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Outlook for This Week in the Nation's Capital

Congress. Both the House and Senate return this week from a two-week recess for the holidays. The House is scheduled to take up legislation that would require the Environmental Protection Agency to regulate polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS). The annual defense authorization bill passed last month included language to regulate PFAS, but some Democrats felt that those provisions did not go far enough. In the Senate, Majority Leader McConnell (R-KY) said that the chamber will proceed with regular business until an agreement is reached on the impeachment trial. The Senate is currently scheduled to vote on nominations, including the new head of the Small Business Administration. The Senate Finance Committee is scheduled to vote on the US-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA).

Impeachment. Congressional leaders remain at an impasse on how to handle the Senate impeachment trial. Speaker Pelosi (D-CA) has continued to refuse to send the articles of impeachment to the Senate until an agreement is reached that ensures a fair trial. However, Majority Leader McConnell (R-KY) continues to push for a two-step approach that first includes an agreement on basic terms. This would start the trial and allow the Senate to make decisions related to the witnesses later.

2020 Outlook. Election years are nearly always contentious in Congress, and so far, it seems that this year will be no different. The Hill outlined the five fights to watch for this year: impeachment, USMCA, surveillance reform, drug pricing, and government funding. The full article is [here](#).

Last Week in the Nation's Capital

CONGRESS

Health

Over 200 Republican Members of Congress Urge Supreme Court to Reconsider Roe v. Wade: More than 200 members of Congress — nearly all of them Republicans — urged the Supreme Court to reconsider the landmark 1973 Roe v. Wade abortion rights decision, prompting a wave of protests from Democrats and reproductive rights groups. The 207 lawmakers signaled their position in an amicus brief supporting a restrictive Louisiana abortion law that is expected to be reviewed by the Supreme Court on March 4. ([The Washington Post](#))

Cyber

Lawmakers Close to Finalizing Federal Strategy to Defend Against Cyberattacks: A federal strategy for defending the US government against cyberattacks is one step closer to completion, with lawmakers saying they have a draft form that could be finalized as early as March. ([The Hill](#))

Environment/Interior

Five Environmental Fights to Watch in 2020: The Trump administration is pushing ahead with its broad regulatory rollback, while on Capitol Hill House Democrats are looking to pass legislation on their ambitious clean energy agenda. ([The Hill](#))

Defense

Congress to Clash Over Trump's War Powers: Democrats will attempt to curb President Trump's war powers after a US drone strike killed a senior Iranian military leader in what lawmakers are calling a major escalation that could lead to war. ([The Hill](#))

Impeachment Inquiry

Congress and Justice Department Face Off Over Impeachment-Related Lawsuits: A panel of federal appeals court judges in Washington heard arguments last Friday in two high-profile disputes between the legislative and executive branches over testimony and documents congressional Democrats pursued as part of their impeachment inquiry. ([ABC News](#))

EXECUTIVE BRANCH

Health/HHS/NIH

FDA Bans Most Fruit- and Mint-Flavored Nicotine Vaping Products: The Food and Drug Administration is banning most fruit- and mint-flavored nicotine vaping products in an effort to curb a surge in teen use, the agency said. Under the new rule, which takes effect in 30 days, companies that do not stop the distribution the sweeter flavors that appeal to kids risk enforcement action, the FDA said. Companies are also at risk of regulatory action if their products target kids or if they fail to take "adequate measures" to prevent access to children. ([CNBC](#))

One-On-One With Trump's Medicare And Medicaid Chief: Seema Verma, administrator for the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, sat down for a rare one-on-one interview. They discussed her views on President Trump's plan for sustaining public health insurance programs, how the administration

would respond if Obamacare is struck down by the courts in the future and her thoughts on how the latest “Medicare for All” proposals would affect innovation and access to care. ([KHN](#))

Labor & Workforce/DOL

America’s Economy Needs to Pull More Workers Into the Labor Force: Fed Officials: At an economics conference in San Diego last Friday, Fed officials noted the past decade has proved difficult to get the participation rate up, and said they were already happy to keep the labor force participation rate from declining. Amid an aging population, automation, and globalization, some policymakers may have expected more workers trapped on the sidelines. ([Yahoo Finance](#))

Pompeo: Trump Threat of Iran Strikes ‘Entirely Consistent’ with Message of De-Escalation: Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Sunday defended President Trump’s threats to launch strikes against culturally significant Iranian sites as “entirely consistent” with a policy of de-escalation. ([The Hill](#))

Pentagon to Deploy Roughly 3,500 More Troops to Middle East with Others Placed on Alert Status, Amid Tensions with Iran: The soldiers from the 82nd Airborne Division could leave Fort Bragg in North Carolina for the Middle East as early as this weekend. ([ABC News](#))

Banking & Housing/HUD

Rules, Privacy Issues Loom for Fintech Industry in 2020: The nascent financial technology industry started the year faintly optimistic that the 116th Congress would pass bills in its favor. But as 2019 comes to an end without legislation, the industry isn’t even expecting action in 2020. And for that, they’re feeling relieved, not disappointed. ([Roll Call](#))

The Facts on Housing Affordability in the United States: Democrats on the November debate stage in Atlanta turned the spotlight to an issue affecting millions of Americans when they were asked how they planned to make housing more affordable. There is also a major proposal from the Administration on the issue pending, and numerous bills have been introduced in Congress to tackle this growing problem. ([Politifact](#))

