In Congress

Democratic negotiations with centrist Sen. Joe Manchin (D-W.Va.) over President Biden’s sweeping climate and social spending bill are close to melting down as Manchin appears to be backing out of an earlier deal with the White House to extend the child tax credit for one year.

Manchin is now floating the idea of extending the child tax credit for multiple years so that the cost of a proposal that is likely to be extended by Congress in the future is fully reflected in the Build Back Better bill, which is now officially projected to cost roughly 2 trillion dollars over 10 years.

Democratic senators say it now looks highly unlikely that Biden’s climate and social spending package will get a vote before Christmas, though Senate Majority Leader Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.) hasn’t yet announced a decision on pushing the massive bill into 2022.

The National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), which sets spending top lines and policy for the Pentagon, passed the House last week and now goes to President Biden’s desk, where he’s expected to sign it.

The defense bill also includes a major overhaul of how the military prosecutes certain crimes, including military sexual assault. The bill strips commanders of most of their authority, but they would still be allowed to conduct trials, pick jury members, approve witnesses and grant immunity.

The Senate on December 8th voted to nix President Biden’s vaccine mandate for larger businesses, handing Republicans a symbolic win.
Senators voted 52-48 on the resolution, which needed a simple majority to be approved. Democratic Sens. Jon Tester (Mont.) and Joe Manchin (W.Va.) voted with Republicans, giving it enough support to be sent to the House.

The House cleared legislation early in the morning on December 15 to raise the debt limit through next year’s midterm elections, staving off an unprecedented federal default just in time for the deadline set by the Treasury Department. The bill, which lawmakers passed 221-209, with one Republican voting yes, raises the federal debt ceiling by 2.5 trillion dollars to increase the limit to close to 31 trillion dollars.

Congressional leaders say the new level will allow the nation to continue to meet its financial obligations through 2022 and into 2023. The debt limit hike does not authorize new spending – a message Democrats sought to underscore during debate ahead of the vote amid attacks from Republicans.

Drug companies are deliberately targeting the U.S. to raise prices and game the patent system to delay generic competition in a way that is "unsustainable, unjustified, and unfair to patients and taxpayers," according to the findings from a new investigation released on December 10 by House Democrats.

The investigation focused on 10 companies that sell 12 of the most expensive drugs to Medicare, including insulin, and found those companies collectively raised prices more than 250 times. The drugs in the committee’s investigation are now priced at a median of almost 500 percent higher than when they were brought to market, the report found.

All 10 companies have compensation structures that tie incentive payments to revenue and other financial targets, and several companies directly tied incentive compensation to drug-specific revenue targets, the report found.

*Sourced from The Hill.*

**FEW Washington Legislative Update – December 1-15, 2021**

**Tier I**

**Paid Family Leave:**

Biden is working with Congress to pass the investments we need. The Build Back Better Act that recently passed the House includes a national, comprehensive paid leave program. That would empower working people to take care of themselves and their families during a medical emergency or to welcome a new child into the world.

Right now, only one in five American workers has access to paid family leave through their employers. For the overwhelming majority, getting sick or caring for a family
member means being stuck with the impossible choice of earning a paycheck or caring for the people they love.

As we rebound from the pandemic, our nation is at a crossroads. We can either continue to push women out of the workforce or we can create an economy that works for every working person.

Manchin faces pressure from Gillibrand, other colleagues on paid family leave

The President's Build Back Better Act is at risk of being delayed or jettisoned by opponents' stated concerns about inflation. And, even if Build Back Better moves forward, its historic paid family and medical leave provisions are in jeopardy because of the preference of one Democratic senator, West Virginia’s Joe Manchin, to wait and move later on a bipartisan path.

Delay is misguided. If policymakers are serious about addressing Americans’ concerns about the rising costs of living, they’ll pass the country’s first national paid family and medical leave program as part of the Build Back Better Act with haste. Americans are already overwhelmingly supportive of national paid family and medical leave as part of the jobs, families, climate and care bill and concerns about costs should make them even more so.

As of December 2021, just 23 percent of workers have paid family leave through their jobs to care for a new child or a seriously ill loved one; only 40 percent have personal medical leave through an employer-sponsored temporary disability insurance program.

Manchin suggests that paid leave can wait. He says he can find bipartisan support in 2022 for a proposal funded through shared payroll contributions like the FAMILY Act, a proposal Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-N.Y.) and Rep. Rosa DeLauro (D-Conn.) have championed since 2013, and programs in nine states and the District of Columbia. But after nearly a decade of work to secure bipartisan support for the FAMILY Act in Congress not a single Republican senator has expressed support. In fact, in May 2021, Senate Republicans railed against the FAMILY Act during a Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee hearing, taking particular aim at its funding mechanism. It seems safe to say that bipartisan agreement on national paid family and medical leave is not coming soon.

