
Jul 27, 2020

Outlook for This Week in the Nation’s Capital

The House. This week, House lawmakers have planned action on H.R. 7617, a seven-bill FY 2021 appropriations package which includes Defense, Commerce-Justice-Science, Energy and Water, Financial Services, Homeland Security, Labor-HHS-Education, and Transportation-HUD funding. The second, larger package touches on contentious issues, including measures that would cut off the Pentagon’s financial flexibility due to the Trump administration’s use of defense funds for the border wall; block Trump administration restrictions on asylum; make some police grants contingent on policy changes including chokehold bans; and create a commission to review federal displays that might be “inconsistent” with the values of diversity, equity, and inclusion, among others. Progressive lawmakers have also called on leaders to pull out the Homeland Security measure, which has been the most controversial funding bill in recent years. The House Rules Committee is scheduled to meet today to set the amendments and terms for floor consideration of the package.

The House could also vote on the multibillion-dollar Water Resources Development Act (H.R. 7575) this week, a measure that would help build, repair, and maintain a wide variety of water infrastructure projects. The bill was approved unanimously by voice vote in the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee earlier this month and would authorize the Army Corps of Engineers every two years to carry out specific projects and feasibility studies. The bill, which has bipartisan support, is expected to face little to no opposition on the House floor.

The Senate. The Senate will vote today on the confirmation of William Scott Hardy to be a judge on the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Pennsylvania. The Senate is also positioned to hold a confirmation vote in the coming days on the president’s picks for two seats on the National Labor Relations Board, a move that would avoid a potential loss of a quorum at the agency.

Next COVID-19 Package. Lingerling differences among Senate Republicans and the White House stalled the rollout of the GOP proposal for another pandemic relief package, which was anticipated to be released last week. Over the weekend, Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin and White House Chief of Staff Mark Meadows visited Capitol Hill for multiple rounds of COVID relief negotiating sessions with Senate Republicans, with the goal of producing a GOP negotiating position ahead of talks with House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) and Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY). The proposal Republicans intend to release includes back-to-work tax credits, enhanced unemployment benefits covering 70 percent of lost wages, K-12 education and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell’s (R-KY) chief priority, liability overhaul. However, yesterday, both Mnuchin and Meadows said that Congress might have to pass a narrower piece of legislation this week to ensure enhanced unemployment benefits don’t expire for millions of Americans. The slimmed down legislation would also include McConnell’s liability provisions, which Democrats have opposed for weeks. Though Pelosi has rejected the piecemeal approach and called the GOP’s plan woefully inadequate, time is running short, as the temporary unemployment benefits are set to expire at the end of this week.

Last Week in the Nation’s Capital

CONGRESS

Budget & Appropriations

House Approves $259.5B Spending Package: The House on Friday approved a $259.5 billion four-bill package of spending bills for the 2021 fiscal year, which included the bills for state and foreign operations; agriculture; interior and environment; and military construction and veterans’ affairs. The legislative package passed in a largely party-line 224-189 vote – seven Democrats and the chamber’s sole Independent joined every Republican in voting against the measure. (The Hill)

Senate Appropriators’ Dilemma: The House Appropriations Committee has marked up all 12 spending bills, with floor action having begun last week and continuing this week. The Senate Appropriations Committee has not marked up any of its bills, and the holdup seems to be the lack of an agreement between Senate Appropriations Chairman Richard C. Shelby (R-AL) and ranking member Patrick J. Leahy (D-VT) on what amendments will be offered in committee. (Roll Call)

Mnuchin, Meadows Made Rare Weekend Trip to Capitol as GOP Prepares Coronavirus Package: Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin and White House chief of staff Mark Meadows made a rare weekend trip to Capitol Hill as part of the negotiations on a GOP coronavirus proposal. The trip to Capitol Hill by two of the top administration officials to meet with Senate staff — no lawmakers were present — is unusual. (The Hill)

GOP Virus Aid Package Cuts Out Payroll Tax Cut, Includes Restaurant Deduction: Senate Republicans were preparing to unveil a $1 trillion-plus coronavirus relief package last Thursday, and it isn’t immediately clear when the series of bills will now be rolled out, though GOP senators were preparing floor speeches to start talking up their provisions. (Roll Call)

