

American Nephrology Nurses Association

Weekly Capitol Hill Update - Monday, October 23, 2017

Congressional Schedule

Senate

- Senate convenes at 3 pm; plans a cloture vote on House-passed \$36.5b aid package to deliver assistance to hurricane-ravaged Puerto Rico, Fla. and Texas, as well as areas hit by wildfires in the west.

House

- House meets at noon; is set to consider six bills under suspension of the rules including H.R. 4010, relating to congressional subpoenas, and H.R. 3551, which would reauthorize a global supply chain security program for cargo importers and carriers.

Legislative Update

- **Week in Review**

- *Alexander struggles to find health-care breakthrough.* "Senate Health Committee Chairman Lamar Alexander (R-Tenn.) faces the challenge of his career in selling a breakthrough health-care deal to skeptical Republican colleagues. If he fails, it would be a blow not only to his reputation but perhaps also to the political prospects of the Republican Party in 2018. The Congressional Budget Office projects health insurance premiums are projected to rise 20 to 25 percent without congressional action. Alexander told colleagues during an impassioned floor speech Thursday that it's time to change course on ObamaCare and work with Democrats to reform the law instead of trying again unsuccessfully to repeal it with party-line votes."
 - To read more: <http://thehill.com/homenews/senate/356325-alexander-struggles-to-find-health-care-breakthrough>
 - *Key senators reach deal on resuming payments to health insurers after Trump blocked them.* "Key senators reached a breakthrough deal Tuesday on resuming federal payments to health insurers that President Trump has blocked. Insurers had warned that unless the money is quickly restored, premiums will go up. At the White House, the president spoke favorably about the bipartisan compromise, which is still likely to

face opposition in Congress. The agreement would involve a two-year extension of federal payments to insurers that Trump halted last week, said Sen. Lamar Alexander, R-Tenn. Unless the money is quickly restored, insurers and others say that will result in higher premiums for people buying individual policies and in some carriers leaving unprofitable markets.”

- To read more: <https://www.statnews.com/2017/10/17/senators-deal-insurance-payments/>

- **24 hours later, Senate health deal all but completely dead.** “A Senate healthcare deal to extend critical ObamaCare payments to insurers appears all but completely dead just 24 hours after it was announced. President Trump reversed course Wednesday and said he opposed the deal, while Speaker Paul Ryan’s (R-Wis.) office said the Senate should keep its focus on repealing and replacing President Obama’s signature law. Sen. John Thune (S.D.), the third-ranking Senate Republican, acknowledged the deal had “stalled out.””

- To read more: <http://thehill.com/policy/healthcare/356110-24-hours-later-senate-health-deal-all-but-completely-dead>

- **Bipartisan group of governors calls on Congress to stabilize ObamaCare markets.** “A bipartisan group of 10 governors is calling on Congress to vote on a deal to stabilize ObamaCare’s insurance markets. “We urge Congress to quickly pass legislation to stabilize our private health insurance markets and make quality health insurance more available and affordable,” the governors wrote Wednesday in a letter to House and Senate leaders from both parties.”

- To read more: <http://thehill.com/policy/healthcare/356148-bipartisan-group-of-governors-calls-on-congress-to-stabilize-obamacare>

- **Week Ahead**

- **Senators push to win support for ObamaCare deal.** “Sen. Lamar Alexander (R-Tenn.) and Patty Murray (D-Wash.) face a tough challenge as they try to get President Trump and congressional Republicans on board with their bipartisan plan to stabilize ObamaCare's insurance markets. The senators unveiled a proposal last week to fund key ObamaCare insurer payments and provide states with more flexibility to waive out of ObamaCare rules. But, so far, the plan has received a lukewarm reception from Trump and conservative Republicans.”

- To read more: <http://thehill.com/policy/healthcare/356452-week-ahead-senators-look-to-win-support-for-bipartisan-health-plan>

- **Dem pushes back on CHIP extension proposal.** “Disagreements over how to pay for an extension of the Children’s Health Insurance Program could result in a partisan bill reaching the House floor as soon as this week, a top House Democrat said Monday. Rep. Frank Pallone Jr. (D-N.J.), the ranking member on the House Energy and Commerce Committee, said Republicans are insisting that

the extension is paid for by cutting other health programs adding that the bill could get a floor vote in the House this week.”

