

Political Update – July 2006

U.S. Small Business Committee Chairman Don Manzullo joined House leadership in introducing legislation to reform the U.S. government committee that initially gave rapid and cursory approval to the controversial Dubai ports deal. HR 5337, the Reform of National Security Reviews of Foreign Direct Investments Act of 2006,” would require the administration to more closely scrutinize deals when foreign government-owned enterprises try to purchase companies operating in the United States. The bill would require an automatic 45-day extended investigation of these deals and would prohibit the administration from waiving the extended review. The legislation is sponsored by Manzullo, among other House leaders. The bill would also require the secretive Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States (CFIUS) to provide more information to Congress on pending deals; it would require CFIUS to consider foreign purchases of infrastructure in the United States as a national security concern; and it would name the Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security as the vice-chairman of the CFIUS committee (Secretary of Treasury would remain chair of CFIUS). CFIUS created a furor earlier this year when it approved the sale of a British port management company to Dubai Ports World, a state-owned enterprise of the United Arab Emirates, and gave that country control over 27 terminals in six major U.S. ports.

Senate Majority Leader Debbie DeFrancesco Halvorson is expressing serious concern about unfinished Illinois Department of Transportation projects throughout the state. She noted serious concern about the 164 bridges across the state that have gone without repair. Sen. Halvorson noted to the IDOT representative at a recent Senate Executing Appointment Committee that lawmakers need to send a clear message that they are not willing to sacrifice safety for idle bureaucracy.

Halvorson was recently named 2006 recipient of The Arc of Illinois Legislator of the Year Award for her dedication, passion and leadership in the General Assembly on behalf of Illinois’ persons with developmental disabilities and their families. Halvorson has been a key advocate for Illinois Life Span Program (www.illinoislifespan.org), an online advocacy and services database for people with developmental disabilities to find community-based resources.

State Rep. Rosemary Mulligan was the sponsor of the recently passed ALL KIDS health coverage program. Sen. Mulligan introduced legislation to create the Children’s Health Insurance Task Force that gathered information and make recommendations to the General Assembly relating to access to quality, affordable health insurance. The program begins July 2006 and will offer Illinois’ uninsured children comprehensive health care that includes doctor’s visits, hospital stays, prescription drugs, vision care, dental care and medical devices like eyeglasses and asthma inhalers. Parents will pay monthly premiums for the coverage, but rates for middle-income families will be significantly lower than they are on the private market. For instance, a family of four that earns between \$40,000 and \$59,999 a year will pay a \$40 monthly premium per child, and a

\$10 co-pay per physician visit. To get enrollment information, go to the State of Illinois website <http://www.illinois.gov/> and fill out an application.

Elmwood Park Village President Peter Silvestri hosted an Open House Public Information meeting with the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) at the Elmwood Park Parks and Recreation Building to facilitate discussion surrounding a study the state agency will conduct to assess the feasibility of improving safety at the Grand Avenue Metra railroad crossing.

Elmwood Park is cut in half by three sets of railroad tracks. The November 25th accident was one many had feared and one which has now expanded these debates far beyond the borders of Elmwood Park. Village President Silvestri notes that the impact of constant traffic delays, most importantly, on the safety of Elmwood Park residents and others traveling through the community, has long been a challenge, particularly because the village does not have jurisdiction over the tracks nor the trains that travel them.

The Feasibility Study is expected to take a year to complete. Silvestri also thanked Elmwood Park legislators Senator Don Harmon and Representative Angelo "Skip" Saviano for their support of efforts to make the Grand Avenue crossing a safer intersection, including joint sponsorship of legislation allowing the use of automated, electronic monitoring systems at railroad crossings. If signed into law by the Governor, local law enforcement agencies, in cooperation with the Illinois Commerce Commission and the Illinois Department of Transportation, will be given the authority to establish a system for automated enforcement of railroad crossing violations using video cameras. Vehicles that enter a crossing against a signal, or obstruct traffic at a crossing, could be ticketed and fined; the legislation does not allow for cameras to be used to determine whether or not a motorist is speeding.

This column is written by Nina Albano Vidmer, executive director of the Italian American Political Coalition. To submit information, please fax to 708-401-0360 by the first of each month for consideration in the following month's issue.