
Window On Washington - September 14, 2020, Vol. 4, Issue 37

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Outlook for This Week in the Nation's Capital

Congress. The House and Senate are both in session this week. Congress faces a Sept. 30 deadline to fund the government, and Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) and Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin are continuing to work on a stopgap funding measure to avoid a government shutdown. Critical details, such as how long the measure will last and minor changes to legislative language, are still under discussion. Additionally, the House Oversight and Reform Committee will hold a hearing today with updates on the postal service and on Wednesday a hearing on the Trump administration's contracts for ventilators with Philips Respironics. On Wednesday, the Senate Appropriations' Labor, HHS, and Education Subcommittee will hold a hearing on the HHS' coronavirus response, and the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee is scheduled to mark up [10 bills](#). This week's House floor schedule includes three bills from the Education and Labor Committee addressing diversity in education ([H.R. 2639](#)), racial discrimination ([H.R. 2574](#)), and pregnant workers' rights ([H.R. 2694](#)), a resolution targeting anti-Asian bigotry related to COVID-19 ([H. Res. 908](#)), and at least two other bills under expedited floor procedures. The Senate floor schedule includes votes and cloture on various judicial nominations.

Next COVID Package Negotiations. With no movement on a bipartisan relief package after last week's failed Senate vote on the Republican "skinny" bill, the Trump administration is reportedly considering more executive actions to address the pandemic, including assistance for the airline industry, more money for school vouchers, changes to the earlier payroll tax deferral executive action, and additional unemployment benefits.

2020 Elections. Democratic nominee and former vice president Joe Biden will be making his first stop in Minnesota this coming Friday, but further details on the visit have yet to be announced. President Trump will also be in Minnesota, followed by Wisconsin, on Friday. Separately, Rep. Tom Graves (R-GA) announced last Friday that he plans to resign from Congress in October, even though he was not seeking reelection. His successor in Georgia's 14th District is likely to be Republican Marjorie Taylor Greene, who now has a clear path to serving in the 117th Congress after her Democratic opponent Kevin Van Ausdal dropped out last Friday as well.

Last Week in the Nation's Capital

CONGRESS

Budget & Appropriations

McConnell Says Chance for Coronavirus Deal 'Doesn't Look That Good Right Now': Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) on last Friday cast doubt on the ability for Congress to get a deal on a fifth coronavirus relief package after a failed vote in the Senate and a weeks-long stalemate between Democrats and the White House. ([The Hill](#))

Pelosi Expresses Confidence Lawmakers Will Avoid Government Shutdown: Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) last Tuesday expressed confidence that Congress and the Trump administration will reach a deal this month to avoid a government shutdown. ([The Hill](#))

Health

'Skinny' Coronavirus Relief Bill Blocked in Senate: The Senate rejected Republicans' latest coronavirus relief proposal last Thursday, though Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) may have strengthened their hand in bipartisan negotiations with a display of GOP unity. ([Roll Call](#))

Senate Report Claims 'Significant Delays' in Postal Service Delivery of Prescription Drugs: Operational changes implemented at the United States Postal Service are posing potentially "serious health risks" to Americans who rely on prescription drug deliveries, according to a new report from Sens. Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) and Bob Casey (D-PA). ([The Hill](#))

House Energy and Commerce Advances 38 Bills to House Floor: The House Energy and Commerce Committee last Wednesday approved 38 mostly bipartisan bills, with legislation related to mental health, controlled substances, Medicare, and reauthorizations of other health programs. ([Clark Hill Insight](#))

Labor & Workforce

Trump's Payroll Tax Deferral Nixed for House Employees: House employees won't have their payroll taxes deferred under President Donald Trump's recent order, a top House official said last Friday in the latest setback for the administration's ill-received plan. ([Politico](#))

Banking & Housing

In Ongoing Debate Over Fed's Main Street Program, Lawmakers Reach Little Consensus: At a Senate Banking Committee hearing last Wednesday, policymakers differed over whether the Main Street program can be strengthened with a new structure and relaxed loan terms, or if more direct aid from Congress is needed to help companies fighting for survival during the pandemic. ([Washington Post](#))

Tax Reform

Top Republican Offers Bill to Create Payroll Tax Holiday: Rep. Kevin Brady (R-TX), the top Republican on the House Ways and Means Committee, introduced legislation last Friday that would create a payroll tax holiday from Sept. 1 through Dec. 31, an effort aimed at forgiving the taxes deferred under a memo President Trump signed last month. ([The Hill](#))

Top Democrat Urges IRS To Expedite Letters to Non-Filers About Stimulus Payments: House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Richard Neal (D-MA) urged the IRS to expedite sending letters that urge non-filers to claim their coronavirus relief payments. ([The Hill](#))

Transportation

Highway Bill Could Hitch a Ride on the Continuing Resolution: With weeks to go before the current surface transportation authorization expires, the biggest mystery is increasingly whether an extension will be passed as a standalone measure or as part of a likely continuing resolution to avert a partial government shutdown. ([Roll Call](#))

