
Window On Washington - June 8, 2020, Vol. 4, Issue 23

Jun 08, 2020

Outlook for This Week in the Nation's Capital

The House. The House will meet in a pro forma session at 9 a.m. today, but no votes are scheduled this week. However, the lower chamber will hold multiple remote hearings addressing COVID-19, including a House Financial Services hearing on the pandemic's effect on housing renters and evictions, and a House Armed Services Committee hearing on how the virus has impacted the defense industrial base.

The Senate. A bill to permanently fund the Land and Water Conservation Fund and address a massive backlog of national parks maintenance projects is headed for a vote in the Senate this week. Off the floor, lawmakers will begin marking up the annual defense authorization. The Senate Armed Services subcommittees will hold markups on their portions of the measure today, and the full committee could begin its consideration on Wednesday. The subcommittees, with the exception of the Personnel panel, will do their markups behind closed doors. The full committee will also hold a closed-door markup. The legislation sets defense policy and funding levels for the fiscal year that begins Oct. 1 and is viewed as a must-pass measure.

Next COVID-19 Response Package. Administration officials have recently started to float the possibility of a \$1 trillion package, and over the weekend, the White House signaled that they expect negotiations for this package to start after July 4th. The proposed cost also aligns with the amount Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) has said (behind closed doors) that he'd be willing to accept. However, President Trump continues to push for the inclusion of infrastructure in the package along with other measures, like changes to unemployment benefits, a back-to-work tax credit for workers returning to their jobs, a payroll tax cut, liability protections and tax deductions for companies for workers' restaurant and entertainment expenses. These provisions would push spending greatly beyond the \$1 trillion limit.

A \$1 trillion package would be narrower in scope and likely focus on additional funding for state and local governments and health care expenses, while also including liability protections for businesses. McConnell and Sen. John Cornyn (R-TX) have been working on legislation on the liability issue, but no text is available yet. McConnell said the bill will include new legal protections for businesses, nonprofits and government agencies, and try to create an environment where schools will be comfortable to reopen in the fall.

Policing Reform. Last week, Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) said legislation from Democrats to institute national changes to policing could be introduced today. She said the package would bar racial profiling, excessive use of force and end "the qualified immunity doctrine" adopted by the Supreme Court forty years ago that protects police officers from civil lawsuits for alleged misconduct in the course of official duty. Pelosi said she hopes for bipartisan cooperation on the measure. The House Judiciary Committee scheduled a hearing on the topic on Wednesday, where the legislation is expected to be discussed. Though Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) said his caucus will urge McConnell to put police legislation on the floor before July 4, most are not hopeful that the Republican-controlled Senate will act.

Last Week in the Nation's Capital

CONGRESS

Budget & Appropriations

House Democrats Set Tight Schedule for 2021 Spending Bills: House Appropriations Chairwoman Nita Lowey (D-NY) last Thursday announced the 12 subcommittees and full committee will mark up the 2021 spending bills in the first two full weeks of July, and work to pass all the bills in the latter two weeks of the month. ([The Hill](#))

Ex-CBO Director Calls for More Than \$1 Trillion in Coronavirus Stimulus Spending: Congress should pass at least \$1 trillion in further stimulus and emergency relief to keep the economy afloat through the COVID-19 pandemic, former Congressional Budget Office Director Doug Elmendorf testified to the House Budget Committee last Wednesday. ([The Hill](#))

Health

Top House, Senate Lawmakers Warn HHS Over Slow Health Provider Aid Payouts: In a letter last Wednesday to HHS Secretary Alex Azar, the bipartisan group demanded a timeline for distributing the roughly \$100 billion in funds that Congress earmarked for providers months ago. ([Politico](#))

CDC Director Says U.S. Needs Up To 100,000 Contact Tracers by September to Fight Coronavirus: CDC Director Robert Redfield told Congress last Thursday that the country needs between 30,000 and 100,000 people working on contact tracing in order to help contain the next wave of the coronavirus. ([The Hill](#))

Labor & Workforce

GOP Renews 'Go Slow' Approach on Virus Aid After Jobs Report: Some top Republicans see more reasons to pump the brakes on efforts to pass another multi-trillion-dollar pandemic relief package after Friday's surprisingly positive jobs numbers. ([Roll Call](#))

Republicans Tell Unions to Stop Collecting Dues: Two House Education and Labor Committee members, Ranking Member Virginia Foxx (R-NC) and Rep. Tim Walberg (R-MI), called on unions last Tuesday to stop collecting dues from unemployed workers. ([Politico](#))

Transportation

House to Unveil \$494B Surface Bill, Including Promised Climate Focus: The House Transportation Committee's surface transportation bill will be a \$494 billion, five-year effort that hews closely to the framework released in January and contains a hefty focus on climate mitigation, as House leadership has promised. ([Politico](#))

With No GOP Input, Stakeholders Fear House Highway Bill May Stall: A five-year, \$494 billion surface transportation bill crafted by House Democrats received a lukewarm reception from stakeholders who warned that it lacked the bipartisan backing needed to get it passed by the time the current highway authorization expires. ([Roll Call](#))

