



FEDERAL COVID-19 UPDATES – May 26, 2020

Total U.S. coronavirus deaths reported: (last Friday, 96,363); Tuesday 99,807.

Happening on the Hill

White House

- 11:00 am – In-House Pool Call Time
- 12:45 pm – Trump participates in a ceremonial swearing-in of the Director of National Intelligence
- 1:00 pm – Pence leads video call with governors on Covid-19 response and economies
- 2:00 pm – Press Secretary Kayleigh McEnany holds a briefing
- 3:00 pm – Trump meets with the Secretary of State
- 4:00 pm – Trump delivers remarks on Protecting Seniors with Diabetes.

Senate

- 9:30 am – pro forma session; Senators return on June 1

House

- 9:30 am – pro forma session
- House Oversight and Reform Committee will hold a [video briefing](#) today for members with Health and Human Services Department Principal Deputy Inspector General Christi Grimm.
- The House is the only chamber in session this week with votes planned on legislation to broaden portions of the Paycheck Protection Program and penalize China for human rights abuses. Votes on renewing expired surveillance authorities and overriding President Donald Trump’s veto of a measure to overturn an education rule are possible.

Small Business Loans: The House is scheduled to consider two bills related to coronavirus aid.

An as-yet-unnumbered [bill](#) by Rep. Dean Phillips (D-Minn.) would give businesses more time and flexibility to make qualifying expenditures for loan forgiveness under the Paycheck Protection Program, and allow businesses with forgiven loans to defer payroll taxes. It’s similar to a bill ([H.R. 6886](#)) introduced by Rep. Chip Roy (R-Texas), though it includes new language that would extend the deadline to apply for a PPP loan to Dec. 31 from June 30.

A second measure ([H.R. 6782](#)) would require the Small Business Administration to issue a report on entities that received more than \$2 million in small business aid under the CARES Act ([Public Law 116-136](#)) and the measure that replenished the PPP ([Public Law 116-139](#)).

The Senate put off action on a bipartisan proposal to extend the PPP and make other changes to the initiative before leaving last week for a weeklong recess.

Surveillance Programs: The House may consider legislation that would renew elements of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act through Dec. 1, 2023, according to the schedule released by House Majority Leader [Steny Hoyer](#) (D-Md.).

The Senate passed its amended version of the measure May 14 by a vote of 80-16, after adopting an amendment from Sens. [Mike Lee](#) (R-Utah) and [Patrick Leahy](#) (D-Vt.) making changes to amicus and evidentiary provisions in FISA.

Look to see if the House Rules Committee allows a vote on a bipartisan amendment to the surveillance legislation ([H.R. 6172](#)) that fell one vote short of adoption by the Senate. Reps. [Zoe Lofgren](#) (D-Calif.) and [Warren Davidson](#) (R-Ohio) urged the Rules Committee to allow a floor vote on the provision, which would require the FBI to obtain a warrant to search the web browsing histories of U.S. citizens.

Veto Override: Under a unanimous consent agreement reached last week, the House could vote Thursday to override an anticipated veto of [H.J. Res. 76](#), which would overturn the Education Department's 2019 student loan forgiveness rule using the Congressional Review Act.

The rule established new policies for the borrower defense program, through which students who have been defrauded by education institutions can request loan forgiveness from the Education Department. It's scheduled to take effect July 1.

The House passed the measure Jan. 16 by vote of 231-180, with six Republicans in favor, and the Senate passed it on March 11 by a vote of 53-42, with 10 Republicans in support. Both votes were short of the two-thirds majority required for an override.

The measure was sent to the White House last week. It [issued a veto threat](#) on the legislation Jan. 13.

Proxy Voting: Speaker [Nancy Pelosi](#) (D-Calif.) announced last week the House will begin using emergency proxy voting procedures it [approved](#) earlier this month. Lawmakers in attendance may cast votes for as many as 10 of their peers under their colleagues' written instructions.

The House clerk's office has begun posting proxy letters on its website. [Click here to see more.](#)

Wednesday

- House will meet at 10:00 am, votes planned

- **Virus Effects on Minorities:** The House Ways and Means Committee holds a remote hearing Wednesday to discuss the disproportionate [effects of Covid-19 on minority communities](#).

Thursday

- House will meet at 9:00 am, votes planned
- **VA Virus Response:** The House Appropriations Military Construction-VA Subcommittee plans a [hearing](#) Thursday on the Veterans Affairs Department's Covid-19 response efforts. VA Secretary Robert Wilkie is scheduled to testify.
- **Worker Protections:** The House Education and Labor Workforce Protections Subcommittee scheduled a hearing Thursday on the government's efforts to [protect workers](#) from covid-19.
- **Small Business Virtual Forum:** The House Small Business Committee plans a virtual forum Thursday to discuss [priorities for the next phase of recovery](#) and how to leverage the Small Business Development Center Network.

