



Velocity Update October 9, 2020

Congressional Schedule. The Senate and House are in recess. (*More below.*)

U.S. Economic Outlook

Weekly numbers and long-term outlook. Some areas are doing better, and that's better for pandemic levels. [840,000 people applied for unemployment benefits](#) for the first-time last week, which is down as compared to the previous week. Another 460,000 people claimed Pandemic Unemployment Assistance, the program for self-employed or gig workers, for the first time, which is also down from last week. A total of 25.5 million people have claimed some kind of unemployment benefits during the pandemic. The big story this week is the number of women who dropped out of the workforce in September (meaning they are not employed outside the home and are not looking for work) and especially black and Latinas. [Around 617,000 women](#) left the workforce just in September, compared to 78,000 men. The U.S. budget deficit tripled in the fiscal year ending Sept. 30, [according](#) to a new Congressional Budget Office estimate, widening to \$3.1 trillion from \$984 billion. Receipts dropped 1 percent to \$3.4 trillion, while outlays rose 47 percent to \$6.5 trillion.

Coronavirus government operations update

National perspective. As of Friday mid-day, the number of confirmed cases in the U.S. [is at least 7,569,000 with at least 212,000 deaths of victims who either tested positive with Covid or died directly from the virus](#). The U.S. is averaging more than 45,000 new positive tests a day, more than double the numbers in June, an [ominous increase](#) that has some experts concerned about a potentially devastating winter. The CDC predicts deaths in the U.S. could reach 233,000 by the end of this month, and projections from the University of Washington's Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation show more than 2,900 Americans could die daily by January. States in the Midwest and South are seeing an increase in both the number of new cases and the number of hospitalizations. On Wednesday, Wisconsin Gov. Tony Evers said that the state will open a field hospital at the Wisconsin State Fair Park outside of Milwaukee to handle the increasing number of cases that are starting to "overwhelm" hospitals in the state. Eight states are seeing a daily hospitalization rate tied with or above peak highs from earlier in the year.

Washington metro area. Overall coronavirus cases in [D.C., Maryland, and Virginia topped 300,000 by Friday afternoon, with at least 7,000 deaths](#). The death rate from Covid-related or Covid positive tests in the Washington region is under 2.5-percent. [Experts warn](#) that the region's daily caseload, which has stabilized around 1,500 since late July, is not likely to significantly decline in the coming months.

Pentagon. The Pentagon remains in Phase Two HPCON (Bravo), which means a maximum of 80-percent of staff allowed on-site, keeping six feet distance from others, and the wearing of face coverings. The Pentagon continues to keep a steady stock of hygiene supplies on the reservation and the metro rail is running every 12 to 15 minutes. The big story this week is that all but one of the Joint Chiefs of Staff are [self-quarantining](#) after Coast Guard Vice Commandant Adm. Charles Ray and Marine Corps Assistant Commandant Gen. Gary Thomas both tested positive for Covid-19. Ray attended a Gold Star family event at the White House last week also attended by a number of people who have since tested positive for the virus. The Pentagon is [conducting contact tracing](#) and is taking additional precautions. All the close contacts to Gen. Ray are quarantining and have been tested.

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. Since news broke about President Trump testing positive for Covid, [at least 35 people](#) who either work at the White House or attended events with White House staff have also tested positive, including Press Secretary Kayleigh McEnany, along with a military aide who works in the West Wing and two White House residence staff. Three members of the White House press corps have also tested positive since Friday after covering events at the White House, as have 11 people who helped put on the presidential debate last week. News reports say the White House is not doing contact tracing for the people who attended the ceremony in the Rose Garden announcing Judge Amy Coney Barrett as a nominee for the Supreme Court. Of interest, Judge Coney Barrett and her husband both had Covid earlier this year, and are reported to be healthy. Some White House staff have expressed frustration over conflicting guidance and lack of information, and [many staff have been working from home](#) since the president's diagnosis. On Friday, the President [suggested](#) that he might have contracted Covid-19 from Gold Star family members who were too close to him when telling stories of their loved ones who died in the line of duty. On Friday morning, White House physician Sean Conley [said](#) it is safe for President Trump to return to public events, less than two weeks after being diagnosed with COVID-19. From Dr. Conley: "Saturday will be day 10 since Thursday's diagnosis, and based on the trajectory of advanced diagnostics the team has been conducting, I fully anticipate the President's safe return to public engagements at that time."

