

American Nephrology Nurses Association

Daily Capitol Hill Update – Monday, March 16, 2020

(The following information comes from Bloomberg Government Website)

Schedules: White House and Congress

WHITE HOUSE

- 10am: President Trump takes part in video teleconference with G7 Leaders to coordinate action over the coronavirus
- 10:30am: Virus task force holds press briefing
- 11:30am: Trump participates in teleconference with governors to discuss virus response
- 12:30pm: Trump has lunch with Vice President Mike Pence

CONGRESS

- House on recess
- Senate, which canceled its planned recess, meets at 3pm
 - Will consider economic relief bill, H.R. 6201, passed in the House and backed by Trump to deal with the coronavirus outbreak
 - At 5:30pm, will vote on motion to limit debate on motion to proceed to a bill, H.R. 6172, that would extend elements of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act through Dec. 1, 2023

Congressional, Health Policy, and Political News

- **Lawmakers Work on Virus Response:** The Senate this week will consider an economic relief plan to deal with the spreading coronavirus backed by Trump. The House-passed package includes free testing for everyone who needs it, and two weeks of paid sick leave to allow people with the virus to stay home from work and avoid infecting co-workers. It also includes enhanced jobless benefits, increased food aid for children, senior citizens and food banks, and higher funding for Medicaid benefits.
 - Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) said that while the Senate works on the House bill, her chamber's leaders will begin working on an additional emergency response measure. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) said in a statement shortly after Saturday's vote that the Senate "will need to carefully review" the House measure. "But I believe the vast majority of senators in both parties will agree we should act swiftly to secure relief for American workers, families, and small businesses," he said.
 - McConnell in a statement last night also said more work would likely be needed, and that he has talked to Senate committee heads about next steps. "Senate Republicans feel strongly that this bill must only be the beginning of Congress's efforts to support our nation's economy and stand with American families," he said in a statement last night.

- The Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee will hold a hearing tomorrow on the U.S. response to the outbreak with Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute Of Allergy and Infectious Diseases; Stephen Hahn, commissioner of the FDA; Anne Schuchat, deputy director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; and Robert Kadlec, assistant secretary for preparedness and response at the Department of Health and Human Services.
- **Emergency Declaration Gives States Medicaid Flexibility:** States can gain new authority to use their Medicaid programs to respond to the coronavirus pandemic under the national emergency Trump declared Friday. The direct impact of Trump’s declaration will be a flow of federal disaster-relief funds to the states, but the announcement also allows states to seek new flexibility in their Medicaid programs through waiver applications to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. States can also seek to loosen restrictions on eligibility for the program, which provides health coverage for low-income people.
- **Generic Drug Competition Gets Boost:** The market for drugs with flagging competition will get a boost thanks to new FDA guidance that aims to cut down on drugs produced by a single company or supplier. Companies looking to make drugs that have no patents yet face inadequate competition can apply for a special designation that speeds up their drug’s approval time and offers 180 days of exclusivity under certain circumstances, according to the industry guidance. Inadequate competition is when there’s not more than one FDA-approved drug available to patients.
- **CDC Urges Against Mass Gatherings:** In the most extreme effort yet to slow the march of coronavirus in the U.S., the CDC recommended that events of 50 people or more not be held for about two months. For the next eight weeks, organizers should cancel or postpone in-person events of that size throughout the U.S., the agency said on its website yesterday. When feasible, organizers could modify events to be virtual. “This recommendation is made in an attempt to reduce introduction of the virus into new communities and to slow the spread of infection in communities already affected by the virus,” the CDC said.
 - The National Security Council, in a Twitter post on a verified account, said text message rumors of a national quarantine “are fake,” adding there’s “no national lockdown.”
- **Mass General Chief Calls for ‘War-Like Stance’:** Hospitals across the U.S. are preparing for a surge in patients seeking help as testing for the novel coronavirus becomes more prevalent, revealing the extent of COVID-19’s spread. One leading doctor called for a war-like footing to ensure resources are properly assigned. “We need to think about this in almost like a war-like stance,” Peter Slavin, president of Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston, said on NBC’s “Meet the Press.” He called for the federal government to engage in a Manhattan Project-type effort to spur the health care industry to create more surgical masks, eye protection and gowns.
- **White House Urges Telework for Federal Workers:** The White House is asking all federal agencies to offer “maximum telework flexibilities” to their employees in the Washington

area, citing concerns about the coronavirus. "The Administration wants to ensure that department and agency leaders assertively safeguard the health and safety of their workforce while remaining open to serve the American people and conduct mission critical functions," the White House Office of Management and Budget said in a memo to department heads and agencies last night.