Friday

- No votes are scheduled for Friday, when a pro forma will be held.
- **Maritime Supply Chain:** The House Transportation and Infrastructure Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation Subcommittee on Friday will hold a [hearing](#) on the U.S. maritime supply chain during the pandemic.

Seven measures will be considered under suspension of the rules, which limits debate to 40 minutes, bars amendments and requires a two-thirds majority for passage:

1) Police Suicide Data: The FBI would be required by [S. 2746](#) to collect data on suicides and attempted suicides within federal, state, tribal, and local law enforcement agencies. The Senate passed the measure by unanimous consent on May 14.

2) Uighur Human Rights: The administration would be required to sanction Chinese government officials responsible for the repression of Turkic Muslims, predominantly Uighurs, under S. 3744. The Senate passed the measure by unanimous consent on May 14. For more, see the [BGOV Bill Summary](#) by Naoreen Chowdhury.

3) Veterans' COLA: Disabled veterans and their families would receive a one-time cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) in disability and survivors' compensation effective Dec. 1 under [H.R. 6168](#), as long as there's one for Social Security recipients. The House Veterans' Affairs Committee approved the bill by voice vote on March 12. For more, see the [BGOV Bill Summary](#) by Michael Smallberg.

4) Authorize VA Medical Facility Projects: Several medical facility construction projects at the Veterans Affairs Department would be authorized to receive \$2.27 billion under [S. 3414](#). The Senate passed the bill by unanimous consent on March 5. For more, see the [BGOV Bill Summary](#) by Michael Smallberg.

5) VA Health Officials' Salary Cap: A salary cap for certain health-care officials at the Veterans Affairs Department would be increased by [S. 3084](#). The Senate passed the bill by unanimous consent on Jan. 16, and the House Veterans' Affairs Committee approved it without amendment by voice vote on March 12. For more, see the [BGOV Bill Summary](#) by Michael Smallberg.

6) Small Business Funding & Report: The Small Business Administration would be required by a [modified version](#) of H.R. 6782 to issue a public report on entities that received more than \$2 million in small business aid under coronavirus relief laws. The modified text also would set a lending total for the SBA's traditional 7(a) small business loan program in fiscal 2020 that's separate from the lending authority for the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP). That would allow the 7(a) program to continue if PPP funds are exhausted. Phillips introduced the measure on May 8 and it was referred to the House Small Business Committee, which hasn't acted.

7) Paycheck Protection Program Loans: Several restrictions on companies that borrow money through the Paycheck Protection Program would be relaxed under an as-yet-unnumbered [bill](#). Among other provisions, the measure would give businesses more time and flexibility to make qualifying expenditures for loan forgiveness, and allow businesses with forgiven loans to defer payroll taxes. The measure, slated for floor action, is sponsored by Phillips and is similar to a bipartisan bill (H.R. 6886) introduced May 15 by Roy.

The House also may consider the following items:

FISA Renewal: Elements of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act would be renewed through Dec. 1, 2023, under the [Senate amendments](#) to H.R. 6172. For more, see the [BGOV Bill Summary](#) by Adam Taylor.

Education Rule Veto Override: The House could vote to override the potential presidential veto of H.J. Res. 76, which would overturn the Education Department's 2019 student loan forgiveness rule. For more, see the [BGOV Bill Summary](#) by Sarah Babbage.

SBA Program

Trump administration said firms that took loans of more than \$2 million that they didn't need from a small business aid program would be allowed to repay the money without legal consequences ahead of a deadline today

If you're looking for a real-time list of public companies who have received SBA Cares Act loans, AI Margaret from Factsquared has been reading SEC 8-Ks as they're filed.

<https://factba.se/sba-loans>

Virus Relief Legislation

What Will Shape the Next Virus Bill The contents of the next coronavirus relief package will hinge on a central question—whether the goal should be to provide another tourniquet for the economy or a crutch to help return it to normal.

House Democrats planted their flag for the upcoming negotiations by passing a \$3 trillion relief package. Republican leadership and the White House are taking a more cautious approach, calling for some time to measure the impact of previous relief bills and determine what else is needed to get the economy on track.

The tension over whether the next package should aim to provide more aid or stimulate a reopening economy is evident in two of the key areas of disagreement: whether unemployment benefits and further federal aid to states should be extended in the next bill, which could rival or exceed the size of the third law, known as the CARES Act.

