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FEW Washington Legislative Update March 1-15, 2022

In Congress

A proposal to suspend the federal gas tax is gaining political momentum among Senate Democrats who are worried that high gas prices will hurt them in the midterm election.

The measure sponsored by Sens. Mark Kelly (D-Ariz.) and Maggie Hassan (D-N.H.), who both face competitive reelection races, would suspend the federal gas tax of 18.4 cent per gallon until January.

The idea has never gained much traction among Senate Democrats because the tax is the main source of funding for the Highway Trust Fund, which pays for federal roads and bridges.

Four Senate Democrats on Saturday, March 12, issued a statement in response to the Biden administration's decision to uphold Title 42, a public health clause that began being used under the Trump administration to restrict immigration due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Senate passed a massive bill to fund the government and provide new Ukraine-related aid, sending the 2,741-page bill to President Biden's desk. Senators voted 68-31 on the bill, which includes \$1.5 trillion in government funding and \$13.6 billion in aid tied to Ukraine.

The bill moved at lightning speed through Congress, passing the House less than 24 hours after it was unveiled early on Wednesday, March 9. The Senate's vote comes less than two days after the bill was introduced.

Congressional negotiators have reached a bipartisan deal on a \$1.5 trillion sprawling omnibus package to fund the government, as pressure mounts on lawmakers to wrap up spending talks under the wire amid the ongoing crisis in Ukraine.

The legislation includes what Democrats have lauded as the biggest increase to nondefense discretionary spending in four years. The GOP has also touted a \$42 billion increase for defense spending in the package, saying the deal achieves dollar-for-dollar parity for defense and nondefense increases.

The Senate on Tuesday, March 8, passed legislation to reform the Postal Service, sending the bill to President Biden's desk. Senators voted 79-19 on the legislation, which makes financial and operational reforms to the U.S. Postal Service. The bill passed the House earlier this year.

The Senate on Monday, March 9, passed legislation to make lynching a federal hate crime, sending the bill to President Biden's desk. The bill passed the Senate by unanimous consent, meaning every senator signed off on it moving forward.

A GOP-backed ban on weed sales in Washington, D.C., was preserved in a sprawling government funding bill passed by Congress on Thursday, March 10, despite opposition from advocates who say the provision overrides the will of the District's 22 years after they voted to legalize marijuana.

The House passed legislation on Wednesday, March 9, to ban imports of Russian oil and authorize further sanctions, following a similar executive order from President Biden. Lawmakers passed the bill on a bipartisan basis, 414-17. Only 15 Republicans and two Democrats voted against the bill.

The House on Thursday, March 3, passed legislation that would expand access to health care for veterans exposed to toxins, such as chemicals emanating from burn pits, during their military service.

Lawmakers passed the bill largely along party lines, 256-174. Thirty-four Republicans joined Democrats in support.

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Tier I

Biden Administration Announces Commitments to Advance Pay Equity:

There is growing recognition that reliance on past salary and a lack of pay transparency can contribute to arbitrary and potentially discriminatory pay that then follows women and workers of color from job to job, entrenching gender and racial pay gaps over time. But we still have work to do.

In 2020, the average woman working full-time, year-round earned 83 cents for every dollar paid to their average male counterpart. Compared with the average man working full-time, year-round, disparities are even greater for Black women, Native American women, and Latinas, as well as certain subpopulations of Asian women.

On March 15, Equal Pay Day, the Vice President hosted a virtual summit, which brought together partners across the country who are taking critical steps to tackle pay discrimination, create good-paying jobs, and support families' access to care.

The Biden-Harris Administration is announcing new actions to promote women's employment and support working families across the country.

The Office of Personnel Management announced that they anticipate issuing a proposed regulation that will address the use of prior salary history in the hiring and pay-setting process for Federal employees, consistent with the President's Executive Order on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility in the Federal Workforce.

President Biden signed an Executive Order directing the Federal Acquisition Regulatory Council to consider enhancing pay equity and transparency, including by limiting or prohibiting federal contractors from seeking and considering information about job applicants' and employees' existing or past compensation when making employment decisions, and appropriate accountability measures.

The Department of Labor will consult with the FAR Council on the efficiency, economy, and effectiveness in Federal contracting that would be promoted by potential regulatory changes, and the most effective implementation strategy for any subsequent rulemaking.

