



Velocity Update

October 16, 2020

Congressional Schedule. The House is out of Washington until after the election. The Senate will take up legislative business on Monday, including a vote on a GOP-backed stimulus bill. (*More below.*)

U.S. Economic Outlook

Weekly numbers and long-term outlook. [898,000 people applied for unemployment benefits](#) for the first-time last week, up by more than 50,000 people over the previous week. Another 373,000 people claimed Pandemic Unemployment Assistance, the program for self-employed or gig workers, for the first time, which is a decrease from last week. A total of 25.3 million people are claiming some kind of unemployment benefits. Stimulus measures in the early days of the pandemic helped bring the poverty rate down from 11% in February to 9.3% in June. However, continued economic woes have brought the rate back up to 11.1%.

Coronavirus government operations update

National perspective. As of Friday afternoon, the number of confirmed cases in the U.S. [is at least 7,975,000 with at least 217,000 deaths](#). For the first time since early August, the number of newly reported cases on Thursday topped 60,000, and more than 36,000 people are hospitalized nationally. Forty-four states and the DC have higher caseloads than in mid-September. Data compiled by the New York Times reveals a 19-percent increase in new coronavirus cases over the past two weeks, with 45,927 new cases reported on October 12 across the country. Midwestern states in particular are seeing growth in the number of new cases and hospitalizations. Wisconsin set a record Thursday when it surpassed 4,000 newly reported cases. Illinois also reported more than 4,000 cases, eclipsing records set during the state's first wave in April and May. Ohio set a new high, as did Indiana, New Mexico, North Dakota, Montana and Colorado. In El Paso, officials have ordered new restrictions and lockdowns amid a coronavirus surge.

Anthony Fauci, the head of the National Institute for Allergies and Infectious Diseases, confirmed this week that numbers across the country do not look good. "I think we're facing a whole lot of trouble," Fauci [said in an interview](#). And in another interview, [Fauci looked ahead to the holidays](#), noting that his three children would not be coming home for Thanksgiving because he is in the higher-risk category. "You may have to bite the bullet and sacrifice that social gathering, unless you're pretty certain that the people that you're dealing with are not infected," he said. While experts are still hopeful about a vaccine, [Johnson & Johnson announced](#) on Monday that it had halted its trials on a COVID-19 vaccine due to an "unexplained illness" affecting a trial participant. It's the second company to halt a coronavirus vaccine trial, though we'll emphasize that this kind of action is normal in any medical trial. "We are committed to providing transparent updates throughout the clinical development process of our vaccine candidate," Johnson & Johnson said in its statement. "Adverse events – illnesses, accidents, etc. - even those that are serious, are an expected part of any clinical study, especially large studies." Another [clinical trial testing a coronavirus antibody](#) treatment similar to the Regeneron antibody cocktail that President Donald Trump received has stopped enrolling volunteers over safety concerns, days after the from Eli Lilly, the company making the treatment, asked the FDA to approve its emergency use. The data and safety monitoring board overseeing the trial will review data again at a meeting on October 26 and recommend whether or not enrollment should be resumed. This week, senior administration officials also praised the idea of [pushing for herd immunity](#), an idea that President Trump has also promoted heavily, which would involve taking no precautions like wearing masks and social distancing for young and healthy people so that they could also quickly get sick and theoretically develop immunity (we should note that there have been

some cases reported around the world, including [one in the U.S.](#), of people being re-infected with the coronavirus and little is known yet about how immunity works for this virus). Public health experts [have said](#) that a herd immunity strategy “haphazardly and unnecessarily sacrifices lives.” Meanwhile in the Nordic nation of Sweden there is a growing fascination on how this country of 10 million handled [Covid-19](#) so differently, and some would say with great success, as compared to its European neighbors. Sweden avoided formal restrictions and relied on individual responsibility to achieve success. The nation’s epidemiologist, Anders Tegnell noted he followed scientific evidence instead of decisions based on political reasoning.

Washington metro area. Overall coronavirus cases in [D.C., Maryland, and Virginia topped 314,000 by Friday afternoon, with at least 8,000 deaths](#). The seven-day rolling average of new cases across the D.C. metro region jumped to a two-month high of 1,801. It’s the highest number of new cases in the area since mid-August. Health officials in all three locations are saying that [small social gatherings](#) are helping to fuel an increase in the virus’s spread.

Pentagon. The Pentagon remains in Phase Two (Bravo), which means a maximum of 80-percent of staff allowed on-site, though the actual number of staff on site tends to be much lower. Additional precautions are being put into place, including frequent testing for personnel working in mission essential roles, ensuring greater distance between work stations, discontinuing or significantly limiting use of the conference rooms, and staggered times of arrival for shifts.

NASA. All of NASA’s facilities are at Stage 3 of its pandemic response plan. (Stage 3 means mandatory telework except for those needed for critical work for missions.)

The White House. President Trump has been traveling to campaign rallies this week. Earlier this week, his doctors said that he has tested negative for COVID-19 at least twice. On Wednesday, First Lady Melania Trump thanked people for their support and outlined her experience with the virus. She also revealed that the Trumps’ youngest son, Barron, also had the virus, though he did not have any symptoms.

Congress. Access to the congressional office buildings and capitol complex continues to be limited, open only to Members, Congressional staff, and credentialed press. Meanwhile, another member of Congress has tested positive for the novel coronavirus. Rep. Bill Huizenga (R-MI) tweeted yesterday: “Earlier today, I was expected to appear with the Vice President. While taking part in offsite testing protocols, I took a rapid test that came back positive for COVID-19. I am awaiting the results of a PCR test and I am self-isolating until I have confirmed results.”

National Census. On Tuesday, the [Supreme Court ruled](#) that the Trump administration can end the census count on October 15 instead of October 31. The Census Bureau said that field operations would end on Thursday. The administration stated this would give the bureau enough time to meet the December 31 deadline to provide the numbers for apportionment for representation as directed by the Congress. In addition to helping set the number of congressional seats each state has in the U.S. House of Representatives, the census also helps determine how \$1.5 trillion in federal funding is distributed each year. According to the [Census Bureau](#), as of October 12, 99.9-percent of housing units have been accounted for in the United States, to include territories and Puerto Rico either by phone, paper response or in person.

