

White House readying emergency coronavirus budget request

February 24 2020, by Andrew Taylor



In this Feb. 13, 2020 file photo, Secretary of Health and Human Services Alex Azar testifies on Capitol Hill in Washington. Democrats controlling the House wrote HHS Secretary Alex Azar earlier this month to request funds to help speed development of a coronavirus vaccine, expand laboratory capacity, and beef up screening efforts at U.S. entry points. Azar is slated to testify before the Senate Appropriations Committee on Tuesday, and the U.S. response to the outbreak is sure to be a major topic. (AP Photo/J. Scott Applewhite)

The White House is readying an urgent budget request to address the deadly coronavirus outbreak whose rapid spread is spooking financial markets and restricting international travel.

The request is still being developed but is likely to come this week, a senior administration official confirmed Monday. The Department of Health and Human Services has already tapped into an emergency infectious disease rapid response fund and is seeking to transfer more than \$130 million from other HHS accounts to combat the virus but is pressing for more.

"We need some funding here to make sure that we protect all Americans," Deputy White House Press Secretary Hogan Gidley said on Fox News. "We need to combat this, we need to make sure our people are safe and the president is always going to take action to do that."

Senators returning to Washington after a weeklong recess will receive a classified briefing Tuesday morning on the government's coronavirus response, a Senate aide said.

Among the needs is funding to reimburse the Pentagon, which is housing evacuees from China—who are required to undergo 14-day quarantines—at several [military bases](#) in California.

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In this Saturday, Feb. 22, 2020, photo, a woman wearing a protective face mask works in a weaving factory in Hangzhou in east China's Zhejiang province. Regulators on Monday promised tax cuts and other aid to help companies recover from China's virus outbreak and expressed confidence the ruling Communist Party's growth targets can be achieved despite anti-disease controls that shut down much of the economy. (Chinatopix via AP)

The White House budget office, led by Russell Vought, a stout conservative, is working with HHS to shape the request, with the agency seeking more than the White House is likely to approve. There is a receptive audience for the request on Capitol Hill, though stand-alone emergency spending bills can be tricky to pass since they are invariably a target for lawmakers seeking add-ons.



In this photo taken Saturday, Feb. 22, 2020, a chef looks out from behind a display of food products at a restaurant in Beijing, China. Regulators on Monday promised tax cuts and other aid to help companies recover from China's virus outbreak and expressed confidence the ruling Communist Party's growth targets can be achieved despite anti-disease controls that shut down much of the economy. (AP Photo/Ng Han Guan)

The quickly spreading virus has slammed the economy of China, where the virus originated, and caseloads are rapidly increasing in countries such as South Korea, Iran, and Italy.

The administration official required anonymity because the request is not public.

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