

Policy News & Monthly Review

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President Trump releases infrastructure proposal

Date: Monday, February 12, 2018

In conjunction with the fiscal year (FY) 2019 budget request, President Donald Trump released his Legislative Outline for Rebuilding Infrastructure in America on February 12. The proposal asks Congress to act soon on infrastructure legislation that will stimulate at least \$1.5 trillion in new investment over the next ten years, shorten the process for approving projects to two years or less, address unmet rural infrastructure needs, empower state and local authorities, and train the American workforce of the future.

House chamber

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Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018 raises budget caps and directs disaster relief funding to federal agencies

Date: Friday, February 9, 2018

For the second time in 2018, the federal government went into a partial shutdown on February 9 – this time for just under nine hours – until H.R.1892 passed both the House and Senate and was signed into law by President Trump. The bill funds the federal government at fiscal year (FY) 2017 levels until March 23, 2018, raises the budget caps for FY 2018 and FY 2019 by almost \$300 billion, increases the debt limit through March 1, 2019, and provides nearly \$90 billion in disaster relief for recent fires and hurricanes.



Second session of 115th Congress begins with new members and shifting committee assignments

Date: Wednesday, January 31, 2018

After the second session of the 115th Congress began on January 3, two new members were sworn into the Senate – Doug Jones (D-AL) and Tina Smith (D-MN) – bringing the party numbers to 51 Republicans, 47 Democrats, and 2 Independents. There is now a one-vote margin separating the majority and minority for each committee in the Senate, except the Judiciary Committee which has a two-vote margin. House committee assignments have also shifted in the second session, with the Energy and Commerce Committee welcoming four incoming Republican members and new leadership announced in the Science, Space, and Technology Committee.



Two-year delay to WOTUS applicability date finalized after the Supreme Court ruled that challenges belong in federal district courts

Date: Wednesday, January 31, 2018

On January 22, the U.S. Supreme Court unanimously ruled that any challenges to the Waters of the United States (WOTUS) Rule must be filed in federal district courts, not federal courts of appeals. While the Supreme Court's ruling would have permitted enforcement of the WOTUS Rule in 37 states, the EPA and USACE finalized a rule on January 31 that creates a new applicability

date for the WOTUS rule two years from now.



Federal Register: January 2018

Date: Wednesday, January 31, 2018

Summary of the relevant notices posted to the Federal Register in January 2018 from various federal science agencies, including the Department of Energy (DOE), Department of the Interior (DOI), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), National Science Foundation (NSF) and more.



Directors of NSF and NIST testify regarding progress on implementing the American Innovation and Competitiveness Act

Date: Tuesday, January 30, 2018

On January 30, the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation held a hearing to discuss the implementation of the American Innovation and Competitiveness Act (AICA). The AICA reauthorized and updated policies at the National Science Foundation (NSF), the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP), and other federal science agencies.



President Trump briefly covers energy and infrastructure issues in 2018 State of the Union address

Date: Tuesday, January 30, 2018

President Donald Trump delivered his first State of the Union address to a joint session of Congress on January 30. Despite the administration's efforts over the past year to make energy independence and dominance a priority, the President only made a few passing remarks relating to energy and natural resource issues during his speech. "We have ended the war on American energy, and we have ended the war on beautiful, clean coal," President Trump stated, adding that, "We are now, very proudly, an exporter of energy to the world."



Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee holds hearing on natural hazards programs

Date: Tuesday, January 30, 2018

On January 30, the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources held a full committee hearing to address the role of the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), U.S. Forest Service (USFS), and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) in preparing for and responding to natural hazards, as well as the current status of mapping and monitoring systems. Several witnesses testified regarding early warning systems and programs for earthquake, volcano, and tsunami hazards.

Earth from Space showing Africa and Antarctica

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White House announces intent to nominate Director of the U.S. Geological Survey and re-nominates heads of key science agencies

Date: Friday, January 26, 2018

President Donald Trump announced his intent to nominate Dr. James Reilly to be Director of the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) at the Department of the Interior. After a 13-year career at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), Dr. Reilly currently serves as a technical advisor on space operations for the U.S. Air Force's National Security Space Institute in Colorado Springs, Colorado. Dr. Reilly worked for 15 years as an oil and gas exploration geologist with Enserch Exploration, Inc. prior to joining NASA. After 98 presidential nominees were rejected on January 3, President Trump sent a list of several of these nominations back to the Senate on January 8 seeking to fill other key science positions in his administration.



