

American Nephrology Nurses Association

Daily Capitol Hill Update – Thursday, April 30, 2020

(The following information comes from Bloomberg Government Website)

Schedules: White House and Congress

WHITE HOUSE

- 11am: President Trump meets with New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy in Oval Office
- 4pm: Trump delivers remarks on protecting seniors

CONGRESS

- Senator Dianne Feinstein urged Majority Leader Mitch McConnell to reconsider plans to convene on May 4, citing continuing health risks from the coronavirus pandemic

Congressional, Health Policy, and Political News

- **Bill Would Federalize Medical Supply Chain:** Senate Democrats will press for legislation to use the Defense Production Act to bump up production of testing supplies, personal protective equipment and other medical gear, they said in a written statement yesterday. Their bill would require weekly public reports on assessments of equipment supplies, identify which manufacturers are ready to fill orders, and establish an executive officer post appointed by the secretary of Defense to oversee acquisition and logistics.
- **Trump Says He's Set to Visit Arizona:** Trump said he expects to visit Arizona next week, as the administration forges ahead with its effort to urge states to reopen their economies. The tentative visit to Arizona, which is expected to be one of the key battleground states in the November election, could include a tour of a manufacturing plant that is making protective masks, people familiar with the matter said. But no final decisions have been made yet and the White House hasn't chosen an exact date for any such trip.
- **Florida to Start Reopening on Monday:** Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis (R) plans to start reopening the state this Monday, permitting restaurants and retail in most areas to resume business with certain limitations to prevent the virus's spread. Speaking yesterday in Tallahassee, DeSantis said movie theaters and bars must remain closed for the time being throughout the state, and schools will continue to use distance learning. The reopening plans aren't uniform across the state of 21.5 million people. DeSantis said the first phase of reopening would exclude the counties of Miami-Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach, the state's three most populous.
- **Tech's Virus Combat Plan Hinges on Still-Scarce Testing:** Apple and Google earlier this month unveiled an ambitious plan to jury-rig billions of smartphones into coronavirus-

tracking beacons, hoping to help public-health authorities fight the disease and pave the way to end lockdowns that have crippled the global economy. Now, just weeks after the announcement, the program is already facing serious challenges and it's unclear whether the system will ever be used at a large scale. Persistent concerns about privacy, weak consumer adoption, and the lack of a coordinated government effort on testing could all pose obstacles to the companies' push. Some governments have already struck out on their own, building systems used by millions without needing Apple and Google's help.

- **Gilead Treatment Stirs Cautious Optimism:** With competing data published on Gilead Sciences' potential coronavirus drug, the jury is still out on how well it works, and there are two big reasons why. While Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, said that a government-run trial has met its overall target, full details haven't been published. At the same time, the only major, rigorous study for which full data is public, a Chinese trial published in *The Lancet* medical journal yesterday, is showing the opposite.
 - The dueling trials are the latest example of how science has taken a back seat to optimism in the rush to pave a way out of the coronavirus crisis that's paralyzed economies worldwide. Dozens of companies are studying 11 potential therapies and 137 vaccines in a push to get the virus under control. Gilead's experimental drug remdesivir, which had already been tested against other coronaviruses — is one of the most closely watched.
- **Feinstein Opposes Reconvening:** Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) asked Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) to reconsider his plan to bring the Senate back next week amid the pandemic. "It is clear that we remain in a critical time," Feinstein said in a statement. "Returning the Senate for non-essential business is not worth the risk." The House scrapped its plans to return next week citing the continued risk from the coronavirus.
 - The Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee is scheduled to hold a hearing May 6 on the effects of the coronavirus pandemic on the aviation industry.
 - The next day, the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee plans to hold a hearing to examine new tests for the coronavirus.
 - The Senate currently plans at least four hearings next week, according to a schedule on the chamber's website.
 - The House Appropriations Committee also is planning to host an in-person committee hearing on May 6 on the Covid-19 response, with witnesses to be confirmed later this week, committee spokesman Evan Hollander said in an email.
- **Mnuchin Pressed for More Aid:** The House's tax writers yesterday made their case to Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin for expanding relief for businesses, a conversation that comes as lawmakers are starting negotiations on the next phase of the virus response. House Ways and Means Chairman Richard Neal (D-Mass.) urged the treasury secretary in a teleconference to expand a tax credit for employers that retain their employees during the pandemic, a lawmaker on the call said.

