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CORONAVIRUS UPDATE

March 20, 2020

Quick Headlines

Administration

- President Trump said he will use the Defense Production Act to accelerate the production of medical supplies to fight coronavirus pandemic.
- The Treasury Department pushed back the tax filing deadline from April 15 to July 15.
- Trump moved June's G-7 meeting at Camp David to videoconference due to pandemic concerns.
- DHS asked 16 critical industries to maintain work schedules, including food, manufacturing, electric power, petroleum, water and wastewater, transportation, and communications technology.
- The second EPA employee tested positive for coronavirus.
- The first Navy SEAL tested positive for coronavirus. Other members of the group are quarantined.
- The number of National Guardsmen dealing with coronavirus may double by the weekend. A Pentagon spokesperson said the Defense Department was not considering federalizing the Guard.
- Department of Veterans Affairs is preparing to deploy 3,000 doctors, nurses, and other emergency personnel, including mobile hospitals and pharmacies, to help with the coronavirus pandemic.
- Navy hospital ship USNS *Mercy* is set to sail Monday; USNS *Comfort* will leave in two weeks.
- Trump declined an aggressive response to Iranian proxy attacks due to coronavirus.
- The U.S. is pausing additional deployments to Afghanistan and is quarantining 1,500 troops and civilians who recently arrived to avoid any possible spread of coronavirus.
- Education Department will not enforce federal standardized testing requirements for K-12 schools.
- Federal student loan borrowers can suspend monthly payments without penalty for next 60 days.
- The Interior Secretary directed the National Park Service to suspend collection of park entry fees.
- Trump announced an agreement with Canada and Mexico to limit border crossings.
- The first State Department employee was diagnosed with coronavirus in one of the D.C. annex buildings. A small number of employees abroad have tested positive.
- Pentagon called on defense contractors to maintain normal work schedules during the outbreak.

Congress

- Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) filed cloture this evening on the motion to proceed to a "shell" bill that will serve as the legislative vehicle for *The Coronavirus Aid Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act*. He is hoping for a bipartisan package to pass the Senate early next week.
- Sens. Cory Booker (D-NJ) and Doug Jones (D-AL) want \$1.5b in emergency funding for HBCUs and other minority-serving institutions to support coronavirus-related costs.
- Sen. Ted Cruz (R-TX) sent a letter to HHS Secretary Azar urging him to exercise authority delegated by Defense Production Act to speed up production of resources to fight coronavirus pandemic.

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State and Local

- Illinois issued a “stay-at-home” order for its residents, including almost 10 million in Chicago.
- New York Gov. Cuomo orders nonessential businesses to close and residents to stay home, effective Sunday night, saying restrictions could last for months.
- Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Wolf declared that all non-life-sustaining businesses must shut down.
- Effective last night, California Gov. Newsom ordered the state’s 40 million residents to stay home. Newsom thinks half his population will be infected within 8 weeks. House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-CA) said the decision was premature and made without input from state leaders.
- New York said it would run out of medical supplies in 2-3 weeks.
- Wisconsin issued updated guidance on its restrictions, including a ban on all gatherings over 10 people. Schools closed on Wednesday. Today, Gov. Evers ordered salons, spas, barbershops, and more to close effective tonight. There are currently no plans to issue a shelter-in-place order.
- Indiana postponed its May 5 primary election to June 2. Georgia, Connecticut, Ohio, Louisiana, and Kentucky have also postponed their primaries. Rhode Island is still considering it.
- North Carolina is postponing the Republican primary runoff for Rep. Mark Meadows’ seat.
- Connecticut Gov. Ned Lamont announced the state’s April 28 primary will be postponed to June 2.
- Texas regulators are considering cutting oil production for the first time in decades.
- The National Governors Association (NGA) requested that Congress and the Administration provide at least \$150 billion in immediate direct aid to the states and an increase of the Federal Medical Assistance Percentage (FMAP) to at least 12 percent.

International

- There are nearly 200,000 cases of coronavirus and nearly 8,000 deaths in 161 countries.
- In Europe, some med school graduates can start working as fully qualified doctors immediately.
- Researchers at Sharif University of Technology estimate a best-case scenario for Iran is 12,000 deaths; worst case is 3.5 million deaths.
- UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced a nationwide lockdown today, closing bars, restaurants, nightclubs, cinemas, gyms, and more.
- Tunisia ordered a general lockdown, restricting public movement to counter spread of coronavirus.
- The Australian government asked Netflix and Stan to reduce data to avoid broadband overload.

General

- Dow drops more than 925 points as Wall Street finishes its worst week since 2008 financial crisis.
- New Orleans Saints coach tests positive for COVID-19, the first known infected person in the NFL.
- DISH Network lent some of its airwaves to AT&T for free to ensure capacity amid the pandemic. Hundreds of broadband providers are signing on to FCC Chairman Ajit Pai’s pledge to not cut off service to consumers experiencing virus-related billing disruptions.
- Charter Communications employees have accused the company of needlessly placing them and their families at risk after CEO told them to continue coming into work.

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- Elon Musk wrote on Twitter that Tesla would make ventilators “if there is a shortage.” Tesla announced it would halt production in California and New York amid the pandemic.
- Nikki Haley, former U.S. Ambassador to the UN and governor of South Carolina, resigned from Boeing’s board of directors, citing disapproval over plans for government assistance.
- About a million travel and tourism jobs are being lost daily at airlines, hotels, and other companies.

