

Congressional Update

The summer recess is over, and the full Congress is coming back to DC with two things on its to-do list: keep the government open and find a deal for another stimulus package. One of those two things will be easier than the other.

Federal spending authority expires on the last day of the month with the end of the fiscal year. The Administration and the House Democrats have already announced that they plan on reaching a deal for a “clean” continuing resolution (CR) -- which would keep the same level of funding across the board. This reflects the fact that neither side wants to have a government shutdown, especially this close to an election. As of right now, negotiations are ongoing as to how long the CR will last with some pushing for it to expire in December before the holidays and others wanting it to go until past the inauguration. We should know more soon.

Unfortunately, there is not a clear path forward on stimulus negotiations. Both sides are at a stalemate with negotiations having broken down and neither side engaging the other in serious talks for weeks. The “skinny bill” that the Senate GOP attempted to pass failed because Democrats did not believe it to be sufficient -- it included less than \$500B in funding, far less than the \$2T that Democrats are asking for. However, there is growing pressure among moderate Democrats for the House to pass smaller, issue-specific bills that will increase pressure on the Senate. Speaker Pelosi is strongly opposed to a piecemeal approach and has resisted this strategy so far, however that could change as we approach the end of the month. Many Democrats do not want to leave Washington in October and campaign with the HEROES Act being so far in the rear-view mirror that many voters may have forgotten about it.

Ultimately, with every week that goes by without a deal, the chances diminish that a bill will reach the President’s desk before Congress leaves town until after the election. Over the next few weeks, Congress will receive a barrage of messaging from constituents who are desperate for assistance and whose organizations are unlikely to survive the fall without more funds.

Hill Activity Report

In the month of August, we continued to work for AJA on several issues.

First, we continued to engage on the Medicaid Inmate Exclusion Policy, keeping in touch with the informal coalition of advocacy groups urging Congress to take action. We spoke with the advocacy lead for COCHS, to discuss how his organization is approaching the problem and the conversations that they've had.

Second, we took meetings with staff in the House and Senate urging them to pass legislation that provides for additional access to PPP, that covers pandemic event cancellations (the Pandemic Risk Insurance Act), and that provides tax incentives to businesses that exhibit

at conferences. Unfortunately, as was mentioned earlier, the stimulus package is currently locked up in Congress and we're adding our voices to countless others urging Congress to act.

Finally, we also had an important conversation with key staff on the Senate Commerce Committee regarding Inmate Call Rates. The House passed language four months ago that would have capped calls while the FCC went through its process of setting rates for intrastate calls. We laid out AJA's position to the lead staffers on the issue for the Senate Republicans and expressed our support for Senator Duckworth's bill, particularly because it allows the FCC to determine what is just and reasonable without setting caps devoid of data. They informed us that currently the Chairman has not taken a position on this topic and that it is not presently at the top of his priority list.

Prepared for AJA by Lobbyit.com (9/18/2020)