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Outlook for This Week in the Nation's Capital

House and Senate Return. Both the House and Senate are back in session this week. The Senate is planning to take a series of judicial nominations as well as a few other agency nominations. The House is scheduled to consider its intelligence authorization.

Supreme Court Nominee. President Trump is planning to announce his Supreme Court nominee this evening in a nationally televised event. He had originally planned to come to a decision yesterday but has now stated he would make a choice by noon today. At this time, it appears that Trump is deciding between Thomas Hardiman, Amy Coney Barrett and Brett Kavanaugh. Trump has previously stated he would prefer a nominee that could be confirmed easily given the slim majority of Senate Republicans.

Last Week in the Nation's Capital

CONGRESS

Budget

House Begins Work on Next Minibus: The House is planning to take up its next minibus containing the Interior and Financial Services appropriations bills during the week of July 16. The bill is available [here](#). If both chambers complete action on the second minibus they will have passed 5 of the 12 appropriations bills. ([House Rules Committee](#))

Senate Floor Time for Appropriations: With the Senate having to deal with approving a Supreme Court judge to replace Justice Anthony Kennedy, some are worried that floor time for appropriations bills will be reduced. Senate Appropriations Chairman Shelby, however, is optimistic that appropriations will make their way to the floor while others work on the Supreme Court nomination. ([The Hill](#))

Health

Dem Memo: Top Trump Official Compared Abortion to Slavery, the Holocaust: The Trump administration's top official overseeing family planning once compared abortion to slavery and the Holocaust, according to a memo prepared by Democratic staffers on the Senate Health Committee. Tonic, a vertical of Vice, first reported on the memo detailing the past comments made by Deputy Assistant Secretary for Population Affairs Diane Foley. Foley was appointed by the Trump administration to oversee Title X, the federal government's family planning program. Sen. Patty Murray (D-Wash.) shared the document with the publication. ([The Hill](#))

Marco Rubio to Introduce 'Conservative Solution' on Paid Family Leave: Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Fla., is introducing legislation that is likely to allow parents to draw from their Social Security benefits early in what he is calling a "conservative solution" for paid family leave. Under the plan, the provision to draw from Social Security would be available to each spouse for up to 12 weeks, for a total of 24 weeks, for each child who has been born or adopted. In return, parents would defer their retirement benefits for the amount of time necessary to offset the cost of their parental benefits. ([The Washington Examiner](#))

Immigration

Clash Looms Over ICE Funding: The spotlight on U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) is about to become brighter as Congress weighs the Trump administration's request for a huge spending boost even as a growing number of Democrats want the agency abolished. The administration is pressing Congress for \$8.3 billion in discretionary funding for ICE in fiscal year 2019 — a \$967 million increase over this year's budget. Democrats are already balking at the figure out of early concern that Republicans will designate the money for bolstering enforcement efforts, including an acceleration of deportations. ([The Hill](#))

Agriculture

Senate Farm Bill Provides a Glimmer of Hope for Rural Broadband: For far too long, Rural Utilities Service (RUS) loans have funded telephone and broadband service with few assurances that the money is being deployed in legitimately unserved areas across the country. This is problematic for rural communities striving to compete for services and jobs against regions that have broadband service. The lack of infrastructure buildout to unserved communities will become even more apparent as the U.S. races to become a leader in 5G and broadband deployment. The Senate farm bill places new restrictions on the Department of Agriculture's RUS Broadband Loan Program, which would help focus the program on the unserved who need broadband the most, while simplifying the application process for companies seeking loans and grants. ([The Hill](#))

Interior

Senate Democrats: Interior Department Is Snubbing Us on Grant Delay Questions: Senate Democrats say the Interior Department is not answering questions about delays in the issuing of federal grants, a move they contend is holding up money used to fund conservation programs. The senators

raised concerns that the Interior Department was improperly withholding grants from conservation groups for political reasons after hearing from several dozen groups in their states who said they had not received the grants they were expecting for conservation-related programs. A senior Interior official wrote to the senators last week that the department was targeting the grant-making process for “increased scrutiny.” ([Roll Call](#))

EXECUTIVE BRANCH

Banking & Housing

Central Bank Likely Ignoring Calls to Slow Interest-Rate Hikes: At the June meeting, the Fed raised the target range for its benchmark policy rate to between 1.75% and 2% and made changes to its statement and economic projections that were hawkish relative to expectations. The central bank projected four rate increases in 2018 instead of three previously planned. Some economists think that the Trump White House’s various trade disputes will eventually interfere with the Fed’s policy path, others believe they are locked in on a path that will take rates above 3% in 2020. ([Market Watch](#))