- **Chaos at Airports From New Screening:** Chicago's O'Hare International Airport was among those overwhelmed over the weekend with passengers, including many returning from Europe, who faced new screening measures hastily announced last week by the White House. The throngs of anxious travelers were a stark contrast to the increasingly loud calls for people to practice "social distancing" as a way to get ahead of the spread of the coronavirus and buy time for fragile health care systems.
 - As pictures of crowds and horror stories from travelers were shared on social media, Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker (D) accused the White House of failing to prepare for the fallout from Trump's new travel restrictions. Trump tweeted that the medical screenings at airports were "very precise" and moving as quickly as possible. A White House official said the administration was actively working with Pritzker's office.
- **Closures Mark America's Big Shutdown:** The biggest school system in the U.S. is closing. California is confining the elderly to their homes. Bars, restaurants, resorts and several retail chains are closing shop. Wide swaths of the American economy are entering suspended animation to combat the spread of the coronavirus. Yesterday, New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio (D) said the city's public schools -- encompassing some 1.1 million students -- will close until at least April 20. California Gov. Gavin Newsom (D) called for all of the state's bars and wineries to close and for restaurants to cut capacity by half, while advising the state's 5.3 million citizens above 65 to isolate themselves in their homes.
- **Fed Slashes Rates to Near Zero:** The Federal Reserve swept into action yesterday to save the U.S. economy from the fallout of the coronavirus, slashing its benchmark interest rate by a full percentage point to near zero and promising to boost its bond holdings by at least \$700 billion. In remarks underlining the sense of urgency, Fed Chairman Jerome Powell told a hastily assembled press briefing by telephone that the disruption to lives and businesses meant second quarter U.S. growth would probably be weak and it was hard to know how long the effects would last. That left a clear role for fiscal policy to help cushion the blow.
 - "The thing that fiscal policy, and really only fiscal policy can do, is reach out directly to affected industries, affected workers, and we've seen some of that so that's an important job," he said. "We do know that the virus will run its course and that the U.S. economy will resume a normal level of activity. In the meantime, the Fed will continue to use our tools to support the flow of credit."
 - Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said he doesn't expect the coronavirus to tip the U.S. economy into recession, even though growth will inevitably slow as many businesses shut down operations for a time. Mnuchin also said yesterday he wants to reinstate certain powers used during the 2008 financial crisis to help buttress the economy from the economic shock now on the way. "Later in the year, obviously the

economic activity will pick up as we confront this virus," Mnuchin said on ABC's "This Week," one of two interviews on Sunday-morning talk shows.

- **Fear G-7 Cannot Match Past Crisis Responses:** Trump, as the host of the Group of Seven, was nudged by European leaders into holding an emergency conference call to tackle the spiraling threat of the coronavirus. That does not bode well for the outcome today during trading hours.
 - Chancellor Angela Merkel in particular, who helped orchestrate a pressure campaign behind the scenes last week, is not feeling optimistic about the call at noon Washington time, according to a German official. She was liaising with French President Emmanuel Macron before he spoke to Trump on Friday afternoon and persuaded him to organize the talks. They are already feeling bruised after Trump closed U.S. airports to flights from Europe without consulting them. Now they seek a commitment that it won't happen again and a plan to coordinate on economic stimulus, officials said.
- **U.S. to Start Buying Oil:** The U.S. is preparing to start buying as much as 77 million barrels of oil for its emergency stockpiles within the next two weeks, an effort by Trump to support the domestic industry and boost reserves at cheap prices.
- **Grocery Group Seeks Federal Aid:** A group representing U.S. consumer goods manufacturers called for federal aid to help avoid supply disruptions as customers emptied shelves on fears of the spreading coronavirus. The Consumer Brands Association, an industry trade group, asked for emergency federal funding to help mitigate any supply chain problems and manage input shortages. The group released a letter to Trump after he convened a conference call yesterday with U.S. grocery executives.
 - Trump later asked Americans to cut back on purchases of groceries and essential goods that are straining the system. Major cities across the U.S. have seen shelves emptied of products like canned soup and toilet paper as authorities call for citizens to stay home as much as possible to reduce the virus's spread.
- **Biden, Sanders Vow to Fight Coronavirus in Debate:** Joe Biden and Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) sparred over whether Medicare for All would ease the impact of the coronavirus crisis in their first one-on-one debate, a testy face-off that showed Sanders wasn't ready to concede the nomination to Biden despite an all-but-insurmountable delegate lead.
 - The debate, sponsored by CNN and Univision, opened and closed with the coronavirus. Sanders has been using the attention on the virus to insist that his signature policy proposal, Medicare for All, would ease some of the financial impact of the virus on people who lack health insurance. "We are the only major country on Earth not to guarantee health care to all people," Sanders said. He said all Americans should be able to get treatment when they are sick regardless of their income.
 - Biden pushed back against the idea of Medicare for All as the solution, saying Italy has a similar system and it has not stopped the crisis there. "You have a single payer

system in Italy," he said. "It doesn't work there. It has nothing to do with Medicare for All. That would not solve the problem at all."