- To read more: <http://thehill.com/policy/healthcare/356738-dem-pushes-back-on-chip-extension-proposal>

Regulatory and Administration Update

- ***States file emergency motion to force continuation of ObamaCare payments.*** “Multiple states have filed an emergency motion to force the Trump administration to continue making ObamaCare subsidy payments to insurers. Eighteen states and Washington, D.C., signed onto the motion for a temporary restraining order filed Tuesday in federal court in California, according to New York Attorney General Eric Schneiderman (D). President Trump last week announced he would not continue making the payments, which are required under the health-care law and help low-income people afford co-payments and deductibles.”
 - For more information: <http://thehill.com/policy/healthcare/health-insurance/356081-states-file-emergency-restraining-order-to-force>
- ***Medicare Comprehensive End Stage Renal Disease Care Model Performance Year 1 (Oct 2015 - Dec 2016) Quality and Financial Results.*** 12 of the 13 ESRD Seamless Care Organizations (ESCOs) that participated in the first year received sharing savings.
 - For more information: <https://innovation.cms.gov/Files/x/cec-fncl-py1.pdf>
- ***Care for Dialysis patients a key focus of Hurricane Maria response efforts in Puerto Rico.*** “Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) Administrator Seema Verma today released additional details on the agency’s efforts in support of dialysis patients and providers in Puerto Rico. Care for these fragile patients is a top priority as are the agency’s actions to help all of those impacted by the storm. During the past few weeks, CMS has worked to ensure hospitals and other facilities can continue operations by waiving numerous Medicare, Medicaid and Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) requirements, and has helped individuals and doctors by creating special enrollment opportunities to access healthcare immediately and a hotline for physicians assisting with Hurricane Maria response efforts.”
 - To read more: <https://www.cms.gov/Newsroom/MediaReleaseDatabase/Press-releases/2017-Press-releases-items/2017-10-17.html>
- ***Effects of ESRD bundling on efficiency of U.S. dialysis centers.*** “In January 2011, major payment reforms were implemented by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) for the treatment of patients with End-Stage Renal Disease (ESRD) on dialysis. These reforms focus on curtailing the rapid spending growth in the population of dialysis patients. The growth was largely due to the high utilization of injectable drugs, especially erythropoietin stimulating agents (ESAs).² The reforms include prospective bundled payments and pay-for-performance incentives in the effort to curb costs, while still incentivizing quality of care and improving the efficiency of the care delivered.”
 - To read more: <https://www.nephrologynews.com/effects-esrd-bundling-efficiency-u-s-dialysis-centers/>

Articles of Interest

- ***White House Considering Bipartisan Drug Price Task Force.*** “President Donald Trump is considering launching a bipartisan task force to investigate the rising cost of prescription drugs, sources with knowledge of the discussion say. The announcement could come as early as next week, but the sources caution that discussions remain in the early stages and are still fluid. They say it could be part of an expected announcement on the opioid crisis that Trump hinted at earlier this week. “We are going to be doing that next week,” Trump said of his decision to declare the opioid epidemic a national emergency. “That is a very, very big statement. It’s a very important step. And to get to that step, a lot of work has to be done and it’s time-consuming work.”
 - To read more: <http://www.rollcall.com/news/politics/white-house-considering-bipartisan-drug-price-task-force>

- ***Blindsided Trump officials scrambling to develop opioid plan.*** “President Donald Trump overrode his own advisers when he promised to deliver an emergency declaration next week to combat the nation’s worsening opioid crisis. “That is a very, very big statement,” he said Monday. “It’s a very important step. ... We’re going to be doing it in the next week.” Blindsided officials are now scrambling to develop such a plan, but it is unclear when it will be announced, how or if it will be done, and whether the administration has the permanent leadership to execute it, said two administration officials. “They are not ready for this,” a public health advocate said of an emergency declaration after talking to Health and Human Services officials enlisted in the effort.”
 - To read more: <http://www.politico.com/story/2017/10/20/trump-opioid-plan-blindsides-advisers-243974>