HHS

Trump Administration Freezes Billions in Obamacare Payments, Outraging Advocates: The Trump administration is freezing billions of dollars of payments to Obamacare health insurers, another blow to the fragile markets as health plans begin to set premiums and get ready for the next enrollment season. The so-called risk adjustment payments are supposed to protect insurers from big losses. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services said it was halting the decision after a federal court in New Mexico court decided in February the payments were based on flawed rules. It also said it would appeal – particularly because another court in Massachusetts upheld the payments. ([Politico](#))

HHS Rushing to Reunite Migrant Families Separated at the Border: Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar said Thursday that officials are racing against a federal judge’s “extreme” deadlines to reunite “under 3,000” migrant children separated from their parents at the U.S. border. Azar did not provide a precise number, but he said hundreds of government employees are poring over databases, examining case files, and conducting DNA tests to reunite families. ([The Washington Post](#))

Labor & Workforce

The Road Beckons, But Truck-Driving Jobs Go Begging: As the nation grapples with a historically low level of unemployment, trucking companies are doing what economists have said firms need to do to attract and retain workers: They’re raising pay significantly, offering bonuses and even recruiting people they previously wouldn’t have considered. But it’s not working. The industry reports a growing labor shortage — 63,000 open positions this year, a number expected to more than double in coming years — that could have wide-ranging impacts on the American economy. ([Providence Journal](#))

Defense

Wall Street Journal Editorial Board Shoots Down Space Force: President Trump has become “fixated” on the idea of a new military branch for space and appears to be ignoring legitimate arguments for why the plan should not move forward at this time, the Wall Street Journal editorial board cautioned in its July 4 editorial titled, “Houston, We Have a Space Force.” The Journal’s take on the Space Force underscores just how politicized this issue has become since the president on June 18 at a White House space policy event ordered Gen. Joseph Dunford, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to “immediately begin the process necessary to establish a Space Force as the sixth branch of the armed forces.” ([Space News](#))

The Pentagon’s Latest Budget Is its Largest Counter-drone Budget Ever: As the Pentagon’s latest budget slouches toward Washington, it is time to take a closer look at how the robots in the budget survived the various committees and drafts. As expected, the 2019 National Defense Authorization Act is a boon for drones, allocating funding for nearly three times as many uncrewed vehicles as in previous years. The Pentagon is set to spend almost twice as much on countering other drones in 2019 as it spent on that same in 2018. For the counter-drone mission, the Pentagon is splitting \$1.5 billion between over 90 different projects, ranging from modifications to existing missiles and anti-air systems to directed energy weapons to electronic warfare software. ([C4ISR](#))

DOT

USDOT Announces Pilot Program to Allow Under-21 Drivers with Military CDL: Following through on a mandated requirement as part of the FAST Act, the U.S. Department of Transportation will formerly announce a pilot program designed to transition military members into truck driving careers in interstate commerce. The program, to be published in the Federal Register on Thursday, will allow 18- to 20-year olds who possess the U.S. Military equivalent of a commercial driver’s license (CDL) to operate large trucks in interstate commerce, USDOT said. ([Freight Waves](#))

Federal Court Rules against Drone Hobbyist, Sets Stage for Regulations: A federal court upheld the government’s authority over hobbyist drone use. The U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit’s ruling against a drone hobbyist who sued the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) is set to pave the way for new drone regulations. The judges said that while they intended to give drone hobbyists some exemptions, they would not invalidate the FAA’s rules governing amateur drone use. ([The Hill](#))

Trade

New Trade Case on Steel Racks from China: A new US antidumping (AD) and countervailing duty (CVD) case was filed on June 20, 2018 by the Coalition for Fair Rack Imports against imports of Certain Quartz Surface Products from China. The case targets numerous US importers and Chinese

suppliers of this product which is commonly used in facilities such as warehouses, fulfillment and distribution centers, big-box retail stores, and manufacturing facilities. ([Clark Hill Insight](#))

DHS

Trump Nominates Former Energy Official to Lead Homeland Security Tech Research Arm: President Trump on Thursday announced that he is tapping William Bryan, an Army veteran and former Department of Energy official, to lead the Department of Homeland Security's technology research and development arm. Bryan has been serving as undersecretary of science and technology at the department in an acting capacity since May 2017. Trump's decision will allow him to formally assume the position, if confirmed by the Senate. ([The Hill](#))

