
Window on Washington - This Week in the Nation's Capital - June 9, 2017 Vol. 1, Issue 12

Jun 09, 2017

CONGRESS

Budget

- **Freedom Caucus Proposed to Cancel August Recess:** The House Freedom Caucus has called on Republican leadership to cancel the August recess to continue work on the budget, tax reform and other GOP priorities ([Politico](#)).
-

Comey Testimony

- **Comey—"White House Lied 'Plain and Simple' About Firing":** Fired FBI Director James Comey testified that he was "confused" and "concerned" when President Donald Trump told the public he was firing him for undermining the morale of the agency Comey had led since 2013. "Those were lies, plain and simple," Comey said. The Trump administration, he said, "chose to defame me and, more importantly, the FBI by saying that the organization was in disarray, that it was poorly led, that the workforce had lost confidence in its leader" ([NBC News](#)).
 - **Trump's Lawyer Fires Back After Comey Testimony:** President Trump's outside lawyer flatly denied that the president ever asked former FBI Director James Comey for a pledge of loyalty, and he accused Comey of disclosing privileged communications with the president to the news media, without authorization ([NPR](#)).
-

Debt Ceiling

- **Dems Will Back Clean Debt-Limit Hike:** House Minority Whip Steny Hoyer (D-Md.) deflated nascent Democratic plans for using the debt ceiling fight to extract political concessions from the GOP ([The Hill](#)).
 - **Ryan Will Not Commit to Treasury Timetable for Debt Increase:** House Speaker Paul Ryan said that he will not commit to holding a vote to increase the government's borrowing authority this summer ([Associated Press](#)).
 - **Ryan Picks Mnuchin in Debate With Mulvaney on Debt Limit:** House Speaker Paul Ryan said that when it comes to negotiating legislation to raise the U.S. debt ceiling, Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin is in charge ([Bloomberg](#)).
-

Dodd-Frank

- **House Passes Choice Act:** The House of Representatives pushed through a bill Thursday that would gut many of the key banking reforms implemented after the financial crisis. In a primarily partisan vote, the House passed the Financial Creating Hope and Opportunity for Investors, Consumers and Entrepreneurs Act, a highly controversial measure that stands virtually no chance of passing the Senate ([CNBC](#)).
 - **House Drops Attempt to Repeal Swipe Fee Cap:** In what is a huge win for booksellers and other retailers, U.S. House of Representative Financial Services Committee Chair Jeb Hensarling (R-TX) announced that backers of the Financial CHOICE Act would drop a provision from the bill that would have repealed a cap on debit card swipe fees ([Associated Press](#)).
-

Energy/Environment

- **Greenhouse Gasses:** Five House Democrats and two Republicans introduced a bill that would create a task force to study how to limit emissions of powerful greenhouse gases ([The Hill](#)).
-

Healthcare

- **Democrat's Bid to Allow Drug Importation Fails in Committee Vote:** A House Democrat's effort to allow imports of cheaper prescription drugs from Canada failed in a committee voice vote June 7 ([Bloomberg](#)).
-

Infrastructure

- **Chuck Schumer Predicts Nationwide Tolls Under Trump's Infrastructure Plan:** Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer signaled he would not support President Trump's plan to use private funding to fulfill much of his massive infrastructure plan, and predicted Trump's idea would create toll roads all around the country ([Washington Examiner](#)).
 - **President Trump Launches \$1 Trillion Initiative to Fix America's Infrastructure:** President Donald Trump is launching a major push for a \$1 trillion overhaul of the nation's roads and bridges, a key item on his domestic agenda that's gained little traction amid a slew of controversies that have engulfed the White House ([Time](#)).
 - **Dems Lose Appetite for Deal With Trump on Infrastructure:** Major elements of President Trump's infrastructure initiative are facing staunch opposition from Democrats, increasing the likelihood that Republicans will have to go it alone ([The Hill](#)).
-