Politicians debate efforts to improve the nation's electrical grid

Date: Tuesday, January 23, 2018

The Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee held a hearing on January 23 that underscored concerns surrounding the reliability and resiliency of the electrical power system, particularly under certain weather conditions. Experts on the witness panel discussed the overall performance of nation's grid during recent cold weather events, and potential areas for improvement.



Three-day government shutdown ends with fourth continuing appropriations bill for 2018

Date: Monday, January 22, 2018

The federal government went into a three-day partial shutdown after the Senate rejected a short-term spending agreement that passed in the House to keep agencies funded past January 19. The shutdown ended when both chambers passed and President Donald Trump signed H.R.195 into law on the night of January 22. H.R.195 funds the government at FY 2017 levels through February 8, extends funding for the Children's Health Insurance Program for six years through FY 2023, and delays the enactment of three health care related taxes.



House energy subcommittee holds oversight hearing to discuss permitting for offshore seismic surveys

Date: Friday, January 19, 2018

On January 19, the House Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources held an oversight hearing to identify and examine regulatory obstacles to offshore geological and geophysical resource surveying on the U.S. Outer Continental Shelf (OCS). The hearing was held in response to a December 2017 Government Accountability Office (GAO) report detailing the permitting process for seismic research and identifies instances of inefficiency and inconsistency in meeting federal internal control standards. Congress is seeking compromises within the regulatory framework that would allow the U.S. to understand our offshore resource potential and ensure national energy security, while also minimizing the negative effects of anthropogenic noise in the marine environment.



NSF report on the state of U.S. science shows America in the lead as China rapidly advances

Date: Thursday, January 18, 2018

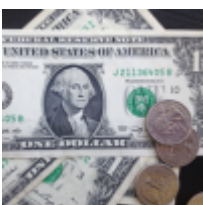
According to the National Science Foundation's (NSF) Science and Engineering Indicators 2018 report released on January 18, the U.S. is currently the global leader in science and technology (S&T), though our nation's share of global S&T activities is declining as others continue to rise. This year's report indicates that the U.S. invests the most in research and development (R&D), attracts the highest venture capital, awards the most advanced degrees, and is the largest producer in high-technology manufacturing sectors. However, U.S. leadership in the global science and engineering landscape is being challenged by rapidly developing nations, particularly China.



Interior Department announces plans for U.S. Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program

Date: Thursday, January 18, 2018

Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke announced his plans for the development of the National Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program (National OCS Program) for 2019-2024. The new Draft Proposed Program (DPP) aims to make more than 98 percent of the undiscovered, technically recoverable oil and gas resources in the OCS available for leasing and exploration. Less than a week after release of the DPP, Secretary Zinke informally announced that all of Florida's coastline would be removed from consideration in the proposed five-year leasing program, prompting questions from various lawmakers and other stakeholders about the apparent preferential treatment given to the state.



Department of the Interior mandates political review for grants of at least \$50K to universities and nonprofits

Date: Tuesday, January 16, 2018

The Department of the Interior (DOI) is now mandating review by a political appointee for all grants and cooperative agreements with an individual or aggregate award of at least \$50,000 to a nonprofit organization that can legally engage in advocacy or to an institution of higher education, and for all grants or cooperative agreements of over \$100,000. In the memo, DOI's principal deputy assistant secretary for policy, management, and budget instructed other assistant secretaries and heads of bureaus and offices to submit qualifying grants and agreements to one of his senior advisors for approval.



FERC rejects Department of Energy proposal to subsidize coal and nuclear plants

Date: Monday, January 8, 2018

On January 8, the Federal Energy Regulation Commission (FERC) rejected a proposal that was submitted by Secretary of Energy Rick Perry in September 2017 to subsidize the operating costs of coal and nuclear power plants, since the rule did not satisfy certain statutory standards. However, FERC also recognized that this issue warrants further attention and initiated a new proceeding to specifically evaluate the resilience of the bulk power system in certain operating regions.



