
Window On Washington - June 17, 2019, Vol. 3, Issue 25

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Outlook for This Week in the Nation's Capital

Congress: Despite attacking President Donald Trump last week for undertaking “criminal conduct,” Speaker Nancy Pelosi also said the House is still a long ways from any impeachment proceedings against Trump for such actions. Related to this issue, Rep. Lou Correa has requested that the Speaker form an official Congressional task force to examine proposals for combating foreign influence and ensuring U.S. electoral systems are secure. The Senate continues to work through judicial and administration nominations, which have been slowed by the minority, but even some Republican Senators have begun to express frustration with the lethargic legislative pace. However, Senate Majority Leader McConnell has recently been telling committee chairmen to start approving bills and get them ready for the floor, according to other Republican senators, with some lawmakers optimistic that this summer will see debate and votes on a bill lowering health care costs, defense policy legislation, as well as a new North American trade deal, in addition to a budget cap and appropriations bills.

White House: President Trump roiled Washington last week with his suggestion that he would accept dirt on a political opponent from a foreign government. Personnel changes also continue to come in a rapid fire pace, with White House Press Secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders’ announced plans to step down. The President named a new legislative affairs director (his third), Eric Ueland, who has decades of experience in the D.C. “swamp” that Trump loathes. Ueland was previously chief of staff to former Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist and a Senate Budget Committee staff director.

Budget & Appropriations: The House recessed last week after taking 70 votes on amendments to HR 2740, the 4-bill (DoD, Energy & Water, Labor/HHS/Education, State/Foreign Ops) appropriations “minibus,” and with several more amendments still to go the House will resume voting at 3 PM on Tuesday. Following HR 2740, the House will next take up H.R. 3055 - the second FY20 “minibus” which will include another four bills – Commerce/Justice/Science, Agriculture, Mil Con/VA and the Transportation/HUD bills - so far, over 300 amendments have been filed to HR 3055. Meanwhile, the SAC will mark up the President’s \$4.5B border supplemental request on Wednesday. SAC Chairman Richard Shelby also reiterated that the Senate will likely ‘deem’ a topline spending level for FY20 appropriations bills after lawmakers return from the July Fourth recess, unless a spending caps deal is struck before then.

Last Week in the Nation's Capital

CONGRESS

Tax

Higher IRS Funding Level Set for House Appropriations Markup: House appropriators on Tuesday advanced legislation to give the IRS \$12 billion in funding for next year, a bigger boost than the agency has had in years, and end a restriction that blocked guidance on tax-exempt 501(c)(4) organizations’ political activity.

Senate Passes Bipartisan IRS Modernization Bill: The Senate on Thursday passed a bipartisan bill to make improvements to the IRS, after the House passed the measure earlier in the week. ([The Hill](#))

Defense

Marathon All-night House Armed Services Committee Markup Session of Defense Policy Bill Resolves Few Partisan Issues: The House Armed Services Committee markup of the National Defense Authorization Act began last Wednesday morning and continued through Thursday morning, with the most contentious issues resisting any bipartisan compromise in a marathon overnight session. The bill passed 33 to 24, and the session adjourned just before 7 a.m. ([Washington Examiner](#))

Dem Proposal to Ban Pentagon Funds for Border Wall Survives House Panel Votes: The House Armed Services Committee early Thursday rejected Republican attempts to remove language from the annual defense policy bill aimed at blocking President Trump’s border wall. ([The Hill](#))

Cyber

Homeland, Judiciary Democrat asks Pelosi to Form Election Security Task Force: Rep. Lou Correa is asking Speaker Nancy Pelosi to form a task force to examine proposals for combating foreign influence and ensuring U.S. electoral systems are secure, according to a letter obtained by CQ Roll Call. ([Roll Call](#))

Social Media Should Be Accountable for ‘Deepfake Content,’ Intelligence Experts Say: Congress should amend portions of U.S. law that allow social media companies to enjoy immunity for content posted on their platforms in light of the significant dangers posed by artificial intelligence-enabled fake videos, a panel of experts told the House Intelligence Committee at a hearing Thursday. ([Roll Call](#))

Labor & Workforce

Centrist Democrats Raise Concerns Over \$15 Minimum Wage Push: House Democrats are moving forward with legislation that would raise the federal minimum wage to \$15 per hour, despite concerns from centrist lawmakers about the impact on lower-cost areas. Democratic leaders say they're close to clinching the 218 votes needed to pass the bill, which they expect to bring to the floor in July. ([The Hill](#))

Environment

Bipartisan Senators Propose Forcing EPA to Set Drinking Water Standard for 'Forever Chemicals': Sens. Shelley Moore Capito (R-W.Va.), Tom Carper (D-Del.) and John Barrasso (R-Wyo.) proposed new EPA rules regarding the chemicals known as PFAS, which has been linked to cancer and other health impacts and has contaminated water in at least 43 states. ([The Hill](#))

Justice

House Panel Votes to Hold Barr, Ross in Contempt: The House Oversight Committee voted to hold Attorney General William Barr and Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross in contempt of Congress on Wednesday for defying the panel's subpoenas for documents about the decision to add a citizenship question to the 2020 census. ([The Hill](#))

Homeland Security

House Homeland Security Panel to Hold Hearings on DHS's Use of Biometric Information in Wake of CBP Breach: The House Homeland Security Committee will hold hearings next month on the Department of Homeland Security's use of biometric information, committee Chairman Bennie Thompson announced. ([The Hill](#))

Warren and Clyburn Team up on Effort to Cancel Student Loan Debts for 95 Percent of Borrowers: Sen. Elizabeth Warren will be joining House Majority Whip James E. Clyburn in an aggressive effort to cancel student loan debt. ([Roll Call](#))

