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FEW Washington Update March 1-15, 2020

FEW Recognizes March is Women's History Month

In Congress

Both chambers of Congress reconvened for legislative business as Senators look to wrap up work on a bipartisan package of energy-related legislation. The measure compiles more than 50 bills out of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee aimed at fostering innovation in clean energy technology. The Senate will vote on a motion to end debate on the bill, with a vote on final passage likely to occur soon.

On the House floor, lawmakers are expected to take up: (1) legislation that would limit the Trump administration's authority to suspend or restrict immigration from predominantly Muslim countries; (2) a bill that would make certain that those held or detained while attempting to enter the U.S. are guaranteed access to legal counsel; and (3) a Senate-passed "War Powers" resolution that seeks to restrict President Trump's ability to engage in military action against Iran absent Congressional approval.

Coronavirus Emergency

President Donald Trump signed the emergency supplemental spending bill funding the response to the COVID-19 coronavirus outbreak, making \$8.3 billion in new federal assistance available to government health officials, research, and purchases of vaccines and medications.

The package grew substantially since February 24, 2020, when the White House submitted an initial request for \$2.5 billion, with about half of those dollars redirected from existing funds. Lawmakers added to the price tag as the death toll mounted and

stock markets nosedived, and Trump announced he'd accept a much larger appropriation.

"We've signed the 8.3 billion. I asked for two and a half and I got 8.3 and I'll take it," the President told reporters Friday morning.

Administration officials had told lawmakers in recent days after their initial request was submitted that there may be a need for more money before the fiscal year ends on September 30. That in part prompted appropriators to increase the size of the initial tranche, rather than be caught up in another legislative struggle later in the year when funds were running out.

"That's why we bumped it up," Senate Appropriations Chairman Richard C. Shelby, R-Ala., said Thursday before the Senate cleared the measure for Trump's signature on a 96-1 vote. The House margin was a similarly lopsided 415-2 vote on Wednesday, just hours after the bill had been introduced.

The supplemental aid package contains over \$3 billion for research and development into drug treatments, testing and an eventual vaccine, including funds to purchase vaccines and medications that would have to comply with federal contracting rules on pricing. Democrats lost a bid to apply the same pricing standards to commercial market purchases of drugs and vaccines, which Republicans derided as price controls that would stifle innovation.

The measure also contains about \$3.2 billion to help public health agencies contain and treat the disease, including almost \$1 billion to buy medical supplies. There's also \$1.25 billion for overseas assistance efforts.

Trump signed the measure as the number of COVID-19 climbed above 100,300, according to data compiled by Johns Hopkins University, with over 3,400 deaths. In the United States there are 233 confirmed cases, with 14 deaths so far, but expected to increase.

Here's What You Need to Know About the Coronavirus Legislation

During the early morning hours of March 14, 2020, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the "Families First Coronavirus Response Act," (H.R. 6201) by an overwhelming vote of 363-40. The bill now heads to the Senate where it is expected to pass sometime early next week. Besides dealing with immediate public health related matters, the bill contains several provisions that will impact employers. Set forth below are summaries of the bill's provisions relating to paid family medical leave, paid sick leave, and unemployment insurance.

Note that, as drafted, the leave provisions apply only to employers with fewer than 500 employees. At this time, it is unclear why the bill was drafted this way or whether additional legislation may be forthcoming for employers with more than 500 employees.

It may be, for example, that the intent is to focus these immediate measures in the context of relief and aid for small businesses, in light of the fact that the bill also provides tax credits to assist employers in making the leave payments.

Paid Family Medical Leave

- The bill provides 12 weeks of job-protected paid Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) leave—of which the first 14 days may be unpaid—for employees of employers with fewer than 500 employees.
- Employees may use accrued personal or sick leave during the first 14 days, but employers may not require employees to do so.
- This leave benefit covers employees who have been working for at least 30 calendar days.
- Among other uses, employees may use the leave to respond to quarantine requirements or recommendations, to care for family members who are responding to quarantine requirements or recommendations, and to care for a child whose school has been closed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- After the first 14 days, employers must compensate employees in an amount that is not less than two-thirds of the employee's regular rate of pay. These pay requirements apply to only the COVID-19-related leave reasons listed above.
- The provisions will go into effect 15 days after the date of enactment and expire on December 31, 2020.

