

Congressional Schedule. Both the Senate and House are in session. (*More below.*)

2020 Election and Transition

While there are a handful of states still in the process of certifying the election outcome, all the states in which President Trump's campaign has tried to overturn or prevent the official certification of the results have certified Joe Biden as the winner. Last week, even as the president called the leaders of the Michigan legislature to the White House for a meeting and amid some last-minute drama with the state canvassing board, Michigan certified its election results. The Trump campaign paid for a recount in two Wisconsin counties, which was completed on Nov. 29 and confirmed that Biden [won the state](#) by over 20,000 votes (Biden's lead actually increased by 87 votes). Georgia completed their second recount, and once again affirmed that Biden won the state.

Challenges to the outcome. So far, the Trump campaign has offered 42 court challenges related to the election. They've lost 41 of those challenges (the one win was related to the time voters could cure, or fix, mailed in ballots). On Thursday, the Wisconsin Supreme Court declined to hear a challenge to the election results, and the Pennsylvania Supreme Court unanimously denied a request to stay its dismissal of a lawsuit seeking to overturn Biden's victory there. Attorney General Bill Barr also said publicly this week that he has "not seen fraud on a scale that could have effected a different outcome in the election." However, many Republicans continue to call the election undecided, including House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy, who responded to a reporter's policy question by saying "Let's wait until who's sworn in, and we can discuss that."

Rep. Mo Brooks (R-AL) told Politico that he plans to challenge the Electoral College votes on Jan. 6, when Congress certifies the election, and said that he has had "indirect communication" with some Senators about joining him. If one representative and one Senator each challenge the results, it will force a deliberation and vote in each chamber. [And then what will happens is](#) a vote will be taken to certify each state's slate of electors, meaning challengers can force delays. Even if they can force delays, the outcome in the House is certain since the Democrats control the chamber. On Jan. 6, the Senate will be 51-48 (Georgia Senator David Purdue's term ends on Jan. 3, and although the run-off election in Georgia is on Jan. 5, the election results won't be final by the time the next Congress is seated) so it's possible (but not likely) that the Senate would not certify the electors. It's not clear what happens in that case.

Georgia runoffs. While most government agencies are careful to avoid announcing any decisions that could look political right before an election, the Air Force announced last week that Savannah, Georgia, would be home to new C-130J transport planes. Sen. David Purdue, one of the Republicans currently competing for a Georgia Senate seat in the January runoff, is a current member of the Senate Armed Services Committee. In a press release announcing the basing move, he said he is: "making sure our women and men in uniform always have the tools they need." House Armed Services Committee Chair Adam Smith called the decision a political move. "The Air Force has traditionally avoided making basing announcements near an election so as not to be accused of playing politics with force structure decisions. In this instance, the timing and decision to include Savannah, GA in the announcement, when Georgia is focused on Senate runoff elections, raises questions about the Secretary's motives," Smith said in a statement. President Trump is planning to campaign in Georgia on Saturday for the Republican candidates.

Transition to the new administration. Even while continuing to offer court challenges, the White House has started the transfer of power. Chief of Staff Mark Meadows instructed White House staff to only speak with the Biden transition team if they had express permission to do so. And while [Meadows said](#) that the administration “will comply with all actions needed to ensure the smooth transfer of power” he also said: “Our work here is not finished ... I am confident that each of you will represent and preserve the Executive Office of the President as we continue on.” On Nov. 23, GSA administrator Emily Murphy signed the letter of ascertainment officially beginning the transition to President-elect Biden, allowing his transition team access to funds and permission to coordinate with agency officials.

Some of the Agency Review Teams have added a few more people, including paid staff now that they have access to government transition funding. Here are our updated lists for the [Intelligence Community](#) and [Department of Defense](#) teams, and you can also find memos regarding the teams for [Office of Management and Budget](#), [National Security Council](#), [Department of Commerce](#), [Department of Transportation](#), and [NASA](#).

Each agency is also naming an official point person for the outgoing administration to oversee the transition. At the Pentagon, Kash Patel, one of the officials installed after the White House purged Pentagon senior leadership, is heading up the Pentagon transition from the current administration side. Tom Muir, the Washington Headquarters Services director, will [manage the day-to-day work](#) of the transition team as the Defense Department transition task force lead and the senior career executive for transition.

Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, is [planning to stay on](#) in that role in the Biden administration. He met this week by telecon with the Biden team and has spoken several times with Ronald Klain, Biden’s chief of staff, and on Thursday, [Biden asked Fauci](#) to serve as his chief medical expert in addition to his current role. Biden also told [CNN’s Jake Tapper](#) that on Inauguration Day he will be “going to ask the public for 100 days to mask — just 100 days to mask. Not forever — 100 days.”