Banking & Housing

Bipartisan Group Wants Deficits Addressed in Next Virus Aid Bill: A bipartisan group of 60 House members, evenly divided between Democrats and Republicans, wrote to House leaders last Monday asking them to include measures to begin curbing the nation's mounting red ink. ([Roll Call](#))

Agriculture

Bipartisan Bill Introduced to Bolster Carbon Credit Markets in Ag: Key senators on both sides of the aisle introduced the Growing Climate Solutions Act last Thursday that would create a new certification program at USDA to help carbon markets function better — a significant bipartisan move that could position agriculture as a more prominent player in the battle against climate change. ([Politico](#))

Tax Reform

Senators Crafting a Tax Break for SBA's Forgivable Loan Program: After passing legislation to amend a forgivable loan program for coronavirus-stricken small businesses on last Wednesday, the Senate was working on a related bill last Thursday that would give borrowers another tax break on their loans. ([Roll Call](#))

Justice

House Judiciary Panel to Hold Police Brutality Hearing: House Democrats — led by the Congressional Black Caucus — are considering a number of measures to respond to the national outpouring of grief and anger following the death of George Floyd. ([Politico](#))

House Judiciary Panel to Hear From DOJ 'Whistleblowers' Amid Efforts to Reschedule Barr Testimony: The whistleblower hearing, which has yet to be formally scheduled, is part of a series of steps the panel intends to take in the coming weeks to push back against Barr, who they say has rejected renewed efforts to testify before the Democrat-led panel. ([Politico](#))

Defense

Defense Bill Turns Into Proxy Battle Over Floyd Protests: The protests have led to Democratic calls to defund the use of the military to respond to the demonstrations, amend the Insurrection Act and end a program that provides surplus military equipment to police. ([The Hill](#))

Democrats Introduce Bill to Rein in Trump's Power Under Insurrection Act: Senate Democrats introduced legislation last Thursday to limit presidential power under the Insurrection Act after President Trump warned that he could deploy active military troops into U.S. cities. ([The Hill](#))

Homeland Security/Immigration

House Panel Seeks Information on Homeland Security's Role in Protest Response: House Democrats are requesting additional information from the Department of Homeland Security after a drone flew to Minneapolis amid protests and department personnel were deployed to city streets to respond to the unrest, according to a letter sent to acting Homeland Security Secretary Chad Wolf on Friday. ([CNN](#))

Environment/Interior

In Rare Bipartisan Bill, U.S. Senators Tackle Climate Change Via Agriculture: U.S. Senators last Thursday introduced a bipartisan bill that would direct the Agriculture Department to help farmers, ranchers and landowners use carbon dioxide-absorbing practices to generate carbon credits, a rare collaboration on climate change. ([Reuters](#))

Trade

U.S. House Panel Says Opposes Any U.S. Trade Deal with Brazil: The U.S. House Ways and Means Committee said last Wednesday it opposed the Trump administration's plan to expand economic ties to Brazil under the leadership of President Jair Bolsonaro, given its record on human rights and the environment. ([Reuters](#))

Education

Democrats Call for Safeguards if Campuses Reopen: As colleges decide whether to resume classroom instruction as soon as two months from now, Republican Senators last Thursday emphasized the importance of campuses reopening, saying it would help restore a sense of normalcy, allow higher education employees to return to work and prevent students from falling behind or dropping out entirely. ([Inside Higher Ed](#))

EXECUTIVE BRANCH

Budget and Appropriations

CBO Releases Analysis on Extending Increased Unemployment Benefits: The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) said last Thursday that if the \$600-per-week increase to unemployment benefits amid the coronavirus pandemic were extended for six months, about five out of every six recipients would get more than they could expect to receive from working during that time period. ([The Hill](#))

Trump Team Envisions Up to \$1 Trillion for Next Stimulus Round: Trump administration officials increasingly expect to spend up to \$1 trillion in the next round of economic stimulus, according to people familiar with the matter, though action on a measure is unlikely until at least next month. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) has said that there are no plans to do a stimulus bill before the July 3 two-week recess, leaving action on any such measure after July 20. ([Bloomberg](#))

Health/HHS/NIH

U.S. Health Department Asks Labs to Add Demographic Data to COVID-19 Results: U.S. laboratories testing patients for COVID-19 are required to report data such as a patient's age and ethnicity along with test results, HHS said last Thursday. ([Reuters](#))

Private Equity Benefits from HHS Loans Meant to Help Health Care Providers During Pandemic: Private equity companies have borrowed at least \$1.5 billion from the federal government through programs intended to provide emergency funding to struggling health care companies during the coronavirus pandemic. ([Axios](#))

Defense/DOD

Esper Risks Being Sidelined as White House Floats Replacements: President Trump is unhappy with Pentagon chief Mark Esper. Aides are gossiping about who could replace him. Yet the embattled Defense secretary may be on his way to a more Trumpian punishment: sidelined within the administration. ([Politico](#))