Paid Sick Leave

- Employers with fewer than 500 employees will be required to provide full-time employees 2 weeks (80 hours) of paid sick leave for specific circumstances related to COVID-19 (e.g., self-isolating, doctors' visits, etc.).
- Part-time employees are entitled to the number of hours of paid sick time equal to the number of hours they work, on average, over a 2-week period.
- Employers must compensate employees for any paid sick time they take at their regular rates of pay.
- Employers will be required to post a notice informing employees of their rights to leave.
- As currently drafted, the bill expressly provides that it does not preempt existing state or local paid sick leave entitlements.
- The provisions will go into effect 15 days after the date of enactment and expire on December 31, 2020.

Unemployment Insurance

The bill provides \$1 billion in emergency unemployment insurance (UI) relief to the states: \$500 million for costs associated with increased administration of each state's UI program and \$500 million held in reserve to assist states with a 10 percent increase in unemployment. Besides the necessary increase in unemployment, in order to receive a

portion of this grant money, states must temporarily relax certain UI eligibility requirements, such as waiting periods and work search requirements.

What's Next?

While the situation regarding Congress' response to COVID-19 is very fluid, the Senate will take up the bill early next week. All indications now are that the Senate will pass the bill.

The Federal Reserve

The Federal Reserve slashed interest rates in an extraordinary attempt to pre-empt economic fallout as fears about coronavirus mounted, with policymakers voting unanimously for their biggest single cut — and first emergency rate move — since the depths of the 2008 financial crisis.

“The virus and the measures that are being taken to contain it will surely weigh on economic activity for some time,” Jerome H. Powell, the Fed chairman, said at a news conference in Washington following the announcement. “The magnitude and persistence” remain “highly uncertain” and “the situation remains a fluid one,” he added.

Rates are set in a 1 percent to 1.25 percent range following the announcement and Mr. Powell signaled a willingness to do more if needed.

While he and his colleagues “do like our current policy stance,” he said they are “prepared to use our tools and act appropriately, depending on the flow of events.”

The Fed's move came as economists around the globe sharply downgraded their economic growth expectations for the year as the coronavirus spreads, idling factories, curtailing travel and quarantining workers. Investors, increasingly nervous that the fallout could plunge the global economy into a dramatic slowdown or even a recession, looked to central banks, first among them the Fed, to respond decisively to the building threat.

Stocks in the United States spiked more than 1 percent immediately after the Fed said it would cut interest rates, before turning lower. Treasuries surged as well, pushing the yield on the benchmark 10-year Treasury note to a record low of 1.02 percent on Tuesday.

The emergency reduction underlines the fraught moment economic policymakers currently face. Coronavirus has torn across the globe, sickening about 90,000 people. While the vast majority of those cases are in China, where the infections first surfaced, major outbreaks have also taken hold in South Korea, Japan, Iran and Italy, and cases are climbing in other countries.

Emergency rate cuts are not without precedent. The Fed's move echoed a 50 - basis point rate cut it made in October 2008 as markets melted down in the wake of the collapse of Lehman Brothers, and another it made earlier that year.

But this time, the central bank moved pre-emptively — trying to get ahead of the economic problem, rather than waiting until the fallout was more fully realized. It came after Australia's and Malaysia's central banks lowered borrowing costs early Tuesday, and, could presage a wave of action from global policymakers as officials rush to offset coronavirus fallout.

There are limits to what rate cuts can do to contain the damage. While they can bolster confidence and help to keep borrowing cheap, there are questions about how effective rate cuts will be in counteracting the fallout from the virus. Central banks cannot keep disease from spreading, prevent workers from losing hours at work, or mend broken supply chains amid factory delays.

