



What's ahead for Washington this week: NGA kicks off a 'watershed week'

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Washington, Feb. 21 – On Monday, the National Governors Assoc. ends its three-day winter conference in Washington by meeting with President Obama in the White House. Topping the agenda will be how to get bipartisan agreement to pass key stalled legislation covering, in order of White House urgency: jobs, healthcare reform, financial re-regulation, immigration, and climate change.

Also on Monday, the Senate plans to vote on a scaled-down jobs bill, in the week's first of several tests of whether or not the current partisan gridlock will continue.

The governors' mood over the weekend was broadly in favor of bipartisan action, particularly on both jobs and healthcare since it's the governors who are dealing with the immediate economic and social pain caused by high unemployment and increasing numbers of people without health insurance. National Governors Assoc. Chair Gov. Jim Douglas (R-VT) reflected the mood when he charged that "we spend too much money for too little return" for healthcare and called on Congress to "act boldly to reform our delivery system." This kind of appeal from Republican governors could make it impossible for Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) and House Minority Leader John Boehner (R-OH) to carry out their threatened refusal to attend President Obama's bipartisan healthcare summit scheduled for Thursday, to be broadcast live on C-Span television.

The White House health summit presents a dilemma for Republicans – and a potential Hail Mary pass for Democrats. If Republicans boycott the healthcare meeting, Obama will have the stage to himself – along with new reason to label Republicans as "the party of no." If Republicans attend, however, they could be boxed into a nationally televised public acceptance of the need for healthcare reform along the lines that Obama will publish on the White House web site Monday. If even a few Senate and House Republicans break with the party line of stalwart opposition to the Democrats' legislative agenda, a bipartisan agreement on healthcare could create momentum leading to passing other legislation as well.

So this watershed week may decide whether Republicans boast of being the party of no – as Rep. Mike Pence (R-IN) did this weekend in a speech at the packed Conservative

Political Action (CPAC) conference in Washington – or whether the governors’ bipartisan mood proves persuasive with congressional Republicans.

USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack plans a busy week. Monday, he’s taking part in the President’s meeting with the National Governors Association – followed by Vilsack meeting just with President Obama and Vice President Biden; Tuesday Vilsack will address child health & nutrition issues in a National Press Club speech; and Wednesday he’s testifying in a House Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee hearing on the proposed FY 2011 USDA budget.

Congressional hearings this week include:

Tuesday, Feb. 23

- Joint Economic Committee hearing on promoting job creation and economic growth.
- House Financial Services Committee hearing on “Prospects for Employment Growth: Is Additional Stimulus Needed?”

Wednesday, Feb. 24

- House Appropriations Agriculture Subcommittee hearing with Sec. Vilsack on 2011 USDA budget
- House Appropriations Interior Subcommittee hearing with Adm. Jackson on 2011 EPA budget
- Senate Energy Committee hearing on proposed 2011 US Forest Service budget

Thursday, Feb. 25

- House Energy Subcommittee hearing on “Endocrine Disrupting Chemicals in Drinking Water: Risks to Human Health and the Environment”
- House Appropriations Interior Subcommittee hearing on 2011 US Forest Service budget with FS Chief Tom Tidwell

Friday, Feb. 26

- Joint Economic Committee hearing on promoting job creation and economic growth.

USDA’s National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) reports include:

- Monday, Feb. 22, Catfish Feed Deliveries, Cold Storage, Cold Storage - Ann.
- Tuesday, Feb. 23, Weather-Crop Summary
- Wednesday, Feb. 24, Broiler Hatchery
- Thursday, Feb. 25, Poultry Slaughter, Poultry Slaughter - Ann., Chickens and Eggs - Ann.
- Friday, Feb. 26, Dairy Products Prices, Livestock Slaughter, Agricultural Prices, Chickens and Eggs, Egg Products, Honey, Peanut Prices, Peanut Stocks and Processing, Trout Production

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