



WIPP WORKS IN WASHINGTON – December 2013

By Ann Sullivan

Every year, our policy team submits a wish list for Santa. And as we prepared this article, our number one item was “bipartisan anything, please.” So, rather than prepare the list, we are celebrating the surprise present that Senator Patty Murray (D-WA) and Representative Paul Ryan (R-WI) gave the Congress on December 10: a budget deal.

Even if the Congress doesn’t pass the budget deal that Murray and Ryan negotiated, the mere fact that two people, of different parties, sat in a room together and negotiated anything is a major improvement for the political atmosphere. A two-year budget deal, in light of this atmosphere, is extraordinary.

It was only two months ago that the government was shutdown. The end of the shutdown was negotiated between Senate Leaders. This time, the budget leaders in the House and Senate negotiated the deal, one a conservative Republican, the other a progressive Democrat. In previous budget battles, short-term deals, not nearly as extensive as this one, were negotiated between the Vice President and Senate leaders, the President and the House Leaders. It goes to show that in order to put together a negotiating strategy that sticks, both Houses of Congress have to be involved, both parties and the leadership of the relevant Committees.

What happens under a scenario like this is that there is political cover for voting for or against the agreement without torpedoing it. Ryan, a conservative, gave the conservatives in the House cover to vote for the agreement if they so choose, but this agreement will get enough Democrats in the House to vote for it so a “no” vote does not torpedo the whole agreement. Similarly in the Senate, this might be a difficult vote for those up for reelection depending on their primary opponents. By negotiating in a bipartisan fashion, there were enough votes in the Senate to allow some “no” votes.

In the absence of a “budget crisis” every three months, Congress can turn to finding solutions to other pressing problems. Easing up on the budget deadlines allows Congress to tackle issues such as tax reform, considering social security and Medicare fixes to secure our long-term fiscal future, and immigration reform. Our optimism is based on the fact that we believe there is plenty of leadership in the Congress. We deal

with elected officials who are dedicated to the health and welfare of this great nation. No lumps of coal for Congressman Ryan and Senator Murray. They have shown others the way.

Happy Holidays from the WIPP Policy Team!