The Fed's move "can provide a short-term floor under sentiment, which is what they've done today," Neil Dutta, head of economic research at Renaissance Macro Research, wrote in a note following the announcement. "But the Fed's tools are imperfect and not adequate to deal with a public health crisis."

Mr. Dutta added that "the panic needs to come from the opposite of 17th Street" — which is where the White House is.

President Trump, who has no control over monetary policy, has been urging the Fed to lower interest rates, saying the United States should have the lowest borrowing costs. But the Fed's half-point cut did little to assuage his complaints.

For now, the White House seems unconvinced other measures are necessary. Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said on Tuesday that the Trump administration is not currently considering rolling back or suspending its tariffs on Chinese imports to mitigate the economic effects of the coronavirus.

Mr. Mnuchin said that the Treasury Department has set up a group within the agency to begin looking at tax measures that the Trump administration could take to provide relief to small and medium-sized businesses, if needed. He said that the White House may present proposals to Congress for such "special action" if warranted.

This cut leaves the Fed with limited room to lower rates further should the economy run into danger. Going into the last recession, from 2007 to 2009, the Fed cut rates from above 5 percent. Now it will have just four quarter-point moves left at its disposal.

Coronavirus is a global problem, and the central bank's counterparts around the world are in an even weaker position. The European Central Bank and Bank of Japan already have negative interest rates, leaving them with limited room to act to offset any crisis — and placing more onus on fiscal policy.

In a joint statement out earlier Tuesday, leaders of the Group of 7 — which also includes Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy and Japan — pledged global coordination and cooperation in containing fallout from the coronavirus but fell short of committing to concrete action.

Global finance ministers and central bankers said they were “closely monitoring the spread of the coronavirus disease” and reaffirmed their “commitment to use all appropriate policy tools to achieve strong, sustainable growth and safeguard against downside risks.”

Mr. Powell said the virus response would need to be multifaceted, coming from health care professionals and fiscal authorities when they deem it appropriate.

“We do recognize that a rate cut cannot reduce the rate of infection, it won’t fix a broken supply chain,” he said. “We get that.”

But he would not specify how much he expected other central banks to act to boost growth, or whether the economy needed Congress and Mr. Trump to provide a fiscal stimulus like tax cuts or spending increases.

Mr. Powell also would not say how Fed officials might adjust interest rates if a growth slowdown from the virus fails to materialize — or what economic data points might cause the central bank to act again to cut rates if the virus is worse than expected.

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Tier I

Paid Leave

March 8 was International Women’s Day. Though it’s been observed for over a century, it has become more popular and more political in the United States in recent years. It’s apt that this year International Women’s Day coincides with daylight savings time, the day we all lost an hour, because the relationship of women to time is a primary cause of gender inequality.

Compared to men, women in the U.S. spend two hours more per day on unpaid care work, including domestic chores, looking after children and providing care to the sick and elderly. That’s 95 extra eight-hour workdays, or nearly five months of work — for free — each year.

Women doing paid work don’t cut back on unpaid labor. Instead, they extend their working day. In other words, women work more and make less; the cost of unpaid labor comes to one and a half-trillion dollars less per year. To “have it all,” we’re sacrificing our well-being and our sleep, while also forgoing the wealth.

We can go into the workforce intending to “lean in,” but it’s not that easy. We hear a lot about flexibility being the answer to working mothers’ struggles, and that it can increase productivity and save companies money. But flexibility only works when it’s accessible and truly valued. People of all genders face serious career harm due to flexibility bias — they’re shunted to lower-value and lower-responsibility roles or forced out of a job entirely. Lower-income salaried workers and many hourly workers don’t even have the option.

The cost of taking a break from paid work is high and getting higher. A recent study found that women who took a single year off between 2001 and 2015 earned 39 percent less over 15 years. That’s more than triple the cost for women who did the same back in the 1970s.

