

This Week in Washington

January 20, 2012

DOMESTIC POLICY MATTERS

The House reconvened fully late Tuesday. The Senate is still in pro forma session, fully reconvening next Monday (23rd). As President Obama prepares to give his **State of the Union Address** next Tuesday (24th), a **new Washington Post-ABC News poll** indicates a divided electorate on the President's performance with respect to job creation: 48 percent of Americans approve of President Obama's performance on jobs, while 48 percent of Americans disapprove. The same poll showed that a record 84 percent of Americans disapprove of the job Congress is doing.

Online Piracy Bills and Protests. Saturday (14th), the White House released a statement expressing concerns about the anti-piracy legislation under consideration in the House and Senate. The Stop Online Piracy Act (SOPA) in the House and the PROTECT IP Act (PIPA) in the Senate are supported by the American music and film industries, but Internet companies have strongly opposed them. Thousands of online companies participated in an online "blackout" on Wednesday in protest of the legislation, which caused several key members to withdraw their support for the bills. On Friday, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nevada) postponed Tuesday's scheduled vote on PIPA "in light of recent events." Shortly after Leader Reid's announcement, House Judiciary Committee Chair Lamar Smith (R-Texas) agreed to postpone consideration of the House's version of the legislation until wider agreement on the legislation is achieved. Meanwhile, U.S. authorities shut down website Megaupload.com Thursday, announcing charges against seven of the company's executives for engaging in a scheme to offer material online without compensating copyright holders.

On Wednesday, the Administration announced its rejection of the current application for the **Keystone XL pipeline**. The State Department attributed the rejection to a lack of sufficient time allotted under the December 2011 *Temporary Payroll Tax Cut Continuation Act* to obtain the necessary information to make an informed decision about whether the pipeline is in the national interest. The White House issued a press release Wednesday reporting that 28 states are moving forward with implementation of the **new healthcare law**. Wednesday evening, the House passed a resolution disapproving of President Obama's request to **increase the debt ceiling** by another \$1.2 trillion. The Senate is expected to reject the resolution, paving the way for the increase. On Friday, the Obama Administration announced it will give some religious organizations an additional year to comply with a new federal law requiring employers that offer health insurance to include **access to contraception** with no out-of-pocket cost.

Political News. Tuesday, the Wisconsin Democratic Party said that one million signatures were submitted in the effort to force a recall of Wisconsin Republican Governor Scott Walker. The signatures will be subject to review by the Wisconsin elections board. The White House named Deputy Director for Management and Chief Performance at the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Jeffrey Zients as Acting OMB Director Tuesday.

2012 U.S. Elections News. On Saturday (14th), a group of 150 conservative activists voted to coalesce behind former Pennsylvania Senator Rick Santorum for the Republican nomination for President. Former Utah Governor Jon Huntsman formally withdrew from the GOP presidential nomination process Tuesday, endorsing former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney. Six-term Pennsylvania Representative Todd Platts (Republican) announced Tuesday he will not seek re-election to his solidly Republican seat. The Republican Party of Iowa announced Thursday that Rick Santorum won 34 more votes than Mitt Romney, who was initially declared the winner of the Iowa Caucuses. Texas Governor Rick Perry withdrew from the GOP presidential race Thursday, endorsing former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich. Also on Thursday, New York Democratic Representative Maurice Hinchey announced he is retiring at the end of this Congress, after serving more than nineteen years in Congress. On Thursday evening, the remaining candidates in the race for the Republican nomination for President debated in South Carolina, where a primary will be held on Saturday. The Supreme Court rejected the Texas redistricting map drawn by the District Court for the Western District of Texas for the 2012 Texas elections Friday, ruling that the district court's alternative to the GOP-controlled legislature's initial proposal deviated too far from what state lawmakers had originally intended.

FOREIGN POLICY MATTERS

Iran. Amidst global tension over Iran's nuclear ambitions, the Chair of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Martin Dempsey, headed to Israel Thursday. U.S. Ambassador to Israel Dan Shapiro said the visit is related to ongoing bilateral coordination and is a reflection of Washington's "unshakable commitment to Israel's security." Wednesday, Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta said the U.S. military is "fully prepared" to deal with any Iranian effort to attempt to close the Strait of Hormuz. Senators Robert Menendez (D-New Jersey) and Mark Kirk (R-

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Illinois) submitted a letter Thursday to Secretary of the Treasury Timothy Geithner, expressing concern over the Administration's forthcoming draft rules to guide implementation of the new law requiring sanctions on the Central Bank of Iran. On Friday, the United States and the European Union (EU) jointly stated they would try and pressure Iran to return to the P-5+1 talks, at the same time that the EU reportedly is preparing sanctions against Iran's Central Bank.

