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Federal Budget Debate Blossoms

The Cherry Blossoms have bloomed and are at their peak, and like this perennial event, the federal budget debate blossomed this week when House Republicans unveiled their blueprint for the year ahead. As it turns out, the Republican budget plan envisions deeper spending cuts than agreed to in the Budget Control Act of 2011. This in itself suggests that the proposal will, like past budget blueprints, generate high decibels of debate, but result in little more than noise. As the budget debate intensified, there were indications this past week that policy making gridlock was beginning to ease. In the House, hearings into ways to address water infrastructure funding seemed to bathe in bipartisan agreement that a federal role is vital and energy legislation appeared to be headed toward congressional hearings later this spring. These telltale signs signal the growing possibility that should a Lamé Duck Session be convened after the fall elections, we will witness one of the busiest congressional Lamé Ducks in recent memory.

Budget - House Republicans Offer Path to Prosperity - Part Deux

This week, House Committee on Budget Chairman Paul Ryan (R-WI) released "[The Path to Prosperity](#)." Overall Ryan's fiscal plan would bring in \$2.73 trillion in tax revenue in 2013, compared to \$3.53 in outlays, leaving next year's deficit at just under \$800 billion. In the Senate, Budget Committee Chairman Kent Conrad (D-ND) responded to the House plan with a strong statement that the Senate will proceed

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with fiscal 2013 spending bills “based on the \$1.047 trillion cap agreed and signed into law last year.” The broader goals of Ryan’s plan will not be enacted, but the document serves as a statement of House Republican principles. The House will begin debate on the bill next week with a final passage vote expected on Thursday.

The Path to Prosperity budget plan includes the following recommendations:

- Sets a goal of reducing spending by \$5 trillion over the next 10 years
- Calls for just two income tax brackets (down from the current six) of 10 percent and 25 percent (The top rate currently is 35 percent)
- Restore more than half of the nearly \$500 billion cut from defense accounts over the coming decade by last year's budget pact
- Would eliminate the alternative minimum tax
- Calls for giving elderly Americans subsidies with which they could buy private health insurance while making major cuts to Medicare
- Calls on House committees to come up with \$116 billion worth of cuts over the next five years
- Would reduce transportation spending from \$88.6 billion in FY 2012 fiscal year to \$57.1 billion in FY 2013

[CBO Releases a Report on the Long-Term Budgetary Impact of Paths for Federal Revenues and Spending Specified by Chairman Ryan](#)

New U.S. Water Partnership Announced

On World Water Day (March 23) U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton launched a new partnership to improve water security entitled, U.S. Water Partnership (USPS). The USPS is a public-private partnership created to mobilize U.S.-based knowledge, expertise and resources to improve water security around the world.

The USPS was established by the Global Environment and Technology Foundation, with five founding partners: Global Water Challenge; Environmental Law Institute; University of North Carolina Water Institute, World Resources Institute; and the U.S. Department of State. The USPS recently expanded to include Africare; Clean Water America Alliance; Centers for Disease

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Control; The Coca-Cola Company; Department of Energy; Department of Interior; Environmental Protection Agency; U.S. Export-Import Bank; Ford Motor Company, International Boundary and Water Commission (U.S. Section); National Aeronautics and Space Administration; National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration; Overseas Private Investment Corporation; Procter & Gamble; Skoll Global Threats Fund; Rockefeller Foundation; The Nature Conservancy; U.S. Agency for International Development; U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; U.S. Bureau of Reclamation; U.S. Trade and Development Agency; and U.S. Geological Survey.

Secretary Clinton also announced the release of an [Intelligence Community Assessment \(ICA\) on Global Water Security](#).

Ninth Extension - House Seeks Short-Term Continuation of Highway Bill

Authorization of federal surface transportation program funding is scheduled to expire on March 31. Without an extension, funding for highway construction, transit and other transportation programs will cease. Next week, the House of Representatives is expected to approve a three-month extension ([H.R. 4239](#)) of highway funding that will extend program funding until June 30. The action comes on the heels of House Republican's rejecting a two-year, \$109 billion plan ([MAP-21](#)) that was approved in a bipartisan vote by the Senate last week.

U.S. EPA Administrator Testifies on President's Proposed Budget

On March 22, the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works received [testimony](#) from U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Administrator Lisa Jackson on EPA's proposed FY 2013 budget. The proposed FY 2013 Administration budget of \$8.344 billion for EPA is \$105 million below the EPA's enacted level for FY 2012. Chairman Barbara Boxer (D-CA), in her opening statement expressed her support for Clean Water and Safe Drinking Water Revolving Loan programs, stating, "In recent years, Congress and the Administration have supported significant investments in clean water and drinking water infrastructure, and I believe we can't stop now."

Administrator Jackson's testimony included a strong policy statement. She explained that Congress needs to avoid a sequester by passing a balanced deficit reduction. Administrator

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Jackson added that, "If the sequester were to happen, it would bring another round of deep cuts in discretionary spending. Although the Administration is continuing to analyze the impact of the sequester, the Congressional Budget Office has said that in 2013, the sequester would result in a 7.8 percent cut in non-security discretionary accounts that are not exempt from the sequester. It would be impossible for us to manage cuts of that magnitude and still achieve our fundamental mission to protect human health and the environment."

