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Lashway, Lisa

From: Lashway, Lisa
Sent: Saturday, February 18, 2012 9:38 AM
To: Greenbaum, Rob; Canning, Sean
Subject: Correspondence - FW: Washington Watch

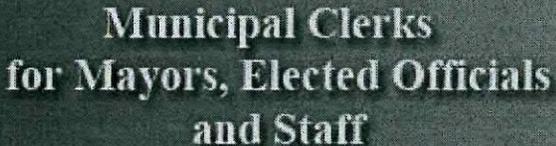
Please see information below.

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From: NJLM to Municipal Officials [mailto:njlm-clerks@cityconnections.com]
Sent: Friday, February 17, 2012 4:09 PM
To: Lashway, Lisa
Subject: Washington Watch

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February 17, 2012

RE: WASHINGTON WATCH

Federal Transportation Policy Debates Stall for Presidents' Day Recess

Dear Mayor:

While attention in our Nation's Capital has been focused the payroll tax, like Turnpike traffic on a holiday weekend, progress on a new federal transportation policy has come in fits and starts. Congress faces a March 31 deadline, at which time the current program will expire. Meanwhile, the Congressional Budget Office announced last week that current transportation revenues will soon run out.

After moving quickly to bring legislation to the House and Senate floors for debate, action has been delayed in both Chambers.

Racing towards the week-long Presidents' Day recess, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid attempted to block extraneous amendments that have prevented the Senate from debating S 1318, the two-year Senate authorization bill. Today, Senator Reid will attempt to close off debate.

Over the recess, Senate leaders will try to pare down the numerous amendments that have been offered and bring the bill to the Senate floor when lawmakers return, on Monday, February 27.

In the House, Speaker John Boehner was stymied by opposition to HR 7, the House five year authorization bill and forced to break the bill into three parts and debate each separately. The three sections of the proposal include the transportation section, a bill to fund the program through expanded oil shale and off shore drilling, and a bill to change federal employee pension contributions. Speaker Boehner announced that the transportation bill will not come up for debate before the House leaves for recess this afternoon. Over 300 amendments have been filed with the House Rules Committee for debate on HR 7 and it is unclear which will be permitted to be offered during debate.

Lawmakers have until March 31 to reconcile the two very different approaches to transportation funding when the current short term extension of the program, already extended 8 times, runs out.

Before it was split, H.R. 7, the American Energy and Infrastructure Jobs Act of 2012, had included a five-year, \$260 billion bill was adopted on a mostly

party-line vote after an 18-hour session of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. The House Ways and Means Committee was responsible for the funding portion of the bill, voted for a radical shift in financing for public transportation programs, strongly opposed by more than 600 groups, including National League of Cities. The provisions adopted by the Ways and Means Committee would end the transfer of federal fuel taxes to a mass transit account and force transit to be funded by the regular appropriations process after a one-time transfer of \$40 billion in general revenues to fund public transportation for urban and rural areas and for the Congestion Management Air Quality program. Also included were provisions from bills adopted by the House Natural Resources Committee to expand oil shale and off-shore drilling and to use those revenues to finance the transportation programs.

Amendments to H.R. 7 during committee action included an amendment to strip a change that would have allowed greatly increased truck weights on portions of the Interstate system, rejection of an amendment to reinstate a set-aside for local transportation enhancements projects, discussion of funding for Amtrak and prohibiting funding for high speed rail in California.

The Senate's two-year bill, S. 1813, provides full funding of federal transportation programs, including \$13 billion in additional funding above federal transportation revenues in the Highway Trust Fund. The bill includes a provision to keep transit commuting benefits equal to parking benefits that expired at the end of last year.

While lawmakers have worked to move legislation through their respective houses, the path forward remains unclear. Although the Senate has enjoyed mostly bipartisan support in the four committees that have jurisdiction over the bill, strong policy disputes continued when floor debate begins.

The House has had a much more partisan debate over its bill and it is unclear whether the leadership will have the support of many of the newly elected members that came to Congress opposing federal spending.

We will keep you posted on any further developments. You may want to contact your Congressman and/or Senators Lautenberg and Menendez on this

or other matters, during next week's recess. If you have any questions, contact Jon Moran at 609-695-3481, ext. 121 or jmoran@njslom.com

Very truly yours,

William G. Dressel, Jr.
Executive Director

*If you would like to be removed from receiving faxed advisories please contact Shirley Cade at scade@njslom.com or 609-695-3481 ext. 114 with the name of your municipality and fax number. Thank you.

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