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Trump Administration Updates

White House Coronavirus Task Force – Briefing

During today's White House Coronavirus Task Force [briefing](#), Trump noted the Department of Education would not enforce Standardized Testing Requirements, and they would waive all federal interest on student loans. Student loan borrowers could also suspend payments for the next 60 days. Dr. Birx noted mortality of the virus in males is twice that of females. She called for vigilance in nursing homes. Trump praised governors for efforts in containing the virus. He said he put the Defense Production Act into effect, and they are producing masks and ventilators to distribute to states. A reporter said governors are being outbid by the federal government. Trump stated this would occasionally happen, but they would provide supplies to the states. Vice President Mike Pence stated they would put into place a plan that is locally executed, state-managed, and federally supported. Trump did not think there would be a national lockdown. A reporter noted the Labor Department asked states not to disclose job numbers. Trump could not comment.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo noted that restrictions on non-essential travel between Canada and the U.S. would go into effect tonight at midnight and be reviewed in 30 days. Mexico and the U.S. had also agreed to restrict travel. Commerce would continue. Essential travel referred to medical travel, education, emergency response, health services, and trade. He called on all Americans abroad to return home unless they planned to stay for a long time. On border control, Trump said illegal immigrants would spread the virus and overwhelm the health care system, posing a threat to national security. He praised the suspension of all non-essential travel on the borders of Canada and Mexico.

CMS Approves 1135 Waivers for Washington State

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) approved Washington State's application for 1135 waivers. The waiver provides Washington with additional regulatory flexibilities, including: waiving prior authorization requirements for Medicaid benefits; waiving parts of the provider enrollment process through which providers sign up to offer services to Medicaid beneficiaries; allowing Washington Medicaid beneficiaries to receive care from out-of-state providers, as long as those providers are registered with Medicare or another state; suspending screening requirements for beneficiaries admitted to nursing homes, through which providers document the needs of the patient; and allowing care to be provided in alternative settings in the event a facility is evacuated. **Resources:** [CMS announcement](#), [Approval letter](#), [Washington request letter](#) (CMS 03/19)

CMS Encourages Minimizing Face-to-Face Contact for Medication Delivery

CMS announced steps to encourage Part D sponsors to work with their downstream entities to identify means of ensuring medication is delivered to patients without requiring face-to-face contact. Medicare Part D regulations require sponsors and their downstream entities to allow their books and records to be available for HHS audits. These audits can include a review of documentation of medication delivery or dispensing, including evidence of the patient's signature. CMS made it clear they will not audit for patient signatures as proof of delivery for any medications, including for controlled substances.

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FDA Looks at Compassionate Use Program for COVID-19 Drugs

Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Commissioner Stephen Hahn said the FDA hopes to use its compassionate use program to get potential COVID-19 therapies to healthcare providers and patients while also gathering information on safety and efficacy. Hahn said the compassionate use program, also known as Expanded Access, will allow the agency to collect more data on potential therapies over the Right to Try path. The agency is also looking at other mechanisms to get potential treatments out to the public as soon as possible, including expanding indications for already approved drugs and collecting plasma from those who have recovered from COVID-19. (Inside Health Policy 03/19)

CDC Launches COVID-19 Bot to Help People Decide if They Need to See a Doctor

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) launched a COVID-19 assessment bot Thursday to help initially screen Americans who are concerned they are suffering from symptoms connected to the novel coronavirus. The new, conversational bot—deemed the Coronavirus Self-Checker on the agency's website—can gauge the risk factors and symptoms for people who engage with it, and offer insights into next moves they should consider in support of their health. The bot doesn't make a diagnosis or offer treatment plans, but it is meant to act as a guide to help people discern if they should seek certain medical care. In a deliberate effort to help free up health care professionals to treat patients in dire need, Microsoft opted to freely offer up COVID-19 response templates through its Healthcare Bot service, which the officials said customers can use and modify to rapidly deploy artificial intelligence-powered chatbots of their own to assess potential patients, before they head in for care. (Nextgov 03/20)

FDA Postpones Routine Domestic Inspections

The FDA postponed all routine domestic facility inspections in order to protect the health and well-being of agency staff and to address the industry's concern over visitors. FDA will still proceed with inspections it deems "mission-critical," as well as respond to all public health emergencies involving FDA-regulated products. Only routine surveillance facility inspections have been postponed at this time. FDA Commissioner Stephen Hahn said the agency is considering other inspection methods, such as assessing a facility's records instead of conducting an on-site facility inspection. The goal is to protect staff, firms, and public safety while still evaluating products as suitable for consumer use. (Inside Health Policy 03/19)

FDA Provides Additional Guidance on Sanitizer Production

The FDA issued new guidance on the production of alcohol-based hand sanitizer in order to address the recent shortages. These guidances will remain in effect for the duration of the public health emergency. The guidance [Temporary Policy for Preparation of Certain Alcohol-Based Hand Sanitizer Products During the Public Health Emergency \(COVID-19\)](#) is immediately in effect and outlines that the agency does not intend to take action against manufacturing firms that prepare alcohol-based hand sanitizers for consumer use and for use as health care personnel hand rubs during this ongoing public health emergency. The second guidance, [Policy for Temporary Compounding of Certain Alcohol-Based Hand Sanitizer Products During the Public Health Emergency](#), is in effect for the temporary compounding of certain alcohol-based hand sanitizers by pharmacists in state-licensed pharmacies or federal facilities and registered outsourcing facilities. Compounding is generally a practice in which a licensed pharmacist, a licensed physician, or, in

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the case of an outsourcing facility, a person under the supervision of a licensed pharmacist, combines, mixes, or alters ingredients of a drug to create a tailor-made medication. The temporary policy outlined by the agency does not require compounders to obtain a patient-specific prescription. (FDA 03/20)

