SCOTUS denies Trump effort to block tax return subpoena
The move clears the way for prosecutors in New York to receive eight years of the ex-president’s tax returns and financial records.

‘An easy target’
GOP opposition to Haaland rankles Native Americans.

Urgency to ramp up vaccination clashes with Biden’s equity focus
Virus variants are adding pressure to speed up vaccinations, complicating efforts to ensure hard-to-reach communities don’t get left behind.

Matt Wuerker
The cartoonist’s daily take on the world of politics.

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U.S. surpasses 500K Covid deaths
‘As a nation we can’t accept such a cruel fate,’ Biden said before a national moment of silence
BY BRIANNA EHLEY
The U.S. surpassed half a million coronavirus deaths on Monday, reinforcing the magnitude of the pandemic even as more Americans get vaccinated and Covid deaths and hospitalizations are declining. The milestone, based on a tally maintained by Johns Hopkins University, came just over a month after the nation’s death toll passed 400,000 and as public health officials train their sights on new, more contagious coronavirus strains that have been reported in almost every state and threaten to tax already stressed local health systems.

“We as a nation we can’t accept such a cruel fate,” said President Joe Biden, before holding a moment of silence for those who have died. “We have been fighting the pandemic so long, we have to resist becoming numb to the sorrow. We have to resist viewing each life as a statistic or a blur or on the news.”

The president ordered flags be flown at half-staff for the next five days.

Biden, soon after being sworn in, predicted the nation would hit half a million deaths by the end of February while warning his administration would be unable to dramatically increase the pace of vaccinations. The half-million mark, beyond its symbolism, underscores how quickly Biden’s team has come to own the health crisis as tensions build with states over vaccine allocations, school reopenings and basic public health measures like mask mandates.

“It really is a terrible situation that we have been through, and that we’re still going through,” Biden said before a national moment of silence.

Garland cruises through confirmation hearing
Republicans nudged AG candidate to commit to allowing federal prosecutors to press on with politically sensitive investigations
BY MARIANNE LEVINE AND JOSH GERSTEIN
President Joe Biden’s pick to lead the Justice Department, D.C. Circuit Judge Merrick Garland, appears to be coasting toward an easy confirmation after a relatively low-key outing before the Senate Judiciary Committee on Monday.

Republicans did use the opportunity to gingerly push Garland to commit to allowing federal prosecutors to press on with politically sensitive investigations into the Department of Justice probe of Donald Trump’s ties to Russia and into the business affairs of Biden’s son Hunter. But beyond voicing that politics would play no role in his decisions, Garland made few promises.

The president ordered flags be flown at half-staff for the next five days.

Democrats are scrambling to piece together a backup plan that could save their minimum wage hike from getting tossed out of President Joe Biden’s $1.9 trillion relief package and win over moderates wary of the proposal.

The budget tool that Democrats are using to steer Biden’s plan through Congress without GOP support, known as reconciliation, is laden with thorny restrictions, including some designed to ensure the $15 minimum wage boost they’ve added to the next tranche of coronavirus relief. The wage increase is also running into strong headwinds from two influential Senate Democratic centrists, Joe Manchin of West Virginia and Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona, who are both resistant to enacting the sweeping policy change through the powerful budget process.

The White House and Democratic leaders have been waiting to see how the Senate’s pariahs—Republicans who have voted against the $15 minimum wage and GOP senators who have backed the measure—will respond to Biden’s threat to fly the flag at half-staff as part of the moment of silence on February 23.
Dear President Biden, Vice President Harris, and Members of Your National Health Care Team:

It is with great hope that we welcome you to the White House.

As Black female CEOs of some of the nation’s leading health care organizations, we share your priority to get the pandemic under control through the safe, free, and equitable distribution of vaccines. COVID-19 continues to serve as a stark reminder of the racial disparities that exist in our healthcare system, especially for Black Americans who have died of the virus at a rate of more than twice that of White Americans.

In addition to the devastation from COVID, the Black community continues to experience health care disparities across all generations, from birth throughout the lifespan. We constantly see the impact of these inequities through the work of our organizations in responding to the health care needs of Black children and adults with disabilities; Black mothers and babies; and Black women, men and children struggling with chronic illnesses including diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and obesity.

We applaud your commitment to improve and expand the Affordable Care Act and to protect Medicaid so that all Americans, regardless of age or color, have access to quality, affordable health care with intervention and prevention programs to address conditions that disproportionately affect the Black community. These actions promise to change the trajectory for communities of color in achieving social determinants of health which a recent scientific review revealed are shaped by the distribution of money, power, and resources, and are mostly responsible for health inequities.

The racial divide in health care is the result of 400 years of policy, legislation, laws, and infrastructure that continues to disenfranchise Black Americans. Undoing these inequalities has been a struggle throughout our nation’s history, but we must wade through the racism built into the system as we try to right these wrongs.

We urge you to prioritize solutions to remedy these persistent health care inequities within the Black community that have only worsened during the pandemic. It is imperative that we ensure that all Americans have equal access to resources to enjoy optimal health and well-being in a just society.

We welcome the opportunity to work with you to further the vision of a more United States.

We cannot do this alone.

Your presence brings us hope for long overdue change.

Sincerely,

Tracey D. Brown
American Diabetes Association®
Chief Executive Officer

Linda Goler Blount, MPH
Black Women’s Health Imperative
President and CEO

Angela F. Williams
Easterseals
President and CEO

Stacey D. Stewart
March of Dimes
President and CEO

Paid for by EasterSeals