“Republicans know CARES was not the end of the congressional response, but they clearly don’t feel the same urgency as their blue state counterparts,” said Liam Donovan, a principal at Bracewell in Washington. “You might think of this ongoing pause as walking away from the legislative bazaar—blithely dismissing what they deem a liberal wish list, winding down the clock, and lowering the price on the inevitable next phase.”

Aides on both sides of the aisle expect talks to gain steam in June. By that time, the effectiveness of the Federal Reserve’s new emergency powers and the return to operations of some nonessential businesses could weigh heavily on the next steps.

There appears to be bipartisan momentum behind certain provisions in the House-passed response bill, including tweaking the employee retention credit to make it more usable, providing further financial assistance through the tax code to help businesses cover fixed costs during shelter-in-place orders, and loosening IRS rules on deductions related to loans issued under the Paycheck Protection Program.

Less clear is whether Republicans would agree to another round of direct payments to Americans, something they viewed as an emergency bridge to increased unemployment benefits. [Read more from Colin Wilhelm.](#)

Reopening of the States

Republicans Risk Backlash in Reopen Efforts: Trump is pushing to reopen the U.S. economy quickly as his core supporters are hit harder by job losses than by the coronavirus. The balance between lives and livelihoods during the pandemic has been experienced very differently across the ideological spectrum. In states Trump won in 2016, 23 people have lost a job for every one person infected. In states Hillary Clinton won, the number was 13. That is, in Trump country, Covid-19’s greater pain has been economic, which helps explain why support for a fast reopening is so much more intense there.

The question now is if Trump could face a backlash as the geographic locus of the pandemic shifts red. Confirmed coronavirus cases rose 46% faster over the past two weeks in states that Trump won in 2016 than in the rest of country. If infections spike once lockdowns are lifted, Republican voters could blame GOP candidates who pushed for reopening, [Mike Dorning and Gregory Korte report](#).





- The U.S. jobless rate may still be in the double digits when Trump stands for re-election in November, a top White House adviser said. While jobless data are a lagging indicator, business activity is already near an “inflection point” toward recovery, White House aide Kevin Hassett told CNN Sunday. The job market as shown by unemployment figures is “probably about a month away” from that point, Hassett said. The jobless rate is likely to peak above 20%, he said. [Read more from Tony Czuczka and Ros Krasny.](#)
- Federal Reserve Bank of Boston President Eric Rosengren said he expects companies to begin receiving money through the central bank’s long-awaited Main Street Lending Program within two weeks. “This is a program that’s just starting up so we’re expecting to have the loan documents up this week,” Rosengren said Sunday on CBS’ “Face the Nation.” “We then have to register the banks, and then we’re going to be ready to start issuing the loans.” [Read more from Christopher Condon.](#)

Federal Workers See Risks in Push to Reopen: As Trump presses states to reopen, government workers and their unions say they’re increasingly concerned that their bosses will force them back to the office without sufficient protection. Agencies’ approaches to returning to offices have been uneven, they say. Although the Securities and Exchange Commission’s chief told many workers to plan on staying home through at least mid-July, the Internal Revenue Service has called back 11,000 workers to begin processing paper tax returns, responding to a backlog of mail and answering taxpayer calls.

Workers at some agencies who are already back -- or who never left -- report wide variations in their employers’ attitude toward safety. For starters, there are no plans for broad testing or

contact-tracing. The haphazard approach has led to confusing and often contradictory messages being sent to more than 2 million federal workers, 85% of whom live outside the greater Washington, D.C. region. [Read more from Nick Wadhams.](#)

U.S. Restricts Entry From Brazil: The U.S. will prohibit the entry of most non-U.S. citizens arriving from Brazil, where coronavirus cases have spiked to the second highest in the world, expanding restrictions already placed on visitors from China and Europe. Trump later updated the order to begin today. [Read more from Ros Krasny.](#)

Meanwhile, Department of Homeland Security acting Secretary Chad Wolf [told](#) Fox News the travel restrictions in place, especially with China and Europe, need to stay in place as the U.S. economy reopens.

Churches Move Slowly After Trump Urges Opening: Trump used the words “this weekend” when he demanded Friday that states allow houses of worship to reopen. Robert Jeffress, an influential Texas evangelical pastor, spoke with Trump afterward and told him he didn’t plan to open his megachurch until June 7. “He wasn’t ordering every church to open,” said Jeffress, the senior minister at the First Baptist Church in Dallas who’s in regular contact with the president. “There’s no one-size-fits all.”

