

American Nephrology Nurses Association

Daily Capitol Hill Update – Thursday, March 5, 2020

(The following information comes from Bloomberg Government Website)

Schedules: White House and Congress

WHITE HOUSE

- President Trump meets with Sec. of State Mike Pompeo at 11:45am
- 4:10pm: Trump departs White House for Pennsylvania; attends Fox News town hall at 6:30pm
- 12:15: VP Mike Pence arrives in Minnesota to meet with 3M CEO Mike Roman at 1pm to discuss coronavirus supply chain issues
- Pence then departs Minn. for Washington state, to meet with Gov. Jay Inslee 7pm, participates in press briefing with Inslee at 8:05pm

CONGRESS

- Senate meets at 10am; set to vote on House-passed funding package to fight coronavirus
- House meets at 9am; first votes expected 10:30am; Set to consider H.R. 1140, on rights for transportation security officers

Congressional, Health Policy, and Political News

- **Surgery Centers' Undisclosed Costs:** The opaque finances of 6,000 same-day surgery centers are making it impossible for members of an influential Medicare advisory group to do their jobs, they said. Traditional Medicare paid ambulatory surgery centers \$4.9 billion in outpatient surgical and diagnostic procedures for 3.5 million beneficiaries in 2018. But because the facilities don't provide annual cost data to the Medicare agency, the advisory group said it can't document the centers' growth over time, can't determine their profit margins on beneficiaries, and, therefore, can't accurately evaluate the adequacy of Medicare payments.
- **Paid Sick Leave:** A bill (H.R. 1784) that would allow workers at businesses with at least 15 workers to earn up to 56 hours, or seven days, of paid sick leave each year is getting scrutiny from a House Education and Labor subcommittee next week. The bill is scheduled to be the subject of a hearing on March 11, the second such hearing on paid leave held by the committee this year. Employers would have to provide staff with at least one hour of earned paid sick leave for every 30 hours worked, Jaclyn Diaz reports.
- **Hearings Today:** The House Science, Space, and Technology Committee holds a hearing on the spread of infectious diseases and mobilizing solutions today. The Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee will discuss the federal interagency response

to the coronavirus and preparing for future global pandemics today, where Deputy DHS Secretary Ken Cuccinelli is set to testify.

- **CDC Lifts Test Restrictions:** The CDC lifted most of its restrictions on Covid-19 testing, saying in a new set of guidelines released yesterday that doctors could use their judgment in deciding what patients to test. “This expands testing to a wider group of symptomatic patients,” the agency said in a document posted to its website. Testing decisions should be based upon how the virus is spreading in a given community and whether a patient has symptoms consistent with the coronavirus infection.
- **America’s Jobs Engine Braces for Virus Hit:** America’s streak of robust job gains is being threatened by a spreading coronavirus that’s roiling financial markets and may exact a growing toll on the U.S. economy. Tomorrow’s employment report is projected to show payrolls increased 175,000 in February, below January’s pace but in line with the average of the past year, according to a survey of economists. The unemployment rate is seen holding near a 50-year low as wages keep marching higher.
 - But the February data, and what they say about the labor market’s health and momentum, may already be outdated ahead of such a unique economic shock. The Federal Reserve this week cut interest rates half a percentage point in response to the growing outbreak. While the virus probably failed to dent February hiring, America’s jobs engine is unlikely to be immune to its effects.
- **VA Stockpiles of Masks:** Some emergency stockpiles of respirator masks at the Veterans Affairs Department have deteriorated in storage and can no longer be used, according to an internal email warning that the agency’s supplies could be overestimated. The warning about problems in emergency supply caches comes after the World Health Organization said Tuesday that disruptions to the supply of personal protective equipment are endangering lives during the coronavirus outbreak.
- **Justice Roberts Chastises Schumer:** U.S. Chief Justice John Roberts delivered an extraordinary rebuke of Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.), chastising him for making “threatening” statements about two justices during an abortion rights rally on the court’s steps. Schumer earlier yesterday said that justices Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh “will pay the price” if they sided against abortion access. The senator’s remarks came as the court heard arguments in an abortion case for the first time in four years.
 - “Threatening statements of this sort from the highest levels of government are not only inappropriate, they are dangerous,” Roberts said in a statement issued by the court.
- **DeVos Backs Away From Rural Cuts:** The Department of Education said it will back off plans to change eligibility for a rural education program after pressure from senators, including Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.). The lawmakers, in a letter to Secretary Betsy DeVos, said such changes would sever federal funds to more than 800 low-income rural schools and urged her to drop the eligibility changes. Over 20 senators, including McConnell, signed the letter yesterday. McConnell and one of letter’s principal authors, Sen.