Congress. Access to the congressional office buildings and capitol complex continues to be limited, open only to Members, Congressional staff, and credentialed press. With three senators testing positive for the virus in the last week, there has been more discussion of adding testing and other measures for the safety of those who work on the Hill. On Wednesday, Senate Minority Leader Chuck. Schumer (D-NY) and Sen. Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) introduced a resolution that would increase coronavirus testing and mandate the universal use of face masks within the U.S. Capitol complex. The resolution would also ban senators who have tested positive from attending committee hearings in person or entering the Senate chamber until they have had two negative tests in a row taken on separate days. It is expected this legislation will not go anywhere because the Democrats are in the minority. On the House side, two staffers for Rep. Doug Lamborn (R-CO), who has kept his office open and has been attending in-person fundraising events, tested positive for coronavirus and, according to [the Denver Post](#), were told to not tell their housemates about their diagnosis. And, on Friday, it was reported that Rep. Mike Bost (R-IL) [has tested positive for Covid-19](#).

Census. Over the weekend, Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross said that the Census would continue through October 31. However, on Wednesday, the Trump administration [asked the Supreme Court to intervene](#) by blocking the lower court opinion that required the count to continue to that date. Of note, the reason for the date certain end of the Census was to ensure the Department of Commerce was able to present the final results of the count to the Congress, as mandated by the Constitution and federal law, by the December 31 deadline.

Congressional activities

SCOTUS confirmation process. Two senators on the Judiciary Committee have tested positive for Covid-19, which puts the fast track for Judge Amy Coney Barrett's confirmation in question. The committee has said that it does not intend to delay the hearings, scheduled to begin next week (October 12), even though the Senate has recessed until October 19 due to the number of Senators who have either tested positive or quarantined after exposure. Sen. Ron Johnson (R-WI), one of the senators who tested positive over the weekend, said that he would vote "in a moon suit," if necessary, to confirm Barrett. Here's the SCOTUS Judiciary hearing schedule, which Senators will be allowed to attend virtually, if they choose to:

- Monday, 10/12: Opening statements

- Tuesday, 10/13: First round of questions
- Wednesday, 10/14: Second round of questions and closed session
- Thursday, 10/15: Outside witnesses
- Thursday, 10/22: Report the nominee out of committee

Democrats in the House launch investigation into Pentagon CARES Act spending. We noted recently that information had come to light about the Pentagon spending pandemic relief funds marked for production of medical equipment instead to other defense contractors, to include the critical manufacturing of national security programs. This week, [the Democrats in the House sent](#) a letter to Defense Secretary Mark Esper calling for the Pentagon to turn over all [documents](#) related to the \$1 billion in CARES Act spending by Oct. 16. What is of importance – and an important nuance offered by defense journalists who cover this spending – is the money spent also significantly supported the national defense supply chain, the workforce to stay employed and critical logistics hubs up and operating for national security.

The next pandemic relief package: hardcore negotiations. On Tuesday afternoon, President Trump tweeted that he had directed his team negotiating the next [pandemic relief package](#) to end meetings with House Majority Leader Nancy Pelosi, and that a relief package would be passed after the election. Pelosi and Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin had been talking, and in fact had a call on Tuesday prior to the President’s tweet. The stop to negotiations happened even as Jerome Powell, head of the Federal Reserve, warned about devastating long-term effects to the economy without more emergency relief. After [stocks fell sharply](#) based on Trump’s direction, the President seemed to walk back the idea of no more relief via additional tweets. He called for a stand-alone bill bailing out airlines and for a stand-alone bill to send relief checks to individuals. However, [Pelosi has said](#) that stand-alone bills are off the table, though she did offer to consider an airline-relief bill alongside a broader relief package. Senate [Republicans have also said](#) that a stand-alone bill for airlines isn’t in the cards. Pat Toomey (R-PA) and Mike Lee (R-UT) issued a statement that said, “Consideration of legislation providing grants to the airlines should not happen unless there are adequate protections for taxpayers and the opportunity to offer related amendments.” On Thursday morning, President Trump called for negotiations to [continue, saying](#), “Well I shut down talks two days ago because they weren’t working out. Now they are starting to work out, we’re starting to have some very productive talks.” Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi spoke on the phone yesterday about mixed messages Pelosi said the White House has sent over economic stimulus, [according](#) to a spokesman for the California Democrat. On Friday afternoon, the [media reported](#) that President Trump will offer Speaker a \$1.8 trillion coronavirus relief package as the president urged the negotiators to “go big.” The new figure was a jump from the White House’s \$1.6 trillion offer last week, but there was no indication that Pelosi would come down from her demand for a \$2.2 trillion package.