Voices Grow in Condemnation of Trump's Military Response to Protests: High-ranking current and former defense officials are piling on condemnations of President Trump's handling of last week's protests following the death of George Floyd. ([The Hill](#))

Labor and Workforce

Trump Signs Bill to Ease Guidelines on Coronavirus Relief Loans for Small Businesses: President Donald Trump signed a bill Friday to give recipients of government small business loans during the coronavirus more flexibility in how they spend the money. ([CNBC](#))

Surprise Unemployment Drop Sparks Debate Over How Fast the Economy Will Rally: The unemployment rate fell to 13.3 percent in May from a peak of 14.7 percent in April, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported — surprising economists who had widely expected the rate to jump to about 20 percent in May, given that more than 40 million people have applied for unemployment benefits in recent weeks. ([Politico](#))

Labor IG Departs Amid Fraud Dispute Over Jobless Benefits: The long-time inspector general of the Labor Department, Scott S. Dahl, said he will retire as of June 21, leaving the office in search of new leadership as it ramps up a \$26 million program to oversee the vastly increased unemployment benefits funded by coronavirus relief laws. ([Roll Call](#))

EPA/Interior

Trump to Reopen Northeast Canyons and Seamounts National Monument for Fishing: The monument, about 130 miles from Cape Cod, Mass., was established in 2016 by then-President Obama to protect deep-sea environments and marine life. ([The Hill](#))

Agriculture/USDA

USDA Issues First Coronavirus Food Assistance Program Payments: USDA has approved more than \$545 million in payments to producers who have applied for the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program. ([USDA Press Release](#))

Space/NASA & NOAA

NASA Human Spaceflight Directorate Reorganization on Hold, Search for New Leader Intensifies: The top civil servant at NASA said last week that the agency is actively looking for someone to replace Doug Loverro as the head of the human spaceflight program and hopes to name someone within weeks, not months. Associate Administrator Steve Jurczyk also said reorganization of HEOMD will now wait until that person is in place. ([Space Policy](#))

Online)

Maxar Studies Legion Spacecraft for NOAA Weather Mission: Under a new NOAA six-month study contract, Maxar Technologies will explore the application of its Legion-class satellite to weather observation from low Earth orbit. NOAA is awarding a series of study contracts to explore potential instruments, spacecraft, business models and mission concepts for a space-based architecture to succeed the Joint Polar Satellite System and GOES-R series, this being the latest of 26 such contracts awarded to date. ([Space News](#))

Northrop Grumman Snags \$187 Million to Design NASA's Lunar Gateway Habitat for Astronauts: Their Gateway pressurized crew cabin likely won't be involved in the planned 2024 landing of astronauts on the moon, but NASA sees the mini space station as crucial to its longer-term lunar plans. This initial award funds the project through a key milestone called preliminary design review, which is expected to be complete by the end of this year. ([Space.Com](#))

Astronomers Warn About Effects of Satellite Megaconstellations: While SpaceX has been willing to work with astronomers on the issue of reflectivity of their large planned "Starlink" satellite constellation, the AAS is holding an online workshop in late June to discuss the issue with astronomers and other satellite companies which have yet to come to the table. Wide-field survey research where it's impossible to avoid satellites passing through the field of view as well as time-sensitive observations of transient phenomena could be badly affected by these satellites. ([Space News](#))

Baking & Housing/HUD

Fed Expands Municipal Bond Program, Opening Door to Some Smaller Cities: The Federal Reserve said last Wednesday that it would allow states to designate some cities, counties and other debt issuers, like mass transit systems, to raise funds by selling debt to the central bank's municipal bond-buying program. ([New York Times](#))

Transportation/DOT

Airline Industry Soaring Back to Life: Domestic air travel is picking up after almost three months of severe cutbacks spurred by the coronavirus pandemic. The number of passengers in the U.S. has nearly doubled since early May, airlines are adding more flights and major carriers are seeing their stock prices bounce back. ([The Hill](#))

New Acting DOT Watchdog Says He'll Keep his Other Agency Job: The U.S. Department of Transportation's acting Inspector General told three key House Democrats last Thursday that he will remain head of a key sub-agency while he performs his duty as the overall agency's watchdog. ([Roll Call](#))

Trump Executive Order Aims to Speed Permits for Infrastructure: President Trump signed an executive order that would expedite permitting for infrastructure projects, building on earlier orders to ease regulations for industry. The White House contends the move will help speed the nation's recovery after the coronavirus pandemic. ([The Hill](#))

Justice

Attorney General Barr Defends Response to Protests Near the White House: U.S. Attorney General William Barr last Thursday defended the decision to order that protesters be driven back from a park near the White House this week and said extremist groups were involved in sometimes violent demonstrations in the aftermath of George Floyd's death. ([NPR](#))

Cyber

Report Details New Cyber Threats to Elections from COVID-19: The report, compiled by New York University's Brennan Center for Justice, lays out threats such as attempts to target election officials working on unsecured networks at home, recovering from voter registration system outages and securing online ballot request systems. ([The Hill](#))