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Executive Insight Brief

September 8, 2023

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Notable Headlines

- [McConnell publicly vows to 'finish' term after private update to Senate GOP](#)
- [Mike Whitaker Is President Biden's Pick to Lead FAA](#)
- [Slife, former Air Force special operations chief, tapped as service No. 2](#)
- [Justice Dept. Says It Will Indict Hunter Biden on Gun Charge This Month](#)
- [Navy's sprawling 'Fat Leonard' bribery scandal loses 4 convictions to prosecutor misconduct](#)
- [Peter Navarro: Former Trump adviser convicted of contempt of Congress charges](#)

Worth reading: [Facing Threats, U.S. Navy Struggles to Modernize its Ships](#)

View From The Hill



The Senate returned to Washington this week with a mighty to-do list. Senators Patty Murray (D-WA) and Susan Collins (R-ME), the Chair and Vice Chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee, formally [announced the](#) first tranche of appropriations bills to be taken up next week will be Military Construction and Veterans Affairs; Transportation, Housing, and Urban Development; as well as Agriculture and Rural Development. Senators on [both sides](#) of the aisle believe that the upper chamber can jam House Republicans by demonstrating firm, bipartisan support across the appropriations process, with even conservative Senators warning their House counterparts against risking a government shutdown when the federal fiscal year ends on September 30. So far, however, House conservatives appear [eager](#) for an inter-and-intra party fight over an ever widening list of issues including Ukraine aid, border security, the Trump investigations, and energy policy, not to mention overall funding levels. Speaker McCarthy is [reportedly](#) strategizing to leave Ukraine aid out of supplemental disaster relief funding in his plan for a Continuing Resolution to fund the government into November. Instead, he is [seeking](#) to tie Ukraine aid to a border security bill firmly opposed by Democrats.

Congress will also need to continue hashing out differences between the two looming versions of NDAA, which has House Armed Services Ranking Member Adam Smith (D-WA) [expressing](#) pessimism over coming to a bipartisan agreement anytime soon. Further impacting the Pentagon, Senator Tommy Tuberville (R-AL) [remains](#) opposed to expediting Senate confirmation of top military leaders, as three vacancies remain among the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the current chairman, General Mark Milley, eyes retirement at the end of this month. Tuberville's opposition centers around the Pentagon's current abortion and gender identity policies. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) [vowed](#) this week that he will not put any of the nominees up for a confirmation vote until Tuberville relents, hoping to apply political pressure to Senate Republicans and frame this issue as one adversely impacting military readiness.

Aerospace & Defense

[Kendall Pledges 'Major' Review of DAF's Readiness to Meet China Challenge \(Air and Space Forces\)](#)

A week after saying the Department of the Air Force was not as prepared as it could be for war against an adversary like China, Air Force Secretary Frank Kendall pledged a sweeping review of Air Force and Space Force organization, training, supply, and readiness in an open letter to Airmen and Guardians. The review would conclude after the Department of the Air Force finishes building its fiscal year 2025 budget request, but before it is sent to Capitol Hill. Upon completion, the review will be followed by “an implementation phase,” the length of which Kendall did not specify. Kendall’s letter likely foreshadows his remarks at next week’s AFA conference where he is expected to make a major announcement about the Air Force’s plan for Collaborative Combat Aircraft, and how they will tie in with the Pentagon’s larger “Replicator” effort to produce unmanned, “attritable” fighting vehicles, watercraft, and aircraft.

[Replicator program needs no new money, Hicks says](#)

[Anduril acquires drone company Blue Force Technologies \(Defense News\)](#)

Defense technology company Anduril Industries agreed to acquire Blue Force Technologies, a maker of uncrewed aircraft based in North Carolina. The company said that Blue Force’s emphasis on UAV hardware development and digital engineering aligns well with Anduril’s investments in mission autonomy software and its vision to field large quantities of uncrewed systems. Blue Force has been developing its Fury uncrewed system, which is designed to perform fighter aircraft-like missions. Anduril in May unveiled its Lattice for Mission Autonomy software platform, a hardware-agnostic capability that can link various autonomous systems to perform complex operations. Anduril’s acquisition of Blue Force follows its purchase in June of solid rocket motor manufacturer Adranos, significantly broadening the six-year-old technology firm’s scope.