Congressional activities

The House is in recess until after the election, though it is still possible for lawmakers to return for votes (or cast their vote by proxy), if necessary. The Senate plans to come back into session starting on Monday and be in through at least the following Monday, October 26.

SCOTUS confirmation process. Supreme Court nominee Amy Coney Barrett answered questions from Senators on the Judiciary Committee this week as part of her confirmation hearing. Committee Chair Senator Lindsey Graham [set the committee vote](#) for October 22 at 1 pm. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell said that he plans to put the nomination on the Senate floor the next day, on October 23, which will set up a final vote on the nomination during the week of October 26. Of note, [it is expected Barrett will be confirmed](#) along party lines.

Playing chicken with pandemic relief. The twists and turns on possible pandemic relief legislation this week packed a year's worth of news into just a few days. The bottom line up front is that President Trump is hoping for a big win before the election, even as he continues to inject uncertainty into the negotiation process, House Speaker Pelosi believes she has leverage to get a better deal, many Democrats (especially moderates and those in tough reelections) are getting nervous about not passing something before the election, and Republicans are still pushing back against any deal at all because of the price tag.

During a [Saturday morning call](#) with Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin and White House chief of staff Mark Meadows, Senate Republicans attacked the \$1.8 trillion proposal from the Trump administration for costing too much and also questioned individual pieces of the bill including the expansion of Affordable Care Act tax credits to the unemployed. The opposition was so intense that Meadows told the Senators, "You all will have to come to my funeral" after he took the message back to the president. On Sunday, Mnuchin and Meadows seemed to pivot to a much narrower legislative measure that would allow the Trump administration to redirect about [\\$130 billion in unused funding](#) from the Paycheck Protection Program and allow businesses to apply for a second round of PPP funding, something prohibited in the original legislation.

On Tuesday morning, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell said that when the chamber returns next week, their first order of business would be to vote on a targeted relief bill (likely around \$500 billion). President Trump undercut that position [less than an hour later by tweeting](#) "STIMULUS! Go big or go home!!!" and continuing to advocate for a \$1.8 trillion bill.

Pelosi has continued to hold out on a deal in the hopes of getting the White House to come up on its number and directing more of that money to states and cities. This week, she has said several times that the White House proposal is too focused on allowing the President to direct money where he wishes, instead of where Congress directs it. In a letter to House Democrats, she wrote, "When the president talks about wanting a bigger relief package, his proposal appears to mean that he wants more money at his discretion to grant or withhold, rather than agreeing on language prescribing how we honor our workers, crush the virus and put money in the pockets of workers." Pelosi also vehemently defended her position in an interview with CNN's Wolf Blitzer (watch the [video here](#)).

On Thursday, Mnuchin talked with CNBC, where he mentioned the idea of spending the unused PPP money and noted that he would accept Pelosi's language on testing and tracing (which only leaves enhanced unemployment, business liability, and state and local funding on the table). He said, "We are going to keep trying. I don't want to say that it is not likely – there are significant issues." Then President Trump [told Fox Business](#) that he had authorized Mnuchin to offer more than \$1.8 trillion in spending. "I've told him," Trump said. "So far, he hasn't come home with the bacon." And while the President is open to a larger amount in spending, he's a firm no on state or local funding. Also on Thursday, McConnell talked with Washington Post reporter Erica Werner, who asked about discussions with the White House and a possible compromise in the \$1.8-\$2.2 trillion range. McConnell noted again that he plans to put his \$500 billion bill on the floor of the Senate next week. [He said](#), "You're correct we're in discussions with the Secretary of the Treasury and the Speaker about a higher amount. That's not what I'm going to put on the floor." About a higher number, he

added, “I don’t think so ... That’s where the Administration’s willing to go. My members think what we laid out, a half a trillion dollars, highly targeted, is the best way to go.”

Pressure to confirm FCC nominee. President Trump is [pressuring](#) Senate Republicans to hurry up and confirm nominee Nathan Simington for the Republican FCC seat now belonging to Commissioner Mike O’Rielly (who has to give up the seat at the end of the year following President Trump’s decision to not renominate him for another term in the position). (The push for confirmation is also head of the potential for the Senate to switch from GOP to Democrat control in 2021.) Simington has been meeting with Republicans on the Senate Commerce Committee, who will have to vote to advance his nomination before it goes to the Senate floor for a vote. An aide to Committee Chair Senator Roger Wicker (R-MS) said that they are looking at potential dates for a confirmation hearing. While Simington does have support from some Republicans on the committee, Alaska Senator Dan Sullivan has blocked FCC nominees in the past over broader concerns with the agency.

House leadership changes. The House Democratic Caucus plans to hold leadership elections on November 18 and 19, according to a letter sent to Members yesterday. The Democratic Steering and Policy Committee will then likely meet the week of November 30 to nominate committee chairs, including the next leader of the House Appropriations Committee. Reps. Rosa DeLauro (D-CT), Debbie Wasserman Schultz (D-FL) and Marcy Kaptur (D-OH) are all vying for the gavel. Also, Rep. Mark Pocan said this week that he will not seek [another term as co-chair](#) of the Congressional Progressive Caucus. Pocan, who has held the position since May 2017, will remain active with the group, though. Rep. Ro Khanna (D-CA), who currently serves as first vice chair could succeed Pocan as co-chair.

On the other side of the aisle, we told you last that Rep. Steve Womack (R-AR) was not seeking a waiver to continue in his role as top Republican on the House Budget Committee. Now, Rep. Bill Johnson (R-OH) has [announced that he is running](#) for that spot. In a statement, Johnson said that he’s talked with Womack and has his support along with that of other “influential House Republicans.” However, Rep. Jason Smith (R-MO) may also decide to throw his hat in the ring for the position.

FY2021 NDAA. The conference process for the NDAA to work out an agreement between the House and Senate versions of the bill has not yet officially begun. The House and Senate passed their competing bills by wide margins in July and must now form a joint conference committee to reconcile their differences. Though staffers have begun informal talks, neither chamber has voted yet to formally begin the conference process and name lawmakers to the panel. The conference process is unlikely to formally kick off until Congress returns after the November election. Despite the delay, House and Senate Armed Services leaders say they’re optimistic a deal on the NDAA can be struck quickly in the lame duck session.