Health

Clyburn Leads Bipartisan Call for GAO Review of Administration’s Coronavirus Vaccine Development Efforts: Rep. James E. Clyburn (D-SC), Chairman of the Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis, Rep. Bill Foster (D-IL), and Rep. Mark E. Green, M.D. (R-TN), sent a letter to Comptroller
General Gene Dodaro calling on the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to conduct ongoing oversight of Operation Warp Speed and other vaccine-development initiatives funded by the CARES Act and other laws passed by Congress. (House Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis)

**Labor & Workforce**

**McConnell says Stimulus Deal Could Take ‘a Few Weeks,’ Putting Millions with Expiring Jobless Aid in Limbo:** With days to go before enhanced jobless benefits expire, the White House and Senate Republicans are struggling to design a way to scale back the program without overwhelming state unemployment agencies and imperiling aid to more than 20 million Americans. (Washington Post)

**Republican Plan Would Send More $1,200 Stimulus Checks in August:** “Our proposal is the exact same provision as last time,” Mnuchin told reporters last Thursday. (Bloomberg)

**Transportation**

**COVID-19 Has Been ‘Apocalyptic’ for Public Transit. Will Congress Offer More Help?:** Public transit use has plummeted nationwide as people work from home or avoid buses and subways for fear of contracting COVID-19, resulting in less revenue from fares. And as the economy cratered, so too have the tax revenues upon which many transit systems rely. (Time)

**Agriculture**

**Senate GOP’s $1T Aid Plan Authorizes Expanded Ag Assistance:** A $1 trillion coronavirus relief package that Senate Republicans are trying to finalize would authorize compensation to livestock and poultry producers and also aid ethanol plants as well as provide additional direct payments to farmers, according to Sen. John Hoeven (R-ND). (Agri-Pulse)

**Fudge Critical of Food Box Program Following Hearing:** Congresswoman Marcia L. Fudge (D-OH), Chair of the House Agriculture Subcommittee on Nutrition, Oversight, and Department Operations, expressed concerns about the USDA’s Farmers to Families Food Box Program ability to properly distribute the food and to responsibly spend the money allocated to the program. (House Agriculture Committee)

**Justice**

**Pivotal Tech Antitrust Hearing Officially Postponed:** The House Judiciary Committee had initially scheduled the blockbuster hearing for July 27 at noon, setting the stage for a dramatic public airing of the various antitrust concerns facing the companies. (The Verge)

**Defense**

**U.S. House Passes $740 Billion Defense Bill; Fight with Trump Looms:** The U.S. House of Representatives last Tuesday passed its version of the National Defense Authorization Act, a $740 billion bill setting policy for the Pentagon that President Donald Trump has threatened to veto over a provision removing Confederate names from military bases. (Reuters)

**Senate Clears Bill Removing Confederate Names from Military Bases, Setting Up Clash with Trump:** The Senate overwhelmingly passed its $741 billion defense policy legislation last Thursday, with the Republican-led body defying a threat from President Donald Trump to veto legislation that would force the removal of Confederate names from Army bases. (Politico)

**House Democrats Add Some ‘Forever Chemicals’ Provisions to Defense Bill After Spiking Major Amendment:** House Democrats added several amendments aiming to regulate a class of cancer-linked chemicals called PFAS to a defense spending bill Monday. The additions followed the failure of the chamber to add a broader amendment that would tackle the substances. (The Hill)

**Environment/Interior**

**Democrats Push Environmental Policies in $259.5B Budget Package:** Lawmakers voted on a series of amendments to the budgets for the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Department of the Interior last Thursday and Friday, seeking to block funding from being used to implement a number of Trump administration rollbacks. (The Hill)

**Vulnerable Republicans Ask McConnell for ‘Clean Energy’ Help:** They want support for renewable energy and other low-carbon technologies that appeal to moderate voters. (Roll Call)

**Homeland Security/Immigration**

**Lawmakers Question DHS Crackdown Tactics in Protest Cities:** The military tactics utilized by Homeland Security officers to control protesters in Portland, Oregon, and other cities are being decried by congressional lawmakers and investigated by federal watchdogs. (Roll Call)