The Biden-Harris team starts to take shape. The Biden transition team has started to announce nominees for key positions in the administration. It is possible that some of these positions will be confirmed quickly by the Senate. Democrats in the Senate are already pushing for confirmation hearings to be held between the first day of the new (117th) Congress and the inauguration on Jan. 20, so that floor votes can be taken to confirm nominees as soon as Biden is sworn in. Moving this quickly is not a new thing: Several Trump appointees had hearings prior to his inauguration and were confirmed on or shortly after the inauguration including Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, Defense Secretary James Mattis, and DHS Secretary John Kelly. And six of Obama’s appointees were confirmed on Jan. 20, 2009, while seven of Bush 43’s appointees were confirmed on Jan. 20, 2001. Here is the current list of individuals named so far that will require Senate confirmation:

- Antony Blinken, Secretary of State
- Alejandro Mayorkas, Secretary of Homeland Security
- Avril Haines, Director of National Intelligence
- Linda Thomas-Greenfield, United States Ambassador to the United Nations
- Jake Sullivan, National Security Advisor
- John Kerry, Special Presidential Envoy for Climate
- Janet Yellen, Secretary of the Treasury
- Neera Tanden, Director of the Office of Management and Budget
- Wally Adeyemo, Deputy Secretary of the Treasury
- Cecilia Rouse, Chair of the Council of Economic Advisors
- Jared Bernstein, Member of the Council of Economic Advisors
- Heather Boushey, Member of the Council of Economic Advisors
- Brian Deese, Director of the National Economic Council



While most of these nominees have received little pushback, some Republicans have protested Tanden for OMB, complaining about her social media posts. Biden [defended his choice](#) saying if social media attacks were disqualifying then, “That disqualifies almost every Republican Senator and 90 percent of the administration.” After noting her qualifications, Biden added, “Yeah, I think they’re going to pick a couple of people just to fight [over] no matter what.”

Biden also met with Michèle Flournoy this week in a formal interview for the position of secretary of defense. Flournoy is the leading candidate for the job, but there is [some pressure on Biden](#) to choose former DHS Secretary Jeh Johnson instead. And Reps. Anthony Brown of Maryland and Marc Veasey of Texas, both members of the Congressional Black Caucus, [threw their support](#) behind Michèle Flournoy to be the next defense secretary and the first women to hold the post.

Other [positions in the administration](#) are being filled as well. The White House communications team will include: Kate Bedingfield, White House communications director; Jen Psaki, White House press secretary; Pili Tobar, White House deputy communications director; and Karine Jean-Pierre, principal deputy press secretary. Louisa Terrell will serve as the director of the White House Office of Legislative Affairs, and Reema Dodin and Shuwanza Goff will both serve as deputy directors for that office. Vice President-elect Harris has also named staff members, including Hartina Flournoy as her chief of staff, Symone Sanders as senior adviser and chief spokesperson, and Ashley Etienne as communications director.

Velocity is tracking the latest updates to potential candidates for senior positions in the Biden-Harris Administration [here](#). *(This is a live document and will be kept updated.)*

Media roundup of new administration policy stories:

Space News: [From the moon to the Earth: How the Biden administration might reshape NASA](#)

Space News: [Biden likely to stay course on Space Force and defense investments](#)

National Review: [How Will Joe Biden Handle Outer Space?](#)

Defense One: [Biden Team Highlights Cybersecurity With First Cabinet Picks](#)

Defense One: [Tapping Flournoy as SecDef Would Be a Really Big Deal](#)

Secure World Foundation: [Space Policy and Sustainability Issue Briefing for the Biden Administration](#)

2020 Election tracking. Velocity continues to update their 2020 election update ([available here](#)) with details about the 2020 Senate, House, and Presidential races. This is a living document, and we will keep it updated until the last race is called.

U.S. Economic Outlook

Weekly numbers and long-term outlook. [712,000 people applied for unemployment benefits](#) for the first-time last week, which is a decrease after two weeks in a row where claims were higher. However, [November’s job gains](#) fell short of predictions, according to ADP, with businesses adding only 245,000 workers, as compared to 610,000 jobs added the month prior. Also, 400,000 people dropped out of the labor force last month, and America has 9.8 million fewer jobs than in February. The GAO released a report this week that called the [weekly unemployment statistics deeply flawed](#) because of backlogs and inconsistent reporting by overwhelmed state unemployment agencies.

In an acknowledgement that things aren’t going back to normal quickly even after vaccines start distribution, [Warner Brothers](#) announced this week that all 17 of their films scheduled to be released in 2021, including

Dune and *The Matrix 4*, will go live on HBO Max on the same day they are released in theaters (a plan they'd already announced for *Wonder Woman 1984*, which is being released on Dec. 25). The studio said that this move is only due to the pandemic, but if other studios (especially Disney/Marvel) follow suit, we're likely to see a more lasting change in the entertainment industry in the U.S.

