American Nephrology Nurses Association

Daily Capitol Hill Update – Wednesday, December 15, 2021

The following information comes from directly from news sources including Bloomberg Government, Kaiser Health News, and other news sources.

Schedules: White House and Congress

WHITE HOUSE:

- Biden will depart Washington shortly after 9 a.m. and arrive in Kentucky after 10 a.m. to survey the damage from tornadoes that struck the state last weekend.

- At 3 p.m., the president will deliver remarks on the administration’s response to the storms. Biden on Sunday declared a major federal disaster in Kentucky as state and local officials continued to assess damage from the storms. The move will unlock federal aid for temporary housing, home repairs, and loans to help those with uninsured property losses.

- Shortly before 5 p.m. Biden will depart Kentucky and return to Washington just after 7 p.m.

CONGRESS:

- The Senate plans to vote on whether to clear the House-passed defense policy measure for Biden’s signature. The defense bill would authorize $25 billion more than the $715 billion recommended by the Biden administration for the Pentagon in fiscal 2022.

Congressional, Health Policy, and Political News

- **Axios: COVID May Qualify As Disability Under ADA, EEOC Says:** The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) updated guidance on COVID-19 on Tuesday stating that employees who have had the disease may be protected under the Americans with Disabilities Act. The updated guidance expands on previous announcements that people with long-haul COVID could qualify for disability resources. Not everyone who tests positive will qualify and the EEOC said that employers must individually evaluate each employee to determine if they meet the requirements.

- **Bloomberg Government: Home Health Expansion Push:** Democrats are pushing for an expansion of home health care services under Medicaid and a boost in wages for home health workers as part of their sweeping social spending and tax bill. The legislation, which is advancing via the budget reconciliation process, would spend around $150 billion over 10 years on home health — less than the $400 billion that Biden initially sought — by offering states incentives to raise wages and expand home health services.

- **Stat: Califf Escapes Senate Hearing For FDA Job Largely Unscathed:** Robert Califf escaped largely unscathed from a two-hour hearing Tuesday vetting him to be commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration. He gushed about his love of high-quality data, skillfully navigated questions on hot-button topics like abortion and drug pricing, and even had
personal anecdotes about Covid-19 testing and opioid prescribing at the ready. His only stumble came when he clearly frustrated lawmakers with his responses to pointed questions about the FDA’s approach toward approving opioid drugs, including its general reluctance to crack down on long-term prescribing of opioids and its recent decisions to approve new high-dose opioids.

- **AP: EU Official: Omicron To Be Dominant Variant By Mid-January**: European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said Wednesday that omicron is expected to be the dominant coronavirus variant in the 27-nation bloc by mid-January. The head of the EU’s executive branch said the bloc is well prepared to fight omicron with 66.6% of the European population now fully vaccinated against the virus. Von der Leyen said she is confident the EU has the “strength” and “means” to overcome the disease, although expressing her disappointment that once again year-end celebrations will be disturbed by the pandemic.

- **Bloomberg Government: U.S. Economic Recovery Tied to Global Vaccination, Panel Hears**: A top House lawmaker said yesterday that increasing the global vaccination rate—now below 10%—will be crucial to restoring a robust U.S. economy. “Global vaccination will help us avoid empty shelves and higher prices here at home. A fully vaccinated world is critical to the American recovery,” House Majority Whip James E. Clyburn (D-S.C.), chairman of the Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis, said at a hearing on accelerating global vaccine access. But as new variants such as omicron sweep the world, lawmakers and others say that increased global access to vaccines are a critical step to avoiding economic disruptions in the U.S.