
Window On Washington - May 18, 2020, Vol. 4, Issue 20

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Outlook for This Week in the Nation's Capital

House Goes Virtual. After voting on Friday to allow remote voting and virtual hearings, there are no votes expected in the chamber this week as House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-MD) wants to give aides time to determine how the new remote rules will work. Hoyer says there will be pro forma sessions this week, with a swearing-in on Tuesday of two Republicans who won special elections last week. The House Appropriations Military Construction-VA Subcommittee will also hold a hearing Tuesday on the VA's COVID-19 response efforts, with VA Secretary Robert Wilkie scheduled to testify. The House Education and Labor Committee will hold a hearing to discuss how the federal government can protect workers from COVID-19.

Senate Resumes Nominations. The Senate is back today with a procedural vote on Scott Rash to be a judge for the District of Arizona, as well as votes on four other judges and James "Trey" Trainor to be a member of the FEC. The Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee will meet Wednesday to mark up ten bills, including a bill that would require a joint task force on air travel during and after the pandemic, as well as legislation that would require the DOT to support state and local governments in providing testing for essential critical infrastructure workers. The committee also plans to vote on several nominations, including Neil Jacobs to be undersecretary of commerce for oceans and atmosphere.

Next Coronavirus Response Package. Though House Democrats on Friday passed the HEROES Act, a sweeping, \$3 trillion stimulus bill built around aid for local governments and a fresh batch of direct payments to the public, the Republican Senate majority has no immediate plans to produce an alternative. There's currently minimal bipartisan talk among congressional leaders about what to do next, though Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) and Sen. John Cornyn (R-TX) are working on legislation that would exempt some businesses and employees from liability during the coronavirus pandemic — which McConnell deems a must-have in any next relief bill. But Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) and Leader McConnell have no plans to hash out their differences, primarily because they don't even agree on whether a bill is needed immediately. President Trump is noncommittal. At this point, Congress will likely pass another bill later this summer.

Last Week in the Nation's Capital

CONGRESS

Budget & Appropriations

Next Coronavirus Aid Package Expected to Become Reality 'in June at the Earliest,' as House Passes its Bill: As the Democratic-run House of Representatives approved its \$3 trillion coronavirus relief bill on Friday night, analysts are saying it's likely that President Trump will end up signing a new aid package into law next month or later following extensive negotiations. ([Market Watch](#))

Historic Rule Change OKs House Proxy Votes and Virtual Committees: The House voted 217-189 on Friday to approve a package of historic changes to the chamber rules due to the coronavirus pandemic, including authorization for proxy voting and for House committees to hold virtual hearings, markups, and depositions. ([Roll Call](#))

House Narrowly Passes \$3 Trillion Coronavirus Aid Bill: The near party-line tally was 208-199, with 14 Democrats voting against sending the bill to the Senate. Rep. Peter T. King (R-NY) was the lone Republican to support the measure. ([Roll Call](#))

McConnell says 'High Likelihood' that Congress Will Need to Pass Fifth Coronavirus Bill: Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) said last Thursday that Congress would likely need to pass a fifth coronavirus relief bill, but declined to give a timeline for additional legislation. Senators in both parties have said they think it's unlikely the Senate takes up a fifth coronavirus relief bill before the chamber leaves for Memorial Day recess. ([The Hill](#))

Health

Bright says it Will Likely Take Longer than 18 Months to Get Coronavirus Vaccine: Former top federal vaccine official Rick Bright warned last Thursday that projections of a coronavirus vaccine available in 12 to 18 months may be overly optimistic during testimony before the House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Health. ([The Hill](#))

Labor & Workforce

Senate Democrats Introduce Bill to Boost Nonprofit Workforce as Coronavirus Crushes Resources: A group of Senate Democrats introduced legislation on Friday to provide grants to nonprofits to bolster hiring efforts as their resources dwindle amid the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. ([CNBC](#))