- **DeFazio Asks FAA to Require Masks:** House Transportation and Infrastructure Chairman Peter DeFazio (D-Ore.) called on FAA Administrator Stephen Dickson to require masks or face coverings be used by all crew-members and all passengers on U.S. flights, according to a statement yesterday. DeFazio said that he also asked Dickson to force airlines to adopt “reasonable, sound procedures” including for passengers to be “spaced at safe distances from one another.” The Federal Aviation Administration said it’s “working with air carriers to ensure they have processes in place for addressing public health risks,”
- **Thompson Calls for IG Probe of Racial Disparities:** House Homeland Security Chairman Bennie Thompson (D-Miss.) sent a letter to the Department of Health and Human Services Office of Inspector General regarding “healthcare disparities” in HHS’s response to the pandemic. Thompson requested the OIG to explore the department’s “past and present efforts to eliminate racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic health disparities” and offer ideas of lessening the effects of health disparities going forward.
 - Also, Thompson and Homeland Security Counterterrorism Subcommittee Chairman Max Rose (D-N.Y.) in a letter to Department of Homeland Security Acting Secretary Chad Wolf ask for information DHS had about Covid-19 in late 2019 and 2020, after press coverage suggests the intelligence community was issuing reports as early as November 2019.
- **Road From Lockdown Paved With Tradeoffs:** The world economy is entering a new stage of the pandemic as governments inch toward easing restrictions. It’s a phase that entails stark trade-offs between economic growth and the threat of another wave of infections and death. Some countries, such as China and South Korea, are firing up their economic engines already, having contained the virus—for now at least. Others, including hard-hit Italy and the U.S., are preparing to reopen their wounded economies even as they still fight to get a lid on the virus.
- **Trump Poised to Unveil Bridge Loans for Oil:** The Trump administration may announce as soon as today a plan to offer loans to the oil industry, possibly in exchange for a financial stake, according to two people familiar with the matter. Mnuchin and Energy Secretary Dan Brouillette have already briefed Trump on a plan to provide financial aid to oil drillers beset by a historic crash in prices, the people said. Brouillette, on a conference call with an industry group on Tuesday, said Mnuchin was leaning toward aid that includes two separate programs: bridge loans and emergency lending authority through the Federal Reserve.
- **Powell Warns More Action Needed:** Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell called on lawmakers to deliver more fiscal stimulus to shield the U.S. economy from the coronavirus as he warned of a weak recovery even once the pandemic has subsided. “Economic activity will likely drop at an unprecedented rate in the second quarter,” Powell told a video press conference yesterday. “It may well be the case that the economy will need more support from all of us, if the recovery is to be a robust one.”

- **Wealthy Shielded Billions With Trump Tax Break:** Just before the coronavirus roiled the economy, wealthy investors piled into funds that take advantage of a popular, two-year-old tax break meant to help poor communities. More than \$10 billion in total has flowed into “opportunity zone” funds, a survey released today by tax adviser Novogradac shows. That’s up from the \$6.7 billion the group tallied in January. Nearly all of the money was raised before mid-March, when Trump declared a national emergency to combat the virus. The haul could benefit low-income communities during major economic stress and help spur a post-pandemic recovery, Michael Novogradac, the tax adviser’s managing partner, said in a statement.
- **Trump’s Meat Order No Quick Fix for Supply:** A day after Trump’s unprecedented executive order to keep meat plants running, one more shut down. Another opened back up – but only to cull animals that can’t be processed. Those are the latest indications that the sweeping order is anything but a quick fix for supply-chain woes. Tyson Foods, the biggest U.S. meat processor, late yesterday said it was idling a beef facility in Nebraska for four days, with the news hitting just about 24 hours after Trump invoked the Defense Production Act to keep meat supplies secure. A JBS plant in Minnesota is starting a mass culling operation, destroying hogs that it can’t process into pork cuts until it’s able to get the protective equipment needed to restart.
- **Pentagon Weighs Space Industry Bailout:** The Air Force and Space Force are feeling out the space industrial base for a potential bailout from Congress. The services said yesterday they have begun a survey on how coronavirus upheaval has stressed companies and increased the costs of existing programs as well as how stimulus funding could be used for small space vehicles, micro-electronics, and other areas that could be important to future operations.
- **Iraq Seeks More U.S. Virus Aid:** Iraq is seeking financial relief from the U.S. to help the country combat the fallout of the Covid-19 pandemic and plummeting oil revenue, Baghdad’s health minister-designate said yesterday. “We have been promised by the United States government as part of this strategy between Iraq and United States to help us financially,” Jaafar Allawi said yesterday during an online policy forum organized by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.
- **Biden Launches Formal Search for Running Mate:** Joe Biden has tapped four allies to lead a committee to advise him on his vice-presidential selection, a process that will be especially closely watched given his age and speculation that he might not seek a second term if elected.
 - The co-chairs of the presumptive Democratic presidential nominee’s panel are former Sen. Christopher Dodd (D-Conn.), Rep. Lisa Blunt Rochester (D-Del.), Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti and Cynthia Hogan, a vice president for policy and government affairs at Apple as well as a former White House and Senate counsel to Biden. They will conduct conversations with Democrats across the party and work with the lawyers who are running the vetting process, Biden’s campaign said today.

