
Window On Washington - March 11, 2019, Vol. 3, Issue 11

Mar 11, 2019

Outlook for This Week in the Nation's Capital

Congress. House Democrats were in high spirits Friday after they passed the top item on their policy agenda — a package of voting, campaign finance and ethics overhauls dubbed HR 1. Speaker Pelosi gets to designate the bills numbered HR 1 to HR 10, and the coming weeks will see the new Democratic majority moving deliberately to roll out legislation to fulfill their 2018 midterm campaign promises and reintroducing bills that languished during the past eight years when Republicans controlled the House. HR 2 and HR 3 are infrastructure and prescription drug bills that are in the works and will be introduced and debated in coming weeks. The Senate continued to vote on judicial nominations last week, and Majority Leader McConnell filed cloture on Neomi Rao's nomination to serve on the District of Columbia Circuit Court of Appeals, setting up a floor vote this week. The Senate is also expected to vote this week on the House passed resolution disapproving of the President's emergency declaration regarding border security.

White House. The White House is bracing for the vote expected this week in the Senate on the Trump emergency declaration. While the measure is expected to pass since at least four Republican Senators have voiced support, the White House has been working hard behind the scenes to try and limit the overall number of defections from Republican Senators, to avoid an embarrassing rebuke. Trump will veto the bill, and it is unlikely that there would be enough House Republicans who would vote with Democrats to override the veto.

Budget & Appropriations: The "top line" numbers for President Trump's fiscal year (FY) 2020 federal budget request will be released today, and the request will apparently (again) call for sharp cuts in domestic spending that likely will be mostly ignored by Congress even as it sets up a funding fight that risks another government shutdown in the fall. Acting budget director Russ Vought has said the budget will seek a "historic" five percent decrease in discretionary spending, though the administration has refused to specify whether that is in addition to the nine percent cut that would be forced by the budget caps set to kick in for the FY 2020, which begins Oct. 1. We will find out soon, albeit more detailed agency specific budgets are not expected to be released until next week. The pace of House and Senate Appropriations Committee hearings as a result has begun to noticeably pick up, and in other news House Democrat Leader Steny Hoyer announced an ambitious goal of passing all 12 annual bills by the end of June.

Last Week in the Nation's Capital

CONGRESS

Tax Reform

House Passes Bill to Require Presidents to Disclose their Tax Returns: The House on Friday passed legislation that would require presidents to disclose their tax returns, as Democrats have made obtaining President Trump's tax returns one of their top priorities. ([The Hill](#))

Health

Dems Renew Push to Fund Gun Violence Research at CDC | New Uncertainty Over Vaping Crackdown | Lawmakers Spar Over Medicare Drug Prices: House Democrats are poised to approve new funding for gun violence research in the face of what they say is a "public health emergency" - if successful, it would be the first time in nearly 20 years that Congress has funded gun violence research after a measure passed in the 1990s discouraged federal agencies from studying the issue. In other news, the abrupt resignation of Food and Drug Administration Commissioner Scott Gottlieb has raised questions about whether the agency will further pursue its aggressive crackdown on vaping and tobacco companies. Lastly, Republicans and Democrats faced off in a hearing on a proposed bill to reduce drug prices, offered by Rep. Lloyd Doggett (D-TX). ([The Hill](#))

Defense

Military Should Pursue Legal Action Against Privatized Housing Companies, Senators Say: As senators pressed senior military leaders on their plans and timelines to fix the systemic problems with military housing, some urged the leaders to pursue legal action against some privatized housing companies, during a hearing Thursday. ([Military Times](#))

Cyber

Cost of New Voting Technology in Election Overhaul Bill: House Democrats' election overhaul bill ([H.R. 1](#)) would cost \$2.6 billion over five years, with the vast majority of that money — \$1.5 billion — going to states and counties for new voting technology, the Congressional Budget Office said in an [analysis](#) published late last week. The CBO also determined that the bill's requirement for states to report on their voting systems would only impose a small — and thus permissible — cost on local election officials. The cost of the bill's election infrastructure bug bounty program would be \$55 million over the five-year period, the CBO said. (Clark Hill Insight)

Senators Slam Equifax, Marriott Executives for Massive Data Breaches: Members of Congress sharply rebuked Equifax and Marriott on Thursday for failing to protect people's personal data and prevent two of the largest security breaches in U.S. history, putting hundreds of millions at risk. ([Washington Post](#))

