

American Nephrology Nurses Association

Daily Capitol Hill Update - Tuesday, January 7, 2020

(The following information comes from Bloomberg Government Website)

Schedules: White House and Congress

WHITE HOUSE

- 2pm: Trump welcomes Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis to White House; leaders hold expanded bilateral meeting at 2:40pm

CONGRESS

- House meets at 2pm; votes expected at 6:30pm
- Senate meets at 10am; plans vote on confirmation of Jovita Carranza to lead Small Business Administration
 - Senate to recess until 2:15pm for weekly caucus meetings

Congressional, Health Policy, and Political News

- **Romney Wants Bolton Hearing, Collins Backs McConnell:** Sen. Mitt Romney (R-Utah) said that “of course” he’d like to hear from Bolton, but didn’t say whether he’ll vote with Democrats to call him as a witness in the impeachment trial. “He has first-hand information,” Romney said yesterday. “I’d like to hear what he has to say.” Romney said “time will tell” if he will vote with Democrats to bring Bolton in. The senator said he doesn’t know what the trial process will be like.
 - Meanwhile, Sen. Susan Collins (R-Maine) said the Senate should follow impeachment trial precedent and not decide on witnesses until after hearing arguments and senators’ questions. On whether Bolton should be called to testify, Collins said a decision should be made at the end of the trial process. Collins’s view aligns with that of McConnell.
- **USMCA Vote Eyed This Week:** The U.S.-Mexico-Canada trade agreement could come to the Senate floor for a vote later this week if House leaders don’t send over the articles of impeachment, Senate Majority Whip John Thune (R-S.D.) told reporters. “It depends on whether or not the articles come over. If they do this week sometime then we’ll probably turn to that. But if there is a gap our members are interested in getting that done. And the leader wants to get that done,” Thune said. The Senate Finance Committee meets today to mark up the House-passed legislation.
- **Congress Seeks Drug-Pricing Deal:** In an election year when nobody expects Congress to pass meaningful legislation, lawmakers are feeling strong political pressure to reach a deal on at least one main voter priority: lowering drug prices. The most likely result

could be a small deal that caps out-of-pocket costs for Medicare beneficiaries but leaves more contentious questions of market intervention until after the election.

- The issue is one of few that Democrats and Trump have vowed to address. House Democrats already proved that they're willing to give Trump a major political victory, when they passed his U.S. Mexico-Canada free trade agreement the day after impeaching him. Any drug pricing bill -- and other legislation on issues like ending surprise medical bills and protecting data privacy -- would have to go through a similarly rigorous round of negotiations to find the narrow areas of agreement that might have a chance of becoming law in 2020.
- **Budget Proposal Coming Feb. 10:** Trump is scheduled to send lawmakers his fiscal 2021 budget request on Feb. 10, after his Feb. 4 State of the Union address, Cheryl Bolen reports, citing a senior administration official. The budget proposal is technically due the first Monday in February, which is Feb. 3 this year, but is often late and there's no penalty for tardiness.
- **New Senator Sworn In:** Georgia Republican Kelly Loeffler was sworn in to the Senate yesterday after being picked last month to fill the seat held by Sen. Johnny Isakson. McConnell announced her placement on the Agriculture, Health, Education, Labor and Pensions, Joint Economic, and Veterans Affairs committees.
- **U.S. Orders More Forces to Middle East:** Tensions between the U.S. and Iran continued to climb after last week's killing of Soleimani as the Pentagon sent additional forces to the Middle East and Defense Secretary Mark Esper insisted the U.S. hasn't made a decision about leaving Iraq. The three-ship Bataan Amphibious Readiness Group was ordered to move to the Persian Gulf region from the Mediterranean, where it has been exercising, according to a U.S. official. The group, which includes about 2,200 Marines and a helicopter unit, follows the deployment of about 3,500 soldiers from the Army's 82nd Airborne to Kuwait late last week.
 - The latest move followed reports of a letter purportedly telling military officials in Baghdad that American forces were repositioning in advance of a departure. Army General Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told reporters yesterday that the letter was a draft and should never have been sent. "There is no decision to leave, nor did we issue any plans to leave or prepare to leave," Esper said at a briefing alongside Milley.
 - Three dozen mourners were crushed to death in a stampede at Soleimani's funeral. Soleimani's exploits in conflicts from Syria to Yemen made him a national hero, and hundreds of thousands have turned out this week as his funeral procession stopped in various cities, first in Iraq, where he was killed, and later Iran. But the masses that met the cortege ahead of his burial overwhelmed his southeastern hometown, and 35 people were killed and 48 injured, state TV reported today. The funeral was postponed indefinitely, state-run Islamic Republic News Agency reported.
 - Iran served notice that it was assessing 13 scenarios for retaliation. "Even if the weakest of these scenarios gains a consensus, its implementation can be a historic