Banking & Housing

Senate Banking Committee Presses Financial Regulators on COVID-19 Responses: Senate Banking Committee members criticized financial regulators' coronavirus responses last Tuesday in the panel's first remote hearing, telling the officials that too many businesses and public bodies were slipping through the gaps of aid programs. ([Roll Call](#))

Fed's Powell Says More Spending from Congress 'Costly, But Worth It': Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell last Wednesday warned that fallout from the coronavirus crisis could result in lingering pain for the U.S. economy and said further action by Congress to head off that damage would be worth the high cost. ([Politico](#))

Agriculture

House Ag Chairman Collin Peterson Wants FEMA to Help Farmers Euthanize and Dispose of Livestock: The Minnesota Democrat and other lawmakers proposed that the expenses be reimbursed under Category B of FEMA's Public Assistance program, and said FEMA "has been a valued federal partner in responding to animal losses due to other natural disasters, and we should treat COVID-19 no differently" in their letter to President Trump. ([House Agriculture Committee](#))

Justice

Lindsey Graham Announces Senate Judiciary Investigation into Origins of Mueller Probe: On Thursday, Senate Judiciary Chair Lindsey Graham (R-NC) announced his committee would be opening an investigation into Crossfire Hurricane, the FBI investigation into possible ties between President Trump's 2016 campaign and Russia. ([Yahoo News](#))

House Judiciary Chairman Demands Barr Testify by June, Warns of Potential Subpoena: Amid a growing controversy over the Justice Department's handling of several criminal cases involving former advisers to President Trump, the chairman of the House Judiciary Committee is pressing for Attorney General William Barr to immediately testify when Washington reopens in early June. ([NBC News](#))

Environment/Interior

Corporations Pushing Climate Action Return to Hill for Virtual Visit: The event, which organizers said is the largest push to date from businesses to prod Congress to address climate change, marks the latest private-sector effort for a federal carbon tax, though not all the companies included today are calling for a price on carbon, which many climate scientists and economists say is a must-have component of any serious plan to lower carbon emissions to safe levels. ([Roll Call](#))

Cyber

Senate Votes to Increase Legal Protections to Targets of Surveillance Court: The Senate last Wednesday passed an amendment to provide additional legal protections to targets of Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act warrants and nearly approved new restrictions on the federal government's power to search internet history in a sign of bipartisan frustration over surveillance authorities under the FISA law. ([CNN](#))

Lawmakers Move to Boost Federal Cybersecurity in Annual Defense Bill: Sen. Ron Johnson (R-WI) said last Wednesday that he was pushing for inclusion of measures meant to defend the United States against cyber threats in the upcoming annual NDAA. ([The Hill](#))

Education

Education Provisions in the HEROES Act: Under HEROES, the Department of Education would provide up to \$90 billion through September 2022 for states to use on their early childhood, elementary, secondary, and post-secondary education systems. ([American Action Forum](#))

EXECUTIVE BRANCH

Budget and Appropriations

White House Would Likely Support a New Round of Stimulus Checks, Sources Say: The White House would likely support another round of stimulus checks, two senior administration officials told CNBC last Thursday. ([CNBC](#))

Health/HHS/NIH

Trump Names Ex-Pharmaceutical Executive, General to Lead Vaccine Push: Trump has tapped Moncef Slaoui, the former chairman of GlaxoSmithKline, as Operation Warp Speed's chief scientist and Army Gen. Gustave Perna as the project's chief operation officer. ([The Hill](#))

ASPR Sees Another Departure as Kevin Yeskey Leaves: The principal deputy to Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response Robert Kadlec retired on Friday. While there's been significant attention on ASPR after Rick Bright's public ouster, Yeskey told colleagues that the retirement was months in the making, and Politico Pulse confirmed first learning about this before the pandemic. ([Politico](#))

NIH Begins Studying Hydroxychloroquine and Azithromycin as COVID-19 Treatment: The trial will study the use of hydroxychloroquine, a malaria drug, and azithromycin, an antibiotic, in 2,000 adult COVID-19 patients. ([The Hill](#))