- ***Short on staff: Nursing crisis strains U.S. hospitals.*** “A shortage of nurses at U.S. hospitals hit West Virginia’s Charleston Area Medical Center at the worst possible time. The non-profit healthcare system is one of the state’s largest employers and sits in the heart of economically depressed coal country. It faces a \$40 million deficit this year as it struggles with fewer privately insured patients, cuts in government reimbursement and higher labor costs to attract a shrinking pool of nurses.”
 - To read more: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-healthcare-nursing/short-on-staff-nursing-crisis-strains-u-s-hospitals-idUSKBN1CP0BD>

- ***Why doctor and hospital groups are fighting a measure to rein in drug costs.*** “In recent years, doctors nationwide have lamented ever-rising drug prices that are limiting patient access to crucial medicines and undermining hospital finances. But a ballot initiative in Ohio is flipping that script. Several prominent physician and hospital groups are joining pharmaceutical companies to oppose a proposal to rein in drug costs paid by state agencies. Their reasoning? Drug makers, wholesalers, and pharmacies will actually raise prices on most Ohioans if the state takes a mandatory discount.”
 - To read more: <https://www.statnews.com/2017/10/19/drug-costs-ohio-issue-2/>

- ***The storm has passed, but Puerto Rico's health faces prolonged recovery.*** “As President Donald Trump signals impatience to wind down emergency aid to Puerto Rico, the challenges wrought by Hurricane Maria to the health of Puerto Ricans and the island’s fragile health system are in many ways just beginning. Three weeks after that direct hit, nearly four dozen deaths are associated with the storm. But the true toll on Puerto Rico’s 3.4 million residents is likely to involve sickness and loss of life that will only become apparent in the coming months and in indirect ways.”
 - To read more: <https://www.statnews.com/2017/10/16/puerto-rico-health-recovery/>

- ***Former drug czar nominee Marino defends role in opioid law.*** “President Donald Trump’s former nominee to be the nation’s drug czar is defending his role in writing a law that critics say weakened the government’s authority to stop companies from distributing opioids. Rep. Tom Marino, R-Pa., said he’s proud of his work on the 2016 law, which passed without opposition in the House and Senate and was signed by President Barack Obama. In a statement released by his office, Marino said the law will help “facilitate a balanced solution” by ensuring access to certain medications while allowing the Drug Enforcement Administration to prevent the sale and abuse of prescription drugs.”
 - To read more: https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/congress/former-drug-czar-nominee-marino-defends-role-in-opioid-law/2017/10/18/2fbd9d76-b416-11e7-9b93-b97043e57a22_story.html?utm_term=.bd0279b68185

- ***Trump says opioid emergency will be declared next week.*** “President Trump indicated on Monday the White House would formally declare a national emergency over the opioid crisis as soon as next week and signaled he may withdraw his nomination for drug czar. “We are going to be doing that next week,” Trump said in an impromptu Rose Garden press conference. “To get to that step, a lot of work has to be done, and it’s time-consuming work. We’re going to be doing it next week.””
 - To read more: <https://www.statnews.com/2017/10/16/trump-says-opioid-emergency-will-declared-next-week/>

- ***Near the campus cow pasture, a scientist works to grow human organs – in pigs.*** “Like many of the scientists who helped usher in the groundbreaking creation of a part-human, part-animal chimera earlier this year, biologist Dr. Pablo Juan Ross is no stranger to cutting-edge tools such as CRISPR and stem cells. But he also knows his way around the inside of a pig uterus. While growing human cells inside fetal pigs involved some of science’s fanciest new tricks, it also required something decidedly more mundane: a farm, stocked with livestock and staffed with people like Ross who know how to handle them.”
 - To read more: <https://www.statnews.com/2017/10/20/human-pig-chimera/>