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PAL November Legislative Update 11/14/19

HMT House Legislation Passes

The big news for ports and waterways users was the passage of HR 2440 by House T&I Chairman DeFazio on Oct.28. The bill, Full Utilization of the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund Act, passed 296-109, or a 10-vote margin over the 2/3 votes required. Louisiana's House delegation was 100 percent supportive of the measure – so a big 'Thank You' to everyone who reached out to their representatives in the last few weeks and months and for the years of educating members on the issue. The next step is to determine the Senate's version of the HMT legislation, which is anticipated to be similar to the already supported proposal. The Senate Environment and Public Works Committee will publish its version any day now. AAPA and PAL will be asking for your support again on the Senate side in the coming months, as the legislation faces some push back from "budget hawks" and some members of the Administration.

Congress Returns from Recess

Congress returned from its most recent recess Oct. 15 and has been *busy*. Many of you saw and met with your representatives while they were back in their districts – hopefully those meetings proved beneficial. Congress will likely remain in session through mid-December, although the impeachment issue could alter Congressional schedules.

E&WD Bill Stalls

The FY20 Energy & Water Development appropriations bill that funds the Corps has remained stalled, while the federal government operates on a short-term Continuing Resolution through Nov. 21. While the Louisiana delegation and their staff are supportive of moving the bill, which appropriates record funding for the Corps, many also believe it is likely another short-term CR could be passed to extend into December or 2020. The bill will likely be included in a minibuss package that would include E&WD, State-Foreign Operations, Labor-HHS-Education and Defense. The hold up here is discussion of funding the border wall within the Defense bill.

Senate Appropriations Bill Cuts Port Funding

The Senate approved a fiscal 2020 appropriations bill Oct. 30 that cuts funding by more than two-thirds to a U.S. Department of Transportation Maritime Administration (MARAD) program that provides critical grants for port infrastructure projects nationwide. MARAD's Port Infrastructure Development Program initiated last year and funded at \$292.73 million, would be slashed to \$91.6 million if the Senate's appropriation mark is upheld in the final bill. Not only would funding for the program be severely cut, the Senate bill requires deep-draft coastal ports and shallow-draft inland waterways ports share those funds, which wasn't the case last year.

AAPA advocates that the program be funded at a minimum of \$300 million. AAPA is working to achieve a higher funding level for the program in the final Congressional negotiations for the bill. The House approved \$225 million for the program in FY 2020.

Future HMT Issues

The HMT surplus balance was \$9.3 billion at the end of FY18. The next HMT push if successful with HR 2440 is to find a mechanism and build a case for use of the surplus funds for waterway projects across the country to modernize and deepen harbors. AAPA and the Corps will be conducting surveys to determine what the cost of “fully maintained” channels and harbors would be and what level of investment the Corps would need to achieve it.

NOAA PORTS system

PORTS, the NOAA system that provides mariners with real-time current, water levels and air-draft information, has been funded at \$5 million per year for the last decade. AAPA and Big River Coalition is seeking \$10 million to expand and perform maintenance on the system.

Louisiana Native Nominated for US Energy Secretary

Dan Brouillette, a native of Paincourtville, La. in Assumption Parish, was recently nominated for US Energy Secretary. He previously served as Deputy Energy Secretary under Rick Perry. This would bode well for Louisiana as many of you know him from his time as chief of staff with former Congressman Billy Tauzin and staff director of the Energy and Commerce Committee when Tauzin chaired the committee from 2003-2004. Most recently he served as vice president at Ford from 2004-2006 handling governmental affairs matters before heading public policy for the US Automobile Association.

State Politico Update

Election Day is finally here – in two days to be exact. And unless you’ve dropped off the grid entirely incumbent Governor John Bel Edwards is taking on challenger Eddie Rispone after the Baton Rouge businessman defeated his nearest challenger Congressman Ralph Abraham by three percentage points. Recent polling shows Edwards leading Rispone by slim margins but statistically tied at about 48-46%, which means turnout on Saturday will be key for both candidates. If you didn’t vote early make sure to vote Saturday!

Legislative Races

Republicans secured 63 seats in Louisiana’s House of Representatives in the October primary. That number is a mere seven seats shy of a “veto-proof” super majority, which could pose problems for a second-term Edwards Administration or give a new Rispone Administration carte blanche in the House. A Republican super majority was already secured in the Louisiana Senate. According to a report by LSU’s political communication professor Michael Henderson, the lone competitive House seat left would be District 70 in Baton Rouge, which pits Democrat Belinda Davis against Republican Barbara Reich Freiburg. That seat was held by Rep. Franklin Foil, who was term limited in the House and is in a runoff for the Senate.

Statewide Races

Only two statewide offices have yet to be decided – Governor and Secretary of State. Lt. Governor Billy Nungesser, Commissioner of Agriculture and Forestry Mike Strain, Treasurer John Schroder, Attorney General Jeff Landry and Commissioner of Insurance Jim Donelon (all Republicans) were reelected in the primary.

Upcoming Dates:

International Workboat Show – Dec. 4-6 in New Orleans.

PAL December Meeting – Dec. 5th at Port NOLA, Second Floor of Administration Building.