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Outlook for This Week in the Nation's Capital

Congress. The 117th Congress began yesterday, and the 2021 Congressional Calendar can be found [here](#). In the House, Democrats will have 222 seats and Republicans 211, but two seats are currently vacant. Given the tight margins in both the House and the Senate, Democrats will need to be even more mindful of their legislative expectations given that any faction of the party could potentially prevent a piece of legislation from moving forward. Additionally, after 18 years of leading Democrats in the House, Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) was re-elected as Speaker of the House, and this is expected to be her final term as Speaker. Meanwhile, the balance of power in the Senate will be decided after the two runoff elections wrap up in Georgia tomorrow. Both races remain neck and neck.

Separately, a group of Senate Republicans led by Senators Josh Hawley (R-MO) and Ted Cruz (R-TX) have pledged that on Wednesday, Jan. 6 they will oppose the Electoral College tallies that certify President-elect Joe Biden's victory. This comes after the news that at least 140 Republicans in the House are expected to vote against counting the electoral votes. The move will not alter Biden's path to assuming the presidency, but it will draw out a normally routine process. A handful of Republicans in both the House and the Senate have criticized these efforts.

Biden Transition. President-elect Biden has not yet announced his picks for CIA Director, Attorney General, Secretary of Labor, Secretary of Commerce, and Small Business Administrator, but he is expected to announce these remaining positions by early January.

Last Week in the Nation's Capital

CONGRESS

Budget & Appropriations

Boosting Stimulus Checks to \$2,000 Blocked in Senate: Despite last-ditch efforts by President Donald Trump, House Democrats, and some outspoken Republicans to push through a change that would have raised the \$600 stimulus check ceiling to \$2,000, the Senate did not pick up a vote to increase the stimulus checks to \$2,000. The House had passed the bill in a 275-134 vote last Monday, with support from 44 Republicans. ([CNET](#))

Health

Rep.-Elect Luke Letlow Dies of COVID-19: Representative-elect Luke J. Letlow (R-LA), former chief of staff to retiring Rep. Ralph Abraham (R-LA), whom he was elected to succeed, passed away from COVID-19 last Tuesday, just five days before the beginning of the 117th Congress. ([Roll Call](#))

Defense

Congress Overrides Trump Veto for the First Time on NDAA Votes: Congress delivered a stinging rebuke to President Trump during a rare New Year's Day session, handing him his first veto override in the final days of his administration, with the GOP-controlled Senate voting 81-13 to override Trump's veto of the FY21 Defense Authorization Act, after the House also voted to override by a 322-87 margin earlier last week. ([The Hill](#))

Congress Gives More Power to DoD's Industrial Base Official: The decision by Congress in the annual Defense Authorization Act to raise the industrial base job in the Pentagon hierarchy will help prioritize key issues for the department, but questions remain about the structure of the office, according to analysts. ([Defense News](#))

Cyber

Congress and Biden May Have to Act in 2021 on Ransomware Attacks: Ransomware cyberattacks are expected to pose a growing threat to hospitals and schools next year, putting pressure on Congress to draft a legislative response, while President-elect Joe Biden's new cybersecurity team will have to focus on improving coordination and response to recent attacks on federal systems. ([The Hill](#))

EXECUTIVE BRANCH

Health/HHS/NIH

Feds May Cut Moderna Vaccine Doses in Half So More People Get Shots, Warp Speed Adviser Says: Operation Warp Speed chief adviser Moncef Slaoui said there is evidence that two half doses in people between the ages of 18 and 55 gives "identical immune response" to the recommended one hundred microgram dose, but said the final decision will rest with the FDA. ([Politico](#))

Labor & Workforce

Weekly Jobless Claims Fall for a Second Straight Week: The number of people filing for unemployment benefits for the first time unexpectedly fell last week, marking its second straight decline. Initial jobless claims declined by 19,000 to 787,000 in the week ended Dec. 26, the Labor Department said last

Thursday. [\(CNBC\)](#)

Banking & Housing/HUD

\$600 Stimulus Payments Have Started Going Out: The Trump Administration began sending stimulus payments of up to \$600 to millions of Americans as part of the recently passed COVID-19 relief bill, the second such direct payment to Americans amid historic unemployment and business closures. [\(CNBC\)](#)

Transportation/DOT

U.S. Railroads Complete Installation of Crash-Prevention Systems: The Federal Railroad Administration announced on Dec. 29 that all 57,536 miles of freight and passenger tracks in the U.S. have now installed safety technology known as Positive Train Control, as mandated by a federal law passed in the aftermath of a deadly 2008 commuter rail crash in Los Angeles that killed 25 people – the original 2015 deadline was extended to 2020. [\(Transport Topics\)](#)

Space/NASA & NOAA

Puerto Rico Government Supports Rebuilding Arecibo: The outgoing governor of Puerto Rico says she backs rebuilding the Arecibo radio observatory, but a final decision on whether, and how, to reconstruct the giant telescope could take years, and will also heavily involve the U.S. Congress and the National Science Foundation. [\(Space News\)](#)

White House Releases Implementing Strategy for Planetary Protection: The White House last Wednesday released a strategy for implementing the section of U.S. National Space Policy regarding planetary protection — protecting Earth from harmful contamination by microbes from elsewhere in the solar system and vice versa. The topic has gained new prominence in recent years as not only more countries, but companies, make plans to send probes into deep space. [\(Space Policy Online\)](#)

Viasat Asks FCC to Perform Environmental Review of Starlink: Viasat has petitioned the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to perform an environmental review of SpaceX's Starlink broadband constellation, arguing that the satellite system poses environmental hazards in space and on Earth. The categorical exemption to the NEPA that satellite companies enjoy is also being studied by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) at the behest of several U.S. Senators. [\(Space News\)](#)

Defense/DOD

Kathleen Hicks is Biden's Pick to be First Female Deputy Defense Secretary: President-elect Joe Biden has picked Kathleen Hicks, a former Pentagon official under President Obama, to serve as deputy secretary of defense. If confirmed, she would make history as the first woman to hold the No. 2 Pentagon job. [\(Politico\)](#)

Department of Energy

Biden Set to Supercharge Clean Energy Push With "\$40B Stash": The incoming President may be eyeing a \$40 billion unused Energy Department loan authority that was included in the 2009 stimulus, which he helped to oversee. That pot of money could offer a way to kick start his climate and infrastructure plan at a time when a narrowly divided Congress may balk at his call to spend \$2 trillion over four years. [\(Politico\)](#)

DOE Releases Energy Storage Grand Challenge Roadmap: The Roadmap includes an aggressive, but what it says is an achievable goal, to develop and domestically manufacture energy storage technologies that can meet all U.S. market demands by 2030, including a targeted 44% reduction in manufactured cost for 300-mile EV pack for autos. [\(Green Car Congress\)](#)

Trump's Unplanned Gift to Biden - Clean Energy on the Rise: Oil and gas producers are struggling amid weak prices and growing pressure to address climate change — a trend that could help Biden make a U-turn in energy policy. [\(Politico\)](#)