Senate passes bipartisan ocean monitoring and research act

Date: Monday, January 8, 2018

On January 8, the Senate unanimously passed Senator Roger Wicker's (R-MS) Coordinated Ocean Monitoring and Research Act (S.1425). The bipartisan bill revises and reauthorizes the Integrated Coastal and Ocean Observation System (ICOOS) Act of 2009, which established the Integrated Ocean Observing System (IOOS) to consolidate and coordinate the efforts of hundreds of federal, state, and local observing programs through fiscal year (FY) 2021. In addition to reauthorizing the ICOOS Act, S.1425 promotes best practices regarding data sharing for public use, investment in autonomous unmanned underwater and surface ocean research vehicles, closing gaps in high frequency radar, and assisting Coast Guard search and rescue operations.



National Academies release second decadal survey for earth observations from space

Date: Saturday, January 6, 2018

Last month, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine released a report titled *Thriving on Our Changing Planet: A Decadal Strategy for Earth Observation from Space*. Commissioned by the civilian agencies involved with space-based Earth observations – the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and the U.S. Geological Survey – the study identifies key science and application priorities for 2017-2027. The report calls for the overall U.S. government's program of Earth observations from space to be robust, resilient, and appropriately balanced, and for federal agencies to ensure efficient and effective use of U.S. resources.



Trump administration moves to revise Obama-era energy regulations through rulemaking process

Date: Friday, December 29, 2017

Following several executive orders issued by President Donald Trump, the Department of the Interior and the EPA announced rulemaking revisions to offshore drilling protections, fracking regulations, and the Clean Power Plan in the final days of 2017.

House chamber

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Congress ends session by passing tax reform and continuing federal funding into January, but delays disaster aid

Date: Friday, December 22, 2017

On December 22, President Donald Trump signed into law a bill to provide for tax reform and legislation to continue funding the federal government under fiscal year (FY) 2017 levels through January 19. Lawmakers from various states impacted by hurricanes and wildfires this year were seeking billions more in disaster aid funding, but Congress stopped short of sending an \$81 billion relief package to the President before the end of the year.



USGS releases new assessment of oil and gas resources in Alaska's North Slope, following annual lease sale

Date: Friday, December 22, 2017

On December 22, the USGS released a new assessment of undiscovered oil and gas resources in the National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska (NPR-A). Just weeks before release of the USGS report, the Bureau of Land Management held its annual oil and gas lease sale for all available tracts in the NPR-A on December 6. The sale lasted less than 10 minutes and received only 7 bids.



Congress reauthorizes U.S. Fire Administration and grant programs in wake of recent wildfire disasters

Date: Friday, December 22, 2017

Following a highly destructive wildfire season this year for the west coast, the House passed the United States Fire Administration, AFG, and SAFER Program Reauthorization Act of 2017 (H.R.4661) to reauthorize the U.S. Fire Administration, the Assistance to Firefighters Grants program, and the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response grants program through fiscal year 2023.



President Trump and Secretary Zinke sign orders to advance domestic production of critical minerals

Date: Thursday, December 21, 2017

Following the release of a USGS report on 23 mineral commodities that are critical for the U.S. economy and security, President Donald Trump signed an executive order to reduce America's dependence on foreign sources of critical minerals. Shortly after the executive order, Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke released a secretarial order on December 21 directing the initial steps to producing a nationwide geological and topographical survey of the U.S.



House passes three bipartisan bills to advance science, technology, engineering, and mathematics

Date: Wednesday, December 20, 2017

On Monday, December 18, a day that was informally declared “Science Day in Congress”, the House considered three bipartisan pieces of legislation that support careers and education in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics).



Senate Commerce Committee votes to advance earthquake and drought bills and NOAA nominee

Date: Wednesday, December 13, 2017

At an executive session on December 13, the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation approved the nomination of Barry Myers as Administrator of NOAA, the National Integrated Drought Information System (NIDIS) Reauthorization Act of 2018 and the National Earthquake Hazards Reduction Program (NEHRP) Reauthorization Act of 2017.



House Natural Resources hearing revisits U.S. dependence on foreign minerals

Date: Tuesday, December 12, 2017

On December 12, the House Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources held an oversight hearing, “Examining Consequences of America’s Growing Dependence on Foreign Minerals,” to discuss reasons for the declining self-sufficiency of the United States for mineral commodities, and the consequences of relying on foreign sources for critical minerals.



Trump administration slashes 2 Utah monuments, with ongoing reviews to spur more reductions

Date: Thursday, December 7, 2017

On December 4, following an ongoing review by the Department of the Interior of 27 national monuments, President Donald Trump signed two proclamations reducing the Bears Ears National Monument and the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument in Utah by about 85 percent and 47 percent, respectively. Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke publicly released his final report to the President one day later, which recommended modifications to national monuments in Nevada, Oregon, and California.