Supreme Court Decision on Private Property

On March 21, the U.S. Supreme Court issued a unanimous decision in [Sackett v. Environmental Protection Agency](#) finding that an administrative compliance order issued by the Environmental Protection Agency under the Clean Water Act (CWA) was final agency action reviewable under the Administrative Procedure Act and that the CWA does not preclude pre-enforcement review of the compliance order.

House Subcommittee on Water and Power Examines FY 2013 Budget

The House Committee on Natural Resources, Subcommittee on Water and Power held a [hearing](#) on March 20 to examine the impacts to water supplies and hydropower rates that could result from the FY 2013 budget. The Subcommittee heard from the Commissioner of the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (USBR), the U.S. Geological Survey, and Power Marketing Agency. USBR Commissioner Mike Conner testified that the 2013 budget for Water and Related Resources (Reclamation's principal operating account) is \$818.6 million, a decrease of \$76.4 million from the 2012 enacted level. Conner explained that the decrease is due, in part, to a shift of \$46.5 million for the requested establishment of the Indian Water Rights Settlement account, and \$12.0 million for a discretionary appropriation for the San Joaquin River Restoration Fund.

Subcommittee Chairman Tom McClintock (R-CA) expressed his opinion that, "While the House is moving to restore abundance as the central objective of federal and water policy, it appears the Administration is moving in precisely the opposite direction. Ironically, this Administration sees nothing wrong with dumping millions of acre feet of water into the ocean, but it is aghast that a family might actually prefer a toilet that works on the first flush."

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House Hearing on Water Project Financing

On March 21, the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment held the second in a [series of hearings](#) reviewing innovative approaches for financing community water infrastructure projects. The Subcommittee received testimony from an array of public and private sector stakeholders. The purpose of the hearing was to discuss innovative financing options to close the water infrastructure gaps. The hearing focused on draft legislation authored by Subcommittee Chairman Bob Gibbs (R-OH) to establish the Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act.

Administration Pushes Ways to Reduce Regulatory Burdens

In January, the President issued Executive Order 13563, "[Improving Regulation and Regulatory Review](#)." This week, the Executive Office of the President issued a [memorandum](#) to all Departments and Agencies directing them to take a number of actions to reduce such cumulative costs:

- Early engagement with state, tribal, and local governments to identify opportunities for eliminating redundancy and reducing burdens on the public and private sectors;
- Early consultation with affected stakeholders to reduce cumulative burdens, well in advance of proposing new rules;
- Specific consideration of the cumulative effects of regulations on small businesses and start-ups;
- Careful consideration, in the analysis of costs and benefits, of the relationship between new regulations and those regulations that are already in effect;
- Identification of opportunities to harmonize the requirements of new and existing rules, so as to eliminate inconsistency, excessive cost, and redundancy.

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New Legislation, Events, Studies, Reports, and Grant Opportunities:

[Rural Energy Program Highlighted](#) - Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack released a report highlighting USDA's Rural Energy for America Program, which is a competitive renewable energy and energy efficiency program.

[April 5 – \(Webcast\) Selecting and Evaluating New and Underused Energy Technologies](#) - U.S. Department of Energy, April 5th from 1:30 to 3:00 p.m. EST.

[DOE Offers Up to \\$2 Million for Hydrogen Fueling Stations Data Collection](#)

[ARPA-E Funding Announcement](#) - Early-stage research projects that would not otherwise be able to attract private investment, but could lead to breakthrough energy technologies. Letter of Intent Submission Deadline: 3/30/2012

[Executive Order to Expedite Infrastructure Projects](#) - This week, President Obama issued an Executive Order to expedite federal permitting and review of infrastructure projects, including, but not limited to projects involving highways, drinking water and wastewater facilities, ports and waterways and those involving renewable energy generation. Federal agencies are to enhance coordination on permitting and review processes, avoid duplicative reviews, and engage stakeholders early in the permitting process.

[Status of Discretionary Appropriations: FY 2012 Senate](#) – CBO Report

[Will Pond Scum Save You From Ever-Rising Gas Prices?](#)

[Environmental Protection Agency \(Meeting\)](#)

EPA holds meeting by teleconference of the Good Neighbor Environmental Board to discuss its Fifteenth Report, focusing on water infrastructure issues in the U.S.-Mexico border region.

[Give Yourself the Green Light](#) - "This is the American dream of freedom on wheels. An automotive age, traveling on time-saving super highways," begins the narrator of a 1954 film funded by General Motors.

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Hearings

Senate

Date: March 27, Time: 10:00 am
Committee: Environment and Public Works
Hearing: Improving Federal Environmental Performance

Date: March 28, Time: 2:30 am
Committee: Appropriations
Hearing: Army Corps of Engineers/Bureau of Reclamation Budget

House

Date: March 27, Time: 10:00 am
Committee: Appropriations
Hearing: Energy Budget - Energy Efficiency/Fossil Energy/Electricity Delivery

Date: March 27, Time: 10:00 am
Committee: Transportation and Infrastructure
Hearing: Army Corps of Engineers Budget

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

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

Date: March 28, Time: 10:00 am
Committee: Transportation and Infrastructure
Hearing: EPA Budget

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