Defense/DOD

Pentagon Fires its Point Person for Defense Production Act: Jennifer Santos, the Pentagon's industrial policy chief who oversees efforts to ramp up production of masks and other equipment to help fight Covid-19, was fired from her job this week and will move to a position in the Navy, according to two

people familiar with the matter. ([Politico](#))

Pentagon Inks \$134M Deal to Buy PPE for Nursing Homes: The Pentagon last Wednesday announced a \$134 million deal to buy personal protective equipment for medical personnel at more than 15,000 U.S. nursing homes to aid in the fight against the coronavirus pandemic. ([The Hill](#))

Homeland Security/Immigration

DHS Begins Collecting DNA from Undocumented Immigrants after Whistleblower Complaints: On May 1, ICE's Enforcement and Removal Operations arm began the pilot program as ICE ramps up to fully implement a Department of Justice rule authorizing it to gather DNA under the 2005 law. ([Politico](#))

Dept. of Education

Colleges Worry They'll Be Sued if They Reopen Campuses: Colleges, in seeking that protection from Pence and from a Senate committee this week, aren't alone. ([Inside Higher Ed](#))

DeVos Guidance Directs School Districts to Increase Funding to Private Schools: Education Secretary Betsy DeVos issued guidance to the country's school districts on how they should allocate funds received from Congress's \$2 trillion CARES Act, telling the districts that they should increase the amount of money given to private schools. ([The Hill](#))

Trump Pushes Schools to Reopen. DeVos Says Some Classes May Remain Online: President Donald Trump expects a full reopening of schools come fall. Education Secretary Betsy DeVos isn't so sure. ([Politico](#))

Labor and Workforce

3M More Americans File for Unemployment Benefits as Coronavirus Economic Impact Expands: Just under 3 million people applied for initial unemployment claims in the week ending May 9, according to Labor Department data released last Thursday. This brings the total number of newly unemployed Americans since the start of the pandemic to around 36.5 million. ([The Hill](#))

Fed's Powell Warns Unemployment Could Reach Depression-Level 25 Percent: Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell on Sunday warned that the nation's unemployment rate could soar to 25 percent during the worst of the coronavirus crisis, though he said the economy should recover more quickly than during the Great Depression, when joblessness last reached those levels. ([Politico](#))

Department of Energy

Trump Administration to Buy 1 Million Barrels of Oil for National Stockpile: The Department of Energy (DOE) is planning to buy 1 million barrels of oil from U.S. companies after funding to make a larger purchase failed to pass Congress. ([The Hill](#))

Justice

Trump Justice Department Asks for More Resources to Enforce Gun Laws: In recent outreach to Capitol Hill, DOJ made two requests related to the spike in gun purchases. ([Politico](#))

Agriculture/USDA

Multimillion-Dollar Food Bank Delivery Contracts Go to Firms with Little Experience: The Agriculture Department has awarded multimillion-dollar contracts to companies that appear to have little experience working with food banks or farmers, spurning several big produce companies with extensive expertise in food distribution. ([Politico](#))

USDA Biotech Rule Exempts Gene Edited Foods from Oversight: The USDA last Thursday [finalized a biotech rule](#) that exempts many genetically engineered and gene edited foods from oversight by the department. ([Politico](#))

Department of Justice Supports National Pork Producers Council's Ability to Combat Meat Shortage: The DOJ will not challenge the proposed collaborative efforts of the National Pork Producers Council (NPPC) to work with the USDA to address certain hardships facing hog farmers as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. ([DOJ Press Release](#))

