June 17, 2020

Capitol Hill is buzzing today with several hearings and mark-ups on issues that directly impact equipment manufacturers and our industry. United States Trade Representative (USTR) Robert Lighthizer testified before the U.S. House Ways and Means Committee this morning, and as of this afternoon continues to testify before the U.S. Senate Finance Committee.

On the infrastructure front, the U.S. House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee began to mark-up H.R. 2, also known as the INVEST in America Act. The funding bill had 293 amendments for consideration when the hearing began this morning, and we expect it to roll into tomorrow and, even possibly, Friday.

Finally, as states begin to reopen and American businesses are trying to bounce back from the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, including stay-at-home orders, the U.S. Small Business Administration announced it would reopen applications for the Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL) and EIDL Advance program.

Here are some of today’s other developments:

**US Trade Rep Lighthizer Appears Before House and Senate Committees**
With both the U.S. House Ways and Means Committee and the U.S. Senate Finance Committee hosting USTR Robert Lighthizer in hearings today, AEM reminded lawmakers of the importance of trade to the industry the need to champion free and fair trade policies in statements (Senate and House) submitted to both committees. Specifically, AEM encourages Congress and the Administration to create trade policies incentivizing foreign direct investment in the United States, streamlining global supply chains, reducing or eliminating tariffs, creating new trade agreements opening up foreign markets to U.S. manufactured goods and services, and properly enforcing U.S. trade laws that have already been enacted.

**House Begins to Consider Infrastructure Funding Legislation**
Infrastructure is another policy topic on the agenda on Capitol Hill this week. AEM continues to push Congress to pass legislation that will provide a nearly $50 billion infusion to state departments of transportation that are facing declining revenue as a result of the ongoing coronavirus crisis. Without this infusion, we will see continued delays or cancellations of critical infrastructure projects. AEM has previously sent its own letter, joined coalition letters, and helped drive support for a House letter on the issue. This week, [U.S. Senator Mike Rounds (R-]
S.D.) led a similar letter in the Senate, and AEM helped lead that push, generating 25 additional signatures.

In advance of today’s U.S. House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee’s markup of the Democratic surface transportation bill (H.R. 2, or the INVEST in America Act), AEM joined a letter with 30 other organizations urging Congress to include provisions in the bill that would streamline and expedite permitting processes in line with the original intent of Congress when the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) entered into law.

The markup in the Committee will cover more than 200 amendments and is likely to last at least two days. One of the amendments being offered is the Republican amendment in the nature of a substitute (it would replace the text of the current bill), the STARTER Act or “The Surface Transportation Advanced through Reform, Technology, & Efficient Review Act.” Republicans on the Committee continue to express frustration at a lack of inclusion in the crafting of the bill and the STARTER bill outlines policy items that they want to see included in a surface transportation package and were not included in H.R. 2. While the funding levels are generally lower than the House Democrats’ INVEST in America Act, the legislation does authorize FAST act programs at current levels and includes provisions that streamline permitting processes and reviews. AEM will provide more information about the results of the markup in Friday’s update.

SBA Reopens Economic Injury Disaster Loan and Advance Program
The Small Business Administration (SBA) announced this week it would reopen the Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL) and EIDL Advance program application. The EIDL is a long-term, low interest aid program for small businesses and non-profits. SBA Administration Jovita Carranza said of the program, “Since EIDL assistance due to the pandemic first became available to small businesses located in every state and territory, SBA has worked to provide the greatest amount of emergency economic relief possible. To meet the unprecedented need, the SBA has made numerous improvements to the application and loan closing process, including deploying new technology and automated tools.” Read more about the EIDL and EIDL Advance programs.

State Activities
AEM has been monitoring activities taken by Governors as they continue to issue closure and reopening orders. We are in close contact with their staff to make the case that our industry is establishing health and safety protocols to protect both employees and customers.

Notable for today’s update is that the Governor of Nebraska announced the resumption of limited operations for certain businesses in the coming days. The Governor of Colorado has published important guidance for businesses.

Now that state governments are transitioning into re-opening strategies, we are providing a new U.S. map showing when state shelter-in-place orders and stay-at-home advisories expire.
Canada Activities
Prime Minister Trudeau announced the Canada-U.S. border to remain closed to non-essential travel until at least July 21.

Despite mounting pressure from business interests and border communities, however, Trudeau is offering no clues about how the border restrictions will be eased when the time finally comes. While the measures prohibit discretionary travel like vacations and shopping trips, essential workers, trade shipments and temporary foreign workers are still allowed to cross the border.

Today’s updates from the provinces include:

- **Manitoba**: The Manitoba government is extending the province-wide state of emergency for COVID-19. The news comes as provincial health officials reported no new cases of the virus as of Monday. In a release, the province said the state of emergency, in place since March to help stop the spread of the virus, will be extended for another 30 days till July 8.

- **Ontario**: On June 17, the provincial government has extended all emergency orders, which includes restrictions on social gatherings. The emergency orders, which were set to expire on June 19, have been extended until June 30.

We continue to update our resources on Canadian activities on AEM’s COVID-19 resources page. You can also click here for the latest updates from Ottawa and all the provinces.
Do you have questions or need to get a hold of AEM’s Advocacy Team? E-mail our Response Team at responseteam@aem.org with any questions or feedback.

As always, if you have any questions about AEM’s ongoing efforts, need assistance with a specific issue, or would like to share how the unfolding COVID-19 pandemic is impacting your business, please do not hesitate to reach out to me at keideberg@aem.org.

Best,
-Kip

Kip Eideberg
Senior Vice President, Government & Industry Relations
Association of Equipment Manufacturers