



*Week of 3-27-17
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Congressional Overview

The House postponed their final vote on the American Health Care Act last Friday, killing President Trump's first major legislative initiative. The White House and House Speaker Paul Ryan signaled their next legislative move would be a pivot toward a sweeping tax overhaul package that could prove just as tough to pass.

This week, one of the Senate's focuses continued to be Supreme Court Nominee Neil Gorsuch, and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell said he'll do whatever is necessary to confirm him before the Senate's April recess. The Senate also considered President Trump's Cabinet nominees: Agriculture nominee Sonny Perdue and Labor nominee Alexander Acosta. Finally, the Senate voted to ratify Montenegro as a member of NATO. Meanwhile, the House considered a handful of disaster-preparedness bills.

Several House Republicans Continue Talking Affordable Care Act Repeal

Several House Republicans continue to talk about using the FY 17 budget reconciliation process to pass legislation to repeal the Affordable Care Act. However, leadership has yet to make any decisions on the path forward after pulling the bill last week. On Thursday, the House Energy and Commerce Committee scheduled a members-only meeting to discuss the path forward for the effort to repeal and replace the law.

Proposed Spending Cuts in FY 17 Budget

The Office of Management and Budget has proposed \$17.9 billion in specific spending cuts to offset higher proposed defense and border security spending in the current fiscal year. The White House budget office suggested cutting Pell Grant funding by \$1.3 billion, National Institutes of Health funding by \$1.2 billion and the Community Development Block Grant program by \$1.5 billion, among billions of dollars in other reductions across federal agencies. The reductions are spread across nine Appropriations subcommittees that allocate nondefense discretionary dollars.

The Labor-HHS-Education Subcommittee would take the biggest hit at \$7.2 billion, while State-Foreign Operations would be chopped by \$2.8 billion. Defense and most of Homeland Security are not included in the spreadsheet. None of the spending reductions would go into effect without Congress' approval, and appropriators already were balking at such dramatic changes in current year funding. Negotiations are already concluded on many of the FY 17 spending bills.

President Trump Announces New Initiative to Combat Opioid Epidemic

President Trump announced the formation of a new office of innovation to address the opioid epidemic. The White House Office of American Innovation will be led by Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law, and will aim to overhaul federal bureaucracy by infusing ideas from the corporate world. New Jersey Governor Chris Christie will chair an official commission within the office devoted to the problem of opioid addiction. Christie has been concerned about opioids for years and recently made it the centerpiece of his legislative agenda in New Jersey. He signed a bill last month to limit initial opioid prescriptions to a five-day supply, which he said was the most stringent limit in the country.

House Intelligence Committee Cancels Open Hearing on Russian Interference Investigation

The House Intelligence Committee's chairman canceled an open Russia hearing, prompting an outcry from Democrats and renewing calls for an independent commission. Rep. Devin Nunes' (R-CA) decision, which he informed his Democratic colleagues of just minutes before telling the press, calls into question the public's confidence in the panel and its ability to conduct a bipartisan and independent inquiry into Moscow's interference in the 2016 presidential race.

President Trump's Disapproval Rate

No president wants to make history when it comes to high disapproval. However, per a Gallup poll this week, President Trump has the highest disapproval rate of any president this early in his tenure. Trump's approval fell to 37 percent in polls conducted by both Gallup and by Quinnipiac. His disapproval numbers are setting records, reaching 58 percent in Gallup and 56 in Quinnipiac. Both are disapproval numbers never before reached by any president in his first two months.

DNA Science Could Improve Shale Well Productivity

About a dozen U.S. shale companies are looking to improve their well productivity and reduce costs with the help of a DNA science technique. The technique can reveal which areas have the biggest potential by testing DNA extracts from microbes found in shale and comparing them with the DNA of oil produced. This technique could help shale drillers reduce production costs by about 10 percent and start pumping faster.