Coronavirus government operations update

National perspective. As of Friday afternoon, the number of confirmed cases in the U.S. [is at least 14,188,000 with at least 276,000 deaths](#). The truth about Covid and human behavior this past week, according to the [Associated Press](#), "Americans could not resist the urge to gather for Thanksgiving, driving only slightly less than a year ago and largely ignoring the pleas of public health experts." This does not bode well for the Christmas holiday season and early January. Great Britain granted emergency authorization for the Pfizer vaccine this week, though Dr. Fauci cautioned that the U.S. was being more cautious. He told Fox News, "The U.K. did not do it as carefully, they got a couple of days ahead. I don't think that makes much difference. We'll be there very soon." The Federal Drug Administration is scheduled to discuss approval of the [Pfizer vaccine on Dec. 10](#), after going through a process of reanalyzing all of the company's data and talking to independent experts. On Thursday, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [approved](#) a set of recommendations for initial distribution of the vaccine, saying that healthcare workers and residents of long-term care facilities should be first in line. There are still questions around manufacturing and distribution of the vaccine. Right now, the CDC expects between [5 million and 10 million doses](#) to become available each week for the first few months, if both current vaccine candidates are approved, while manufacturers increase their capacity to make the vaccine. Former presidents Clinton, Bush, and Obama all offered to take the [vaccine on camera](#) to help promote the safety and effectiveness and encourage people to get the vaccine.

Washington metro area. Overall coronavirus cases in [D.C., Maryland, and Virginia topped 479,000 by Friday afternoon, with at least 9,000 deaths](#).

Pentagon. The Pentagon, which has always remained operational, is in Phase Bravo Plus, which means a maximum of 40-percent of staff allowed on-site. Moreover, a memo was issued to all staff restricting activities to including holiday parties. The National Capital Region remains open and operational, but with restricted access and enhanced health protection measures being taken beyond the health protection measures begun under earlier this year. 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. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Mark Milley, noted in a Brookings event earlier this week, the Pentagon remains fully operational and focused supporting Covid efforts.

NASA. Most of NASA's facilities are at Stage 3 of its pandemic response plan with mandatory telework for most workers. Johnson Space Center and Michoud Assembly Facility are at Stage 2, where employees who must be on site to work are allowed to return.

The White House. The White House remains open for operations. The White House has also announced plans holiday parties, including a congressional ball on Dec. 10, to all be inside and, according to Axios, the invitations do not include any guidance for safety protocols, but a spokesperson for the White House noted masks will be available and social distancing encouraged. Speaking of Christmas and the White House, you can see a virtual tour of the decorations [here](#). Every year hundreds of volunteers decorate the historic house with guidance from the First Lady.

Congress. Access to the congressional office buildings and capitol complex continues to be extremely limited, open only to Members, congressional staff, and credentialed press. More members have Congress have tested positive for the coronavirus, including Reps. Ted Budd (R-NC), Rick Allen (R-GA), Joe Courtney (D-CT), Bryan Steil (R-WI), and Sens. Rick Scott (R-FL), and Kelly Loeffler (R-GA). This week, the House of Representatives Attending Physician issued a memo with guidelines on travel and testing (*read a copy of the memo [here](#)*), including a warning not to attend “dinner, receptions, or restaurant gatherings outside of your family unit” and, if eating or drinking in public, not to sit at a table without a mask for a prolonged period. However, we also expect holiday parties to commence in congressional offices.

There are also discussions happening about how to [open the 117th Congress](#) and swear in new members in January. The House, which has been operating under rules that allow proxy voting, will also need to pass a new rules package that allows for proxy votes, but Members will need to be present to take that vote.

Congressional activities

While a few days ago, it looked like we would have a government funding deal and no coronavirus relief package before the holidays, now it is looking like it could be the opposite. And, the President is still promising to veto the NDAA in the meantime. Also, the House Majority Leader has released the 2021 House legislative calendar, which you can find [here](#). More below.

New Senator. Retired Navy Captain and astronaut Mark Kelly is now Senator Mark Kelly (D-AZ). Kelly was sworn in at noon on Wednesday after winning the Nov. 3 election to fill the rest of the late Sen. John McCain’s term. Kelly won the seat from Republican Martha McSally, shifting the balance of the Senate to 52-48 for the final weeks of the Congress.

New Congress, new Appropriations committee. The new chair of the House Appropriations Committee is Rep. Rosa DeLauro (D-CT). She was given the recommendation of the House Democratic Steering Committee, who makes recommendations for members’ committee slots, over Reps. Debbie Wasserman Schultz (D-FL) and Marcy Kaptur (D-OH). When she takes control of the committee early next year, it’s expected that they will bring back earmarks. As a reminder, an earmark is a provision inserted into a discretionary spending appropriations bill that directs funds to a specific recipient while circumventing the merit-based or competitive funds allocation process. Majority Leader [Steny Hoyer said](#), “I expect that the House will pursue safe, transparent, and accountable Congressionally-directed spending in the next Congress.” Earmarks have been banned since 2011. Earmarks are a way for Members to direct funding to their district, but they’re also a way for Members to make deals by supporting other Members’ earmarks. To Congress, it’s a way to assert power over spending by telling government agencies specifically where they can and cannot spend money, not just allocating funding by program. To agencies, it can be a roadblock to spending funds the way they see best. From a congressional perspective, earmarks have never gone away, as many executive agencies continued to direct funding to pet projects even while Members of Congress – who possess the constitutional power of the purse – were not allowed the same control for a period of time. It’s not clear if Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell will [follow](#) suit. (For more on what happens if the ban on earmarks is lifted, the Congressional Research Service has a FAQ [here](#).)

