



*Week of 12-5-16
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Congressional Overview

Congress passed another short-term funding bill late Friday night, avoiding a government shutdown by less than an hour. The bill will keep the federal government funded through late April. While originally expected to easily pass through Congress, the bill hit a snag in the Senate over the United Mine Workers' retiree health and pension benefits.

Additionally, this week, the Senate passed the 21st Century Cures Act, a \$6.3 billion bill that funds a variety of measures: Vice President Biden's "cancer moonshot," President Obama's Precision Medicine Initiative, a major Alzheimer's research program, a significant grant to address the opioid crisis, along with reforms that quicken the drug and device approval review process at the Food and Drug Administration. Once completed, the Senate passed the annual defense-policy bill, which includes the largest troop pay raise in six years.

Congress is now in recess until Tuesday, Jan. 3.

Congress Passes Continuing Resolution

With less than an hour to spare, the Senate passed a continuing resolution to keep the federal government funded through April 28. The bill was held up in the Senate over a provision to provide support to the United Mine Workers' retiree benefits. The provision funded health benefits through April 28 using money from the Abandoned Mine Reclamation Fund. Senate Democrats pushed for longer-term funding for the provision and for the provision to also cover pension benefits.

The resolution contains \$872 million in funding for the 21st Century Cure Act (\$20 million for the FDA, \$352 million for the NIH and \$500 million in grants for states to address opioid abuse). The bill also includes language designed to speed confirmation of retired General James Mattis to be Donald Trump's defense secretary. The language lowers the waiting period from seven to three years, which would ease General Mattis' path to confirmation.

Senate Passes 21st Century Cures Act

The 21st Century Cures Act was passed by the Senate this week and the new version of the bill is nearly 1,000 pages long and includes provisions to streamline the research and development of medical products, overhaul the mental-health system, and make changes to Medicare. The legislation lowers the amount of money designated for the National Institutes of Health (NIH) from the originally slated \$8.75 billion to \$4.8 billion, and it is no longer mandatory but instead must be appropriated each year. There is also \$500 million for the FDA and \$1 billion in grants for states to address the opioid crisis.

President-Elect Trump's FY 18 Budget

Although the Congressional Budget Act requires the president to submit the fiscal 2018 budget to Congress between Jan. 2 and Feb. 6, President-Elect Trump could easily say that it was the responsibility of the outgoing Obama administration to comply with the law before the new president is sworn in on Jan. 20. While the new president not sending a budget to Congress might not be illegal, it would clearly be unprecedented. Every in-coming president since the Congressional Budget Act went into effect in the mid-1970s has submitted a budget. In many years, those budgets (or amendments to the outgoing president's final budget) were submitted months after the first-Monday-in-

February deadline and were truncated versions of the usual multi-volume presentation. However, a fiscal plan with the new president's priorities has been consistently released for over four decades.

House Democrats Create Four New Leadership Positions

Last week, the House Democrats filled four new leadership posts, which were created by the caucus in response to cries for broad changes following the party's poor performance at the polls this year. As part of that restructuring, Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-OH) carved out new leadership posts reserved for a lawmaker serving five terms or fewer. The new members include Reps. Tony Cardenas (D-CA), Cheri Bustos (D-IL), Hakeem Jeffries (D-NY) and David Cicilline (D-RI). Democrats also voted to grant Rep. Michelle Lujan (D-NM) another two-year term at the helm of the party's campaign branch.

House Republican Committee Assignments Delayed Until January

Speaker Paul Ryan (R-WI) has decided that his House colleagues will not receive their committee assignments until January after they cast a public vote on the House floor for Speaker. The move has sparked behind-the-scenes grumbling from a handful of Ryan critics, who say the delay allows him and the Speaker-aligned Steering Committee to dole out committee assignments based on political loyalty rather than merit or expertise. The first vote of the new Congress is set for Jan. 3. Some are saying that this move sends an unmistakable message to Ryan's detractors: "if you are going to shoot at the king, don't miss!"

Senate Renames Cancer Moonshot Project After VP Biden's Son

By unanimous consent, the Senate agreed on a separate resolution (H Con Res 174) to rename the cancer moonshot project the "Beau Biden Cancer Moonshot." Vice President Biden, who was presiding over the vote, teared up as Senate leaders, particularly Minority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV), talked about the cancer moonshot efforts and Biden's late son Beau. A clerk swiveled around in her chair and snuck Kleenex to Biden, who hid them in his hands below the presiding officer's desk until he needed to wipe his eyes.

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Denies Easement for the Dakota Pipeline

On Dec. 4, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers announced "...[it] would not grant an easement for the Dakota Access Pipeline and it would look for alternative routes and analyze more closely the environmental impact of the project."