Houses of worship, by nature centers for community, are eager to open -- especially when businesses like liquor stores, many complain, have been open throughout the deadly coronavirus pandemic. But the faithful, despite Trump’s desire to cater to them politically, appear to be moving cautiously. [Ian Fisher has more.](#)

Healthcare

Democrats Dismiss Trump’s New Testing Plan The federal government will continue to support state Covid-19 testing efforts, the White House signaled in a report submitted to Congress over the weekend that focused heavily on the successes of that system, Alex Ruoff reports.

The [new report](#) outlined how the federal government will maintain a system of “supporting and encouraging” states to boost their testing capabilities for cases of the virus that’s killed nearly 100,000 people in the U.S., but it doesn’t specifically lay out a nationwide testing goal. One section noted states need to submit this year a plan to test at least 2% of their population by May and June—12.9 million tests—and recommended investing in a technology accelerator program to help scale up testing.

As of April 21, the report said, U.S. states had tested a total of 4.1 million people. Now, states can perform more than 2 million tests per week, the report said. It also noted that the proportion of positive test results is decreasing, a sign that testing capacity is large enough to avoid missing many people who are positive but aren’t being tested as well as their contacts.

Democratic leaders, who first released the report and have pressed the Trump administration for a national strategy on tests that includes clear benchmarks, said yesterday the report shows the White House “still does not have a serious plan” for increasing coronavirus testing nationwide.

“This disappointing report confirms” that Trump’s national testing strategy is to “deny the truth that there aren’t enough tests and supplies, reject responsibility and dump the burden onto the states,” Speaker Nancy Pelosi (Calif.), Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer (N.Y.), House Energy and Commerce Chairman Frank Pallone, Jr. (N.J.), and Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions top Democrat Patty Murray (Wash.) said in a joint statement.

The administration’s national testing strategy was required by the Paycheck Protection Program and Health Care Enhancement Act ([Public Law 116-139](#)), which Trump signed into law on April 24.

The number of new Covid-19 tests being performed in the U.S. has ranged from fewer than 300,000 on May 1 to more than 400,000 last week, according to the Covid Tracking Project, created by The Atlantic. The Trump administration expects the U.S. be capable of performing “at least 40-50 million tests per month” by September.

In addition to a nationwide testing plan, Pallone and Republican counterpart Greg Walden (R-Ore.) on the Energy and Commerce Committee in a letter Friday called on the administration to craft a “comprehensive Covid-19 vaccine plan” that also must “take into account the decisions that will be necessary related to the allocation of a vaccine.” They requested a briefing on vaccine development efforts by June 4, [Greg Sullivan reports](#).

Protections for Nonprofit Hospitals Sought: Rep. [Vicky Hartzler](#) (R-Mo.) unveiled a measure on Friday that seeks to expand liability protections for nonprofit organizations as states begin to reopen their economies. Specifically, Hartzler’s bill would provide “churches, faith-based nonprofits, and all 501(c)(3) organizations with increased liability protections” for any harm that could arise from being exposed to or infected by the coronavirus, according to a statement. Some examples of nonprofit hospitals include Ascension Health, Trinity Health, and Kaiser Permanente. [Read text of the bill here](#).

Meanwhile, attorneys say hospitals and health-care providers making use of federal aid during the crisis should prepare themselves for eventual audits, even as they grapple with how the funds may actually be tapped. Congress appropriated \$175 billion under the CARES Act to help medical providers in fighting the virus. It permits use of the funds to cover health-care expenses and lost revenue attributable to Covid-19, but it provides little guidance as to how far those funds will spread. [Christopher Brown has more](#).

Bipartisan Senators Introduce Strategic National Stockpile Plan: Sens. Thom Tillis (R-N.C.), Michael Bennet (D-Colo.) and Cindy Hyde-Smith (R-Miss.) [introduced a bill](#) that would authorize \$500 million annually through fiscal year 2023 to rebuild the depleted Strategic National Stockpile and encourage domestic manufacturing of personal protective equipment and medical supplies, according to a press release.

