

American Nephrology Nurses Association

Daily Capitol Hill Update - Wednesday, April 1, 2020

(The following information comes from Bloomberg Government Website)

Schedules: White House and Congress

WHITE HOUSE

- Noon: President Trump receives intelligence briefing
- 2:30pm: Trump participates in call with military families to discuss coronavirus
- VP Mike Pence travels to Gordonsville, Va., to visit Walmart distribution center to see supply chain operations
- 5pm: White House coronavirus task force meeting

CONGRESS

- House, Senate out
- 11:30am: House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, senior Democrats hold press conference call to discuss infrastructure priorities for next stimulus package

Congressional, Health Policy, and Political News

- **White House Will Not Reopen Obamacare Enrollment for Virus:** Trump will not reopen the Obamacare exchanges to allow uninsured Americans to purchase health care coverage during the coronavirus pandemic, a White House official said Tuesday night. The decision comes after the president said last week he was considering a special enrollment period to allow individuals to purchase insurance during the crisis -- a move that had been endorsed by America's Health Insurance Plans, the trade organization representing health insurers.
 - Ultimately, however, the administration opted against a national mandate that would have mirrored steps that states like New York, California, Connecticut, and Maryland are taking. In New York, people without insurance "can apply within 60 days of losing coverage," according to the state website.
- **Insulin During Outbreak:** The drug pricing advocacy organization Patients for Affordable Drugs sent letters to the heads of the three major makers of insulin asking them to lower their prices during the coronavirus pandemic. The group, along with dozens of insulin users, penned the letter to executives with Eli Lilly, Sanofi and Novo Nordisk saying financial hardships will worsen during the outbreak in the U.S. and their current charity programs aren't enough to help diabetic people weather the storm.
- **Groups Say Judge Pick Would Undermine ACA:** Liberal leaning advocates and health groups are urging lawmakers to oppose confirming the latest White House pick for one of the most conservative federal appeals courts on the grounds that he would undermine Obamacare. In op-eds from 2012, 2013 and 2014 when he was a lawyer in private practice, Cory Wilson encouraged the Supreme Court to strike down the health law and called it "illegitimate" and "perverse."

- Those remarks indicate that Wilson would rule against the Affordable Care Act if a related case came before him on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit, the groups said in a letter sent to senators on the Judiciary Committee. The Fifth Circuit has been a key stop for challenges to the embattled health law.
- **Infrastructure Plan to be Financed by Borrowing, Trump Says:** Speaking at his daily coronavirus briefing last night, Trump said low rates would allow the country to borrow cheaply to finance spending on any infrastructure plans being floated for a fourth coronavirus legislative package. He said none of the funds should go toward environmental initiatives called for in the Democrats' Green New Deal. Both Pelosi and Trump have called for infrastructure spending to help address the surge in unemployment spurred by the coronavirus and economic shutdown. But Trump previously hadn't settled on how to finance it. House Democrats proposed a \$760 billion infrastructure plan in late January, which covered roads, bridges, rail, broadband, and water.
- **Industries Shoot for Next Stimulus:** Industries that missed out on the largest stimulus bill in U.S. history are already lobbying to ensure they get a piece of the next one, including the U.S. Chamber of Commerce that's pitching its initiative to rebuild roads and bridges.
- **Mnuchin Urged to Defend Oversight of Funds:** Senate Democrats called on Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin to provide every tool available to a new inspector general who will oversee hundreds of billions in aid to curb economic fallout from the coronavirus. Democrats are angry that Trump issued a statement Friday saying he'd gag a new inspector general intended to oversee distribution of \$500 billion in relief to companies. Several White House aides were unhappy that Mnuchin agreed to the oversight in the first place, according to two people familiar with the matter.
- **Sway Over Municipal Rescue:** Congressional Democrats are also pushing to have the Federal Reserve take over the rescue of state and local debt markets, cutting the Treasury Department out of the decision-making. The central bank is expected to announce a new emergency facility to support municipal debt, part of the \$2 trillion stimulus approved last week. It had the backing of progressive Democrats and conservative Republicans alike. They're urging the Fed and Treasury to move quickly.
- **Student Veteran Benefits:** The House passed a bill (H.R. 6322) yesterday by unanimous consent that would preserve Veterans Affairs Department benefits for additional students who can't complete their courses due to Covid-19. It would expand on similar legislation enacted March 21 (Public Law 116-128), authorizing payments or extending eligibility periods for students who participate in work-study or vocational rehabilitation programs, are affected by school closures, or can't take courses online.
 - The measure — backed by House Veterans' Affairs Chairman Mark Takano (D-Calif.), ranking member Phil Roe (R-Tenn.), and several veterans groups — is similar to language in a sweeping coronavirus response package (H.R. 6379) that House Democratic leaders released last week.