Federal Reserve Takes Steps to Support U.S. Municipal Bond Market

The Federal Reserve stepped in to support the U.S. municipal bond market. Having already slashed interest rates, linked up a \$700 billion bond-buying program, and set up dollar swap lines with several central banks around the world, the Fed is expanding a program to support local-government financing through a lending facility for money market mutual funds. As U.S. cities and states take on the brunt of immediate spending for the public health response to the coronavirus pandemic, the \$3.9 trillion municipal bond market has been significantly damaged by volatility in recent days. Investors sold the bonds in huge quantities, selling a total of \$12.2 billion from municipal mutual funds as of Wednesday. (Financial Times 3/20)

NIH Halts Non-Mission-Critical Research Amid Coronavirus Outbreak

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) announced it will shift all non-mission-critical laboratory operations to a maintenance phase to reduce the risk of coronavirus transmission and protect staff. Starting Monday, only mission-critical functions within NIH research laboratories will be supported. This includes care for research participants in non-elective clinical trials, coronavirus research, and urgent public health research recommended by NIH leadership, as well as care for research animals. (Politico 03/20)

Trump Says He Would Consider Government Equity Stakes in Companies Seeking Bailouts

President Trump said Thursday he would consider taking an equity stake in companies accepting federal aid. He did not specify which companies he was referring to but called out those that have bought back stock. Delta, American, Southwest, and United airlines have collectively spent about \$39 billion over the last five years buying back shares. The airline industry is seeking more than \$50 billion in aid. Other industries, such as automobile companies, have also been struck by the pandemic. General Motors, Ford, and Fiat Chrysler will temporarily close all U.S. factories. The halt in production could create an immediate cash crunch for the automakers as demand for cars declines amid the COVID-19 outbreak. However, an equity stake is unlikely to be the companies' preferred form of relief. The move is often dilutive to shareholders and gives the government greater ability to oversee a company. (CNBC 03/20)

Poll: Majority of Americans Now Approve of Trump's Coronavirus Management

As the Administration has issued stricter federal guidelines in recent days, and President Trump has adopted a more public-facing role in combating the disease, more Americans now approve of his response to the coronavirus pandemic. An ABC News/Ipsos poll reported that 55% of respondents approved of Trump's management of the current crisis, while 43% disapprove. The uptick in public sentiment comes in the wake of a variety of measures the president has taken to combat the rapid spread of COVID-19 within the United States. Since last Friday, Trump has declared a national emergency, expanded the European travel ban, urged against group gatherings of more than 10 people, signaled his support for dispensing checks to affected Americans, and invoked the Defense Production Act. (Politico 3/20)

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After Pressure, Trump's Coronavirus Guide is in Spanish on CDC, White House Sites

Under pressure from Latino groups, the Trump Administration posted a Spanish translation of the president's latest coronavirus guidelines on the websites of the White House and the CDC. The Spanish-language version of "15 Days to Slow the Spread" was posted late Thursday afternoon, three days after it was released in English. The overdue translation comes after complaints from Latino groups who said they were scrambling to fill the gap in information for Spanish-dominant speakers. (NBC News 03/19)

Used Facemasks and Bandanas: How the CDC is Warning Hospitals to Prepare for Coronavirus Shortages

Doctors are being told by the CDC to reuse masks between patients and even use scarves as makeshift masks in the event they run out of supplies. This reflects a growing crisis in hospitals across the United States: There are too many patients and not enough resources to treat them. Health care facilities facing a crisis may need to consider steps to ration face masks during the pandemic, even if those strategies "are not commensurate with U.S. standards of care," according to the CDC. During shortages, the agency says health care providers should consider using masks beyond their designated shelf life and reusing them between patients. But while those measures may be better than nothing, they are also no substitute for the protective equipment doctors need to stay safe. (CNN 03/19)

Administration Reverses Course on Request to Cut CDC, NIAID Funding

After weeks of criticism, the Trump Administration reversed course on its request to cut funds for the CDC and NIAID in its FY2021 budget. Last week, Acting OMB Director Russell Vought doubled down, telling a House Appropriations Subcommittee, "I'm not sending up a budget amendment." The Administration proposed cutting \$1.2 billion from the CDC and \$451 million from NIAID, compared to current levels. In his Tuesday letter, Vought sought to increase CDC funding to \$8.3 billion, about \$100 million more than current levels, as well as a \$440 million increase to the NIAID, a touch below current funding levels. (The Hill 03/19)

HHS' Pandemic Simulation Showed How US was Ill-Prepared for Coronavirus

The Trump Administration ran a government exercise last year simulating a severe influenza pandemic for which there is no vaccine that showed the country was ill-prepared. The results laid out in a draft report showed the US was underprepared and disorganized for a pandemic scenario like coronavirus. Last January to August, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) ran a scenario named "Crimson Contagion" that included participation from 19 federal agencies, a dozen states, tribal nations, hospitals, and NGOs, according to the HHS draft report obtained by *The New York Times*. The fictional outbreak involved a group of tourists visiting China who then become infected and fly home to various countries, including the US. In this scenario, the virus is first detected in Chicago. The draft report concluded the US did not have the capacity to manufacture personal protective equipment, needles, and syringes and noted these supplies, along with antiviral medications, respirators, and ventilators, would be "limited and difficult to restock," due to them being largely manufactured overseas. (CNN 03/19)

HHS May Delay Implementation of Data-Sharing Rules Due to COVID-19 Outbreak

The Trump Administration is evaluating whether to push back the timeline for providers, payers, and health IT vendors to implement recent data-sharing regulations. The Administration released on March 9 widely

