

American Nephrology Nurses Association

Daily Capitol Hill Update - Monday, May 4, 2020

(The following information comes from Bloomberg Government Website)

Schedules: White House and Congress

WHITE HOUSE

- President Trump said Sunday the intelligence community will release information today on briefings he had about coronavirus in late January

CONGRESS

- 3pm: The Senate meets after an absence of almost six weeks; considers nomination of Robert Feitel to be Nuclear Regulatory Commission inspector general
- House leaders last week abandoned plans to reconvene today, citing concern about Covid-19 spread
 - Both chambers are trying to figure out next steps on response to the coronavirus

Congressional, Health Policy, and Political News

- **Fiscal Fights Ahead:** As the U.S. moves past the peak of the coronavirus pandemic and begins to focus on the road ahead, lawmakers are preparing for a debate over whether the economy will need a long-term federal rebuilding effort that could last several years. Such a sustained push to bolster the economy could cost trillions of dollars, which will pressure lawmakers to consider how long the deficit-financed efforts should go on. A debate in Congress over proposals to boost the federal safety net and to let the deficit grow could occupy lawmakers for the rest of the year, if not longer.
 - "It's going to be a number of years before we get to reasonably good unemployment numbers," House Budget Chairman John Yarmuth (D-Ky.) said in an interview, adding he expects "a three- or four- or five-year recovery."
- **Collins Says Trump's Pick for Spy Chief Has Experience:** Trump's nominee to be the nation's spy chief, Rep. John Ratcliffe (R-Texas), picked up a crucial endorsement Friday from a moderate Senate Republican, just days before his confirmation hearing. Sen. Susan Collins (R-Maine) said in a statement she met Friday with Ratcliffe and "concluded that he does have the experience to meet the statutory standard to fill the position."
 - Among the criticisms leveled at Ratcliffe by Democrats is that he is too much of a Trump loyalist, in a post where independence and objectivity is critical. "I also pressed him for his commitment to deliver objective analysis, regardless of the president's views on an intelligence issue," said Collins, who pointed out she co-authored the 2004 law creating the job of director of national intelligence.

- **White House Blocks Fauci From Testifying:** The Trump administration has barred Anthony Fauci, the scientist who's leading the U.S. response to the coronavirus pandemic, from testifying before a congressional hearing Wednesday. Fauci was sought as a witness for a House Appropriations subcommittee that was looking into the U.S. response to the pandemic, according to Evan Hollander, a committee spokesman. "We have been informed by an administration official that the White House has blocked Dr. Fauci from testifying," Hollander said on Friday afternoon.
 - The White House later confirmed that Fauci, the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, would not be appearing.

- **Trump Presses to Reopen With Risk of Promising Too Much:** Trump prodded an anxious nation to reopen for business with a combination of optimism and grievance, seeking to move past the pandemic that has killed more than 67,000 Americans and imperiled his odds of a second term.
 - In a virtual town hall staged symbolically at the Lincoln Memorial last night, Trump said he hopes to return to his raucous political rallies in packed arenas in the final months of his campaign for re-election. He complained that some states "aren't going fast enough" to ease public health restrictions.
 - "We have to go back," Trump said during the made-for-TV event on Fox News. "It's going to pass."
 - Trump has agitated since March to end social distancing, which has collapsed the U.S. economy -- his calling card for re-election. But in his remarks yesterday, he risked over-promising and under-delivering both to supporters protesting stay-at-home orders at statehouses around the country and the majority of Americans that polls show are more fearful of the virus than the economic fallout.
 - His arguments were also hurt by a litany of exaggerations, misstatements and partisan attacks on his opponents, leaving him open to criticism that he is foremost concerned about his own re-election odds than the health and safety of the American people. The event also highlighted Trump's characteristic bombast. "They always said, 'nobody got treated worse than Lincoln.' I believe I am treated worse," Trump declared, sitting at the foot of the statue of the 16th president.
 - Trump revised upward the number of Americans he expects to die from the virus to as many as 100,000 and promised more assistance for those put out of work during the town hall event. "We're going to lose anywhere between 75, 80 to 100,000," he said. He said at the beginning of April he hoped deaths would total less than 60,000. The number of U.S. dead so far is more than 67,000.
 - Trump said he won't agree to pass further stimulus measures to combat the economic fallout of the coronavirus outbreak without a payroll tax cut. Trump has been advocating for the cut for weeks but it's opposed by most congressional Democrats and it's not clear the idea has much support in Trump's own party. A payroll tax cut would have no benefit for Americans put out of work in the wake of the outbreak until they return to employment.
 - Trump promised a "conclusive" report on the Chinese origins of the coronavirus outbreak. Trump pledged the report and said he had little doubt that Beijing misled the world about the scale and risk of the disease. Earlier, Secretary of State Michael

Pompeo said “enormous evidence” shows the Covid-19 outbreak began in a laboratory in the central Chinese city of Wuhan, without providing evidence to support his claims.