- **Biden Vows to Pick a Woman to Be His Vice President:** Biden committed to choosing a woman to be his vice president if he becomes the Democratic presidential nominee, though Sanders didn't make as firm a promise to do so during the debate. "I commit that I will, in fact, pick a woman to be vice president," Biden said. "There are a number of women qualified to be president tomorrow. I would pick a woman to be my vice president."
 - The pledge came after a voter asked via video what the candidates would do to ensure that women are represented in their administration. Sanders didn't commit to having a female vice president, but said "in all likelihood" he would.
- **Biden Adopts Free Public College Plan:** Biden is adopting a version of tuition-free college in an effort to reach out to Sanders's young supporters as the former vice president attempts to unite the two wings of the Democratic Party around him, his campaign said. Biden now supports making public college and university tuition free for all students whose families earn less than \$125,000 a year, his campaign said yesterday.
- **How Biden Came Back:** Biden is now on a clear path to the Democratic presidential nomination, and if tomorrow's four primaries go as planned, that means he'll lock it up by late April. Just three weeks ago, it looked like his campaign would end painfully, just like the two times he'd run before.
- **Biden Needs to Woo Skeptical Oil, Gas Workers:** Biden's chief claim to the Democratic nomination is that he can compete better in the Rust Belt states that Trump won in 2016 -- places like Ohio and his native Pennsylvania, where he grew up in Scranton. But to win there, he'll have to overcome his party's baggage on energy. Many Rust Belt voters rely on oil and natural gas jobs and they're wary of Democratic proposals, such as the "Green New Deal," that push for "net-zero emissions" and would effectively put coal and other fossil fuels out of business. The party has also taken aim at fracking, which has become the lifeblood of many previously down-and-out rural communities in those states.
- **Biden Leads Sanders in Arizona Poll:** A poll released today shows Biden with a 20-point lead over Sanders in Arizona, a state where the Vermont senator hopes to do well in a primary tomorrow thanks to his support among a large Hispanic population. Sanders beats Biden 48% to 41% among the state's Latinos in the Monmouth University poll. But Biden is well ahead among all likely Democratic primary voters, with 51% support compared with 31% for Sanders.
- **Ohio, Illinois Governors Say Primaries Still On:** Ohio and Illinois will move forward with their Democrat primaries this week, even as a response aimed at stemming the spread of coronavirus widens nationwide, the states governors said. Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine (R) and Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker (D), speaking on NBC's "Meet the Press," said voting will go

ahead as planned despite other restrictions such as school closures imposed on their residents.

- Louisiana and Georgia have delayed upcoming Democratic primaries to June and May, respectively.
- **House Passes Chemical Facility Program Extension:** Lawmakers early Saturday morning passed legislation that would extend the Department of Homeland Security's Chemical Facility Anti-Terrorism Standards (CFATS) program. The program expires in April. The measure, passed by unanimous consent, would extend it for 18 months. The bill now heads to the Senate.
- **Food-Stamp Cuts Blocked:** A federal judge in Washington put off much of the Trump administration's effort to make it harder for poor Americans to get food assistance, in a blistering ruling that not only criticized the White House but chided other courts for having too often "rolled over" to the president's demands. In an 84-page ruling, Chief U.S. District Judge Beryl Howell issued a nationwide injunction that blocks two of the three changes the White House had made to the nation's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP. "As a global pandemic poses widespread health risks, guaranteeing that government officials at both the federal and state levels have flexibility to address the nutritional needs of residents and ensure their well-being through programs like SNAP, is essential," Howell said.
- **Trump Victory Over Congressional Oversight in Doubt:** A federal appeals court set aside and will review a legal victory for Trump last month that called congressional oversight of the White House into question. The court in Washington said Friday it would have a larger panel of judges rehear a Feb. 28 decision dismissing a House lawsuit seeking the testimony of former White House Counsel Don McGahn. The court said in the prior ruling that it lacked jurisdiction to decide a dispute between the executive and legislative branches. The rehearing is scheduled for April 28. Friday's order suggests that the court's full bench was unsettled by the earlier ruling.
- **USAID Administrator Plans to Depart:** Mark Green, administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development since August 2017, plans to leave his post soon, said a person familiar with the matter. The White House is compiling a list of possible alternatives to serve as acting head of the agency, the person said. The White House didn't immediately respond to a request for comment. He's expected to be named as president of the McCain Institute for International Leadership, a Washington-based think tank.