**IMPORTANT LAWS ENACTED DURING THE 114th CONGRESS OF 2015-16**

**David R. Mayhew, 3/25/17**

**Laws for calendar 2015:**

***Permanent fix to Medicare’s sustainable growth rate formula.* The so-called “doc-fix.” (April)**

***Fast-track trade authorization to president to negotiate agreements with Asia and Europe* (June)**

***USA Freedom Act.* Rollback of NSA telephone surveillance authority. (June)**

***Two-year budget deal lifting domestic and defense spending caps.* (November)**

***Overhaul of No Child Left Behind e*ducation law. Powers reverted to the states. (December)**

***Five-year transportation infrastructure plan*. Spending for highway transit and rail projects. (December)**

***$680 billion tax-cut package.* Dozens of expiring tax subsidies made permanent.(December)**

***Lift of 1920s-era ban on oil exports.* (December)**

**Laws for calendar 2016:**

***Opioids policy.* To strengthen treatment and recovery efforts. (July)**

***Puerto Rico debt relief.* To restructure $72 billion bond debt. (July)**

***21st-Centurry Cures Act.* To speed up FDA approval of new drugs, supply $4.8 billion for NIH research, address mental health. (December)**

***Water Resources and Development Act (WRDA).* To authorize dozens of water-related infrastructure projects, with $170 million to address lead contamination in Flint MI (December)**

**Sources: Newspaper stories with serious lookback wrapup content covering calendar 2015:**

**Carl Hulse, “McConnell Says Do-Nothing Senate Is History, With Democrats’ Help,” New York Times, December 15, 2015, p. A18**

**Nick Timiraos & Kristina Peterson, “Massive Bill Leaves Deficit Fears Behind,” Wall Street Journal, December 19-20, 2015, p. A6**

**Alan Fram, “Congress wraps up another raucous year,” Boston Globe, December 20, 2015, p. A16**

**Seung Min Kim & Burgess Everett, “McConnell vows ambitious agenda in treacherous 2016,” Politico, December 14, 2015**

**Burgess Everett, “Mitch McConnell’s improbable 2015 partner: Democrats,” Politico, December 23, 2015**

**Sarah Binder, “These four reasons explain why bipartisanship is breaking out all over. Will it last?” Washington Post, December 17, 2015**

**Ben Weyl, “Short-Term Potential: Even with fewer legislative days and an election in 2016, Congress might get some things done,” Congressional Quarterly Weekly, January 4, 2016, pages 14+**

**Shawn Zeller, “Beyond Gridlock,” Congressional Quarterly Weekly, February 8, 2016, pages 20+**

**Sources: Newspaper stories covering calendar 2016. These are not a very satisfactory lot. Some good midyear reviews played up either or both of the opioids and Puerto Rican measures listed above, as did a number of at-passage-time stories on these measures. Yet as has happened in recent years, the wrapup industry more or less went to sleep at the close of the full 2016 calendar year. Sad! The newspapers didn’t look back across the full congressional year well. The Trump election was eating up the headlines in late 2016. Below, I report some mid-year reviews that played up the opiods and Puerto Rico measures. Also, I list a few late-season stories that serve as a good basis for seeing the importance of either or both of the Cures and WRDA measures cleared in December. These are not annual wrapups, but for purposes here they do a plausible job.**

**The mid-year reviews:**

**David Hawkings, “No, Congress Won’t Get Productive in the Fall,” Roll Call, July 11, 2016, p. 3.**

**David M. Herszenhorn & Jennifer Steinhauer, “Congress Hits Recess With Trail of Impasses,” New York Times, July 15, 2016, p. A12**

**“What Has Congress Ever Done for Us?” Wall Street Journal editorial, July 20, 2016, p. A14**

**Rachel Bade & Heather Caygle, “Congress takes 7-week vacation with little to show for it,” Politico, July 14, 2016**

**The late-season pieces mentioning the Cures and WRDA measures:**

**Jennifer Steinhauer, “Progress? It Depends on the Party That’s Talking,” New York Times, September 20, 2016, p. A12**

**Erica Werner, “Lame-Duck Congress Works to Set Stage for President Trump,” Associated Press story, November 29, 2016**

**Bridget Bowman, “Senate Gears Up for a Busy Lame Duck,” Roll Call, September 29, 2016, p 6.**

**Jordain Carney, “Lawmakers eye early exit from Washington,” The Hill, December 2, 2016**

**Kelsey Snell & Karoun Demirjian, “Congress’ rush to finish year-end work could create early headaches for Trump,” Washington Post, December 5, 2016**

**Erica Werner, “Uncertainty Looms as Republicans prepare for a monopoly of power,” Boston Globe, December 11, 2016, p. A5**

**Source covering both years of the Congress of 2015-16.**

**--Congressional Quarterly Weekly is very good when they put their mind to it. Yes, they seem to have given up on the comprehensive check-box coverage of outgoing Congresses that they used to do (Congress did this but didn’t do that). And they weigh in late. But they did finally weigh in this time. Thus:**

**--Shawn Zeller, “Nothing Comes Easy: The GOP has unified government [now in 2017], but the demise of its health care bill shows it is far from enacting landmark legislation,” Congressional Quarterly Weekly, March 27, 2017, pages 15-21. This is a smart, thoughtful essay. But I thought that its attribution of big laws during 2015-16 was rather skimpy. Zeller fingers just NSA surveillance, the doc fix, and NCLB reform (all in 2015). Yet a year earlier in wrapping up calendar 2015 he or Weyl (another CQW wrappuper) or both had also dwelt on the tax permanentization, the two-year budget deal, the highway bill, the fast-track trade authorization, and the lift of the oil export ban. Also, for its coverage of calendar 2016 in 3/27/17, CQW also offers at pages 22-29 a series of policy-specific accounts. Some of these go as follows: On the Puerto Rico bailout: “This was a big win for Ryan, who promised to find a ‘responsible solution’ to save Puerto Rico from a $72 billion debt crisis. And he delivered with partisan legislation [p. 23)”. On the pharmaceutical CURES act: “The House vote for the compromise effectively guaranteed the bill would become one of the few genuinely important and broadly bipartisan accomplishments of the year [p. 25)”; “It took until a month after the election, and the day before the legislative year came to an end, for Congress to finish the most consequential domestic policy measure of the year [p. 29].” As for myself, in my roundups of laws for previous Congresses I believe I have always fingered fast-track trade authorizations to the White House, multi-year highway bills, and big prominent bailouts (as of New York City in 1975 and Chrysler in 1979, now Puerto Rico in 2016).**

**Also-rans during the two years: That is, enactments that drew at least some media attention, but where I thought that the attention wasn’t all that great or that it didn’t carry through enough into wrapup stories:**

**--Authorization for process of an Iran deal in early 2015.**

**--Overhaul of toxic chemicals regulation, 2016**

**--Money to fight ZIKA virus, 2016**

**--Bill allowing suits against foreign governments (notably Saudi Arabia) over terrorist attacks, passed over Obama veto, September 2016.**