- The intelligence community briefed Trump twice in the eight days before he imposed travel restrictions on China in an attempt to stop the spread of coronavirus, said a senior White House official familiar with the briefings. Trump said last night that he was told on Jan. 23 that a virus might be coming but that it wasn't of much import. “They said it very matter of factly,” he said, adding that the intelligence community would release more information on Monday. The Jan. 23 session was the first time the intelligence community briefed the president on Covid-19, said the official, who requested anonymity to describe the classified briefings.
- **DOJ Backs Virginia Church in Distancing Dispute:** The U.S. Department of Justice filed a statement of interest in a federal court, siding with a Virginia church in one of the first Trump administration interventions over state and local social distancing rules. The move comes a week after Attorney General William Barr directed top Justice Department prosecutors to take legal action against state and local officials if their coronavirus restrictions go too far.
- **Democrats Slam Trump's Coronavirus Stimulus Oversight:** Joe Biden and Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) lambasted what they called the Trump administration's weak oversight of trillions of dollars in coronavirus relief spending in an op-ed published yesterday. The Democrats laid out what they termed the administration's failings and how Biden, as president, would strengthen supervision of the funds being spent to prop up the U.S. economy.
 - Biden, the presumptive Democratic presidential nominee, and Warren, a former 2020 contender who's seen as a possible vice presidential pick, said Trump has ignored the law requiring oversight of the stimulus funds. They also criticized him for firing an inspector general responsible for independently overseeing the spending. “Both of us have served in Congress overseeing the executive branch,” they wrote in the piece for McClatchy-owned newspapers. “We have also both served in the executive branch and answered to independent oversight. Take it from us: Oversight is vital to an effective democracy and a fair economy, and it's a threat only if you have something to hide.”
 - Meanwhile, the watchdog created to monitor the work of the Treasury Department and the Federal Reserve in buffering corporate America and Main Street from the Covid-19 pandemic is functioning like an ad hoc committee as it waits for a chairman to start formal operations. The congressional oversight panel, formed as part of the \$2.2 trillion pandemic relief bill, is expected to issue its first report in mid-May but still has no leader and has yet to conduct any formal meetings, said Rep. Donna Shalala (D-Fla.), who was appointed to the five-person panel. “We have no staff, we have no office,” Shalala said in an interview on Friday. The panel's first public report is due around mid-month.

- **SBA Touts More Small Businesses Getting Relief Funds:** Fresh figures from a government coronavirus relief program for small businesses that's been criticized for giving loans to large companies and favoring certain states show disparities in approvals among states have been largely eliminated, and suggest more smaller firms are getting loans. The Small Business Administration released updated data yesterday for the second round of funding for its Paycheck Protection Program, which offers loans of as much as \$10 million that can become grants.

 - While firms in Nebraska and other rural states got an outsize share of the initial tranche compared with New York and other areas hit harder by the outbreak, an analysis shows subsequent lending has erased most of the disparity.
 - Small businesses that struggled to get loans from the government pandemic relief program still don't know how much they may have to repay after the government missed a deadline to give specific guidance. The SBA was supposed to clarify by April 26 how the loans can be spent and still qualify to become grants. Companies and lenders say they need more guidance on how to calculate the amount that's eligible for forgiveness and what documentation is required to support the claims.
 - A major Trump donor whose companies are among the biggest known recipients of rescue loans for small businesses hurt by the coronavirus outbreak said he will return the money. Texas hotelier Monty Bennett, whose companies own 130 properties across the country, said Saturday that he will return the loans provided under the Small Business Administration's Paycheck Protection Program. Bennett said new restrictions meant those companies may no longer qualify.

- **Treasury's \$4 Trillion Funding Task Signals Auction Slate:** Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin is likely to boost the government's quarterly round of debt auctions to unprecedented levels this week to finance a deficit that's set to surpass estimates of \$4 trillion for this year as lawmakers discuss additional economic stimulus. Treasury's announcement Wednesday on its issuance plans for the coming months will signal how Mnuchin plans to manage a debt burden that's poised to eclipse the record seen in the wake of World War II as a share of the economy. Analysts see the department needing to raise massive amounts of cash every quarter possibly into 2021.

- **Roche Antibody Test Gets Approval:** Roche became the latest company to win emergency U.S. approval for a coronavirus antibody test and promised a fast scale-up of the tool that policy makers hope will smooth the reopening of economies. The Swiss giant expects production of the test to reach the high double-digit millions by June and pass the 100 million monthly threshold later this year. The test looks for antibodies in blood that have been raised to fight off the virus that causes Covid-19.

 - Researchers continue to debate how fast a coronavirus vaccine may be available as states and nations look for a fast track to recovery from the pandemic's economic toll, with January or even the fall now on the timetable. British scientists hope to see a "signal" on whether their vaccine candidate is working by June, John Bell, professor of medicine at Oxford University, said yesterday. Trump last night said he was confident a vaccine would be developed by the end of the year.

