



**Week of 10-28-19**  
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### **Congressional Overview**

The House and Senate were in session with the impeachment inquiry into President Trump taking center stage, along with sanction legislation against Turkey's incursion into Syria against the Kurds. The Senate passed a four-bill funding minibus of agriculture, interior-environment, transportation, and commerce-justice-science. Immediately following the vote, the chamber considered a second funding minibus, which was objected by the Senate Democratic Leadership because of President Trump's plan to divert military funding to the border wall.

### **Vaping Outbreak Injuries Slowing**

Federal health officials said the outbreak of lung injuries tied to vaping may be slowing, but cautioned it was too soon to be certain and could be due to a reporting lag. As of Oct. 22, the CDC reported 1,604 confirmed and probable cases, an increase of 125 cases from the previous week, but a smaller increase in previous weeks. Deputy CDC Director Anne Schuchat cautioned that the pattern may or may not hold but was hopeful that warnings against vaping both marijuana and nicotine might be having an effect. Health officials still do not know the exact cause of the illnesses, though most of the sick and the 34 who died reported THC use. Lawmakers and public health advocates are growing impatient over a Trump administration proposal to stop the sales of flavored nicotine for e-cigarettes.

The proposed ban was first announced on Sept. 11, and at that time, FDA officials said it would be a matter of weeks for them to issue guidance to the industry on halting sales. The delay is fueling speculation that the Trump administration may consider backtracking from its plan to include mint and menthol flavors in its ban. Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL) is cautiously optimistic that a ban including menthol and mint would be in place by year's end after a phone call with HHS Secretary Alex Azar. "I appreciate Secretary Azar's personal commitment and I'm still hopeful that by the end of this year these addictive, kid-friendly flavors will be off the shelf," Durbin said.

### **Houses Passes e-Cigarette Legislation**

The House passed the "Preventing Online Sales of E-Cigarettes to Children Act" on Monday, which was sponsored by Rep. Rosa DeLauro (D-CT). The bill would bar sale or delivery to anyone under the legal age to purchase tobacco products in the state where the delivery occurs. The measure wouldn't apply to devices approved by the FDA to help end tobacco use (or for other therapeutic purposes) and is marketed and sold only for that purpose. The Senate Judiciary Committee has not yet considered companion legislation (S. 1253) sponsored by Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-CA).

### **Federal Deficit Increases for Fourth Year in a Row**

The federal government's deficit for FY 19 increased 26 percent to \$984 billion dollars. This is the fourth year in a row the deficit increased. The increase is attributed to an 8.2 percent spending increase, coupled with the impacts of the GOP's tax cut. The Congressional Budget Office estimates that the deficit will reach \$1 trillion for FY 20.

### **U.S. and China Claim to be close to Portions of Limited Trade Agreement**

The U.S. and China each released statements claiming that they are close to finalizing portions of the limited trade agreement that President Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping are aiming to sign at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit Nov. 16-17 in Chile. Last Friday, U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) Robert Lighthizer and Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin spoke with Chinese Vice Premier Liu He. Per the USTR, the three officials "made headway on specific issues and the two sides are close to finalizing some sections of the agreement." Deputy-level discussions will continue with another high-level call expected "in the near future." The two sides have reached consensus on U.S. imports of Chinese cooked poultry, a supervision system for catfish products, and lifting the Chinese ban on U.S. poultry, among other areas of agreement.

### **House Passes More Sanctions Against Turkey**

The House passed a package of new sanctions against Turkey in response to its invasion of Northern Syria. The package (H.R. 4695) was introduced by Foreign Affairs Chairman Eliot Engel (D-NY) and ranking Rep. Michael McCaul (R-TX). Members of Congress fear President Trump's decision to withdraw troops from Northern Syria will have dire consequences for U.S. national security, because it could allow the Islamic State to rebuild itself in the region. Additionally, the U.S. withdrawal has already strengthened the position of Syria's Bashar al-Assad, and consequently those of his two biggest allies: Russia and Iran. Policymakers also fear the troop withdrawal will damage America's reputation as a reliable ally.