- **Biden Open to Republicans in Cabinet:** Biden said he would look at enlisting Republicans for his Cabinet, though not for his running mate. The presumptive Democratic presidential nominee said during a virtual fundraiser yesterday that a Republican would be considered for a position if they were “the best qualified person” to do the job. But he made clear the potential bipartisanship wouldn’t extend to his choice of vice president.
- **Democrats Struggle Over Biden Accuser:** A former aide’s allegation that Biden sexually assaulted her 30 years ago has put Democrats into a quandary, as they attempt to square their support for the #MeToo movement with their backing of a nominee who now stands accused himself. Tara Reade says that when she worked in Biden’s Senate office in 1993, Biden pushed her against a wall in a Senate office building and sexually assaulted her with his fingers. The allegations are particularly troubling for the Democrats who have taken a zero tolerance stance on sexual misconduct and were adamant in their support for Christine Blasey Ford against Brett Kavanaugh.
- **Cook Says Graham’s Odds of Re-election Slip:** The Cook Political Report said today the South Carolina Senate race is now “Likely Republican” rather than “Solid Republican.” Sen. Lindsey Graham (R), the chairman of the Judiciary Committee and ally of the president, is being challenged by Jaime Harrison, the former chairman of the state Democratic Party. Harrison outraised Graham in the first quarter.
- **China Denies Trump’s Claim It’s Trying to Make Him Lose:** China rejected Trump’s claim that Beijing was trying to damage his re-election chances with its handling of the coronavirus outbreak, as rhetoric between the world’s two largest economies continued to heat up.
 - Trump said in an interview with Reuters published yesterday that China’s response to the disease was focused on a desire to see him lose in November. The president, who provided no evidence for why China would deliberately mishandle an outbreak that has killed more than 4,600 of its citizens, said he was considering various ways to punish Beijing. “China will do anything they can to have me lose this race,” Trump said in the Oval Office interview. He didn’t elaborate what punitive actions he might take, but added: “There are many things I can do.”
 - The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs responded today that the country had “no interest” in interfering in internal U.S. affairs.
- **White House Domestic Policy Chief Grogan Is Resigning:** Joe Grogan, Trump’s chief of domestic policy, will be leaving the administration next month, a White House official said last night. He becomes the latest official to depart following the arrival of Chief of Staff Mark Meadows, who has heightened tensions at the White House with a series of abrupt staff changes. Grogan, whose resignation was reported earlier by the Wall Street Journal, was considered an ally of Meadows’ predecessor, Mick Mulvaney. He previously worked at the White House Office of Management and Budget when it was led by Mulvaney.

- **More transitions:** James Clapper, who served as U.S. Director of National Intelligence under the Obama administration, has joined the executive board at the Center for Ethics and the Rule of Law at the University of Pennsylvania Carey Law School, according to a tweet.
- **Minnesota Clinic Sues to Stop Abortions:** A Minnesota women's health clinic that opposes abortions wants surgical abortions put on hold in the state under an emergency coronavirus executive order requiring the postponement of elective surgeries. Abortion providers have filed several lawsuits accusing states of "exploiting" the pandemic and using emergency orders to shut down the right to abortion. This appears to be the first complaint over a state's failure to apply an order to halt surgical abortions.
- **Kim's Train Spotted, Leader Still Out of Sight:** A train resembling the one used by Kim Jong Un was spotted again near a coastal leadership compound, according to satellite imagery analyzed by 38 North, as the North Korean leader's unusual absence from public continued. The special train was seen yesterday parked at a station near the eastern resort area of Wonsan where it had been repeatedly spotted since April 21, 38 North reported, adding that it couldn't be considered as proof of Kim's presence. Speculation about Kim's whereabouts have focused on the area, where a top South Korean foreign policy adviser said he's been staying — "alive and well" — since April 13.