Trade

Pelosi Warns 'No Chance' of US-UK Trade Deal if Brexit Violates International Treaty: House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) has warned that Britain will be unable to secure a trade deal with the US if it does anything to undermine the treaty that brought peace to Northern Ireland after decades of violence. ([CNN](#))

Defense

Five Things to Watch in Talks on Massive Defense Bill: The list of thorny funding, policy and political issues still facing the Congress this fall includes renaming DOD bases which are currently named after Confederate military officers, the 1807 Insurrection Act, U.S. nuclear weapons testing, U.S. troops in Germany and Afghanistan, and the border wall. ([The Hill](#))

Defense Authorization Bill Delayed Until After Election: A bipartisan compromise and vote on the 2021 defense policy bill isn't likely before the Nov. 3 elections, but it should come "quickly" thereafter, the House Armed Services Committee's top Republican said last Wednesday. ([Defense News](#))

Homeland Security & Immigration

Democrats Smell Blood with New DHS Whistleblower Complaint: House Democrats are moving quickly to investigate a new whistleblower complaint that alleges top leaders at the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) repeatedly sought to politicize intelligence to appease President Trump. ([The Hill](#))

Senate Panel Seeks Documents in Probe of DHS Whistleblower Complaint: Sens. Marco Rubio (R-FL) and Mark Warner (D-VA), the acting chair and vice chair of the Intelligence panel, wrote to DHS deputy general counsel Joseph Maher last Thursday asking for documents relating to the whistleblower complaint. ([The Hill](#))

Judiciary/Justice

Republicans Call for Judiciary Hearing into Unrest in Cities Run by Democrats: Top Republicans on the House Judiciary Committee are calling for a hearing into violence and "civil unrest seen in Democrat-run cities" during recent demonstrations against police brutality across the country. ([The Hill](#))

Cyber

Lawmakers Cautiously Optimistic About Creation of National Cyber Director: Top figures on the House Armed Services Committee and on a congressionally-mandated cyber panel say they are cautiously optimistic that legislators and the White House can come to an agreement to form a national cyber director position this year. ([Federal News Network](#))

Environment & Interior

Democrats Push Resolution to Battle Climate Change, Sluggish Economy and Racial Injustice: The THRIVE Act, short for Transform, Heal, and Renew by Investing in a Vibrant Economy, echoes many of the principles laid out in the Green New Deal, calling for strong labor protections and access to unions, "improving upon New Deal-era institutions" and curbing global warming. ([The Hill](#))

Energy

Senators Reach Compromise on Greenhouse Gas Amendment Stalling Bipartisan Energy Bill: Sens. Tom Carper (D-DE) and John Kennedy (R-LA) agreed to compromise with Sen. John Barrasso (R-WY) on an amendment that would step down the use of a powerful greenhouse gases called hydrofluorocarbons (HFC), an issue that threatened to hold up the American Energy Innovation Act, which would boost research and development into renewable energy and technology to ease pollution from fossil fuels. ([The Hill](#))

EXECUTIVE BRANCH

Budget & Appropriations

White House Weighing Executive Actions to Bolster Unemployment Benefits and Bail Out the Airline Industry: The Trump administration is considering bulking up unemployment benefits and a bailout of the struggling airline industry, among other steps, according to two anonymous sources familiar with internal deliberations. ([Business Insider](#))

Health/HHS/NIH

Trump Officials Interfered with CDC Reports on COVID-19: The health department's politically appointed communications aides have demanded the right to review and seek changes to the CDC's weekly scientific reports charting the progress of the coronavirus pandemic, in what officials characterized as an attempt to intimidate the reports' authors and water down their communications to health professionals. ([Politico](#))

Health Official Tries to Reassure Public That Science Will Set Vaccine Approval: Dr. Francis S. Collins, the director of the NIH, sought to reassure senators and the public that a vaccine would not be made available unless it was safe and effective. ([New York Times](#))

Labor & Workforce

Trump's Extra \$300 Jobless Benefit Already Running Dry in Some States: The extra \$300 federal boost to unemployment benefits created under an executive action signed by President Donald Trump is already running out for some states, less than a month after the program launched. ([Politico](#))

Jobless Claims Steady at 884K Despite Decline in Unemployment Rate: New weekly claims for unemployment benefits stayed flat last week when adjusted for seasonal factors but rose by more than 20,000 on an unadjusted basis, the Labor Department reported last Thursday. ([The Hill](#))

Department of Education

DeVos Drops Controversial Rule on Coronavirus Aid: Education Secretary Betsy DeVos quietly dropped a controversial rule directing states to give private universities a larger share of coronavirus relief funds than specified by Congress. ([The Hill](#))

Banking & Housing/HUD

Most Loans in Fed's Main Street Program Exceed \$1 Million: The Federal Reserve's Main Street Lending Program, aimed at supporting small to midsize businesses through the coronavirus pandemic, has mostly made loans in the millions of dollars, according to data disclosed by the central bank last Tuesday. ([American Banker](#))

CFTC Report Says Climate Change Poses Serious Risk to Financial System: A task force for a federal financial markets regulator is warning in a new report that climate change poses "serious emerging risks to the U.S. financial system," and it calls for regulators to "move urgently and decisively" to confront them. ([Politico](#))

