

American Nephrology Nurses Association

Weekly Capitol Hill Update - Tuesday, March 5, 2019

Congressional Schedule

Senate

- Senate meets at 10am; resumes consideration of judicial nominees; weekly caucus luncheons held between 12:30pm-2:15pm

House

- House meets at noon; first votes held at 6:30pm
 - Set to consider 7 bills relating to energy, VA

Legislative Update

- **Week in Review**
 - *In muted hearing, pharma execs dodge attempts to pin blame for high prices.* “There were no Martin Shkreli moments. Instead, Tuesday’s congressional hearing on high drug prices served mostly as a retreading of arguments that lawmakers and the drug industry have spent years fine-tuning.”
 - Read more: <https://www.statnews.com/2019/02/26/capitol-hill-warns-pharma-americans-are-tired-of-the-blame-game/>
 - *Progressive Democrats unveil Medicare for all plan in House.* “Rep. Pramila Jayapal (D-Wash.) on Tuesday unveiled a revised Medicare for all bill, with more than 100 cosponsors, as the idea gains steam among leading Democrats. The bill from Jayapal, a progressive leader in the House, would cover replace private insurance companies with a government-run health insurance system. She plans to formally introduce the measure in the House on Wednesday.”
 - Read more: <https://thehill.com/policy/healthcare/431707-progressive-democrats-unveil-medicare-for-all-plan-in-house>
 - *Pelosi on single-payer health care: 'How do you pay for that?'* “Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) expresses some skepticism about single-payer health insurance in a new interview, asking how the trillions of dollars in new spending would be

paid for. “That is, administratively, the simplest thing to do, but to convert to it? Thirty trillion dollars. Now, how do you pay for that?” Pelosi said of single-payer in an interview with Rolling Stone.”

- Read more: <https://thehill.com/homenews/house/432047-pelosi-on-single-payer-health-care-how-do-you-pay-for-that>

- **Senators tell FDA to speed up approvals of generic insulin.** “A bipartisan group of senators want the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to change its policy in order to speed up approvals of lower-cost, generic insulin products. Sens. Dick Durbin (D-Ill.), Kevin Cramer (R-N.D.), Bill Cassidy (R-La.), and Tina Smith (D-Minn.) urged the agency amend a recent guidance that they said poses “unreasonable approval delays for insulin products that could help patients with diabetes.””

- Read more: <https://thehill.com/policy/healthcare/432259-senators-tell-fda-to-speed-up-approvals-of-generic-insulin>

- **Week Ahead**

- **House Dems to begin considering drug pricing legislation next week.** “House Democrats will begin considering legislation to lower drug prices at a hearing next week, moving forward on one of their top priorities, according to people familiar with the plan. The House Energy and Commerce Committee will hold a legislative hearing on March 13 to consider bills to lower drug prices, the sources said.”

- Read more: <https://thehill.com/policy/healthcare/432634-house-dems-to-begin-considering-drug-pricing-legislation-next-week>

- **GOP lawmaker says panel to investigate drug company gaming of patent system.** “Sen. John Cornyn (R-Texas) said Tuesday that the Senate Judiciary Committee will be investigating how drug companies game the patent system to delay competition from cheaper generic drugs. Cornyn said that he spoke with Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.), the chairman of that committee, following concerns that Cornyn raised in a drug pricing hearing on Tuesday.”

- Read more: <https://thehill.com/policy/healthcare/431691-gop-lawmaker-says-panel-to-investigate-drug-company-gaming-of-patent-system>

- **GOP braces for showdown on wall emergency with Trump.** “Congress is on a collision course with President Trump over his national emergency declaration, setting the stage for the first veto of his administration. A showdown appears all but inevitable with momentum building behind a resolution of disapproval, which clinched the votes needed to pass over the weekend and could pick up several additional Republican supporters ahead of a vote expected to take place in a matter of days. Top Republicans signaled on Monday that they are resigned to it passing the GOP-controlled Senate, an embarrassing setback for Trump that will force him to use his first veto if he’s going to defeat the backlash from Congress.”

- Read more: <https://thehill.com/homenews/senate/432560-gop-braces-for-showdown-on-wall-emergency-with-trump>
- ***GOP senator: Legislation combating surprise medical bills could come in March.*** “A bipartisan group of senators working on legislation to stop patients from getting massive, surprise medical bills is hoping to release new legislation by the end of March, a senator says. Sen. Bill Cassidy (R-La.), one of the leaders of the effort, said Thursday that “our goal” is to release a new piece of legislation by the end of March.”
 - Read more: <https://thehill.com/policy/healthcare/432128-gop-senator-hoping-to-unveil-new-surprise-medical-bills-measure-by-end-of>
- ***Moderate Dems revive effort to stabilize ObamaCare markets.*** “A group of moderate House Democrats will make a push this year to stabilize ObamaCare's markets, reviving an effort that fell to partisan bickering in 2017. The New Democrat Coalition, a caucus of 101 centrists, says the House should "immediately" work with Republicans to bring down ObamaCare premiums and reverse the Trump administration's "sabotage" of the health care law.”
 - To read more: <https://thehill.com/policy/healthcare/431893-moderate-dems-revive-effort-to-stabilize-obamacare-markets>
- ***Insurance group urges Congress to boost ObamaCare subsidies.*** “The federal government should expand ObamaCare subsidies for low income people to reduce premiums, a health insurance group said Thursday. According to the Blue Cross Blue Shield Association (BCBSA), expanding the tax credits to give more financial assistance would help reduce premiums and ensure more people get covered.”
 - Read more: <https://thehill.com/policy/healthcare/432110-insurance-group-wants-congress-to-boost-obamacare-subsidies>

