reform Act of 2011, which was introduced by Rep. Biggert (IL). On September 30, 2010, the President signed the National Flood Insurance Program Re-extension Act of 2010, which Congress passed on September 24, 2010 and expires

on September 30, 2011. OIA and the Federal lobbying team will work to ensure that issues of importance to Miami-Dade County and the State of Florida are addressed in this legislation.

REP. DIAZ-BALART INTRODUCES CUBA TRAVEL AMENDMENT

Rep. Mario Diaz-Balart introduced and passed an amendment during an Appropriations Committee, Financial Services Subcommittee mark-up. The amendment prohibits any funding for enforcement of Obama's regulations regarding Cuban-American travel and remittances. The amendment replaces those regulations with those that were in place during the Bush Administration. According to the Congressman, the "amendment does not eliminate Cuban-American travel and remittances, it curbs the abuse that help fund the Castro regime. Tourism travel is the number one source of revenue for the regime."

SEN. RUBIO AND SEN. LIEBERMAN PEN WSJ OP-ED ON LYBIA

Sen. Rubio, along with Sen. Lieberman (Conn.), wrote an Op-Ed in Thursday's Wall Street Journal calling on Congress to support U.S. military action in Libya. Specifically, the Senators call on Congress to support a resolution sponsored by Sen. McCain (Ariz.), which backs American involvement in the Libya conflict saying the United States has "an unequivocal national interest" in removing Libyan dictator Muammar Qadhafi and should "intensify strike operations" to target him.

SEN. MENENDEZ INTRODUCES IMMIGRATION REFORM BILL

Congress rekindled the long-stalled debate over immigration reform this week. On Wednesday, Sen. Menendez (NJ) introduced new legislation with a four year old objective: to provide for comprehensive immigration reform. The bill, S. 1258 (the *Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act of 2011*), was introduced with seven cosponsors including Majority Whip Durbin (IL) and Majority Leader Reid (NV). It was subsequently referred to the Senate Judiciary Committee. The bill was lauded by the sponsor and Democratic leaders as a foundation for further negotiations. As Sen. Menendez said upon introduction, "we will never move forward if we do not have something from which to lay a foundation, to have a debate, to have a negotiation." Nonetheless, Comprehensive immigration reform remains a highly partisan issue both in Washington and throughout the country.

Although the text of the bill has not yet been released, an accompanying press release stated that the bill includes provisions to strengthen border security and enhance worksite enforcement of immigration laws. The legislation includes both a mandatory employment verification system and a program to require undocumented immigrants in the U.S. as of June 1, 2011 to register with the government, learn English, and pay fines and taxes on their way to becoming citizens. The bill also seeks to strengthen enforcement by providing additional resources for the Border Patrol; expanding penalties for passport and document fraud; adding new requirements for the Department of Homeland Security to track entries and exits at the border; and creating new criminal penalties for fraud and misuse of Social Security numbers. Lastly, the bill incorporates the DREAM Act.

In a related development, the House Judiciary Committee held a markup this week of HR 1933, a bipartisan bill to amend the Immigration and Nationality Act to modify the requirements for admission of nonimmigrant nurses in health professional shortage areas. HR 1933 effectively extends the H1-C visa program for three years. This legislation permits a one-time three-year extension of admission for nonimmigrant nurses in health professional shortage areas, which extends the visa for a total of six years. Additionally, the bill reduces the maximum number of such visas per fiscal year to 300.

During debate, House Judiciary Committee Chair Lamar Smith (TX) said that the bill was targeted at helping hospitals in inner cities obtain qualified health care professionals. Democrat Zoe Lofgren (CA) noted that there are only 14 hospitals in the country able to apply for these special visas, but she issued her support despite the limited reach of the program. The bill was passed by the full Judiciary Committee by a voice vote. OIA and federal contract lobbyists will continue to follow immigration issues in the 112th Congress and keep the County informed of all developments.

OBAMA USES OIL RESERVES

On Thursday, President Obama ordered the release of 30 million barrels of crude oil from the U.S. emergency stockpile. The purpose of the release according to Administration officials, was to “fill a gap in supply caused when political upheaval in Libya and Yemen disrupted global oil markets.”

HUNTSMAN CAMPAIGNS IN MIAMI

Jon Huntsman, candidate for the Republican presidential nomination, was in Miami to meet with business leaders on Thursday. Later in the day, the former Utah Governor and Ambassador to China opened his national campaign headquarters in Orlando, Florida.

REP. HASTINGS FACES CONGRESSIONAL ETHICS PROBE AND LAWSUIT

Rep. Hastings is facing an investigation by the House ethics committee over sexual harassment allegations made by a former congressional staffer. The Congressman is also being sued by the former staffer and Judicial Watch. Ms. Winsome Packer, a former staff member of the U.S. Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, previously chaired by Rep. Hastings, alleges that she received “unwelcome sexual advances” and “unwelcome touching” from Rep. Hastings. Ms. Packer also alleges that she faced retaliation when she tried to report the harassment. Rep. Hastings responded to the allegations thusly - “I have never sexually harassed anyone. In fact, I am insulted that these ludicrous allegations are being made against me. When all the facts are known in this case, the prevailing sentiment will be, ‘How bizarre!’” “I will win this lawsuit. That is a certainty. In a race with a lie, the truth always wins. And when the truth comes to light and the personal agendas of my accusers are exposed, I will be vindicated.”

DEBT LIMIT TALKS BREAKDOWN

One day after Republicans pulled out of the bipartisan debt limit negotiations being led by Vice President Biden, it was announced that President Obama would meet with Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid and Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell on Monday morning in an attempt to jump-start the stalled talks. On Thursday, the eight week talks collapsed when Rep. Cantor (VA) and Sen. Kyl (AZ) departed from the group because of Democratic members' insistence on including tax increases in any deal, which Republicans said would not be able to pass the House.

REPUBLICAN CANDIDATES FOR 2012 PRESIDENTIAL RACE

OFFICIALLY ANNOUNCED WILL RUN:

Herman Cain – former CEO of Godfather's Pizza
Newt Gingrich – former Speaker of the House
Jon Huntsman – former Gov. of Utah & former Ambassador to China
Gary Johnson – former Gov. of New Hampshire
Ron Paul – Texas Congressman
Tim Pawlenty – former Gov. of Minnesota
Mitt Romney – former Gov. of Massachusetts
Rick Santorum – former Sen. From Pennsylvania

YET TO OFFICIALLY ANNOUNCE:

Michele Bachmann – Minnesota Congresswoman
Jim DeMint – South Carolina Senator
Rudy Giuliani – former Mayor of New York City
Sarah Palin – former Gov. of Alaska
Rick Perry – Gov. of Texas
Buddy Roemer – former Gov. of Louisiana

NEXT WEEK'S CALENDAR: JUNE 20 – JUNE 24

The House will be in recess next week and will not return until after July 4th.

The Senate will be in session.