

This Week in Washington

March 30, 2012

DOMESTIC POLICY MATTERS

Budget & Appropriations. The House of Representatives on Thursday approved Budget Committee Chairman Paul Ryan's (R-Wisconsin) Fiscal Year 2013 Budget Resolution by a vote of 228 to 191. Ten Republicans joined the entire Democratic caucus in voting against the measure, which sets an overall discretionary spending cap at \$1.028 trillion – \$19 billion less than the cap established by last year's Budget Control Act. The Democratic-controlled Senate has vowed to stick with the \$1.047 trillion cap set last year, and thus is unlikely to take up the Republican-supported House resolution. Appropriators in both chambers held their final round of hearings this week in preparation to mark-up their respective appropriations bills soon after they return from the April recess. On Thursday, a group of Republican senators held a press conference to urge Congress to take action to prevent sequestration and request a meeting with President Obama to negotiate a deal to avert the automatic cuts. Congress recessed Friday, returning April 16th.

Supreme Court: Health Care Law Case. On Wednesday, the U.S. Supreme Court wrapped up its third and final day of oral arguments on the 2010 health care reform law, which included debate about the constitutionality of the individual mandate, the severability of the law if other portions are struck down, and the Medicaid expansion provisions. A decision is not expected until June.

The House overwhelmingly passed (380-41) the **Jumpstart Our Business Startups (JOBS) Act** on Tuesday, which seeks to make it easier for growing companies to attract investors and comply with securities laws, sending the measure to President Obama for his expected signature. After President Obama made a speech Thursday morning supporting the measure, Senate Democrats failed (51-47) to limit debate on legislation that would **end some tax breaks** for oil and gas companies while providing new ones to renewable fuel and green energy enterprises. Also Thursday, Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nevada) filed to invoke cloture on a bill to impose the **"Buffet Rule,"** which would require a phased-in 30 percent tax on taxpayers with an annual income greater than \$1 million, setting up a likely vote when the Senate returns on April 16th.

A Senate Armed Services Committee hearing on Tuesday pitted Senator Joe Lieberman's (I-Connecticut) **cybersecurity** measure against Ranking Member John McCain's (R-Arizona) when the Senators disagreed about the need for new government standards and which department – Defense or Homeland Security – was best suited to help protect private sector computer networks from attack. Meanwhile, House Republicans introduced a companion measure on Tuesday that mirrors Ranking Member McCain's proposal.

Thursday, the House and Senate passed a "clean" 90-day surface **transportation reauthorization extension**, which heads to the President's desk for enactment before those programs expire on Saturday. After passing the House, several Senate Democrats attempted to amend the extension (H.R. 4281) by replacing it with MAP-21, the Senate-passed two-year reauthorization of surface transportation programs. Those attempts failed to secure unanimous consent, and Senate eventually passed the House bill without any amendments.

Political News. Former Pennsylvania Senator Rick Santorum won the Louisiana Republican presidential primary on Saturday, while former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney placed second, and former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich placed third. Gingrich's campaign announced on Tuesday that they would cut back their schedule, replace the campaign manager, and lay off a third of their full-time staff in order to focus on a "big-choice convention strategy" moving forward. Senator Marco Rubio (R-Florida), a potential Vice Presidential candidate, endorsed Mitt Romney for President on Thursday.

FOREIGN POLICY MATTERS.

Syrian Conflict. Early this week, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad indicated he would accept U.N.-Arab League Special Envoy Kofi Annan's ceasefire plan to end the violence in Syria. Days later, with no signs Syrian forces were standing down, a letter from Assad reportedly conditioned his acceptance upon assurance that foreign assistance to the Syrian opposition would cease. The Arab League Summit convened Tuesday in Iraq, with Syria at the top of the agenda. Despite the League's support for the Annan plan, Senate Minority Whip Jon Kyl (R-Arizona) joined Senators John McCain, Lindsey Graham (R-South Carolina), Joe Lieberman (I-Connecticut) and John Hoeven, (R-North Dakota) in unveiling a resolution calling on President Obama to work with regional partners "to provide the people of Syria with the means to defend themselves against Bashar al-Assad and his forces, including through the provision of weapons and other material support." The resolution faces a generally skeptical Senate. Senator McCain also spoke out in favor of options that include air strikes. The next Friends of Syria meeting begins Sunday in Turkey; Secretary Clinton will attend.

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Iran. The Treasury Department announced additional sanctions this week against entities connected to the network of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and with Iran's national maritime carrier, Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines. On Thursday, after amending S. Res. 80 and removing the call for the White House to sanction Iran for human rights abuses, the Senate adopted by voice vote the bipartisan resolution urging Iran to release imprisoned Baha'i leaders. On Friday, Turkish Energy Minister Taner Yildiz said Turkey will reduce the amount of oil it buys from Iran by around 10 percent, a week after Washington warned Iran's oil customers they could be subject to U.S. sanctions unless oil purchases were significantly cut.