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anticipated rules that will change how providers, insurers, and patients exchange health data. The rules implement interoperability and patient access provisions of the 21st Century Cures Act passed in 2016. Specifically, the regulations allow patients to access and download their health records with third-party apps. To make that happen, the rules require hospitals, payers, and health IT vendors to adopt technology capabilities such as application programming interfaces (APIs). Some requirements, such as the mandate that hospitals enable electronic admission, discharge, and/or transfer notification, go into effect in six months. Other requirements have longer two-year timelines, such as the mandate for health IT vendors to enable patients to download all the information in their electronic health record. (Fierce Healthcare 03/19)

House and Senate Updates

Senate Republicans Release Third Stimulus Package

Senate Republicans released text yesterday evening for *The Coronavirus Aid Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act*, a third package developed in consultation with the Administration. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) named the following Senators as the lead negotiators: Crapo and Toomey (Banking), Alexander (HELP), Grassley and Portman (Finance), Rubio and Collins (Small Business), Wicker (Commerce), and Thune (Leadership). McConnell filed cloture this evening on the motion to proceed to a “shell” bill that will serve as the legislative vehicle for the CARES Act. He intends to reach an agreement on all four provisions of the Act by the end of today and hopes to pass a bipartisan package early next week.

The draft bill includes numerous tax-related provisions, including moving the tax filing deadline to July 15, providing checks of up to \$1,200 to eligible taxpayers, waiving withdrawal penalties for retirement accounts, and increasing limitations on deductions for charitable contributions.

The four stated priorities of the bill are:

1. Direct financial help for the American people;
2. Rapid relief for small businesses and employees;
3. Steps to stabilize the economy and protect jobs; and
4. Support for health care professionals and patients.

Summary of the CARES Act:

- Provides a total of \$208 billion to the Secretary of the Treasury, through the Exchange Stabilization Fund, to provide sufficiently collateralized loans and loan guarantees to eligible entities, broken out in the following amounts:
 - Up to \$50 billion for passenger air carriers;
 - Up to \$8 billion for cargo air carriers; and
 - Up to \$150 billion for other eligible entities.
- The Treasury Secretary is afforded flexibility to provide collateralized loans and loan guarantees to domestic businesses that have incurred losses as a result of the coronavirus global pandemic.

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- Entities eligible for loans or loan guarantees are those for whom credit is not otherwise reasonably available at the time of the transaction.
- An entity is only eligible for relief if the Treasury Secretary determines its continued operations are jeopardized as a result of losses stemming directly from the coronavirus outbreak.
- Interest rates on any loans extended by the Treasury Secretary may be no less than the current average yield on outstanding marketable obligations of the United States of comparable maturity.
- The legislation explicitly bars the Treasury Secretary from using the funds provided to make grants or direct cash payments to entities.
- The legislation mandates that entities receiving assistance do not increase compensation for, or provide golden parachutes to, executives over a two-year period from the date of enactment.
- The legislation directs the Secretary of the Treasury, to the extent feasible and practicable, to ensure the Government is compensated for the risk assumed in making loans and loan guarantees. To that end, “the [Treasury] Secretary is authorized to enter into contracts under which the Government, contingent on the financial success of the eligible entity, would participate in the gains of the eligible entity or its security holders through the use of such instruments as warrants, stock options, common or preferred stock, or other appropriate equity instruments.”

Provisions Aimed at Improving the Healthcare Response to COVID-19:

The plan includes several provisions aimed at improving the healthcare response to COVID-19:

- Lifts spending restrictions on Medicare payments this year, known as sequestration. The sequester has cut more than \$15 billion from Medicare payments just in fiscal year 2020.
- Provides hospitals caring for coronavirus patients a 15 percent add on payment.
- Provides drug companies an incentive to create new therapies and vaccines by ensuring they have a market for their products. It would also require any new medical products to quickly receive a code so physicians can bill Medicare and Medicaid for the use of those technologies. It would require CMS to promptly decide if the therapies will be covered nationally by Medicare.
- Allows increasing telehealth services for Medicare patients at certain health centers and rural clinics during the emergency and allows patients with high-deductible health plans to use telehealth services without paying their deductible.
- Waives a requirement on face-to-face visits between dialysis patients and doctors; allows clinicians like nurse practitioners and physician assistants to provide some Medicare home-care services.
- Requires medical device makers to report potential device shortages or supply disruptions to the FDA. Drug manufacturers would have expanded drug shortage reporting requirements.
- Establishes safe harbor protections for communications about drugs and devices approved through emergency use authorization (EUA) and clarifies certain marketing requirements for laboratory-developed tests cleared through EUA.
- Allows inpatient hospitals to get paid for qualifying antibiotics under Medicare and requires the Government Accountability Office to study possible barriers to antibiotic development.
- (Bloomberg 03/19) (CQ 03/19) (Inside Health Policy 03/19)

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Resources:

- Full text of the proposal can be found [here](#).
- Press releases:
 - Senate Finance Committee: [Senators Recommend Tax Policies for Phase 3 Coronavirus Response](#)
 - Senate Appropriations Committee: [Shelby, Thune, Wicker Unveil Liquidity Assistance for Distressed American Industries Within Coronavirus Package](#)
 - Small Business Committee: [Small Business Task Forces Unveils \\$300 Billion Emergency Coronavirus Relief Package](#)
- Summaries of Provisions:
 - Senate Finance Committee *Relief for Individuals, Families, and Businesses* Section-by-Section Summary can be found [here](#).
 - Small Business Committee *Keeping Workers Paid and Employed Act* Section-by-Section Summary can be found [here](#).
 - Small Business Committee *Keeping Workers Paid and Employed Act* can be found [here](#).
 - HELP Committee Provisions Section-by-Section Summary can be found [here](#).
 - HELP Committee Provisions Side-by-Side Summary can be found [here](#).
- A floor speech by Leader McConnell outlining the proposal can be found [here](#).