Nominations

- **Trump Picks Ex-Banker Otting to Regulate Wall Street:** Joseph Otting, a former lieutenant of Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin's at OneWest Bank, has been tapped to lead a U.S. regulator that oversees more than 1,000 lenders -- including Wall Street giants ([Bloomberg](#)).
 - **Trump to Nominate Christopher Wray as Next FBI Director:** President Trump announced Wednesday that he would nominate Christopher A. Wray — a white-collar criminal defense attorney who led the Justice Department's Criminal Division during the George W. Bush administration — to serve as the next FBI director ([Washington Post](#)).
 - **Pro-Regulations Group Pushes Back on Trump's 'Regulatory Czar' Pick:** A regulatory advocacy group called on the Senate to reject Neomi Rao, President Trump's nominee to be the nation's so-called "regulatory czar" ahead of her confirmation hearing. Public Citizen's Robert Weissman said that the country needs an administrator for the White House Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs (OIRA) that believes that federal agencies play a vital role in protecting the public ([The Hill](#)).
-

Supreme Court

- **Supreme Court Rules in Favor of Religious Hospitals in Pension Dispute:** Religious hospitals do not have to comply with federal laws protecting pension plans, a unanimous Supreme Court ruled in a case that affects retirement benefits for roughly a million workers nationwide ([CBS](#)).
-

Tax Reform

- **Trump Wants Tax Reform, Not Just Tax Cuts:** Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin asserted Thursday that the Trump administration is unified in seeking a tax reform that is more than just mere tax cuts, and that the legislation should be paid for ([Washington Examiner](#)).
 - **History Suggests Tax Reform Process Is Just Getting Started:** Republicans laid out an ambitious agenda at the start of the year to overhaul the tax code by the end of 2017, but history suggests that there is not time for a complete overhaul by December. It took more than two years to pass tax legislation in 1986, which was shepherded through with bipartisan plans and buy-in from the White House. As June begins, however, it's unclear if the GOP has unified around the framework and cost of tax reform ([Bloomberg](#)).
-

Telecom

- **Senate Dems Seek Hearing On Sinclair-Tribune Deal:** Eight Senate Democrats asked the chairmen of the Senate Commerce and Judiciary committees to conduct hearings on the proposed Tribune-Sinclair merger and on a Federal Communications Commission media ownership rule change helping make way for the deal ([Law360](#)).

EXECUTIVE BRANCH

Department of Education

- **Betsy DeVos:** Student Loan Debt is 'Of Grave Concern': Betsy DeVos said that student debt is "of grave concern" ([CNN](#)).
-

Department of Energy

-
- **Clean Energy:** Energy Secretary Rick Perry assured his Japanese counterpart that the U.S. is still committed to working on environmental issues and promoting clean energy after the announcement that the U.S. will leave the Paris agreement ([The Associated Press](#)).
 - **Basic Research Funding:** A group of business leaders, including oil and utility executives, sent a letter to lawmakers on the House and Senate Appropriations committees asking them to maintain the Department of Energy's basic research funding, which was cut in the White House budget proposal ([The Washington Post](#)).
-

EPA

- **Fracking:** Environmental groups sued the Trump administration over its delay of Obama administration fracking rules that the agency is now reviewing ([Washington Examiner](#)).
 - **Ozone Levels:** The Environmental Protection Agency delayed by a year its requirement for states to comply with its ozone-level standard ([E&E News](#)).
 - **California:** China and California signed an agreement to reduce greenhouse gas emissions ([The Associated Press](#)).
 - **Environmental Reviews:** The Trump administration may place restrictions on the length of environmental reviews, as part of an effort to promote its eventual \$1 trillion infrastructure package ([The Hill](#)).
-

Department of Transportation

- **Trump Pushes Air Traffic Control Privatization:** President Trump will push for a privatization of the country's air traffic control system — an ambitious overhaul which he said would help usher in an era of more modernized and improved travel for the world's most complex airspace ([NBC News](#)).
-

