
Window On Washington - February 10, 2020, Vol. 4, Issue 6

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Outlook for This Week in the Nation's Capital

Budget Release. The President is scheduled to release his Fiscal Year (FY) 21 budget request today. The bipartisan budget agreement passed earlier this year set the FY 21 topline spending levels for defense and nondefense discretionary funding. Defense and nondefense levels are set to increase by \$2.5 billion each from FY 20 to 21 under the agreement. However, the Administration is expected to include a 5 or 6 percent cut in nondefense spending and propose deep cuts to many programs of importance for Democrats. Defense spending is expected to be largely flat. As in years past, Congress will work to restore many of the funding reductions in the appropriations process and will use the budget agreement spending levels as the guide.

House. In response to Virginia recently becoming the pivotal, 38th state needed to approve the Equal Rights Amendment, the House will take up legislation to change the deadline for ratifying the amendment. The House will also vote on a package of wilderness and public lands bills largely related to California and Colorado. Speaker Pelosi (D-CA) said that Democrats will also be announcing more details on initiatives for housing, school construction and veterans programs.

Senate. The Senate returns to its more traditional duties after wrapping up the President's impeachment trial with a vote for acquittal last week. The Senate will vote on several judicial nominations and a resolution to direct the President to withdraw US armed forces from hostilities against Iran.

Last Week in the Nation's Capital

CONGRESS

Budget & Appropriations

House Democrats Shelve Plan to Bring Back Revamped Earmarks: House Democrats on Friday suspended their plan to resurrect a reformed system of earmarks, but again left the door open for a return to the spending practice in the future. While reinstating earmarks has long had bipartisan support, the idea faced highly dubious prospects in the Senate, particularly in an election year. ([Politico](#))

House Passes Supplemental Disaster Relief for Puerto Rico: The House passed legislation to provide Puerto Rico with \$4.7 billion in emergency aid to help the island recover from the devastation caused by recent earthquakes and damage that remains from hurricanes Maria and Irma despite a veto threat from President Trump. ([The Hill](#))

Health

House Panels to Take Up Surprise Billing Proposals: Two House committees on Friday released proposals to curb surprise medical bills, setting up action soon on a potent political issue that frustrates consumers. The Ways and Means Committee and the Education and Labor Committee plan to vote on their bills this week, following the Energy and Commerce Committee, which approved its own plan last year. ([Roll Call](#))

House Democrats Vote to Condemn Trump Plan for Overhaul of Medicaid Expansion: The House passed a resolution officially condemning the Trump administration's new Medicaid block grant plan. The non-binding resolution won't have much practical effect. It passed on a mostly party line vote of 224-189 and will almost certainly see no time in the GOP-controlled Senate. ([The Hill](#))

Environment/Interior

As Congress Talks Climate Policy, Carbon Price Gets No Love: A carbon price is widely considered one of the most economically efficient ways to tackle climate change. But, economics be damned, its politics remain deeply unpopular. ([Axios](#))

Defense

DOD Needs to Invest Heavier in Emerging Tech to Attract New Companies, Experts Say at Hearing: Experts on defense innovation say the Defense Department needs to stop patronizing nontraditional companies with one-off contracts and competitions, and actually heavily invest in the technologies the Pentagon thinks will dominate the future. ([Federal News Network](#))

Education

Child Care Advocates Press Congress to Help Families Cope with Costs: Witnesses who testified before a House Education and Labor subcommittee told lawmakers that child care costs are eating up large portions of family income, often making it harder to make ends meet. ([The Hill](#))

Justice

House Republicans Move Jordan to Judiciary, Meadows to Oversight: Rep. Jim Jordan (R-OH) will soon become the top Republican on the House Judiciary Committee, after the House Republican Steering Committee voted unanimously last Thursday to have him replace Rep. Doug Collins (R-GA),

multiple sources told The Hill. ([The Hill](#))