So why do women make this “choice?” Lots of reasons. Cisgender men have more to lose due to the pay gap. With child care so expensive and long-term care options in free fall, it makes economic sense for many women to retreat from the workplace to conserve more money for their families. That’s arguably not a choice. And for single parents, there’s no question of choice. They’re all they’ve got.

Men aren't always offered paid leave. But men who have leave don't take it as much. Too often, men don't formalize flexible arrangements, while women are unequally pushed toward flexibility. And while men in relationships with women expect them to work outside the home, they don't do the unpaid work to make up the gap. Why would they, when the cost is so high, and they have options?

Meanwhile, the time gap is getting worse. Women spend more time than ever in the workforce. We all do. Extended hours are on the rise, and culture has shifted to give greater rewards for a longer workweek, which is increasingly important as wages stay flat. That means your career suffers not only for flexibility during the traditional workday, but also for not being reachable 24 hours per day, seven days per week, 365 days per year.

The expectation to sacrifice time extends to work tasks; one study found women are seen as selfish if they don't stay late to complete projects, while men are not. Another showed that women (and particularly women of color) are given more valueless tasks like organizing parties and taking meeting notes (tellingly, this is called "housework").

The flip side of expecting low-value work is less expectation to drive high value. While men are promoted on potential, women are promoted on achievement. When you're held to a "prove your worth" standard, you advance more slowly. When you advance more slowly, you have less power to change the culture.

So, the cycle continues, and its effects are severe. The time gap, and the pay gap, are key contributors to the gender wealth disparity. On average, women have only 32 cents for every dollar a cisgender white man has. Black and Latina women have less than one penny. That one and a half-trillion dollars could really help.

There are things we can do personally to fight time discrimination. Like Congresswoman Maxine Waters, we can reclaim our time when it's disrespected. If we can afford it, we can outsource care work and deal with the guilt and judgment that come with that choice. We can talk to the people who aren't pulling their weight at home. We can make unpaid labor visible all year long, not just on Mother's Day.

But this cycle isn't the effect of individual choice. It's a sign of an infrastructure in crisis. So, we need to make infrastructural changes if we ever want to see any real difference.

Paid family leave should be a given. The U.S. is the only industrialized country that doesn't have it. But it will not work until everyone, of all genders, is incentivized to take it. Our care infrastructure is broken. Oxfam estimates that if the richest 1 percent paid half a percent extra tax on their wealth for 10 years, we could create 117 million care jobs. Businesses should contribute to building a system that will drive employee productivity.

The Paycheck Fairness Act, which doesn't go far enough, has been blocked in the Senate multiple times.. We also need to set federal standards for businesses around flexibility and standards for evaluation and promotion.

The clock has stopped for the pay gap — it might not close for 232 years. The advancement of women in the workplace has stalled. Systematically changing how we treat, and value unpaid labor is the only way to “spring forward” to true equality.

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Federal Government Workforce

The minority share of the State Department workforce has increased in recent years, but minorities are under-represented there in both the civil service and foreign service and are promoted at slower rates, GAO has said.

GAO said that as of fiscal 2018, State had just under 23,000 employees, about three-fifths of whom were foreign service and the rest civil service. Since 2002 the percentage of minority employees increased from 28 to 32 percent, attributable to increases in the foreign service while the share in the civil service held about flat.

Within that overall increase there was a slight decrease in African Americans that was more than offset by the rise among other minority groups. Over the same period the percentage of racial or ethnic minorities in the federal workforce as a whole rose from 32 to 36 percent.

Minority employees hold only 13 and 14 percent of executive level positions in the civil service and foreign service, though, and also are under-represented at grade GS-15 in the former system and four classes below executive in the latter.

The percentage of women held steady over that time at about 43 percent, about the government-wide average, and while they are under-represented at only the executive level on the civil service side, that is true on the foreign service side of executives and the four levels below.