- **Coronavirus Upends Congressional To-Do List:** The coronavirus pandemic has disrupted the congressional calendar in an already tight election year, pushing off a slate of legislative priorities and deadlines. But the virus hasn't changed the Sept. 30 deadlines for fiscal 2021 government funding and surface transportation programs that require authorization to continue.
- **Stimulus May Come Too Late for Businesses Already Stretched:** The economic peril from the coronavirus is growing more stark every day, and the \$2 trillion stimulus may not deliver a rescue in time for the many small businesses and families who lack the cash to stay afloat for more than a week or two. Many businesses shut their doors either for a lack of customers or on orders from state or local governments as emergency declarations began rolling across the country in mid-March. Yet it could be weeks more before the business loans, bigger unemployment checks and direct payments to individuals from the stimulus plan flow into the economy.
 - Small businesses account for almost half of U.S. private employment. A complete collapse of even some of those enterprises not only would dash the dreams of entrepreneurs and threaten the livelihoods of many, it risks sapping the power of an eventual economic rebound as the financial distress ripples through to landlords, vendors and lenders.
- **Virus Crushes Retail, Hotels, Dining:** Americans are listening to government guidelines to avoid crowds, putting stores, hotels and restaurants into near-total shutdowns. Retail, dining and hospitality have been particularly hard hit by social distancing measures undertaken to stem the spread of the coronavirus, new data show. All three industries have been hit by broad share routs during March as investors survey the extent of the damage to consumption.
 - Widespread job cuts and losses are mounting as these three sectors remain largely closed for business. Department stores and clothing boutiques are telling shoppers to go online, restaurants have either closed completely or converted to delivery and takeout, and hotels are trying to survive with empty rooms. Transactions at American hotels plummeted 96% over the past week, compared with the week of Feb. 2, as confirmed cases began to spread in the U.S., according to payment processor Shift4. The data looks at more than 21,000 hotels across the country.
 - Foot traffic is down 100% year-on-year over the last seven days in restaurants across 42 U.S. states and fell precipitously after nationwide restrictions were put in place requiring Americans to stay at home, according to data from OpenTable. The 54,000 restaurants listed on the reservation site have reported almost no dine-in activity at all for the last week. The data tracks dine-in traffic across online, phone bookings and walk-ins and does not include deliveries or takeout orders.
- **U.S. Bets Furloughed is Better than Fired for 600,000 Workers:** The wreckage appeared overwhelming the past few days as U.S. retailers furloughed hundreds of thousands of employees. But some economists and lawmakers say it shows that last week's \$2 trillion

stimulus package to combat the economic fallout from the coronavirus pandemic is working as designed by keeping workers attached to companies and receiving health benefits. “You stay on that employer’s work list. If you have health benefits with the employer, you can keep getting them. But, and most importantly, the federal government will pay your salary - your full salary -- for four months,” Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.) said last week.

