



# WASHINGTON UPDATE

PREPARED BY CAROLINE DECKER,  
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**January 14, 2022**

## **Congress Returns**

Members of U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate have returned to Washington to convene the 2<sup>nd</sup> session of the 117<sup>th</sup> Congress. There are several high priority items on their respective agendas. The Senate is working to advance the House passed "[John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act of 2021](#)". Majority Leader Chuck Schumer has announced that the Senate will take up consideration of the bill on Tuesday, January 18. Further Senate action on the Build Back Better Act has not been announced.

Congress also must complete action on the Fiscal Year 2022 federal funding bills. The new fiscal year started on October 1, 2021 however Congress has not finalized any of the 12 pending funding bills. The current continuing resolution (CR) funds the government through February 18. [Visit CRFB.org for more information.](#)

Much attention will be on the looming midterm elections that will occur on Tuesday, November 8, 2022 when a total of 469 seats in the U.S. Congress (34 Senate seats and all 435 House seats) are up for election. While Democrats are the Majority party in both chambers, they hold a narrow margin in the House: 222 Democrats – 213 Republicans. The Senate is split 50-50 with the deciding, tie-breaker vote belonging to Vice President Kamala Harris.

## **Infrastructure Funding**

The U.S. DOT unveiled its Bridge Formula Program earlier today – 60 days since the enactment of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. According to the DOT's press release: "*The U.S. Department of Transportation launched the historic Bridge Replacement, Rehabilitation, Preservation, Protection, and Construction Program (Bridge Formula Program), made possible by President Biden's Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. The program, to be administered by the Federal Highway Administration, represents the single largest dedicated bridge investment since the construction of the interstate highway system – providing \$26.5 billion to states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico over five years and \$825 million for Tribal transportation facilities. The total amount that will be available to states, D.C. and Puerto Rico in Fiscal Year 2022 is \$5.3 billion along with \$165 million for tribes. The FHWA also published initial guidance on the new program.*" [Read the full FHWA announcement.](#)



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## **New FRA Administrator Confirmed, Sworn into Office**

Following Senate confirmation of his nomination, Amit Bose was sworn in as the new Administrator for the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA). As the U.S. enters a new, transformative era of historic federal funding levels for rail modernization and expansion, Administrator Bose will lead FRA's implementation and administration of the rail title in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. More information on Administrator Bose can be found at [railroads.dot.gov](https://railroads.dot.gov).

## **Supreme Court Blocks Vaccine Mandate**

The Supreme Court on Thursday blocked enforcement of the Biden Administration's vaccine requirement for private employers. The mandate applied to businesses and other organizations with more than 100 employees and was the most widely applicable of the vaccine mandates. At the same time, the court is allowing the administration to proceed with a vaccine mandate for most health care workers in the U.S. Private employers can still pursue vaccine mandates, as the Supreme Court's ruling has no bearing on whether an individual employer can impose a vaccine mandate on its workforce.

Federal workers and employees of contractors that do business with the federal government will be required to be vaccinated. However, the administration's vaccine mandate for federal contractors is also temporarily blocked, after a district court judge ruled against the policy in December, but that litigation is still playing out in appeals court and hasn't made it to the Supreme Court yet.

The Supreme Court decision, with both majority and dissenting opinions, can be downloaded from the [Supreme Court website](#).

## **American Rescue Plan Funds**

On January 6, the U.S. Treasury Department issued the final rule for the State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds Program, enacted as a part of the American Rescue Plan, which delivers \$350 billion to state, local, and Tribal governments to support their response to and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.



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More information can be found in these links:

- [View the final rule text](#)
- [View a user-friendly overview of the major provisions of the final rule.](#)
- [Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds | U.S. Department of the Treasury](#)
- [Treasury Issues Final Rule for State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds Program to Support the Ongoing COVID Response | U.S. Department of the Treasury](#)

## **Lawmakers Pay Tribute to Late Senator Harry Reid**

Longtime Senator and former Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nevada) passed away on December 28, 2021 – he was 82 years old. After serving in several state and local positions in Nevada, Reid was elected to the United States Senate in 1986 and served in the Senate from 1987 to 2017. He served as the Senate Democratic Whip from 1999 to 2005 before succeeding Tom Daschle as Senate Minority Leader. The Democrats won control of the Senate after the 2006 United States Senate elections, and Reid became the Senate Majority Leader in 2007. He held that position for the final two years of George W. Bush's presidency and for the first six years of Barack Obama's presidency. As Majority Leader, Reid helped pass several pieces of major legislation including the Affordable Care Act and the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009.

Senator Reid died of pancreatic cancer at his home in Henderson, Nevada. President Biden, lawmakers, former staffers, and family members paid tribute to him at a memorial in the Capitol Rotunda on January 12, 2022. May he rest in peace.