HUD Awards Nearly \$2 Billion in CARES Act Relief Funds, Focusing on Communities with Higher Risk of Eviction: HUD Secretary Ben Carson last Friday announced the allocation of the remaining \$1.988 billion in CARES Act funding for the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program. ([HUD Press Release](#))

Tax Reform/IRS

IRS to Offer Tax Filing Form in Spanish for the First Time: The IRS announced last week that it will be providing the individual income tax return in Spanish for the first time. ([The Hill](#))

Space/NASA & NOAA

NASA Proposes to Pay Private Companies to Collect Lunar Samples: NASA wants to buy lunar resources mined by private sector companies by 2024, either to be returned to earth for study or for in-situ utilization connected to manned missions planned for 2024. ([Space Policy Online](#))

NSF and NASA Partner to Address Space Weather Research and Forecasting: Together, NSF and NASA are investing over \$17 million into six, three-year awards, each of which contributes to key research that can expand the nation's space weather prediction capabilities, via a new mechanism called the Space Weather with Quantified Uncertainties program. ([HPC Wire](#))

Charlie Bolden Says the Quiet Part Out Loud: SLS Rocket Will Go Away: The combination of run-away costs and delays, its lack of reusability along with the strides made by the "commercial sector" to develop heavy lift rocket has caused the former NASA Administrator and once staunch supporter of SLS to change his mind on its usefulness and future. ([Ars Technica](#))

Gerstenmaier Warns Against Ending Space Station Program Prematurely: The former head of NASA's human spaceflight program, now working as a consultant to SpaceX, said he welcomes greater commercial activity in low Earth orbit but cautioned against ending the International Space Station prematurely. ([Space News](#))

Defense/DOD

DoD Explains How Contractors Will Get Reimbursed for COVID Expenses — If Congress Cuts a Check: With lawmakers and the White House unable

to come to an agreement on a new coronavirus stimulus package, it's unlikely that money requested to reimburse defense contractors for pandemic-related expenses will reach these companies until at least the second quarter of 2021, according to the Ellen Lord, Defense Undersecretary for Acquisition and Sustainment. ([Defense One](#))

DHS & Immigration

Federal Judges Block Trump Census Order on Undocumented Immigrants: The federal judges ruled last Thursday that excluding the immigrants would violate both the 14th Amendment, which requires the number of House seats each state is allotted to be based on "counting the whole number of persons in each State," and federal law, which permits the Commerce secretary to include only census figures in his report to the president. ([Politico](#))

Trump Administration Considers Postponing Refugee Admissions, U.S. Official Says: U.S. officials are weighing whether to postpone or further cut refugee admissions in the coming year amid legal fights over President Donald Trump's refugee policy and uncertainty caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, a senior official said. ([Reuters](#))

Whistleblower Alleges Top DHS Officials Sought to Alter Intelligence Products to Fit Trump's Comments: A whistleblower is alleging that top leaders at the DHS have politicized intelligence, with the political appointees pushing him to alter intelligence assessments to match President Trump's public remarks. ([The Hill](#))

Judiciary/DOJ

Court-Appointed Adviser Blasts 'Corrupt' DOJ Move to Drop Flynn Case: Former national security adviser Michael Flynn's lies to the FBI are so clear — and their effect on the FBI's Russia probe so obvious — that the Justice Department's decision to drop the case can only be a pretext to help an ally of President Donald Trump, a court-appointed adviser to Judge Emmet Sullivan argued last Friday. ([Politico](#))

Cruz, Cotton, Hawley Headline Trump's Additional 20 Potential Supreme Court Picks: President Donald Trump last Wednesday added 20 names to his existing list of 25 potential picks to fill a future Supreme Court vacancy, including Republican Sens. Ted Cruz, Tom Cotton and Josh Hawley. ([Politico](#))

Cyber

Army Cyber Command Completes its Move to Georgia's Fort Gordon: The Army command dedicated to defending against hackers and other online threats celebrated its move into a new \$366 million headquarters in Georgia last Thursday. Created a decade ago, the Army Cyber Command had been spread across Army installations in three states before consolidating at Fortitude Hall, its new home at Fort Gordon in Augusta. ([Army Times](#))

Agriculture/USDA

Perdue Says Second Round of CFAP to be Announced This Week: USDA Secretary Sonny Perdue said last Thursday that he will release the rules for the next round of Coronavirus Food Assistance Program payments to farmers this week, just ahead of the deadline for applying for the first round. ([Agri-Pulse](#))

EPA & DOI

EPA's Top Lawyer to Depart: EPA General Counsel Matt Leopold told POLITICO he will depart the Trump administration in the coming weeks, and he defended his litigation record at the agency amid mixed reviews. Leopold will be replaced in an acting capacity by Principal Deputy General Counsel David Fotouhi, who has been at EPA since March 2017. ([Politico](#))

Department of Energy

U.S. Showers Tiny Wind Turbines with Big Love: The Department of Energy's Competitiveness Improvement Project, a cost-sharing program launched in 2013 under the National Renewable Energy Laboratory, is again accelerating the deployment of small and mid-sized wind turbines with seven large new awards. ([Clean Technica](#))