Department of Interior

- **Climate Change:** Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke told lawmakers his agency will continue researching climate change, but it will be consolidated into one division because he wants to know "what's going on" ([Washington Examiner](#)).
-

Department of Veterans Affairs

- **House Seeks to Pass VA Accountability Bill Next Week:** The House will vote next week on Senate-passed legislation to make firing employees easier for the troubled Department of Veterans Affairs, moving quickly on a long-sought accountability effort urged by President Donald Trump. ([ABC News](#)).
-

CFPB

- **States Standing By to Fill 'Imminent' CFPB Enforcement Gap:** State attorneys general are set to take up much of the slack that will be created if and when the federal Consumer Financial Protection Bureau ramps down its vigorous enforcement activities as Republican opponents of the agency impose their will on it ([Bloomberg](#)).
-

FDA

- **Drug Prices Become Target for FDA as Chief Expands Purview:** The head of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration is considering using the agency's powers to bring more price competition to the market for generic drugs, targeting high-priced products by prioritizing the approval of additional competing treatments ([Bloomberg](#)).
-

FEC

- **Senate Democrats Press FEC on Foreign-Money Rules:** Senate Democrats are pressing the Federal Election Commission to strengthen campaign finance disclosure rules to prevent foreign money from influencing U.S. elections ([Bloomberg](#)).
-

NASA

- **SpaceX Will Launch Next Secret X-37 Air Force Mission:** The Air Force is preparing to launch its secret X-37B spaceplane aboard a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket later this year ([Space News](#)).
- **2017 GEOINT—U.S. Government Should Reduce Impediments to Commercial Space Innovation:** The U.S. government could bolster commercial space innovation by relaxing regulations and lowering some of the bureaucratic hurdles that discourage private firms from working with federal agencies, according to panelists at the 2017 GEOINT Symposium ([Space News](#)).
- **India's GSLV Mark 3 Launch Moves Nation Closer to Full Space Autonomy:** India's maiden launch of the GSLV Mark 3 rocket June 5 marks a big step forward on the country's path to greater self sufficiency in space — a strategy India has used to guide its space activities not only in launch, but the construction and operation of telecommunications satellites ([Space News](#)).
- **Pence Reiterates Plans to Reestablish the National Space Council:** Vice President Mike Pence used a ceremony announcing NASA's latest class of astronauts June 7 to restate the administration's plans to reestablish the National Space Council, but set no timetable for formally doing so ([Space News](#)).
- **House Bill Seeks to Streamline Oversight of Commercial Space Activities:** The House Science Committee is expected to approve a bill that seeks to improve regulation of commercial space activities, but not without criticism from some within the industry ([Space News](#)).

National Institute of Health

- **Trump Will Keep NIH Director:** President Donald Trump has decided to keep Francis Collins as director of the NIH ([Politico](#)).

National Science Foundation

- **U.S. Economic Competitiveness at Risk With Science Cuts:** America's economic competitiveness is being jeopardized as other countries accelerate their investment in science and engineering while the U.S. faces steep budget cuts, the director of the National Science Foundation (NSF) said June 7 at a House Appropriations subcommittee hearing ([Bloomberg](#)).

White House

- **Sanctions:** The U.S. is considering sanctions on Venezuela's energy industry, according to White House officials ([Reuters](#)).
- **Google, Facebook Challenge US's Exit from Paris Accord:** Alphabet's Google, Microsoft and Facebook are among dozens of companies that pledged their support for policies combating climate change following President Donald Trump's decision to withdraw from the Paris accord ([Business Standard](#)).
- **Under Trump, Regulation Slows to a Crawl:** From Inauguration Day until the end of May, just 15 regulations were approved by the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs (OIRA), the White House department that reviews important new federal rules. That's by far the fewest among comparable periods since recordkeeping began in the 1990s: ninety-three rules were approved during the same period in Barack Obama's administration, and 114 under George W. Bush ([Politico](#)).

If you have any questions about this alert please contact your Clark Hill attorney.