

American Nephrology Nurses Association

Daily Capitol Hill Update – Tuesday, March 24, 2020

(The following information comes from Bloomberg Government Website)

Schedules: White House and Congress

WHITE HOUSE

- 12:30pm: President Trump participates in a Fox News virtual town hall from White House rose garden
- 10:30am: VP Mike Pence participates in call with conservative leaders on coronavirus response
- Noon: Pence participates in Fox News virtual town hall
- 2:15pm: Pence participates in call with educators
- 3pm: Pence meets with coronavirus task force meeting

CONGRESS

- House in recess
- Senate meets at 10am; resumes consideration of the legislative vehicle for the coronavirus supplemental
- House Democrats last night introduced their own \$2.5 trillion stimulus

Congressional, Health Policy, and Political News

- **Speaker Pelosi Unveils House Democrats' Stimulus Plan:** Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) unveiled Democrats' \$2.5 trillion virus economic stimulus plan yesterday in a bid to shape negotiations on the Senate measure.
 - Pelosi's 1,400-page bill would have broad implications for the financial sector. It would force lenders to grant a temporary reprieve from mortgage and car payments and credit card bills. It would order the Federal Reserve to provide loan servicers with liquidity to allow borrowers to stop paying their mortgages for up to 360 days. Public housing residents would get a temporary reprieve from paying rent, and student loan borrowers would have \$10,000 of debt forgiven. Negative consumer credit reporting would be halted. Foreclosures and evictions would be banned.
 - Struggling airlines would get \$37 billion in grants to keep workers on the job as part of a \$71 billion package to rescue airlines and airports under the bill, according to a person familiar with the matter. The House's plan would also require airlines that accept federal aid to give labor a seat on their board of directors, offset carbon emissions by 2025 and would fund a program to be run by the Transportation Department to make carrier fleets more efficient by scrapping older planes, according to a release by House Transportation and Infrastructure Republicans who oppose such provisions.

- There are currently no plans for House members to return to Washington to vote on the bill, and the proposal appears to be a list of demands Democrats want to see included in the Senate bill.
- **Emergency Lab Funding:** The clinical lab industry, which has asked Congress for \$5 billion in emergency funding for expanded testing capacity, said all the packages under debate leave behind an industry that's already overwhelmed with processing Covid-19 tests. Laboratories are performing more than 50,000 Covid-19 tests a day and are still waiting for reimbursements, the American Clinical Laboratory Association said, Jeannie Baumann reports.
 - "It is disappointing and alarming that Congress has not yet recognized the contributions of the lab industry and its response during this public health crisis," Julie Khani, ACLA president said yesterday. "If the urgent funding and supply challenges aren't resolved now, America's commercial laboratories could be forced to retrench rather than keep building the capacity that is needed."
- **HHS Told to Ease ACA Access:** Congressional Democrats called on the Trump administration to re-open enrollment in the Obamacare exchanges, following the lead of states, so people can get health care coverage as the coronavirus spreads. "We've seen many state leaders, governors, step up, offer those types of interventions, and many more," Rep. Lauren Underwood (D-Ill.) said yesterday. Underwood called for a national special enrollment period for those who want to get health insurance during the outbreak in case they get sick.
- **Community Health Centers:** House Democrats' proposal, mirroring Senate Republicans' version, proposes extending federal funding for community health centers and other health programs until November of this year at the request of the White House. Health care industry lobbyists are warning such an extension will delay and likely end efforts to pass surprise medical billing and drug pricing legislation this year.
 - But one Republican aide said funding the programs beyond the expected life of the coronavirus outbreak will give Congress the opportunity to take on the issues when lawmakers aren't focused on the fast-spreading coronavirus. One House Democratic aide said the White House "drew a line in the sand" demanding any coronavirus bill include funding for community health centers until November and that congressional leaders have agreed to that condition, meaning it's likely to be part of any bipartisan agreement that might arise between Republicans and Democrats.
- **Schumer Expects to Reach Deal With Mnuchin Today:** Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin has agreed to "significant oversight" of a \$500 billion exchange stabilization fund in Republicans' proposed coronavirus rescue package, Politico reporter John Bresnahan said in a Twitter post, citing three sources familiar.
 - Fund oversight had been a concern for Democrats worried about accountability of how funds will be used. Politico also said the Democrat-sought 'Marshall plan for hospitals' is also in the bill. Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.) said leaders expect to have a deal This morning, according to CNN and CQ Roll Call.