House leadership changes (minority report). On Wednesday, Rep. Steve Womack (R-AR) was [appointed](#) as ranking member on the House Appropriations Financial Services Subcommittee, which required a waiver of GOP conference rules since Womack is also serving as ranking member of the House Budget Committee. However, Womack does not plan to seek the waiver to keep serving on the budget committee in the next Congress, so it’s likely that Rep. Bill Johnson (R-OH), who is now the vice ranking member on the committee, will succeed Womack.

Presidential competency bill. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi is [pushing a new bill](#) that would give Congress a role in determining whether a U.S. President can be forced out of office if he or she is determined to be incapable of doing the job. To be clear, the measure stands virtually no chance of becoming law.

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

neither chamber has voted yet to formally begin the conference process and name lawmakers to the panel, it is important to note that professional staff have been holding informal talks for weeks. The formal 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. It is typical that all but the biggest issues are usually worked out by the professional staff ahead of the Members themselves sitting down for formal negotiations.

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. However, we understand that appropriators have already indicated an intention to have a FY2021 omnibus package ready for consideration by the time the continuing resolution runs out on December 11. Therefore, we expect professional staff have already begun informal bicameral conversations across the sides of the Capitol. 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!)

FY2021 Intelligence Authorization. We expect the House to move its intelligence bill to the floor as a standalone measure sometime this fall. We do not expect many amendments to be considered when the bill comes to a floor, and it is very possible that the two chambers could opt to include the intelligence bill as an addendum to the conference legislation for the NDAA. Like the NDAA and appropriations bills, informal conversations among professional staff have very likely already commenced on a conference measure.

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). We understand that the committee, at this point, does not intend to hold a remote mark up for the bill, and therefore, we do not believe there is much likelihood that this bill will see any more movement during this Congress. Nonetheless, Rep. Kendra Horn (D-OK), who chairs the Space and Aeronautics subcommittee, [expressed some hope](#) for action on the bill late in the year after the election. "I think we're hopefully going to get some movement on it after the election," she said. "We're going to continue to work on it. Hopefully after the election we'll see some progress. I'm going to keep working on it. I don't think it's gone." (*You can read our summary of the event, which also includes comments from the NASA administrator, [here](#).*)

Personnel changes

Vice Adm. Kenneth Whitesell is the Navy's new Air Boss. Whitesell took command of Naval Air Forces and Naval Air Force, Pacific Fleet, in a ceremony last Friday aboard the aircraft carrier Theodore Roosevelt at Naval Air Station North Island in San Diego. Whitesell, who was the deputy commander of U.S. Pacific Fleet, succeeded now-retired Vice Adm. DeWolfe "Bullet" Miller III.

Retired Army General Bert Mizusawa, number one in his class at West Point and a Harvard law school graduate, who was an adviser to Donald Trump during his 2016 campaign, is serving as senior adviser for national security technology and business integration at the CIA. The appointment, which does not require Senate confirmation, was made earlier this year but has only just now [become public](#). Former agency officials have remarked in their opinion this is an unusual appointment, specifically because of the position to which he was appointed. There is speculation Mizusawa was appointed to keep an eye on CIA Director Gina Haspel,

while others have noted that Mizusawa has positioned himself in such a way that he could be considered for Haspel's job if President Trump wins reelection.

The Commercial Spaceflight Federation announced a new board chair this week. Audrey Powers, vice president of legal and compliance at Blue Origin, was selected to succeed Taber MacCallum at the end of his two-year term.