Further, GAO said that its analysis of the civil service side, “controlling for factors other than racial or ethnic minority status that could influence promotion, found that racial or ethnic minorities had lower adjusted rates of promotion and lower odds of promotion from each rank, from early career (GS-11) through senior manager level (GS-15), than their white counterparts.” On the foreign service side, there was a statistically significant similar difference only for promotion from class 4 to class 3, it said.

It said there were no statistically significant differences in promotion rates for women in the civil service but that rates of promotion were generally higher for women in the foreign service.

For the complete report, read [here](#)

Federal Government Responds to Coronavirus

A group of Senators, noting that the federal government is the largest employer in the nation, called on the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) to take steps to ensure federal employees and contractors will not be penalized for taking health precautions during the COVID-19 outbreak.

Democratic Senators [wrote](#) to OPM Director Dale Cabaniss with concerns that the personnel agency's [guidance](#) does not prioritize the health and safety of the approximately 2 million civil servants and [4.1 federal contractors](#). While acknowledging that the trajectory of the novel coronavirus continues to evolve, the lawmakers said OPM should do more to support federal workers, many of whom face exposure to the virus that causes COVID-19 in the course of their jobs.

“We worry that OPM’s guidance to date does not demonstrate to our nation’s hardworking public servants that the federal government is prioritizing their health, well-being, and economic security,” they wrote. “We urge you to swiftly develop and circulate guidance that does more to reassure them that they will not be penalized for heeding public health guidance, they will continue to receive pay while doing so, and they will not be expected to work while sick.”

The letter was signed by Sens. Mark Warner, D-Va., Benjamin Cardin, D-Md., Tim Kaine, D-Va., Chris Van Hollen, D-Md., Mazie Hirono, D-Hawaii, Brian Schatz, D-Hawaii, Sherrod Brown, D-Ohio, and Gary Peters, D-Mich. They all represent large numbers of federal employees and contractors in their states. They asked Cabaniss to:

- Clarify that employees and contractors who follow Center for Disease Control and Prevention guidance will not be at risk of losing income or disciplinary actions.
- Issue guidance telling employees and contractors they will not have to choose between financial obligations and following health protection guidance.
- Direct agencies to expand telework policies.
- Tell employees and contractors they aren’t expected to work if they’re caring for a loved one (even if they have exhausted paid leave benefits).
- Educate agencies and their human resources departments on the types of paid leave workers can use.
- Work with health insurance companies to make sure employees can afford preventative care and treatment in the event they contract the virus.

On [Thursday](#), add the specific date here, three House Democrats reintroduced a bill to protect telework at agencies and expand access due to the coronavirus. While OPM and the CDC have advocated for telework, [some agencies have recently scaled back telework options for employees](#).

As the virus continues to spread globally, many federal employees and contractors have a particular risk of exposure because of the nature of their work. This includes Internal Revenue Service employees handling envelopes and documents from taxpayers nationwide, Customs and Border Protection officers screening people at ports of entry and military personnel and Defense contractors working at installations in high-risk countries.

The senators said that, as was demonstrated during the last government shutdown, many federal employees and contractors live paycheck to paycheck. They asked OPM to be generous and make sure employees can protect themselves without fear of losing pay.

FEW Washington Update – March 1-15, 2019 Tier III

Global Sexual Harassment and Violence Against Women

March 8 marks International Women’s Day. It is a day when women receive flowers, chocolates and cards. However, in 2020, women deserve more than that. Women deserve equality at last. Indeed, the theme for this year’s International Women’s Day, [“I am Generation Equality: Realizing Women’s Rights”](#), focuses on strengthening the steps towards achieving gender equality.

As the UN [stresses](#), “Today, not a single country can claim to have achieved gender equality. Multiple obstacles remain unchanged in law and in culture. Women and girls continue to be undervalued; they work more and earn less and have fewer choices; and experience multiple forms of violence at home and in public spaces.” Despite international and domestic laws, policies, pledges and commitments, Sustainable Development Goal 5, calling for gender equality and empowerment for all women and girls, continues to be far away from the goal.

