

## **WASHINGTON WEEKLY REPORT**

### **October 17TH – October 21ST, 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 RECESS THIS WEEK*

### **MIAMI-DADE COUNTY AND MEMBERS OF CONGRESS DISCUSS FREE TRADE AGREEMENTS AT MIAMI INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT**

On Thursday, Miami-Dade County Mayor Carlos A. Gimenez, Board of County Commissioners Chairman Joe Martinez and Commissioner Jose “Pepe” Diaz joined members of Congress Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, Mario Diaz-Balart and David Rivera to discuss the recently passed Free Trade Agreements (FTA) with Colombia, Panama and South Korea at Miami International Airport. Additionally, Aviation Director Jose Abreu, SeaPort Director Bill Johnson and OIA Director Joe Rasco participated in the FTA event. The FTA’s are expected to improve the Florida economy and create local jobs, especially in Miami-Dade County, because of its role as the gateway to the Americas and as the base of operations for many import/export oriented businesses.

The ratification of these agreements is expected to play a leading role in doubling Florida-origin exports within five years, creating more than 20,000 new jobs, and generating more than \$1.5 billion in international trade opportunities for Florida. Much of that growth will center on Miami and throughout South Florida.

### **PRESIDENT SIGNS THREE FREE TRADE AGREEMENTS INTO LAW**

On Friday, President Obama signed three free trade deals in the Oval Office of the White House. The South Korea, Panama and Colombia Free Trade Agreements are expected to boost annual U.S. exports by \$13 billion, which the White House estimates will create or maintain about 70,000 jobs. The implementing bills for the Colombia, Panama and South Korean Free Trade Agreements were voted on and passed by Congress last week.

Miami-Dade County has advocated for the passage of these agreements for many years and according to the County’s trade data, the agreements stand to have a positive economic impact on the County due to the following data points:

- Colombia is Miami’s second largest trading partner;
- Panama is Miami-Dade County’s 16th largest trading partner;
- Colombia is the 10th largest trading partner with the Port of Miami worth \$6.8 billion in 2010;

- Panama's is the 8th largest trading partner with the Port of Miami worth \$1.85 billion in 2010;
- Out of all the flowers that are sent to the U.S. from Colombia, 96% come through Miami International Airport;
- Colombia is MIA's second top trading partner by value bringing in \$5.2 billion a year, which helps to support 282,000 direct and indirect jobs related to MIA and related aviation industries in South Florida.

### **3% WITHHOLDING BILL HELD UP IN THE SENATE**

On Thursday, the Senate took up Minority Leader Mitch McConnell's version of the 3% withholding bill, S. 1726, and in a procedural motion (known as a cloture vote) to close debate on the bill, the Senate voted 57 to 43 to reject the motion, effectively stalling the measure in the upper chamber. Importantly, the motion did include votes in favor of the measure by Senators Marco Rubio, Bill Nelson and nine other Democratic Senators.

In a White House Statement of Administration Policy, officials said they would recommend a veto of the bill because it contained a \$30 billion rescission that would "cause serious disruption in a range of services supported by the federal government."

Commissioner Sally Heyman has been a strong advocate of the bill and the County strongly supports passage of a 3% withholding measure. While this setback is disappointing, the 3% withholding effort is far from over. The House has over 270 cosponsors including, Rep. Frederica Wilson who signed on earlier this week, as well as Reps. Ros-Lehtinen, Diaz-Balart and Rivera. The House version, H.R.674, is expected to be voted on late Monday, October 24.

OIA, along with Commissioner Heyman, Director Miriam Singer and the federal lobbying team continue to work to help secure the passage of the legislation in the coming weeks. Additionally, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's Government Withholding Coalition and NACo continue to coordinate lobbying efforts to gain support of the bills.

Last week the House Ways and Means Committee favorably reported H.R. 674 to the House floor on a voice vote.

### **DIRECTOR FORTNER TO MEET WITH HUD ON SECTION 8 HOUSING CHOICE VOUCHER ISSUE**

Director of Public Housing and Community Development Gregg Fortner will be in Washington next week. The purpose of the trip will be to meet with U.S. Housing and Urban Development (HUD) officials and discuss the ongoing issue regarding the disproportionate \$43 million in recaptured Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) funds while the department was in HUD receivership. This discrepancy was the second largest recapture amount of the top ten programs experiencing recapture in the country.

OIA has been working with Rep. Diaz-Balart's office and the rest of the county delegation regarding the recaptured funding discrepancies. At issue are provisions within the FY 2009 THUD Appropriations Act which required HUD to rescind \$750 million in unspent HCV funds from 2400 public housing authorities.

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. On June 16, Chairman Martinez again sent a letter to HUD, requesting an adequate explanation regarding HUD's calculation of the recapture amount and lack of corrective action. Last week, Commissioner Lynda Bell, Director Fortner and OIA discussed the issue and the County's position with HUD officials in Washington.