DHS and 16 Other Agencies Are Upgrading Their Mobile Device Security: DHS' Science & Technology Directorate announced it will make use of an update to San Francisco-based Lookout, Inc.'s Mobile Endpoint Security platform. The update offers security beyond the detection of attacks through SMS messages. The system monitors and prevents attacks that hide inside mobile applications, social media messages and in personal or work email messages. In addition, it inspects any outbound connections at the network level and alerts users—and administrators—in real-time if connections are harmful. ([Next Gov](#))

DOE

Proposed DOE Test Reactor Sparks Controversy: Plans for a controversial multibillion-dollar U.S. nuclear research reactor are coming together at lightning speed—much too fast, say some nuclear policy experts. With a push from Congress, the Department of Energy (DOE) has begun designing the Versatile Fast Neutron Source, which would be the first DOE-built reactor since the 1970s. It would generate high-energy neutrons for testing materials and fuels for so-called fast reactors. But U.S. utilities have no plans to deploy such reactors, which some nuclear proliferation analysts say pose a risk because they use plutonium, the stuff of atomic bombs. ([Science Magazine](#))

Pitt Professors Tasked with Improving 3-D Printing for Nuclear Energy Industry: The nuclear energy industry requires the manufacturing of complex components, but faces a problem in harnessing the power of cost-effective additive manufacturing, or 3-D printing. An associate professor and research director To of the University of Pittsburgh's Swanson School of Engineering received a \$1 million U.S. Department of Energy award to help solve the problem. The researchers are tasked with designing and manufacturing nuclear plant components via additive manufacturing, with a focus on developing solutions including dissolvable supports. ([Biz Journals](#))

Space, NASA & NOAA

Texas Researchers Left in a Lurch With Continued Delays of NASA's James Webb Telescope: The launch of NASA's James Webb Space Telescope was fewer than two years away when Steve Finkelstein was tapped in November as one of the first astronomers to test the agency's newest telescope. Finkelstein, an associate astronomy professor at the University of Texas-Austin, began prepping the lab for data simulations ahead of the launch. But then the problem-plagued telescope suffered the latest in a string of human error and technical issues, causing it to be delayed yet again to March 2021. The most recent delay has left researchers, like Finkelstein, in a lurch as the wait for James Webb stretches far beyond what was originally anticipated when the telescope was first suggested almost two decades ago. ([Houston Chronicle](#))

NASA's Parker Solar Probe is About to Get Up Close and Personal With the Sun: NASA's Parker Solar Probe is about to embark on one daredevil stunt of a space mission. Slated to launch August 4, the probe will be the first spacecraft to swoop through the sun's outer atmosphere, or corona, a roiling inferno of plasma heated to several million degrees Celsius. Parker's closeup observations of the corona and the solar wind, the torrent of charged particles that the sun spews into space, could help resolve long-standing mysteries about the inner workings of the sun's atmosphere. And the new data may improve forecasts for space weather that endangers spacecraft, astronauts and technology on the ground. ([Science News](#))

Cybersecurity

Cyber Command Moves Closer to a Major New Weapon: The Air Force issued a formal proposal for the Department of Defense's long-awaited cyber weapon system, known as the Unified Platform. DoD officials have said the Unified Platform is one of U.S. Cyber Command's largest and most critical acquisition programs to date. Industry officials have said it is necessary to conduct cyber operations and is critical to national security. But details on what the Air Force wants in a Unified Platform are scarce. ([Fifth Domain](#))

DOJ

California's 'Sanctuary State' Laws Withstand Federal Suit: A federal judge denied the U.S. Department of Justice's request to block California's "sanctuary state" law. The state can decide for itself whether or not to help the federal government "implement its immigration enforcement regime," wrote Judge John Mendez in his order. ([Route Fifty](#))

IRS

People Waste \$1B A Year Because Feds Don't Advertise A Free Tax Filing Program: Since 2003, the IRS has partnered with tax software companies to provide free electronic filing services (if you meet the program/income limit requirements). The IRS says that 70% of all taxpayers should be eligible to use Free File. That's 100 million. However the 50 million returns the system has processed over the past 16 years has been only about 3% of all those

eligible, in large part because the IRS does a poor job publicizing the program. ([Forbes](#))