

Weekly COVID-19 Oversight & Enforcement Report

April 22, 2021

A. Congress
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. On April 21, the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation Subcommittee on Aviation Safety, Operations and Innovation held a hearing entitled “Prepare for Takeoff: America’s Safe Return to Air Travel.” The hearing focused on the impact of federal COVID-19 aid to the aviation industry and the health and safety precautions needed as more Americans participate in commercial air travel. 2. On April 15, a group of Democratic Senators sent a letter to President Biden urging him to support a temporary patent waiver for COVID-19 vaccines that would allow other countries to produce vaccines locally.
B. Executive Agencies
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A senior NASA employee has pleaded guilty to fraudulently seeking over \$350,000 in PPP and EIDL loans. Using fabricated IRS returns and claiming payroll expenses that did not exist, he submitted five fraudulent loan applications and received almost \$300,000. He used the money for a pool, a minivan, and to pay a dog breeder.
C. State Attorneys General
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The California Department of Justice and Alameda County District Attorney reached a plea agreement with Apna Bazar, a grocery store, in which the store pleaded guilty to two counts of price gouging. According to the state and local joint investigation, the store had increased the prices for certain grocery items by between 60% and 400% after the governor issued its emergency declaration, which triggers the state’s price gouging law. Pursuant to the plea agreement, the store will make a \$20,000 donation to the Alameda County Community Food Bank. 2. Minnesota AG Keith Ellison announced the settlement of a lawsuit filed against St. Patrick’s Tavern & Restaurant, which AG Ellison had alleged defied state executive orders prohibiting indoor, on-premises consumption of food and beverages. The consent judgment requires the restaurant to pay a \$15,000 fine and to abide by future state executive orders. 3. A bipartisan coalition of 42 state AGs, led by Illinois AG Kwame Raoul, North Carolina AG Josh Stein, and Tennessee AG Herbert H. Slatery III, wrote a letter to OfferUp, an online mobile marketplace, asking the company to monitor its platforms for offers of counterfeit or blank COVID

vaccine cards, remove them, and preserve the records and information about such offers for law enforcement investigation.

D. Special Inspector General for Pandemic Recovery (SIGPR)

No updates this week.

E. Pandemic Recovery Accountability Committee (PRAC)

1. On Monday, House Oversight and Reform Committee Chair Carolyn Maloney (D-NY) introduced the [IG Independence and Empowerment Act](#). The legislation would limit a president's ability to remove a sitting IG (by establishing a set of "for cause" reasons); set up whistleblower training for IGs and their staff; and give IGs subpoena authority to obtain testimony from contractors and former federal employees. In April 2020, former President Trump replaced Glenn Fine as the acting IG for the Defense Department just as he was set to become the chair of PRAC. By replacing Fine, President Trump essentially disqualified him from serving on PRAC.