



*Week of 1-2-17
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Congressional Overview

This week Congress convened to start the 115th Congress. Republicans retained control over both chambers of Congress in the past election, with a 241-194 majority in the House and a 52-46 majority in the Senate.

President-Elect Trump's FY 18 Budget

President-elect Donald Trump plans to submit a FY 18 budget request to Congress, but it may not come until later in the spring. While it is the usual practice of presidents to submit a budget for the fiscal year beginning after their election, there was a lack of certainty about whether Trump would and even some speculation he would skip it. Rep. Mick Mulvaney (R-SC), Trump's pick for director of the White House Office of Management and Budget, confirmed that the president-elect will submit a FY 18 budget.

House Proposal to Abolish Appropriations Committee Defeated

Earlier this week at the House GOP Conference, House leaders and appropriators had to beat back a proposal to change House rules to abolish the Appropriations Committee. The amendment, by House Intelligence Chairman Devin Nunes (R-CA) would have upended the appropriations process used since 1974 by abolishing the spending panel and letting each House standing committee be responsible for funding its own projects and programs.

The amendment was defeated by a vote of 137-49, but the challenge showed that about a quarter of the House Republican Conference is frustrated by the appropriations process and they are willing to overthrow it. Incoming House Appropriations Chairman Rodney Frelinghuysen (R-NJ), said that overhauling the committee system now would create, "a major distraction and invite discord within our conference."

House Considering New Congressional Measure Designed to Cut Spending

The House is considering rules for the new Congress that include a measure designed to cut spending. A draft text circulated last month included a provision that would revive an old House rule from the early 1980s that took aim at federal employees. The rule, which was eliminated in 1983, would allow members to offer floor amendments to spending bills to reduce the headcount of the federal workforce within a department or agency or adjust salaries for certain federal workers.

Such amendments in more recent years have been deemed to violate restraints against legislating through the appropriations process, although appropriators often disregard that restriction. The experimental return of the so-called Holman Rule would apply for only one year, according to the draft resolution text. The purpose would be "to see if the reinstatement of the Holman Rule will provide members with additional tools to reduce spending."

Secretary of State Confirmation Hearing for Rex Tillerson Tentatively Scheduled

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee has tentatively scheduled a Jan. 11 confirmation hearing for Exxon-Mobil CEO Rex Tillerson, the nominee to become the next Secretary of State. Tillerson is expected to be questioned about whether and how he intends to financially separate himself from Exxon, which under his current retirement agreement owes him dividend payments that could be boosted if U.S. sanctions restricting the oil conglomerate's work in Russia are ended. The top Republican and Democratic members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee

are split on seeking Tillerson's tax returns. Senator Ben Cardin (D-MD) has sought the nominee's tax filings and says that Tillerson has promised to furnish the details, but Chairman Bob Corker (R-TN) said it was not customary for the committee to seek tax filings from nominees unless there were irregularities in their financial disclosures.

Senate Majority Leader McConnell Plans to Lay Groundwork for Repeal of Affordable Care Act

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) plans to bring a fiscal 2017 budget resolution to the floor that would pave the way for repeal of the Affordable Care Act. The resolution will include a fast-track provision known as reconciliation instructions that would allow Senate Republicans to repeal the law without the risk of Democrats blocking it. Passing tax and spending items through reconciliation requires only a simple majority vote, instead of the 60-vote threshold normally needed for bills to advance under Senate rules.

Some Republican senators have voiced concerns about plans to repeal the healthcare law without figuring out how to replace it first. GOP leaders have promised a "transition period" that delays the actual repeal until a replacement is ready, to avoid throwing 20 million Americans off their healthcare plans, but it's not clear how long a transition period would last or how long it would take before Republicans reach consensus on a replacement.

New Leading Contender for Chairperson of House Budget Committee

Rep. Diane Black (R-TN) has emerged as a leading contender to become the chairwoman of the House Budget Committee. The post is open because President-elect Trump named the committee's current chairman, Rep. Tom Price (R-GA), as his choice to head the Department of Health and Human Services. Price has suggested he would remain chairman until confirmed by the Senate for his Cabinet position. Indiana Republican Todd Rokita, the committee's vice chairman, was seen as Price's natural successor, but Rep. Rokita expressed support last week for Black. Black, who begins her fourth term in Congress, worked for decades as an emergency room and long-term-care nurse. She has said the implementation of TennCare, a state insurance program in Tennessee, drew her into government.