

WASHINGTON UPDATE

by: Meyers & Associates



Funding the Federal Government Up Against the Wall Again

The last time we reported to you we were up against a deadline to fund the government and keep things running. After a short-term continuing resolution (CR) we are in the same situation once again. As I write this, Congress is faced with a \$1.2 trillion Omnibus government spending bill. If Congress cannot pass the \$1.2 trillion spending package or agree to a temporary spending extension by Friday evening, March 23, the government could partially shut down for the third time this year. For the funding package to pass, Republicans will need the help of Democrats because the legislation will need 60 votes to advance in the Senate. Due to the amount of spending anticipated in the bill it appears that many fiscal conservatives will oppose the legislation. The details of the legislation are not clear at this time.

Budget Bill Raises the Cap on ELAP

In February Congress passed a stop gap spending and a two-year budget bill that lifted the budget caps. The bi-partisan legislation included disaster relief and temporary federal spending. It also included several other provisions important to lawmakers. Included in the massive legislation was language that lifted the \$20 million cap on the Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honey Bees and Farm-Raised Fish program (ELAP). ABF had been working very hard to have the ELAP cap lifted and was very pleased that Congress included the provision in the budget package.

90-Day Extension of the Agriculture Exemption from Electronic Logging Devices (ELD)

Transportation (DOT) Secretary Elaine Chao announced an additional 90-day extension of the agriculture exemption from the ELD mandate. The ELD rule went into effect in December 2017, with DOT granting the agriculture industry an initial exemption requested by ABF and other livestock organizations that was set to expire on March 18, 2018. ABF and other agriculture groups petitioned DOT to again extend the implementation of the ELD rule and were pleased with the Secretary's announcement to extend it an additional 90 days. This additional 90 days are critical for the agency to have additional time to provide guidance on hours-of-service (HOS) and other ELD exemptions that are very troubling to honey producers and other livestock producers. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue said, "I applaud Secretary Chao for recognizing these obstacles and giving extra time for compliance while DOT issues guidance. While public safety is a critical concern for all trucking, the safety of living agricultural commodities in transport must also be considered." ABF will continue to work with our livestock coalition and DOT as they prepare their ELS-HOS guidance.

2018 Farm Bill Update-House Negotiations Stalled

As we get ready to begin the 2-week Congressional recess for Easter/Passover progress on the House reauthorization of the farm bill has hit an obstacle. Congressman Collin Peterson (D-MN) the ranking member of the House Agriculture committee has informed the Committee Chairman Mike Conaway (R-TX) that he would heed the request of the Democrat members of the committee and stop negotiations until the Chairman provides the members legislative text of the proposed farm bill, together with Congressional Budget Office (CBO) cost estimates and impact assessments. Mr. Peterson said that Democratic members of the committee sent him a letter asking that he "abstain from further negotiations until the chairman agrees to share the legislative text and its detailed impact with members of the committee." In a statement, Congressman Peterson said, "the Democratic members of the committee have made it clear that they unanimously oppose the farm bill's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (food stamps) language as it has been described to them and reported in the press."

Eighty-percent of the farm bill's estimated \$900 billion (over 10 years) cost goes to the SNAP program. The other 20 percent of the bill's spending is spread among all the other programs contained in the farm bill including a vast array of farm, research and conservation programs. The position taken by the committee's ranking member could further delay committee action on the farm bill which is scheduled to expire on September 30.

Letter from Members of Congress to Appropriators Supporting FY2019 Funding for Federal Pollinator-Related Programs

A bi-partisan letter was sent this week to the Chairman and ranking member of the House Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee supporting robust funding for all USDA programs related to bee and other pollinators. The letter was initiated by Congressman Jeff Denham (R-CA) co-chair of the Congressional Pollinator Caucus and supported by the American Beekeeping Federation and other pollinator supporting organizations. The letter addressed the several agencies in USDA undertaking extensive and long-term research initiatives. The letter went on to request of the subcommittee leadership, "given the national reach of this problem, sufficient resources must be allocated to support longitudinal research that involves more real-world feedback, long-term monitoring, and advanced data collection outside of traditional laboratory studies."

Until Next Time

Hopefully at our next reporting we will be waist deep in farm bill committee negotiations or have considered it on the floor. In addition, the government will hopefully be funded through the rest of this fiscal year and Congress hard at work considering the appropriations bills to fund the government for the next.