House lawmakers discuss Grand Staircase-Escalante during Natural Resources subcommittee hearing

Date: Wednesday, December 6, 2017

The House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Federal Lands held a legislative hearing on December 14 to consider the Grand Staircase Escalante Enhancement Act, introduced by Representative Chris Stewart (R-UT-2) to create Utah's sixth national park - the Escalante Canyons National Park and Preserve.

House chamber

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House natural resources subcommittee hearing on geothermal energy, geologic mapping, and hazards

Date: Thursday, November 30, 2017

The House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources held a hearing on November 30 to discuss a draft bill to promote timely geothermal energy exploration under federal leases, and three other bills related to geologic mapping and hazards research, monitoring, and response.



President Trump nominates Assistant Secretary of the Interior as Congress continues confirmation process for numerous nominees

Date: Wednesday, November 29, 2017

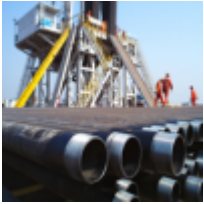
On November 13, President Donald Trump nominated Dr. Tim Petty to be Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Water and Science, with direction to oversee the U.S. Geological Survey and the Bureau of Reclamation. On November 2, the Senate confirmed by voice vote three previous nominees to serve at the Department of Energy: Steven Winberg as Assistant Secretary of Energy (Fossil Energy), Mark Wesley Menezes as Under Secretary of Energy, and Paul Dabbar as Under Secretary for Science.



Senate releases spending bill for Department of the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies

Date: Monday, November 20, 2017

The Senate Committee on Appropriations released the fiscal year 2018 appropriations legislation for Department of the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies, which outlines their proposed budget for the U.S. Geological Survey, Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, and Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement, among other agencies. The appropriations bill totals \$32.6 billion in discretionary funding, including \$12.17 billion for the Department of the Interior.



Nebraska approves Keystone XL pipeline

Date: Monday, November 20, 2017

Nebraska regulators from the Nebraska Public Service Commission approved the building of the Keystone XL pipeline on November 20.



NASA and NOAA successfully launch next-generation polar orbiting satellite

Date: Saturday, November 18, 2017

On November 18, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) launched a new satellite for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), which has significantly better imaging capabilities than any of its predecessors.



House passes legislation repealing tax exemptions of tuition waivers for graduate assistants

Date: Friday, November 17, 2017

On November 16, the House of Representatives passed H.R.1, the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, introduced by Representative Kevin Brady (R-TX-8). Generally, the bill restructures the tax code with fewer tax brackets and repeals or modifies a number of provisions. The House bill would repeal Sec. 117(d)(5) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code, which allows for the tax exemption of tuition waivers for graduate students serving as teaching and research assistants. If the provision was to become law, student taxable income would include both the graduate assistant stipend and the value of the tuition waiver.



Congress considers legislation to improve forest management in wake of recent wildfires

Date: Thursday, November 16, 2017

In response to the catastrophic wildfires in 2017 thus far, and the escalating costs of battling fire-related damages, Congress is fielding legislation to promote forest management techniques that would return resilience to overgrown, fire-prone forested lands.



House lawmakers reach deal for reauthorizing the National Flood Insurance Program

Date: Tuesday, November 14, 2017

On November 14 the House of Representatives passed legislation that would reauthorize the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) for five more years, while making several operational changes. According to the Office of Management and Budget, the NFIP is not fiscally sustainable in its present form, and is currently set to expire on December 8.



Senate takes first step to open ANWR for oil and gas leasing

Date: Wednesday, November 8, 2017

On November 8, the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources introduced reconciliation legislation, fulfilling instructions in the fiscal year 2018 budget resolution for the committee to provide legislative recommendations to the Senate Committee on the Budget that would result in \$1 billion in new revenue over ten years to offset federal tax cuts.



Trump administration releases draft of comprehensive report on latest climate science

Date: Friday, November 3, 2017

The U.S. Global Change Research Program released a draft of the highly-anticipated Fourth National Climate Assessment for public comment on November 3. The NCA is a quadrennial scientific assessment, which analyzes the impacts of both human-induced and natural global climate change, mandated by Congress in the Global Change Research Act of 1990.