Democrats Push Trump to Use Emergency Powers for Virus Supplies

House Democrats are starting work on measures to fund manufacturing needs for medical supplies amid the coronavirus outbreak. President Trump has invoked the Defense Production Act (Public Law 81-774) but has yet to act and enter contracts with private manufacturers to ramp up production of medical supplies such as ventilators. The 1950 law allows the President to require businesses to enter contracts with the government to provide materials needed for national defense. Private companies would make the needed supplies, and the federal government, through the Strategic National Stockpile, would ship them. House appropriators are already in the early stages of considering measures to pay for those provisions as part of the third coronavirus response bill. The Trump Administration has not sent appropriators a formal request for funds to support a Defense Production Act invocation. (Bloomberg 03/19)

Lawmakers Voice Frustration on COVID-19 Testing Problems

Lawmakers are raising concerns with the Administration as issues over COVID-19 testing continue. While the number of diagnostic tests increase, labs warn of more roadblocks that could hinder progress. In a letter to the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), House Oversight and Reform Committee Chairwoman Carolyn Maloney (D-NY) and subcommittee chairs said, "We are gravely concerned that, due to multiple missteps, people across the country have been unable to get tested as healthcare providers are being forced to ration the extremely limited number of tests available." The letter criticizes the Administration for overstating how many tests would be available. Senator Patty Murray (D-WA) also sent a letter to the Government Accountability Office (GAO) asking for an investigation into what is happening with testing. (CQ 03/20)

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Senator Rick Scott Holds COVID-19 Briefing Call

Senator Rick Scott (R-FL) held a briefing call yesterday in response to the coronavirus outbreak. He praised Americans for coming together in times of crisis. He noted several immediate steps he wanted to take, including closing the borders and ending all travel from foreign countries, except for U.S. citizens and permanent residents; solving the testing shortage and leading the U.S. down the path of South Korea and Taiwan, which was tied to successful isolation and testing; encouraging governors to take extreme measures to enforce social distancing; and protecting the supply chain for personal protective equipment for first responders and healthcare workers. He called on the U.S. to increase its domestic supply. Scott argued the government should not bail out big businesses, and money should go to hourly workers, tip workers, and small businesses. He called for giving small businesses a 60-day postponement on rents, fees, and utilities. Scott noted he had not heard any conversations about port closures in Florida and that it would be extremely hurtful if Florida closed any ports.

State and Local Updates

State and Local Officials Ask Trump to Pause Rulemakings During Pandemic

Groups representing states, cities, and counties have asked President Trump to suspend public comment periods for the duration of the coronavirus pandemic, a request the Administration has so far indicated it does not plan to grant. The group includes the National Governors Association, the U.S. Conference of Mayors, and the National Conference of State Legislatures. They wrote in a letter today that state and local officials are “vital” to federal policymaking but are unable to provide input during the outbreak. They noted Regulations.gov, the government’s regulatory clearinghouse, which has nearly 700 public comment periods on proposed rules or guidance that will close in the next 30 days. More than 1,000 are set to close in the next 90 days. “The extreme impact on normal working and living conditions will impair the ability of not only state and local officials, but also the general public, issue experts and others to provide thoughtful and meaningful participation and involvement in potential federal government actions that directly affect millions of people,” they wrote. (Politico 03/20)

States Report Over 4,500 New Coronavirus Cases During 24-Hour Period

U.S. states reported 4,581 new cases of coronavirus over the last 24 hours, according to a CNN tally. CNN tallied 8,898 cases with 149 deaths at 6 a.m. ET Thursday, rising to 13,479 total cases and 196 deaths, one day later, an increase of 4,581 cases and 47 deaths. A week ago, on March 13, CNN reported 1,666 cases and 41 deaths. These tallies include all cases detected and tested through the public health system across all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and US territories. The White House Task Force and public health officials have warned that the number of cases would increase as more testing is done. (CNN 03/20)

Coronavirus is Hitting Restaurants Hard, Even in States that Haven’t Shut Them Down

The number of COVID-19 cases are increasing and the number of restaurant patrons plummeting. Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine was the first to shutter bars and restaurants statewide, but even before his March 15

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order, restaurants were feeling the impact of the coronavirus as customers began to avoid crowded areas. Many restaurants are now paralyzed. Governors across the country have issued executive orders restricting or prohibiting seated dining in restaurants - 33 states so far. Most closures have come on the heels of updated guidelines from the CDC and White House, recommending social gatherings of no more than 10 people. Regardless of an order or not though, restaurants in every state available in the OpenTable dataset have experienced declining attendance over the last two weeks. Diminishing clientele, and as a result diminished profits, make it unsustainable for many restaurants to stay open and maintain fixed costs, let alone pay wages. To soften the economic blow, advocacy and nonprofit groups are calling for relief funds and resources to support laid-off workers and small business owners. (FiveThirtyEight 03/19)

'We Are All in Quarantine:' 100% of NY Work Force Must Stay Home, Cuomo Puts State on Pause