Regulatory and Administration Update

- ***HHS Secretary Azar Speaks on Transforming Kidney Care at the Kidney Patient Summit.*** “The Secretary of the United States Department of Health and Human Services Alex M. Azar II (pictured, left, with National Kidney Foundation CEO Kevin Longino) today announced his vision for kidney care at the 6th Annual Kidney Patient Summit, led by the National Kidney Foundation (NKF), which is being held March 4th and 5th in Washington, DC. Speaking during the advocacy training day for the more than 100 kidney patients and family members attending the Summit, Secretary Azar announced what the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services is doing to improve outcomes for kidney patients.”
 - Read the Secretary’s speech here: <https://www.hhs.gov/about/leadership/secretary/speeches/2019-speeches/remarks-to-the-national-kidney-foundation.html>
 - Read more: <https://www.kidney.org/news/hhs-secretary-azar-speaks-transforming-kidney-care-kidney-patient-summit>

- ***U.S. seeks to cut dialysis costs with more home care versus clinics.*** “The Trump administration is working on a new payment approach for treating kidney disease that favors lower cost care at home and transplants, a change that would upend a dialysis industry that provides care in thousands of clinics nationwide. The goal is to reduce the \$114 billion paid by the U.S. government each year to treat chronic kidney disease and end-stage renal disease, a top area of spending.”
 - Read more: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-healthcare-dialysis/u-s-seeks-to-cut-dialysis-costs-with-more-home-care-versus-clinics-idUSKCN1QL0G6>
- ***Top White House official warns hospitals on surprise medical bills.*** “A top White House policy adviser on Monday warned hospitals that they need to address the issue of surprise medical bills if they don’t want Congress to do it for them. “If hospitals, providers and issuers don’t protect these patients from financial harm, Congress and the administration will need to act,” said Joe Grogan, director of the White House Domestic Policy Council.”
 - Read more: <https://thehill.com/policy/healthcare/432452-top-white-house-official-warns-hospitals-on-surprise-medical-bills>

Articles of Interest

- ***Scientists report curing a HIV-positive patient for second time ever.*** “Scientists believe a patient has been cured for just the second time ever of HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, The New York Times reported Monday. Researchers are expected to publish a report on Tuesday in Nature, a leading science journal, and describe their findings at a press conference in Seattle. The patient's identity will remain anonymous, researchers said.”
 - Read more: <https://thehill.com/policy/healthcare/432576-scientists-report-curing-hiv-positive-patient-for-second-time-ever>
- ***Drug company announces new version of insulin at half the price.*** “The drug company Eli Lilly on Monday announced that it is introducing a cheaper version of its insulin that will sell at half the price, a decision aimed at tamping down the outcry over insulin prices. The move comes in response to intense scrutiny of drug prices and particularly insulin, a decades-old drug that people with diabetes need that has seen huge price spikes in recent years.”
 - Read more: <https://thehill.com/policy/healthcare/432439-drug-company-announces-new-version-of-insulin-at-half-the-price>
- ***Rebates And Drug Costs: What The New Proposal Would Mean.*** “The Trump administration is trying in myriad ways to answer demands from consumers for lower prescription drug prices – a topic that got serious attention before the Senate Finance Committee on Tuesday where top executives of seven major drug companies testified. The president announced his “American Patients First” agenda in May, offering nearly 30 policy recommendations to modernize payment policies and expand competitive

price negotiations, and the administration is forging ahead with action on these and many other recommendations.”

- Read more:

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/gracemarieturner/2019/02/28/rebates-and-drug-costs-what-the-new-proposal-would-mean/#25b615953133>

- ***Prescription Drug Pricing Hearing: Is The Senate Probing In The Wrong Place?*** “Last week, during a Senate hearing on prescription drug prices, chief executives from seven large pharmaceutical firms each offered arguments in defense of the ways in which they set prices, citing the fact that high rebates nullified for the most part the increases in list prices. The executives hammered home the point that net price increases have become stagnant due to the growing gross to net bubble.”
 - Read more: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/joshuacohen/2019/03/04/prescription-drug-pricing-hearing-is-the-senate-probing-in-the-wrong-place/#276fd96b1fd4>
- ***Big Pharma's Leaner Look Spells Trouble for Obesity Research.*** “The pharma world’s newfound zeal for slimmer pipelines has brought an end to once-promising obesity medicines. Both Sanofi and Novartis have halted work on experimental weight-loss treatments, leaving rival Novo Nordisk A/S with little competition in the field.”
 - Read more: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-03-04/pharma-s-leaner-look-spells-trouble-for-obesity-drug-research>
- ***How Affordable are 2019 ACA Premiums for Middle-Income People?*** “The majority of enrollees who purchase health coverage through Affordable Care Act (ACA) exchanges receive premium tax credits to help them afford their monthly premiums. To a large extent, subsidized enrollees are shielded from premium increases because their subsidies rise along with premiums. On the other hand, middle-income people with incomes above 400% of the Federal Poverty Line (“FPL”, equal to \$48,560 for an individual and \$100,400 for a family of four in 2019) are not eligible for subsidies and may struggle to afford ACA-compliant plans.”
 - Read more: <https://www.kff.org/health-reform/issue-brief/how-affordable-are-2019-aca-premiums-for-middle-income-people/>