Next appropriations steps. With the Senate focused on confirming a new Supreme Court justice, it’s likely there won’t be any formal work done on FY2021 spending bills until after the election. A reminder — the House already marked up and passed nearly all of its appropriations bills in two bundles, [H.R. 7608](#) and [H.R. 7617](#).

For those tracking the FY2021 requested program funding numbers, [here](#) is where the Congress is in approving funds for the programs you and we care most about. (Let us know what funding lines of interest to you we are missing from this list, and we will add them!)

Defense budget reprogramming approved. Each year, the Pentagon requests the authority to move around money in the defense budget to address emerging requirements. This week, the Senate and House Appropriations and Armed Services committees granted [this year’s request](#) (or most of it). Lawmakers

[approved](#) just over \$1.3 billion of the request, along with an additional \$198 million for [military intelligence programs](#).

FY2021 Intelligence Authorization. We still expect the House to move its intelligence bill to the floor as a standalone measure sometime this fall, but at this point, it may also be possible that this bill will be negotiated as part of the NDAA conference process. As a reminder, the Senate version of the FY2021 intelligence authorization act was attached on the floor as an addendum to the NDAA

NASA Authorization. The House Science Committee has not scheduled a time for consideration of the [NASA authorization bill](#) (the Senate Commerce Committee marked up and reported out [its version of the bill](#) in November 2019). As the committee does not intend to hold a remote mark up for the bill, we do not believe there is much likelihood that this bill will see any more movement during this Congress.

Personnel changes

Nobu Okada, the founder and CEO of Astroscale, was elected to a three-year term as vice president of the International Astronautical Federation.

Joshua Whitehouse is now the [White House liaison for the Pentagon](#), apparently having moved into the job in September. Whitehouse, who worked on the Trump campaign and is a former New Hampshire state representative, was previously liaison for the Department of Homeland Security. Parker Doyle, who also worked in the liaison office at DHS, is now the deputy liaison at the Pentagon. Peter O'Rourke is serving as a special assistant in the office.

Elena R. Hernandez, who was press secretary at the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, has been named the Director of Strategic Communications and Senior Advisor to the U.S. Chief Technology Officer.

Axel Rodriguez is the new [Field Director](#) for the Federal Communications Commission. He has served as a supervisor in the FCC's Office of Engineering and Technology lab since 2013.

Serving at the pleasure. Anyone serving as a political appointee (either Senate confirmed, SES or schedule C) in a presidential administration understands that they serve at the pleasure of the president, and that when a president's term is over, they leave their position. There is typically a standard blanket process overseen by the Presidential Personnel Office (PPO) that directs political appointees who are staying through the end of the term on how and when to submit their resignation letter, which usually happens in the December timeframe. Presidents may also ask for the resignation of staff if they move from one term to the next, though that has not been applied on a blanket level in at least the last several administrations. However, this PPO is apparently considering asking nearly every political appointee to tender their [resignations right before Election Day](#), a process which would be incredibly unusual. If President Trump wins a second term, PPO would decide which resignations to accept and which to reject, meaning that people might not know their job status for some time after the election. Two current senior administration officials talked with Politico about the possible move, noting that asking staff for their resignations before the election would generate fear and uncertainty and would certainly affect morale.

The "Plum Book." Every four years, just after the Presidential election, the "United States Government Policy and Supporting Positions," commonly known as the Plum Book, is published. This publication contains data on over 9,000 Federal civil service leadership and support positions in the legislative and executive branches of the Federal Government that may be subject to noncompetitive appointment (e.g. political appointment), including

agency heads and their immediate subordinates, policy executives and advisors, and aides who report to these officials. The duties of many such positions may involve advocacy of Administration policies and programs and the incumbents usually have a close and confidential working relationship with the agency head or other key officials. While the next version will not be published until December, you can get an idea of what political positions might be available for appointment in a potential Biden-Harris administration by taking a look at the 2016 Plum Book [here](#).

National security update

National Strategy for Critical and Emerging Technologies. On Thursday, the White House released a [National Strategy for Critical and Emerging Technologies](#) focused on how the U.S. will promote and protect a competitive edge in high-tech fields including artificial intelligence, advanced and quantum computing, communication and networking technologies, semiconductors, and space. The [strategy calls](#) for development of a high-performing technology workforce, and increasing government research and development funding. It also outlines ways to secure technology advances by “strengthening rules where gaps exist, insisting that agreements be enforced, and working with like-minded allies and partners to promote, advance, and defend our industry, address unfair practices, and level the playing field for American workers.”

National Security Commission on AI report. On Tuesday, the National Security Commission on Artificial Intelligence [submitted its interim report](#) and third-quarter recommendations to the President and Congress. The report includes 66 recommendations on everything from workforce and education to research and development. Some of the bigger recommendations include creating a technology council chaired by the Vice President and tasked with the development of a national technology strategy (similar to the National Space Council) and a chief technology officer for the intelligence community. Read the full report [here](#), or a shorter summary [here](#).

New START negotiations. Depending on which set of negotiators you ask, there is either an “agreement in principle” to extend New START ... or there is very much not an agreement. During an event on Tuesday, Ambassador Marshall Billingslea, who is the top arms control negotiator for the Trump administration, said “We are in fact willing to extend the New START treaty for some period of time provided that they, in return, agree to a limitation — a freeze — on their nuclear arsenal. We believe that there is an agreement in principle at the highest levels of our two governments.” To which the Russians said, not so fast. Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov [said](#), “If the Americans need to report to their superiors something about allegedly reaching an agreement with the Russian Federation before their elections, then they will not get it.” In other treaty news, [leaders from 20 European nations](#) are urging the U.S. to find a way to extend the treaty. A letter addressed to the chairs and ranking members of the Senate and House Armed Services and Foreign Affairs Committees and released this week said, “As was evident in the process that led to New START, time is needed to negotiate solutions that meet the laudable goals put forward by both the United States and Russia during their strategic stability talks this year. In short, extending the duration of New START is not an end. It is a mutually beneficial tool for maintaining stability, transparency, and predictability while we write a new chapter of arms control together.”