Schumer added there's still a few differences but neither expect them to be obstacles to a final deal, a CQ Roll Call reporter said in tweet.

- **Federalized U.S. Medical Supply Chain:** Sen. Chris Murphy (D-Conn.) and other Democrats unveiled legislation that would federalize the U.S. medical supply chain. "Leaving it in private hands encourages hoarding and gouging, maximizes inefficiency during a crisis," Murphy tweeted yesterday. Murphy's bill would seek to "federalize the manufacture and distribution of scarce in-demand medical supplies" to "cure the growing inefficiencies of 50 states and thousands of hospitals competing against each other for medical supplies."
- **Trump Says U.S. Isn't 'Built to Be Shut Down':** President Donald Trump said the American economy can't remain slowed for too long to fight the coronavirus, declaring that the country "was not built to be shut down."
 - "America will again, and soon, be open for business. Very soon," Trump said yesterday. "A lot sooner than three or four months."
 - The president of the St. Louis Federal Reserve Bank, James Bullard, said yesterday that the government should consider shutting down much of the economy for three months to combat the outbreak. Trump didn't mention Bullard, but said: "We're not going to let the cure be worse than the problem."
 - Trump began discussing how to get Americans back to work last week, according to people familiar with the matter -- just days after endorsing "social distancing" measures that have slowed the economy as people stay home from work and avoid eating out and socializing. "I'm not looking at months, I can tell you right now. We're going to be opening up our country," Trump said. "Can't keep it closed for the next, you know, for years. This is going away."
- **Governors Clamp Down:** Meanwhile, governors and mayors across the U.S. issued orders to clamp down normal human contact and commercial life.
 - Yesterday, Indiana, West Virginia and Massachusetts ordered all residents to stay home while Virginia and Maryland placed restrictions on non-essential movement. The actions by the governors, Democrats and Republicans alike, show that even if Trump relaxes federal recommendations, states won't necessarily follow.
 - The governors of New York, Ohio, Illinois, California, Connecticut, Nevada and Pennsylvania within the last week told their residents -- one-third of the U.S. population of 328 million -- that nonessential businesses must close and they shouldn't venture out other than for groceries, medicine or emergencies. This week, more are following that lead.
- **U.S. Stock Futures Rise With Congressional Negotiations:** U.S. stock futures advanced alongside shares in Europe and Asia as investors speculated Congress would eventually pass a spending package that, together with the Federal Reserve's massive stimulus program, would be able to contain the fallout from the coronavirus.

