



*Week of 1-18-16
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Congressional Overview

This week the Senate filibustered a House-passed bill that would tighten screenings of Syrian and Iraqi refugees, and the House was not in session.

When Was the Last Time all Appropriations Bills were Passed on Time?

When was the last time all appropriation bills were passed on time? Last year, the Congressional Research Service (CRS) said it was 1996, but Senator Mitch McConnell (R-KY) said he hopes to complete the bills on schedule "for the first time since 1994." So, who's right? It turns out they both are correct, depending on the fine print. The CRS report states that the last time all appropriations bills were completed before the start of the new fiscal year, without requiring continuing resolutions, was in 1996. However, six of the spending bills that year were combined into an omnibus catchall package, the CRS acknowledged in a footnote of its report.

CBO Releases Projections Showing \$1 Trillion Deficit Increase Over the Next Decade

On Tuesday, the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) released new tax and spending baselines and it's expected the projections will show a substantial increase in the deficit, roughly \$1 trillion or more in red ink over the next decade. Per the CBO, "Unlike past deteriorations in the budget outlook that were the result of factors outside policymakers' control, the primary reason the deficit will be worse now is legislation enacted by Congress. Higher deficit projections will make it much harder to balance the budget and raise more questions about the viability of tax-cut plans from presidential candidates."

Per the CBO, a package approved last month to make many popular tax breaks permanent without any spending cuts to make up for the lost revenue will add \$680 billion to deficits over the next decade. The approved "doc fix," which avoids planned reductions in Medicare reimbursements to doctors, will add \$141 billion to deficits over 10 years, and the CBO is expected to lower its projections for economic growth, which will further reduce revenue.

Representatives Pen Multiemployer Pension Reform Letter

On Tuesday, Reps. Jim Renacci (R-OH), Marcy Kaptur (D-OH), Pat Tiberi (R-OH), Michael Turner (R-OH) and Rick Nolan (D-MN) sent a letter to Thomas Nylan (Executive Director of Central States, Southeast and Southwest Areas) requesting that "we explore alternative solutions that could prevent massive cuts to a specific segment of retirees."

Additionally, the representatives requested "an analysis of raising the Multiemployer Pension Reform Act's (MPRA) mandated benefit to a higher level between 120-150 percent and any recommended policy proposals to amend the MPRA that would provide Central States with greater flexibility to ensure long-term solvency." Finally, they requested "that Central States meet with Congress during the first two weeks of February to discuss next steps regarding the above and the economic impact the reduction of retiree benefits will have on consumer spending in their local communities."

President Obama Proposes Changes to Unemployment Insurance

On Saturday, Jan. 16, President Obama proposed changes to the U.S. unemployment insurance system that he says would offer more security to the jobless and encourage experienced workers to rejoin the workforce, even if it means

taking a pay cut. The president's proposal would require states to provide wage insurance to workers who lose their jobs and find new employment at lower pay. The insurance would replace half of the lost income, up to \$10,000 over two years.

It would be available to workers who were with their prior employer for three years and make less than \$50,000 in their new job. Also, the proposal would require states to make unemployment insurance available to many part-time and low-income workers, and it would mandate that states provide at least 26 weeks of unemployment insurance. Currently, nine states fall short of the benchmark. The proposal comes as U.S. businesses, outside the manufacturing sector, are experiencing strong demand and adding employees. A recent government employment report showed that employers added a net 292,000 jobs in December as the unemployment rate held at 5 percent.

Vice President Biden Announces Upcoming Executive Order as Part of New Cancer Initiative

Vice President Biden said the White House will soon issue an executive order as part of its new cancer initiative that will bring data from every major agency, including the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and FDA, together in one place. NIH Director Francis Collins told the vice president that data sharing was a high priority for NIH and that anybody getting dollars from NIH to carry out this research will need to make that data accessible.

British Columbia's Proposed Lead and Crystalline Silica Amendments

Two proposed amendments to British Columbia's provincial Occupational Health and Safety Regulation regarding use and control of products containing lead and respirable crystalline silica and rock dust are now open for public feedback. Public hearings on the amendments are scheduled to begin March 31. Both amendments stress risk assessments and exposure limits. Under the amendments, employers would have to ensure that workers exposed to all the named substances receive adequate training for safe work practices and procedures, as well as education on the purpose and limitations of personal protective equipment.