

American Nephrology Nurses Association

Daily Capitol Hill Update - Thursday, October 17, 2019

(The following information comes from Bloomberg Government Website)

Schedules: White House and Congress

WHITE HOUSE

- 10:30am: President Trump departs White House for Texas for campaign rally, fundraisers
 - 2:45pm: Trump participates in roundtable with supporters in Fort Worth, Texas
 - 3:20pm: Trump delivers remarks at a joint fundraising committee luncheon
 - 5:10pm: Trump visits Louis Vuitton Workshop - Rochambeau in Alvarado, Texas, cuts ribbon and delivers remarks, departs at 6:35pm
 - 8:05pm: Trump holds campaign rally in Dallas
- Vice President Mike Pence, Sec. of State Mike Pompeo in Turkey to meet with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan at 8:15am
 - 11am: Pence holds press conference before departing for Washington at 12:20pm

Congressional, Health Policy, and Political News

- **Pelosi Sweetening Drug-Negotiation Bill:** House Democratic leaders are winning support from members of the party's left flank for their drug-pricing bill with minor tweaks and add-ons to the legislation. The leaders announced alterations to a bill backed by Pelosi that would permit the government to demand lower prices from drugmakers. The changes include increasing over time the minimum number of medicines subject to negotiation and subjecting some newly launched, high-price drugs to negotiation. Two committees will consider the legislation today.
- **'Look-Alike' Medicare Plans:** Private Medicare health plans that critics say improperly target fragile, low-income beneficiaries could get more scrutiny from federal regulators who recently abandoned efforts to restrict the way the plans are marketed. As Medicare open enrollment gets underway, program advocates say Medicare beneficiaries who also qualify for Medicaid should avoid "look-alike" plans that don't address their unique coverage needs and can expose them to hidden costs.
 - Nearly 2.7 million of these "dual eligible" beneficiaries are enrolled in Dual Eligible Special Needs Plans, or D-SNPs, offered by the private Medicare Advantage plans that cover the program's benefits. But Medicare Advantage plan sponsors, including Humana and UnitedHealth, also offer "look-alike" plans that don't integrate benefits from Medicare and Medicaid like actual special needs plans do. The look-alike plans don't have to meet the same federal and state enrollment and contracting requirements as D-SNPs. And while look-

alike plans often tout additional services like vision and dental coverage—much the way regular Medicare Advantage plans do—they often come with higher premiums and deductibles.

- **Warren \$30 Trillion Short of Paying for Health Plan:** Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) took a lot of flak at this week's Democratic presidential debate for being evasive about the taxes needed to pay for the \$30 trillion Medicare for All plan she champions. There's a reason for being vague: Her team hasn't yet figured out how to pay for it. "Her taxes as they currently exist are not enough yet to cover fully replacing health insurance," University of California, Berkeley economics professor Emmanuel Saez, who advised the Warren campaign when developing the wealth tax, told Bloomberg News yesterday.
 - Warren has made it a hallmark of her campaign to demonstrate how she'd pay for her dozens of policy proposals. Her 2% wealth tax on America's richest would be one of the biggest sources of revenue, bringing in about \$2.75 trillion over a decade. That would finance some of her most ambitious plans: \$1.07 trillion for universal childcare, \$610 billion for free college, \$640 billion for eliminating student debt, and among others, \$100 billion to combat the opioid crisis. All told, Warren's wealth tax would pay for her plans with some room -- \$303 billion -- to spare.
- **HHS Nomination:** Trump yesterday announced his intent to nominate Sarah Arbes to be assistant secretary of HHS for legislation. Arbes, who currently serves as principal deputy assistant secretary for legislation, would serve as a liaison between Congress and HHS.
- **Trial Could End By Holidays:** Republican senators discussed the possibility of finishing an impeachment trial before the holidays if the House impeaches Trump before Thanksgiving, Sen. Kevin Cramer (R-N.D.) told reporters yesterday. He said Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) briefed Republican senators behind closed doors on procedures for a trial, which McConnell told reporters would be held six days a week. McConnell said the trial would begin after noon each day, and senators wouldn't be allowed to speak during the proceedings.
- **McKinley Says State Didn't Back Staff:** Michael McKinley, a former senior adviser to Secretary of State Michael Pompeo, told House committees he resigned last week in part because of the State Department's failure "to offer support to foreign service employees caught up in the impeachment inquiry on Ukraine," according to excerpts released by a former colleague familiar with the testimony. McKinley said he also quit because of "what appears to be the utilization of our ambassadors overseas to advance domestic political objectives," according to the excerpt.
- **Pelosi Cites Trump 'Meltdown' on Syria:** A White House meeting between Trump and congressional leaders to contain fallout from the Syria crisis broke down abruptly yesterday, with the president hurling insults at Speaker Nancy Pelosi, who accused him of having a "meltdown."