- **Halt in Moving Troops:** Civilian moving companies, denied a requested \$186.6 million bailout in the most recent pandemic relief legislation Congress cleared, should be protected from financial failure amid a halt in military shipments, a top general said. Gen. Steve Lyons, the head of U.S. Transportation Command, said he is keeping in close contact with the industry following the halt of all shipments of troops’ personal belongings to new job postings March 12. The pause came as the military imposed wider restrictions aimed at slowing infections.
- **White House Will Not Reopen Obamacare Enrollment:** Trump will not reopen the Obamacare exchanges to allow uninsured Americans to purchase health care coverage during the coronavirus pandemic, a White House official said last night. The decision comes after the president said last week he was considering a special enrollment period to allow individuals to purchase insurance during the crisis -- a move that had been endorsed by America’s Health Insurance Plans, the trade organization representing health insurers.
 - Ultimately, however, the administration opted against a national mandate that would have mirrored steps that states like New York, California, Connecticut, and Maryland are taking. In New York, people without insurance “can apply within 60 days of losing coverage,” according to the state website.
- **One Ventilator, Two Patients:** Hospitals, as “an absolute last resort,” may put two Covid-19 patients on a single ventilator, the Department of Health and Human Services said in an open letter. The department gave hospitals the green light as they prepare for the possibility of not having enough ventilators to care for all the patients who are struggling to breathe while ill with Covid-19. Hospitals should first use other ventilator types – like those used for anesthesia, transporting patients, and sleep apnea – prior to co-venting patients, Surgeon General Jerome Adams and HHS Assistant Secretary for Health Brett Giroir said in the letter released yesterday.
 - Putting a patient on a ventilator is already very risky. It comes with a 40% to 60% mortality rate, according to physician and patient safety organizations, including the Society of Critical Care Medicine and American Society of Anesthesiologists. There are “significant technical challenges” to using a single ventilator for more than one patient, according to the groups, including an unequal distribution of gas.
- **Putin Sends Military Plane With Coronavirus Aid to Help U.S.:** A Russian military plane loaded with medical equipment took off from outside of Moscow today after President Vladimir Putin offered Trump help for the U.S. battle with coronavirus. “The Russian side offered assistance amid the dire epidemiological situation in America,” Kremlin spokesman

Dmitry Peskov told state-run Channel One yesterday. "Trump gratefully accepted this humanitarian aid."

- **De Blasio Hires Wall Builder for Hospitals:** The company New York Mayor Bill de Blasio chose to construct emergency hospitals at the National Tennis Center in Queens and a cruise-ship terminal in Brooklyn also holds a federal contract to build a portion of Trump's border wall, a project de Blasio has railed against for three years, describing it and the president as "racist" and "inhumane." SLSCO of Galveston, Texas has extensive experience in fast-tracking emergency disaster relief and was awarded a \$789 million contract for border wall replacement a year ago to work on a stretch south of Santa Teresa, N.M., according to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.
- **Navy Rejects Captain's Plea:** A U.S. Navy captain's dramatic plea to evacuate most sailors from an aircraft carrier struck by the coronavirus was tamped down by an admiral who called for a more gradual rotation of crew members off the ship that's sidelined in Guam. Citing an "ongoing and accelerating" danger on board the USS Theodore Roosevelt, Captain Brett Crozier sent his Navy superiors a memo pleading, "We are not at war. Sailors do not need to die." He called for removing all but a skeleton crew off the carrier, where sailors are in close quarters, so that they can be isolated and tested.
 - Asked whether the carrier should be evacuated, Defense Secretary Mark Esper said yesterday evening that "I don't think we are at that point."
 - "At this point in time, we are trying to make sure that we contain the virus, that we deploy testing kits, and we get a good assessment of how much of the crew is infected," Esper said in an interview on the "CBS Evening News."
- **California, Texas to Release Inmates:** California and Texas are planning cuts to their jail populations with early releases to limit the spread of the coronavirus in the states' overcrowded prison systems. California plans to grant early parole to as many as 3,500 inmates convicted of non-violent crimes while a federal judge in Houston on Tuesday ordered Harris County officials to start processing and releasing about 250 non-violent pre-trial detainees per day.
- **Carnival Beggars for Florida Dock for Virus-Beset Ships:** Carnival urged Florida's Broward County to accept on humanitarian grounds two Holland America Line ships, one bearing sick passengers, as they sailed for Fort Lauderdale with nowhere else to turn. Dozens of people have shown flulike symptoms on board the Zaandam, which was denied requests to dock in ports across Latin America. It had been sailing there on a voyage that left Buenos Aires on March 7. The ship's chief maritime officer said two people needed urgent medical evacuation.
- **Biden Doubts Convention Will Happen as Planned:** Joe Biden expressed doubts yesterday that the Democratic National Convention could go on as planned this summer in Milwaukee, citing continued concerns about containing the coronavirus outbreak. "It's hard

to envision that," the Democratic front-runner said in an interview on MSNBC. "Again, we should listen to the scientists."