[Lockheed, Raytheon sign deal to make Javelin anti-tank weapons in Poland](#)

[Lockheed Again Lowers F-35 Deliveries On New Upgrade \(Aviation Week\)](#)

Lockheed Martin has further delayed delivery of the first F-35 upgraded with new avionics, to the second quarter of 2024, adding more jets to a backlog of deferred shipments since

2020, the company announced on Sept. 6. The latest schedule slip means Lockheed now expects to deliver only 97 F-35s this year, a further reduction from an estimate in July of 100-200. The delays are being caused by scheduling with an ongoing certification process for the software in the Technology Refresh-3 (TR-3) hardware, which includes an L3Harris integrated core processor, an aircraft memory unit and an RTX electro-optical distributed aperture system, Lockheed says in a new regulatory filing.

Budget & Appropriations

[Senate unity puts House Republicans in a jam over government funding fight \(NBC News\)](#)

The Senate is displaying a rare unified front on government funding, putting the squeeze on the Republican-led House as the Sept. 30 deadline to avert a shutdown nears. All 12 funding bills have sailed through the Senate Appropriations Committee on bipartisan votes and senators sound triumphant about completing the task. The Democratic-led chamber plans to hold votes on the first three bills — military construction and veterans affairs, agriculture and the Food and Drug Administration, and transportation and housing — starting Monday. Senate Republican leaders are even warning Speaker Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., that his party-line approach to fund the government by slashing spending and advancing divisive conservative measures is going nowhere in the Senate. They say that if McCarthy continues to struggle to corral the votes for funding legislation in the closely divided House, he could simply take up the Senate bills.

[The White House wants \\$44 billion in emergency funding. Here's what that covers](#)

[Schumer says briefing highlighted 'unanimity' on aid to Ukraine \(The Hill\)](#)

Leading Democrats and Republicans are unanimous in thinking that the United States should provide more military and financial assistance for Ukraine, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said Thursday after a closed-door briefing on the state of the Russia-Ukraine war. The briefing was provided by national security adviser Jake Sullivan. President Biden sent Congress a request last month for \$24 billion in more funding for Ukraine, part of a larger \$40 billion supplemental funding request. But it's unclear how lawmakers will look to pass the funds. Schumer did not address a question over whether House Speaker Kevin McCarthy was on board with how to pass Ukraine aid. Infighting among lawmakers is raising alarm among allies, particularly in eastern Europe, that a distracted Washington would push Ukraine into early negotiations with Russia.

[AUKUS standoff: Australia, UK wait on Congress to approve pact](#)

[Air Force pushes for quickstart plan to launch programs without budget \(Defense News\)](#)

The U.S. Air Force still hopes lawmakers will approve a proposal allowing armed services to start work on new programs before a budget is passed, a move that could ease problems brought about by a continuing resolution. Andrew Hunter, the Air Force's assistant secretary for acquisition, technology and logistics, said that the so-called quickstart legislative proposal would allow the service to progress with initial contract work and early-stage program activities — even if a budget isn't yet passed and the military was forced to operate under a continuing resolution, limiting its spending to prior year levels. Under a CR, Hunter said, the Air Force can hold informal talks with industry. But arranging contracts and setting up vendor pools is trickier if a formal budget isn't yet passed. The quickstart proposal could change that, he argued.

Advanced Technologies

[Google will require election ads to 'prominently disclose' AI content \(Financial Times\)](#)

Google will require verified advertisers to “prominently disclose” when a campaign ad “inauthentically depicts” people or events, in a bid to combat the spread of digitally manipulated images for political gain, the company said on Wednesday. The tech company said the policy would take effect in mid-November, a year ahead of the US presidential and congressional elections. The announcement comes just a week before top tech executives including Google chief executive Sundar Pichai, Microsoft boss Satya Nadella and Microsoft's former chief Bill Gates are set to attend an artificial intelligence forum hosted by Senate majority leader Chuck Schumer in Washington that is likely to become the foundation of legislation on AI.

[NIST to seek input on White House strategy for emerging tech standards development](#)

[Air Force research arm plans AI prototypes contract for command and control efforts \(Nextgov\)](#)

The Air Force Research Laboratory is preparing for a new contract to test and prototype artificial intelligence applications that could ultimately strengthen its Joint All Domain Command and Control operations. In a presolicitation notice, the Air Force's research and development arm detailed a planned broad agency announcement to develop C2 AI

applications that can operate in a distributed and contested environment. The anticipated five-year contract would include multiple awards touching on options that range from traditional procurement contracts to Defense Department-based grants, Other Transaction Authorities and cooperative agreements. Awards are expected to have a period of performance of up to 48 months and may range between \$200,000 to \$20 million.