- Pelosi said Trump appeared to be “shaken” after 129 Republican lawmakers backed a resolution rebuking him for withdrawing U.S. forces from Syria. Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.) said Trump’s insults of Pelosi during a “nasty diatribe” prompted Democratic leaders to leave.
 - The meeting blow-up punctuated a tumultuous day in Washington that began with Trump defending his decision to leave Syria and expose U.S. Kurdish allies to Turkey’s forces, triggering a harsh back-and-forth between Trump and one of his usual defenders. Then came the emergence of a breezy letter from Trump to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan warning him “Don’t be a tough guy. Don’t be a fool!”
- **Trump’s Letter:** Trump wrote a letter to Erdogan calling on him to “work out a good deal!” “History will look upon you favorably if you get this done the right and humane way,” according to the Oct. 9 letter, reported earlier by Fox Business Network and confirmed by the White House. “It will look upon you forever as the devil if good things don’t happen.” The letter was “disturbing,” Ahaber cited the Turkish presidency as saying.
 - Trump insisted the letter was proof that he hadn’t provided Erdogan a “green light” for his incursion into Syria. “I wrote a letter right after that conversation -- a very powerful letter,” Trump told reporters at the White House. “There was never given a green light. They’ve been wanting to do that for years and, frankly, they’ve been fighting for many, many years.”
 - Republican allies sought to spin the letter as evidence that the administration had warned Turkey against misbehavior. House Foreign Affairs Committee ranking member Michael McCaul (R-Texas) described the missive as “very stern” and said it proved Turkey had acted despite warnings from the White House.
- **Erdogan Set to Reject Pence Call for Truce:** Turkey signaled it will reject U.S. calls for a cease-fire in northern Syria, as a top Turkish official described the allies as “miles apart” just hours ahead of crunch talks between Erdogan and Vice President Mike Pence.
- **Halkbank:** Trump assigned his attorney general and Treasury secretary to deal with Erdogan’s repeated pleas to avoid charges against one of Turkey’s largest banks, according to two people familiar with the matter. In an April phone call, Trump told Erdogan that William Barr and Steven Mnuchin would handle the issue, the people said. In the months that followed, no action was taken against Halkbank for its alleged involvement in a massive scheme to evade sanctions on Iran. That changed when an undated indictment was unveiled Tuesday.
- **Oversight Chairman Cummings Dies:** House Oversight and Reform Chairman Elijah Cummings (D-Md.), a key figure in Democrats’ impeachment inquiry and a fierce critic of Trump, has died, AP reported. Cummings passed away today at Johns Hopkins Hospital due to complications concerning long-standing health challenges, AP reported, citing a statement from his office.

- Born in 1951 in segregated Baltimore, Cummings said he was among the first black children to integrate the city's Riverside Park swimming pool in the summer of 1962. His political career started in 1982 when he won election to the Maryland state House. He served there for seven terms, and was the first black lawmaker in the state to become speaker pro tem, before being elected to Congress in 1996.
 - Who might succeed Cummings as chairman of the Oversight panel, and that post's duties as a top House impeachment investigator, is not yet clear.

- **Stopping Highway Cut With NDAA:** Relief for state transportation projects could also be airdropped into the fiscal 2020 defense authorization, according to Smith. The National Defense Authorization Act could be used as a vehicle to block a \$7.6 billion rescission scheduled to occur on July 1, 2020. Smith said in an interview after a conference meeting on the NDAA that stopping the cut is on a list of items that congressional leaders would like to include in the must-pass bill.

- **Senators Defy China Threat on Hong Kong Bill:** Republican senators said yesterday they want to move quickly on legislation to support pro-democracy protesters in Hong Kong despite a threat of retaliation from China. "Hong Kong is a high priority for me," said Sen. Jim Risch (R-Idaho), chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee. "We're going to move on it as rapidly as we can."
 - Sen. Roy Blunt, a member of the Senate GOP leadership, said there haven't been any discussions about the timing for a vote on Hong Kong legislation similar to a measure that passed the House Tuesday. That bill would subject the city's special U.S. trading status to annual reviews and provides for sanctions against officials deemed responsible for undermining its "fundamental freedoms and autonomy."