nightmare for the Americans,” Ali Shamkhani, the head of Iran’s national security council, was cited as saying by Iran’s semi-official Fars news agency. “For now, for intelligence reasons, we cannot provide more information to the media.”

- China’s muted response to Soleimani’s killing suggests Beijing is still not ready to join Russia in taking a more direct role in the Middle East’s entrenched conflicts.
 - Vice President Mike Pence will deliver an address on the Trump administration’s Iran policy next week. Pence will speak at the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies “National Security Summit” in Washington. “The vice president will discuss U.S. policy toward the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Iranian people,” the organization said.
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- **U.S. ‘Underestimated’ Importance of Russia, Cuba to Maduro:** The U.S. has underestimated Russia and Cuba’s ability to prop up the Venezuelan regime, envoy Elliott Abrams told reporters, acknowledging frustration that President Nicolas Maduro has clung to power despite a pressure campaign to oust him. Russian companies now handle more than 70% of Venezuela’s oil, including in ship-to-ship transfers, and the beleaguered nation’s economy has become more dependent on Moscow generally, Abrams said at a briefing yesterday.

 - **Long-Troubled F-35 Shows Improvement:** Lockheed Martin showed “marked improvement” by delivering its F-35 jets on time -- and sometimes early -- as the No. 1 defense contractor seeks approval for a full-rate production decision by December, according to the Pentagon agency that oversees contracts. The Defense Contract Management Agency said Lockheed delivered 134 of the fighter jets in 2019, seven more than its contractual requirement for the year and three more than its annual “commitment” to the Pentagon program office.

 - **Top Defense Post:** Trump has nominated J. David Patterson to be the principal deputy undersecretary of the Defense Department for Personnel & Readiness, according to a statement from the White House. Patterson currently is senior vice president of strategic business opportunities at SMA and previously served as an executive with Boeing, the statement said.

 - **Biden Finds Iowa Footing:** Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden has energized his once-sagging operation in Iowa and is making a late surge from behind, yet a crowded field still leaves the contest in the crucial state wide open. Democrats say there are still a sizable number of voters in the party’s first nominating contest who remain undecided or not firmly committed. The candidates’ closing arguments between now and the Feb. 3 caucuses could make all the difference. Biden, the national front-runner, and the other top three candidates — Pete Buttigieg, Sens. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) and Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) — are bunched at the top of the polls.

- **Oil Lobby Takes On Democrats' Climate Plans:** The oil industry's top lobbying group today is launching a campaign to counter attacks from 2020 Democratic hopefuls vowing to phase out fossil fuels. Sanders and Warren have called for banning fracking and curbing the use of fossil fuels as part of efforts to combat climate change. Other candidates have also outlined ambitious environmental plans. The American Petroleum Institute will air advertisements that highlight the industry's role in paring greenhouse gas emissions that drive climate change while encouraging a truce in heated political debates over energy.
- **Patrick Makes First Media Buy:** Former Massachusetts Gov. Deval Patrick (D) is launching his first paid ad of the campaign, set to begin running on cable TV outlets in four states tomorrow. Patrick's campaign is spending about \$245,000, according to Advertising Analytics, for ads that are set to run on both cable and digital platforms in Iowa, South Carolina, Nevada and New Hampshire. Patrick is spending \$100,000 on cable ads in the Granite State alone.
- **Pompeo Will Not Run for Senate:** Secretary of State Michael Pompeo will not run for an open Senate seat in his home state of Kansas, a person familiar with the matter said yesterday. Pompeo went to the Hill on Monday and told Mitch McConnell that he would not be a candidate, according to the person, who was granted anonymity to discuss a private meeting. McConnell and others urged Pompeo, who represented Kansas in Congress, to enter the race to replace Sen. Pat Roberts (R-Kan.), who is retiring.
- **Trump to Hold Rally for Van Drew:** Trump will host a campaign rally for Rep. Jeff Van Drew (R-N.J.), who just crossed over to the Republican Party amid the impeachment furor. Trump's campaign announced yesterday that he will hold a Keep America Great rally on Jan. 28 in Wildwood, N.J., in Van Drew's district. Elected as a Democrat, Van Drew crossed the aisle last month, joining Republicans after voting against both articles of impeachment.
- **Facebook Tightens Policy Against Deepfakes:** Facebook has shed more light on its efforts to eradicate doctored videos known as deepfakes, addressing an issue it's identified as an emergent threat ahead of the U.S. election. The operator of the world's largest social network pledged to remove content that has been "edited or synthesized" beyond adjustments for quality or clarity and is deemed likely to mislead viewers. Facebook emphasized, however, that its new rules will not apply to parody or satire. Facebook said videos that don't immediately meet its internal criteria for removal may still get fact-checked by more than 50 organizations it's partnered with worldwide. The company added that it will collaborate with Reuters to help newsrooms spot deepfakes through free online courses.