New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo announced Friday that 100 percent of non-essential work forces are now required to stay home, calling it "the most drastic measure we can take." Two days ago, that decree applied to 50 percent of the non-essential work force. A day ago, it rose to 75 percent. Now it is practically everyone. Cuomo said the increase of cases gave him no choice but to further control density. "This is not life as usual. Accept it. Realize it. And deal with it," he said. He asked the public to "remain indoors to the greatest extent possible to protect physical and mental health... We are all in quarantine." As of Friday morning, New York's cases had surpassed the 7,100-mark, accounting for nearly half of all confirmed cases in the country. New York City had more than 4,400 cases alone, adding nearly another 2,000 overnight for the second time in as many days. Right now, the five boroughs account for 28 percent of all cases in America. Dozens have died. Effective immediately, non-essential gatherings of any size are banned, public transit should only be taken when necessary, and strict social distancing must be obeyed. (NBC NY 03/20)

Hundreds in Sacramento May Have Coronavirus. A 'Ridiculous' Lack of Tests Masks True Figure

Sacramento's top health official said Thursday that testing for coronavirus in the region is so far behind where it should be that the actual number of people infected with the virus there could be 20 to 100 times higher than what has been reported. County health director Peter Beilenson said the federal government has been "woefully inadequate" in delivering test materials, forcing public health officials and healthcare providers to ration tests to the most vulnerable cases. Beilenson's comments echo those repeatedly made by California Gov. Gavin Newsom, although Newsom noted testing is increasing, albeit haltingly. Drive-through public testing for thousands of residents could be available at several sites in the county late next week. Forty-five people in Sacramento County had tested positive for coronavirus as of Thursday morning, but given the lack of testing, Beilenson suspects many more residents have been infected, and some are contagious without knowing it. Beilenson hopes drive-through testing will help turn the tide. He did not disclose where those sites would be and said county officials are still deciding whether everyone would have access to the tests or just those with severe symptoms. (Sacramento Bee 03/20)

Texas Gov. Abbott Announces Approval of Emergency Small Business Disaster Loans

Gov. Greg Abbott announced the Small Business Administration (SBA) has included the entire state of Texas in its Economic Injury Disaster Declaration. The SBA granted access to its Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL) program, which will provide long-term, low-interest loans to qualifying businesses across the state.

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"Small businesses are the foundation of our state's economy and they need all the help they can get as the ripple effects of COVID-19 impact their everyday operations," said Governor Abbott. He called the EIDL loans a "vital lifeline" for Texas small business owners. He also commented on the SBA's rapid turnaround to a request he made by [letter](#) three days ago. (KXXV 03/20)

Governors Leapfrog Feds on Coronavirus Response

Governors of both parties are taking charge of the coronavirus pandemic, setting up rules and plans for their states as federal officials scramble to keep up. They are also raising their political profiles as they become the go-to authorities for citizens. Governors were the first to limit gatherings to specific numbers of people, the first to shut down businesses and community programs, and the first with information. The governors' actions have transcended party. Republicans such as Charlie Baker in Massachusetts, Mike DeWine in Ohio, and Larry Hogan in Maryland, as well as Democrats like Andrew Cuomo in New York and Gavin Newsom in California have taken the lead in getting health care and information to constituents. With notable exceptions (Oklahoma Gov. Kevin Stitt last weekend took his family to a mall food hall), most have counseled their state residents to stay home and avoid meeting with others. Within the first 11 days of March, eight Republican governors and a dozen Democratic governors had declared a state of emergency. President Donald Trump declared a national emergency March 13. (Pew 03/20)

As Coronavirus Crisis Rocks Colleges, Higher-Education Groups Push Congress for More than \$50 Billion

Higher-education leaders are pressing Congress for more than \$50 billion in emergency aid to help colleges, universities, and students respond to the coronavirus crisis. On Thursday, the American Council on Education, which represents college presidents, sent lawmakers a memorandum asking for billions of dollars in direct funding for students and schools that have taken unprecedented steps to shut down campuses this month amid the public health emergency. Under the proposal, students would be eligible for reimbursement of emergency expenses of up to \$1,500 each, and institutions would be able to recover some of their immediate costs. Ted Mitchell, president of the group, predicted emergency-response costs for schools would total in the hundreds of billions of dollars. (The Washington Post 03/19)

International Updates

Australian Government Asks Netflix and Stan to Reduce Data to Avoid Broadband Overload

Streaming companies like Netflix and Stan were asked by Australian Communications Minister Paul Fletcher to reduce the amount of data required for streaming videos, as the national broadband network plans for large portions of the population to work from home. Fletcher convened a roundtable with telecommunications operators Monday as more Australian businesses send staff to work from home during the pandemic. At that roundtable, two concerns raised were the possibility of more people streaming video from Netflix, Stan, Disney+, and others and the strains large-file gaming updates would put on the internet. Netflix did not comment on whether it would agree to the request. (The Guardian 3/20)

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Thousands of Medical Students are Being Fast-Tracked into Doctors to Help Fight the Coronavirus

Thousands of medical students across Europe are being fast-tracked into early service to boost health systems across the continent. In Italy, this year's medical school graduates will be able to start working as fully qualified doctors immediately, months ahead of schedule. Other countries are making sure qualifying students are joining the workforce as soon as possible, while urging their junior colleagues to volunteer. The United Kingdom has taken similar steps. The country's Medical Schools Council told universities last week that amid the outbreak, it was "important that medical schools do not delay qualification and so prevent new doctors joining the workforce in the summer." In Germany, the Bavarian regional government called on its medical students to help, and medical students from several universities across the Czech Republic have also stepped up to help in hospitals and other medical establishments. (CNN 3/20)