## **FY12 SENATE APPROPRIATIONS ACTION – UPDATE**

The FY12 Agriculture-CJS-Transportation/HUD appropriations minibuss was considered on the Senate floor this past week. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid had hoped to complete work on the package on Thursday before adjourning for the scheduled weeklong recess. However, the Senate was unable to finish its work on all of the amendments to the minibuss during yesterday's legislative session. After voting late into the evening, Senators voted to invoke cloture on the bill and agreed to resume work on any remaining amendments upon return from the weeklong recess. When the Senate returns on Monday, October 31, they will deal with the approximately two dozen pending amendments to the minibuss bill, with a final vote on the package likely to occur on Tuesday, November 1<sup>st</sup>.

The Senate has considered a number of amendments to the Commerce-Justice-Science section of the bill, including:

- An amendment offered by Senator Cornyn (TX) to bar the use of funds for the undercover operation known as Fast and Furious or similar "gun walking" programs. The amendment was adopted by a vote of 99 to 0.
- Senator Webb (VA) offered an amendment to create a national criminal justice commission tasked with conducting a comprehensive review of the criminal justice system and reporting its findings and recommendations. The amendment was rejected.
- Senator Grassley (IA) offered an amendment, which was rejected, that would have required the U.S. Department of Justice's inspector general to audit at least 10 percent of grants funded by the measure. The amendment would have barred grant recipients found to have used funds in an unauthorized manner, and did not resolve the issue, from receiving certain grants administered by the Justice Department for the following two fiscal years. The amendment, which needed 60 votes to pass, was rejected by a vote of 46-54.

- Senator Ayotte (NH) offered an amendment that would bar the use of DOJ funds for civilian trials of suspects belonging to al-Qaeda or its affiliates that have participated in planning attacks on the United States. The amendment was rejected.

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## **PRESIDENT OBAMA NOMINATES BALSERA FOR UNITED STATES ADVISORY COMMISSION ON PUBLIC DIPLOMACY**

On Tuesday the President nominated Freddy Balsera of Miami to the U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy – the nomination must be confirmed by the U.S. Senate. Balsera is the Founder and Managing Partner of Balsera Communications, a public relations firm based in Coral Gables, Florida. Prior to founding his company in 1999, Mr. Balsera worked for the Miami Dade County Mayor's Office handling intergovernmental relations and media relations duties. Mr. Balsera currently serves on the board of the YMCA of Greater Miami and was elected to the Miami Dade College Alumni Hall of Fame in 2010. In 2008, he worked with the Obama-Biden Transition Team as part of the agency review panel for the Federal Communications Commission. He was nominated for a term expiring July 1, 2014. He attended Barry University.

## **SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR SALAZAR VISITS THE EVERGLADES**

On Thursday, U.S. Department of Interior Secretary Ken Salazar was in Miami to learn about the progress of the Tamiami Trail Bridge Project. The Secretary was joined by U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Director Dan to highlight the Department's work to help preserve and protect America's great outdoors. The Tamiami Trail Bridge Project is expected to be completed by December 2012 and will help restore fresh water flows to Everglades National Park and the south Florida ecosystem.

## **NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES' (NACO) LARGE URBAN COUNTY CAUCUS (LUCC)**

Next week the National Association of Counties' (NACo) Large Urban County Caucus (LUCC) will meet in South Florida to debate the many critical legislative issues impacting the nation's urban counties. LUCC Steering Committee Members are also expected to determine LUCC's 2012 legislative agenda and calendar of events.

## **U.S. SENATE CONFIRMS NEW U.S. COMMERCE SECRETARY**

On Thursday, the Senate confirmed John Bryson to be the Secretary of Commerce, by a vote of 74-26. Secretary Bryson will succeed Gary Locke, who left to become the ambassador to China. Bryson is the former Chairman, Chief Executive Officer and President of Edison International.

President Obama said, "As Secretary of Commerce, John Bryson will be a key member of my economic team, working with the business community to promote job creation, foster growth, and help open up new markets around the world for American-made goods."

## **DIAZ-BALART MOURNS LOSS OF CUBAN HERO LAURA POLLAN**

Congressman Mario Diaz-Balart released the following statement on the death of Laura Pollan, founder of the Ladies in White:

"I am deeply grieved to hear of the passing of Laura Pollan, the courageous founder of the Ladies in White. Laura founded the Ladies in White ten years ago when her husband, Hector Maseda, was imprisoned. Since then, the Ladies in White has brought international attention to the unjust imprisonment and harsh prison conditions that Cuba's brave pro-democracy dissidents have suffered at the hands of the Castro regime. While I mourn the loss of one of Cuba's great heroes, I am tremendously grateful that Laura Pollan's leadership and unshakable resolve have left an enduring legacy that undoubtedly will hasten freedom to the Cuban people."

## **GOP PRESIDENTIAL FIELD 2012**

Michele Bachmann – U.S. Rep. from Minnesota  
Herman Cain – former CEO of Godfather's Pizza  
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

## **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: OCTOBER 24TH – OCTOBER 28TH**

*The House will be in session next week*

*The Senate will be in recess next week*