Other leadership races. Sen. Dick Durbin (D-IL) was just re-elected as minority whip and is also still the ranking member on the Senate Appropriations defense subcommittee, but [he also wants to succeed](#) Sen. Dianne Feinstein as the top Democrat on the Senate Judiciary Committee in the next congress. According to seniority, the next in line for Feinstein’s position is Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI) and progressives are pushing for him instead of Durbin. While there is no prohibition against Senators holding key leadership positions and ranking member spots, some Senators are asking if that’s too much for one Senator to take on. Several Democrats have

put forth [proposals](#) to limit the number of leadership positions one Senator could hold and others have pushed for term limits, similar to the six-year limits imposed by the GOP on its committee leaders.

Democrats also chose Rep. Rosa DeLauro (D-CT) to chair the House Appropriations Committee, Rep. Gregory Meeks (D-NY) to chair the House Foreign Affairs Committee, and Rep. David Scott (D-GA) to chair the House Agriculture Committee. They also chose Rep. Sean Patrick Maloney (D-NY) as the next Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee chairman. [Rep. Eddie Bernice Johnson \(D-TX\) will return as chairwoman of the House Science Committee](#) in the next Congress, and [Rep. Frank Lucas \(R-OK\) will return as ranking member](#) of the committee.

Speaking of ranking members, Republicans picked also Rep. Mike Rogers (R-AL) for House Armed Services Committee and Rep. Jason Smith (R-MO) for the House Budget Committee. Rogers will fill the ranking member post being vacated by Rep. Mac Thornberry, R-Texas, who is retiring at the end of this term after 25 years in Congress and for whom this year's annual Pentagon policy bill, or the National Defense Authorization Act, is named. Of Rogers, House Republican leader Rep. Kevin McCarthy of California stated, "His vision to modernize our military and take on China will put our service members and country in a better position over these crucial next few years. ... He is a proven leader who has been advocating on behalf of these bases for nearly two decades, and he is ready to keep fighting now as a leader of the committee representing and equipping America's heroes." A full list of all of the ranking members approved earlier this week by the House Republican Conference upon recommendations from the House Republican Steering Committee is available [here](#).

Pandemic relief. A bipartisan group of Senators released a framework this week for a pandemic relief bill providing \$908 billion in funding, with \$160 billion to state and local governments, \$180 billion in additional unemployment insurance, \$288 billion in new funding for the Paycheck Protection Program, and funding increases for vaccine development and distribution, testing, schools and sectors that have been hammered by COVID-19, among other things. It would also shield businesses from lawsuits related to the coronavirus for a limited time while states developed their own liability statutes. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi [spoke on Thursday](#), and both have said they want to pass a relief bill before Christmas. Moderate Republican Senators also met with McConnell to present the new plan, though there is no commitment to bringing that specific package up for a vote on the Senate floor. Senate Republicans are [putting the squeeze on McConnell](#), arguing he should agree to a deal even if it means accepting a price tag higher than the \$500 billion target he has set for a relief package. It's not clear if the relief package will be considered as a standalone bill or be attached to the omnibus spending bill. Some GOP Senators had said that it was unlikely to be attached to the appropriations omnibus, but on Tuesday McConnell said that any relief spending would like be attached to the omnibus. Adding to the momentum, President Trump [has also indicated](#) to reporters that he will support the bill if it reaches his desk. And, Thursday evening, president-elect Biden [indicated](#) his support for the package: "That would be a good start. It's not enough."

FY2021 NDAA. The conference process for the NDAA is [complete](#) and the [final conference report](#) and [joint explanatory statement](#) were released on Thursday evening. The bill authorizes \$635.5 billion for the base Pentagon budget and \$26.6 billion for nuclear programs under the Energy Department. Another \$69 billion goes toward the war-related Overseas Contingency Operations account. It is expected that the bill will be taken up by both chambers sometime early next week. On Wednesday, the Senate on Wednesday morning agreed to [officially proceed to conference](#) by unanimous consent, a step required for the bill to be brought up for a vote and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi is ready to bring the bill to the floor. One of the key issues appears to have a compromise, with the [House agreeing to support Senate language](#) to task an independent commission with recommending the removal of names, symbols and monuments from military assets that honor the Confederacy or people who served in it. The panel's recommendations must be implemented within three years. The bill also

stripped a provision that was in the Senate version to set aside at least \$10 million to prepare for a resumption of live nuclear tests, which the U.S. has not conducted in three decades. But it also left out a House provision that would bar any funds from being used for the purpose. The NDAA also does not require the Space Force to use Navy ranks, instead allowing the new service to decide for itself what officers and enlisted personnel should be designated. The bill does urge Space Force leaders to consider “all of the military services historic rank structures.”