National security update

Intelligence chief briefed lawmakers of foreign influence threats to Congress. John Ratcliffe, Director of National Intelligence, [briefed](#) lawmakers last month that foreign influence campaigns targeting Congress were more expansive than previously known, and specifically that burgeoning foreign influence threat is being perpetrated by the usual suspects: China, Russia and Iran, with Beijing the primary aggressor.

Brennan memo on Clinton campaign plan declassified. This past Tuesday, Ratcliffe also declassified documents revealing former CIA Director John Brennan briefed then President Obama on Hillary Clinton's purported plan to tie then-candidate Donald Trump to Russia as "a means of distracting the public from her use of a private email server" ahead of the 2016 presidential election, according to [media reports](#). In Brennan's handwritten note, "We're getting additional insight into Russian activities from [REDACTED]," and "CITE [summarizing] alleged approved by Hillary Clinton a proposal from one of her foreign policy advisers to vilify Donald Trump by stirring up a scandal claiming interference by the Russian security service." Later in the week President Trump tweeted he was going to declassify all information related to Sen. Clinton's proposal. According to [Politico](#), a former senior intelligence official said Brennan would frequently brief Obama on Russia's actions regardless of whether it was about Trump or Clinton, adding that Brennan also wanted to "demonstrate the extent of the U.S. intelligence community's ability to collect against Russia."

Durham report to be published after election. According to [media reports](#), Attorney General William Barr has told top Republicans that the Justice Department's review of the origins of the Russia probe, led by U.S. Attorney John Durham, will not be released before the Nov election. Republicans had hoped the report would find damning revelations about the Obama administration, and Trump has grown frustrated with Barr and Federal Bureau of Investigation Director Christopher Wray for not moving fast enough.

DIU wants to revolutionize space access. This week, *Politico* has an [interview](#) with Brig. Gen. Steven Butow, the space director of the Defense Innovation Unit, the Pentagon's innovation arm that works with Silicon Valley startups. In the interview, Butow says that the five-year old DIU wants to open up geostationary orbit — and eventually lunar orbit. Butow said, "As soon as you go to that approach where you're doing modular components, you're no longer constrained to have things fit into rocket fairing ... It's also a perfect time to be doing this because if you can get to geostationary orbit, you can get into lunar orbit very easily."

SDA moves forward. The Space Development Agency is expanding tranche 0 of its National Defense Space Architecture with the [announcement](#) this week that it has chosen SpaceX and L3 Harris to each design and build four satellites with wide field of view overhead persistent infrared sensors. The sensors will track hypersonic weapons from space. The contract award gives SpaceX \$149 million, while L3 Harris will receive \$193 million. This award follows the August award to York Space Systems and Lockheed Martin for 10 satellites each. The agency also posted a [solicitation](#) this week for one company to [provide launch services](#) for all 28 satellites for a launch timeline starting in September 2022.

One year of Space Force. It's not quite the first birthday of the U.S. Space Force, but it's clear the new service is thinking about what it has accomplished, and what still [needs to be done](#). One of the biggest questions on the

table is the acquisition process. Space Systems Command, the new acquisition unit, is still in the planning stages, and Gen. David “DT” Thompson, vice chief of space operations for the Space Force, said during a Defense One event last Friday that he could not provide a specific timeline for the new organization because they are still working on how best to transition all the different existing organizations. “Part of the consideration for the right approach is how all of these organizations and what they do today and how they do it today fit together – how they complement each other, how they duplicate each other, how they provide and how they support each other,” Thompson said. (*Find our summary of the event [here](#).*)

Another issue is when the Space Development Agency will be folded into Space Systems Command. SDA is required by law to move over to the Space Force no later than October 1, 2022, but SDA leadership has advocated for keeping the agency independent longer than that. We’re going to direct you to read this excellent [Breaking Defense article](#) on the Space Force acquisition puzzle that includes comments from former Air Force Secretary Heather Wilson at an event last week. Specifically about SDA, Wilson said, “There are seven different entities in the Pentagon that buy space equipment. The last thing we need is one more. They came up with this Space Development Agency concept in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, mostly because somebody there who thought it would be really cool,” Wilson said. “It had nothing to do with the efficiency of procurement, or effectiveness of the force. And I think that that piece of bureaucracy could easily die away without anybody missing it.”

