The Daily Dish

They’re Making a List, Checking it Twice

DOUGLAS HOLTZ-EAKIN | DECEMBER 5, 2017

Eakinomics: They’re Making a List, Checking it Twice

And a long and important list it is. Tax reform is done (well…almost done), but much remains. The government needs funding for fiscal year 2018. As a matter of reality, that means arriving at a deal to raise the caps on defense and non-defense spending — it is simply dangerous to operate at the cap level of defense spending. The National Flood Insurance Program’s (NFIP) short-term extension will soon lapse, as will the temporary reauthorization of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). Congress has yet to pass a reauthorization of the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP). Another item on the agenda is the reauthorization of Title VII of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA), including the controversial Section 702, which was the vehicle for mass surveillance as revealed by the Snowden leaks. President Trump has also asked Congress to address the Deferred Action on Childhood Arrivals (DACA) population. And it is inconceivable that Congress will leave for the year without providing disaster relief for hurricanes and wildfires.

In each case, it will require 60 votes in the Senate to pass legislation, so get ready for bipartisan legislating.

The most obvious and pressing of these issues is government funding. The present continuing resolution (CR) expires a nanosecond after midnight on Friday. Unless the president has signed a new CR, the government will be forced to close; a shutdown is bad policy and would reflect a fundamental failure. Other than the NFIP, none of the other issues needs to be addressed by Friday. Senate Democrats might be tempted to drag in a favorite issue (e.g. DACA) as the price of getting to 60 votes on the CR, but trying to jam Republicans on such a short timetable would reveal them to be playing politics and indifferent to a shutdown.

These policy issues do need to be settled in 2017. But they should be settled by negotiation, not budgetary brinksmanship with a shutdown on the line.