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Following St. Patrick's Day Celebrations - Congress Schedules Busy Week



On Monday, the House returns after a week-long recess and begins debate on [H.R. 5](#) which would reverse parts of the 2010 health care law. House Republicans are also expected to unveil details of their fiscal 2013 budget resolution. Last fall in an effort to resolve the debt-limit battle, Congress passed the Budget Control Act that sets limits on discretionary spending for each of the next 10 years. According to published reports, House Republicans are determined to avoid reductions to the defense budget in an election year. Instead they will propose further reductions to the federal work-force and freeze federal employee pay to prevent further military spending cuts.

The Senate will shift its attention from transportation infrastructure to legislation addressing Securities and Exchange Commission rules and reauthorization of the Export-Import Bank ([HR 3606](#)).

*** Video:** "[What if your president, your senator, and your congressman knew a crisis was coming?](#)" House Committee on Budget Chairman Paul Ryan (R-WI) video preview of next week's release of the "Path to Prosperity" budget.

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House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee Returns to Water Infrastructure Needs Review

On March 21, the House Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment will return to its review of water and wastewater infrastructure financing options it began on February 28. The committee will hear from an assortment of witnesses ranging from Mayors to private capital project financing experts. As it did during the first hearing, this second part will continue to examine the half trillion in funding needs and the growing use of enforcement actions that have led to increasing demand for capital assistance to comply with enforcement orders. This new demand has exacerbated the shortfall in assistance beyond the tremendous rehabilitation and restoration needs. In some cases, it is estimated at costing between \$1 billion and \$5 billion per city. As was the case during the first hearing, an examination of financing tools such as private activity bonds, infrastructure bank concepts, and the innovative use of the SRF program are expected to serve as the key areas of the hearing's testimony.

Among the witnesses slated to appear are: Karen Massey, Director, MO Environmental Improvement and Energy Resources Authority; David Weihrauch, Water Treatment Plant Manager, Oxford, OH; Stephen Howard, Barclays Capital; Ben Grumbles, Clean Water Alliance; Lynn Broaddus, The Johnson Foundation at Wingspread; Rich Abelson, American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees; David Dornbrier, CoBank; and Ryan Schmitt, National Utility Contractors Association.

Senate Passes Surface Transportation Reauthorization Bill - Non-Starter in House

This week, the Senate, approved 74 to 22, a \$109 billion two-year surface transportation reauthorization bill, the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act ([MAP-21](#)). The bill, sponsored by Senator Barbara Boxer (D-CA), Chairman, Committee on Environment and Public Works (EPW), and Ranking Member James Inhofe (R-OK), streamlines transportation programs, establishes national policy goals and performance measures, gives states greater control over how to use federal transportation funds, and preserves funding for mass transit assistance. The bill was amended to restore a requirement for states to dedicate a specific percentage of their

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highway funds to repair bridges that are also not on the National Highway System and not located on a federal-aid highway.



According to House Republican transportation staff, the Senate bill is a non-starter. They plan to instead move a modified version of their 5-year bill ([H.R. 7](#)) with additional funding paid for through additional energy production and reforms to the federal pension program. The leadership plans to scratch the proposed “Alternative Transportation Account” and return transit, CMAQ, and research program funding to the existing funding structure.

When the House returns for business next week, it is expected to set-aside debate on the highway bill and focus attention on advancing a budget resolution that would hold discretionary spending to \$19 billion below the level previously approved under the debt limit deal last fall. The highway bill may be revisited on the House floor after the Spring recess. This timetable means Congress will need to pass a short-term extension of highway programs before the March 31 expiration.

- [Summary of Senate Finance Title](#) (PDF)
- Transportation Bill Contains Exempt-Facility Bonds for Sewage/Water Projects: The Senate bill contains a provision that would eliminate the volume cap for water sewage and water facility projects for bonds issued after the date of enactment and before January 1, 2018. Private activity bonds are tax-exempt bonds issued by state and local governments for private activities with public benefits, such as construction of low-income housing or hazardous waste facilities.

U.S. Transportation Secretary LaHood Proposes to Streamline Environmental Reviews for Transit Projects

The [proposed revisions](#) would affect actions by FTA and project sponsors. The proposed revisions are intended to streamline the FTA environmental process for transit projects in response to the Presidential Memorandum on the subject “Speeding Infrastructure Development through More Efficient and Effective Permitting and Environmental Review” of August 31, 2011.

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Alternative Energy Development in US Navy

On Monday, the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources held a hearing regarding the USS Kearsarg, an energy-efficient amphibious assault ship. Navy Secretary Ray Mabus reiterated President Obama's top energy talking points and emphasized that clean energy and conservation in the military increases fighting power while reducing costs. As oil prices rise and the cost in human life of moving fossil fuel convoys to the front lines soars, the administration maintains that the best way to reduce economic pains of oil price spikes is to reduce oil use entirely. The Navy has set out a series of concrete goals for transforming its energy use, such as using 50 percent of its energy from alternative sources by 2020. Lieutenant Commander Mark Harris testified that changes at the nation's largest naval installation could drive changes in the surrounding Virginia economy, bringing clean-technology suppliers to a new market, as well as changes in the state's politics.