As late as [Thursday night](#), President Trump threatened to veto the legislation, this time if lawmakers did not include a repeal of the online shield law, aka Section 230, in the bill. (As a reminder, the White House offered previously to trade a Section 230 repeal for the renaming of military bases, which did not get any traction on the Hill.) Since a provision regarding the renaming of military bases was included, and a provision regarding section 230 was not included, it appears Congress is ready to call the president’s bluff, with lawmakers from both sides of the aisle calling for the bill to be passed. Senate Armed Services Chair Jim Inhofe (R-OK) stated that Section 230 has “nothing to with the military... You can’t do it in this bill. That’s not a part of the bill.” Sen. Jack Reed (D-RI), the ranking member on the Senate Armed Services Committee, agreed. “At this last minute, this sudden threat on an item that’s not even part of a defense bill... I don’t think we could do it in a thoughtful, logical way at all,” he said. Rep. Mac Thornberry (R-TX), the ranking member on the House Armed Services Committee, called for passage of the bill without any major changes, [saying](#), “The purpose of the bill has always been to support our troops and to protect American national security. Disagreements on all other issues have been put aside. This year should be no different.”

Some [legislation](#) that is apparently getting attached to the NDAA is an overhaul of financial crime safeguards which will require millions of business entities to reveal their true owners to the federal government. The legislation is designed to prevent the use of anonymous shell companies by drug traffickers, terrorists and foreign adversaries. The legislation has bipartisan and administration support. [Here is our summary](#) of provisions of interest to our clients in the NDAA conference report.

Progress on FY2021 Appropriations. There is a week left before government funding runs out via current continuing resolution, and appropriators are working to make sure there isn’t a government shutdown, though at this point there is apparently discussion that another short-term continuing resolution may be needed. House and Senate appropriators have struck a [deal on the total funding level](#) for each of the 12 spending bills, which will be rolled into one omnibus bill. The plan is to keep those numbers — known as 302(b)s — under wraps until the omnibus is finalized and has agreement in both chambers. However, Senate Appropriations Committee Chairman Richard Shelby (R-AL) [said on Tuesday](#) if negotiators haven’t reached a deal by Dec. 9, they’ll need to do a CR. If everyone feels like they’re close to a deal, the CR could be for just a few days. Shelby also predicted that lawmakers would be in town for another couple of weeks, and when the appropriations chair says it’s going to take more time, there’s a good chance that it’s going to take more time. Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-VT), the ranking Democrat on the Senate Appropriations Committee, is not happy with the delay. “I’m frustrated. My staff and I worked all through Thanksgiving, we worked all last weekend, we’re working all this week. We’re ready to go,” he said. The Office of Management and Budget is objecting to proposed cuts in the defense budget, including cuts to nuclear weapons spending and missile defense (read the letter from OMB director Russ Vought [here](#)).

While appropriators in both chambers remain optimistic that they’ll finish their work before the holidays, Republicans and Democrats are still swapping offers and arguing over details, kicking some of the most difficult items up to congressional leaders. For example, according to [Politico](#), a House Democratic aide close to the talks said Republicans want to scrub any mentions of Covid-19 from the omnibus package entirely. Earlier this year, House Democrats added coronavirus relief to their slate of fiscal 2021 appropriations bills, while Senate Republicans have insisted that pandemic aid remain totally separate from annual appropriations

measures. While some areas of the budget are close to being finalized, border barrier funding and veterans health care are also some of the remaining sticking points. There is also still the question of whether or not President Trump will sign either a continuing resolution or the omnibus bill.

Here is our updated [tracking table](#) with line-by-line funding numbers for accounts of interest, including the recently released Senate Appropriations Committee numbers. If there is a program or line that is missing from our table, let us know and we will add it.

FY2021 Intelligence Authorization. Earlier this week, the intelligence authorization legislation ran into some significant challenges. The plan had been for the bill to be attached to the NDAA. The Senate had it on their version of the NDAA, but the House did not, so the NDAA could have moved forward with – or without – the intelligence authorization bill attached. Based on the text of the FY2021 NDAA, that came out last night, it appears the intelligence authorization bill *will not* move forward with NDAA this year. One of the issues is that California Rep. [Devin Nunes objected](#) to some of the provisions in the intelligence authorization bill as partisan attacks on the Trump administration, including language on election security and protecting whistleblowers and inspectors general. With HPSCI Ranking Member Nunes refusing to support his own committee’s bill, it appears the bill expires and the intelligence community will not be authorized for FY2021 – until or unless Congress moves another bill next Congress. The intelligence committees could elect to consider a multi-year authorization bill next year, as they have in years past.

