

American Nephrology Nurses Association

Daily Capitol Hill Update – Friday, February 28, 2020

(The following information comes from Bloomberg Government Website)

Schedules: White House and Congress

WHITE HOUSE

- President Trump departs White House at 4:10pm; en route to Charleston, S.C for rally at 7pm
- VP Mike Pence travels to West Palm Beach, Florida; speaks at Club for Growth conference at 12:45pm then holds a coronavirus response meeting with Fla. Gov. Ron DeSantis at 3pm
 - Pence then speaks at NRCC Florida Republican delegation dinner in Longboat Key, Fla. at 6:30pm before returning to Washington

CONGRESS

- 8am: House lawmakers get unclassified briefing on coronavirus from officials, including FDA Commissioner Stephen Hahn and Director of National Institute of Allergies and Infectious Diseases for the NIH Anthony Fauci
- Senate returns Monday
- House Speaker Nancy Pelosi holds press conference at 9am on H.R. 2339, a bill that would impose a new tax on nicotine used in vaping products and ban flavored vaping products
 - Vote on bill expected at 10:30am

Congressional, Health Policy, and Political News

- **More Opioids Legislation Urged:** House lawmakers from states hit hard by the opioid crisis are seeking action on proposals to authorize more federal funding for prevention programs and expand limits on opioid prescriptions. A bipartisan task force unveiled a package of 27 bills they say have wide, bipartisan support. They are trying to gather enough cosponsors to persuade House leaders to put them up for a vote this year.
 - “I think we’ll see quite a few of them become law this session,” according to Rep. Annie Kuster (D-N.H.), whose state had one of the highest rates of overdose deaths in 2017 and 2018. Kuster leads the Bipartisan Opioids Task Force. The push comes after the CDC said overdose deaths fell slightly from previous years, and Senate Republican leaders have shown little interest in taking up any stand-alone health legislation.
- **HHS Faulted Over Worker Protections:** A whistleblower is accusing HHS of a “failure to protect its employees” responsible for responding to the outbreak, according to the attorney representing the person making that claim. Federal health workers who received Americans quarantined for possible exposure to the coronavirus were not given proper equipment or

training, The Washington Post and The New York Times reported, citing a complaint filed with the Office of Special Counsel.

- **Food, Drug Safety Watchdog Funding:** Federal watchdogs tracking FDA food recalls and drug safety procedures need a boost in funding, according to Rep. Sanford Bishop (D-Ga.), chairman of the House Appropriations panel overseeing Agriculture Department and FDA spending. Inconsistent follow-ups after failed food safety inspections and challenges tracking drugs as they make their way from manufacturing plants into patients' hands were among a litany of concerns raised at a panel hearing yesterday. It's a "clear and present danger" to Americans due to such regulatory failings, Bishop said.
- **Bloomberg Releases More Health Details:** Former New York City Mayor Mike Bloomberg released details of a recent cardiac exam and challenged Sanders, who had a heart attack last year, to do the same. Bloomberg is specifically calling on Sanders to release his "left ventricular ejection fraction" – or the amount of blood his heart pumps with each contraction. It is a key piece of data cardiologists would use to assess his health. Bloomberg's doctor said his rate of 60% to 65% was "normal."
- **U.S. to Expand Coronavirus Tests:** U.S. health officials will let state and local health labs modify a test for the coronavirus that has been plagued by weeks of delays, in an effort to better keep watch for cases that may be quietly arising in some parts of the country.
 - Officials from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Food and Drug Administration held a conference call Wednesday in which they gave permission for state and local labs to drop a troublesome step in the tests that stopped them from being used, said Scott Becker, CEO of the Association of Public Health Laboratories. Becker's group represents state and local testing labs.
- **Whistleblower Says HHS Didn't Protect Workers:** A whistleblower is accusing Trump's Health and Human Services Department of a "failure" to protect employees responsible for responding to the outbreak, according to the attorney representing the person making that claim. Federal health workers who received Americans quarantined for possible exposure to the coronavirus were not given proper equipment or training, The Washington Post and The New York Times reported, citing a complaint filed with the Office of Special Counsel.
- **House to Vote on Vaping Bill:** The House will vote today on a bill meant to curb youth use of e-cigarettes by banning certain popular flavored tobacco and vaping products, such as mint and menthol. The legislation would impose a tax on e-cigarettes that supporters say is similar to the current tax on traditional cigarettes. The bill gained steam in the House after the White House put forward its own prohibition on some flavored vaping products, but Democrats panned the move as insufficient and instead moved forward with their own, broader flavor ban.
- **Khashoggi Report Sought:** House Intelligence Chairman Adam Schiff (D-Calif.) yesterday requested that U.S. intelligence officials declassify an annex to a report on the murder of Saudi dissident Jamal Khashoggi, with appropriate redactions. Failure to declassify the