Transportation

Congress and White House Agree on Infrastructure, but Need a Way to Pay for it: Virtually everyone on Capitol Hill and in the White House seems to agree that the nation's infrastructure needs immediate federal investment, and on Wednesday the call in the House and Senate was renewed: Figure out how to pay for it. ([The Washington Post](#))

House Dem Dismisses Paying for Infrastructure by Rolling Back Trump Tax Law: Rep. Earl Blumenauer (D-OR) signaled last week that he thinks there are better ways to pay for an infrastructure package than a rollback of the GOP tax law. ([The Hill](#))

Waters Releases Flood Insurance Bills: House Financial Services Chairwoman Maxine Waters has released a discussion draft of legislation that would reauthorize the National Flood Insurance Program for five years and make several changes to its operations. Included in the California Democrat's proposal are provisions that would forgive the flood insurance program's debt, create a demonstration program that would offer discounted flood insurance rates to low-income policyholders and establish a new state loan arrangement for mitigation. ([Clark Hill Insight](#))

Financial Services

Democrats Seek Commitment for Change in CFPB Hearing: CFPB Director Kathy Kraninger testified before Congress for the first time as head of the bureau in a hearing with the House Committee on Financial Services titled, Putting Consumers First? A Semi-Annual Review of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. Committee Chairwoman Rep. Maxine Waters started with a series of questions to measure Kraninger's commitment to fair lending. However, Waters was unable to get a clear answer out of Kraninger on if she has opened any new investigations and if she plans to restore the office of fair lending within the bureau. ([Housing Wire](#))

EXECUTIVE BRANCH

Health/HHS/NIH

Longevity and Anti-Aging Research: 'Prime Time for an Impact on the Globe': Harvard has established a new nonprofit academy for work on extending the human lifespan. Having demonstrated the ability to extend health and lifespan of simple organisms like yeast and worms and flies researchers want to increasingly apply such techniques to animals, and the grand challenge is rather than tackling one disease at a time, which is the way 20th-century medicine and pharmaceutical development was practiced, developing medicines that will treat aging at its source and thereby have a much greater impact on health and lifespan than drugs that target a single disease. ([The Harvard Gazette](#))

Space/NASA & NOAA

SpaceX Crew Dragon Completes First Test Flight: SpaceX's new Crew Dragon capsule splashed down in the Atlantic Ocean off the Florida coast last Friday, wrapping up a historic mission to the International Space Station. There were no astronauts aboard this flight, but the success of the test flight, known as Demo-1, helps pave the way for a crewed mission of the SpaceX vehicle, perhaps as early as this summer. That will be a huge milestone when it comes; astronauts haven't launched to orbit from American soil since NASA retired its space shuttle fleet in July 2011. ([Space.com](#))

GAO Takes Weather Satellite Program Off Watch List: The U.S. Government Accountability Office has taken a weather satellite program off a list of high-risk projects it is monitoring, but is heightening its concerns about NASA acquisition management. In a March 6 report, timed to testimony before the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, the GAO announced it was taking the issue of "mitigating gaps in weather satellite data" off its list of about 35 high-risk topics across the federal government it was monitoring. ([Space News](#))

Defense

Trump Administration Alters Obama-era Bill on Civilian Casualties in U.S. Airstrikes: The Trump administration has revoked part of an Obama-era executive order mandating an annual accounting of how many civilians have died in military and CIA strikes, reducing the potential for public scrutiny of counterterrorism activities overseas. ([Washington Post](#))

Pentagon's R&D Request will be the Biggest Ever, Shanahan Says: The Pentagon will request a research and development budget of \$104 billion, the biggest in the department's history, boosting spending in space and for hypersonic weapons, according to defense officials. ([Bloomberg](#))

Justice/DOJ

Paul Manafort Gets 47 Months in Prison for Financial Fraud: Paul Manafort, the one-time 2016 Trump campaign chairman and longtime Republican lobbyist, was sentenced Thursday to nearly four years in prison for a slate of financial fraud crimes, a much lighter sentence than many had anticipated. ([Politico](#))

Trump to Nominate Jessie Liu for No. 3 Spot at Justice Dept.: President Trump intends to nominate Jessie Liu, the U.S. attorney for the District of Columbia, to be the associate attorney general, a senior U.S. official familiar with the decision tells NBC News. The No. 3 position at DOJ has been open since last February, when Rachel Brand left to take a position as a lawyer for Walmart. ([NBC News](#))