Cyber

First Suleimani Attack By ‘Iranian’ Hackers Hits US, Exposing ‘Noisy’ New Threat: Hackers claiming to be linked to Iran targeted a low-level domain—the website of the Federal Depository Library Program—defacing its home page, echoing Teheran’s threats of vengeance alongside imagery of President Trump, Ayatollah Khamenei and the Iranian flag. There is nothing substantive to link the hackers with the regime in Teheran. ([Forbes](#))

Army Bans TikTok from Being Used on Government-Issued Devices Citing Security Risk: Army spokeswoman Lt. Col. Robin Ochoa told Military.com in an interview this week that the Chinese social media app is “considered a cyber threat.” The regulation comes after the Defense Department and lawmakers have expressed concerns about how the app collects personal data. ([The Washington Post](#))

Historic California Data Privacy Measure Leaves Companies Scrambling: California became the first state in the country to have a comprehensive data privacy law last Wednesday when the California Consumer Privacy Act (CCPA) goes into effect. ([The Hill](#))

DHS/Immigration

DHS to Review State Laws Granting Driver’s Licenses to Undocumented Immigrants: Acting Homeland Security Secretary Chad Wolf last Tuesday called for a department wide study of how recent state laws allowing undocumented immigrants to obtain driver’s licenses impact federal enforcement capabilities, according to The Associated Press. ([The Hill](#))

Environment/EPA/DOI

Trump EPA Has Largest Backlog of Toxic Waste Cleanups in 15 Years: The figures released by the agency focus on projects at Superfund sites, highlighting a backlog of work designed to clean up dangerous contamination. ([The Hill](#))

EPA Science Board Criticizes Trump Administration’s Environmental Proposals: Members of the Environmental Protection Agency’s own Scientific Advisory Board are raising concerns about several of the Trump administration’s environmental priorities, including on auto emissions rules and clean water regulations. ([CNN](#))

Agriculture/USDA

After a Rough Year, Farmers and Congress Are Talking About Climate Solutions: The National Climate Assessment released in late 2018 warned that climate change will exact a dire toll on American farms. It projected more drought, more heat—and more extreme rainfall. A few months later, the Midwest flooding began, swamping fields as farmers watched helplessly. However the floods revealed another benefit of sustainable agriculture: fields that had been farmed with conservation practices recovered faster. ([Inside Climate News](#))

Farmers Got Billions From Taxpayers In 2019, And Hardly Anyone Objected: In 2019, due mostly to Spring flooding and the protracted trade war with China, the federal government delivered an extraordinary financial aid package to America’s farmers. Farm subsidies jumped to their highest level in 14 years, most of them paid out without any action by Congress. ([NPR](#))

Space/NASA & NOAA

Commerce Department to Develop New Estimate of the Size of the Space Economy: An agency of the US Department of Commerce is developing its own estimate of the size of the space industry, the most authoritative effort to date to measure space's role in the broader economy, which has seen previous efforts produce widely different results. The account is a joint effort of the BEA, part of the Commerce Department, and the department's Office of Space Commerce. The goal is to have a prototype version of the account ready in late 2020, "pursuant to available resources." ([Space News](#))

China and the United States Will Compete for Launch Supremacy in 2020: For the second year in a row, China dominated the global rankings in terms of orbital launches. The communist country finished 2019 with 34 orbital launch attempts and 32 successes, and has recently announced a goal of 40 launches in 2020. However the US should also see a dramatic uptick this year, with increased cadences from ULA, SpaceX and new comers. ([Arstechnica](#))

The Decade of Mars: How the 2020s May Be a New Era of Red Planet Exploration: The 2010s saw big advances in Mars exploration, but the new decade may bring even more exciting news. Between additional planned NASA missions and commercial efforts to research Mars, the push will be on to go beyond proving that Mars previously had conditions amenable to life, to actually discovery of whether life ever managed to take hold on the Red Planet. ([Space.Com](#))

Trade

Trump Says He Will Sign 'Phase One' China Trade Deal on Jan. 15 at the White House: In a tweet last Tuesday morning, the president said "high level representatives of China" will attend the signing. Trump added that he will travel to Beijing "at a later date" to start talks toward a second piece of the trade pact. ([CNBC](#))

Tax Reform/IRS

IRS Gets New Protections for Taxpayers in 'Free File' Program: The IRS last Monday announced an updated agreement with tax-preparation companies that prohibits the businesses from hiding the landing pages for the agency's "free file" program from internet searches. ([The Hill](#))

Energy/DOE

Rick Perry Rejoins Pipeline Company: Former Energy Secretary Rick Perry was appointed to the board of the general partner that controls pipeline company Energy Transfer LP following his exit from the Trump administration. ([The Hill](#))

Transportation/DOT

Trump Rule Would Exclude Climate Change in Infrastructure Planning: Federal agencies would no longer have to take climate change into account when they assess the environmental impacts of highways, pipelines and other major infrastructure projects, according to a Trump administration plan that would weaken the nation's benchmark environmental law. ([New York Times](#))

FAA Proposes Tracking Most Drones in US Airspace: The country's top transportation regulator proposed tracking nearly every drone in US airspace, a rule that would pave the way for companies like Google and Amazon to deploy commercial drones across the US. ([The Hill](#))