Syrian Conflict. Earlier this week, a Russian ship reportedly delivered munitions, in violation of a European Union arms embargo, to the Syrian regime. On Monday, Russia introduced a U.N. resolution explicitly stating nothing could justify foreign military intervention in Syria. Western diplomats criticized the resolution for lacking strong condemnation of the Syrian regime's crackdown on civilians. Tuesday, a senior Obama Administration official said a recent visit by the commander of Iran's Quds Force to Damascus is a sign Iran is supplying weapons to the Syrian regime. Late Tuesday, Syrian activists said representatives of the Free Syrian Army and the Syrian regime had agreed to a cease-fire in the activist-controlled town of Zabadani. On Wednesday, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said Russia, as a U.N. Security Council permanent member, would block any attempts to secure U.N. support for military intervention, further saying Russia is fully compliant with international law. The State Department said Wednesday countries that continue to trade with Syria, "particularly those that are trading arms, need to really think hard about the fact that they are now contributing to fueling the violence...." Thursday was the anticipated deadline for the Arab League's report on its Syrian monitoring operation. This weekend, the Arab League will meet to discuss the report and possible recommendations. The State Department said Thursday it looks forward to consulting with the League. On Friday, a senior Administration official suggested the U.S. embassy in Damascus might be shuttered, given the rapid deterioration of the security situation.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was in Monrovia Monday to attend the second inauguration of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf as president of **Liberia**. In Abidjan Tuesday, the Secretary met with President Alassane Ouattara, discussing international support for **Côte d'Ivoire**, institution building, reforming the cocoa sector, and Côte d'Ivoire's desire for a Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) compact. Secretary Clinton travelled on to **Togo**, marking the historic first visit ever by a U.S. Secretary of State. The Secretary's final stop was in **Cape Verde** to meet with Prime Minister José Neves; a country the State Department classifies as "one of Africa's strongest and most successful democracies." Also Tuesday, Secretary Clinton said the United States will join with the E.U. and other nations to develop an **International Code of Conduct for Outer Space Activities**, citing the space environment is at serious risk from space debris and irresponsible actors. The Secretary met Wednesday in Washington with **outgoing U.S. Ambassador to Azerbaijan** Mathew Bryza, whose recess appointment ended in December. The Secretary later held a bilateral meeting with King Abdullah II of **Jordan**. President Obama met with the Jordanian King on Tuesday, with one topic of discussion the resumption of direct talks between the Palestinian Authority and Israel. On Friday, Secretary Clinton met with **German Foreign Minister** Guido Westerwelle.

Last Saturday, President Obama congratulated Ma Ying-jeou on his re-election to the presidency, and the people of **Taiwan** for successful conduct of presidential and legislative elections. On Tuesday, the White House announced President Obama will host President Mikheil Saakashvili of **Georgia** for a meeting in the Oval Office on Monday, January 30th. Wednesday, National Security Council (NSC) Spokesman Tommy Vietor said the United States is "deeply disturbed by the recent interethnic clashes in Jonglei State in the Republic of **South Sudan**," and welcomed the Government's "launch of an investigation into these attacks and its deployment of additional military and police forces to the region." On Thursday, President Obama signed a new Executive Order, announcing initiatives to **promote tourism to the United States**, including the easing of some restrictions for non-immigrant visas, particularly for residents of Brazil, China, and India. White House Press Secretary Jay Carney relayed President Obama's sympathy on the news of the **death of Cuban democratic activist** Wilmar Villar, who launched a hunger strike to protest his incarceration.

On Tuesday, Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor Michael Posner spoke on **Internet freedom**, saying some governments are trying to impose restrictions that would cripple the exercise of human rights online. Also Tuesday, the United States, **Japan**, and the **Republic of Korea** held a **trilateral dialogue** to exchange views on regional and global issues, including recent developments in Burma and the situation on the Korean Peninsula. Singapore Ministry of Foreign Affairs Permanent Secretary Bilahari Kausikan and Assistant Secretary of State Kurt Campbell met Wednesday to co-chair the first **U.S.-Singapore Strategic Partners Dialogue**, discussing areas of engagement, regional developments, and affirming the importance of freedom of navigation and the peaceful settlement of disputes. In response to the **Italian cruise tragedy**, Democratic Representative Doris Matsui (California) said more legislation is necessary to rein in a "highly unregulated cruise line industry."