

POLICY MATTERS

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One Down, Two to Go. As you know, last Friday, on the heels of some test votes that indicated a weakening of Senate support for the shutdown, President Trump signed a bill funding the previously-shuttered parts of the government for three weeks. The three weeks are intended to allow a bipartisan, bicameral group of legislators to craft a spending bill that would fund the government for the remainder of this fiscal year. [Negotiations](#) began in earnest earlier this week, but it remains unclear whether the group can come to an agreement that would pass both houses of Congress and would be signed by the President. Mark February 15 on your calendars for another round of budget brinksmanship.

Getting Down to Business. With the budget impasse temporarily off the front burner, both the House and Senate labor committees turned to their agendas. The Senate HELP Committee announced that they would take up the nominations of several individuals who cleared committee in the last session of Congress, but whose nominations were returned to the President at the end of the session. The committee will vote on [February 6](#) on the nominations of Scott Mugno to be Assistant Secretary of Labor for OSHA, Cheryl Stanton to be Wage & Hour Division Administrator, and John Pallasch to be Assistant Secretary of Labor for ETA, among others. Each nominee is expected to be voted out of committee along party lines.

On the other side of Capitol Hill, the House Education and Labor Committee [announced](#) subcommittee chairs and the topics for its first four hearings, including workers with pre-existing conditions, a \$15 minimum wage, and gender-based wage discrimination. True to its word, the committee has scheduled two hearings for next week: "[Examining Threats to Workers with Preexisting Conditions](#)" and "[Gradually Raising the Minimum Wage to \\$15: Good for Workers, Good for Businesses, and Good for the Economy](#)." Witnesses for the hearings have not yet been announced.

It's Back: Paycheck Fairness. In advance of the identified-but-not-yet-announced hearing on gender-based wage discrimination, Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro and Senator Patty Murray [reintroduced](#) the Paycheck Fairness Act, which would expand remedies under the Equal Pay Act to include compensatory and punitive damages, weaken employer defenses to claims of pay discrimination, and ban reliance on salary history, among other things. A version of the bill has been introduced in every Congress since 1997, but this time is co-sponsored by every Democratic member of the House, as well as 45 Senators.

H-1B Visa Processing Order Reversed. The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services issued a [final rule](#) amending the regulations governing H-1B petitions subject to the annual cap, including those eligible for the advanced degree exemption. The regulation reverses the order of selection such that holders of advanced degrees from U.S. institutions will have increased odds of selection, with USCIS predicting a 16% increase. The rule also introduces an electronic registration requirement. Although the rule takes effect on April 1, the electronic registration requirement is suspended for the FY 2020 cap season.

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