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Coronavirus Update - 04/20/20

Administration

- President Donald Trump announced that he would be invoking the Defense Production Act (DPA) in order to increase production of swabs for COVID-19 testing. Trump also announced that the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) are finalizing guidelines for resuming elective surgeries.
- President Trump announced a \$19 billion aid package for farmers hurt financially by the coronavirus. The aid includes \$16 billion in direct payments to farmers to boost their incomes, along with \$3 billion in government purchases of meat, dairy products and other foods.
- The administration released [guidelines](#) to the heads of executive agencies for planning to “ramp back up government operations to the maximum extent possible, as local conditions warrant, consistent with the National guidelines for Opening Up America Again.”
- Negotiations on legislation to provide additional funding for the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) are still ongoing, but progress has been made and a bill is expected to pass this week. Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin told CNN’s Jake Tapper that the interim coronavirus response bill could include \$300 billion for the PPP, \$50 billion for the Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL) program, \$75 billion for hospitals and \$25 billion for testing. Mnuchin said he hoped Congress would vote on the bill early this week.
- The U.S., Mexico, and Canada announced that border restrictions imposed in response to COVID-19 would be extended by 30 days to May 20. The same terms will remain in place, which allow essential goods and services to move between countries.
- The Treasury Department [announced](#) it was temporarily postponing certain tariff payments for 90 days. The deferrals do not apply to Section 201, Section 232 or Section 301 duties, and as such do not apply to the duties on Chinese steel and aluminum or enforcement actions against Airbus.
- The Treasury Department has confirmed that economic impact payment paper checks have started being sent out in the mail.
- CQ has reported that the second tranche of payments to hospitals under the CARES Act could be delayed over disputes about how to divide the money.
- The Federal Reserve is reportedly working on a plan to publish transactions under its CARES Act facilities, as part of a push for transparency.

Senate

- Negotiators were unable to reach an agreement to provide additional funding for the PPP prior to today’s 2pm Senate pro forma session. The Senate met but did not take up any legislation. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) criticized Democrats for blocking efforts to provide additional PPP funding. He announced that the Senate would hold an additional pro forma session at 4pm tomorrow, at which he hopes to pass a PPP bill.

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- During the pro forma session, Senator Maria Cantwell (D-WA) stressed the need to provide aid to local newspaper and broadcast businesses, noting that they were excluded from the CARES Act.
- Senators Bill Cassidy (R-LA) and Bob Menendez (R-NJ) are reportedly working on a proposal to provide \$500 billion for state and local governments in the next comprehensive coronavirus response bill.
- House and Senate Democrats are pushing to repeal a provision in the CARES Act which allowed pass-through entities more latitude to spread out losses across tax years.
- Senator Rick Scott (R-FL) has called for changes to the PPP, stating “I am concerned that many businesses with thousands of employees have found loopholes to qualify for these loans meant for small businesses. Unfortunately, when it comes to the PPP, millions of dollars are being wasted. Right now, companies that are not being harmed at all by the Coronavirus crisis have the ability to receive taxpayer-funded loans that can be forgiven. That’s wrong, and it takes money out of the hands of those Americans who really need it.”
- Senators Martha McSally (R-AZ) and Marsha Blackburn (R-TN) [announced](#) they would be introducing a bill that would allow Americans to sue China in U.S. courts for compensation over the spread of the coronavirus. Representative Lance Gooden (R-TX) is introducing companion legislation in the House.

House

- The House Majority Leader’s office sent a [notice](#) to members that the House could meet as soon as 10:00am Wednesday to vote on PPP legislation, if an agreement is reached. The notice stated “Members are further advised that at this time, a recorded vote on the interim legislation is likely in the House this week. Members will be given sufficient notice about the exact timing of any votes and when they will need to return to Washington, DC.”
- Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY) announced that she could not support the interim pandemic response package, if the final text matches what has been reported in the media.
- Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) named Representative Donna Shalala (D-FL) to serve on the Congressional Oversight Commission created by the CARES Act. Four of the five members of the commission have been announced, but the commission is unlikely to begin operating until a chair is selected. The chair must be selected jointly by Speaker Pelosi and Majority Leader McConnell.
- Politico has [reported](#) that some House Republicans are planning to return to Washington, DC this week in protest of the shutdown of Congress and the economy. The effort is reportedly being led by Representative Brian Mast (R-FL) and could include 20 other members.
- House Energy and Commerce Committee Chairman Frank Pallone (D-NJ) sent a [letter](#) to White House Coronavirus Task Force Coordinator Dr. Deborah Birx urging the administration to craft a national testing plan

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and raising concerns about easing social distancing rules before the country has robust testing.

- A group of more than 80 Democratic lawmakers, led by Representative Jerry McNerney (D-CA) and Senator Kamala Harris (D-CA), sent a [letter](#) to FEMA requesting an update on what steps they agency is “taking to ensure that it is adequately prepared to respond to a natural disaster during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.”

State/Local Government

- The National Governors Association is [continuing](#) to push for coronavirus response legislation to include substantial aid for state and local governments.
- At the direction of Governor Greg Abbott (R), Texas began reopening state parks. Visitors are required to wear face coverings and keep a six-foot distance from others outside their group. Gatherings of groups with more than five people are prohibited.
- At a press conference, New York Governor Andrew Cuomo (D) called for the federal government to pay health professionals, first responders, transit workers, grocery store employees and other essential workers 50 percent bonuses over what they are being paid to work during a pandemic.

Private Sector

- The Department of Transportation granted Delta Airlines, Hawaiian Airlines, and Alaska Airlines waivers from CARES Act provisions that require a minimum level of service for carriers that accept financial assistance.
- A trade group of large mortgage lenders, including Wells Fargo and Quicken Loans, have said there is an “urgent need” for the U.S. government to provide liquidity for loan servicing companies in the wake of stimulus legislation that encourages companies to let borrowers postpone monthly payments.
- The Independent Community Bankers of America (ICBA), the Consumer Bankers Association (CBA) and the American Bankers Association (ABA) sent letters to the Federal Reserve urging changes to the Main Street Lending Facility, including reducing the \$1 million minimum loan size and allowing more flexibility on underlying reference rates.
- Wells Fargo, Bank of America, JPMorgan Chase, and US Bancorp have been sued by small businesses accusing the lenders of prioritizing large loans under the PPP, rather than taking them on a first come-first served basis.