- **Port Authority Relief Urged:** Reps. Jerrold Nadler (D-N.Y.) and Albio Sires (D-N.J.) are calling for emergency financial relief for the Port Authority of New York & New Jersey, according to a statement from Nadler's office. Nadler and Sires requested the aid in a letter to Pelosi, Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-Calif.), and Senate leaders. The letter details the decreased ridership, higher operational costs, and diminished revenue that have resulted in a "period of extreme financial strain" on the authority.
- **Trump Says Boeing Will Need 'Help':** Trump said yesterday that Boeing needs federal government "help" amid an economic slowdown that has hit the travel industry. "Boeing's going to need some help," Trump said at the White House. "Obviously the airlines are going to have a problem, but the airlines aren't going to be buying from Boeing or anybody else right now because of this difficulty." The planemaker announced it is shutting its Seattle-area manufacturing hub for two weeks after a worker died of coronavirus complications, adding to a wave of plant closings sweeping the globe as the aviation industry navigates the biggest disruption in decades.
- **Cattlemen Want Coronavirus Stimulus:** Livestock producers, to keep beef and chicken on American dinner plates, need congressional support during the new coronavirus pandemic and, more importantly, funding, lawmakers said. "Many of my farmers and ranchers may not, probably will not, survive this crisis," said Sen. Jerry Moran (R-Kan.) on the Senate floor yesterday, as legislators hammer out the details of their stimulus plan. Moran joined Sen. John Hoeven (R-N.D.), chairman of the Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee, in a push for \$20 billion to replenish the Commodity Credit Corp. The Agriculture Department entity subsidizes programs such as farm income.
- **Loan Loss Rule Postponement:** Rep. Gregory Meeks (D-N.Y.) is the latest lawmaker to call on U.S. accounting rulemakers to suspend major credit loss accounting rules until the coronavirus pandemic ends. Meeks, with long-time FASB critic Rep. Blaine Luetkemeyer (R-Mo.), in a letter urged the Financial Accounting Standards Board to postpone the current expected credit losses accounting standard. The standard will force businesses to record losses they expect to see rather than waiting for customers to miss payments. Meeks, chairman of the Consumer Protection and Financial Institutions subcommittee, has expressed concern about the accounting change.
- **Hotels, Restaurants Seek More Aid:** Trade groups representing restaurants, travel destinations and hotels called on Congress to increase the loan amount offered to small businesses in an economic stimulus package. The U.S. Travel Association supports increasing the maximum loan amount offered to small businesses to four times the borrowers' monthly operating costs from 2.5 times the borrowers' monthly payroll expenses, said Tori Emerson Barnes, who heads policy for the group. The American Hotel & Lodging Association also backs that position, according to a person familiar.

- **Trump Says Helping States to Get Equipment Against Pandemic:** The Trump administration is helping states get equipment amid the coronavirus outbreak, but it “is not easy,” Trump said in a tweet this morning.
 - “The World market for face masks and ventilators is Crazy,” Trump tweeted. “We are helping the states to get equipment, but it is not easy. Just got 400 Ventilators for @NYC Mayor Bill de Blasio. Work beginning on 4 hospitals in New York! Millions of different type items coming!”
 - The tweet comes as China’s ventilator makers rush to fill global orders. Last week, New York Governor Andrew Cuomo said the state, which has about 5,000 to 6,000 ventilators, might need 30,000 of them.
- **Stronger Rules on Masks:** Congressional Democrats want to raise standards for protective measures used by health-care providers treating people suffering from coronavirus as part of a wide-ranging stimulus package meant to bolster the sputtering economy. House Democratic leaders announced yesterday they will introduce a stimulus bill that includes a provision to direct the Occupational Safety and Health Administration to create standards for how workplaces must safeguard health-care employees against the spread of the virus. The move may run up against White House efforts aimed at giving providers options for gear amid equipment shortages.
- **Boosting Production of Ventilators:** The Trump administration is looking to identify manufacturers that can make up to 100,000 ventilators and how much those life-saving devices would cost, according to an information request. The Health and Human Services Department is aiming to decide which companies can make the amount needed and which can quickly modify their capacities to make at least 5,000 of the machines that assist people with breathing if they go into respiratory failure.
- **Supply Hoarding, Price Hikes:** Trump signed an executive order yesterday to prevent hoarding and price hikes of supplies amid the pandemic, according to the White House press secretary. “We will not let those hoarding vital supplies and price gougers to harm the health of America in this hour of need,” press secretary Stephanie Grisham tweeted yesterday in announcing the move. The White House didn’t immediately release the text of the executive order. Trump signed it behind closed doors.
 - At the White House, Attorney General William Barr said the government won’t go after a family with a large supply of toilet paper at home, but “if you have a warehouse of surgical masks, you’ll hear a knock on the door.” He said that the government had already initiated investigations of activities that are disrupting supply chains and suggestive of hoarding. Trump has given HHS the power to designate items people are banned from unreasonably accumulating and from selling above market value. Such items haven’t yet been designated, Barr said.
- **Trump Delays Real ID Rules:** Trump said yesterday he was delaying the Oct. 1, 2020, deadline for Americans to obtain a Real ID to travel domestically, as part of an effort to limit people’s exposure to the coronavirus. “I’m also announcing that we’re postponing the