Biden pitches Manchin with agenda in balance

On December 13, President Biden and Sen. Joe Manchin (D-W.Va.) held a highly anticipated phone call on the future of the Democratic spending agenda. We’ll also look at the pressure to cement paid family leave and the child tax credit.
President Biden spoke to Sen. Joe Manchin (D-W.Va.) for the second time in a week on December 13 in what is becoming an increasingly desperate last-minute effort to cajole him into voting for a sweeping climate and social spending bill before Christmas. Manchin told reporters after the call he and Biden had “a nice conversation” and that he is “engaged” with the president. He said he and Biden “were just talking” about “different iterations” of the legislation.

Sourced from The Hill.

**Military Justice Reforms Against Sexual Assault in the Military**

On December 15 the Senate passed a sweeping defense policy bill on an 88-11 vote, ending a weeks-long standoff that had stalled work on the legislation. The defense bill includes a major overhaul of how the military prosecutes certain crimes, including military sexual assault. The bill strips commanders of most of their authority, but they would still be allowed to conduct trials, pick jury members, approve witnesses and grant immunity.

Diverging Views

The changes were not enough for Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-N.Y.), who had been pressing to completely remove commanders from the chain of command in these instances and let independent military prosecutors handle them.

Gillibrand has called for a vote on her original proposal, arguing that the authority the commander still has under the NDAA does not bring about true independence.

At issue is how far the NDAA should have gone to address how the military prosecutes major crimes, like sexual assault.

Gillibrand’s proposal would entirely remove military commanders from the chain of command, replacing them with independent military prosecutors.

The House bill strips commanders of most of their authority to prosecute serious crimes, but still allows them to conduct trials, pick jury members, approve witnesses and grant immunity. The bill also cuts the number of crimes handled by outside prosecutors from 11 to 38 and allows commanders to keep their power to allow service members accused of crimes the option of separation from service instead of facing court martial.
Gillibrand said on December 15 that the NDAA doesn’t truly help survivors of sexual assault and called for a stand-alone vote on her original legislation.

“The majority of our colleagues have recognized that our bill has the support of a bipartisan, filibuster-proof majority in the Senate and a majority in the House,” she said. “But the will of those members was ignored in the NDAA, where committee leaders stripped out reforms from the bill behind closed doors, despite assurances that they would follow regular order.”

Shortly after Smith’s statement, the House Armed Services Committee issued a separate press release of positive responses to the military justice reforms in the NDAA.

That release included a comment from Lynn Rosenthal, who led the Pentagon’s civilian-led commission to address military sexual assault.

*Sourced from The Hill*

**FEW Washington Legislative Update – December 1-15, 2021**

**Tier II**

**Federal Vaccine Mandates**

A federal appeals court on December 15 effectively revived a Biden administration vaccine mandate for health workers at hospitals that receive federal funding in roughly half of the U.S.

The procedural ruling by the New Orleans-based U.S. Court of Appeals for the 5th Circuit temporarily scaled back a nationwide injunction put in place by a Louisiana-based federal judge late last month.

The move notched a modest and tentative win for the Biden administration following a series of legal setbacks to efforts to blunt the effects of a global pandemic that has killed roughly 800,000 people in the U.S.

The Biden administration maintains that the rule is necessary to slow the spread of COVID-19 among millions of health care workers and Medicare and Medicaid patients.

The US Senate on December 15 voted 52-48 to block President Joe Biden’s COVID-19 vaccine mandate for private companies with 100 or more employees that was scheduled to begin Jan. 4. The resolution will now go to the House of Representatives for a vote. The mandate was suspended by the Occupational Safety and Health
Administration last month. Earlier this week, a federal judge blocked the mandate that would require health care workers to get vaccinated.

While the mandate is on hold, several states and cities have started taking vaccine requirements into their own hands, which proves to be working. "Vaccination requirements have helped reduce the number of unvaccinated Americans ages 12 and older by almost 40 percent -- from about 100 million in July to under 60 million now," White House Coronavirus Response Coordinator Jeff Zients said during a briefing. In the US, nearly 76 percent of people 5 and older have had at least one dose, as of early December.

Sourced from The Hill and CNET

FEW Washington Legislative Update – December 1-15, 2021
Tier III

Women's Health:

On Dec. 1, the U.S. Supreme Court signaled its intent to roll back or dismantle Roe v. Wade and Casey v. Parenthood, the two precedents that secure a women’s right to seek abortion care. At issue is a Mississippi law banning most abortions after 15 weeks — a ban the state says is justified in part because societal norms have progressed so far that women need no longer fear economic hardship or other adverse consequences if forced to carry a pregnancy to term.