World's Most Vulnerable in 'Third Wave' for Covid-19 Support, Experts Warn

Countries dealing with humanitarian and refugee crises face a struggle to find resources to deal with the pandemic by the time it reaches them, specialists said in a webinar hosted by the New Humanitarian news agency Thursday. Europe and China already do not have enough protective equipment and resources for testing, and a third wave could leave developing countries with weakened health systems. Experts working with refugees, on humanitarian responses, and in global health warned the international community to begin working closely with governments around the world to help the most vulnerable. (The Guardian 3/20)

Spain Official Warns 80% of People in Madrid Will Get Virus, as Nationwide Death Toll Tops 1,000

On Friday, Spain's health emergency chief reported the country's death toll had soared to 1,002, which is 235 more than yesterday. Isabel Diaz Ayuso, the president of Madrid, said 8 of 10 people in the city would contract COVID-19. The World Health Organization advised all countries to adopt a mix of interventions based on an analysis of the local situation and context, with containment as a major pillar. (CNBC 3/20)

UK Government to Pay 80% of Wages for Those not Working in Coronavirus Crisis

British Chancellor Rishi Sunak announced the government will pay up to 80% of the salary of workers kept on by companies during the coronavirus outbreak, up to 2500 pounds per month. He said the grants comprise one of the most comprehensive bailout packages in the world and is "unprecedented in British history." This announcement comes after growing pressure to do more to support ordinary people after taking unprecedented steps to help businesses through the worst of the outbreak. (The Guardian 3/20)

Data from China Shows Majority of People with Covid-19 Only Suffer Mild Symptoms, Then Recover

According to data from China, most people who contract the coronavirus experience mild symptoms. Last month, scientists from the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention published a research paper analyzing the data for the first 72,314 people diagnosed. The data shows that men and women have roughly the same chance of contracting the virus. When the scientists looked at 44,672 patients confirmed to have the disease, they found there were 106 diagnosed men per 100 women. However, the impact on men appears to be worse: while 2.8% of the men diagnosed died, only 1.7% of women did. (CNN 3/20)

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Germany's Coronavirus Anomaly: High Infection Rates but Few Deaths

Germany has been hit hard by the coronavirus crisis, coming in fifth behind China, Italy, Iran, and Spain in terms of cases, but it has only 42 registered deaths. Neighboring France, by contrast, reported 9,058 infections and 243 deaths. Spain had 17,395 infections and 803 deaths. The US, UK, Italy, and even South Korea all show case fatality rates significantly higher than Germany. The debate rages on as to why Germany's fatality rate remains low. Some say the country's low fatality rate most likely reflects the fact the outbreak is still at a relatively early stage, and the age profile of those affected has so far been younger than in other countries. Others say the variance is the unusually high number of tests being carried out in Germany. According to Lothar Wieler, president of the Robert Koch Institute, German laboratories are conducting 160,000 coronavirus tests every week — more than some European countries have carried out in total since the crisis started. Even South Korea, which is conducting 15,000 tests a day and has been held up by virologists as an example to follow, appears to be testing less than Germany. (Financial Times 3/20)

Rohingya, UN Step up Efforts to get Malaysia Refugees Screened for COVID-19

The UN refugee agency and Rohingya community leaders in Malaysia are stepping up efforts to get refugees who attended a Muslim gathering to come forward for COVID-19 checks, after cases linked to the event jumped across Southeast Asia. More than 670 infections in the region have been linked to the gathering last month at a mosque on the outskirts of the Malaysian capital Kuala Lumpur. A total of 16,000 people of many nationalities attended the four-day event. Reuters reported on Thursday that authorities were trying to track down an estimated 2,000 Rohingya who had attended the gathering. (Channel News Asia 3/20)

General Updates

Pharmacists Request Provider Status to Help Respond to COVID-19

Pharmacies are asking the government to grant permission in Medicare to take on services that doctors typically provide to help adjust to shortages and alleviate pressure on hospitals and doctors' offices. Pharmacies want to make hand sanitizer, but first the government must let them buy high-proof alcohol. Both independent and chain pharmacies say the government should use pharmacies to help respond to the pandemic. The National Association of Chain Drug Stores says pharmacists should be allowed to initiate and administer vaccines and treatments for COVID-19, flu, strep, and other minor ailments. Pharmacists also want to be allowed to switch the drugs and biologics patients are prescribed, without approval from the patients' physicians, when products are unavailable due to shortages. (Inside Health Policy 03/19)

Stocks Fall Despite Fed's Actions to Ease Strains

U.S. stocks fell Friday to finish off a poor week on Wall Street as new actions to contain COVID-19 have spooked investors, despite massive interventions by central banks to ease market strains. The Dow Jones Industrial Average dropped 0.7%, and the S&P 500 dropped 1.0%. The indexes rallied earlier in the morning but dropped again after New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo ordered citizens to stay home to combat the spread

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of COVID-19. Senators are racing to pass a stimulus package by the beginning of next week, and the strong bipartisan commitment appears to be giving reassurance to the current market downfall. (WSJ 3/20)

Fintechs Could Make Federally-Backed Loans in McConnell Aid Bill

Fintech lenders like Kabbage Inc. and Funding Circle would be able to temporarily offer government-backed small business loans under a stimulus plan offered by Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY). The proposed relief package would allow the Treasury Department and Small Business Administration to let fintechs and a broader range of banks offer “small business interruption loans” under Section 7(a) of the Small Business Act. The authority would last as long as the coronavirus-related national emergency stays in effect. The government-backed loans have previously only been available through banks and other institutions approved for the SBA program. The bill would add another \$299.4 billion to the SBA’s budget to help fund the loans. Borrowers would have to use the funds for paid leave, salaries, rent, and mortgage payments, and other business expenditures. (Bloomberg Government [03/19](#))

