Schedules: White House and Congress

WHITE HOUSE:

- The president has no public events scheduled. The White House Covid-19 Response Team will hold a press briefing at 11 a.m. Press Secretary Jen Psaki and the administration’s Supply Chain Disruptions Task Force Port Envoy John D. Porcari will hold a press briefing at 12:15 p.m.

CONGRESS:

- The Senate holds a cloture vote at noon on the nomination of Anne A. Witkowsky to be the State Department assistant secretary for conflict and stabilization operations
- The House is not in session.

Congressional, Health Policy, and Political News

- **KHN: Listen: How The New ‘No Surprises’ Law Tackles Unexpected Medical Bills**: The federal No Surprises Act, which aims to eliminate unexpected out-of-network medical bills, took effect Jan. 1, and KHN correspondents hit the airwaves to explain the new law. KHN senior correspondent Julie Appleby appeared on NPR’s “Weekend Edition” on Sunday to give background on why the law was necessary: Surveys showed that up to 1 in 5 emergency department visits and 1 in 10 elective surgeries resulted in an unexpected, out-of-network bill.

- **Bloomberg Government: Six lawyers will argue in special Supreme Court sessions** Jan. 7 over Biden’s Covid-19 vaccine rules, including several current or former state solicitors general. The unusual hearings will feature a mix of first-time and repeat players at the court, according to the court’s list of the lawyers arguing, released this week. Kicking off the rare day is veteran attorney Scott Keller, a former solicitor general for Texas who is representing business groups against the employer mandate.

- **Bloomberg Government: Biden Agenda Stuck as Manchin Reports ‘No Negotiation’**: Sen. Joe Manchin (D-W.Va.) said yesterday he’s not in talks with the White House or Democrats on reviving Biden’s $2 trillion tax and spending agenda, leaving the administration’s signature domestic initiative stalled. Manchin signaled he may be open to future talks on some of Biden’s proposals, including some clean energy proposals. He has had problems with the legislation’s paid family leave and Medicare expansion provisions.

- **Fox News: COVID-19 Variant Found In France Nicknamed IHU**: Report: An official from the World Health Organization told a press conference Tuesday that another COVID-19 variant has infected a dozen people in France and has been on the agency’s radar, according to a report. Bloomberg reported
that the ‘IHU’ variant, which was nicknamed by researchers at the Marseille-based Mediterranee Infection University Hospital Institute (IHU), has infected individuals in the southern Alps region in the country. Abdi Mahamud, a WHO incident manager, told researchers in Geneva that it’s too soon to "speculate on virological, epidemiological or clinical features" of the variant that was identified in November — at about the same time as omicron.

- **Bloomberg Government: CDC Sticks to New Covid-19 Isolation Guidance**: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention clarified the rationale behind its decision to shorten recommended isolation and quarantine guidance, and not support more testing to resume normal activities, following criticism that its shift was not driven by current science. In a posting on its website yesterday, the federal public-health agency said that it had opted to change its guidelines based on emerging scientific evidence concerning when and for how long a person is most likely to transmit the highly infectious omicron variant.

- **Bloomberg Government: Pfizer-U.S. Pill Pact Hits 20 Million**: Pfizer said the federal government has agreed to buy an additional 10 million courses of its Covid-19 pill, adding to the country’s stash of virus-fighting tools as infections continue to rise. The company said in a statement yesterday that the U.S. agreed to buy the additional supply of the drug, known as “Paxlovid,” on top of 10 million courses it had previously agreed to purchase. Around 10 million courses have been accelerated for delivery by the end of June, Pfizer said, with the remaining tranche to be delivered by the end of September.

- **Bloomberg Government: U.S. Hits Record 1 Million Cases in 1 Day**: The U.S. set a new global daily record of coronavirus cases, with more than 1 million people diagnosed with Covid-19 on Monday as omicron sweeps across the country. That’s more than any country has ever seen since the pandemic began and comes after the recent record of around 590,000 cases was itself a doubling from the prior week. The stratospheric numbers come even as many Americans rely on tests they take at home, with results that are not reported to authorities. That means that the record is likely a significant underestimate.
  
  - Omicron is accounting for the lion’s share of new coronavirus cases, according to estimates from federal health officials. The variant made up 95% of all sequenced Covid-19 cases in the U.S. in the week ending on Jan. 1, up from a revised 77% in the previous week, according to a model by the CDC. Previously, the CDC estimated that the variant accounted for 58.6% of cases in the week ending Dec. 25, Fiona Rutherford reports.
  
  - Still, U.S. hospitals are so far seeing significantly fewer severe outcomes from the omicron wave than they saw in past Covid spikes, mirroring the experience of South Africa and the U.K. The U.S. is reporting a weekly average of 485,363 cases, roughly twice the peak of last winter, and true prevalence is projected to be far higher. But U.S. hospitals have just 64% of the Covid-19 patients in adult intensive-care beds as they did at last winter’s peak, and hospital deaths are around 52% of last winter’s worst period.