Administration goes after foreign funding for think tanks. In a [statement released on Tuesday](#), Secretary of State Mike Pompeo is pressuring think tanks and academic institutions to publicly disclose any funding they receive from foreign governments. “To protect the integrity of civil society institutions, the [State] Department requests henceforth that think tanks and other foreign policy organizations that wish to engage with the department disclose prominently on their websites funding they receive from foreign governments, including state-owned or state-operated subsidiary entities,” Pompeo said. While revealing funding sources isn’t a requirement, Pompeo noted that State officials may choose not to participate in events with organizations who have not shared that information. “Disclosure is not a requirement for engaging with such entities. Department

staff will, however, be mindful of whether disclosure has been made and of specific funding sources that are disclosed when determining whether and how to engage,” he said. Of note, non-profits – like think tanks – must provide the salaries of their top employees as well as how much they invest in their mission statement. You can look up non-profit reports [here](#).

An audit of DOD pandemic funding. The Pentagon inspector general is launching an audit of coronavirus relief funds, [according to a newly released memo](#). “The objective of this audit is to determine whether the DoD awarded Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act funding to increase the Defense Industrial Base manufacturing capacity in accordance with Federal regulations and Defense Production Act authorities,” it states. The IG is focusing its scrub, which is starting immediately, on the office of the deputy assistant secretary of defense for industrial policy, the Air Force, Special Operations Command and Defense Contract Management Agency. “We may identify additional locations during the audit,” wrote assistant IG Theresa Hull.

DoD 5G. The White House is pushing the Pentagon to move forward with a plan to create a national 5G network in spite of opposition from industry, the FCC, and some members of Congress. The network would be a public-private partnership, with a private company under federal contract to operate a 5G network on the government’s behalf, using airwaves held by DoD. There is some speculation that a request for proposals from companies that would bid to run the network could come [within the next two weeks](#). White House Chief of Staff Mark Meadows is apparently pushing for the plan, which is [running into opposition](#) from the chairs of the House Energy and Commerce Committee and the Communications and Technology subcommittee. Reps. Frank Pallone Jr. (D-NJ) and Mike Doyle (D-PA) sent letters to the [Government Accountability Office](#) and the [National Telecommunications and Information Administration](#) requesting information on the plan. The Commissioners from both sides of the aisle at the FCC have also said they are not in favor of establishing a federally-backed 5G network. (And as a reminder, the FCC is also working to auction off Pentagon-controlled spectrum that could be used for 5G.) Wireless providers have also expressed opposition to the idea. *Axios* has a great deep dive into the subject – read their take [here](#). On Thursday, NDIA held a spectrum working group meeting and discussed ways to manage DoD spectrum sharing (*read our notes from the meeting* [here](#)).

Also, in an interesting spectrum-related note, the [Nobel Prize in economic sciences](#) was awarded to Paul Milgrom and Robert Wilson, who designed the first FCC spectrum auction to sell radio frequencies to telecom operators.

National Spaceport Authority. *Ars Technica* has a [really interesting article](#) on the possibility of a national spaceport authority that would merge the Space Force Cape Canaveral facility with NASA’s Kennedy Space Center. The spaceport would then manage government, national security, and commercial launches. As commercial companies especially ramp up the number of planned launches and as Boeing and SpaceX gain final approval to fly astronauts to the ISS on a regular basis, having a single authority to manage schedules, priority ranking, and infrastructure could be beneficial to all sides.

McMaster’s thoughts on U.S. pandemic response. Former national security adviser H.R. McMaster has [co-authored a lessons-learned report](#) on the U.S. response to the pandemic, offering a comprehensive blueprint for “how to improve biomedical innovations and emergency response.” The study, published by the Hoover Institution at Stanford University, said “Obstacles to effective coordination across federal agencies; between local, state, and federal governments; and among critical public- and private-sector organizations hampered the speed and the effectiveness of the medical response and implementation of measures necessary to reduce the spread and effect of the virus.” But it credits the military with being more agile in responding to needs, including the Army Reserve, the Army Corps of Engineers, and the Air Force’s AFWERX rapid acquisition office. “The federal government and states can learn from the processes our military forces leveraged to move

fast, but they must put in place new policies, procedures, and structures to supplement the military's rapid response," the study says.

Events this week. On Thursday, Defense Secretary Mark Esper spoke to the Heritage Foundation (*read our event summary [here](#)*), and CSIS hosted a discussion on innovation in the intelligence community (*see our summary [here](#)*).

Civil and commercial update

FAA commercial launch regulations released. On Thursday afternoon, the Department of Transportation [released its long-awaited updated and streamlined regulations](#) today for commercial space launch and reentry. The Streamlined Launch and Re-entry Licensing Regulation-2 (SLR2) creates a new, streamlined regulatory structure for launch and re-entry activities, including [requiring a single license](#) for all types of commercial space flight launch and reentry operations. The FAA will hold a three-day industry workshop on November 4-6 to go through the regulation page-by-page with industry representatives to explain their intent. The rule goes into effect 90 days after publication in the Federal Register.

Artemis Accords. On Tuesday, NASA announced that seven countries – the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, Japan, Luxembourg, the United Arab Emirates, and Italy – have [signed the Artemis Accords](#) with the U.S. NASA Administrator Jim Bridenstine said that other nations would be joining the Accords soon. One nation that looks like it will not join is Russia. Dmitry Rogozin, who heads up Roscosmos, said during International Astronautical Congress this week that Russia was not likely to participate in the Artemis mission because it's "too U.S.-centric." Bridenstine noted that even without other large spacefaring nations like Russia and China, the Accords create a set of norms and standards for everyone to follow. Mike Gold, NASA's acting associate administrator for the office of international and interagency relations, said, "Precedent is important. By embracing our values, along with our partners, we're creating a track record, a norm of behavior that will influence the entire world to proceed with the transparent, peaceful and safe exploration of space."

