

## The Top 10 Storylines of 2020

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*"Washington is gridlocked." "Impeachment is a distraction."  
"Nothing gets done in an election year."*

*Nonsense.*

*Here in the policy wonk corner of POLITICO, we are preparing to cover an intensive year of market-moving legislation, regulation, court cases and executive orders.*

*In 2020, there will be monumental court cases that determine the future of the Affordable Care Act. The Trump administration is rapidly deregulating everything from power plants to financial institutions. Facebook, Google and Apple will find themselves under even more intense scrutiny from the Department of Justice and the Federal Trade Commission as politicians from both parties accuse them of everything from bias to monopolistic practices.*

*On top of that, trade negotiations are heating up with the United Kingdom and China is ready to negotiate the next phase of tariff reduction, with each move potentially roiling world markets.*

*We will also look beyond Washington and dig into state capitals from Tallahassee to Sacramento for policy actions with national consequences, as California is practically at war with the Trump administration on everything from health care rules to environmental policy.*

*POLITICO Pro is more prepared than any other news organization to cover the fast-breaking, incremental policy news while connecting the dots so that you have the context, know the key players and receive actionable intelligence to do your jobs more effectively in 2020.*

*Here's POLITICO Pro's look at the top 10 storylines of the year.*

Martin Kady II  
Editor, POLITICO Pro

### 01 TECHNOLOGY WARS

The tech industry's biggest players are waiting for the hammer to drop on a series of antitrust actions that could permanently clip the wings of Facebook, Google, Amazon or Apple. These include the Justice Department's review of complaints of anti-competitive behavior in the tech industry writ large — a probe that Attorney General William Barr has said he hopes to wrap up this year — as well as potential DOJ antitrust investigations of Google and Apple and possible Federal Trade Commission inquiries into Facebook and Amazon. Attorneys general from almost all 50 states are also pursuing separate antitrust reviews of Google and Facebook. And the antitrust clouds could darken even further depending on the outcome of the presidential election; Democratic hopeful Elizabeth Warren says she would direct her antitrust enforcers to seek breakups of Google, Facebook and Amazon.

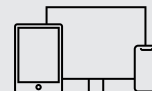
### 02 A DECADE OF OBAMACARE ON THE BRINK

If you squint just enough, you'll find bipartisan agreement in Congress that something must be done about surprise billing and skyrocketing drug prices. But the real questions are whether Democrats and Republicans can overcome divisions on how to do that and whether either side wants to hand out a victory during an election year.

On the election front, POLITICO Pro will continue to cover the wide-ranging differences over "Medicare for All" and where the Democratic field shakes out on single-payer health care, while closely tracking the Trump administration's continued attempts to undercut and overturn Obamacare. We will closely follow drug pricing debates, FDA regulations and state-level lawsuits.

#### WHY IT MATTERS

It's been almost 40 years since the last huge antitrust breakup in the U.S., which busted up the old Bell telephone monopoly, so anything approaching that kind of ambitious action would be a major departure from Washington's decades-old approach to confronting concentrated corporate power. But even less severe antitrust actions could have a big impact on the tech industry. Some industry watchers think Microsoft never quite regained its swagger after the Clinton administration's unsuccessful antitrust suit in the 1990s, offering an opening for other companies to dominate the money-making opportunities on the internet.



#### WHY IT MATTERS

The two parties could not be further apart on health care policy, and with the 10th anniversary of the Affordable Care Act in March, the health care landscape in 2020 and beyond remains as unsettled as ever. Enormous resources will be spent on the campaign and in lobbying expenditures to influence the debate, with POLITICO Pro Health Care reporters breaking down every move.



## 03 ELECTION SECURITY AND HACKING THREATS

While the 2020 spending bill included \$425 million in election security grants, that's hardly enough, according to experts and many lawmakers. Democrats have been pushing for more election security funding and fundamental changes to the U.S. election system, but there's little they can do at this point to harden the democratic process against cyberattacks. But we will see a greater emphasis from the administration, tech companies and law enforcement to safeguard voting and thwart disinformation campaigns leading up to Election Day.

## 04 CALIFORNIA LEADS THE RESISTANCE

California views itself as the leader among states of the "resistance" to the Trump administration. It's also long enjoyed autonomy on environmental matters, being the only state that sets its own auto emissions standards, which are stronger than proposed federal levels under President Donald Trump and have served as the de facto national standard because automakers want to meet one standard rather than two for the U.S. market.

### WHY IT MATTERS

If you thought 2016 was a bad year for election disinformation, 2020 may be even worse. Worries about deepfake videos, continued Russian interference and rogue actors trying to hack U.S. election systems make cybersecurity one of the key topics for the coming year.



