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ViewPoint

Matt Smith: Much at stake during lame-duck session

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Although the focus lately has been on the election, vital work remains in the coming days and weeks for the current session of Congress.

In the next several weeks, Congress and President [Barack Obama](#)'s administration will need to finalize important legislation prior to the new administration and Congress taking office in 2017.

During this lame-duck period, Congress will be working on updates to our water infrastructure policy and important energy modernization policies. They also will need to reauthorize the critical [Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006](#) and pass a legislative fix to the current standoff on board approvals for the Export-Import Bank of the United States.

For Pittsburgh, there is a lot at stake in all of these measures.

Our region had a significant win with the Upper Ohio River Navigation project's inclusion in both the Senate and House versions of the Water Resources Development Act, which passed this fall. The project will allow necessary repairs to be made to the Emsworth, Dashields and Montgomery locks, which are between 70 and 90 years old.

According to an Army Corps of Engineers' analysis, failure to address the issues at the locks could



NATHAN GUTSHALL-KRESGE/ISTOCK PHOTO
Pennsylvania State Capitol, Harrisburg.

cost our region \$430 million per site each year, or \$1.29 billion annually.

Our waterways are vital arteries for the movement of commerce and bulk commodities that the Greater Pittsburgh economy and industries including energy and manufacturing are dependent upon. Additionally, failure of one of the structures would negatively impact drinking water, boating and other recreational benefits of our rivers.

If the WRDA is finalized, it would infuse \$1.3 billion in federal investment into our waterways over 20 years, matched by another \$1.3 billion of private matching funds. Thanks to bipartisan leadership from our congressional delegation and our collaborative partnership with the Port of Pittsburgh Commission, we have a chance to finalize this important legislation this fall. We are hopeful that House and Senate leadership will move expeditiously to name conferees and advance these needed infrastructure improvements to our waterways.

Another issue of importance for is key energy modernization legislation, which is currently in conference committee.

Various provisions in the Senate and House versions of the bills begin to address a number of our region's policy concerns over electric grid modernization, storage and reliability, energy efficiency, base load and hydroresource development, natural gas distribution, regulatory updates and energy workforce readiness. The current Congress has a chance to chart a bipartisan path on energy legislation with the first update of federal energy policy in over a decade.

Congress and the Obama administration also will need an agreement to address the Ex-Im Bank's lack of a quorum, which is prohibiting loans above \$10 million from being made to exporters in our region and across the country. This bank is a playing-field leveler for our region and the nation's exporters and job creators.

Lastly, Congress should finalize the reauthorization of the Perkins CTE law, which will help to better align our career-training curriculum with the needs of employers.

Our congressional partners have made significant progress on the issues I have mentioned as well as others this session, and we greatly appreciate their efforts. Completing work on these issues will have long-lasting and tremendous positive impacts on the regional economy and quality of life.