[The Pentagon's innovation arm has a new chief and a new strategy](#)

[NTIA looks to modernize federal spectrum systems as demand for 5G, space commerce skyrockets \(FedScoop\)](#)

The National Telecommunications and Information Administration announced Wednesday that it's looking to significantly modernize the systems and software it utilizes for managing spectrum as the government and world become more dependent on emerging uses of spectrum like 5G. NTIA, which is a part of the Commerce Department, said in a request for information (RFI) that one of its key missions is managing the use of radio frequency spectrum by federal agencies, but that's proving challenging because its current IT systems are outdated and its need to modernize them is acute. With the RFI, NITA seeks industry solutions, approaches and other information that could inform a potential request for proposals for a proposed Federal Spectrum Data System composed of user-capability areas designed to reduce manual manipulations and streamline and automate decision making.

Military Installations & Communities

[Chinese Gate-Crashers at U.S. Bases Spark Espionage Concerns \(WSJ\)](#)

Chinese nationals, sometimes posing as tourists, have accessed military bases and other sensitive sites in the U.S. as many as 100 times in recent years, according to U.S. officials, who describe the incidents as a potential espionage threat. The Defense Department, FBI and other agencies held a review last year to try to limit these incidents, which involve people whom officials have dubbed gate-crashers because of their attempts—either by accident or intentionally—to get onto U.S. military bases and other installations without proper authorization. They range from Chinese nationals found crossing into a U.S. missile range in New Mexico to what appeared to be scuba divers swimming in murky waters near a U.S. government rocket-launch site in Florida. The incidents appear designed to test security practices at U.S. military installations and other federal sites.

[Air Force Has Most Delayed Promotions from Tuberville Hold](#)

[Marines to appoint a safety general \(Defense One\)](#)

The Marine Corps will place a general officer in charge of the service's Safety Division next summer, the acting commandant announced Wednesday in the latest response to two deadly aircraft crashes. The division is currently led by a colonel, while the Navy's Safety Command is run by a rear admiral. Like the other services, the Marine Corps is authorized a set number of general officers, so it's unclear at the moment where the general officer will come from to lead the division. The Marine Corps' Safety Division will grow with the new general officer, and while it will not be as large as the Navy's, it will be a similar organization.

[Japan's top court orders Okinawa to allow a divisive government plan to build US military runways](#)

[Navy fires commanding officer of Fleet Readiness Center Mid-Atlantic \(Military Times\)](#)

The commanding officer of Fleet Readiness Center Mid-Atlantic was fired on Thursday, the Navy said. Rear Adm. Joseph Hornbuckle, head of Commander, Fleet Readiness Centers, removed Capt. Paul Choate of command "due to a loss of confidence in his ability to command," according to a statement from the Navy. Choate, who previously served as the executive officer of Fleet Readiness Center Mid-Atlantic starting in 2020, has been reassigned to Command, Fleet Readiness Centers. Capt. Richard Foster, executive officer of Fleet Readiness Center Mid-Atlantic, was scheduled to take over for Choate in December and is now serving as commanding officer.

Homeland Security

[Biden declines to grant conditions 9/11 defendants were seeking in plea negotiations \(NBC News\)](#)

President Joe Biden will not approve conditions proposed by lawyers for 9/11 criminal defendants who are seeking a plea agreement, a National Security Council spokesperson confirmed Wednesday. The rejected terms included a presidential guarantee that the five men would be spared solitary confinement and provided care for the trauma of their torture in CIA custody. Biden's refusal on the plea agreement guarantees leaves it to military prosecutors and defense lawyers to try to hash out an agreement. The terms still under discussion would have the five detainees at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, plead guilty and serve life sentences in exchange for being spared the death penalty.

[DHS Awards \\$20 Million to 34 Organizations in Effort to Prevent Targeted Violence and Terrorism](#)

[CISA plans new 'secure-by-design' guidance \(Nextgov\)](#)

The Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency is set to release new guidance aimed at bolstering national cybersecurity — including updated best practices for software providers to build secure-by-design products — and a public service awareness campaign to promote cyber preparedness across the country. CISA Director Jen Easterly said the nation's cyber defense agency will be launching a public service awareness campaign later this month to help foster a cybersecurity-conscious culture and amplify best practices that everyday technology users and ordinary citizens can employ to safeguard their digital assets. The agency is also expected to release an updated white paper as early as next month that builds off of its initial report on shifting the balance of cybersecurity risks from end users to software providers.