Tiping Point technology awards. NASA has awarded contracts totaling \$370 million to 14 companies for cutting-edge technology development for exploration in space and on the lunar surface. Four of those awards, and the biggest chunk of funding at \$256.1 million in total, are for long-term cryogenic fluid management work. The other programs are related to descent and landing, in-situ resource utilization, surface power generation and energy storage, and communications. Read the full list of awards [here](#).

Space debris. A real-time illustration of the need for good space traffic management is happening as two pieces of space debris – a defunct Soviet satellite and a discarded Chinese rocket booster – headed for a near miss on Thursday night at 8:56 p.m. ET. According to LeoLabs, the chance of a collision was [higher than 10%](#), but [their data shows](#) that there was no collision between the two objects.

NASA reaches a spaceflight milestone. There were some successful launches this week, some launch delay news, and the end of an era in NASA spaceflight. NASA astronaut Kate Rubins launched on a Soyuz spacecraft this week as part of the next ISS crew. The flight marks a milestone as it is the [last mission](#) with a NASA-purchased seat on a Russian rocket. NASA astronauts may fly on a Soyuz in the future, but the expectation is that those seats will be bartered in exchange for Russian astronauts flying on U.S. commercial crew vehicles. In a bit of news from the flip side of that launch coin, NASA announced that it is [delaying](#) the SpaceX Crew-1 launch from Oct. 31 to no earlier than early November. NASA also announced this week that the [SLS Green Run hotfire test](#) will take place on Nov. 14. In other launch news, [Blue Origin launched](#) its New Shepard rocket on Tuesday for the first time in 10 months, carrying 12 payloads to 66 miles altitude.

A close encounter. NASA will try for the first time to collect a sample of an asteroid next Tuesday afternoon. The mission is targeting the asteroid Bennu, a carbon-rich asteroid within our solar system that comes close to Earth about every six years. The [Origins Spectral Interpretation Resource Identification Security - Regolith Explorer, or OSIRIS-REx](#), spacecraft will touch down on the surface for between five and 15 seconds to [collect a sample](#) of the carbon-rich space rock that could hold answers to how the solar system formed. It will take a couple days to know if the collection attempt was successful. If not, the spacecraft can try twice more before it's scheduled to depart the area in March. The mission, which launched in 2016, is expected to get back to Earth in 2023.

Another reason to really dislike 2020. The planet saw the [warmest September on record](#), according to three temperature-tracking agencies, including the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, which found an average global temperature last month of 1.75 degrees Fahrenheit above the 20th century average. The data shows that 2020 is on track to be among the warmest years on record, with an average temperature potentially as hot or hotter than the current high in 2016.

Section 230 changes. Federal Communications Commission Chairman Ajit Pai [said](#) in a statement the commission will move forward with a rulemaking to “clarify ambiguities” in Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act, citing the “bipartisan support in Congress” for reform and noting that the agency has received clearance from the FCC’s general counsel to review the law. Pai added that social media companies do not have “a First Amendment right to a special immunity denied to other media outlets, such as newspapers and broadcasters.”

Events this week. Last Friday, CSIS hosted a panel of three women leading change in the space community (*read our notes [here](#)*) and Aviation Week hosted three former NASA administrators (*read our summary of the event [here](#)*). On Tuesday, Space News hosted a conversation on space traffic management (*read our notes [here](#)*) and CSPC hosted a panel on building the space economy (*read our summary [here](#)*).

2020 Election update

There are 18 days left until Election Day. Across the country, absentee votes are being sent in and states are seeing record numbers of early voters, both in person and by mail. As of [Thursday](#), voters have cast more than 17.5 million ballots in advance of Nov. 3. There were hours-long lines of people in Texas and Georgia on Monday morning, ready to vote. Michigan Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson [said that almost 1 million Michigan residents](#) had already cast absentee votes ahead of election day, around a third of the 2.9 million residents who requested mail-in ballots. Michigan does not start to count absentee ballots until the morning of Election Day, so this week Benson warned that it may be several days before election results are finalized. During the state’s August primaries, 1.6 million absentee ballots were cast and it took the state 40 hours to count those ballots, so it could take around 80 hours to count the November ballots if all of them are returned. One concern across the country is how many absentee ballots end up tossed. According to the U.S. Elections Commission, about 1% of absentee ballots cast in 2016 and 2018 were tossed for [various mistakes](#), including the voter forgetting to sign the ballot, not getting a witness signature where required, or missing a deadline. This year, absentee ballot mistakes could result in hundreds of thousands of uncounted ballots (so if you’re voting absentee this year, check your state rules and follow them carefully!).

2020 is already most expensive election. A new report out from the [Center for Responsive Politics](#) estimates the 2020 election cycle will be the most expensive one in U.S. campaign history. Candidates, outside groups, and political parties have already spent more than the \$7 billion that was spent in 2016 on state-level spending and planned television advertising. The that the total spent on elections in 2020 could reach as high as a whopping \$11 billion. At the presidential level, Trump, Biden and those backing them are expected to

spend more than \$5.1 billion. If you want a comparison, close to \$2 billion was spent in the 2016 presidential election. Executive director of the Center for Responsive Politics, Sheila Krumholz, said in a statement: “This is already the most expensive presidential election in history and there are still months of election spending to account for.” (See the Center’s report [here](#).)

Debates: Early this week, the Commission on Presidential Debates [officially canceled](#) the debate scheduled for Thursday of this week (as a reminder, last week the commission changed the format to a virtual debate and President Trump declined to participate). Instead, both candidates participated in separate town halls on Thursday night at the same time, Biden on ABC and Trump on NBC. In Trump’s appearance, he continued to downplay the coronavirus and asserted that ballots with his name on them had been found in garbage cans. He [refused to condemn QAnon](#), and when asked about his recent retweet of a claim that Osama Bin Laden isn’t actually dead, said “People can decide for themselves.” Moderator Savannah Guthrie clashed with the President on several occasions, and told him his claims sounded like “somebody’s crazy uncle.” [During Biden’s town hall](#), the former Vice President discussed policies aimed at helping Black Americans in response to a question from a skeptical constituent. The Biden administration’s [top priority](#), after virus control, will be “building a fiscal bridge to the other side of the crisis.” Biden didn’t clarify his position on the push by some progressives to add seats to the Supreme Court, a notion known as court packing, but he said he would do so before the election. The final presidential debate will be held next week on October 22 in Nashville.