The risk of death due to childbirth is approximately 14 times higher than the risk associated with an abortion. For Black women, the risk is especially acute; they face maternal mortality rates on par with those in poor countries like Mexico and Uzbekistan. What’s more, extensive research on U.S. women who were unable to obtain wanted abortions finds that they are more likely to experience serious health complications, not only during pregnancy but for years after giving birth and are four times more likely to live in poverty.

Sourced from The Hill.
Women’s Wages:

There’s a tendency to gender our recessions. There was the “man-cession” following the 2008 Great Financial Crisis, when manufacturing and construction jobs dried up, and then those out-of-work men declined to get government-funded retraining in areas like health care, which have usually been worked by women. This time around, the pandemic “she-cession” has come with a child-care crisis, pushing women out of the workforce in droves. At the peak of the economic collapse last April, the unemployment rate among women was 15.5 percent, while it was 13.1 percent for men — numbers that perhaps deepened the overall wage gap of 93 cents to every dollar earned by a man.

But 21 months after the start of the pandemic recession, the economic picture for women is brightening. Since July, women’s wage growth outpaced men’s — a reversal of the trend that had been in place since March 2020, according to data from the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta. This September saw the biggest gap in earnings growth between the sexes going back to 1997, with the three-month average of women’s gains reaching 4.9 percent, while men saw a growth of 3.4 percent. It’s stayed around that level since.

The problem with looking at any single piece of data is figuring out what it means amid a broader backdrop — and women, who on average have seen their economic lives more disrupted by the pandemic, have further to catch up than men. “Women are disproportionately likely to be in low-wage jobs in the first place,” said Martha Ross, senior fellow focusing on labor policy at the Brookings Institute Metropolitan Policy Program. “The wage increases are important and good, but often the wage levels are so low to begin with that it’s still not enough for workers to make a living.”

The Great Resignation — the massive turnover as people leave the workforce or find new jobs — appears to be playing a major role in the new trend. According to Gusto, a payroll-services company, women have been more likely to quit their jobs in recent months than men, which has corresponded to a tighter labor market and rising pay in sectors like retail and hospitality, which are typically worked by women. “These areas where women work have been the center of the Great Resignation, and they’ve been able to turn these elevated quits into strong wage gains,” said Luke Pardue, an
economist at Gusto. By and large, women have seen an hourly increase of $1.80 per hour this year through November, while men have gotten $1.40 — gains that, for women, have outpaced inflation, Pardue said. “This is definitely an improvement, these relative wage gains, but they still haven’t made up for the losses that they experienced at the beginning of the pandemic,” he added.

Still, the above numbers really only apply to women who stayed in or rejoined the workforce. The unemployment rate for women is now also on par with men at 4 percent — but that masks a host of other, less positive trends, including more women who’ve dropped out of the workforce due to illness or taking care of children. There are also about 3 million women who aren’t working but want a job, where there are about 500,000 fewer men in the same situation. This has skewed data around the gender pay gap, for instance, which narrowed last year, but only because so many women with low-paid jobs were out of a job. “For the people who stayed in the workforce, both men and women, the wage gap looks relatively similar to where it was before the pandemic,” said Kate Nielson, policy director at the American Association of University Women. “The people who left the workforce tended to be lower-wage workers. So, I don’t know that it’s accurate to say that the pay gap stayed relatively the same if the bottom dropped out.”

Overall, the rise and fall of women’s employment appears to be tied to the severity of the pandemic. Gusto’s data shows that states with lower vaccination rates have higher quit rates among women, particularly in low-vaxx states likes Idaho and Wyoming. While quits have recently been tied to the number of people switching their jobs, it also includes people who’ve had to drop out of the workforce entirely. “It’s not a coincidence that we see the gender gap in quits rise and fall as COVID cases rise and fall, as new variants come in, as schools are closed,” Pardue said.

The question now is how much of an impact these gains will have for women over the long run — and there’s some evidence that they are part of larger shifts in the labor force. More women have been entering into historically male-dominated fields, like warehousing and construction — industries where employers are under more pressure to fill roles and pay is competitive. “In the United States, people do shift fields. But what we don’t get so much is that women move into male-dominated fields,” said Ariane Hegewisch, program director for employment and earnings for the Institute for Women’s Policy Research.

“It’s not new that you can make more in male-dominated fields than in female-dominated fields. But what seems to be new is women moving into construction and women moving into those storage warehouse jobs, where they were fewer before.” And while wage growth driven by quits can peter out just as quickly as it spiked, a provision
in the Democrats’ Build Back Better bill that raises wages for health-care workers paid through Medicare and Medicaid could also bring women back into fields that they’ve typically worked, and lock in gains that they might have otherwise missed out on if they weren’t able to switch industries. “That’s where it’s not just a matter of women’s sort of being fed up enough and having enough other options,” said Mary Alice McCarthy, director of the Center for Education and Labor at New America.

*Sourced from New York Magazine.*


The articles and information posted in this publication are obtained from other qualified published sources and are protected under copyright laws.