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The Senate Mourns the Passing of a Legend and Congress Struggles to Move Forward

With only a handful of legislative weeks remaining in the year, Congress is looking very closely at the agenda and what they can realistically get accomplished before the end of the session. With many of the FY 2011 appropriations bills only now coming out of subcommittee on the House side, no appropriations action to date on the Senate side, an FAA reauthorization bill stuck between chambers due to long-standing disagreements, and a number of tax cuts set to expire at the end of the year, Congress seems to be struggling to act on many legislative priorities. The report below highlights some of the legislation that Congress may move in the coming weeks that could potentially impact NCSSMA members.

FY 2011 Appropriations Bills

Following what was a very slow start for the FY 2011 appropriations process, we are finally starting to see Congress gain some forward momentum on these measures. In the last couple of weeks the House has been able to move out of subcommittee the Agriculture, Commerce/Justice/Science, Homeland Security, Legislative Branch, State/Foreign Operations, and Transportation/HUD spending measures. We believe we will see a few other spending measures acted on prior to the August recess, but due to growing concerns this election year about the federal deficit and government spending, it will continue to be extremely difficult to move any spending related legislation.

It still appears, as reported in our last Legislative Report, that the Senate Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations Subcommittee will mark up their bill in late July. We may also see action by the House Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations Subcommittee as early as next week. As always, both of these timeframes are subject to change. The Labor-HHS-Education appropriations bill contains the Limitation on Administrative Expenses (LAE) account which funds the administrative costs for SSA. As this bill starts to move we will provide details on the funding levels and language related to SSA.

In advance of the Independence Day recess, NCSSMA took the lead on an important meeting of the SSA Advocacy Group related to SSA's FY 2011 funding. On June 24, NCSSMA President Joe Dirago, Grassroots Coordinator Rick Warsinskey, and Rachel Emmons and Aaron Hunter of the Greystone Group, along with a number of representatives from other Advocacy Group organizations met with key House and Senate contacts to discuss SSA's funding needs and the possible roadblocks facing the agency for FY 2011 and beyond. It was clear from this meeting that it will be difficult in the current budget environment to secure the funding that SSA so desperately needs to effectively carry out the agency's mission. The Advocacy Group meeting provided an opportunity for group members to share information and to ensure that everyone is "on message" in making the case for SSA's FY 2011 funding. This cooperation and coordination by group members will provide a more uniform and organized advocacy effort that

should help make the case for SSA to receive no less than the President's FY 2011 Budget Request. NCSSMA and other group members are continuing to make contacts with the Hill and it is likely that we will organize a conference call with the group once we have a funding level out of either the House or Senate Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations Subcommittee.

A Legend Passes Away

A Senate "landmark," "an institution," "a giant." These were all words used to describe the late Senator Robert C. Byrd (D-WV). On June 28, 2010, at the age of 92, Robert C. Byrd passed away. He dedicated much of his life in service of the people of West Virginia. Senator Byrd was first elected in the 1950s to the U.S. House of Representatives, and then in 1959 to the U.S. Senate. He spent some 51 years, five months, and 25 days in the Senate halls, making him the longest serving U.S. Senator in the country's history.

In many ways Senator Byrd embodied both the most revered and the most ridiculed characteristics of the Senate that he loved so passionately. He used his power during his years as Senate Majority Leader, Senate Minority Leader, Chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, and President pro tempore of the Senate to speak for so many from his beloved state of West Virginia.

In a July 5, 2010 article entitled, "The Quintessential Senator," current Chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, Congressman David R. Obey (D-7th-WI) said this of Senator Byrd, "I can think of no one in the history of the Senate who demonstrated a greater capacity for growth than Robert Byrd. He was unmatched in his recognition of our obligation to the Constitution and to the institution of Congress itself. They really don't make them like him anymore."

On July 8, the West Virginia Attorney General cleared the way for the Governor of West Virginia to hold a special election for the Senate seat of the late Senator Byrd, on the November ballot. The winner of the special election will finish out the remainder of the late Senator's term.

Federal Pay

With ever growing concerns about the federal deficit and in turn heightened scrutiny of government spending, the idea of cutting or freezing federal employee pay continues to be raised by some in Congress. There have already been three legislative attempts to do so, one on the House side, and two on the Senate side, none of which have succeeded. Rumors continue to abound that a handful of Senators and Representatives will look very closely at all Title 5 bills under consideration in hopes of attaching an amendment that would cut or freeze the pay of federal employees.

The President's FY 2011 Budget Request recommended a 1.4% pay raise for both the military and civilian sectors. This was in line with the promise that the President made last year that in FY 2011 he would provide for pay parity between the two sectors. But ultimately it is not the President that controls spending, it is Congress. The House, as part of their Defense authorization bill passed a 1.9% pay increase for the uniformed sector. It seems likely that the

Senate will back the President and only approve a 1.4% military pay hike. Neither the full House nor Senate has yet to take up the appropriations bill that contains the civilian pay increase. This difference between the House and Senate, accompanied with the ever growing pressure to reduce government spending is making it very unlikely that if the civilian sector were to avoid a pay freeze or cut, and get a raise, that it would be any more than 1.4%.

Supervisor Training Legislation

As a follow up to the last Legislative Report, there has been movement related to S. 674, the Federal Supervisor Training Act of 2009. On Thursday, June 24, 2010, the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs passed the bill out of the full committee in the form of a substitute amendment.

The bill, which was introduced by Senator Daniel Akaka (D-HI) would require that members of the federal workforce moving into a supervisory position receive interactive training on a wide range of issues within one year of starting the position. The bill would also require that additional training take place at least once every three years following that initial year.

The House version of the bill, H.R. 5522, is still awaiting action in the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform.

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