Health Industry May Recuperate Relatively Fast: A poll of Americans by the Kaiser Family Foundation indicates the health care industry could bounce back faster than other sectors of the economy this summer. A larger percentage of Americans (82%) surveyed said they expect to visit a doctor or a dentist in person over the next three months than visit a barber or salon (56%), or eat in-person at a restaurant (53%). Despite a public health crisis, the nation's health care sector has seen major job losses, as people stay away from hospitals and doctors' offices. [Read the study here.](#)

New York Adds Two Regions to Reopening: New York City is set to be the only part of the state on lockdown after next week. Long Island and the Mid-Hudson regions are on a trajectory to reopen, provided they see their deaths continue to decline and hit contact-tracing targets, Gov. Andrew Cuomo (D) said in a briefing on Friday. In anticipation, construction preparation can begin in those two regions. With those areas, nine of 10 regions in the state will have started a phased-in reopening, after seven weeks on lockdown. [Keshia Clukey has more.](#)

D.C. Area Has Highest Positive Rate: The Washington D.C. metropolitan area has the highest rate of positive cases of the coronavirus, followed by Baltimore, Chicago, and Minneapolis, according to Deborah Birx, coordinator of the White House's coronavirus task force. There is still "significant circulation" of the virus in the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia, she told reporters at the White House on Friday, [Jennifer Jacobs and Jordan Fabian report.](#)

HHS Watchdog to Brief Panel: The House Oversight and Reform Committee will hold a [video briefing](#) today for members with Health and Human Services Department Principal Deputy Inspector General Christi Grimm. Lawmakers will question Grimm about her office's April 6 [report](#) that spotlighted "severe" shortage of testing and equipment at hospitals during the pandemic, according to a press release. Trump has criticized the report and earlier this month announced his intent to nominate a permanent replacement to Grimm's position. "IGs are more critical now than ever, as they work to ensure proper and effective use of the largest stimulus package in the history of our nation," the committee said in a statement Friday.

Remdesivir Mainly Helped Healthier Patients: Gilead Sciences' remdesivir, the first drug cleared for the treatment of Covid-19, mainly benefited healthier patients who weren't dependent on ventilators or heart-lung bypass machines, according to published results of the study used to get the medicine to market. The medicine helped patients infected with the coronavirus heal faster, letting them return home after about 11 days, compared to 15 days for those given placebos, the study in the New England Journal of Medicine found.

There were also signs that the medicine increased their survival rate—7.1% of patients on remdesivir and 11.9% on a placebo died within two weeks. Still, the difference wasn't statistically significant, meaning it could have stemmed from chance. Outside experts [welcomed](#) the results, saying they showed patients on remdesivir cut their recovery time by 27%. [Read more from Michelle Fay Cortez.](#)

Fauci Optimistic About Moderna Vaccine: Anthony Fauci, the nation's leading infectious disease official, said he was optimistic about Moderna's experimental Covid-19 vaccine. "Though there were only eight individuals, we saw neutralizing antibodies at a reasonable dose of the

vaccine,” Fauci told CNN. Fauci told NPR that he expects the full results of a Phase 1 study of the biotech’s experimental Covid-19 vaccine within weeks, [Cristin Flanagan and Phil Kuntz](#).

Meanwhile, an experimental vaccine developed by China’s CanSino Biologics was safe and generated an immunity response in an early study in humans. The experimental vaccine stimulated production of both antibodies that can stop infection along with immune T-cells, according to a report Friday in The Lancet medical journal.

At the same time, as the pandemic disrupts routine visits to doctors’ offices, more than 80 million children under age 1 are at risk of life-threatening diseases such as polio and measles, according to top global health agencies. Routine vaccinations of children have been substantially hindered in at least 68 nations, according to data from the World Health Organization; UNICEF; the Sabin Vaccine Institute; and Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance.

Coronavirus Adds to Health Risks of Ailing 9/11 Responders: Michael Hollander has prostate cancer, thymus cancer, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, asthma, and has had a piece of his heart removed — all linked to his emergency medical response to the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001. He’s among tens of thousands of emergency medical responders, police officers, and firefighters who breathed toxic dust from the collapse of the World Trade Center, and who now have an elevated risk from coronavirus, according to doctors who treat them. Hundreds of survivors have reported contracting the virus and several have died, [reports Keshia Clukey](#).

Trump Chastised on Sending Ventilators to Russia: Democrats are criticizing Trump’s decision to send 200 ventilators to Russia at a cost to U.S. taxpayers of about \$5.6 million, saying the equipment should be reserved for patients in the U.S. The ventilators should stay in the U.S. due to the “urgent” need here, according to a letter sent to the White House by the chairmen of several House committees. The Trump administration notified Congress about the use of the funds this week. [Read more from Laura Davison](#).

Democrats Slam HHS Over ACA Protections: A group of 30 Senate Democrats demanded the Health and Human Services Department to immediately halt the administration’s intention to finalize a proposed rule implementing Section 1557 of the Affordable Care Act, according to a statement Friday. The proposal would “roll back anti-discrimination protections for millions of American patients, even though these protections are especially critical” due to the nation’s coronavirus outbreak, they wrote. Section 1557 prohibits health-care programs that receive federal aid from discriminating against people based on attributes such as race, sex, or disability status. [Read the letter here](#).