annex and produce an unclassified report may raise concerns the White House is “using the classification process impermissibly in order to shield information of intense public interest from public release,” Schiff said in a letter to acting Director of National Intelligence Richard Grenell.

- **Troop Cuts in Africa:** The House Armed Services Committee is likely to try to prevent cutting the U.S. military presence in West Africa if a review conducted by Defense Secretary Mark Esper concludes that the number of troops on the continent has to be reduced, said Chairman Adam Smith (D-Wash.). Esper’s review of global deployments and the focus on Africa Command has prompted concern in Congress who fear that a reduced American presence in Africa would give strategic ground to China and Russia.
- **‘Rip and Replace’ Huawei Bill:** The Senate has passed by voice vote a bill that would authorize the Federal Communications Commission to help companies “rip and replace” any Huawei and ZTE telecommunications equipment. The bill was passed by the House in December and now heads to Trump. It would direct the FCC to provide subsidies to telecom companies to replace equipment from federally banned companies, which include Chinese companies Huawei and ZTE. The FCC adopted an order in November that levied a similar ban on using assistance from the Universal Service Fund to buy equipment and services from Huawei and ZTE.
- **Biden Tries to Defy History:** Despite leading national Democratic primary polls for more than a year – often by wide margins – former Vice President Joe Biden’s national polling numbers collapsed in the days following his fourth-place finish in the tumultuous Iowa caucuses. He’s not the only perceived frontrunner to falter in recent elections. Biden joins five other candidates since 1988 who lost their national polling lead after the Iowa caucuses; none of the others were able to recover from their decline. Biden’s path to the nomination seems uncertain. Since Iowa, he has placed fifth in New Hampshire and a distant second in Nevada and now trails Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) by about 11 points nationally. Now he’s banking on a win in South Carolina on Saturday to reverse his downward trajectory before Super Tuesday.
- **Iowa Recount Confirms Buttigieg Caucus Win:** The Iowa Democratic Party said yesterday that a partial recount of the Feb. 3 caucuses confirmed Pete Buttigieg’s lead with 14 delegates and Sanders in second place with 12. The Buttigieg and Sanders campaigns had asked for the recount of 23 precincts after the reporting of the results was marred from the beginning by problems with a smartphone app that didn’t work and a backup telephone hotline that was jammed by calls from supporters of Trump. The Iowa Democratic Party’s state central committee is expected to certify the results Saturday. The Associated Press, which hasn’t called the race, said it would update its tally of the national delegates won after that vote.
 - Meanwhile, Buttigieg met with about 10 members of the Congressional Black Caucus yesterday, as polls show the candidate struggling to win African-American supporters and to expand his coalition in southern states like South Carolina. Rep.

Anthony Brown (D-Md.), who has endorsed Buttigieg and hosted the get-together, said Buttigieg was “well received and will continue to engage and listen.” One-fifth of the caucus participated.