deadline for compliance with Real ID requirements,” Trump said at a White House briefing. “At a time when we’re asking Americans to maintain social distancing, we do not want to require people to go with their local DMV. We will be announcing the new deadline very soon.” A “Real ID” will eventually be required to board a domestic flight or enter a federal building in the U.S.

- **DNC Exploring ‘Contingency Options’:** The Democratic National Committee is looking at contingency options for its July convention amid growing expectations that the coronavirus crisis will not have abated by the time the parties are ready to nominate their candidates for the White House. “We’re exploring a range of contingency options to ensure we can deliver a successful convention without unnecessary risk to public health,” Katie Peters, communications director for the DNC’s convention committee, said in a statement. Peters added it is a “very fluid situation” with the convention over three months away.
- **Nominations:** The Senate last night confirmed Mindy Brashears to be undersecretary of the Agriculture Department for food safety. The chamber also approved Matthew Donovan to be undersecretary of the Defense Department for personnel and readiness and James McPherson to serve as undersecretary of the Army.
 - Meanwhile, Trump will nominate John E. Whitley to be the director of Cost Assessment and Program Evaluation at the Department of Defense, according to an announcement. Whitley serves as the Army’s assistant secretary for financial management and comptroller.
- **House Voting Procedures:** The House Rules Committee published a memo last night on remote voting that strongly recommends against the practice, despite potential health concerns over the coronavirus. The report warns that “implementing remote voting would raise serious security, logistical, and constitutional challenges.”
 - The report also notes that because the Constitution references physical presence in the chambers of the House and Senate, the “constitutionality of remote voting is an untested principle.” It recommends proxy voting as the best option, as opposed to remote voting. Proxy voting -- where an absent member designates a present member as their proxy to cast a vote on their behalf for a prescribed period of time -- would require a rules change and could be done under unanimous consent if there is bipartisan agreement.
 - Pelosi directed House Rules Chairman Jim McGovern (D-Mass.) last week to conduct a report on voting options.
- **U.S. to Slash Afghanistan Aid:** The U.S. said it will cut assistance to Afghanistan by \$1 billion this year and threatened to cut another \$1 billion in 2021 over the failure of President Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah to form a unity government. Secretary of State Michael Pompeo announced the decision in a statement hours after departing Kabul, saying the U.S. “deeply regrets” the inability of the two leaders to form a unity government, potentially imperiling a peace deal struck between the U.S. and Taliban last month.

- **Rare Spat Between Chinese Diplomats:** An unusual public spat between two top Chinese diplomats points to an internal split in Beijing over how to handle rising tensions with a combative American president. Those differences spilled into public view yesterday after China's ambassador to the U.S. reaffirmed his opposition to promoting theories that the virus that causes Covid-19 originated in an American military lab. Ambassador Cui Tiankai said in an interview with "Axios on HBO" that he stood by his Feb. 9 statement that it would be "crazy" to spread such theories, even as a foreign ministry spokesperson has repeatedly floated the idea on Twitter in recent weeks.
 - "Such speculation will help nobody. It's very harmful," Cui told Axios. "Eventually, we must have an answer to where the virus originally came from. But this is the job for the scientists to do, not for diplomats." Such public differences are rare among Chinese officials who are infamous for their ability to stick closely to the Communist Party's official line.