Health-Care Deals Drop in April: Health-care deals declined last month as the pandemic forced investors to delay or reconsider mergers and acquisitions. But transaction activity is expected to pick back up later this year as physicians and independent hospitals hard hit by canceled procedures look to partnering with larger health-care systems to help relaunch their businesses, some analysts say. [Read more from Sara Hansard](#).

New Medicare Rule Saves \$3.7 Billion: A new rule by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services should increase access to telehealth services, provide more coverage options for Medicare beneficiaries with kidney failure, and offer wider benefits for others with chronic diseases. The wide ranging rule released Friday is expected to save an estimated \$3.65 billion over ten years, CMS said. The rule encourages private plans covering Medicare beneficiaries to increase telehealth offerings for those living in rural areas. [Read more from Tony Pugh.](#)

Transportation

SpaceX to Launch First Crewed Flight President Donald Trump plans to travel to Florida on Wednesday to watch the launch of SpaceX's manned test mission to the International Space Station, according to a U.S. official, as he seeks to project an image of normalcy amid the coronavirus pandemic.

The launch will mark the first time NASA astronauts have blasted off from U.S. soil since the end of the space shuttle program in 2011. The event is also significant in that two American companies will provide ferry service to the space station, and it will also be the first time SpaceX has flown humans.

Astronauts Doug Hurley and Bob Behnken are scheduled to arrive at the space station on May 28 and stay for at least 30 days — and possibly as long as 110, according to NASA. The mission duration will be determined by the readiness of the next commercial crew launch.

The president's re-election campaign has looked to capitalize on American space exploration — and his push to create the Space Force as a new branch of the military — in its merchandise and messaging, Justin Sink [reports](#).

The history of spaceflight is made up of moments etched into humanity's collective memory, including Yuri Gagarin's orbit of the Earth in 1961, Neil Armstrong's "one small step" onto the moon in 1969 and the loss of Space Shuttle Challenger in 1986. While SpaceX's upcoming launch may not end up ranking with those events, it will mark the first-ever ride to orbit on a privately owned vehicle -- and the first time astronauts have flown from U.S. soil since the shuttle program ended in 2011. [Dana Hull and Julie Johnsson have more on the significance of the launch for SpaceX and Elon Musk.](#)

Rural Loan Help: Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Chairman [Roger Wicker](#) (R-Miss.) introduced a bill Friday that would provide technical help to rural communities applying for Department of Transportation loan or grant programs. The Department of Transportation already has an [initiative](#) underway, rolled out in October, to assist rural communities with these applications across different modes of transportation. Wicker's bill would give the agency the ability to hire and pay expert firms to help applicants, a committee spokesperson said in an email.

Airlines to Suspend Service to 75 Airports: The Department of Transportation granted tentative approval to 15 airlines to temporarily halt service to 75 airports over the coronavirus pandemic, Jihye Lee [reports](#), citing Reuters. United, and Delta won tentative approval to halt flights to 11 airports, while JetBlue, Alaska Airlines, Frontier Airlines were approved to stop flights to five airports each. The deadline for filing objections to the order is Thursday.

Bumpy Reopen for GM's Pickup Plants: General Motors is delaying the start of second production shifts at two pickup plants as auto manufacturers trying to ramp up production after weeks-long shutdowns struggle to procure enough parts.

GM originally planned to run two shifts this week at the factories in Fort Wayne, Ind., and Flint, Mich., according to a spokesman. While a sport-utility vehicle facility elsewhere in its home state is still on track to boost output, the truck plants may need to give suppliers in Mexico that have been resuming work more slowly another week to catch up.

For GM, Mercedes and Volvo the issue has been Mexico's restart. The nation's government has issued conflicting and vague decrees on what factories need to do before they're allowed to reopen, contributing to delays that have slowed production at U.S. factories reliant on imported parts.

Nowhere to Go With Cheapest U.S. Pump Prices Since 2004: The coronavirus pandemic all but halted plans for what is one of the biggest U.S. travel holidays of the year, despite the cheapest average unleaded gasoline prices in at least 16 years. Last year, 43 million people traveled for Memorial Day Weekend—the second-highest volume on record since AAA began tracking holiday metrics in 2000, said Paula Twidale, senior vice president of AAA Travel. [Read more.](#)



Trump Admin Split on Ligado Spectrum Plan: The National Telecommunications and Information Administration, a part of the Commerce Department, said last Friday that it filed a [petition](#) asking the FCC to rescind its April 20 grant of approval, or to modify the conditions it imposed on Ligado’s plan for a mobile broadband network. It also asked the FCC to prevent Ligado from deploying as the request is considered, Todd Shields [reports](#).