### WHY IT MATTERS

If California prevails on auto emissions or health care policies, it would set a precedent for other states — both red and blue — to buck federal rules. California's status is being challenged by the Trump administration, which is trying to revoke California's right to set auto emissions standards. The White House has also sued California, seeking to take away the state's cap-and-trade program with Quebec, saying states shouldn't have the ability to sign their own international agreements.



## 05 CLIMATE CATASTROPHE MEETS REAL POLICY ACTION

The science around climate change has advanced rapidly in recent years — so much so that scientists are starting to break out the percentage of an event like a hurricane, rain storm or drought that is due to climate change. This makes it far easier to link specific local events to the changes, which is likely to increase public awareness and calls for action. That's driven a shift in Republican stances on the Hill, where they are no longer fighting climate action as aggressively as in the past and are trying to create new positions.

## 06 TRADE

Trump is expected to sign phase one of the China trade deal on Jan. 15, so 2020 will be dominated by questions about whether his administration can negotiate a phase two that will include lifting more tariffs and forcing Beijing to implement economic reforms and robust intellectual property protections for American firms doing business in China. Once the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement is approved by all parties, attention will turn to implementation of the deal. And the White House will continue to look for opportunities to negotiate bilateral trade deals, particularly with the United Kingdom, which is expected to finally complete its Brexit from the EU on Jan. 31.

### WHY IT MATTERS

Trump remains the most vocal climate disbeliever, and he brings it up frequently. For the 2020 Democratic candidates, this would seem like an easy way to score points — and they are. However, the push for extremely aggressive action could allow them to be painted as willing to radically drive up consumer energy costs and sacrifice hundreds of thousands of oil and gas jobs.



### WHY IT MATTERS

Trump is on a bit of a winning streak on trade, with a de-escalation with China, a USMCA victory and a new front of promising negotiations with the United Kingdom coming post-Brexit. That won't undo the pain of tariffs that have been felt by farmers and manufacturers, but watch for the narrative to slowly change on whether the U.S. is winning or losing the trade wars if he keeps making deals.



## 07 2020 TAX POLITICS

Most of the Democratic candidates for president have far-reaching tax plans, and the tax landscape can change quickly after an election, as was the case in 2016. We'll be closely following this issue and analyzing the plans in-depth, looking at the costs, the economic effects and who would win or lose. The same goes for any new proposals by Trump, who has indicated he isn't finished trying to cut taxes.

### WHY IT MATTERS

The 2017 tax cuts stand out as one of Trump's major domestic policy accomplishments, lowering corporate tax rates while markets continue to grow. But income inequality has become a central topic to the Democratic campaign, and Republicans will have to find a way to message around wealthy people enjoying tax cuts while wages have not grown as dramatically.



## 08 DEFENSE CUTS? IRAN CHANGES EVERYTHING

The Pentagon has been looking for places to cut spending in 2020, but the escalation in Iran changes everything. We'll be watching the services as they compete to keep their programs funded while lawmakers on Capitol Hill do the same for projects in their districts. The defense budget from 2020 to 2021 is essentially flat, per the two-year budget deal.

### WHY IT MATTERS

Talking defense cuts is very different than actually carrying them out. It'll be a big fight on the Hill and in the White House, especially since a 355-ship Navy is a Trump campaign pledge. The creation of a Space Force will also add pressure to the top line, and members of Congress tend to fold when the cuts end up affecting military installations in their own districts. The wild card of Iran throws everything on defense spending into doubt.



## 09 BETSY DEVOS AND TITLE IX

Education Secretary Betsy DeVos will issue final regulations sometime early in the year on Title IX regulations governing how colleges and universities must handle campus sexual assaults. The move is expected to produce blow-back on college campuses among victims' rights advocates, a spate of lawsuits likely seeking injunctions and continuing criticism and questions among college administrators as they struggle to adapt to a new system of handling complaints. POLITICO Pro higher education readers are watching the development of these regulations closely because they affect how Title IX policies are carried out on every campus in the nation. The proposed regulations are in the final step of approval at the Office of Management and Budget.

### WHY IT MATTERS

Title IX is more than just an education policy issue: It's a signature culture war issue and loaded with gender politics that reverberate beyond just education policy interests.



## 10 DON'T FORGET THE BORDER WALL

Election year politics will only intensify the battle over building the border wall, likely complicating funding for the rest of the federal government as the next shutdown deadline falls less than five weeks before voters head to the polls on Nov. 3.

### WHY IT MATTERS

"Build the wall" was the signature chant of 2016 Trump rallies, and it's not anywhere near being built. On the eve of the elections, expect Trump to make this an obstacle to any fiscal year spending bill.

