

American Nephrology Nurses Association

Weekly Capitol Hill Update - Monday, January 28, 2019

Congressional Schedule

Senate

- Senate meets at 3pm

House

- House meets at noon for morning business and at 2pm for legislative business

Legislative Update

- **Week in Review**
 - *Trump, Congress agree to end longest government shutdown.* “Submitting to mounting pressure and growing disruption, President Donald Trump agreed to a deal Friday to reopen the government for three weeks, backing down from his demand that Congress give him money for his border wall before federal agencies get back to work. Standing alone in the Rose Garden, Trump said he would sign legislation funding shuttered agencies until Feb. 15 and try again to persuade lawmakers to finance his long-sought wall. The deal he reached with congressional leaders contains no new money for the wall.”
 - Read more: <https://apnews.com/30769167ab7a4ef9adf880d020b775dd>
 - *Sen. Chuck Grassley backs drug importation bill.* “The legislation, which would allow American consumers to purchase prescription drugs approved by Canadian pharmacies, is challenging the longstanding Senate GOP position on drug importation. Sen. Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa, is throwing his weight behind a bipartisan bill that would provide Americans access to prescription drugs approved by pharmacies in Canada. Along with cosponsor Sen. Amy Klobuchar, D-Minn., Grassley is seeking to expand options for American consumers as Congress and the Trump administration continue to examine policies aimed at lowering drug prices.”
 - Read more: <https://www.healthleadersmedia.com/finance/sen-chuck-grassley-backs-drug-importation-bill>
- **Week Ahead**

- ***Grassley to hold drug pricing hearing.*** “The Senate Finance Committee's first hearing of the year will focus on prescription drug prices, panel chairman Sen. Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa) announced Tuesday. The Jan. 29 hearing ‘will be the first in a series of hearings scrutinizing prescription drug pricing and considering policy and oversight solutions to lower costs for American patients,’ Grassley said in a statement Tuesday. The Senate hearing will be the same day the Democratic-led House Oversight and Reform Committee holds the first of its own drug pricing hearings.”
 - Read more: <https://thehill.com/policy/healthcare/426537-grassley-to-hold-drug-pricing-hearing>
- ***Dem chairman schedules hearing on pre-existing conditions.*** “House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Richard Neal (D-Mass.) will hold a hearing next week on protecting Americans with pre-existing conditions. The hearing will be one of the committee's first since Democrats regained the majority. No other information about the hearing, including who will testify, has been announced yet. But Neal has frequently said that maintaining ObamaCare's protections for those with pre-existing conditions is a top priority for him.”
 - Read more: <https://thehill.com/policy/healthcare/426398-dem-chairman-schedules-hearing-on-pre-existing-conditions>

Regulatory and Administration Update

- ***Rate increase, higher drug payments should improve Medicare margins for dialysis providers by 2020.*** “Medicare profit margins for dialysis providers will still be less than break-even, but continued increases in the bundled payment rate and a new method of paying for dialysis drugs taking effect next year will narrow the loss, according to a review by the Medicare Payment Advisory Commission. The independent panel advises Congress on issues affecting the Medicare program, making payment recommendations and assessing access to care and quality of care.”
 - Read more: <https://www.healio.com/nephrology/policy-and-politics/news/online/%7B5519af7e-e554-4e2b-b359-9c938e3b03a7%7D/rate-increase-higher-drug-payments-should-improve-medicare-margins-for-dialysis-providers-by-2020>
- ***Trump administration approves Medicaid work requirements in Arizona.*** “The Trump administration has approved Arizona’s request to impose work requirements on Medicaid beneficiaries. Arizona is the eighth state to receive permission to impose work requirements on Medicaid beneficiaries, but will be the first to allow an exemption for members of federally recognized tribes. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services said the tribal exemption ‘is consistent with the unique status of tribal governments.’”
 - Read more: <https://thehill.com/policy/healthcare/426055-trump-administration-approves-medicaid-work-requirements-in-arizona>
- ***Wisconsin governor’s order to leave ACA lawsuit rejected.*** “Wisconsin’s attorney general has rejected Democratic Gov. Tony Evers request to withdraw from a multi-state lawsuit targeting the Affordable Care Act, saying in a letter released Thursday that only the Republican-controlled Legislature now has the power to take such action. The

decision is a setback for Evers, who along with Democratic Attorney General Josh Kaul was elected in November and opposed the lawsuit that seeks to repeal the federal health care law. Evers on Tuesday directed Kaul to withdraw from the case, but he later tempered the request after Republican legislative leaders and a nonpartisan legislative attorney said Evers didn't have the authority to make the order."