- **Mercury Names Former Sen. Boxer Co-Chair:** Mercury, a bipartisan public strategy firm, named former Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.) to the role of co-chair. Boxer joined the Mercury team effective Jan. 1, according to a statement.
- **Virginia Governor Proposes Making Election Day a Holiday:** Virginia Gov. Ralph Northam (D) wants to make election day a public holiday. The goal would be to ensure that “every Virginian has the time and opportunity to cast their ballot” with as few barriers as possible, Northam said yesterday.
- **U.S. Collecting DNA at Border:** The Homeland Security Department launched a pilot program with the FBI to collect DNA samples from some migrants and American citizens for use in a criminal database. The program will require individuals – including citizens, lawful permanent residents, and migrants – who are arrested at the border, already convicted of a crime, or facing criminal charges to submit to cheek swabs upon entering. The DNA data will then be stored in FBI files for use in criminal probes nationwide, according to a privacy document posted yesterday.
- **White House Plans to Speed Environmental Permitting:** Separately, the Trump administration’s proposal to remake the rules governing environmental permitting will state that a project’s effects on the environment will only be considered if they are “reasonably foreseeable” and causally linked to the project, according to a draft memo. The proposal, which could come as early as today, marks the biggest changes to the National Environmental Policy Act in more than four decades. They would affect how the federal government reviews the environmental impact of major projects like pipelines, bridges, and roads.
- **Artificial Intelligence Principles Issued by White House:** Federal agencies and the private sector would have new guidelines for developing artificial intelligence technologies, such as AI-powered medical devices and autonomous vehicles and drones, under a draft set of principles from the Trump administration. The 10 principles released today by the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy would direct federal agencies to develop consistent policies on AI technology, including soliciting public engagement from academics, nonprofits, industry and civil society, while also ensuring the products are safe for the public and don’t discriminate.
- **\$812B a Year Spent on Health Paperwork:** Health care bureaucracy costs in the U.S. grew to \$812 billion a year because of the expansion of private insurers’ role in Medicare and Medicaid, according to a countrywide study of domestic spending on administrative costs. Administrative costs now represent more than one-third of what Americans spend on doctor visits, hospitals, long-term care, and health insurance annually and are four times more per capita than what Canadians spend on similar expenses, the study, released yesterday, found.

- **Google Warns of Monopoly Powers in Oracle Fight:** Google urged the U.S. Supreme Court to overturn a ruling that the company's use of Oracle's software for the Android mobile operating system violated copyrights, in a case that may reshape legal protections for software code. Google, in a filing to the court this week, largely repeats the search giant's well-established arguments in a case that has been contested for almost a decade: That it was legal to use parts of Oracle's Java programming language to help make Android communicate more easily with other software. A defeat, Google has argued, would restrict further innovation in the computing industry.
- **Justices Urged to Reject Endangered Species Case:** The Sierra Club is pushing back on the Trump administration's bid for the Supreme Court to keep certain Endangered Species Act records under wraps. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service recently petitioned justices to reverse a lower court's decision that required the agencies to release draft documents from a contentious species consultation process. Sierra Club lawyers argued in a brief yesterday that the Supreme Court should deny the White House request and leave the ruling intact.