Susan Collins (R-Maine), both face tough re-election challenges this fall in their states, which both have areas of rural poverty.

- **Telecom Network Security Mandated in Trade Pacts By Bill:** Sen. John Thune (R-S.D.) will introduce a bipartisan bill today that seeks to ensure trade agreements protect the security of digital telecommunications systems, including next generation 5G equipment. While the legislation doesn't name specific foreign-owned companies, its intended targets include Chinese-owned companies Huawei and ZTE, which the Trump administration said pose a security threat to the U.S. telecommunications sector.
 - "Unfair trade practices of communications equipment suppliers owned or controlled by a foreign government should not be tolerated. Period," Thune said yesterday at a Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation hearing on 5G supply chain security. "If you are trading with companies – in a digital way – that have risky equipment in their networks, then I think that presents a risk for everybody," he told reporters after the hearing.
 - Meanwhile, Huawei said the coronavirus outbreak is making it harder to defend itself against a racketeering and trade-secrets theft prosecution by the U.S. Thomas Green, a lawyer for the China-based telecommunications giant, said at conference in the case that U.S. travel restrictions have made it impossible for Huawei's defense team to gather evidence. The U.S. State Department last month issued a do-not-travel warning for China over the virus outbreak, and many airlines have also canceled flights.
- **Wells Fargo Blasted in House Panel's Report:** Wells Fargo's board and regulators face fresh accusations of doing too little to address customer abuses in a report from the Democratic majority of the House Financial Services Committee ahead of a series of hearings next week. The 113-page report -- titled "The Real Wells Fargo: Board & Management Failures, Consumer Abuses and Ineffective Regulatory Oversight" -- was released late yesterday and is the result of a yearlong investigation of the company's compliance with regulatory orders. The bank said it's reviewing the report.
- **NLRB Leader to Face Grilling on Hill:** The federal labor board's chairman and general counsel have been called to testify before a House Appropriations panel next week, a hearing that will mark the first congressional testimony for either official and allow Democrats to ask pointed questions about the board's record during the Trump presidency. National Labor Relations Board Chairman John Ring and General Counsel Peter Robb are expected to appear before the panel's Labor-HHS-Education Subcommittee during a hearing scheduled on Wednesday next week, according to sources familiar.
- **Down Ballot Democrats Excited:** House Democrats facing tough re-elections awoke yesterday with renewed optimism after former Vice President Joe Biden surged ahead in the presidential primary. Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) still has a path to the nomination – just a third of delegates have been awarded, and key states from Michigan to Florida are voting this month – but Biden's 10-state win Tuesday stirred renewed confidence among

endangered Democratic incumbents on the Hill that the party's standard-bearer will be more palatable to swing voters in their districts.