NASA Authorization. There’s nothing definite on the House Science Committee version of the [NASA authorization bill](#) (the Senate Commerce Committee marked up and reported out [its version of the bill](#) in November 2019), but it doesn’t look good for either version of the bill. The Senate Commerce Committee staff are still optimistic that they will get floor time for their bill during the remainder of this year, though without a House-passed bill, both bills will expire at the end of this year, and the committees will have to go back to the drawing board in January.

Personnel changes

On Thursday, Alyssa Farah resigned as White House communications director. She was with the Trump administration for three years.

FCC Chair Ajit Pai is [stepping down](#) from his position on the commission effective January 20. If the Senate confirms Nathan Simington before the end of the year, that will leave the commission with two Democrats and two Republicans. On Wednesday, the Senate Commerce Committee [advanced](#) Simington’s nomination, with Democrats objecting after information was released showing that Simington sought the help of Fox News host Laura Ingraham in pressuring the FCC to make changes to Section 230. Once he takes office, President Biden can name one of the two Democrats on the commission as acting chair until he nominates a permanent leader for the group.

The Senate Commerce Committee also voted to advance Greg Autry’s nomination as chief financial officer for NASA with a party line vote (14-12). Ranking Member Maria Cantwell specifically opposed the nomination because Autry will only have the job until Jan. 20 when President-elect Biden takes office (*read our notes from the session including Simington and Autry [here](#)*).

On Thursday, the Senate [confirmed Christopher Waller](#) to the Federal Reserve Board of Governors with a vote of 48 to 47. The Senate likely will not vote again on the confirmation of Judy Shelton. As a reminder, her confirmation was defeated before Thanksgiving. Though Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell is able to bring the vote up again, Senate Majority Whip John Thune said this week that another vote is “unlikely.”

In non-government personnel news, Karina Drees, who has been the CEO and General Manager of the Mojave Air & Space Port, is becoming the president of the Commercial Spaceflight Federation effecting Jan. 4.

The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities has hired Sharon Parrott to be the organization's president, succeeding founder Robert Greenstein as of Jan. 1. Parrott is current the senior vice president for federal policy and program development at the organization.

National security update

Defense Business Board members let go. On Friday afternoon, the White House [removed](#) nine members of the Pentagon's Defense Business Board on Friday and installed people loyal to President Donald Trump in their place, including Corey Lewandowski, David Bossie, Henry Dreifus, Robert McMahon, Cory Mills, Bill Bruner, Christopher Shank, Joseph Schmidt, Keary Miller Allen Weh and Earl Matthews. Members removed from the board received a brief email from Joshua Whitehouse, the White House liaison to the Department of Defense, that simply said, "if you are receiving this e-mail, your membership on the Defense Business Board has expired or is coming to an end." The board members who were let go are Michael Bayer. Arnold Punaro, Atul Vashistha, John O'Connor, David Venlet, Paul Dolan, Scott Dorn, David Walker and David Van Slyke. A statement by the Pentagon said the members' terms had expired. Yet three former board members who spoke to *Politico* said their tours were not close to ending.

U.S. Withdraws from Open Skies Treaty. On Nov. 22, the U.S. [formally withdrew](#) from the Open Skies Treaty (the treaty allows the 34 member countries to conduct short notice, unarmed, reconnaissance flights over the other countries to collect data on their military forces and activities). President Trump gave notice of the plan to withdraw six months ago, saying that Russian government had violated the treaty.

CMMC takes effect. The Cybersecurity Maturity Model Certification (CMMC) [went into effect](#) on Tuesday, meaning defense contractors must begin to meet a higher cybersecurity standard. The first step is for companies to self-report on how they are implementing a National Institute of Standards and Technology requirement governing Controlled Unclassified Information. Companies that score between 80 and 110 will be audited by the Defense Contracting and Management Agency (110 is the highest score – the audit is to ensure that companies aren't embellishing their compliance). Eventually, their CMMC status will affect the ability of contractors to bid on defense contracts.

AFRL, Space Force partner on experimental lunar satellite. The Space Force and the Air Force Research Laboratory, which supports research and development efforts for both the Air Force and Space Force, are working together to develop the [Defense Deep Space Sentinel](#) (D2S2) lunar satellite that will "demonstrate extreme mobility of small satellites via advanced electric propulsion and compact power system technologies that are foundational for a variety of deep space missions, including domain awareness, rendezvous/proximity operations, space servicing, space object removal and recovery, and other applications in defensive space operations." The satellite will carry a camera and will be able to change orbits.

Events. Catching up on two weeks-worth of events: The House Armed Services Committee discussed the U.S. presence in Afghanistan (*read our notes [here](#)*). Brookings talked with Gen. Mark Miley (*our summary is [here](#)*) and looked at "forever wars" for the incoming administration (*our notes are [here](#)*). RAND hosted the West Coast Aerospace Forum (*read our notes from several of the panels [here](#)*). The Hudson Institute talked with Ellen Lord about great power competition (*our summary is [here](#)*).

