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Congress and White House Play Out Final Version of Debt Limit Debate

With just ten days until the debt ceiling is hit, congressional and White House negotiators continue to seek a common understanding on how to avoid a default on the nation's debt payments.

Complicating the effort are a number of proposals surfacing from within congressional ranks, including the Gang of Six (now counting eight Senators) that is offering a proposal to reduce domestic spending by trillions of dollars and close tax loopholes such as ethanol production subsidies, mortgage deductions and executive jet travel deductions. In the House, TEA Party adherents continue to stand firm rejecting any increase; stating that the short-term pain of a default would lead to long-term benefits. And within the congressional leadership, Democratic leaders are trying to forestall an Administration that shifts toward immediate spending cuts and delaying tax increases and loophole closings. The Republican leadership continued to voice a view that the plan to adopt legislation know as "[cut, cap and balance](#)" the budget is the roadmap to increase the debt ceiling and address the deficit reduction priority.



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Unfortunately for the Republican “cut, cap and balance” plan, the Senate voted 51 to 46 to end debate on the bill that the House approved on a party line vote earlier in the week. Following the House passage, the President signaled his displeasure with the concept and stated that he would exercise his veto authority on the bill.

With the debt default cliff looming on the horizon, it is still anybody’s guess how the congressional leadership and the White House can stitch together a plan that can attract 218 votes in the House and 60 votes in the Senate that ensures final passage.

Additional Information on the Debt Debate:

House Republicans - <http://rsc.jordan.house.gov/Solutions/debtceiling.htm>

Gang of Six - <http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0711/59675.html>



Senate Committee Conducts Hearing on Next Water Head

On July 18, the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works Chairwoman Barbara Boxer gaveled the committee to order to consider the nomination of Kenneth Kopocis to be the next Assistant Administrator for the Office of Water at the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Kopocis received a warm reception from both sides of the aisle who agreed that he was qualified to carry out the responsibilities of the Assistant Administrator.

The Assistant Administrator is considered the chief policymaker for EPA on water quality and drinking water issues. In this role, if confirmed by the Senate, Kopocis would manage a myriad of issues including the State Revolving Loan Fund Program, development of water pollution control standards and drinking water quality standards, and estuary protection programs. He will also play a key role in reviewing potential regulation of ever increasingly contentious issue of how shale gas wastewaters (fracking) should be managed, treated and disposed. Kopocis served on both the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure and the Senate committee as a counsel. His testimony highlighted a commitment to maintain progress in restoring the nation's waterways and protecting human health. In an acknowledgement of the complicated and often

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times controversial efforts that the Office of Water must undertake, Kopocis informed the committee members that he placed a high value on communication with stakeholders to ensure that he will have the input of all affected interests before making decisions. In the course of the hearing, several members expressed support for recovery of natural gas from shale deposits, however, they stressed the importance of appropriate standards to protect groundwater supplies. A committee vote of approval is expected within the next few months and subsequent approval by the full Senate is hoped for shortly thereafter.

Water Infrastructure Resiliency and Sustainability Act Set for Introduction

The Water Infrastructure Resiliency and Sustainability Act of 2011 is set to be introduced by Senator Ben Cardin (D-MD) and Representative Capps (D-CA) before Congress adjourns in August. The bill would authorize the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency to award grants to projects that enable water systems to “resist and adapt” to changes in hydrologic conditions.

Projects eligible for grants include those improving treatment works, replacement or relocation of water infrastructure and flood protection and prevention. The bill also dictates that funding priority will be given to projects that aid communities whose water supplies are at the greatest and most immediate risk from changes in hydrologic conditions. The bill also states that federal grants for projects are to make up no more than 50% of the total cost of the project. Currently the bill has received strong support from various members of the water and environmental community.

“Milestone” Bi-Partisan Highway Bill Presented in Senate – Set to Move

On July 20, the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee held a [hearing](#) entitled, “Legislative Issues for Transportation Reauthorization.” The purpose of the hearing was to highlight the (pending) introduction of the bi-partisan “Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21)” surface transportation reauthorization legislation. *(An outline of MAP-21 is attached to this report)*

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Chairman Barbara Boxer (D-CA) opened the hearing by expressing her appreciation for the bipartisan effort to draft the legislation and the support of a diverse coalition on state, local, environmental and national transportation organizations. Ranking Member James Inhofe (R-OK) noted that there is a \$12b funding gap between the Highway Trust Fund revenues and the bill's expenditures and they are working with the Committee on Finance to address this issue. Inhofe added that he believes it will be difficult to pass the bill without this funding element. Committee Member and Chair of the Committee on Finance Max Baucus (D-MT) stated that he was optimistic that they will be able to identify the \$12 billion. Chairman Boxer expressed that the Committee is working to identify a date to mark up the bill prior to the August congressional recess.