Early this week, President Obama attended the **Nuclear Security Summit** in Seoul. On the margins, the President met with **Ukrainian President** Viktor Yanukovich, expressing appreciation for the complete removal of highly enriched uranium from Ukraine. Largely stemming from whispered comments between President Obama and **Russian President** Dmitry Medvedev over a live microphone at the Summit, Representative Michael Turner (R-Ohio) demanded Wednesday that White House officials provide a description of what he called "secret plans" between President Obama and Russia to "limit the deployment, use and scope" of a missile defense system. On Tuesday, Senate Foreign Relations Ranking Member Richard Lugar (R-Indiana) announced his strong support for the **Sergei Magnitsky Rule of Law Accountability Act of 2011**, joining several lawmakers in opposing the repeal of the 1974 *Jackson-Vanick* law if the Magnitsky bill does not become law. Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman John Kerry (D-Massachusetts) also agreed to hold a vote on the *Magnitsky Act* some time in April. While in Korea, President Obama also visited the demilitarized zone, saying "**North Korea** will achieve nothing by threats or by provocations." On Thursday, North Korea began fueling a rocket the U.S. and its allies consider to be a long-range missile test attempt.

Secretary Clinton met Tuesday with **Estonian Foreign Minister** Urmas Paet; afterwards they announced the United States and Estonia have agreed to co-chair a new initiative – the **Network for Leaders Engaged in New Democracies** (LEND) – an online platform that will connect leaders from emerging democracies with former presidents, prime ministers, and others who have helped lead democratic transitions in their own countries. LEND is expected to be rolled out later this year in **Tunisia**. Meanwhile, on Friday, Secretary Clinton traveled to Riyadh, **Saudi Arabia**, meeting with King Abdullah and Foreign Minister Prince Saud al-Faisal and discussing **Syria** and **Iran**. This Sunday, the Secretary will also attend the First Ministerial Meeting of the Gulf Cooperation Council-U.S. Strategic Cooperation Forum before heading to **Turkey** for a meeting with the Syrian opposition. Before breaking for the April recess, in separate voice votes, the Senate adopted several foreign policy resolutions, such as measures that: urge **Sudan** to allow humanitarian access to border states and welcome last month's cooperation agreement between Sudan and **South Sudan** (S Res 397); condemn violence against journalists in **Syria** (S Res 391); and call on **China** to respect Tibet (S Res 356).

Africa News. After last week's coup d'état, Mali's military regime is increasingly facing international isolation as the West Africa regional block – ECOWAS – countries sealed their borders with **Mali**. On Thursday, Secretary Clinton announced the United States will allocate an additional \$120 million in humanitarian assistance to the **Sahel region**, providing targeted humanitarian assistance that addresses acute malnutrition and hunger, and also focuses on long-term approaches to establishing food security. Secretary Clinton applauded the people of **Senegal** on Monday for a "peaceful and well-managed presidential election," congratulating Macky Sall for his election and thanking Abdoulaye Wade for his twelve years of leadership.

This past week, President Obama announced his **intent to nominate** the following individuals: Patricia Falcone to be Associate Director for National Security and International Affairs in the Office of Science and Technology Policy; Douglas Griffiths to be U.S. Ambassador to Mozambique (State); Michael Peter Huerta to be Administrator of the Federal Aviation Administration (Transportation); Brett McGurk to be U.S. Ambassador to Iraq (State); and Michele Sison to be U.S. Ambassador to Sri Lanka and the Maldives (State). Also this week, Senate Armed Services Committee Ranking Member John McCain said he will **not support any Pentagon nominees** until his concerns that congressional mandates in the Fiscal Year 2012 Defense Authorization bill are addressed, such as the yet-to-be-initiated mandated independent study examining U.S. security interests, force posture, and deployment plans in East Asia and the Pacific region. Meanwhile, late Thursday, Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nevada) and Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Kentucky) announced an agreement had been reached that prevents White House recess appointments during the April break, allowing for the **confirmation of more than 70** of President Obama's nominees to positions in various federal departments and agencies – including U.S. Ambassadors to Libya, Tunisia, Malta, Georgia, Kosovo, Croatia, Estonia, Latvia, India, Haiti, Barbados, Panama, Uruguay, Nicaragua, and the Togolese Republic; as well as Roberta Jacobson as Assistant Secretary of Western Hemisphere Affairs (State) and Earl Gast as Assistant Administrator for Africa (USAID).