Civil and commercial update

Future of National Space Council. Members of Biden’s transition team held a series of meetings this week with commercial space industry leaders to get their take on the National Space Council. The panel, which President Donald Trump revived in 2017, has been behind a series of space policy directives during the Trump administration. According to [Politico](#), the transition team has also asked NASA Administrator Jim Bridenstine about his views on how useful the panel is, adding that Bridenstine is also “a believer” in the committee’s value. President-elect Biden has yet to say whether he will keep the panel, which is historically led by the vice president. The National Space Council [will meet next Wednesday](#) at Kennedy Space Center in Florida, and will reportedly unveil a final new space policy document, the eighth such meeting and likely final time under Vice President Mike Pence.

NASA launches a new science mission. On Nov. 21, SpaceX and NASA [launched](#) a joint U.S.-European satellite that will track global sea levels for the next five years. The satellite is named after Michael Freilich, the former director of NASA's Earth Science Division who passed away in August of this year.

NOAA contracts. On Nov. 20, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration awarded its first [contracts to purchase radio occultation data](#) from commercial satellite operators GeoOptics and Spire Global. The two-year indefinite delivery-indefinite quantity contracts have a total ceiling of \$23 million. The agency has been working for several years on the Commercial Weather Data Pilot where private companies have been providing radio occultation data. A June report released by NOAA concluded that, “the commercial sector is capable of providing the quality of data needed to help support NOAA’s operational weather forecasting needs.”

GAO and 5G security concerns. On Tuesday, the Government Accountability Office released a [report](#) recommending that cybersecurity standards be created to ensure a safe 5G network as its being built. The report says, “5G networks introduce new modes of cyberattack and expand the potential points of attack,” and that “5G networks will exacerbate existing privacy concerns ... Without a baseline set of security requirements the implementation of network security practices is likely to be piecemeal and inconsistent.”

Orion equipment failure could cause a delay in '21 launch. Engineers at NASA and Lockheed Martin, the prime contractor on the Orion crew capsule, are working to fix a problem with a component inside one of the [spacecraft’s power and data units](#). This Orion capsule is scheduled to launch in November of next year on the uncrewed Artemis 1 mission. Because this component is a redundant capability, NASA could decide to fly the mission as is, while working to determine the source of the problem for future missions. If NASA decided it was necessary to replace the component, it could take up to a year, with nine months of that being needed to take the vehicle apart and put it back together.

Replacement for Arecibo capability? We mentioned in our last report that the National Science Foundation was planning to shut down the Arecibo radio telescope facility because of the risk of an uncontrolled collapse was too great to allow crews to repair the damage. On Dec. 1, that’s exactly what happened – the instrument [platform suspended above the 305-meter dish fell](#) after another cable snapped, causing major damage to the dish. Nothing can really replace Arecibo, but NASA and other science organizations will need to find ways to replace the [capability](#) to track potentially hazardous asteroids and space weather, as well as track radio phenomena and search for potentially habitable planets. NASA said that some planetary defense work can be done at the Goldstone Observatory in California, but also suggested that future planetary radar systems were more likely to be smaller dishes done in partnership with other organizations, including the Space Force who is interested in monitoring objects in cis-lunar space.

Events. The NDIA spectrum working group met last week (*our notes are [here](#)*). The U.S. Chamber of Commerce hosted a discussion on civil space cooperation (*read our summary [here](#)*). The Space Resiliency Summit was this week (*notes from day one [here](#) and day two [here](#)*).

Podcasts we love

War on the Rocks' podcast Net Assessment talks about how the Biden administration needs to rebuild relationships with the intelligence community in this episode titled "Can Biden Bring Intelligence Back?" Listen [here](#).

And now for some fun space news...

Pretty pictures from space are a joy to look at. It turns that looking at pictures of our amazing cosmos can be good for your brain and your general outlook, too. Research has shown that feeling awe when we're faced with something bigger than our individual selves helps us feel connected to other people. It's a version of the "overview effect" astronauts talk about when seeing our pale blue dot alone in the emptiness of space. [This article in The Atlantic](#) has more on this effect on our brains, and if you need a suggestion for where to go for the best in space images, look [here](#) and [here](#).

Jupiter and Saturn Align...No this is not your 2021 Fortune

A rare [celestial event](#) will take place on 21 December, the Winter Solstice, when Jupiter and Saturn will appear to align creating a "double planet" in the night sky. It's the first time since the middle ages the planets have aligned this close.

