



*Week of 7-31-17  
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### **Congressional Overview**

The House and Senate will meet for pro forma sessions throughout August, but will not return for legislative business until September. Meanwhile, the Senate convened this week to consider pending executive and judicial nominations. Sen. John McCain (R-AZ) started treatment for his brain cancer at the Mayo Clinic Hospital in Phoenix. During that time, Sen. McCain will maintain a work schedule, and he plans to return to Washington at the conclusion of the August recess.

### **Congress to Focus on Appropriations Bills in September**

Members of Congress are looking toward September now for any further action on the budget or appropriations. Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) expressed hope that spending negotiations this fall would follow the model laid out earlier this year when lawmakers and the Trump administration reached a deal on the \$1.07 trillion omnibus spending bill. To date, the Senate Appropriations Committee has approved six of the 12 spending bills. The House Appropriations Committee has approved all 12 of its FY 18 spending bills with four of the bills approved on the floor of the House last week.

House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-CA) stated the House will vote on all eight remaining FY 18 spending bills and the budget resolution in September. Republicans are looking to increase defense spending, but Democrats have said domestic spending needs to increase equally with defense spending. Both parties will have to reach a bipartisan budget agreement. Similar negotiations took place in 2013 and 2015.

Both agreements led to two-year budget deals that increased discretionary spending above the Budget Control Act caps that are set to return in FY 18. Bipartisan, bicameral negotiations to increase the \$1.065 trillion discretionary spending cap have not yet begun. Without agreed-to spending levels before the end of September, Congress will need to pass a continuing resolution (CR) to keep the government funded into the new fiscal year until a budget deal can be reached, probably sometime at the end of November.

### **Senate Committee to Hold Bipartisan Hearings on Healthcare**

The Senate Health Committee will begin holding bipartisan hearings the first week of September on how to stabilize and strengthen the individual insurance market. Sen. Lamar Alexander (R-TN), the chairman of the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee, said the goal is for the panel to craft a bipartisan, short-term proposal by mid-September, as insurers must finalize how much their premiums will cost by the end of that month.

### **House Appropriators Looking at Funding for Border Wall**

House Republican appropriators who back President Donald Trump's \$1.6 billion request to begin building a wall on the U.S.-Mexico border are considering how to get him the money if a House-passed minibuss appropriations package does not become law. House appropriators acknowledged the Senate is unlikely to take up the nearly \$790 billion, four-bill spending package, which includes the wall money, because its allocation for defense spending would violate current budget law.

The bill passed the House on Thursday, 235-192. The border wall allocation, requested by President Trump in March and originally included in the House's FY 18 Homeland Security appropriations bill, would fund construction of 74 miles of new construction in the Rio Grande Valley of southern Texas and the San Diego area.

### **Treasury Secretary Warns Congressional Leaders About Debt Limit**

In a letter to Congressional leaders, Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said the "extraordinary measures" being taken by his department in light of the debt limit are reaching their limits. He said that a "debt issuance suspension period," previously determined to last until July 28, 2017, will continue through Sept. 29. He wrote, "Based upon our available information, I believe that it is critical that Congress act to increase the nation's borrowing authority by September 29, 2017. I urge Congress to act promptly on this important matter."

### **Senate FY 18 Defense Authorization Bill Consideration Delayed Until September**

The chances were already slim that the Senate would take up the FY 18 defense authorization measure before the scheduled Aug. 11 start of recess. Those chances slipped to none when Sen. Rand Paul (R-KY) objected to bringing up the bill, because he has not been able to secure agreement for votes on a pair of amendments to the authorization bill that he is championing. Senate leaders had indicated they were willing to work to ensure that Sen. McCain could manage the authorization bill this year. However, given that he will not be back in the Capitol until September, the authorization bill will not be considered until after that time.

The Senate's version of the authorization bill empowers the Pentagon and other security agencies to spend \$692 billion in the coming fiscal year, and the measure also prescribes a number of policies. These include new provisions to improve Defense Department acquisitions, one of McCain's priorities. The House passed its \$688.5 billion version of the measure on July 14.

### **President Trump Russian Sanctions Bill**

President Trump signed a bipartisan sanctions bill that passed in both the House and Senate with veto-proof majorities on Wednesday. The bill imposes new sanctions on Russia, Iran and North Korea. While the president signed the bill, he made it clear that he did not fully agree with it because it "[limits] the executive's flexibility...makes it harder for the United States to strike good deals for the American people, and will drive China, Russia and North Korea much closer together." Trump also touted his business success, saying he can make better deals with foreign countries than Congress.

### **Advisory Commission Urges President Trump to Declare Opioid Abuse a National Emergency**

An advisory commission urged President Donald Trump to declare a national emergency with regard to opioid abuse and addiction, among other recommendations to address a crisis that is claiming upward of 30,000 lives every year. An emergency declaration "would empower your Cabinet to take bold steps and would force Congress to focus on funding," said a new draft report from the White House.

### **Trump Administration Requests Delay on Hydraulic Fracturing Rule**

On July 27, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) asked the 10th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals to indefinitely delay a decision on whether an Obama-era hydraulic fracturing rule is legal until the government repeals and replaces it. Since the process of replacing the rule could take up to five years, the BLM asked the appeals court to leave in place the current ruling by a Wyoming federal district judge, which deemed the regulation illegal, until a new rule comes into effect.