**Progressive Caucus Leaders Demand Democrats Pull Homeland Security Bill:** The Congressional Progressive Caucus (CPC) last Wednesday called on Democratic House leadership to pull the controversial homeland security appropriations bill from consideration on the House floor next week. (The Hill)

**Leahy Announces that USCIS is Postponing Furloughs of 13,000 Public Servants:** Senate Appropriations Committee Vice Chairman Patrick Leahy (D-
VT) on Friday announced the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) agreed to postpone its scheduled furlough of more than 13,000 public servants through Aug. 31. (Senate Appropriations Committee)

Cyber

House-Passed Defense Spending Bill Includes Provision Establishing White House Cyber Czar: The House version of the annual National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) passed last Tuesday included a provision establishing a national cyber director at the White House, a role that would help coordinate federal cybersecurity efforts. (The Hill)

Education

Debate Over Loan Payments in Coronavirus Package: A key sticking point emerged between key Democrats and Republicans over what to do about 43 million Americans who have been excused from making student loan payments during the pandemic, even as Republican senators and the Trump administration continued trying to craft the details of their proposal for the next coronavirus relief package. (Inside Higher Ed)

GOP Senators Push Big Private School Choice Bill Amid Pandemic Relief Debate: Two Republican senators, including the chairman of the Senate education committee, have introduced legislation to provide direct federal aid for private school scholarships to students during the pandemic, and to create permanent tax credits supporting educational choice. (Ed Week)

Banking & Housing

Senate Panel Advances Trump Fed Nominee Who Recently Supported Gold Standard: The Senate Banking Committee voted along party lines to recommend Judy Shelton’s confirmation as a Fed governor, the last hurdle she faced before a full vote in Senate. The committee also approved Trump’s nomination of Christopher Waller, executive vice president of the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, to the Fed board by an 18-7 vote, with five Democrats joining all Republicans in support of his nomination. (The Hill)

As Eviction Bans End, Renters and Landlords Urge Fiscal Help: Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-OH) took to the Senate floor last Thursday afternoon to warn of an imminent peril to millions of the nation’s renters: the end of an eviction moratorium on last Friday that covers 12 million households. (Roll Call)

EXECUTIVE BRANCH

Budget and Appropriations

Mnuchin Says $1 Trillion GOP Coronavirus Relief Plan Ready, Will ‘Move Very Quickly’ With Democrats: Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin yesterday said Republicans have finalized their latest piece of coronavirus relief legislation, worth about $1 trillion, and intend to introduce it today. The plan is expected to have another round of $1,200 stimulus checks for Americans, liability protections for businesses and schools, and a modified federal unemployment insurance supplement. (CNBC)

Health/HHS/NIH

U.S. Testing Czar Says Everyone Who 'Needs' a COVID Test Can Get One: Admiral Brett Giroir, the Trump administration coronavirus testing czar, said that anyone who “needs” a coronavirus test can get one but he acknowledged that the average turnaround time for tests is too long as states smash records for numbers of cases. (Politico)

Trump Administration Renews Public Health Emergency After Urging from States: The Trump administration has renewed the public health emergency for the coronavirus, ensuring that critical resources to fight the pandemic can continue while much of the country battles rising caseloads. Public health emergencies last for 90 days, so the latest renewal will expire in late October without another extension. (Politico)

Trump Signs Executive Orders On Drug Prices: The Trump administration has announced four executive orders to lower drug prices, but health policy experts say they will likely offer patients only minimal relief and may take months to implement, if they’re implemented at all. (NPR)

HHS Unveils New Coronavirus Hospitalization Database, Says It’s More Complete Than CDC’s: The Trump administration last Monday unveiled a new website of COVID-19 hospitalization data that officials said offers a more complete picture of the outbreak than the data previously compiled by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (CNBC)

Defense/DOD

White House Threatens Veto of Defense Bill Over Confederate Provision: The White House last Tuesday threatened to veto annual defense policy legislation in part because it includes a provision that would direct the Pentagon to rename military bases currently named after Confederate leaders. (The Hill)