[China suspected of using AI on social media to sway US voters: Microsoft](#)

[Texas must move floating border barriers in Rio Grande, U.S. judge says \(WaPo\)](#)

A federal judge on Wednesday ordered Texas to reposition floating barriers the state placed in the middle of the Rio Grande, rebuking one of the more contentious elements of Gov. Greg Abbott's effort to deter illegal border crossings. The preliminary injunction granted by Judge David A. Ezra sided with the U.S. Justice Department, which filed a lawsuit in July arguing Texas had no authority to install a 1,000-foot-long segment of the spiked orange buoys in the river, an international waterway where the federal government has jurisdiction. Ezra gave Texas until Sept. 15 to relocate the floating barrier to the U.S. side of the riverbank, in coordination with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Transportation & Infrastructure

[Freight Carriers Could Be Forced to Share Tracks With Competitors \(WSJ\)](#)

Railroads that fail to provide reliable service could be ordered to share tracks with competitors under a proposed rule that backers say will increase competition in the business of moving cows, corn, chemicals and other goods across America. The rule on so-called reciprocal switching, proposed Thursday by the Surface Transportation Board, is seen as a way to improve efficiency among major freight lines that have struggled to move goods and supplies from farms, factories and ports, especially during the Covid-19

pandemic. The bipartisan, five-member board voted unanimously in favor of the proposed rule. If adopted, it would require all six of the nation's Class 1 railroads to maintain uniform data on their on-time performance.

[New bullet trains misfire on old U.S. railroad tracks](#)

[Time is running out to avert UAW autoworkers' strike as deadline looms \(WaPo\)](#)

Detroit's big automakers are running out of time to avert a strike as contract talks with the United Auto Workers remain tense, just one week before the current contract expires. The union has made the most progress in negotiations with Ford but has said it remains unsatisfied with the company's proposals. Talks with General Motors and Stellantis remain further behind, though GM said Thursday that it submitted a new offer to the union that includes a 10 percent wage increase for most employees and a 20 percent increase, to \$20 an hour, for temporary workers. Stellantis says it will submit a new offer by the end of the week. Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer (D) said Thursday that she is speaking with the Big Three automakers and the union in an effort to head off a strike, and the White House is also involved in the talks.

[Navy Will Dismantle Carrier USS Enterprise at a Commercial Shipyard](#)

[Republicans ask Buttigieg for information on 'disturbing' aviation, rail safety failures \(The Hill\)](#)

Republicans on the House Committee on Oversight and Accountability are calling on Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg for information on the "disturbing" trend of aviation and rail safety failures. In a letter dated Sept. 5, House Oversight Committee Chairman James Comer and a group of Republicans requested a briefing, documents and communications related to the Transportation Department's handling of various aviation and rail safety issues. In the letter to Buttigieg, the GOP lawmakers pointed to a report last year from the Department of Transportation's Office of Inspector General, which found "aviation safety" and "surface transportation safety" have been among the leading management challenges for the department since at least 2021.

Biotechnology & Healthcare

[Congress under the gun on must-pass health bills \(The Hill\)](#)

Lawmakers returning to Washington are far apart on a series of must-pass health care bills that could have far-reaching consequences on local health centers, federal authority and

pandemic preparedness. The bills will be part of a post-recess scramble as the House and Senate return ahead of a Sept. 30 government funding deadline. The White House has called on Congress to pass a short-term funding bill, which could buy time for further negotiations on some of the pricklier issues. But the coming weeks will signal whether Democrats and Republicans can find common ground on extending critical health programs. The biggest looming issue is massive funding bills for agencies like the Food and Drug Administration and the Department of Health and Human Services.

[Why health care could start pushing inflation up](#)

[Health-Insurance Costs Are Taking Biggest Jumps in Years \(WSJ\)](#)

Health-insurance costs are climbing at the steepest rate in years, walloping businesses and their workers. Costs for employer coverage are expected to surge around 6.5% for 2024, according to major benefits consulting firms Mercer and Willis Towers Watson, which projects the increase will be the biggest in more than a decade. Such a boost could add significantly to the price tag for employer plans that already average more than \$14,600 a year per employee, driving up health-insurance costs that are among the biggest expenses for many American companies and a drain on families' finances. For people who have individual insurance plans sold under the Affordable Care Act, premiums are also expected to rise by about 6% next year.