Then there are all the other pieces of space that sit currently in the Army and Navy. “We have been engaged in this process for several months now,” Thompson said. “We’re getting close to the decision that needs to be made for us to transfer some of those functions and capabilities. There is a tremendous amount that the Space Force and the Air Force and the Navy working with OSD has already agreed on ... There’s a few units and functions left that we haven’t reached full agreement on.” Plus, there’s the continuing resolution, which means that the Space Force will continue to get its funding through the Air Force until Congress passes the FY2021 spending bills. The delay means the plan to expand the National Space Defense Center in Colorado will be delayed, as will the service’s effort increase the use of artificial intelligence to analyze space-based data.

Events this week. On Monday, there was a discussion on U.S. Southern Command (*find our notes [here](#)*). On Tuesday, CSBA hosted a fireside chat with Secretary Mark Esper (*our summary is [here](#)*). On Wednesday, The Heritage Foundation hosted an event on success and challenge in the final frontier (*our notes are [here](#)*). And catching up from last week, Ciena hosted a discussion on modernization and Space Force (*find our summary [here](#)*).

Civil and commercial update

Update on FAA New Rule on Launch. This week the FAA announced they will issue their updated rule on streamlining launch licenses on Thursday, October 16. It is expected Secretary of Transportation Elaine Chao will lead the announcement effort.

Commercial crew launches. We mentioned recently that NASA has said it’s happy with the progress Boeing is making on improvements to the CST-100 Starliner commercial crew vehicle. The Aerospace Safety Advisory Panel agreed that Boeing is making “substantial progress” but that it had doubts that work could be done in time to allow [another test flight this year](#). In late August, NASA and Boeing said that OFT-2 would launch no earlier than December. There was also a change this week to the CFT, or crew flight test, mission that will follow a successful OFT-2 mission. Former NASA and current Boeing astronaut Chris Ferguson, who was scheduled to command the first crewed flight of Boeing’s CST-100 Starliner commercial crew vehicle, [withdrew from the mission](#) because of family obligations. Ferguson said, “The events next year are good ones, and I just don’t want to risk missing them.” And, on Thursday, the *Houston Chronicle* [reported](#) that Ferguson withdrew from

the flight to attend his daughter's wedding. We'll note that on the original mission timeline, the CFT mission would have already happened, and that there is uncertainty now on the mission timeline and duration making it virtually impossible to plan around family events. Ferguson will be replaced by veteran astronaut Butch Wilmore, who was training as backup for the mission. And Ferguson is still the director of crew and mission operations for the Starliner program, and will continue to be involved on the ground.

Space debris in the news. Kayhan Space, a startup based in Boulder, Colorado, is developing an [automated process](#) it calls the Kayhan Satellite Collision Assessment and Avoidance System. The process is designed to takes in space situational awareness data, analyze it, and then make a decision for satellite operators on whether a maneuver is needed. [CNN also did an in-depth look](#) at “Kessler Syndrome” (the theory that the space above Earth could one day become so crowded with active satellites space debris that it would make it difficult and more dangerous to reach and operate in space) and the problem of space debris.

State of AI. Artificial intelligence is a hot topic. Last week, we talked about the [Future of Defense Task Force](#) calling for a “Manhattan Project” for AI. This week, we recommend reviewing the State of AI report that looks at industry and research in the field, including government usage of AI. The report finds that biology is having an AI moment, discusses some of the ethical issues in AI, and the U.S. is emphasizing AI as an investment area. The report also noted specifically that the AI ecosystem in the U.S. is fueled by foreign talent, including Chinese researchers. Read the report [here](#).

Events this week. On Tuesday, Brookings hosted a look at tech policy in the next administration (*our summary is [here](#)*).

2020 Election update

There are 25 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. At least [5.6 million people have voted](#) already, which is 50 times more than had voted by this time in 2016. Experts are predicting [record turnout](#) this year, though they do note that some of reason for larger early voting numbers is that people are shifting when they vote. Here's the bottom line on what you need to know this week.