Chemical, Cleaning Industries Essential to Fighting Virus: DHS

Chemical manufacturers, along with energy and water utilities, are among the industries essential to maintain amid the coronavirus pandemic, the Department of Homeland Security said in guidance released Thursday. The document is intended to guide state and local jurisdictions as they decide which industries and services should continue normal operations. The guidance does not impose any mandates on states, localities, or private companies, and critical infrastructure industries have a special responsibility to their normal work schedules. The American Chemistry Council “expects states and local governments will use the department’s guidance as they decide which businesses should stay open while all parties try to contain Covid-19,” Bill Erny, the council’s senior director of regulatory and technical affairs, said. Manufacturers and distributors of cleaning, sanitizing, disinfecting, or sterilization supplies, and tissue and paper towel products are among the types of companies specifically highlighted in the department’s guidance. So too are janitors and cleaning personnel, it said. (BGov [03/19](#))

U.S. Coal Mining Industry Seeks Wide-Ranging Coronavirus Bailout: Letter

The coal industry’s main U.S. lobby group has asked for sweeping financial assistance to help mining companies weather the economic fallout of coronavirus. In the letter, dated Wednesday, the National Mining Association asked President Trump, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell to ensure “coal companies have access to the necessary cash flow they need to continue operations.” The coal industry has sought several federal interventions to help it reverse a slide in demand over the past decade as aging plants retire. The Administration has attempted without much success to help the industry, in part by rolling back Obama-era climate regulations. (Reuters [03/19](#))

OPEC, U.S. Shale Producers Open Talks Amid Oil Rout

Talks between U.S. oil regulators and OPEC could bring a truce between the world’s three biggest oil producers and resolve a price war between the Saudis and Russians that have sunk oil markets in recent weeks. Mohammed Barkindo, secretary-general of OPEC, spoke with Ryan Sitton, Texas railroad commissioner who oversees the biggest U.S. oil patch. They agreed an international deal must get done to

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ensure economic stability as the world recovers from coronavirus. U.S. antitrust laws prevent a formal deal, and there is no suggestion the two sides would coordinate on production decisions, but the Texas regulator is considering curtailing output in America's largest oil-producing state for the first time in decades. Shale-oil companies, which are heavily in debt and produce at a higher break-even price compared with conventional Russian and Saudi producers, have been hit hard by the slump. A cut in American production would give Russia a win and help them resume talks with Saudi Arabia. (WSJ 3/20)

Private Jet Industry Asks for Bailout Funding

The private jet industry is asking Congress for bailout money, even as many private jet companies say sales are strong, as wealthy flyers avoid commercial flights because of coronavirus. The National Business Aviation Association (NBAA) sent a joint letter with other industry groups to congressional leaders saying private-jet companies should be included in any airline or aviation bailout. The NBAA stated private jets and general aviation (basically all air travel outside of commercial airlines and the military) support 1.2 million jobs, \$247 billion in "economic impact," and \$77 billion in income. Even though companies such as NetJets, Vista Jet, and WheelsUp cater to the wealthy, the industry says private carriers and general aviation supports thousands of small communities and helps provide medical services. (CNBC 03/20)

Netflix Creates \$100 Million Fund to Aid Hollywood Labor Force

Netflix created a \$100 million fund to support Hollywood laborers put out of work by the coronavirus, deploying a safety net for thousands of people who work on film and TV productions. The world's largest paid streaming service said it will spend \$85 million to support people working on its productions. Netflix pledged an additional \$15 million to third parties, such as the Motion Picture and Television Fund and a disaster fund created by the largest U.S. union for actors. Adam Schiff, the Democratic congressman from Southern California, signed a letter calling for the government to support entertainment workers. Movie-theater owners, with which Netflix has often clashed, have also asked for help. (Bloomberg 03/20)

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Resources

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
 1. [Coronavirus Website](#)
 2. [Twitter](#)
2. World Health Organization
 1. [Coronavirus Website](#)
 2. [Twitter](#)
3. [COVID-19 Global Cases by CSSE at Johns Hopkins University \(JHU\)](#)
4. [CNN State-By-State Breakdown of U.S. Coronavirus Cases](#)
5. [The President's Coronavirus Guidelines for America: 15 Days to Slow the Spread](#)
6. [USA.GOV - Government Response to Coronavirus, COVID-19](#)
7. [U.S. Department of State Coronavirus Website](#)
 1. [Travel Advisories](#)
8. U.S. Agency for International Development
 1. [Coronavirus Website](#)
 2. [Center for International Disaster Information](#)
9. [U.S. Department of Health and Human Services](#)
 1. [Twitter](#)
 2. [Facebook](#)
10. [Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Virtual Toolkit](#)
11. [U.S. Department of Defense Coronavirus Website](#)
12. [U.S. Food and Drug Administration \(FDA\) Coronavirus Website](#)
13. [U.S. Environmental Protection Agency \(EPA\) Coronavirus Website](#)
14. [U.S. Department of Labor Coronavirus Website](#)
15. [U.S. Department of Homeland Security Coronavirus Website](#)
16. [U.S. Department of Energy Coronavirus Website](#)
17. [U.S. Department of Agriculture Coronavirus Website](#)
18. [OSHA Guidance on Preparing Workplaces for COVID-19](#)
19. [The COVID Tracking Project](#)
20. [Politico Live Tracker State-by-State](#)