Blue Dogs Look to Move Forward on Infrastructure Project: Top members of the centrist Democrat Blue Dog Coalition are holding out hope for bipartisan accomplishments on pressing infrastructure projects. ([The Hill](#))

EXECUTIVE BRANCH

Health/HHS/NIH

The U.S. Is Purging Chinese Cancer Researchers From Top Institutions: In recent decades, cancer research has become increasingly globalized, with scientists around the world pooling data and ideas to jointly study a disease that kills almost 10 million people a year. International collaborations are an intrinsic part of the U.S. National Cancer Institute's Moonshot program, the government's \$1 billion blitz to double the pace of treatment discoveries by 2022. One of the program's tag lines: "Cancer knows no borders." Except, it turns out, the borders around China. ([Bloomberg](#))

FDA to Assess Use of Blockchain to Protect Pharmaceutical Product Integrity: IBM, KPMG, Merck and Walmart announced that the companies have been selected by the United States Food and Drug Administration to be included in a program in support of the US Drug Supply Chain Security Act that addresses requirements to identify, track and trace prescription medicines and vaccines distributed within the US. ([Pharmaceutical Business Review](#))

Labor & Workforce

Uber, Lyft Appeal for Deal on Driver Status as Independent Contractors: Faced with legislation in California that endangers their business model, Uber Technologies Inc. and Lyft Inc. are urging a compromise that would keep their drivers from being considered employees. Whether Uber and Lyft drivers remain independent contractors or must be treated like employees goes to the heart of the on-demand economy's reliance on a casual labor force to keep costs down. ([Insurance Journal](#))

Space, NASA & NOAA

Bridenstine Estimates Artemis Cost at \$20–30 Billion: NASA Administrator Jim Bridenstine's recent remark about these estimated costs was the first time he or others at NASA have given even a range of costs for the Artemis program. In other speeches and advisory committee meetings, those officials have declined to give cost estimates on the new moon initiative, in part because development of budget proposals is done behind closed doors. ([Space News](#))

The New Moon Race: The United States is heading back to the moon - and so, it seems, is everyone else. The newest installment of POLITICO's The Agenda series looks at the stakes in the new moon race. Unlike during the Cold War, the new moon race is focused on more than demonstrating national scientific and political dominance. The goals this time around are also commercial: To find new resources, exploit them, and find a way to live and work sustainably outside Earth's orbit. ([Politico](#))

Astrophysicists Gear Up For 2020 Decadal Survey: At a town hall meeting during the 234th meeting of the American Astronomical Society here June 11, leaders of the latest astrophysics decadal survey, dubbed Astro2020, said they're ready to begin work identifying scientific priorities in the field for the coming decade and what spacecraft and ground-based observatories are best suited for them. ([Space News](#))

Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao Sells Stock in Highway Supply Company: Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao has sold the stock she owned in one of the nation's biggest manufacturers of highway construction materials, just days after the holding raised questions over a potential conflict of interest. ([New York Times](#))

Trade

India Imposing Increased, Retaliatory Tariffs on US Exports Including Apples, Almonds: The new tariffs on \$240 million worth of goods went into effect Sunday and include levies of up to 70%. In early June, President Donald Trump announced India would lose its trade privileges with the country as a beneficiary of the Generalized System of Preferences. On Saturday, India amended a previous order "to implement the imposition of retaliatory duties on 28 specified goods originating in or exported from USA." ([USA Today](#))

DOJ

Justice Releases Legal Opinion Backing Treasury's Refusal to Release Trump Tax Returns: The Department of Justice released a legal opinion backing up the Treasury Department's decision to reject a request by congressional Democrats for six years of President Trump's tax returns. ([The Hill](#))

Immigration

Former ICE Official Homan Surprised by Trump's 'Border Czar' Announcement: President Trump's pick to become "border czar" was surprised to be name-checked by the president Friday, according to a person familiar with the situation. ([Politico](#))

DOE

Explosions On Two Oil Tankers Near Iran Send Oil Prices 2% Higher: Oil prices rose as much as 4% on Thursday following attacks on two tanker ships off the coast of Iran that renewed fears of conflict in the Middle East after a series of strikes last month. ([CNBC](#))

Perry: DOE Has No 'Regulatory or Statutory' Ability to Bail Out Plants: Secretary of Energy Rick Perry today gave the clearest indication yet that his agency isn't planning to provide financial support to keep struggling coal and nuclear plants from closing. FERC rejected a DOE financial support package in 2018, leading Perry and his staff later that year to craft a new one that relied on DOE's emergency powers in the Federal Power Act. That plan, however, was held up over legal concerns last fall at the White House — where Perry says it remains. ([Clark Hill Insight](#))

FEC

FEC Chief Blasts Trump Over Willingness to Receive Foreign Dirt on Opponents: The head of the Federal Election Commission issued a scathing response Thursday night to President Donald Trump's willingness to receive foreign dirt on political opponents, saying doing so "risks being on the wrong end of a federal investigation." ([CNN](#))

Defense

Raytheon, United Technologies Merger Will Create A New Aerospace Giant: The Raytheon Co. and United Technologies Corp. are merging in an all-stock deal that the two companies say is a merger of equals. ([NPR](#))

CFPB

FPB to Host First Symposium Focusing on "Abusive" of UDAAP on June 25: This inaugural symposium will focus on unfair, deceptive, or abusive acts and practices (UDAAP). According to the CFPB, the Federal Trade Commission has substantially defined the terms "unfair" and "deceptive" over the years. However, the term "abusive" in UDAAP is still elusive and unclear. The symposium will aim to provide clarity, as promised by Former Acting Director Mick Mulvaney during remarks at the Mortgage Bankers Association's annual conference in October 2018. ([inside ARM](#))