



Biden meets with Republican Senators to discuss bipartisan COVID-19 relief deal

Yesterday, [President Biden and Vice President Harris met with a group of ten Republican Senators to discuss a possible bipartisan COVID-19 relief package](#). The Senators described the conversation as very productive. The President has proposed a \$1.9 trillion package, while [Republicans offered a significantly smaller \\$600 billion plan](#). Their package would scale back direct payments and unemployment benefits, and does not include aid to state and local government. It includes funding for small businesses and the opening of schools, but does not include an increase in the federal minimum wage to \$15 an hour. Despite the negotiation and the President's desire for a bipartisan package, [Senate Democrats are still making plans to pass the President's plan with his support](#) without the support of any Republicans through the budget reconciliation process, which would require only 51 votes to pass instead of 60 votes typically needed to pass legislation.

President Biden to take more executive action on immigration

President Biden is signing [Executive Orders today to create a task force to reunite migrant families separated at the U.S.-Mexico border and authorize a review of the asylum restrictions](#) imposed during the previous Administration. The task force will try to identify more than 500 children separated from family members who have yet to be located and will present proposals to the President and other federal agencies to help reunite those families. [Under the previous Administration's "zero tolerance" policy, more than 5,400 children were forcibly separated from their parents](#) at the border in 2017 and 2018 so the parents could be detained for illegal entry while their children were sent to stay in separate facilities, in foster homes, relatives, or with other families. The orders also include a review of Trump Administration policies that targeted migrants, with the hope that the new administration will ensure that Central American refugees and asylum-seekers can obtain proper legal protections when entering the country.



Senate confirms Buttigieg and Mayorkas

Earlier today, the Senate confirmed [former Mayor Pete Buttigieg as the Secretary of Transportation with a 86-13 vote](#). Buttigieg is the first openly gay person to be confirmed as a cabinet secretary. In the position, Buttigieg will promote President Biden's focus on addressing climate change and racial justice while overseeing the country's infrastructure and transportation safety. In addition, [Department of Homeland Security \(DHS\) nominee, Alejandro Mayorkas, was confirmed by a vote of 56-43](#). Mayorkas's nomination had been held up over his

support of ending construction of a wall at the Mexican border and his support of President Biden's immigration package that will provide a pathway to citizenship for over 11 million people in the country without documentation. Mayorkas was born in Cuba and will be the first Latino and immigrant to lead DHS. Tennessee Senators Marsha Blackburn and Bill Hagerty opposed both nominations. Senator Blackburn has still not supported a single Biden cabinet nomination.



Metro schools announce reopening plan starting next week

[Metro Nashville schools announced a plan to begin reopening schools starting this week.](#) Students with disabilities and special needs can return on Thursday, while preschool and elementary students have the option to return to in-person learning starting next Tuesday. Students in grades 5-9 will return the following Thursday, February 18. Starting on March 3, high school students in grades 10-12 can return to school. [According to a recent family survey, Metro schools are expecting approximately 55% of students to be in schools systemwide](#), but that varies from school to school. Schools will strictly adhere to CDC guidelines, including masks and social distancing requirements



At home COVID-19 test now available

[The first over-the-counter at-home rapid coronavirus tests will be shipped to the U.S. by the end of the month](#) after the Administration reached a \$231 million deal with an Australian manufacturer, Ellume. As part of the Department of Defense (DoD) and Health and Human Services (HHS) deal, the U.S. will fund Ellume's first manufacturing plant in the U.S., which, when completed, will produce 500,000 tests per day. The tests were created with the help of a \$30 million grant to the U.S. National Institutes of Health Rapid Acceleration of Diagnostics (NIH RADx) initiative to support innovations in clinical testing and manufacturing. The tests are done by nasal swab and have shown 96% accuracy even for people without symptoms. The test was approved by the FDA last month for people two years of age and older, with results delivered to your phone within 15 minutes. The test will cost about \$30, but the Administration is optimistic that with increased supply, the unit price should decrease. While this is the first over the counter at-home rapid test approved, more are in development.

Confirmed COVID-19 cases, deaths, vaccinations in Tennessee

Since yesterday, the [Tennessee Department of Health](#) reported 1,326 new cases, bringing the total to 729,187 confirmed COVID-19 cases statewide. There have been 9,753 deaths, an increase of 103 since yesterday. There are 1,562 people currently hospitalized with the virus. There have been 6,336,990 tests statewide, more than 9,606 since yesterday, with a 10.69%

positivity rate. As of today in [Davidson County](#), there have been 85,066 confirmed cases, and 584 total deaths.



As of yesterday, [667,031 vaccinations have been administered in Tennessee](#), which is roughly 7.03% of the state's population. Of all people vaccinated in the state, 193,096 have received a second dose.

To find out your phase and book your appointment for a vaccine visit covid19.tn.gov or covid19.nashville.gov.



Military coup in Myanmar topples democratically elected government

[Yesterday, the military in Myanmar seized power in a coup against the democratically elected government and declared a state of emergency](#) for at least the next year. The coup follows recent national elections in which the party of Aung San Suu Kyi, the current leader, won by overwhelming margins over the military-backed party. [Suu Kyi has been detained and hundreds of lawmakers have been placed under house arrest.](#) Following the coup, internet and phone access were cut off and a blackout of all other communications was imposed. A military news outlet announced that military leader is Min Aung Hlaing, who has been under U.S. sanctions due to human rights abuses and atrocities against the Rohingya Muslim community in the country. Many observers are concerned those actions will lead to wider clampdowns. The country spent 50 years under military rule until 2011. During that time, critics, activists, journalists, academics, and artists were routinely jailed and tortured. [President Biden called the coup “an assault on the country’s transition to democracy,” and threatened that the U.S. will take action, including imposing new sanctions.](#)