Senate Hearing on Onshore and Offshore Energy Development

On March 14, the Senate Appropriations Committee's Subcommittee on Department of the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies conducted an oversight hearing to examine Federal onshore and offshore energy development programs in the Department of the Interior. The testimony given covered how programs have been restructured and the cooperation between the various government entities, as well as what is needed to continue to develop safe, effective offshore and onshore energy. Testifying at the hearing were Robert Abbey, Director, Bureau of Land Management; Tommy Beaudreau, Director, Bureau of Ocean Energy Management; and James Watson, Director, Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement.

Major Boost for First Responders

On February 22, 2012, the President signed into law "The Middle Class Tax Relief and Job Creation Act of 2012." The law included a provision securing the 700 MHz D Block spectrum and providing \$7 billion in federal funding to build a nationwide first-responders broadband network. In addition, the law provides \$135 million for State and Local Implantation Grants and \$115 million for 9-1-1 and NG 9-1-1 grants.

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Under the new law, the nationwide network deployment and operation will be overseen by the First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet), a new entity within the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) within the US Department of Commerce that is supposed to be established by August 2012.

The legislation states that T-Band agencies (radio systems operating from 470 MHz to 512 MHz) will need to relocate their narrowband LMR operations in less than a decade, so that the FCC can conduct an auction of the cleared spectrum. However, public safety entities will be allowed to keep its 700 MHz narrowband spectrum. Now that the bill has been signed into law, attention will now turn to the planning and development of this network, which is expected to take several years.

Middle Class Tax Relief and Job Creation Act of 2012 (Public Law No: 112-96)

Subtitle A: Reallocation of Public Safety Spectrum - (Sec. 6101) Directs the FCC to reallocate the 700 MHz D block spectrum for use by public safety entities in accordance with this Act.

Subtitle B (Section 6201) grants a license to the First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet) for use of 700 MHz D block spectrum and existing public safety broadband spectrum to establish a nationwide, interoperable public safety broadband network. Section 6206 outlines FirstNet's general powers and assigns responsibility to FirstNet to take all necessary actions to build, deploy, and operate a nationwide public safety broadband network. This section also outlines network policies that need to be established, requires consultation with state and local jurisdictions, and sets the termination of FirstNet's authority as 15 years after the enactment of the title.

Subtitle C (Section 6301) establishes in the U.S. Treasury the State and Local Implementation Fund. This Program will make grants to States to assist State, regional, tribal, and local jurisdictions to identify, plan, and implement the most efficient and effective way for such jurisdictions to utilize and integrate the infrastructure, equipment, and other architecture associated with the nationwide public safety broadband network to satisfy the wireless communications and data services needs of that jurisdiction (such as coverage, siting, etc.)

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New Legislation, Reports and Studies

[Budget Process Reform: Proposals and Legislative Actions in 2012](#) (PDF)

[Renewable Energy: Federal Agencies Implement Hundreds of Initiatives](#). GAO-12 260, February 27.

Renewable Energy: The Government Accountability Office (GAO) issued its report on federal agency initiatives regarding renewable energy. It found that 23 agencies implemented nearly 700 renewable energy initiatives during FY 2010. The most commonly supported energy sources were bioenergy, solar, and wind. [GAO-12-260](#). The GAO also issued an [inventory](#) of FY 2010 federal initiatives related to renewable energy.

Hearings

Senate

House

Date: March 20, Time: 10:00 am
Committee: Energy and Commerce
Hearing: American Energy Initiative

Date: March 20, Time: 10:00 am
Committee: Oversight and Government Reform
Hearing: Department of Energy Stimulus Spending

Date: March 20, Time: 2:00 pm
Committee: Appropriations
Hearing: Department of Energy Science Programs

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Date: March 20, Time: 2:00 pm
Committee: Natural Resources
Hearing: FY13 Budget: Bureau of Reclamation, Water Resources Programs, Power Marketing Administrations

Date: March 21, Time: 10:00 am
Committee: Transportation and Infrastructure
Hearing: Financing for Community Water Projects

Date: March 21, Time: 10:00 am
Committee: Appropriations
Hearing: Department of Housing and Urban Development Overview

Date: March 27, Time: 10:00 am
Committee: Agriculture
Hearing: Forest Service Land Management

Date: March 27, Time: 10:00 am
Committee: Appropriations
Hearing: Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy; Fossil Energy; Office of Electricity Delivery and Energy Reliability

Date: March 28, Time: 10:00 am
Committee: Appropriations
Hearing: Bureau of Reclamation

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