- The Democratic National Committee has been exploring contingency options for the convention, which is scheduled for July 13-16, but it has not made any final decisions. Trump said last Thursday that the Republican National Convention, slated for the end of August, would go forward.
- **Idaho Goes with Paper Ballots:** Idaho's May 19 primary election will be conducted entirely by mail under existing laws for absentee voting, Gov. Brad Little said yesterday.
- **Groups Say Judge Pick Would Undermine ACA:** Liberal leaning advocates and health groups are urging lawmakers to oppose confirming the latest White House pick for one of the most conservative federal appeals courts on the grounds that he would undermine Obamacare. In op-eds from 2012, 2013 and 2014 when he was a lawyer in private practice, Cory Wilson encouraged the Supreme Court to strike down the health law and called it "illegitimate" and "perverse."
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- **Stashing Oil in Federal Storage:** The Energy Department is considering renting space in the nation's emergency oil reserve to domestic producers awash in crude, according to three people familiar with the matter who asked for anonymity before a formal announcement. The move would help drillers running out of space to stash their product amid cheap prices and low demand. With storage space and pipelines filling up with crude, domestic producers could begin to curtail drilling.
 - Separately, Trump said the U.S. would meet with Saudi Arabia and Russia with the goal of staunching an historic plunge in oil prices. Trump, speaking at the White House yesterday, said he's raised the issue in conversations with Russian President Vladimir Putin and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. "They're going to get together and we're all going to get together and we're going to see what we can do," he said. "The two countries are discussing it. And I am joining at the appropriate time, if need be."
 - Senate Energy and Natural Resources Chairwoman Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska) also weighed in on oil storage, saying that the U.S. government should publish timely data on oil storage capacity, which she says can be an indicator of potential production shut-ins. "Producers will continue to produce, filling up all kinds of tanks and tankers, until capacity is reached," Murkowski wrote in a letter to the head of the Energy Information Administration.
- **Trump Chides 'Foolish' Car Executives:** Trump attacked automakers for the second time in a matter of days, chiding their "foolish executives" as his White House completed the final step of a three-year quest to dismantle Obama-era fuel efficiency rules. Days after

demanding that GM and Ford make ventilators, Trump claimed unidentified company leaders were being “politically correct” by not endorsing his efforts to ease mileage and emissions regulations for cars, a move that has enraged environmentalists and sparked courtroom battles.

- **Trump to Give 90-Day Deferral for Some Tariffs:** Trump approved a proposal to delay payment of certain tariffs by three months, according to people familiar with the matter. The executive order, which could come as soon as this week, would apply to a 25% tariff the U.S. charges on imported light trucks – dubbed the “chicken tax” that has been in place since the 1960s – which Trump has touted as a reason for that industry’s success.
 - Trump at a White House press briefing last night denied plans for delaying tariff payments in regards China. But the tariff deferrals expected to be announced don’t apply to Chinese goods, they would apply to the most-favored nation tariffs, which are imposed on a non-discriminatory basis to countries exporting certain products to the U.S. such as footwear and apparel.
- **Troop Funding Deal in Korea:** The U.S. and South Korea have tentatively struck a military cost-sharing deal, Yonhap News Agency reported, potentially ending months of bickering over the Trump administration’s demands for a massive increase. The announcement could come as early as today, the Seoul-based news service reported. The two sides agreed to sign a multiple-year contract rather than another stopgap one-year deal, it said.
- **Inaccurate Grants Data From EPA:** The EPA gave inaccurate information to Congress about its grant awards, potentially influencing lawmakers’ spending and policy decisions, the agency’s internal watchdog said yesterday. As of September 2019, the Environmental Protection Agency had \$8.3 million in unspent balances for grants that expired one year or more earlier, the agency’s Office of Inspector General revealed in a report.