- Rep. Sean Patrick Maloney (D-N.Y.), who represents a district Trump won in 2016 and endorsed Biden in January, said yesterday that “anybody in a competitive district is exhilarated by the huge win the vice president delivered last night.”
- **Sanders Calls Race Against Biden a ‘Conflict of Ideas’:** Sanders went on the offensive against Biden yesterday, framing the primary fight for the Democratic nomination as a “conflict of ideas” that pits his outsider campaign against the political status quo. Speaking the day after a disappointing performance on Super Tuesday, Sanders struck a defiant tone, railing against the political establishment and the media. He stuck closely to his core message and did not seek to moderate it to invite more supporters into his campaign.
 - “Joe and I have a very different voting record,” Sanders said at the news conference. “Joe and I have a very different vision for the future of this country. And Joe and I are running very different campaigns. And my hope is that in the coming months, we will be able to debate and discuss the very significant differences that we have.”
- **Biden Decries ‘Negative Attacks’:** Biden yesterday urged his opponents to keep the race positive as it intensifies, an implicit rebuke of Sanders’s aggressive response to the former vice president’s victories. “What we can’t let happen is let this primary turn into a campaign of negative attacks,” Biden said in a brief statement to reporters in Los Angeles. “The only thing that can do is help Donald Trump and it doesn’t do anything to help any one of the candidates who are left in the campaign.”
- **Ocasio-Cortez Promises to Back Nominee:** Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-N.Y.) is all in for Sanders, but she’s not going to tear the Democratic party apart over it. “I am supporting Bernie Sanders until the end,” said Ocasio-Cortez, a top Sanders surrogate. “But at the same time, I also am committed to supporting the nominee, whoever that might be.”
- **NSA Chief Touts Super Tuesday Defense:** An intensive U.S. government effort to protect the Super Tuesday primaries from foreign interference made efforts in the 2018 midterm election look “like a pick-up game,” according to Gen. Paul Nakasone, head of the National Security Agency and U.S. Cyber Command. On Tuesday, the largest voting day of the Democratic presidential race, Nakasone said his team gathered at 6 a.m. and joined a “chat system” with other agencies such as the Pentagon, Homeland Security Department and the U.S. intelligence community, Nakasone said at a House Armed Services subcommittee hearing yesterday.
- **Online Tools Seek to Cut Through Disinformation:** Social media giants Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube have made efforts to crack down on disinformation campaigns in recent years, as U.S. intelligence officials have warned that adversaries are using influence operations to sow chaos and undermine faith in democracy. But the companies have also been clear that they don’t want to become arbiters of truth. As a result, a collection of private companies, advocacy organizations and universities, such as Indiana University

Bloomington's Observatory on Social Media, have stepped up efforts to fight disinformation and developed their own tools to track it, some of which are available to the public.

- **Governing Presidential Transitions:** A new slate of procedures for easing the transition from one presidential administration to the next will require agencies to have plans in place by Sept. 15 for filling all top leadership jobs, not just the head position. That requirement was one of several mandates for U.S. agencies included in a bill (S. 394) that Trump signed into law on Tuesday. The bill, known as the "Presidential Transition Enhancement Act," moved easily through Congress, passing the Senate by unanimous consent in August and clearing the House by voice vote on Feb. 5.
- **U.S. Delays Changes to Economic-Data Release:** The U.S. Department of Labor again postponed a deadline for removing computers from the secure room where journalists get pre-release access to major economic reports, saying it will consider input on the issue while working on possible changes. The delay, a second one in less than a month, followed concerns raised by a coalition of media organizations that the department's proposal would limit the wide distribution of key economic data to the general public.
- **Taliban Deal Results Said Mixed:** The U.S.-Taliban peace agreement has been disrupted but not shattered by small-scale attacks that aren't aimed at American and allied forces, Defense Secretary Mark Esper said yesterday. "The Taliban are honoring their piece" of the accord signed on Saturday in Doha "in terms of not attacking U.S., and coalition forces but not in terms of sustaining a reduction of violence," Esper told the Senate Armed Services Committee yesterday. In spite of the attacks, he said, "the critical thing in the next two days will be getting the conditions set for talks" between the Taliban and the Afghan government.
- **Russian Missile Feud Won't Block U.S. Help to Turkey in Syria:** Turkey's purchase of an advanced Russian missile system won't block the U.S. from helping its NATO ally in its fight against Russian-backed Syrian forces, the American envoy for Syria said today. "There is no unanimity in D.C. on what to do and how fast to do," James Jeffrey told a conference in Istanbul on the conflict in Idlib, the last Syrian rebel stronghold, where Turkey is trying to halt an offensive by Russian-backed Syrian government troops. Ankara's purchase of the Russian S-400 missile -defense system is "a serious concern for the U.S. Congress and for our defense establishment and Trump," he added. "We're looking at ways to work around that."