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FEW Washington Legislative Update February 16-28, 2022

In Congress

The House fell short of passing legislation on Monday, February 28, that would prohibit discrimination against people with hair styles associated with a particular race or national origin.

Democrats set a vote on the bill, titled the Creating a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair, or CROWN, Act under a fast-track process used for noncontroversial bills that required a two-thirds supermajority for passage. While the bill clinched a simple majority, 235-188, it did not meet the two-thirds threshold due to GOP opposition.

The House passed legislation on Monday, February 28, that would classify lynching as a federal hate crime. Lawmakers easily passed the bill, which is named after Emmett Till, a 14-year-old African American boy who was lynched in 1955, on a 422-3 vote.

Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) vowed Monday, February 28, that Congress will approve as much emergency funding for Ukraine as is necessary amid Russia's unprovoked attack on the government in Kyiv.

The Biden administration has requested \$6.4 billion in new spending to boost Ukraine's military defenses and tackle the growing humanitarian crisis as Russian troops move en

masse toward Kyiv and hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians are fleeing to safety across borders.

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Employee Mask Mandates:

The White House is ending a mask requirement for employees who have been fully vaccinated against COVID-19, a White House spokesman confirmed to The Hill.

NBC News first reported Monday, February 28, that the White House would end its mask requirement for fully-vaccinated employees beginning Tuesday, March 1st.

The decision came three days after the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) significantly eased its recommendations for mask use. Under the new guidelines, over 70 percent of Americans are in an area of “low” or “medium” risk for COVID-19 transmission and do not need to wear masks. This includes Washington, D.C., where an indoor mask mandate expires on Tuesday, March 1.

Prior to the announcement, the Biden administration had been under pressure from governors and some in the public health community to release updated mask guidance, as coronavirus cases fell and the omicron wave subsided.

A number of governors, both Republican and Democratic, have moved to end mask mandates for businesses or other gathering spaces, like schools, in recent weeks as COVID-19 cases have declined.

The White House’s move follows similar actions in Washington. The U.S. Capitol’s attending physician said Sunday that masks would be optional in the halls of Congress beginning Monday, February 28.

President Biden is set to deliver his first State of the Union address on Tuesday, March 1. The address will give him the opportunity to chart a path forward for the public out of the pandemic, at a time when Americans are frustrated by the lingering impacts of the virus and seeking a return to some form of normal life.

It was not immediately clear whether the White House would also instruct federal agencies to lift indoor mask requirements for federal workers and contractors.

In an email to journalists later Monday, February 28, the White House Correspondents' Association said that reporters would no longer be required to wear masks indoors at the White House given the new guidance.

Biden signed an executive order last fall requiring federal government employees be vaccinated against COVID-19, unless they are granted a religious or medical exemption.

Sourced From [The Hill](#)

The Biden Administration to Accelerate the Return of the Federal Workforce

The Biden administration plans to accelerate the return of the federal workforce this week, as the White House seeks to show the country that in-person work can be safe, people familiar with the plans tell Axios.

President Biden wants to lead by example in arguing that most Americans can safely return to the workplace. Biden's team is discussing the best way to send a clear back-to-work signal to America

A spokesperson for the White House's Office of Management and Budget says federal workers' return to their offices began stepping up late last year. A majority of workers already are back in some capacity — but that number will "substantially increase ... very soon," the official said.

Planning for the return of in-person work has been ongoing for months, with the White House's Safer Federal Workforce Task Force coordinating with agencies on vaccine requirements and developing department-specific plans.

A State Department official says a "Mission Critical plus Onsite Dependent Functions" posture begins Monday for the D.C.-area workforce. That's government-speak for more people to come to the office, but with the option of mixing onsite and telework options depending on their mission.

A Treasury official says that while thousands of its employees have worked onsite throughout the pandemic, March 14 will mark the start of a nine-week transition to reentry for other employees, with 97% now vaccinated. "Reentry is a process, not an event," the official said. "Employee safety remains a priority. ... The Treasury will continually monitor local and national conditions."

About half of the 700,000 federal and D.C. government workers who are members of the American Federation of Government Employees kept working onsite throughout COVID because they can't do their jobs from home, AFGE's policy director Jacqueline Simon said.

Sourced From [Axios](#)

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Tier III

Women's Bodily Autonomy

Democratic Sen. Joe Manchin (W.Va.) joined with Senate Republicans on the night of Monday, February 28th to oppose legislation codifying the right to an abortion. Senators voted 46-48 to move the bill toward a debate on the Senate floor, falling short of the three-fifths vote needed to move it forward.

The bill, which passed the House last year, enshrines the right to an abortion and pushes back against state-level restrictions. The Senate's failed vote comes as the Supreme Court is weighing a case that would curb *Roe vs. Wade*.

"Sadly, it looks like the Supreme Court will limit abortion rights on the coming months. That's why the bill is essential," Senate Majority Leader Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.) said.

But the bill was guaranteed to fail because it needed 60 votes to move forward.

Manchin and Sen. Bob Casey (D-Pa.) weren't formal co-sponsors of the bill, but Casey had previously said he would vote to start debate on the bill.

GOP Sens. Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska) and Susan Collins (R-Maine) voted against advancing the Democratic bill but introduced a proposal shortly before the vote to codify *Roe vs. Wade*.

"I have long supported a woman's right to choose, but my position is not without limits, and this partisan Women's Health Protection Act simply goes too far. It would broadly supersede state laws and infringe on Americans' religious freedoms," Murkowski said.

"The fact that my choice is between this bill, or nothing at all, shows how insincere Majority Leader Schumer is about protecting women's rights. Failing to conduct any outreach and reducing this important issue to nothing more than a designed-to-fail show vote is a disservice to women across America," she added.

Sourced From [The Hill](#)

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