Debates: There was some renegotiation on the set-up for the vice presidential candidates' debate, which happened Wednesday night, including moving Vice President Mike Pence and Senator Kamala Harris 12-feet apart and adding clear plexiglass barriers between the candidates and the moderator. There was some last-minute confusion, with the Commission on Presidential Debates saying that both camps had agreed to the moves and the Pence campaign disputing the need for barriers on stage. After last week's debate, where many have surmised President Trump and his family and team sitting in the audience could have been contagious with the coronavirus while refusing to wear masks even after being reminded of the rule to do so, there has been additional concern with protecting the candidates and moderator, who do not wear masks during the event, along with all the production staff who make the debate possible. The debate itself did not break any new policy ground, and the biggest news of the night (and the most viral moment from the debate on social media) was a fly that landed on Pence's head and stayed there for a little over two minutes.

On Thursday morning, the outlook for the next two debates got more uncertain. The Commission announced that the second presidential debate, which is a town hall format and scheduled to take place on October 15 in Miami, would instead be virtual, a change that happened without consulting either campaign. The change would have the moderator in place in Miami along with the participants, while each of the candidates would participate remotely. A few minutes after the change was announced, President Trump [told Fox News](#) during an interview that he would not participate, saying “I'm not going to waste my time with a virtual debate.” The Biden

campaign then asked the Commission to change the October 22 debate (the third debate) to a town hall format, so that the candidates would have a chance to answer questions directly from voters. The Trump camp agreed, but chose to view it as postponing the second debate and so they then stated the third debate should also be shifted a week to take place on Oct. 29. The Biden camp said no way. “We accepted the three dates — Sept. 29, Oct. 15, and Oct. 22 — in June. Trump chose today to pull out of the October 15th debate. Trump's erratic behavior does not allow him to rewrite the calendar, and pick new dates of his choosing.” During all of this back and forth, Biden accepted an invitation from ABC News to hold a town hall in Philadelphia on October 15 (since it appears the debate on that day won't take place). As a reminder, all these [pronouncements](#) happened between sunrise and sunset on Thursday. As of Friday morning, [it is still unclear](#) if there will be another presidential debate.

Polls.

Presidential. Polls continue to look positive for Vice President Biden, and not good for President Trump, but the race remains within the margin of error rate in many key battleground states. Many pollsters talk about a candidate reaching 50% as a “magic number” that shows a high chance of winning the election. In an average of national polls, Joe Biden is currently at 52%, with some polls showing him as high as 57%. On Wednesday, Quinnipiac, who also [had](#) Clinton at the “magic” 50 percent rate in 2016, released polls for Pennsylvania, Florida, and Iowa – Biden has least 50% in each poll and leads by 13, 11, and 5 points respectively. While polls are snapshots with some margin of error, the bottom line is that Biden holds a slightly [stronger lead](#) on both a national level and on a state-by-state basis than candidate Hillary Clinton did at this point in 2016.

Senate. Regarding control of the Senate, there continues to be conventional wisdom that there is a solid chance that the Democrats will pick up enough Senate seats to take control of the chamber, even as several races are still close enough that it could go either way depending on any new news that breaks. For example, [this week in North Carolina](#), Cal Cunningham, the Democratic Senate candidate, was accused of an [extramarital affair](#) after it was reported he sent romantic text messages to a woman who later confirmed the intimate relationship. The U.S. Army Reserve Command confirmed Wednesday it is investigating Cunningham, a lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Army Reserve, under provisions of the Uniform Code of Military Justice for adultery. Cunningham has been leading in the polls, and it's not yet clear how either of these events will affect the race. The incumbent, Sen. Tillis, recently tested positive for Covid-19. And in Maine, it seems more and more likely that Sen. Susan Collins will lose her bid for reelection (more on that race in this [Politico podcast](#)).

Election night calls. There has been a great deal of coverage on what might happen if states are not able to call winners on the evening of November 3, due mostly to the large number of mail-in absentee ballots. Different states have different rules about when absentee ballots may be counted. For example, Pennsylvania does not count absentee ballots until Election Day, but they do start counting them early that morning. Florida and North Carolina count their absentee ballots in advance, which means that, barring any major events on Election Day, they should be able to report the vote count that night. That fact is important, because if Biden wins both Florida and North Carolina, there isn't much of a path for President Trump to win the electoral college. There is still a chance that we won't know the winner by that night, but there's just as much of a chance that we will.