Trade

Kudlow Staying ‘Bullish’ on U.S.-China Trade Deal: White House economic adviser Larry Kudlow said Sunday morning that he remains “bullish” on the prospect of a U.S.-China trade deal being finalized sometime in April. “I think we’re making great progress,” Kudlow said on “Fox News Sunday.” But Kudlow noted that despite how optimistic he is about the possibility of a deal, ultimately, the decision is up to President Trump. ([Politico](#))

Environment/EPA

EPA Aims to Curb Biofuel Credit Speculation by Blocking Outsiders: The Environmental Protection Agency will attempt to stamp out speculation in the U.S. biofuel credit market by barring trading by non-industry players, publicizing large positions, and improving price transparency. The measures, included in a broader policy reform under review by the Trump administration, are intended to help U.S. oil refiners cope with the costs of complying with the U.S. Renewable Fuel Standard. Under the law, passed in 2005 and expanded in 2007 partly to help expand farmers’ market for corn, refiners must blend certain volumes of biofuels like ethanol into their fuel or purchase credits from those that do. ([Reuters](#))

Homeland Security/DHS

Democrats Blast Nielsen Over Border Policies: House Democrats on Wednesday sparred with Homeland Security Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen over whether illegal immigration at the U.S.-Mexico border justifies the national emergency declared last month by President Donald Trump. ([Politico](#))

Five Takeaways from Wednesday’s Hearings on Immigration and Family Separation: Across Capitol Hill Wednesday, lawmakers grilled several key Trump administration officials over its enforcement of immigration law, including the “zero tolerance” policy that led to the separation of migrant children from their parents at the border last year. ([CNN](#))

Trump Admin Extends Immigration Protection for South Sudanese: The Trump administration has granted temporary protected status holders from South Sudan an 18-month extension. Homeland Security Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen announced the extension on Friday, saying that she made the decision after reviewing conditions on the ground. ([The Hill](#))

Labor & Workforce

Addressing the Employment Challenge: The Use of Postsecondary Noncredit Training in Skills Development: The United States finds itself in the midst of a unique labor market problem: Job openings vastly outnumber unemployed workers. Many experts and industry leaders have attributed this problem to the mismatch between the skills that workers possess and the competencies employers need. With the skills gap presenting a modern economic problem, what should be the appropriate response to upskill workers and close the gap? As one solution, this report proposes increasing community colleges’ role in upskilling workers through noncredit skills training programs. ([AEI](#))

Industry Pushes Back as House Proposes \$15 Minimum Wage: Although pundits say a proposal raising the federal minimum wage to \$15 an hour has a slim chance of getting through Congress, opponents are taking no chances, blasting the measure as a potential killer of jobs and small businesses such as restaurants. Still, their efforts have failed to derail the initiative, which was voted out of a House committee last week, and it will be put to a floor vote in the House of Representatives in the next few weeks. It is expected to win passage there and then be defeated in the Senate. ([Restaurant Business Online](#))

Energy/DOE

DOE Nominees Clear Energy Committee: The Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee approved four Energy Department nominees this morning that the White House initially tapped in the previous Congress. Lawmakers signed off on Rita Baranwal’s bid to be DOE’s top nuclear energy official, Bill Cooper to be general counsel, Chris Fall to be Science officer director and Lane Genatowski to lead the Advanced Research Projects Agency-Energy. All four were approved by voice vote, the committee said in a statement. ([Clark Hill Insight](#))

Michael Bloomberg Will Not Run for President in 2020: In an op-ed released Wednesday, the former New York City mayor, who joined the Democratic Party last year to crusade against President Trump, announced that he would not seek the White House himself in 2020. Instead, Bloomberg announced a new campaign called “Beyond Coal,” which, in partnership with the Sierra Club, aims to organize and mobilize communities affected by the harmful pollution of coal-fired power plants. ([Bloomberg](#))

Agriculture/USDA

Agriculture Department Staff Given Marching Orders for Controversial Move: Hundreds of employees of two key Agriculture Department research offices on Tuesday learned that they’re on the list to be transferred outside of Washington as part of Secretary Sonny Perdue’s [disputed](#) plan to move operations closer to farm industry stakeholders. At the Economic Research Service a list was circulated showing the job titles and descriptions of 76 positions that will remain in the national capital region, leaving the rest of that office’s 350 employees to assume their job will move to the still-unspecified new location. ([Government Executive](#))