[Massachusetts's Biotech jobs growth](#)

[Weight loss drugs are being tested to treat addiction and dementia \(CNBC\)](#)

Scientists have begun investigating whether so-called miracle obesity drugs could be used to treat conditions such as dementia and alcohol addiction after recent trials pointed to the drugs' efficacy in treating serious health issues. Late-stage trial data released last month by Novo Nordisk indicated that its Wegovy weight loss injection led to "large reductions" in heart failure-related symptoms among at-risk patients. It comes weeks after the Danish pharmaceutical company published the results of its much anticipated "SELECT" study, which showed the drug's role in reducing the risk of major cardiovascular events such as heart attacks or strokes. The findings mark a major milestone as the company seeks to broaden perceptions of its product and researchers are hopeful they spell positive news for the drugs' other applications.

Climate & Development

[Biden administration cancels remaining oil and gas leases in Alaska's Arctic Refuge \(AP\)](#)

In an aggressive move that angered Republicans, the Biden administration canceled the seven remaining oil and gas leases in Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge on Wednesday, overturning sales held in the Trump administration's waning days, and proposed stronger protections against development on vast swaths of the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska. The Department of Interior's scrapping of the leases comes after the Biden administration disappointed environmental groups earlier this year by approving the Willow oil project in the petroleum reserve, a massive project by ConocoPhillips Alaska that could produce up to 180,000 barrels of oil a day on Alaska's petroleum-rich North Slope. Protections are proposed for more than 20,000 square miles of land in the reserve in the western Arctic.

[The \\$100tn path to net zero](#)

[Popular Senate carbon tariff bill gains House champions \(E&E News\)](#)

As interest grows in a Senate proposal to calculate the emissions intensity of industrial materials produced in the U.S., two lawmakers are getting ready to introduce companion legislation in the House. It will mark an important step for the "Providing Reliable, Objective, Verifiable Emissions Intensity and Transparency (PROVE IT) Act," which is being viewed as a first step in building support for a policy known as a carbon border adjustment mechanism, or CBAM, that would impose tariffs on carbon-intensive imports. Reps. John Curtis (R-Utah) and Scott Peters (D-Calif.) will be the lead sponsors of a House version of the "PROVE IT Act," their offices confirmed on Thursday.

[5 climate issues to watch as Congress wrestles with the NDAA](#)

[Saudi Arabia and Russia Extend Oil Production Cuts Through December \(NYT\)](#)

Saudi Arabia and Russia, in coordinated statements, said on Tuesday that they would extend their cuts in oil supplies through the rest of 2023. The moves helped push up oil prices, which have been on the rise in recent weeks. The cuts — one million barrels a day of output by Saudi Arabia and 300,000 barrels a day of exports by Russia — are intended to support oil prices. The Saudis first announced voluntary cuts early in the summer, and they had been extended month to month. The move on Tuesday to extend them by three months surprised some analysts, and appeared to reflect a greater determination to keep a close rein on supplies — with the likely result of raising prices.

Next Week's Hearings

Armed Services Committees

House: None listed

Senate:

- Tuesday, September 12, 2023, 9:30 AM EDT: [To consider the nomination of Gen. David Allvin to be chief of staff of the Air Force](#)
- Thursday, September 14, 2023, 9:30 AM EDT: [To consider the nomination of ADM Lisa Franchetti to be chief of naval operations](#)

Appropriations Committees

House: Wednesday, September 13, 2023, 9:30 AM EDT: [Oversight of the Department of Veterans Affairs implementation of the electronic health record modernization initiative](#)

Senate: None listed

Homeland Security Committees

House: Tuesday, September 12, 2023, 9:15 AM EDT: [Evolving threats: security and safety in a post-9/11 world](#)

Senate:

- Tuesday, September 12, 2023, 10:00 AM EDT: [Business meeting](#)
- Tuesday, September 12, 2023, 10:15 AM EDT: [America's supply chain security: understanding and mitigating threats](#)
- Wednesday, September 13, 2023, 10:00 AM EDT: [The PGA Tour-LIV deal: examining the Saudi Arabian Public Investment Fund's investments in the United State](#)
- Thursday, September 14, 2023, 10:00 AM EDT: [Governing AI through acquisition and procurement](#)

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