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WASHINGTON UPDATE

SEPTEMBER 11, 2015

SENATE DEMOCRATS FILIBUSTER ANTI-IRAN NUCLEAR RESOLUTION

This past Thursday, Senate Democrats put a kibosh on GOP efforts to move forward with a resolution of disapproval over the Iran nuclear deal. The vote was 58 to 42 to proceed to final consideration of the bill-- two votes shy of the sixty votes required to invoke cloture and break the filibuster. The vote was somewhat anticlimactic since President Obama secured the necessary support earlier in the week to block the Republican measure. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY), in response to "Democratic obstructionism," has pledged to take up the resolution once again next week in what is likely to be a futile effort to flip two Democratic votes.

On the House side, Speaker John Boehner's carefully orchestrated plan to pass a resolution of disapproval was scratched at the last minute under pressure from rank-and-file Republicans unhappy with what they considered a failed strategy to block the deal. Under the new GOP game plan, three separate bills were considered today: 1) a measure denouncing President Obama for failing to submit to Congress, as required, all elements of the deal including side agreements reached between Iran and the International Atomic Energy Agency, which was adopted; 2) legislation prohibiting Obama from lifting sanctions against Iran, which also passed; and 3) a resolution approving the Iran nuclear deal, which, as expected, went down to defeat by a vote of 162 to 269, with 25 Democrats voting against it.

Finally, as if the debate over the Iran nuclear agreement was not chaotic enough, three House Republican Members introduced a bill earlier this week to authorize war with Iran if the Islamic Republic violates the deal and attempts to develop nuclear weapons. A vote on that measure, however, is not expected any time soon if at all.

HIGHWAY REAUTHORIZATION MARKUP POSTPONED

House Transportation Committee Chairman Bill Shuster (R-PA) announced today that his Committee markup of a draft transportation authorization bill is now being tentatively rescheduled for the end of September or early October. With the current authorization of federal transportation programs expiring on October 29, Congress is running out of time to enact a long-term bill and, therefore, is going to have to once again pass another short-term extension, possibly through December. Shuster also said that while he is working on passing a long-term transportation bill, he is not interested in enacting a six year bill with a three year funding stream, per Senate legislation.

POSITIVE TRAIN CONTROL DEADLINE EXTENSION LIKELY

Congress is going to have to postpone a yearend deadline it established for commuter rail and freight railroads to install positive train control (PTC) systems. Railroad lines across the country have been actively lobbying for an extension saying that they cannot meet the deadline. In recognition of this reality, the Senate included a PTC extension through 2018 in its recently passed surface transportation authorization bill. The House is expected to follow suit, either in its own transportation authorization bill or in some other legislative vehicle, possible a continuing resolution or omnibus appropriations measure.

SPEAKER BOEHNER'S TURBULENT RIDE

As for palace intrigue, there is increasing concern among Speaker Boehner's closest allies that he may find himself in the crosshairs of another attempt to depose him later this year. On the eve of the August congressional recess, Representative Mark Meadows (R-NC), in his second term in office, introduced a resolution to vacate the chair, which could potentially end Boehner's tenure as Speaker of the House, if not embarrass him while further eroding his hold on power. Meadows recently observed that he is holding the resolution in abeyance, as the Sword of Damocles, over Boehner's head.

Any number of highly contentious issues that Congress must tackle this fall could trigger Boehner's political demise. For instance, Members of the most conservative wing of the GOP conference, the Freedom Caucus, have mobilized in opposition to any Fiscal Year 2016 appropriations bill or continuing resolution that funds Planned Parenthood. The challenge for Boehner, of course, is how to balance the demand from a vocal faction within his conference to cut-off funding for the organization while avoiding a government shutdown. Boehner is truly in an untenable position in light of President Obama's vow to veto any appropriations measure that defunds Planned Parenthood and Senate Majority Leader McConnell's admission that there are simply not enough votes to override a veto, conceding that the funding issue will have to wait until a new president is in the White House. Freedom Caucus members, including Representative Mark Meadows, are likely to be disappointed with the funding outcome and may very well take their frustrations out on Boehner.

Other intractable issues that could discretely or in concert derail Boehner's leadership include whether to strike a budget deal that lifts sequestration caps for both defense and domestic programs, raising the debt ceiling and resurrecting the Export-Import Bank, whose mandate expired last June. If the chaos surrounding the Iran nuclear vote is a harbinger of things to come, Boehner is in for a very rough ride this fall.

9/11 COMMEMORATIONS

As the nation solemnly commemorates the 14th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks on US soil, a new memorial is inaugurated this week in Pennsylvania with the completion of Flight 93 National Memorial visitors center. The center pays homage to the 40 passengers and crew members who died as modern-day heroes, valiantly fighting the terrorists who commandeered their aircraft. The concrete-and-glass visitors' center and museum highlight the personal stories of the

passengers on that doomed flight. Visitors can see the bits and pieces of the plane as well as listen to some 37 calls that were made by passengers on Flight 93 to their loved ones. Paul Murdoch, the architect of the memorial, said of the memorial: “In its raw severity, we acknowledge their sacrifice. In its solemn darkness, we acknowledge their loss. In its calm serenity, we offer solace at their final resting place. And in its monumental scale, we praise their heroic deeds...”