- Obama Alumni Say No Biden Allegations Found:** The leader of the team that vetted Biden to be Barack Obama's 2008 running mate said that Tara Reade's allegations of sexual assault by Biden never surfaced during an extensive investigation.

 - Biden, facing the most serious incident of his 2020 presidential campaign, and his allies have begun a vigorous defense effort against Reade's allegations. She says that in 1993, when she was staffer in his Senate office, then-Senator Biden pushed her against a wall in a Capitol Hill office building, reached under her skirt and sexually assaulted her with his fingers. Biden said Friday that the allegations "aren't true. This never happened." He's directed Senate officials to find and release a written complaint that Reade says she filed at the time, but Biden insists doesn't exist.
 - A team of eight to 10 lawyers, led by Bill Jeffress, spent almost two months vetting Biden to be Obama's vice president. Jeffress said Saturday that neither Reade's name nor her allegations came up. Jeffress also said no rumors of misconduct were floating around at the time.
 - Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, considered a possible Democratic vice presidential pick, said yesterday she believed Biden's denial. "I have read a lot about this current allegation. I know Joe Biden, and I have watched his defense. And there's not a pattern that goes into this," Whitmer told CNN's "State of the Union."
 - Former presidential candidate and Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (N.Y.), a leading voice in the #MeToo movement, will headline a national "Women for Biden" call hosted by Joe Biden's campaign for president on Thursday.
- Warren Is Favorite VP Pick in CBS Poll:** Elizabeth Warren topped the wish list for Joe Biden's running mate among Democratic voters, according to a new CBS poll released on Sunday. Warren had 36% support as voters' first choice, with Sen. Kamala Harris (D-Calif.) at 19%, Georgia gubernatorial candidate Stacey Abrams at 14%, and Sen. Amy Klobuchar (D-Minn.) at 13%. By a seven to one margin, Democrats with a preference want the running-mate pick to be a woman.
- Trump Claims Again Biden Wrote Apology That Biden Denies:** Trump claimed yesterday that Biden wrote a letter to apologize for calling him xenophobic -- something Biden has repeatedly said is a lie. Trump said during the "virtual town hall" event that after he ordered China travel restrictions on Jan. 31, "They called me a racist, they said xenophobic." "Biden said, 'he was xenophobic,'" Trump said at the event. "Biden has now written a letter of apology because I did the right thing. I saved hundreds of thousands of lives."
- Biden Wins in Kansas After All-Mail-In Vote:** Biden easily won the Democratic primary in Kansas after a vote that wrapped up on Saturday, conducted entirely via mail-in ballots because of the coronavirus pandemic. The Associated Press reported yesterday that Biden received 77% of the vote over Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) with 23%. Sanders ended his campaign in April but was still in the running when the state Democratic party started mailing ballots to voters in late March.

- **Bush's Coronavirus Video Has Critics Nostalgic:** Former President George W. Bush says Americans should come together as one to confront the coronavirus pandemic that claimed the lives of over 66,000 in the country so far. In a video released on Saturday, the 43rd U.S. president said, "We are not partisan combatants. We're human beings, equally vulnerable and equally wonderful in the sight of God." It got the Republican, who left office in January 2009 and typically keeps a low profile, trending on the social media site.
- **Warren Doubts Effort to Get Cash to Contractors:** Sen. Warren is questioning whether the Pentagon's policy of increasing payment rates for contractors -- intended to keep assembly lines humming during the coronavirus outbreak -- has sufficient oversight and is helping the companies which need it most. Warren, who raised her doubts in an April 30 letter, is the first lawmaker on a congressional defense committee to publicly question the rationale for the increased rates, and whether the Pentagon will ensure payments flow to subcontractors.
- **China Trade Deal Turns From Trump Re-Election Asset to Albatross:** The trade agreement Trump signed with China less than four months ago has gone from a cornerstone of his re-election bid to a potential political liability as the pandemic sours the relationship between the world's two biggest economies.
- **Raab Says U.S., U.K. to Start Free Trade Talks:** The U.K. and the U.S. will start work this week on a free trade agreement that will benefit both countries in the global downturn, U.K. Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said in a tweet.
- **NASA Sees Months-Long Test for SpaceX's Debut Flight:** SpaceX's first Crew Dragon mission carrying NASA astronauts could last several months as the space agency weighs its staffing needs on the International Space Station. The May 27 test flight will be the first time NASA personnel blast off from the U.S. since the 2011 retirement of the Space Shuttle. It marks a significant milestone for the agency's program to have two American companies provide transportation to the space station. It will also be the first time SpaceX has flown humans.
- **Kim Jong Un Reminds World of Nuclear Threat:** The place North Korean leader Kim Jong Un visited may be just as significant as showing his face in public after a three-week absence that raised questions about his health and control of the nuclear-armed state. State media on Saturday said Kim celebrated the completion of the Suncheon Phosphatic Fertilizer Factory north of Pyongyang, the capital. Although the inspection tour itself appeared routine, the facility has been the subject of high-level attention for years due to its dual-use potential: North Korea could possibly tap it to increase production of both food and nuclear weapons.