Polls. The polls are coming fast and furious now, with multiple national and state polls being conducted every few days by different pollsters (which means we’re getting the multiple poll results almost every day now). One thing to note is that many pollsters have been changing their process to account for some of the discrepancies from 2016, including relying more on cell phones rather than landlines and polling more battleground states as opposed to just polling nationally.

Presidential. State polls continue to show a good picture for the Biden campaign, with a Quinnipiac poll in Georgia this week showing Biden with a 7-point lead over President Trump. Biden also hold a 53-42 lead over Trump in [Nebraska’s 2nd Congressional District](#) (Nebraska does electoral votes by district, instead of winner take all). A [new NBC News/Wall Street Journal poll](#) released on Thursday showed Biden garnering 53-percent of the vote nationwide to Trump’s 42-percent. That lead is driven in part by strong support among Black and Latino voters, as well as the former vice president’s edge among independents, who back him over Trump 46 to 39-percent. The national [polling average](#) has Biden up 10.5 points over Trump. But, let’s not forget Sen. Clinton was up by double-digits [this time](#) this time in 2016.

Senate. This week, the Cook Political Report [shifted three Senate races](#) in Democrats’ favor (Texas, Georgia, and Alaska) and are projecting that the GOP will lose between two and seven seats. Cook’s Jessica Taylor tweeted, “Many Republicans told me that holding Democrats to just a 51-49 majority may be a *good* night for the GOP.” The [Quinnipiac and Real Clear Politics polls](#) this week show Democrats leading in both Georgia Senate races. And Cal Cunningham is [still leading in North Carolina](#), in spite of his brush with a scandal. There is some minor good news for GOP Senate hopes. Michigan’s Senator [Gary Peters](#) is still leading, but the race is closer than Democrats expected. The [Arizona Public Opinion Pulse](#) conducted by the Phoenix-based OH Predictive Insights shows Democrat Mark Kelly with a 5-point advantage over McSally, 50 to 45-percent. And, a Monmouth University poll of the state released hours later shows Kelly with an even larger lead over his Republican opponent: Kelly led McSally by a sizable 10-point margin, 52 to 42-percent.

At this point in the race, polls are important, but they’re not the only indication of how a candidate is doing. Where campaigns choose to spend their money and where candidates choose to go in person or send high-level surrogates can tell you just as much about how the campaign thinks they are doing. This week, President Trump planned a series of rallies in states he won in 2016, something that generally indicates concern about winning

those states again since candidates tend not to campaign in person this close to the election in locations they know the most likely outcome. He was in [Iowa](#) on Wednesday, a state he won by 9-points in 2016, but current polling has as a statistically tied race. The Biden campaign, on the other hand, [sent Jill Biden to Texas](#), a sign that they see the state as potentially being in play on November 3. As always, there are hiccups and bumps in the campaign trail.

Harris off campaign trail. Yesterday morning, Sen. Kamala Harris has [canceled all campaign travel through this weekend](#) “out of an abundance of caution” after a flight crew member and her communications director tested positive for coronavirus. According to the Biden campaign, the Democratic nominee for vice president has tested negative for coronavirus three times over the past week, including yesterday. Harris had expected to be in North Carolina on Thursday and to travel every day through Nov. 3.

Concern over the question of military intervention on Election Day. Senior leadership at the Pentagon spent the week responding to concerns that the military might be used to respond to any unrest following the election. Joint Chiefs Chairman Gen. [Mark Milley said in an interview](#) on Monday, “There’s no role for the U.S. military in determining the outcome of a U.S. election. Zero.” He added, “This isn’t the first time that someone has suggested that there might be a contested election. And if there is, it’ll be handled appropriately by the courts and by the U.S. Congress.” Defense Secretary Mark Esper, [in written answers to questions](#) from Rep. Elissa Slotkin (D-MI) and Mikie Sherrill (D-NJ), would not commit to keeping troops away from polling stations on Nov. 3 saying only, “The U.S. military has acted, and will continue to act, in accordance with the Constitution and the law.” In a separate interview this week, [Army Secretary Ryan McCarthy said](#) that he didn’t foresee the military playing a role in responding to post-election chaos. He emphasized that the role of the National Guard is to help protect federal property and to support law enforcement. “We support law enforcement, whether that is at the federal or state and local levels,” McCarthy said. “We don’t police American streets.” He also noted that there have been no requests from agencies to provide support on Election Day.

Potential Biden administration. As is standard operating procedure, the Biden transition team is vetting potential candidates for positions in the administration should the Democratic nominee win the election. And as is also standard operating procedure, there has been a lot of talk inside the Beltway about who will fill potential cabinet positions. Some of that talk comes from the people who want the jobs or from their supporters trying to raise their profile. The Biden camp had a message for those folks: [stop it](#). “There is speculation with every transition, but public campaigning for administration jobs during an election of this magnitude is tone-deaf,” a Democratic strategist close to transition officials told Politico. “The only campaigning folks should be doing is for Biden, Harris, the Senate and candidates down the ballot who can help turn things around. Everything else is counterproductive.” That being said ... we at Velocity are tracking the latest rumors we are hearing about potential cabinet positions in a Biden administration. (*See our latest list [here](#).*)

Relitigating the 2016 election. U.S. Attorney John Bash, who was appointed by Attorney General Bill Barr to review whether officials in the Obama administration improperly requested the identities of individuals whose names were redacted in intelligence documents (a process called unmasking), has [completed his review without finding any substantive wrongdoing](#) and did not file any criminal charges or release a public report. And John Durham, another federal prosecutor appointed by Barr to investigate the FBI’s 2016 probe of the Trump campaign, said this week that no results from his work will be released before Election Day.