Potential Biden administration. After Vice President Pence and Senator Harris [spurred over climate change](#) in Wednesday night's debate, we learned that a Biden administration is considering creating a [special White House office on climate change](#) led by former Secretary of State John Kerry, Washington Gov. Jay Inslee, or President Bill Clinton's chief of staff John Podesta. On Friday, [Bloomberg](#) reported that the Biden campaign is considering retiring Sen. Tom Udall (D-NM) as Joe Biden's top pick to lead the Interior Department if he wins the election in November. Other contenders for the role who have received praise from environmental groups include Reps. Deb Haaland (D-NM) and Raul Grijalva (D-AZ).

Media roundup of election stories:

Roll Call: [Georgia election to fill Rep. John Lewis' term goes to runoff](#)

The Washington Post: [New Justice Dept. election fraud guidance could allow boosting of Trump's exaggerated claims, legal observers say](#)

Politico: [A wave of polls paints a dire picture for Trump](#)

CNBC: [Trump has dropped TV ad spending in some key states — but he's still pouring money into Facebook](#)

Ars Technica: [Facebook to pause all political advertising—after the election](#)

The Detroit News: [Feds say they thwarted militia plot to kidnap Whitmer](#)

The Hill: [House Democrat accuses Ratcliffe of politicizing election security intelligence](#)

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 will keep it updated throughout the campaign season, and 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

We mentioned the DefenseOne event with Vice Commander of Space Operations Lt. General David “DT” Thompson last week. You can now listen to the whole event [here](#).

And now for some award-winning news...

On Tuesday, the [Nobel Prize in physics](#) was awarded to American astrophysicist Andrea Ghez, German astrophysicist Reinhard Genzel, and British mathematical physicist Roger Penrose for their work in black hole physics. Ghez and Genzel were honored for their observational work, while Penrose was honored for theoretical work (a prize which would likely have been shared with Stephen Hawking if he were still alive – the academy does not award prizes posthumously). Ghez is fourth woman ever to be awarded a physics Nobel. A professor at the University of California at Los Angeles, she said, “I take very seriously the responsibility of being the fourth woman to win the Nobel Prize. I hope I can inspire other young women into the field. It’s a field that has so many pleasures, and if you’re passionate about the science, there’s so much to be done.” And on Wednesday, the [Nobel Prize in chemistry](#) was awarded to American biochemist Jennifer A. Doudna and French microbiologist Emmanuelle Charpentier for their work developing the revolutionary gene-editing tool CRISPR-Cas9. It’s the first time the chemistry Nobel has been jointly awarded to two women. Only seven women, including Doudna and Charpentier, have won the Nobel in chemistry.

Upcoming conferences and other events of interest

- 10/12 to 10/14, virtual International Astronautical Congress (more info [here](#))
- 10/13 to 10/15, Planet Labs Explore 2020 Virtual Conference (more [here](#))
- 10/15, Second presidential debate in Miami, FL; Moderator: Steve Scully, CSPAN
- 10/22, Third presidential debate in Nashville, TN; Moderator: Kristen Welker, NBC News
- 10/26 to 10/28, [2020 AMS Washington Forum](#) (live virtual format)
- 10/26 to 10/28, 2020 AAS von Braun Memorial Symposium (live virtual format) (more info [here](#))
- 11/3 – election day
- 11/16 to 11/19, Ascend, hosted by AIAA (live virtual format, more info [here](#))
- 11/17 to 11/20, Air and Industry Impact Week virtual event (more info [here](#))
- 12/2 to 12/3, Space Resiliency Summit, Alexandria, VA (in-person event, more info [here](#))
- 1/31/21 to 2/4/21, AAS/AIAA Space Flight Mechanics Meeting, Charlotte, NC (more info [here](#))
- 1/10/21 to 1/14/21, American Meteorological Society 101st Annual Meeting (registration 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

Jul. 13, *Center for New American Security*: [Sharpening the U.S. Military's Edge: Critical Steps for the Next Administration](#)

Aug. 10, *Center for New American Security*: [Next Generation Defense Strategy: Space](#)

Sept. 29, *Aviation Week Network*: [Opinion: Rules For Space Warfare](#)

Sept. 29, *Defense Daily*: [Pentagon Publishes Interim Rule For New CMMC Cyber Security Contracting Standards](#)

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