Plan to Probe Bidens Sparks GOP Divisions: With the trial in the rearview mirror, that chatter is set to move to center stage as Republicans strategize over their next steps. Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Lindsey Graham (R-SC), a vocal ally of Trump's, is pledging "oversight." ([The Hill](#))

With Girl Born at 22 Weeks Gestation in Audience, Trump Presses Congress for Ban on Abortions Late in Pregnancy: Trump made a similar request last month when he became the first president to speak in-person at the March for Life, a high-profile anti-abortion rally in protest of the 1973 Roe v. Wade Supreme Court decision, which legalized abortion nationwide. ([Washington Examiner](#))

House Judiciary Democrats Eye Campaign Finance Measures: House members and political money experts debated comprehensive new campaign finance overhaul measures last Thursday, but they heard testimony from a Federal Election Commission member who suggested they might first want to address the existing campaign regulatory infrastructure. ([Roll Call](#))

Energy

Democrats Hit DOE for Holding Back Energy Efficiency Funds: Democrats on the House Science, Space and Technology Committee grilled Department of Energy (DOE) staff last Wednesday on delays in releasing funds for energy efficiency research, a topic that has broad bipartisan support in Congress but not from the White House. ([The Hill](#))

Banking & Housing

Democrats Query FED's Powell on Regulatory Response to Repo Blowup: Senate Democrats sent a letter last Thursday to Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell seeking answers about the central bank's ongoing interventions in the money markets to relieve a cash crunch that erupted in September. Senate Banking Committee Democrats, including ranking member Sherrod Brown and presidential hopeful Elizabeth Warren, posed a series of questions about the mid-September episode, including whether it was being used as a pretext to relax regulations that were put in place after the 2008 financial crisis. Powell is scheduled to testify before the committee on Feb. 12. ([Yahoo! Finance](#))

Labor and Workforce

House Passes Bill to Boost Labor: The House last week on Thursday passed an ambitious bill, 224-194, to expand union power, signaling to Midwestern presidential battleground states an emphatic re-commitment by Democrats to organized labor. The bill was endorsed by most of the top Democratic presidential candidates. Although its co-sponsors also include three House Republicans, the bill is unlikely to clear the Republican-controlled Senate. ([Politico](#))

MLB, Congress Play Hardball in Fight Over Minor Leagues: Congress and MLB are barreling toward a showdown over the league's plans to eliminate 42 minor league franchises across the country ahead of the 2021 season. The league insists the plan is needed to improve the finances of minor league baseball and conditions for developing players. But MLB is facing opposition from the general public and a broad coalition of lawmakers from both parties who say closing those teams would devastate communities in their districts. ([The Hill](#))

Impeachment Inquiry

Trump Acquitted of Two Impeachment Charges in Near Party-Line Vote: After five months of hearings, investigations and revelations about President Trump's dealings with Ukraine, a divided United States Senate acquitted him last Wednesday of charges that he abused his power and obstructed Congress to aid his own re-election, bringing an acrimonious impeachment trial to its expected end. ([New York Times](#))

EXECUTIVE BRANCH

Health/HHS/NIH

Trump Calls for Bipartisan Bill to 'Dramatically' Lower Drug Prices: President Trump called on Congress during the State of the Union to pass bipartisan legislation to "dramatically" lower the cost of prescription drugs. President Trump in his speech did not explicitly endorse a specific approach, but he did give a nod to Sen. Chuck Grassley (R-IA), who has a bipartisan bill to lower drug prices with Sen. Ron Wyden (D-OR). ([The Hill](#))

HHS Notifies Congress that It May Tap Millions of Additional Dollars for Coronavirus Response: The US Department of Health and Human Services notified Congress on it may need to transfer up to \$136 million to help combat the fast-moving coronavirus epidemic, a new sign of how the White House has increased its response in recent days. The notification came as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is quickly burning through \$105 million that was set aside for emergency public-health responses to things such as the coronavirus. ([The Washington Post](#))

Defense/DOD

Air Force Test-Launches Intercontinental Ballistic Missile: The US military test-launched an unarmed intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) early Wednesday, Air Force Global Strike Command said in a news release. ([The Hill](#))

Pentagon Withholding Funds from Army's Top Medical Bio and Chem Labs: The Pentagon has withheld \$104 million from research labs at Fort Detrick and Aberdeen Proving Ground, a decision that has Maryland lawmakers scratching their heads, given the expanding threat of the Wuhan coronavirus.

