

To: Kotzebue Mayor Haviland-Lie and City Council
City Manager Baldwin

Fr: Drue Pearce, Holland & Hart LLP

November 20, 2024

Re: Inside the Beltway Report

The election advertisements on TV, Radio, Robocall, and in the mail are FINALLY over for this cycle.

However, the fundraising requests by text and email – and by phone from real people – haven't stopped. I'm finding some of the reasons folks use to explain why they really, really NEED my money pretty funny.

The real action since the election has been in Florida at Mar-a-Lago, where President-elect Trump (who likes going by "45-47" these days) has interviewed each candidate for all the top positions in his next Administration. He has steadily made his choices – the White House team and most of the Secretary nominees have been named. In fact, today he was interviewing Deputy Secretary candidates. I'm told that the Secretarial nominees sat in on the interviews – something that certainly hasn't happened in many transitions. This Trump transition is much more methodical and organized than in 2016.

There are two people assigned to each Department to go through resumes and decide who should be brought forward for consideration for all the appointed positions. They had to sign a Non-Disclosure Agreement so they can't tell you whether they are vetting people. There haven't been leaks this time around, although speculation abounds.

Congress is in session while all eyes are on the remaining races to be decided so that we know final numbers for the Republican Majority and Democratic Minority, including our Alaska race. By the time you read this, the final votes will have been counted but I predict a recount.

Both the House and Senate have held their leadership elections – Speaker Johnson was elected Speaker by his Republican colleagues. Mr. Jeffries was chosen to be the House Democratic Minority Leader by his caucus.

So the sessions between now and when the new Congress convenes in January are called the “Lame Duck” because many Members aren’t returning. They are the Lame Ducks and can vote however they want since they won’t have to answer to their constituents next year. Interestingly, many of the most important pieces of legislation that affect Alaska were passed during Lame Duck sessions – most led by Ted Stevens.

The Senate Republicans chose Mr. Thune as their new Majority Leader as Mitch McConnell leaves that position that he’s held since 2007. Mr. Schumer expects to become the Minority Leader as his party lost control of the Senate.

There is “must do” legislation pending that they have to deal with over the next 6 weeks. The list includes:

* FY 2025 Appropriations:

Congress passed a CR to maintain government funding through December 20, 2024. Speaker Johnson has said the House will not participate in a “Christmas Omnibus” but the need for funding in the wake of Hurricanes Helene and Milton could facilitate a year-end funding deal if they don’t move a standalone supplemental bill.

Complicating the picture is the eagerness of the incoming House Majority to pass a sweeping budget reconciliation package in the first few months of the next administration. They would like to reach a spending deal to “clear the runway” for a reconciliation package.

*NDAA – National Defense Authorization Act – Reauthorization

In September 2024, Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) leaders filed a manager’s package of 93 non-controversial amendments to the SASC-passed version (S. 4638) of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), including annual authorization bills for the State Department, intelligence agencies and Coast Guard. Meanwhile, the House passed its version (H.R. 8070) of the NDAA in June.

As part of the conference negotiations with the House, the manager’s package and S. 4638 will be combined, and while informal talks have begun in earnest between the two chambers, negotiations will intensify during the lame duck session to reconcile their differences. Matters related to new rules

on outbound investment and efforts to curtail competition with China, including a ban on Chinese-made drones and restrictions on Chinese-based biotech companies, remain at the top of the list of items up for negotiation.

***Judicial Nominations:**

While he's still Majority Leader, Mr. Schumer will spring to get as many judicial nominees confirmed as possible. Expect McConnell to slow that process as much as he can.

***Farm Bill:**

House Agriculture Chair Thompson and Senate Chairwoman Stabenow are deadlocked over competing priorities, hindering progress on a new Farm Bill, despite a looming economic crisis in farm country. Among other differences, Democrats want to protect funding for nutrition and conservation programs, while Republicans aim to redirect those funds to support row crops, such as through increased reference prices and improvements to crop insurance.

The chances of an agreement during the Lame Duck session are rising, as the two sides have stepped up negotiations. Still, for now, chances of a full reauthorization remain low. If a new Farm Bill is not finalized by December 20, 2024, anticipate another extension, coupled with an *ad hoc* emergency relief bill to support falling farm incomes.

Negotiations continue on many other topics and you can expect some surprise compromises that result in legislation that goes to Mr. Biden to sign.

Speaking of the President, he has stopped talking to the media so not much news is coming out of the White House.

I hope you have a wonderful Thanksgiving with family and friends!