



*Week of 2-6-17  
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### **Congressional Overview**

The Senate confirmed the following cabinet nominations: Betsy DeVos (Education Secretary), Jeff Sessions (Attorney General), Tom Price (Health and Human Services Secretary), and is expected to confirm Steven Mnuchin (Treasury Secretary). Meanwhile in the House, members continued using the Congressional Review Act to undo several Obama Administration Regulations. The Congressional Review Act allows Congress to pass resolutions of disapproval to overturn regulations 60 legislative days after they go into effect.

Last week, the House passed resolutions to undo five separate Obama Administration regulations, including rules to report disability benefit recipients deemed unfit to manage their own finances to the FBI's gun background check system and require coal companies to clean up mountaintop removal mining waste from local waterways. This week, the House voted on three resolutions to get rid of regulations that would reorganize the Bureau of Land Management's natural resources planning and management strategies, establish reporting requirements for teacher preparation programs and implement provisions of the bipartisan education policy overhaul passed by Congress in late 2015.

The House did not have votes Wednesday-Friday due to the annual Democratic policy retreat, which took place in Baltimore.

### **President Trump's FY 18 Budget Proposal**

President Trump's FY 18 budget proposal is unlikely to be submitted before April or May, but it's possible that President Trump will skip issuing a preliminary outline of the budget in late February. White House officials are working on an executive order related to the coming budget submission but few details are available at this time. The President's budget is due to Congress the first Monday in February, but this deadline is usually missed when a new administration takes over. The previous three presidents also were unable to meet the deadline in their first year in office.

### **Trump's Cabinet Nominees Getting Appointed Despite Opposition**

Several of President Trump's cabinet nominees were approved this week, despite opposition from Democrats. Democrats held the Senate floor for 24 hours to protest Betsy DeVos' nomination as Secretary of Education. Senators phones were ringing off the hooks with calls urging against DeVos. The vote made history when Vice President Mike Pence became the first Vice President to cast the deciding vote on a cabinet nominee after the Senate's vote of 50 in support and 50 against. The vote was mostly along party lines, with two Republicans breaking rank to vote against DeVos.

After DeVos' confirmation, Democrats again stayed up all night to protest Jeff Sessions' nomination as attorney general. The late night session created a stir when Sen. Mitch McConnell (R-KY) invoked a little-used Senate rule to silence Sen. Elizabeth Warren after she tried reading a letter Coretta Scott King wrote about Sessions. Jeff Sessions went on to be confirmed as Attorney General by a 52-47 vote along party lines.

### **Supreme Court Nominee Neil Gorsuch Making Rounds on Capitol Hill**

Neil Gorsuch, Trump's nominee for the Supreme Court, continued making the rounds on Capitol Hill this week. During a meeting with Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), the Senator reported that Gorsuch found Trump's remarks about James Robart disheartening and demoralizing. President Trump claimed Rep. Blumenthal misrepresented Judge Gorsuch's words. In addition to his meeting with Sen. Blumenthal, Gorsuch met with several democratic senators over the week.

### **FCA Legislative Director Mike Oscar on the Importance of the Filibuster in the Senate**

Confirming a jurist to the Supreme Court has been an outstanding issue that is politically important and needs to be addressed. However, moving to eliminate the filibuster on the Supreme Court nominee will essentially place the Senate in peril. FCA's Legislative Director Mike Oscar worked in the Senate for nearly a decade.

Per Mike, "I can confirm that its central purpose is to remain independent, somewhat bipartisan arbitrator, along with being the deliberate chamber in American government. By invoking the "nuclear option" on the Supreme Court nomination process, which allows majority rule prevail, you are undermining the Senate's status and eliminating its very uniqueness. Regardless of the past or upcoming election, the independent role of a senator is leadership with respect to the history and seriousness of the Senate."

### **FERC Approves Four Pipeline Projects**

Four natural gas pipeline projects (Energy Transfer Partners' Rover pipeline, Williams Cos.' Atlantic Sunrise, Tennessee Gas Pipeline's looping project and Dominion Carolina's pipeline) received permission from the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) to go ahead with construction on Feb. 3, the last day the agency could grant permits. The commission is now unable to make decisions until a new commissioner replaces Chairman Norman Bay, who stepped down on Friday.

### **Record Volume of U.S. Crude Headed for Asia**

Oil companies and trading houses including BP, Shell and Mercuria are expected to export between 700,000 and 900,000 barrels of U.S. crude oil per day in February, mostly to Asian countries such as China, Japan and Singapore.

### **U.S. Crude Imports Increase**

U.S. Refiners imported an average of 3.83 million barrels of crude per day in January, the most since August, with shipments from Saudi Arabia and Canada hitting records.

### **House Votes to Repeal Methane Rule**

Last Friday, the House voted 221-191 to repeal the Obama administration's regulation limiting methane venting and flaring at oil and natural gas drilling site. Methane, a byproduct of natural gas, is a greenhouse gas that traps about 25 times as much heat as carbon dioxide. The Obama administration has worked to cut methane emissions amid the hydraulic fracturing boom, including an agreement with Canada to cut emissions from the oil-and-gas sector by 40 to 45 percent of 2012 levels by 2025.

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM)'s rule was meant to address a specific source of methane emissions, when companies will either release or burn off excess gas when there's not sufficient infrastructure to get it to the market. The rule, which only applies to wells on federal land, also asks manufacturers to look for and replace leaks in pipelines and throughout the extraction process. A 2010 Government Accountability Office report found that some 40 percent of the gas being released from federal lands was capturable, and could increase federal royalty payments by \$23 million a year. In total, 462 billion cubic feet of natural gas were lost between 2009 and 2015 enough to power 6 million homes a year.