- Read more: <https://apnews.com/b2bc7a4abcd849d6832268d94e96db39>
- ***Trump calls for cracking down on surprise medical bills.*** "President Trump on Wednesday spoke out against surprise medical bills that patients often cannot afford, highlighting an issue that has received bipartisan concern in Congress. Cracking down on surprise medical bills is seen as a rare area of possible bipartisan action on health care. Sen. Bill Cassidy (R-La.) unveiled bipartisan legislation to end surprise medical bills in September, and Sen. Maggie Hassan (D-N.H.) has legislation on the topic as well. Rep. Lloyd Doggett (D-Texas) also has a bill in the House to crack down on the practice."
 - Read more: <https://thehill.com/policy/healthcare/426667-trump-calls-for-cracking-down-on-surprise-medical-bills>

Articles of Interest

- ***Not-for-profit to offer 20 generic drugs in 2019 to alleviate shortages.*** "A new not-for-profit supplier of generic drugs formed by a consortium of hospitals systems said it expects this year to be able to provide about 20 products to alleviate shortages of medicines used during surgeries and to treat life-threatening conditions, such as septic shock. Civica Rx initially expected to offer 14 drugs in 2019. It now believes it will exceed that number after forging relationships with several companies with licenses to manufacture additional medicines, company officials said in an interview. Within three-to-five years, it aims to offer up to 100 generic medicines critical to the everyday function of its member hospitals."
 - Read more: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-healthcare-generics/not-for-profit-to-offer-20-generic-drugs-in-2019-to-alleviate-shortages-idUSKCN1PI2PU>
- ***PhRMA to accept inflation caps.*** "PhRMA is prepared to accept a cap on drug price increases, biopharma executives involved in drafting the trade association's response to the Trump administration's drug pricing blueprint told BioCentury. The PhRMA board is considering a proposal that would commit members to limit price increases for drugs purchased by Medicare to a measure of consumer inflation. The proposal is aimed at persuading HHS Secretary Alex Azar to abandon a plan to create an international reference pricing system for drugs purchased by Medicare Part B. PhRMA hasn't decided whether the proposal will be limited to the injectable and infused drugs that are purchased by Part B, or if it will also include drugs dispensed at retail pharmacies and purchased by Part D."
 - Read more: <https://www.biocentury.com/bc-extra/politics-policy/2019-01-25/phrma-accept-inflation-caps>
- ***Health care industry group launches digital ads against 'Medicare for all.'*** "A health care industry group on Thursday launched a digital ad campaign against 'Medicare for

all,' as health care companies ramp up their efforts to fight the idea gaining ground on the left. The group behind the ad is the Partnership for America's Health Care Future, whose members include major industry players such as America's Health Insurance Plans and the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America, who last year came together to form the group to fight Medicare for all. The health care industry is expected to fight single-payer efforts vociferously given that the idea threatens to cut payments to players throughout the industry. Opponents also argue single-payer would mean upheaval and less choice for patients."

- Read more: <https://thehill.com/policy/healthcare/426818-health-care-industry-group-launches-digital-ads-against-medicare-for-all>
- ***Poll: 56 percent of public supports 'Medicare for all.'*** "A majority of the public supports a single-payer health insurance system, often called 'Medicare for all,' as the idea gains steam among Democrats, according to a new poll. The poll from the Kaiser Family Foundation finds that 56 percent of the public supports a single-payer plan, compared to 42 percent who oppose the idea. Progressives are pushing the new Democratic House majority to move forward on the idea, and many Democratic presidential hopefuls have signed on to the idea as well. More centrist Democratic lawmakers remain opposed to the proposal, however."
 - Read more: <https://thehill.com/policy/healthcare/426418-poll-56-percent-of-public-supports-medicare-for-all>
- ***U.S. uninsured rate rises to four-year high.*** "The U.S. adult uninsured rate stood at 13.7% in the fourth quarter of 2018, according to Americans' reports of their own health insurance coverage, its highest level since the first quarter of 2014. While still below the 18% high point recorded before implementation of the Affordable Care Act's individual health insurance mandate in 2014, today's level is the highest in more than four years, and well above the low point of 10.9% reached in 2016. The 2.8-percentage-point increase since that low represents a net increase of about seven million adults without health insurance."
 - Read more: <https://news.gallup.com/poll/246134/uninsured-rate-rises-four-year-high.aspx>
- ***Insulin costs doubled over five-year period: study.*** "Per-person spending on insulin doubled in a recent five-year period, according to a report released Tuesday. Individuals with type 1 diabetes spent an average of \$5,705 on insulin in 2016, compared with \$2,864 in 2012, according to a study from the Health Care Cost Institute. The dollar amount represents the combined amount paid by a patient and their insurer, and doesn't include discounts given later."
 - Read more: <https://thehill.com/policy/healthcare/426444-insulin-costs-double-over-five-year-periodstudy>
- ***Drug-pricing policies find new momentum as 'a 2020 thing'.*** "The next presidential primary contests are more than a year away. But presumed candidates are already trying to stake a claim to one of health care's hot-button concerns: surging prescription drug prices. Spurred on by midterm election results that showed health care to be a deciding issue, lawmakers — some of whom have already launched presidential run