Testifying at the hearing were: Antonio R. Villaraigosa, Mayor, City of Los Angeles; Mr. Terence O'Sullivan, President, Laborers' International Union of North America; Mr. Donald James, Chairman, Vulcan Materials; Ms. Susan Martinovich, P.E. Director, Nevada Department of Transportation (AASHTO); Gary Ridley, Secretary Oklahoma Department of Transportation; Mr. Deron Lovaas, Transportation Policy Director, Natural Resources Defense Council; and Mr. Greg Cohen, President and CEO, American Highway Users Alliance.

Terrence M. O'Sullivan, testified that, "This may be the summer of the blockbuster Harry Potter movie, but a magic wand won't prevent what for so many Americans and for our nation will be the real Deathly Hallows as more jobs disappear, more families suffer and the U.S. falls further behind." It is certain that Chairman Boxer wishes she could tap into the \$330.1 million (worldwide) that the film brought in its opening week.

Read more: <http://www.cbsnews.com/video/watch/?id=7073857n&tag=contentMain;contentBody#ixzz1SqUeaYTC>

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Senate Discusses Infrastructure Bank Proposals

On July 19, the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation held a hearing entitled, "[Building American Transportation Infrastructure through Innovative Funding](#)." While Congress remains embroiled in heated and divisive debate over deficit reduction, discussions over deploying alternative financing options have increased. House Majority Leader Eric Cantor (R-VA) has played down an infrastructure bank as just more stimuli, however, the concept has generated interesting bi-partisan support and provides a private-public option to strengthen job creation and boost much-needed investment in infrastructure.

The hearing highlighted two separate infrastructure bank proposals currently pending in the Senate. The first, the [BUILD Act \(S.652\)](#) introduced by Senators John Kerry (D-MA), Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-TX), and Mark Warner (D-VA), would create a \$10 billion national infrastructure bank that would fund 50% of eligible project costs. The second bill, introduced by Senators Lautenberg (D-NJ) and Rockefeller (R-WV) called the American Infrastructure Investment Fund Act of 2011 ([S.936](#)) would allow the federal government to fund up to 70 percent of a project, with just a 30 percent match that the locality comes up with through private investment. In the case of grants, it's up to an 80 percent match. The bill would finance transportation, energy, water, and telecommunications projects and also would put \$600 million into a competitive grant program for rail, highway, air and water transportation investments. The Administration has called for establishing a \$30 billion infrastructure bank (I-Bank) that would invest in transportation projects alone.

Testifying at the hearing were: Polly Trottenberg, Assistant Secretary for Transportation Policy, U.S. Department of Transportation; Mr. Steve Bruno, Vice President Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen; Mr. Robert Dove, Managing Director, Carlyle Infrastructure Partners; Mr. J. Perry Offutt, Managing Director, Investment Banking for the Americas, Morgan Stanley; and Mr. Pete Ruane, President, American Road & Transportation Builders' Association.

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White House Issues Veto Threat on House Interior-Environment Appropriations Bill

This week, the White House registered its opposition to the fiscal year 2012 Interior-Environment spending bill ([H.R. 2584](#)), which was approved by the House Committee on Appropriations on July 13. The Administration released a Statement of Administration Policy on July 21 that stated, "if the President is presented with a bill that undermines ongoing conservation, public health, and environmental protection efforts through funding limits or restrictions, his senior advisors would recommend he veto the bill."

The White House statement identified several provisions of the bill that undermined EPA's core mission, including:

- The overall funding level, which the Administration warned would fail to protect human health and the environment, and restoration efforts in the Chesapeake Bay and Great Lakes would be delayed.
- The level of funding for the State Revolving Fund would result in approximately 400 fewer wastewater and drinking water projects.
- Funding for grants to States would impede States' ability to carry out water quality permitting.
- Reductions in funding for greenhouse gas programs and regulations would severely limit actions EPA could take under current law to permit, control and monitor greenhouse gases.

Hearings

Senate

Date: July 27, Time: 10:00 am

Committee: Appropriations

Hearing: Fiscal 2012 Appropriations- Labor, HHS, Education

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Date: July 27, Time: 2:30 pm
Committee: Commerce, Science & Transportation
Hearing: NHTSA Reauthorization

Date: July 28, Time: 2:15 pm
Committee: Indian Affairs
Hearing: Enforcing the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act

House

Date: July 26, Time: 11:00 am
Committee: Energy & Commerce
Hearing: Risks to Critical Infrastructure

Date: July 26, Time: 1:30 pm
Committee: Oversight & Government Reform
Hearing: Lights Out: How EPA Regulations Threaten Affordable Power and Job Creation

Date: July 27, Time: 10:30 am
Committee: Transportation & Infrastructure
Hearing: Economic Development Administration

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