(Military Times)

Space Force Gearing Up: Air Force Secretary Barbara Barrett sent Congress a 26-page outline this week for organizing the US Space Force, and Defense Department officials talked about it with reporters Wednesday. ([Space Policy Online](#))

No. 2 VA Official Fired: Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Deputy Secretary James Byrne was fired on Monday, just five months after being confirmed for the job by the Senate. ([The Hill](#))

Trade

Trump Says First-of-its-Kind Kenya Trade Deal 'Probably' Will Happen: President Trump met with Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta last Thursday to discuss a future trade deal between the two countries, as the US tries to counter the influence of China on the African continent. ([Fox News](#))

Energy/DOE

How Iron Carbenes Store Energy From Sunlight -- and Why They Aren't Better at it: Researchers have used an X-ray laser at the Department of Energy's SLAC National Accelerator Laboratory to watch what happens when light hits an iron carbene. They discovered that it can respond in two competing ways, only one of which allows electrons to flow into the devices or reactions where they're needed. In this case, the molecule took the energy-producing path about 60% of the time. The team published their results January 31 in Nature Communications. ([Eureka Alert](#))

Energy Secretary Announces Coal Research Initiative: Energy Secretary Dan Brouillette on Friday announced a \$64 million dollar initiative to fund research and development for coal, giving an assist to an industry that appears to be on the decline. ([The Hill](#))

Dept. of Ed

Trump Calls on Congress to Pass Federal Tax Credit Scholarship: President Trump pressed members of Congress to pass his administration's No. 1 education priority during his State of the Union address – a controversial tax credit scholarship that would allow states to direct billions of dollars to private and religious schools. ([US News & World Report](#))

DOJ

DOJ to Investigate Mississippi Prisons After Spate of Inmate Deaths: After a string of inmate deaths in Mississippi that began late last year, the Justice Department announced last Wednesday that it is opening a civil rights probe into the state's penitentiary system. ([NPR](#))

DHS/Immigration

Build the Wall? Travel Ban? Tax Cuts? After Trump's State of the Union, Here's Where He Stands on Promises: President Donald Trump used his State of the Union address to make the case for his reelection, claiming success in delivering on promises. ([USA Today](#))

Secret Service May Leave Homeland Security, Rejoin Treasury: The White House is throwing its support behind a plan to transfer the US Secret Service back to the Treasury Department to better focus on the growing threat of online financial crimes. ([AP News](#))

New Yorkers Blocked from Global Entry Program over Immigrant License Law: Acting Homeland Security Secretary Chad Wolf wrote in a letter to the state's Department of Motor Vehicles that New York law forbids the state from supplying data to Immigration and Customs Enforcement and US Customs and Border Protection (CBP). ([The Hill](#))

Environment/EPA/DOI

Trump's Regional EPA Chief in California is Suddenly Removed from His Job: No reason has yet been given for Mike Stoker's dismissal. ([LA Times](#))

Cyber

Iowa's 2016 Caucus App Worked and Everyone Forgot About It: The 2020 Iowa caucus has become a tech failure story: A flawed mobile app that was supposed to simplify reporting the caucus results ended up creating chaos and forced the Iowa Democratic Party to rely on paper ballot backups. Three days later, we still don't know who won — and may never. But this wasn't the first time mobile apps were used for the caucus. In fact, both parties used mobile apps with similar functions in 2016. We just didn't hear much about them because they worked. ([Vox](#))