Congress discusses emergency response following the 2017 hurricane season

Date: Thursday, November 2, 2017

The devastating 2017 hurricane season has prompted Congress to take action in recent months, with a number of committee hearings held in both chambers and new legislation introduced relating to natural disaster preparedness and response.

House chamber

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Texas 21st District Representative Lamar Smith will not seek re-election in 2018

Date: Thursday, November 2, 2017

Representative Lamar Smith (R-TX-21) announced in a statement shared on Twitter on November 2 that he will not seek re-election in 2018 for his seat representing the 21st district of Texas. Representative Smith has served as a member of Congress since 1987, and will complete his six-year term as Chairman of the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology at the end of the 115th Congress, which will conclude on January 3, 2019.

House chamber

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Congress passes \$36.5 billion aid package for recent natural disasters; more funds needed

Date: Thursday, October 26, 2017

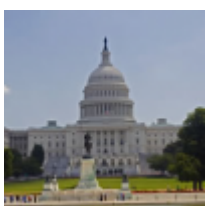
Responding to the widespread destruction from three catastrophic hurricanes, massive wildfires, and a bankrupt federal flood insurance program, the House passed a \$36.5 billion disaster aid package on October 12.



Budget resolution requires natural resource committees to find \$1 billion in increased revenue

Date: Thursday, October 19, 2017

On October 19, the Senate passed a fiscal year (FY) 2018 budget resolution (H.Con.Res.71) with an amendment in the nature of a substitute (S.Amdt.1116), which sets the stage for passing tax reform legislation. Part of the Senate amendment includes instructions for both the House Committee on Energy and Commerce and the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources to write legislative recommendations by November 13 that would result in \$1 billion in new revenue over ten years to offset federal tax cuts.



Senate hearings on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies appropriations bill canceled

Date: Thursday, October 19, 2017

The U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations has four major appropriation bills remaining to consider during the current Congressional session, including an appropriations bill for the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies, which will determine

the FY 2018 budget for the U.S.



Senator Rand Paul introduces bill to reform the federal grant review process

Date: Wednesday, October 18, 2017

On October 17, Senator Rand Paul (R-KY) introduced the BASIC Research Act, a bill that would fundamentally change how the federal government reviews research grant proposals. The bill seeks to make several changes to peer review processes and broaden public access requirements for grant applications and research results.



United States and Taiwan scrap mission for next generation radio occultation satellites

Date: Wednesday, October 18, 2017

The U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and Taiwan's Ministry of Science and Technology (MOST) agreed in a joint memorandum that the two agencies would halt plans to develop a second set of Constellation Observing System for Meteorology, Ionosphere and Climate (COSMIC) 2 satellites, known as COSMIC-2B. However, for FY18, President Trump's budget did not include a funding request for COSMIC 2B.



President Trump taps his picks to lead the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and Army Corps of Engineers; other nominees confirmed

Date: Wednesday, October 11, 2017

Setting a new record for waiting longer than any other president to nominate a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration administrator, President Donald Trump officially tapped Barry Myers, CEO of AccuWeather, to lead the federal agency in charge of weather and climate predictions, ocean and coastal research, and fisheries management.



Lawmakers consider expanding oil and gas leasing on the Outer Continental Shelf

Date: Wednesday, October 11, 2017

On October 11, the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources met to review a draft of the Accessing Strategic Resources Offshore (ASTRO) Act. Modeled after the successful revenue sharing scheme GOMESA, the ASTRO Act seeks to improve access to oil and gas resources and to provide more reliability in the federal management of OCS exploration and development.



National Science Foundation awards over \$5 million in grants to study hurricanes

Date: Tuesday, October 10, 2017

In the wake of this year's disastrous hurricane season, the National Science Foundation (NSF) has awarded 59 grants totaling \$5.3 million for projects that aim to study how hurricanes form and intensify, and how we can best respond to the devastating effects of such disasters.



Climate Solutions Caucus hits 60 members

Date: Thursday, October 5, 2017

On October 4, 2017 the Climate Solutions Caucus hit a record 60 members, with the addition of California representatives Mimi Walters (R-CA-45) and Pete Aguilar (D-CA-31).



Committees discuss forest management and wildfire mitigation

Date: Wednesday, September 27, 2017

On September 27, both the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works and the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations held hearings to explore methods of restoring the health and resiliency of national forests and to mitigate the threat of catastrophic wildfires.