- **Bannon Hosts a Dinner of International Populist Leaders:** As Trump grappled with a public health crisis that could threaten his re-election, his former chief strategist was across the street from the White House dining with a group of like-minded Europeans and Latin Americans to plot the next wave of a global surge in right-wing populism. Steve Bannon, an architect of Trump’s 2016 victory who became a senior White House aide, hosted the dinner Wednesday night for Nigel Farage, a key figure in the movement that led to Brexit; Jerome Riviere, a leader in France’s right-wing National Rally party and member of the European Parliament; Eduardo Bolsonaro, a son of Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro; and Eduardo Verastegui, an actor and staunch Roman Catholic who’s considering a run for president of Mexico.
- **Arizona Voters Lose McSally Challenge:** Arizona voters lost their challenge to Gov. Doug Ducey’s appointment of fellow Republican Martha McSally to fill a Senate vacancy after Sen. John McCain’s death, as the Ninth Circuit said yesterday the state law governing appointments and elections in the aftermath of a Senate vacancy is constitutional. McCain in 2018 died three days before the primary, with over four years remaining in his term. Arizona law provides that if a U.S. Senate seat is vacated 150 days or fewer before the next primary election, Arizona voters won’t fill the vacancy until the next general election.
- **Roberts Faces Moment of Truth on Abortion at Court:** For U.S. Chief Justice John Roberts, the moment of truth on abortion is coming. The Supreme Court on Wednesday will hear its first abortion case since Roberts became the pivotal vote on the issue. Four years after invalidating a Texas law requiring clinic doctors to have hospital admitting privileges, the court will consider whether to switch directions and uphold a similar law in Louisiana. The argument will test Roberts’s appetite for rolling back abortion-rights precedents and could foreshadow a fight over the landmark 1973 *Roe v. Wade* ruling. The justices will rule by the end of June, potentially making abortion and the court itself central issues in the November election. Trump’s administration is supporting the Louisiana law.
- **Trump Can’t Build Mexico Wall With Sub Funds:** The Trump administration was barred by a court from diverting \$89 million to build the Mexico border wall from a construction project at a submarine base in Washington state. Yesterday’s ruling by a federal judge in Seattle is the latest setback to Trump’s multibillion-dollar plan to bolster barriers along the U.S. southern border. The funds at issue were earmarked for construction of a pier at the Bangor naval base, home to the Pacific Fleet’s Trident ballistic subs. It’s one of 127 congressionally approved military projects totaling \$3.6 billion that the administration planned to defund to pay for 11 border wall projects, according to the lawsuit filed by Washington state.

- **U.S.-Taliban Deal Brings Shaky Hope:** The U.S. is ready to take its biggest step toward ending the two-decade war in Afghanistan tomorrow with the signing of a peace deal with the Taliban, the fundamentalist Islamic group ousted by American forces after the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. The accord to be signed in Qatar rests on a simple exchange: The U.S. will start withdrawing some of its 13,000 troops in the country in exchange for a Taliban pledge to cut ties with all terrorists and prevent Afghan territories from becoming militant havens. The Taliban must also begin talks with negotiators from the Afghan government, opposition and civil society for a lasting cease-fire and, the U.S. hopes, an eventual political deal.
- **Cuomo May Sue Trump Over Traffic Plan:** New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo (D) says he may sue the federal government over its failure to approve a plan that would lower traffic in Manhattan by charging motorists fees during periods of high congestion, if evidence shows that the holdup is politically motivated. "The Federal Highway Administration has to be careful because blatant political use of government is certainly unethical, and in some situations it's illegal," Cuomo said in Manhattan yesterday. "I have no problem suing the federal government, especially if they did something illegal."
- **Scientists Hiding Foreign Ties:** The Trump administration may ask Congress to allow universities to share information about scientists who don't disclose their foreign ties, which is now prohibited by U.S. law. Hidden payments from foreign governments to U.S.-backed scientists is a major compliance pitfall for research institutions amid new scrutiny over how other countries influence or steal U.S. research. Researchers who fail to disclose such payments, as is required by the National Institutes of Health, can hide by changing institutions, White House science adviser Kelvin K. Droegemeier said.
- **Trump Policy Unlawful on Grouse Turf:** A federal court has blocked the White House from streamlining oil and gas development on public land in sage grouse territory. The U.S. District Court for the District of Idaho yesterday ruled that the Bureau of Land Management didn't go through required rulemaking procedures before issuing a 2018 "instruction memorandum" aimed at expediting timelines for federal leases under the National Environmental Policy Act.