

# American Nephrology Nurses Association

Daily Capitol Hill Update – Wednesday, January 6, 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

- President Trump departs White House for Ellipse at 10:50am to address a “Save America Rally”
- 1pm: VP Mike Pence presides over joint session of Congress

### CONGRESS

- 1pm: Joint session to certify election results

## Congressional, Health Policy, and Political News

- **Modern Healthcare: Congress Recalibrates Medicare Physician Fee Schedule After Lobbying:** After a lobbying frenzy that pitted primary care providers against specialty physicians, Congress decided to recalibrate the Medicare Physician Fee Schedule in its latest stimulus and government funding bill. CMS decided to give primary care providers a pay boost in the 2021 physician fee schedule through changes to pay for evaluation and management services and creating an additional add-on code for serving patients with multiple chronic conditions. Because of budget neutrality requirements, the pay increases to primary care had to be offset with cuts to other specialties.
- **Bloomberg Government: Senate Control Hangs in the Balance:** Democrats’ hopes of taking control of the U.S. Senate hung in the balance early this morning after the party captured one seat in the Georgia runoff elections and waited on the outcome of another race that remained too close to call.
  - To secure a narrow majority, Democrats need to win both Senate seats, which would split the chamber 50-50 between Republicans and the Democratic caucus, with Vice President-elect Kamala Harris casting tie-breaking votes.
  - Democrat Raphael Warnock defeated Republican Sen. Kelly Loeffler in one of the runoff races, the Associated Press reported this morning, while Republican Sen. David Perdue and Democrat Jon Ossoff were locked in a dead heat with some absentee votes yet to be counted and as many as 17,000 military and overseas ballots due by Friday.
  - With Loeffler’s loss, Republicans must hold on to the other Georgia Senate seat to preserve their hold on the chamber and be able to thwart Biden’s agenda and cabinet nominees. It could take days to determine the final outcome, and the narrow victory margins will almost certainly spark legal challenges or recounts.
  - But GOP state officials were grim. “From the numbers we’re looking at right now, it doesn’t look good for the two incumbent Republican senators,” said elections official Gabriel Sterling, a Republican.

- **Becker's Hospital Review: FDA Updates Medical Device Shortage List:** The FDA recently added new supplies, including pipette tips and micro pipettes, to its medical device shortage list. The agency also changed some of the categories for the list, which includes the reason the supply is in shortage and gives an estimate on how long the shortage is expected to last.
- **NPR: COVID-19 Vaccine May Not Get To Long-Term Care Facilities Quickly Enough:** Long-term care facilities – places that care for the most vulnerable, high-risk populations – now account for close to 40% of all U.S. deaths due to the virus."It is an American tragedy," said Elaine Ryan, vice president for state advocacy and strategy at AARP. "The states need to redouble their efforts to make sure that vaccines are being administered as quickly as possible." Only about 14% of the first shots distributed to long-term care facilities have gone into someone's arms via the federal pharmacy partnership, according to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
- **Politico: Trump Administration Speeds Up Plan To Deliver Covid Shots In Pharmacies:** The Trump administration late Tuesday said it's accelerating a plan to begin offering coronavirus shots in pharmacies – a move that comes after federal officials faced fierce criticism for the slow pace of immunizations. Within the next two weeks, Operation Warp Speed, the federal government's vaccine accelerator, estimates 3,000 to 6,000 pharmacies could begin administering Covid-19 shots, according to a senior HHS official. The administration announced in November that it would work with major pharmacy chains and independent community pharmacies to distribute vaccines but didn't lay out a timetable.
- **Bloomberg Government: Battle Over Forgiving \$1 Trillion in Student Debt Awaits Biden:** Biden ran on a promise of forgiving at least \$10,000 in student debt per borrower. As president-elect he's getting bombarded from all directions with advice on how to scale up that plan – or back away from it. In Biden's Democratic Party, many want him to cancel a bigger portion of the loans via executive order right after taking office this month. They say it's a way to aid the economic recovery without getting bogged down in congressional wrangling. Biden told journalists just before Christmas that he's unlikely to go that far.
- **Bloomberg Government: Trump Told to Scrap Changes to Marketplace:** House and Senate Democratic health-care leaders called on the Trump administration to rescind policies in a rule proposal that would "allow states to end the use of Healthcare.gov and state exchanges" to enroll consumers in coverage. The lawmakers – including House Energy and Commerce top Democrat Frank Pallone (N.J.) and Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee top Democrat Patty Murray (Wash.) said the proposal could "force consumers into navigating a confusing, decentralized landscape of private brokers, agents or insurers" in order to buy a coverage plan.
- **FierceHealthcare: Study: Hospitals At Or Near Full COVID-19 ICU Capacity Increase By 90% Over Past Few Months:** A new study found a 90% increase in hospitals reaching intensive care unit (ICU) capacity from July through December, with rural hospitals facing the biggest capacity issues. The study released Tuesday by the Epic Health Network looked at ICU occupancy rates at 809 hospitals in rural, suburban and metro areas from July through December. The study also explored the increase in nursing staff demand. The number of hospitals that reached 80% to 100% ICU capacity increased from 200 in July to nearly 400 in the middle of November.