Space/NASA & NOAA

NASA's Own Advisers Skeptical of Agency's Ability to Meet 2024 Lunar Landing Goal: Members of a NASA advisory committee expressed doubts that the agency can return humans to the moon by 2024 as currently planned, as well as concerns about the approach the agency is using to develop lunar landers. The committee did not adopt a formal finding about the feasibility of a 2024 landing, but did approve others that noted an "extremely compressed" schedule for developing the HLS landers, calling for fewer trade studies that slow progress and ensuring that there is adequate testing of the landers to avoid jeopardizing safety. ([Space News](#))

China Space Capabilities Report Recommended: The Pentagon should compile an annual unclassified report on China's military space developments, according to one of the recommendations by the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission's report on China's growing military and civil

space programs. The report also recommends that Congress enact new laws to prohibit American entities — including government agencies, national labs, universities and individual investors — from supporting any of China’s activities in space that are “inherently military in nature.” ([U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission](#))

Building the World’s Best Weather Model: A couple years ago, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration set out on a path to create the world’s best weather model—a tool that could dramatically increase the knowledge and safety of boaters nationwide through better predictions about storms and more. And now, having taken a few sizable strides down that path with supercomputing upgrades and private sector data tool partnerships, NOAA is ready to grab a partner and run via a partner award to run the Earth Prediction Innovation Center to coordinate broader efforts to build better models and forecasts. ([Soundings Online](#))

Some U.S. Regions Are Most Vulnerable to Solar Storms: A new study about solar-induced power outages in the U.S. electric grid finds that a few key regions - a portion of the Midwest and Eastern Seaboard - appear to be more vulnerable than others. The good news is that a few preventative measures could drastically reduce the damage done when a solar storm hits Earth, including stockpiling electrical transformers in national strategic reserves. ([IEEE Spectrum](#))

Cyber

Amazon Asks Congress to Pass a Law Against Price Gouging During National Crisis: Amazon has requested that Congress pass a law that would make price gouging illegal during times of national crisis, in light of inflated prices on crucial goods like hand sanitizer and N95 masks that have hounded the online retailer during the COVID-19 pandemic. ([The Verge](#))

Democrats Introduce Coronavirus-focused Privacy Legislation: Democrats in both chambers introduced legislation last Thursday aimed at protecting the privacy and security of health data during the coronavirus pandemic. ([The Hill](#))

Baking & Housing/HUD

Fannie, Freddie Extend Moratorium on Foreclosures Through June: Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac extended their suspensions on mortgage foreclosures through at least June. Fannie and Freddie initially announced the halts on foreclosures in March, though the relief was set to expire May 17. ([Bloomberg](#))

Borrowers in Forbearance Can Defer All Missed Payments Until the End of Their Loan: Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac announced last Wednesday that under the new program, borrowers who took forbearance due to a coronavirus-related issue will not have to repay their missed payments until the borrower sells their house, refinances their current mortgage, or their mortgage matures. ([Housing Wire](#))

Transportation/DOT

CDC Scientists Overruled in White House Push to Restart Airport Fever Screenings for COVID-19: The White House is pushing a return to a failed strategy of relying on temperature screening of air travelers to detect coronavirus despite vehement objections from the nation’s top public health agency, internal documents show. ([USA Today](#))

Airlines, Government at Odds Over Passenger ‘Contact Tracing’: Two months after lawmakers lamented public health officials’ inability to contact air travelers arriving in the U.S. who may have been exposed to the coronavirus, the federal government and airlines are still at odds over who should take the lead on such efforts. ([Roll Call](#))

Update on Treasury Implementation of the Payroll Support Program for the Aviation Industry: Since announcing the Payroll Support Program, Treasury has approved over \$25 billion in assistance to 352 applicants, supporting hundreds of thousands of American jobs. Approved applicants include all of the major passenger air carriers, more than 260 smaller passenger air carriers, and a significant number of cargo air carriers and contractors. ([US Treasury](#))

New Rules Ease Rest Mandates for Truck Drivers: The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration last Thursday announced final regulations that aim to settle years of debate over how to give drivers flexibility in limits on their driving hours while preventing accidents caused by driver fatigue. ([Roll Call](#))