

# David Jurch and Associates

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## **FY 2017 BUDGET TRAINWRECK**

The goal of Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell and House Speaker Paul Ryan to restore “regular order” on the appropriations process and demonstrate to the electorate that a GOP controlled Congress can govern effectively is running headlong into political reality. With some notable successes last fall involving the budget agreement waiving sequestration for FY 2016 and FY 2017, and the enactment of the FY 2016 Omnibus Appropriations Act – thereby avoiding the theatrics of another government shutdown – Republican congressional leaders had reason to hope that they had finally turned the corner on managing their respective fractious caucuses. That was last year.

In the wake of the Administration’s FY 2017 budget submittal to Congress last week, and in the face of a new tea-party rebellion within his conference over the budget caps deal with Obama, Speaker Ryan is hedging on moving a budget resolution this year. Incoming flak is coming from GOP fiscal hawks and Democrats alike, albeit for polar opposite reasons. On the Republican side, House tea-party activists are pushing for cuts in the range of \$30 billion below the bipartisan budget caps agreed to with the White House. Ryan also has to contend with defense hawks within his conference who are protective of the bipartisan budget agreement and are united against any legislative effort that might undermine military preparedness. The Democrats, on the other hand, are attacking Ryan and his leadership team as “weak” and “incompetent” and warning of dire fiscal consequences if Republican leaders backtrack on the budget deal waiving sequestration.

In the midst of this quagmire, Speaker Ryan may be compelled to skip a budget resolution this year, in an effort to avoid a disruptive and bloody intra-party fight between fiscal conservatives and military hawks. Should he make that call, Ryan will have bought himself a little respite before the real hand-to-hand combat starts over the 12 annual appropriations bills that fund the federal government.

## **WHITE HOUSE-CONGRESSIONAL SUPREME COURT ANTICS**

The sudden death of Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia, the leading conservative voice on the bench, has thrown the GOP controlled Senate in a flux over whether they should consider a court nomination to be made by President Obama or wait until next year when a new president will be in the White House. The issue has not only inflamed the passions of congressional conservatives and Republican presidential aspirants but also mobilized President Obama and his Democratic allies in demanding that the Senate fulfill its constitutional mandate of providing “advice and consent.” The partisan fracas threatens to boil over and affect Senate operations for the remainder of the year, ruining any prospect of bipartisanship in that chamber on spending and other legislative matters.

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Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) is on record in support of postponing the nomination process until next year in order to allow the electorate to have a say in who gets to make this critical appointment to the Court. Senate Democrats along with President Obama are equally incensed that the Republican controlled Senate would even contemplate kicking the can down the road until after a new president has been sworn into office. If this issue is not resolved amicably through some form of compromise between the two parties, the political shenanigans over the nomination process will effectively consume the Senate in a bevy of paralysis through the November elections and beyond.

## **NATION'S BRIDGES IN STATE OF DISREPAIR**

According to a newly released report by the American Road & Transportation Builders Association (ARTBA), nearly 59,000 bridges in the country are structurally deficient. The ARTBA came to this conclusion after its analysis of the US Department of Transportation's 2015 bridge inventory database. While the listed bridges are not in jeopardy of collapsing today, the cost to the American economy is borne out on a daily basis through the imposition on vehicle weight restrictions that effect freight transportation, and in some severe cases even bus and delivery truck movements, in some of the most congested regions of the country. The most deficient bridges were found to be located in the following states: Iowa (5,025), Pennsylvania (4,783), Oklahoma (3,776), Missouri (3,222), Nebraska (2,474), Kansas (2,303), Illinois (2,244), Mississippi (2,184) and North Carolina (2,085) and California (2,009).

## **CONGRESSIONAL CALENDAR**

Following a week long hiatus, the House and Senate are due back in session next week.

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