Labor and Workforce

New Unemployment Claims Rose Last Week to 1.4M, Ending Months of Declines: Unemployment claims rose to 1.4 million last week, up about 100,000 from the week before, the Labor Department reported, ending 15 weeks of consecutive declines in new applications. (Politico)
USDA Recommends Beef Market Changes, But Leaves Unanswered Questions About Probe: The Agriculture Department made a series of recommendations to Congress last Wednesday for addressing price volatility in cattle markets, but left the industry in the dark about the results of an investigation into alleged price manipulation by beef processors. (Agri-Pulse)

Democratic Platform Calls for Continuity in NASA Programs: A draft of the Democratic Party’s 2020 platform suggests that an administration led by Joe Biden would make few major changes in NASA programs but also does not explicitly endorse a 2024 human return to the moon. (Space News)

Space Council Updates Moon to Mars Concept: The White House National Space Council issued a report last week laying out its rationale for deep space human exploration. A major theme is that human space exploration requires a whole-of-government approach involving not just NASA, but a host of other agencies from the National Institutes of Health to the Department of Homeland Security. (Space Policy Online)

Space Investment Steady During Pandemic: The pandemic has so far not substantially impacted investment in the space industry, with investment reports showing that venture capital funding in space companies was actually up 4 percent during the first half of 2020 compared to the same time in 2019, defying predictions that funding would dry up during the pandemic and economic downturn. (Politico)

China Raises the Stakes with Second Mars Attempt: Last Thursday China successfully launched the recently named Tianwen-1 mission — meaning “heavenly questions” — that will combine an orbiter and a rover in a single launch and if successful, China will become only the second country, after the United States, to operate a rover on the Red Planet and the first to attempt such a complex mission all at once. (Space News)

EPA Finalizes Rule to Speed up Disputed Industry Pollution Permits: The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) last Wednesday finalized a rule that will speed up the process for reviewing industry permits in a move critics say will limit communities’ ability to fight them. (The Hill)

Kudlow Suggests Extension of Federal Eviction Ban is in Works: White House economic adviser Larry Kudlow suggested yesterday that the government will lengthen a federal moratorium on evictions that has protected millions of tenants from losing their homes in the middle of the pandemic. (Politico)

HUD to Abolish Obama-Era AFFH Fair Housing Rule: The Trump administration will terminate the Obama-era rule regarding the implementation of the Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing, or AFFH, provision of the 1968 Fair Housing Act, according to HUD Secretary Ben Carson last Thursday. (HousingWire)

OCC Allows Banks to Hold Cryptocurrency Assets for Safekeeping: The U.S. regulator of national banks issued an interpretative letter giving banks the all-clear to hold cryptocurrency assets on behalf of their customers. (American Banker)

Here are the States with Coronavirus Travel Restrictions: More states are imposing restrictions on travelers and visitors to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. Restrictions vary by state, with some calling for self-quarantine upon arrival and others advising visitors to take certain precautions. (The Hill)


The Tax Cut That Trump Wants, but Few Others Do, Explained: From the early days of the coronavirus pandemic sweeping the United States, and plunging the economy into a sharp and brutal recession, Trump has been pushing Congress to temporarily eliminate the taxes American workers and their employers pay to help support Social Security and Medicare. He pushed such a cut on Twitter in March, before lawmakers agreed on the first of what would be several economic rescue packages passed this year. (New York Times)

Past D.C. Bar Association Chiefs Call for Probe of William Barr: Four former presidents of the D.C. Bar Association have signed a letter calling on the group to investigate whether Attorney General William Barr has violated its rules. (Politico)
CDC Releases Updated Guidelines in Favor of Reopening Schools: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) late last Thursday released new guidelines with a heavy focus on reopening schools in the fall, saying children are less likely to experience severe symptoms or spread the virus in schools. (The Hill)

Department of Energy

In Push for Better Cybersecurity, U.S. Energy Department Outlines a National Quantum Internet: A group led by the U.S. Department of Energy and the University of Chicago plans to develop a nationwide quantum internet that could be functional in about a decade and with the potential to securely transmit sensitive information related to national security and financial services. (Wall Street Journal)