American Nephrology Nurses Association

Daily Capitol Hill Update – Thursday, December 16, 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 at 1:30 p.m. will award the medal of honor to three servicemembers at the White House.

• At 3 p.m., Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris will meet with the White House Covid-19 response team to discuss the omicron variant.

CONGRESS:

• The Senate is back at 10 a.m. with no votes scheduled, but action possible on nominees and a bill banning goods made with forced Chinese labor.

• The House has wrapped up work for 2021, but meets for a pro forma session at 11 a.m.

Congressional, Health Policy, and Political News

• Bloomberg Government: Health-care spending in the U.S. spiked 9.7% to $4.1 trillion — or $12,530 per person — in 2020, driven by a torrent of cash from new federal Covid-19 programs, the Department of Health and Human Services said yesterday. The growth rate — more than double the 4.3% increase in 2019 — was caused by the 36% boost in federal expenditures for health care in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services said in an analysis.

• Bloomberg Government: Democrats Seek Permanent Health Coverage Tax Credit Extension: Democratic Senators introduced legislation that will permanently extend the Health Coverage Tax Credit for retirees who lost their health care coverage. The health coverage tax credit is set to expire at the end of this year, and a provision in their party’s domestic spending package to extend it may not win approval in time, as the legislation faces delays.
  o Sens. Tammy Baldwin (D-Wis.), Sherrod Brown (D-Ohio), Bob Casey (D-Pa.), and Debbie Stabenow (D-Mich.) introduced a bill to make permanent the Health Coverage Tax Credit, a tax credit for 72.5% of health care insurance premiums for retirees between the age of 50 and 65 years of age who lost their health care coverage when their employers either entered into bankruptcy or laid off workers due to foreign trade. The credit expires Jan. 1, 2022. Brown’s office said the senator is looking at every legislative option to extend the credit.

• The Washington Post: CDC Advisers To Weigh Limits On Johnson & Johnson Vaccine Because Of Continued Blood Clot Issues: Vaccine advisers to the Centers for Disease Control
and Prevention are meeting Thursday to weigh possible limits on the use of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine because of continued blood clot issues, mostly in young and middle-aged women, according to clinicians familiar with the agenda. ... The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices will be presented with new data that appears to show the rate of the clots in people who received the Johnson & Johnson shot has increased since April, although the problem is still rare. There have been about nine deaths related to the issue, according to a federal official familiar with the situation.

- **The New York Times: Manchin Balks On Social Policy Bill; Democrats May Punt To 2022:** Democrats privately conceded on Wednesday that they were all but certain to delay consideration of President Biden’s $2.2 trillion social policy bill in the Senate until 2022, missing a self-imposed Christmas deadline as negotiations with a key centrist holdout, Senator Joe Manchin III of West Virginia, sputtered. Private talks this week between Mr. Biden and Mr. Manchin, who is pushing to curtail the scope of the package and shrink its price tag, have failed to resolve crucial differences, according to White House officials and congressional aides. And leading Democrats have yet to complete work on the complex social safety net, climate and tax package.

- **Politico: HHS Forecast Shows Omicron Stretching U.S. Covid Testing Supply:** Biden administration health officials are privately warning Covid-19 test makers and laboratories that demand for tests could double or even triple over the next two months as cases surge across the country, five people with knowledge of the matter told POLITICO. Internal modeling developed by the Health and Human Services Department’s Testing and Diagnostic Working Group projects that the nation's supply could be stretched by the need to conduct 3 to 5 million tests per day by late January or early February — a sharp increase from current daily levels of more than 1.6 million.

- **Bloomberg Government: U.S. to Set Up New Body Against Drug Trade:** The U.S. is establishing a new interagency body as part of a wider effort to curb illegal drug trade and cut off crime organizations and their facilitators from the U.S. financial system, the White House said. An executive order by Biden sets up the U.S. Council on Transnational Organized Crime, which will coordinate on countering crime organizations engaged in drug trafficking. Another Biden executive order strengthens U.S. sanctions capabilities to cut off drug traffickers and their facilitators.