Banking & Housing/HUD

Consumer Bureau Chief Explains Support for Lawsuit Limiting Her Power: The director of a powerful financial watchdog said Thursday that she asked the Supreme Court to strip her immunity from being fired without cause by President Trump to settle "uncertainty" lingering over the agency. Kathy Kraninger, director of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB), said Thursday that she is supporting a legal challenge to the bureau before the Supreme Court in order to resolve questions about the agency's structure. ([The Hill](#))

Agriculture

Amid Growing Interest in Hemp, USDA Stands Firm on Rules: A lot of farmers will give industrial hemp a try this year, the first time cultivation is allowed nationwide, USDA officials predicted on Thursday. But they said there was no way they could allow more THC in hemp despite complaints that the limit of 0.3% is so low that some growers will be penalized unfairly for a “hot” crop. ([Agriculture News](#))

Larry Kudlow - Coronavirus Will Slow US Farm Exports to China: White House economic adviser Larry Kudlow conceded last week that the spread of the Wuhan coronavirus in China will affect its ability to purchase massive amounts of US goods and services as part of the “phase one” trade deal, saying the deal to boost exports will take longer because of the drag on the Chinese economy from the virus. ([Politico](#))

Transportation/DOT

Trump Scales Down Once-Grand Infrastructure Ambitions: President Trump used 189 words of his 2018 State of the Union address to call for a \$1.5 trillion investment in US infrastructure. ([Roll Call](#))

US Department of Transportation Grants Nuro First Ever Autonomous Vehicle Exemption: Nuro, the leading robotics company that launched the world’s first unmanned delivery service, debuts R2: its second-generation, custom-built vehicle, which today was granted the first ever exemption for an autonomous vehicle by the US Department of Transportation’s National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). ([Yahoo](#))

Space/NASA & NOAA

Industry Puzzled by NASA Withdrawal of CLPS Task Order: NASA withdrew without explanation last week a task order for its commercial lunar lander services program, frustrating many of the companies involved. According to several industry sources, NASA withdrew late Jan. 31 a task order designated 19C for the Commercial Lunar Payload Services (CLPS) program. The task orders serve as requests for proposal for those companies who have CLPS contracts, inviting them to submit bids for carrying out the missions defined in the task order using their landers. ([Space News](#))

SpaceX Plans Likely Spinoff and IPO for Starlink Broadband Division: SpaceX is likely to spin out its Starlink broadband business, SpaceX President and COO Gwynne Shotwell said last week at an investor event, calling Starlink “the right kind of business that we can go ahead and take public”. SpaceX CEO Elon Musk in May told reporters that Starlink could bring in revenue of \$30 billion a year—or about 10 times the highest annual revenue it expects from its core rocket business. ([Ars Technica](#))

NOAA Gets Go-Ahead to Study Controversial Climate “Plan B”: The top climate change scientist for NOAA said he has received \$4 million from Congress and permission from his agency to study two emergency - and controversial - methods to cool the Earth if the US and other nations fail to reduce global greenhouse gas emissions. ([Scientific American](#))

NASA to Industry - Send Ideas for Lunar Rovers: As NASA’s Artemis lunar exploration program mounts toward a robust decade of modern science, research, and human exploration at the Moon, the agency is asking American companies to think about how to get around on the lunar surface. NASA issued two separate Requests for Information (RFI) seeking industry approaches for development of robotic mobility systems and human-class lunar rovers. ([Space Ref](#))

Tax Reform/IRS

2020 Democratic Candidates Vow to Beef Up IRS: Democratic presidential candidates are proposing to give the IRS more resources for enforcement as they seek to combat inequality and raise revenue for their spending priorities. ([The Hill](#))

Impeachment Inquiry

Impeachment Witness and His Brother Removed from their White House Jobs: Lt. Col. Alexander Vindman, who testified in the impeachment inquiry that he found President Trump’s call to Ukraine’s leader “inappropriate,” and his twin brother, were both removed from their posts at the National Security Council on Friday. ([Washington Post](#))