We have yet to eliminate all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls everywhere. We have yet to protect women against all forms of violence in the public and private spheres, including domestic violence, rape and sexual abuse, trafficking and other types of exploitation. We have yet to eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM). We have yet to recognize and value women’s unpaid care and domestic work. We have yet to ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life. The list goes on.

On paper, we have another ten years until the deadline to reach Sustainable Development Goal 5. However, considering that the above pledges are not fulfilled in 2020, could we still hold on to the hope that the next ten years will change that? Unfortunately, despite the increased activism by women all over the world, little will be achieved if men are not on board. Men need to be fully engaged and committed to these pledges as they are the main source of the challenges that women and girls face. Indeed, the UN provides some stark statistics to that. One in 3 women and girls experience physical or sexual violence in their lifetime, most frequently at the hands of an intimate partner. One in 2 women killed worldwide in 2017 were killed by their partners or family. Almost 750 million women and girls, worldwide, were married before their 18th birthday. 200 million women and girls, worldwide, have undergone FGM.

Men are the main perpetrator of violence against all women and girls. Men are the main perpetrator of child, early and forced marriages. This is something that men need to take responsibility for. Men need to understand that hitting their wife does not make them a “man” or more “masculine.” Men need to understand that a forced wife is not a wife, she is an enslaved and abused woman. Men need to understand that a child marriage is a child abuse. International actors and states can do only so much if men do not face these truths. Put simply - men must take responsibility for their own actions.

However, as the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, Ahmed Shaheed, recently emphasized in his new report, some of the practices that hold women back, and which contribute significantly to the gender-based violence they suffer including “FGM, marital rape, early and forced marriage”, are often informed by “religious ethos.” Religion or belief continues to be used to justify violence against women and girls. Because of its prevalence, the UN Special Rapporteur has called upon states to ensure that “traditional, historical, religious or cultural attitudes must not be used to justify violation of human rights.” This is a task not just for states but also for religious and belief leaders who must engage in educating others that such harmful traditional practices do not have place in the 21st century. In pursuance of this goal, later this year, the UK will be introducing a global declaration for religious and faith leaders to take a clear stance against sexual violence in conflict and against narratives abusing religion or belief to justify violence against women and girls.

There is a lot that needs to happen over the next ten years to achieve gender equality and empowerment for all women and girls. States must take their duty to protect women and girls from violence more seriously. Religious leaders must engage others and counter the narratives that accommodate such violence against women and girls. Last, but not least, men must understand the role that they play in perpetrating violence against women and girls. We have just ten years to reach the goal and to ensure that it becomes truly sustainable for generations to come.

FEW Washington Update – March 1-15, 2019 General Interest

50 Years Ago, Gloria Steinem Wrote an Essay for TIME About Her Hopes for Women's Futures. Here's What She'd Add Today

BY [GLORIA STEINEM](#)

MARCH 5, 2020

In the half-century since I wrote the essay below, as part of a cover story on “The Politics of Sex,” there has been some definite progress. “Women’s issues” are no longer in a silo but are understood as fundamental to everything. For instance, the single biggest determinant of whether a country is violent, or will use military violence against another country, is not poverty, natural resources, religion or even degree of democracy; it is [violence against women](#).

And since racial separation can't be perpetuated in the long run without controlling reproduction—and thus women's bodies—[racism and sexism are intertwined](#) and can only be uprooted together.

A [belief in equality](#), without division by sex or race, is now held by a huge majority in public-opinion polls. But a stubborn minority of Americans feel deprived of the unearned privilege of that old hierarchy and are in revolt. The time of greatest danger comes after a victory, and that's where we are now. Many of the predictions of my 50-year-old essay about the future hold up, but there are a few lessons I've learned since then (including negotiating a writing fee beforehand, since my agent later told me I was paid less than male contributors).

FEW receives information from the following sources and contacts: Roll Call, Time Magazine, GovExec, FedScoop, Bloomberg, The Hill, National Law Review, and Army Times.