The Department of Labor's Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs issued a new directive clarifying federal contractors' annual obligation to analyze their

compensation practices. Conducting these pay equity audits helps address and prevent pay disparities based on gender, race, or ethnicity.

The Department of Labor issued a report analyzing the impact that women's concentration in low-wage sectors – and their relative underrepresentation in many good-paying occupations – has on their overall economic security and gender and racial wage gaps. The report finds that, in 2019, Black women lost \$39.3 billion and Hispanic women lost \$46.7 billion in wages compared to white men due to differences in industry and occupation.

This segregation intensified the COVID-19 pandemic's disproportionate impact on women, in part due to the overrepresentation of women in hard-hit industries such as hospitality.

On March 14, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission published technical assistance on caregiver discrimination, addressing the circumstances under which discrimination against applicants and employees based on pandemic-related caregiving responsibilities may violate federal employment discrimination laws.

The actions announced by the Biden Harris administration on March 15 build on steps the Administration has taken to advance pay equity.

Sourced from [The White House](#)

FEW Washington Legislative Update – March 1-15, 2022 Tier II

Vaccination Mandate for Federal Employees:

The Biden administration urged a circuit court panel Tuesday, March 8, to revive the COVID-19 vaccination mandate for federal employees put on hold by a lower court judge earlier this year.

Scarborough told the New Orleans-based court that the president's directive was issued in his capacity as the head of the government workforce, and that the job market acts as an appropriate check on his actions.

The three-judge panel — comprised of two jurists appointed by President Bill Clinton and one by George H.W. Bush — did not offer much indication about which way they were leaning, and a substantial portion of the oral arguments was devoted to granular questions about the applicability of the Civil Service Reform Act, the 1978 law that serves as a bedrock of the federal workforce system.

The president announced in September that more than 3.5 million federal workers would be required to get vaccinated. Unlike other mandates, federal workers were not given the option to get regularly tested in lieu of vaccination unless they received a qualifying medical or religious exemption.

A federal judge in Texas blocked implementation of the Biden administration's mandate on federal employees in January and a different panel of 5th Circuit judges voted 2-1 last month against allowing it to go into effect while the appeals process plays out.

The case is one of several that has hamstrung the Biden administration's attempts to implement pandemic policies via executive action. The onslaught of challenges have been brought by business groups, Republican-led states, some unions and individuals averse to the vaccines.

Earlier this year the Supreme Court stymied enforcement of a requirement issued by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration that workers at businesses with more than 100 employees get vaccinated against COVID-19 or undergo weekly testing, a mandate that would have applied to roughly 84 million workers.

The high court's ruling prompted OSHA to withdraw the emergency standard shortly thereafter, though the Labor Department has said it would explore other ways to regulate COVID-19 in the workplace.

However, the Supreme Court did permit a similar rule applying to health care workers issued by a separate federal agency to move forward.

The appellate did not give a timeline for when it would hand down its ruling on the case.

Sourced from [Politico](#)

FEW Washington Legislative Update – March 1-15, 2022 Tier III

UN Chief calls for efforts to promote gender equality on International Women's Day:

UN Secretary-general Mr. Antonio Guterres highlighted the contribution that women have made to ending the COVID-19 pandemic, hailed the ideas, innovations and activism that are changing our world for the better, and welcomed more women leaders across all walks of life.

However, as the UN chief pointed out, women and girls have frequently borne the brunt of the consequences of the virus spreading worldwide, which have included girls and

women being shut out of schools and workplaces, led to rising poverty and rising violence, and seen women doing the vast majority of the world's unpaid but essential care work.

To remedy the situation, on Monday, March 7, Mr. Guterres called for guaranteed quality education for every girl, massive investments in women's training and decent work, effective action to end gender-based violence, and universal health care.

Other measures recommended by the UN chief include gender quotas that could result in the world benefiting from more women leaders.

The theme for this year's International Women's Day is "gender equality today for a sustainable tomorrow", underscoring the fact that women bear a disproportionate burden of the impacts of the climate crisis, and that they need to be central to the solutions for a sustainable planet.

The Action Coalition for Feminist Action for Climate Justice, is helping to make sure that this happens. The Coalition, which brings together governments, private sector companies, the UN system and civil society, is part of a drive to bring about global action and investment, with a focus on financing for gender-just climate solutions.

These include increasing women's leadership in the green economy, building women's and girls' resilience to climate impacts and disasters, and increasing the use of data on gender equality and climate.

Sourced from [United Nations](#)

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