Media roundup of election stories:

Politico: [Biden campaign lashes out at New York Post](#)

The Washington Post: [Three weeks before Election Day, Trump allies go after Hunter — and Joe — Biden](#)

The Washington Post: [White House was warned Giuliani was target of Russian intelligence operation to feed misinformation to Trump](#)

The Wall Street Journal: [Biden, corruption, and ABC News](#)

The Hill: [Supervisor of soldiers who appeared at Democratic convention faces discipline](#)

Politico: [Top general did not give his consent to be used in Trump political ad](#)

Military Times: [Trump campaign ad targeting mail-in voters, featuring Esper and Milley, raises ethics questions](#)

The Hill: [Nebraska district could prove pivotal for Biden in November](#)

The Hill: [The Memo: Trump travel plans reveal weakness in battlegrounds](#)

Stars and Stripes: [Army Reserve officer running for US Senate says he won't answer questions about scandal](#)

2020 Election tracking. Velocity has put together an election update – [available here](#) – with all sorts of fabulous details about the 2020 Senate, House, and Presidential races, complete with pundit predictions and polls. This is a living document, and we just updated this week (3 weeks before the election). We will update it again before election day, and again until the last race is called. Let us know if there are races not listed here that you would like us to track, and we will add them!

Podcasts we love

Politico is taking a look at global problems in their Global Translations podcast, which looks at roadblocks to smart policy decisions. You can listen to season one [here](#) and subscribe to season two, which starts on Oct. 21.

Also, *War on the Rocks* has a new podcast about U.S. nuclear policy. Should the United States have a “no first use” policy? If so, would that affect choices our allies and partners, as well as adversaries, might make? Has the volatile presidency of Donald Trump shown that more checks are needed in the nuclear weapons launch process? For these and many more questions, take a listen [here](#).

And now for some cool space news...

This might be the best space-related quote of the year: “Any school district now that affords football can afford spaceflight.” This [NYT article](#) talks about how a second grade class in Indiana built and launched an experiment in 2018, but the bigger picture is how schools and students (even elementary school students) can actively participate in spaceflight today.

In a good news for science/bad news for the star story, astronomers published a paper on Monday detailing the “spaghettification” of a [star falling into a black hole](#). The star gave off a burst of light as it fell into the black hole 215 million light years from Earth. Astronomers using telescopes from the European Southern Observatory were able to see and study the tidal disruption event shortly after it happened, giving them (and us) the first opportunity to see what happens to a star as it’s ripped apart by a black hole.

Upcoming conferences and other events of interest

This week, the Space Foundation released an impressive lineup for its [“Space Symposium 365”](#) initiative, which will provide year-round virtual events after the annual conference was canceled because of the pandemic. NASA Administrator Jim Bridenstine, Air Force Secretary Barbara Barrett, Chief of Space Operations Gen. John Raymond and National Reconnaissance Office Director Christopher Scolese will kick off the initiative later this month. Future events are expected to include Gen. James Dickinson, commander of U.S. Space Command, and Wayne Monteith, the FAA’s associate administrator for commercial space transportation.

- 10/19/20, 10 am, The Atlantic Council [holds a webinar](#), beginning at 10 a.m., on “The Future of U.S. National Security,” with a panel of former national security advisers.
- 10/19/20, 1 pm, The [Cato Institute holds](#) a virtual book discussion, beginning at 1 p.m., on “Information Technology and Military Power.”
- 10/19/20, the virtual [SpaceCom Conference and Exposition](#) begins.

- 10/20/20, 1 pm, the National Defense Industrial Association [holds its virtual Precision Strike Technology Symposium](#) on “Advanced Precision Strike for the Multi Domain Fight”
- 10/21/20, noon, Washington Space Business Roundtable webinar “the profound strategic impact of China’s space activities on U.S. interests” (virtual, more info [here](#))
- 10/21/20, 12-noon, The Air Force Association’s Mitchell Institute for Aerospace Studies holds an “Aerospace Nation” [forum via webinar](#), with Gen. Charles Q. Brown Jr., chief of staff of the Air Force.
- 10/21/20, ASCEND hosts a [summit on space policy and education](#).
- 10/21/20, 3pm, Exploring Insights from Emerging Space Agencies, panel discussion hosted by the GWU Space Policy Institute (virtual, more info [here](#))
- 10/22/20, 8:30am, Earth Intelligence Summit: Harnessing GEOINT From Data to Decision, hosted by the Defense Strategies Institute (virtual event, closed press, more info [here](#))
- 10/22/20, 1pm, Space Policy Show: Funding Space: Investment Developments and Commercialization Trends, hosted by the Aerospace Corp. (more info [here](#))
- 10/22/20, Second presidential debate in Nashville, TN; Moderator: Kristen Welker, NBC News
- 10/26 to 10/28/20, [2020 AMS Washington Forum](#) (live virtual format)
- 10/26 to 10/28/20, 2020 AAS von Braun Memorial Symposium (live virtual format) (more info [here](#))
- 11/10 to 11/12/20 – 6th Annual Commercial Spaceport Summit (Members only virtual event - more info [here](#))
- 10/27/20, 8 am to 12:30 pm, Potomac Officers Club holds a 5G Summit. More information [here](#).
- 11/3/20 – election day
- 11/16 to 11/19/20, Ascend, hosted by AIAA (live virtual format, more info [here](#))
- 11/17 to 11/20/20, Air and Industry Impact Week virtual event (more info [here](#))
- 12/2 to 12/3/20, Space Resiliency Summit, Alexandria, VA (in-person event, more info [here](#))
- 12/14/20, electoral college vote commences
- 1/6/21, Joint session of congress and official counting of the electoral college votes
- 1/10/21 to 1/14/21, American Meteorological Society 101st Annual Meeting (registration info [here](#))
- 1/31/21 to 2/4/21, AAS/AIAA Space Flight Mechanics Meeting, Charlotte, NC (more info [here](#))
- 6/4/21, National Space Club’s Goddard Memorial Dinner
- 8/22/21 to 8/26/21, [36th Space Symposium – rescheduled](#) from late October 2020