Upcoming conferences and other events of interest

- 12/7, 11:00 pm ANSI Informational Meeting: Standardization and the Commercial Space Industry (more info and registration [here](#))
- 12/8, 12:00 pm, A Conversation with Rep. Adam Smith on Nuclear Modernization and Arms Control in 2020, hosted by CSIS (more info [here](#))
- 12/8, 2 pm, Secure World Foundation, Space Policy & Sustainability: Issue Briefing for the Incoming Administration (registration [here](#))
- 12/14, SFA Interview with Lt Gen Stephen Whiting sponsored by SAIC (more info [here](#))
- 12/7-12/11, European Space Week, (more info [here](#))
- 12/16-12/17, TC Sessions Space (Registration and 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](#))
- 3/5/21 to 3/6/21, Reagan National Defense Forum, Simi Valley, CA (in person)
- 6/4/21, National Space Club's Goddard Memorial Dinner
- 7/26/21 to 7/29/21, SATELLITE 2021, Washington Convention Center, Washington, DC (new date; more info [here](#))
- 8/22/21 to 8/26/21, [36th Space Symposium – rescheduled](#) from late October 2020

What we're reading

Nov. *Via Satellite*: [Cybersecurity Influencers React to Space Policy Directive 5](#)

Nov. 18, *Aviation Week Network*: [Airborne Launch System For GBSD Enters Development](#)

Nov. 19, *Breaking Defense*: [Space Force Ponders NSSL Revamp For New Missions](#)

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Nov. 20, *Breaking Defense*: [Space Force Struggles To Shape New Acquisition Command](#)

Nox. 20, *Air Force Magazine*: [Meet New DARPA Director Victoria Coleman](#)

Nov. 20, *Air Force Magazine*: [Climate Change Will Guide How the Air Force Builds Arctic Infrastructure](#)

Nov. 20, *Defense One*: [Personality, Not Policy, Will Determine Top House Armed Services Republican](#)

Nov. 20, *Air Force Magazine*: [Space Systems Command to Stand Up Next Summer](#)

Nov. 22, *Space News*: [Space surveillance technologies a top need for U.S. military](#)

Nov. 22, *SciTechDaily*: [NASA Uses Powerful Supercomputers and AI to Map Earth's Trees, Discovers Billions of Trees in West African Drylands](#)

Nov. 23, *Associated Press*: [Trump slams global climate agreement Biden intends to rejoin](#)

Nov. 23, *Space News*: [To boost its military space business, Lockheed Martin turns to commercial players](#)

Nov. 23, *Defense One*: [IC Vets, Dem Lawmakers Applaud Selection of Haines as Intelligence Director](#)

Nov. 24, *CNN*: [Astronauts on a Mars mission will need to be 'conscientious' to work well together](#)

Nov. 24, *Via Satellite*: [Zed Factor Fellowship for Underrepresented Aerospace Professionals Launches](#)

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Nov. 24, *Nature.com*: [Hints of twisted light offer clues to dark energy's nature](#)

Nov. 24, *Bloomberg*: [Mnuchin Plans to Put \\$455 Billion Beyond Yellen's Easy Reach](#)

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Nov. 24, *Yahoo News*: [Intelligence employees vent frustrations over being forced to return to the office](#)

Nov. 24, *GAO*: [5G WIRELESS: Capabilities and Challenges for an Evolving Network](#)

Nov. 24, *Air Force Magazine*: [10 Companies Win Joint US, UK Space Pitch Day Contracts](#)

Nov. 25, *Defense Daily*: [Significant Changes to U.S. Space Force Would Need Congressional Buy-In](#)

Nov. 25, *Defense News*: [Stop the budgetary bleeding to get the Air Force we need](#)

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Nov. 25, *Air Force Magazine*: [Air Force Academy Looks to Become a Place for Space](#)

Nov. 25, *Military.com*: [Climate Change, Terrorism Top List of Challenges Facing US Military](#)

Nov. 25, *Air Force Magazine*: [New Kirtland Lab to Explore How to Build a Better Spacecraft](#)

Nov. 26, *Aviation Week Network*: [Moon Mission Lays Groundwork For Chinese Manned Landing](#)

Nov. 28, *New York Times*: [Why Was Iran's Top Nuclear Scientist Killed?](#)

Nov. 28, *New York Times*: [Assassination in Iran Could Limit Biden's Options. Was That the Goal?](#)

Nov. 28, *New York Times*: [Biden Aides' Ties to Consulting and Investment Firms Pose Ethics Test](#)

Nov. 29, *New York Times*: [Dear Joe, It's Not About Iran's Nukes Anymore](#)

Nov. 29, *Defense One*: [Biden Has Many Good Choices at SecDef](#)

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Nov. 30, *Space News*: [Report concludes former Spaceport America director violated state law](#)

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Dec. 1, *Associated Press*: [Mnuchin defends shut down of Fed emergency loan programs](#)

Dec. 2, *Breaking Defense*: [Space Force Will Boost Reliance On Commercial Sats: Gen. Raymond](#)

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Dec. 2, *Space News*: [ESA signs contract for first space debris removal mission](#)

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Dec. 3, *The Washington Post*: [Army museums have tens of thousands of artifacts. They're looking to downsize.](#)
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