

TO: USTOA Members

FR: Terry Dale

Below are some more updates from Washington, DC on March 18, 2020.

## **Administration**

### **March 18, 2020 updates at 6pm ET**

- The White House Office of Management and Budget released the attached letter seeking \$46 billion to replenish funds for certain agencies who are expending the most resources to fight the COVID-19 pandemic.
  - The \$46 billion request includes a total of \$8.3 billion for emergency response efforts through the Department of Defense, \$16.6 billion for the Department of Veterans Affairs, \$11.5 billion for the Department of Health and Human Services and \$3.2 billion for Homeland Security, among others.

### **March 18, 2020 updates at 2pm ET**

Below are highlights from the White House COVID-19 Task Force press conference held in the early afternoon of Wednesday, March 18:

- The President announced that he would be invoking the Defense Production Act today and later mentioned that the focus would be on mask production, respirators, and ventilators.
- Secretary of Defense Mike Esper discussed efforts that the Department of Defense (DOD) has implemented to respond to the outbreak including:
  - International and domestic travel restrictions for DOD personnel.
  - Making available 5 million N95 masks, 2,000 deployable ventilators, and other personal protective equipment (PPE) to the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).
  - Certifying DOD labs, including what will soon be the 16<sup>th</sup> lab, to help boost test evaluation capabilities.
  - Ready field and expeditionary hospitals to be deployed along with two hospital ships (USNS Mercy and USNS Comfort).
    - The USNS Comfort will be deployed to New York City Harbor, while it is unclear where the USNS Mercy will deploy.
    - Army Corps of Engineers leadership is currently in New York meeting with Governor Cuomo to discuss additional efforts to bolster health infrastructure.
- President Trump announced that HHS would issue a regulation today to allow all doctors and medical professionals to practice across state lines.

- Both President Trump and Vice President Pence announced that following last week's national emergency declaration the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is now activated in every region at Level 1 which is the highest urgency level.
- Members of the task force discussed continued work on expanding testing capabilities, including considering allowing self-swabs. However, the President could not confirm whether the Federal Drug Administration (FDA) had approved this testing method.
  - Ambassador Birx discussed that the increased commercial testing is prioritizing areas that are most affected and that testing could expand to tens of thousands of tests being run daily.
  - Ambassador Birx also mentioned that as the testing increases, diagnoses will rapidly grow and cautioned against panic. She mentioned that the infection curve is not expected to be stable until next week.
- The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services will today announce detailed recommendations on conservation of PPEs, including limiting non-essential medical procedures, including dental procedures.
- Ambassador Birx discussed a troubling new trend that more young people are becoming seriously ill in France and Italy, including ICU hospitalization. She was also not yet willing to confidently discuss the seasonality of COVID-19.
- President Trump announced that he would suspend all foreclosures and mortgages through April 1, though he provided little detail. This provision was also included in the Senate Democrats' \$750 billion stimulus proposal.
- The President confirmed the closure of the northern border to non-essential travel and tentatively said that would remain in place for 30 days.
- The President commented that he is not willing to suspend tariffs at this time.
- The President announced that he plans to invoke additional provisions to limit additional individuals from entering the United States.
- The President was asked about specific numbers within the third stimulus package currently being discussed for specific industries in Congress, but did not confirm any numbers instead mentioning that the work was ongoing and the numbers were changing constantly.

## **Congress**

### **March 18, 2020 updates at 6pm ET**

- The Senate passed H.R. 6201, the Families First Coronavirus Response Act, in a 90-8 vote without changes from the version the House passed by unanimous consent on Monday. The "no" votes came from Sens. Marsha Blackburn (R-TN), Jim Inhofe (R-OK), James Lankford (R-OK), Mike Lee

- (R-UT), Rand Paul (R-KY), Ben Sasse (R-NE), Tim Scott (R-SC) and Ron Johnson (R-WI). The legislation now heads to President Trump's desk for signature.
- The Senate now turns its attention to the next package which will be the largest so far and is expected to include industry-specific relief. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell has indicated that the Senate will stay in session until this third package is passed. Once the Senate passes the legislation, the House will have to return to Washington, DC to pass it as well before it can be signed by President Trump.
    - Republican and Democratic Task Forces have been formed in the Senate to expedite drafting of these relief packages and include Committee leaders from each party.
    - Committees are seeking input from various stakeholders that fall under their jurisdiction on everything from aviation, travel and tourism, and other industry relief, to broadband infrastructure and even potentially surface transportation reauthorization components.
  - The House has begun to consider ideas for additional legislative packages and Speaker Pelosi has begun to solicit ideas. The next House package will likely focus on government revenue. There are likely to be more relief packages.

### **March 18, 2020 updates at 2pm ET**

- In Congress, the Senate has begun consideration of the House-passed H.R.6201, the Families First Coronavirus Response Act, which has also been referred to as "Phase II."
- Final passage is expected as soon as this afternoon, but could be pushed until tomorrow.
- The Senate is also continuing to work on Phase III, which will likely include more specific industry assistance.
- Majority Leader Mitch McConnell has indicated that the Senate will stay in session until this third package is also passed.

### **Other News**

#### **March 18, 2020 updates at 6pm ET**

- The Dow Jones Industrial Average fell 6 percent on Wednesday. This most recent drop has almost completely erased the indexes gains since President Trump took office. The S&P 500 also fell today, at one point falling as much as 7%, triggering the automatic circuit breaker of the exchange and halting trading for 15 minutes. The overall market pushed upwards towards the end of the day.
- Ford and General Motors (GM) announced today that they will be halting production at all North American plants through March 30.

