

November 3, 2011

On Monday, October 31st, members of the New England Council's Transportation Policy Committee had a lunchtime conversation with Congressman Frank Guinta (R-NH-1) regarding the state-of-play in Washington relative to key transportation issues such as a Federal Aviation Administration reauthorization bill as well as a surface transportation reauthorization bill and their impact on New England. A summary of the meeting's conversation is below.

Our thanks and our appreciation goes to Steve Silveira and ML Strategies for hosting this meeting and for providing lunch.

Summary of the Remarks of Rep. Frank Guinta

October 31, 2011

Congressman Guinta began his conversation by giving a short background of his path towards arriving in New Hampshire. He described his New Jersey roots, his migration north to receive an education. He talked about earning a bachelor's degree at Assumption College in Worcester, and a short work history in the state. He discussed a further move north to Concord, New Hampshire where he earned a master's in intellectual property at the Franklin Pierce Law Center (now, the UNH School of Law).

The Congressman also described his foray into politics. He spoke of getting elected to serve as a city alderman in Manchester, New Hampshire for two terms. He discussed serving as a state legislator for two terms and described that it was truly a citizen legislature, as members only receive \$100 per year to serve, and only for a two year stint, which, he discovered, is how Granite Staters like it. Finally, he discussed being elected to serve as Mayor of Manchester for two terms. He mentioned that through it all, he made an effort to work with those holding different views to get things done on behalf of the citizens. He also touched on being in his new position as Congressman for less than a year, and that he serves on three great committees – Budget, Oversight, and Transportation and Infrastructure.

Transportation

In delving into transportation issues, Congressman Guinta stated that Congress needs to fix the surface transportation funding formula so that it is fairer to NH and other small states. He said that he is a member of the "small state caucus" fighting for an equitable

share of funding, but noted that the challenge for funding resources makes that fight difficult.

He said that House Transportation and Infrastructure Chairman John Mica (R-FL) has two legislative priorities: FAA reauthorization and Surface Transportation reauthorization.

He noted that Congress was going to spend less going forward given the lower amounts of funding in the Highway Trust Fund. He said there's not enough money to fix what we've got, but we need alternative funding sources.

Talking about potential funding sources, he indicated Congress would not increase the current gas tax as it is too politically sensitive to do so.

He also said a vehicle miles traveled (VMT) approach is not likely now, but 5-7-9 years from now is a likely possibility for consideration. He stated that Congress will have to weigh privacy rights relative to a GPS-type tracking system that a VMT would likely require, and Congress would need to consider the inequity of such a tax on certain types of travel. The Congressman said it's a very controversial proposal that will have to be discussed incrementally.

The Congressman did point to one funding source that has the commitment of House Speaker John Boehner (R-OH) and that is using revenues generated from oil leases and putting the proceeds towards the Highway Trust Fund. He said that tying fossil fuel exploration to fixing and building roads is a common area that he believes Democrats and Republicans can come together on.

He acknowledged that we need alternative fuels which will make up something like 50 percent of consumption in decades ahead. He further stated that going forward, we'll need to ensure we maintain consumer choice, cleaner options, etc. and also that oil and gas are still important.

The Congressman indicated that how Congress best takes care of our transportation system is the goal, and he believes they can get what they want accomplished within a year. He expressed confidence that both the FAA and Surface Transportation bills would "go" in 6 months, and optimism that Congress will do a 6 year surface transportation reauthorization bill. He said doing so will be a key to get the economy moving, and that there's a drive to get a bipartisan bill.

Regarding a final version of an FAA reauthorization bill, he said there are issues with the Senate, but the House is pushing for a responsible long-term bill in order to instill consistency for aviation planning.

On fiscal issues, the Congressman indicated that the current deficit reduction super committee needs to be mindful of its impact on the stock market, noting that absent any progress towards meeting their legislated deficit reduction target will cause a near daily drop in the stock market as the November 23 deadline approaches.

Mr. Guinta also said that the Congress needs to reform the 1974 Budget Act to decrease the power that members of the Appropriations Committees now have. He stated that he and others are working on a bipartisan measure to reform the budget process towards a 2-year budgeting cycle, which would allow for 2 years of funding decisions which would free-up time for committees to conduct oversight.

He also mentioned the need for a Balanced Budget Amendment, which Congress came one vote shy of passing in the 1990s. He said the House is in the process of working out this legislation.

He wrapped up his remarks by acknowledging that there is some bad history among members of Congress that creates an environment where there is lots of argument. He said that some can be partly attributable to electioneering and some to the constant 24 hour news cycle where actions and reactions are not sometimes fully vetted first. Still, he held out that Congress can work together for the good of the nation.

Congressman Guinta then turned to questions from members.

The first question related to the relationship between Chairman Mica and his Senate counterpart, Barbara Boxer (D-CA) and whether they could work together on forging a new surface transportation bill. Congressman Guinta indicated that he did not think the two Committee Chairs were "close," but that it was his experience that Mr. Mica wants to work on getting long-term legislative items accomplished, and will work with individuals with whom he disagrees to accomplish that goal.

Another question focused on the prospects for transit as an option in the region. The Congressman responded that when considering national congestion factors, transit lends itself as more of a West Coast and East Coast option, and in New England, that essentially means Boston. He noted the current Downeaster (Amtrak) train that runs from Maine through NH to Boston. He also indicated that it would be beneficial for transit expansion to NH, but also, he didn't see that happening soon because there is no money for it. He said rail needs to be viable financially for people in NH to accept it. He also noted that there is a reliable bus service from NH to Boston.

The Congressman was also asked his view on open-road tolling, and he said that he had recently experienced it a few days earlier. In terms of funding it in NH, he said he thought it would be tough to find a necessary funding component.

The Congressman talked about easing congestion in NH and how the expansion of technology will help particularly as the state looks to bring in new businesses and more tourism.

The Congressman was asked if the prospect for an Infrastructure bank like the President was proposing was alive or dead in Congress. Mr. Guinta responded that there are already seven such infrastructure banks in the U.S. and that the nation does not need another. He

said we need to strengthen the ones we have now – possibly via pending legislation – and that they need to be utilized in a more efficient manner. He also talked about bringing in private capital to help.

Another question referenced an earlier point the Congressman mentioned related to using the sale of energy leases as a revenue resource for highway funding and how that would work. Mr. Guinta reiterated Mr. Boehner’s support, but also stated that the Senate and the White House would need to get aboard as well. The Congressman said the target would be about \$10-15 billion, and the number of leases would be the key to determine how much would be utilized for highway funding.

Two aviation-related questions followed, the first asking the Congressman’s view on increasing airport passenger facility charges. The Congressman estimated that in this economic climate, he put the odds at less than 50-50, and with all other priorities, it probably falls even lower. He said that he hadn’t looked at the issue in a little more than a month, and because conditions might have changed in the interim, he would respond back to our Council member. The other question related to the survivability of the Administration’s new proposed \$100 tax on aviation. Congressman Guinta said that he was not in favor, nor did it look as if there was support enough in the House. He said regional airports need to keep costs low, and for purchasers/consumers, there is a point at which you begin to lose them.

The final question related to the New Hampshire presidential primary and whether the Congressman had yet endorsed a candidate. He responded that he has not made a decision on one particular candidate, and is still reviewing the candidates and their views before making a decision.