Ligado’s “ground-based transmitters adjacent to the GPS spectrum have significant potential to disrupt and degrade the operation of” about 1 million GPS receivers belonging to the Defense Department, the NTIA said in its petition, adding that it was acting on behalf of the DOD and Transportation Department. It predicted “harm to military training, readiness, and DoD’s ability to conduct operations.”

However, Secretary of State Michael Pompeo and Attorney General William Barr each expressed support for Ligado in the days leading up to the FCC’s approval of the service.

HASC Weighs In: Reps. Adam Smith (D-Wash.) and Mac Thornberry (R-Texas), leaders of House Armed Services Committee, in a May 21 [letter](#) to the FCC said commissions weren’t aware of classified information regarding Ligado and asked them to reconsider its approval of company’s mobile broadband service, Todd Shields [reports](#).

Amazon Prime Air to Rival UPS: Amazon’s Prime Air fleet will grow to about 200 planes — up from 42 now — in the next seven or eight years, creating an air cargo service that could rival UPS, according to a study. “At a time when many other airlines are downsizing due to the pandemic, Amazon’s push for faster and cheaper at-home delivery is moving ahead on an ambitious timetable,” said the report issued last Friday by DePaul University’s Chaddick Institute

of Metropolitan Development. “Amazon Air’s robust expansion makes it one of the biggest stories in the air cargo industry in years.” [Read more from Spencer Soper.](#)

U.S. Hits Back at China Over Airlines: Growing tensions between the U.S. and China have expanded to the airline industry as the Transportation Department accused its counterpart in Beijing of blocking U.S. carriers’ attempts to resume service there. DOT on Friday said China violated a bilateral agreement allowing airline service between the two nations by ignoring requests by Delta Air Lines and United Airlines. [Read more from Alan Levin.](#)

International

Governments Called to Help Thwart Health-Care Hackers: Dozens of global leaders -- ranging from former heads of state to private sector executives and Nobel laureates -- signed a letter calling on international governments and the United Nations to help prevent the cyberattacks that have plagued health care and research facilities during the coronavirus crisis. “We call on the world’s governments to take immediate and decisive action to stop all cyberattacks on hospitals, health care and medical research facilities, as well as on medical personnel and international public health organizations,” said a letter organized under the CyberPeace Institute, a nonprofit that helps hacking victims. [Read more from Alyza Sebenius.](#)

Beijing Warns U.S. of Budding ‘Cold War’: The U.S. ought to give up its “wishful thinking” of changing China, Foreign Minister Wang Yi said, warning that some in America were pushing relations to a “new Cold War.” China has “no intention to change the U.S., nor to replace the U.S. It is also wishful thinking for the U.S. to change China,” Wang said yesterday during a news briefing in Beijing. Wang also criticized Washington for slowing its nuclear negotiations with North Korea and warned it not to cross Beijing’s “red line” on Taiwan.

The U.S.-China relationship has worsened dramatically in the past few months as America became one of the countries worst hit by the coronavirus pandemic, which was first discovered in the Chinese city of Wuhan. The world’s two biggest economies have clashed on a range of issues from trade to human rights, with Beijing’s latest move to [tighten its grip](#) on Hong Kong setting a stage for another showdown between Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping. [Sharon Chen and Jing Li have more.](#)

In Hong Kong, police deployed a water cannon and fired tear gas as violence returned to the city’s streets with hundreds of protesters marching against China’s plans to impose a sweeping national security law. A heavy police presence prevented activists from proceeding with an unauthorized march. [Bloomberg News is following developments here.](#)

The House will take up a [bill](#) as early as tomorrow that would impose sanctions on Chinese officials over human rights abuses against the Uighur population and other Muslim minorities, a schedule from Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-Md.) says, [Daniel Flatley reported Friday.](#)

Grenell Says He’s Leaving Post: Ric Grenell, a favorite of Trump’s, confirmed in a tweet yesterday that he intends to step down as U.S. ambassador to Germany. Grenell had recently

served as the acting director of the Office of the Director of National Intelligence. The Senate confirmed former Rep. [John Ratcliffe](#) (R-Texas) to the DNI post last week. [Read more from Ros Krasny.](#)

