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WASHINGTON UPDATE

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The House and Senate head home for August recess, leaving many questions unanswered. The House adjourned July 30, and the Senate followed suit August 5. Both chambers have work to be done before the end of the fiscal year, September 30.

Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) policy expires September 30. Leaders in both parties and in both chambers have suggested that a short term extension of FAA policy is in the offing for next month. Some conservatives in the House have pushed to privatize certain FAA functions, a move that meets with robust opposition from unions. Short term extensions have become the norm for FAA funding. The last long term bill was in 2012, following a rash of 20 extensions. The FAA suffered a temporary shutdown in 2011. Another reason why FAA funding has flown under the radar, is the debate over transportation policy and funding.

Surface transportation policy expires October 29. This new deadline is the result of extensions passed in the spring, and again in the summer. Members have promised to focus on shoring up the highway trust fund and moving forward a multiyear transportation bill when they return to Washington in September. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell told the press before leaving this week, that he is opposed to linking repatriation or other modifications to the international tax code to road funding. This is in variance to the position of many within his party, particularly in the House. Senator McConnell reminded his colleagues that his Chamber passed a long term bill with “credible pay-fors”. Highway funding remains a vexing issue, and will be center stage this fall.

The 2016 race for the White House is officially underway. Seventeen Republican candidates collided in Cleveland last night to participate in the first of many presidential debates. Seven candidates took to the stage for the preliminary contest at 5pm Eastern. The top ten candidates (according to national polling averages) then went to the podiums for the prime time show. The Fox News and Facebook sponsored event received record viewership. Sixteen percent of households tuned in last night. In comparison, the highest rated GOP debate of the 2011-2012 cycle was five percent. The election is in 462 days.