What we’re reading

- Oct. 6, *Axios*: [China’s newest astronauts](#)
- Oct. 9, *Associated Press*: [North Korea unveils new weapons at military parade](#)
- Oct. 9, *Stars and Stripes*: [Army hits 2020 recruiting, retention goals amid pandemic, but top officials say more diversity needed](#)
- Oct. 9, *The Hill*: [The bipartisan House task force on America’s future defense is path-breaking](#)
- Oct. 9, *Space News*: [Space industry rebounds from pandemic](#)
- Oct. 9, *The Hill*: [Pentagon use of coronavirus relief was for essential national security](#)
- Oct. 10, *Space News*: [Small satellites’ growing role in Earth science](#)
- Oct. 10, *Military.com*: [Space Command ‘Visits’ Will Start Soon, Colorado Official Says](#)
- Oct. 11, *The Wall Street Journal*: [In Showing Off New ICBM, North Korea’s Kim Jong Un Returns to Old Tactic](#)
- Oct. 12, *C4ISRNet*: [Satellites played a starring role at Project Convergence](#)
- Oct. 12, *C4ISRNet*: [The Pentagon is developing modern architectures to dominate the electromagnetic spectrum](#)
- Oct. 12, *Defense One*: [Esper’s Reforms: An Interim Report Card](#)
- Oct. 12, *The Washington Post*: [North Korea’s monstrous new missile is a reminder of Trump’s failure to contain the regime](#)
- Oct. 12, *Breaking Defense*: [SMDC Pushes For New PNT, Tracking Sat Payloads](#)
- Oct. 12, *Breaking Defense*: [Low, Fast, Networked & Lethal: Future Army Airpower](#)

Oct. 12, *Defense One*: [Video: Filling the gap with a new mid-range missile](#)
Oct. 12, *USNI News*: [Chinese Increasing Nuclear Submarine Shipyard Capacity](#)
Oct. 12, *The Washington Post*: [Threat from nuclear weapons and missiles has grown since Trump entered office](#)
Oct. 12, *Washington Examiner*: [How North Korea's new missile aims for American fear](#)
Oct. 12, *Sea Power Magazine*: [SAIC Wins \\$49.5M U.S. Navy Contract for Saudi C4ISR Upgrades, Refurbishment](#)
Oct. 13, *Space News*: [Planet unveils rapid revisit and change detection products](#)
Oct. 13, *Defense News*: [US-developed hypersonic missile hit within 6 inches of target, says Army secretary](#)
Oct. 13, *Space News*: [Astroscale raises \\$51 million in Series E, \\$191 million overall](#)
Oct. 13, *Defense News*: [US Army hones in on solution for new mid-range missile pursuit](#)
Oct. 13, Heritage Foundation: [Video: Behind the Great Wall of Secrecy: China's Nuclear Buildup](#)
Oct. 13, *Defense News*: [US Army prioritizes open architecture for future combat vehicle amid competition prep](#)
Oct. 13, *Space News*: [SpaceX, Hughes and Viasat qualify to bid for \\$20.4 billion in FCC rural broadband subsidies](#)
Oct. 13, *Defense News*: [US Army pegs 2023 as tipping point for ending old weapons](#)
Oct. 13, *Air Force Magazine*: [Hypersonic Attack Cruise Missile Becomes High-Priority USAF Project](#)
Oct. 13, *The Drive*: [Air Force Says New Hypersonic Missile Will Hit Targets 1,000 Miles Away In Under 12 Minutes](#)
Oct. 13, *Space News*: [ULA's Tory Bruno argues for U.S. investments in the production of fuel in space](#)
Oct. 13, *Breaking Defense*: [NatSec AI Commission Urges New Vice Prez-Led Council](#)
Oct. 13, *FDD's Long War Journal*: [Generation Jihad Ep. 29 – An Interview with Edmund Fitton-Brown](#)
Oct. 14, *C4ISRNet*: [This intelligence agency has found new ways to find magnetic north](#)
Oct. 14, *The Hill*: [A world without alliances](#)
Oct. 14, *Space News*: [SpaceX to explore ways to provide weather data to U.S. military](#)
Oct. 14, *Foreign Policy*: [Trump's Foreign-Policy Adventures Haven't All Flopped](#)
Oct. 14, *Breaking Defense*: [Army's 'Team Ignite' Sets Futuristic R&D Targets: AI, Robotics, Autonomy](#)
Oct. 14, *C4ISRNet*: [Army tactical network office wants industry info on SATCOM as a service](#)
Oct. 14, *Defense News*: [Pentagon officials see 'troubling' small business decline since COVID](#)
Oct. 14, *Space News*: [Telesat wins DARPA contract to manufacture satellite buses for Blackjack program](#)
Oct. 14, *The Washington Post*: [D.C. region's coronavirus caseload hits two-month high; officials say small gatherings are fueling rise](#)
Oct. 14, *Reuters*: [North Korea's nuclear, missile programs 'serious threat' to security: Pentagon chief](#)
Oct. 14, *C4ISRNet*: [US Space Force's next communications satellite clears milestone](#)
Oct. 14, *Washington Post*: [As election nears, Pentagon leaders' goal of staying out of elections is tested](#)
Oct. 14, *Via Satellite*: [Telesat Receives Further DARPA Blackjack Contract for Telesat LEO Demonstration](#)
Oct. 14, *Via Satellite*: [Reaching for the Stars: Why We Need a US Space Port Authority](#)
Oct. 14, *The Hill*: [NOAA: September 2020 was hottest on record](#)
Oct. 15, *Breaking Defense*: [New Counter Drone Strategy Hits Esper's Desk](#)
Oct. 15, *Space News*: [Orbital Sidekick wins \\$16 million U.S. Air Force contract](#)
Oct. 15, *Defense One*: [Will Commanders Trust Their New AI Weapons and Tools?](#)
Oct. 15, *Bloomberg*: [Trump Officials Accused of Defying Court to Keep Building Wall](#)
Oct. 15, *Military.com*: [It's Almost Impossible to Get COVID-19 on an Airplane, New Military Study Suggests](#)
Oct. 15, *Defense News*: [More stars to come for generals in charge of modernization priorities](#)
Oct. 15, *Newsweek*: [Iran Says It's Ready to Start Buying and Selling Weapons With 'Many Friends,' While US Left in 'Isolation'](#)
Oct. 15, *Air Force Magazine*: [SECDEF Is Worried about USAF's Current—and Future—Tanker Fleet](#)
November/December 2020, *Foreign Affairs*: [A National Security Reckoning - How Washington Should Think About Power](#)

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