

WASHINGTON UPDATE

JUNE 17, 2016

STATE OF CONGRESSIONAL ISSUES

Congress has been in session for the past two weeks. There are only four weeks until the August recess. This annual recess or district work period will begin around July 15 of this year. The break is early this year because of the Republican and Democratic Presidential nominating conventions. The recent attack in Orlando played heavily into the thoughts and actions of Congress this past week.

Here were the main issues:

Firearms

The Senate Democratic filibuster, led by Senator Chris Murphy (D-CT), was the issue over gun-control. The 15 hour filibuster lasted part of Wednesday and into Thursday.

The Democrats gained two floor votes on amendments to the Commerce-Justice-Science appropriations bill as part of a compromise to end the filibuster. Most likely they will not have the 60 votes needed to adopt the amendments.

Sen. Diane Feinstein (D-CA) will propose an amendment that would prevent the purchase of a gun by anyone who is on a terrorist watch list. There may also be an amendment to expand background checks to gun shows and online sales. Republicans are favoring an opposing amendment that requires a court order for there to be a block of any gun sale. It is expected that the Senate will vote on these amendments on Monday, June 20.

Defense Spending

The House passed its version of the Defense spending bill on Thursday. However, a presidential veto is increasingly likely. A proposal within the bill to move \$15.7 billion from a war account to the financing of planes, ships, and troops does not sit favorably with the President. The Obama administration had never made a request for the diversion of funds. This monetary shift will result in the end of money for war operations by next April. The funding problem would then be in the hands of the next president.

A veto is even more likely after an amendment was added to the bill that would block funding for the study of other U.S. sites to house Guantanamo Bay prisoners. This would make it impossible for the President to close the prison. Much like the 2008 election, the prison could be a critical issue in the 2016 presidential election.

FY 2017 Spending Bills

There was a return to partisan fervor in the Senate Appropriations Committee this past Thursday. Democrats opposed the spending cuts that to the bill that funds the Interior Department, the Environmental Protection Agency, and other associated agencies. The bill did pass the committee on the 16-14 party line vote.

The House has passed four spending bills: Defense, Energy-Water Development, Legislative Branch and Military Construction-VA. The Senate has passed three of its spending bills: Energy-Water Development, Military Construction-VA and the Transportation-HUD. The Commerce-Justice-Science spending measure is under consideration by the full Senate.

Zika- funding

Bipartisan compromise on a funding package to fight the virus may be in the works. The House could make moves next week by voting on a conference report. House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-CA) is hopeful this action will occur soon.

Public pressure is growing on Congress to formulate a deal to fund against the virus. There have been accounts of three babies being born in the United States with the virus. With the House and Senate offering different spending options, it may still be some time before a deal is reached.