Trump Aides Weigh Nuclear Tests: Trump administration officials discussed whether to conduct the first nuclear test explosion since 1992, The Washington Post reported. A meeting of U.S. government officials representing top national security agencies discussed the matter on Friday, according to the newspaper. It surfaced after some administration representatives said Russia and China were conducting low-yield nuclear tests, “an assertion that has not been substantiated by publicly available evidence,” the newspaper said, [Lee reports.](#)

Foreigner Work Program May Be Limited: The Trump administration may set limits on a program that permits international students to work in the U.S. after graduation while still on their student visa, the Wall Street Journal reported. The looming temporary restrictions are designed to aid American graduates looking for entry-level work during the pandemic-fueled downturn, the newspaper said, citing the officials. [Read more from Colin Keatinge.](#)

Campaign Trail

Trump Threatens to Pull GOP Convention in N.C.: Trump vowed to move the planned Republican National Convention from North Carolina unless Gov. Roy Cooper (D) guarantees that the party will be allowed full attendance regardless of pandemic restrictions. Trump took aim at Cooper in tweets yesterday saying he wanted assurance that Republicans would be allowed to gather in Charlotte at the end of August whether or not there are ongoing outbreaks.

“Plans are being made by many thousands of enthusiastic Republicans,” Trump said in the tweets. “They must be immediately given an answer by the Governor as to whether or not the space will be allowed to be fully occupied. If not, we will be reluctantly forced to find, with all of the jobs and economic development it brings, another Republican National Convention site.” [Justin Sink has more.](#)

RNC Sues Newsom for Mail Ballot Order: The Republican National Committee and two other groups filed a lawsuit against California Gov. Gavin Newsom (D) in a bid to block his executive order allowing mail-in ballots at the November polls, calling it an “illegal and brazen power grab.” Following the coronavirus outbreak, Newsom said this month that every registered voter in the state would receive a mail-in ballot for the upcoming election. In-person voting options will also be offered. [Read more from Linus Chua.](#)

Sessions, Trump in Running Spat Over Senate Seat: Trump’s former Attorney General [Jeff Sessions](#) took to Twitter to fire back at the president and his latest attempt to tip an Alabama Senate runoff election. Trump called for Sessions to “drop out.” Sessions took Trump on directly in a string of tweets late Friday and Saturday, arguing he was right to recuse himself in the probe into Russian meddling in the 2016 election. He also said Trump’s favored candidate in the race is a “coward.” [Alan Levin has more.](#)

Biden Makes First Public Appearance in Months: Joe Biden emerged from his stay-at-home lockdown yesterday after more than 10 weeks to mark Memorial Day with a tribute to veterans. The presumptive Democratic nominee and his wife, Jill, visited the Veterans Memorial Park at the Delaware Memorial Bridge to lay down a wreath of white roses. Both wore black masks over their mouths and noses. [Read more from Jennifer Epstein.](#)

- Also yesterday, Trump paid a controversial visit to Baltimore for a Memorial Day celebration, dismissing the mayor's warnings to stay away from the city as it grapples with the pandemic. The White House said that the ceremony at Fort McHenry, which defended Baltimore Harbor during the War of 1812, was intended to honor service members who lost their lives in battle. [Read more from Justin Sink and Jennifer Jacobs.](#)
- Meanwhile, Biden handily won the Democratic primary in Hawaii in an all-mail-in ballot after the vote was delayed by several weeks because of the outbreak. The former vice president beat Sen. [Bernie Sanders](#) (I-Vt.) by 63% to 37%, [Ros Krasny reports.](#)

Other Stories

Wray Seeks Review of Flynn Probe: FBI Director Christopher Wray ordered an internal review of how the bureau handled the investigation of Trump's former National Security Adviser and campaign aide Michael Flynn, including instances of official misconduct. The "after-action review" by the Inspection Division is set to evaluate the bureau's role in the Flynn investigation and probe whether any current FBI employees engaged in misconduct, according to a statement Friday. [Read more from Billy House.](#)

Meanwhile, U.S. District Judge Emmet Sullivan, the judge overseeing Flynn's prosecution, hired a law firm led by Washington litigator Beth Wilkinson to represent him after an appeals court ordered him to respond to Flynn's emergency petition to have the case thrown out, a person familiar with the matter said. [Read more from Erik Larson](#)

Puerto Rico Oversight Revamp Sought: A group of House Democrats unveiled a long-shot bill Friday that would overhaul the federal government's relationship with Puerto Rico, allow an independent audit of the commonwealth's billions in debt and give local authorities the power to discharge unsecured debt deemed excessive. [Read more from Jim Wyss.](#)

SOURCE: MLA Lobbyists

[O'Neill and Associates](#)

Boston

Washington