exploratory committees — are pushing a bevy of new proposals and approaches. Few if any of those ideas will likely make it to the president’s desk.”

- Read more: <https://khn.org/news/drug-pricing-policies-find-new-momentum-as-a-2020-thing/>
- ***PhRMA spent a record-breaking \$27.5 million on lobbying in 2018, new filings show.*** “PhRMA, the eminent lobbying group for the pharmaceutical industry, spent more than \$27.5 million on its lobbying activities in 2018 — the most the group has ever spent on lobbying in a single year. The tally, as detailed in lobbying filings posted online on Tuesday, far outstrips the group’s previous record-setting spend, when it dropped a little more than \$25 million in 2009, as Congress was deep in the debate over the Affordable Care Act. It spent just shy of that figure again in 2017.”
 - Read more: <https://www.statnews.com/2019/01/22/phrma-spent-a-record-breaking-27-5-million-on-lobbying-in-2018-new-filings-show/>
- ***Characteristics of deceased solid organ donors and screening results for Hepatitis B, C, and Human Immunodeficiency Virus – United States, 2010-2017.*** “The ongoing U.S. opioid crisis has resulted in an increase in drug overdose deaths and acute hepatitis C virus (HCV) infections, with young persons (who might be eligible organ donors) most affected. In 2013, the Public Health Service released a revised guideline to reduce the risk for unintended organ transplantation-associated hepatitis B virus (HBV), HCV, and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) transmission.”
 - Read more: <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/68/wr/mm6803a2.htm>
- ***Uninsured rate at highest level since 2014.*** “The percentage of Americans without health insurance has reached its highest point since 2014, when ObamaCare was still in its early years of implementation. The uninsured rate was 13.7 percent in the fourth quarter of 2018, well above the record-low rate of 10.9 seen in 2016, the last year of President Obama's second term, according to a survey released by Gallup Wednesday. That represents about 7 million people losing or dropping insurance between 2016 and 2018, Gallup said.”
 - Read more: <https://thehill.com/policy/healthcare/426599-uninsured-rate-at-highest-level-since-2014>
- ***Meet the tech company looking to reverse type 2 diabetes in 10 million people.*** “Britain, like many other countries around the world, is facing a Diabetes health crisis. Research shows that diagnoses of the condition have doubled in the past 20 years, with an estimated 3.7 million people aged over 17 affected. But tech company Diabetes Digital Media thinks it can solve this growing problem with evidence-based digital health solutions, one of which being community platform diabetes.co.uk. It’s on a bold mission to reverse type 2 diabetes in 10 million patients by 2022 and to help the NHS save £50 million through de-prescriptions.”
 - Read more: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/nicholasfearn/2019/01/24/meet-the-tech-company-looking-to-reverse-diabetes-in-10-million-people/#7b06308b487b>
- ***After ‘CRISPR babies,’ international medical leaders aim to tighten genome editing guidelines.*** “Less than two years after producing an exhaustive report on human

genome editing, the U.S. National Academy of Medicine and the National Academy of Sciences are planning an international commission on the most controversial use of that technology — creating ‘CRISPR babies,’ medicine academy president Dr. Victor Dzau announced on Thursday at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. The recent birth in China of twin girls whose genes had been edited while they were embryos highlighted the shortcomings of the existing guidelines, he said. The 2017 academy report and others on embryo editing ‘were not clear enough’ on when it would be scientifically and ethically acceptable to permanently alter the DNA of an embryo, sperm, or egg in such a way as to make it heritable by all of that individual’s children, Dzau said, and too open to interpretation.”

- Read more: <https://www.statnews.com/2019/01/24/crispr-babies-show-need-for-more-specific-rules/>