- **Pension, Retirement Differences:** Lawmakers from both sides of the aisle are prodding Senate Majority Leader McConnell to bring up languishing pension solvency and retirement security proposals, to no avail. A burst of activity yesterday failed to dislodge a pair of House-passed bills that have seen no Senate action for months. Frustrated politicians hosted union-member-packed press conferences, fired off letters, and pleaded for floor time, only to have their requests beaten back by GOP leaders who set the agenda.

- **Wall Street's Senate Ally in Democrats' Crosshairs:** Wall Street banks have found few politicians who will stand up for them in Washington since the 2008 financial crisis turned the industry into a villain. Sen. Thom Tillis (R-N.C.) is an exception. Tillis has been an aggressive advocate of de-regulatory policies that would save giant lenders billions of dollars. He once defended Goldman Sachs -- famed for its swashbuckling dealmakers and traders -- as a firm that probably employs "a lot of little guys."
 - Tillis is up for re-election in November 2020, meaning he will soon find out whether throwing in his lot with Wall Street will cost him with voters in a state

that's become the biggest banking center in the U.S. outside of New York. That's making his race, widely expected to be one of the most fiercely contested next year, something of a litmus test on how much of a political punching bag big banks remain a decade after the crisis.

- **Biden's Campaign Is Short on Cash:** Joe Biden is struggling to regain his lead in the polls and fend off an onslaught from Trump. But he may be too short on cash to be able to do either as well as he'd like. Federal Election Commission filings released Tuesday showed that Biden spent \$17.7 million in the third quarter, or \$1.9 million more than he raised. The deficit spending, unusual for a major candidate at this point in an election cycle, left the former vice president with less than \$9 million, the smallest cash reserve among the five top polling candidates in the race.
- **Biden Outlines Foreign Policy:** Biden outlined yesterday how he would address the conflict unfolding in Syria, calling on the U.S. to lead in brokering peace talks instead of leaving the region. He said he'd first reach out to NATO and the UN "to bring more responsible parties to the table" with the goal of mediating a resolution between Turkey and the Kurds. Biden also called for the U.S. to provide humanitarian support to address the refugee crisis unfolding from the conflict and work to prevent the resurgence of the so-called Islamic State.
- **Debate Draws Smallest Audience:** The television audience for Tuesday's Democratic primary debate was the smallest of any forum so far this year, according to Nielsen Media Research ratings. Just 8.5 million people tuned into the debate, which was televised on CNN and co-sponsored by the New York Times. That's less than 8.7 million for the July 30 debate also televised on CNN. Cable debates typically get lower ratings than those on over-the-air networks, and Tuesday's event in Ohio also competed against a deciding National League Championship Series game won by the Washington Nationals.
- **EU and U.K. Reach Brexit Agreement:** Negotiators from the U.K. reached an agreement with officials in Brussels today that could pave the way for Britain to finally break its 46-year-old ties to the European Union this month. The withdrawal agreement was completed just in time for EU leaders to assess it when they gather for summit talks in the Belgian capital later in the day. The deal then needs to win the backing of the U.K. Parliament on Saturday.
 - That's the final, treacherous hurdle for Prime Minister Boris Johnson to clear before he can complete his ambition of leading Britain out of the EU. Hanging over is the prospect of a veto from the Democratic Unionist Party, the Northern Irish group he needs to get the deal approved.
- **China Pushes Back Against U.S. Diplomatic Rule:** The U.S. State Department's new requirement that China give official notice before its diplomats visit universities and research institutions or meet with local government officials violates the Vienna

Convention governing relations between countries, according to the Chinese embassy in America. "According to Article 25 of the Vienna Convention, the receiving State shall accord full facilities for the performances of the functions of the mission," the Chinese embassy said on Twitter. "But the U.S. side is doing exactly the opposite."

- **China Confirms Two U.S. Citizens Detained:** The Chinese foreign ministry said it has detained two American citizens who run an English-teaching business in China, a development that comes amid rising diplomatic tensions and a broader trade war between the two countries. Jacob Harlan and Alyssa Petersen were detained in the eastern province of Jiangsu in late September "on suspicion of organizing others to cross the border," foreign ministry spokesman Geng Shuang told reporters at a regular briefing in Beijing today. Family members of the pair have sought to raise money over the internet to fund their defense, with the post supporting Petersen calling the charge "bogus."
- **Louis Vuitton Mogul Stays on Trump's Good Side:** Louis Vuitton is following through on a pledge to create more U.S. manufacturing jobs, part of plan by Bernard Arnault, chairman of the French luxury conglomerate, to hedge against trade tensions and build on the rapport he's established with Trump. Trump and his daughter Ivanka are set to open a new Louis Vuitton factory with a ribbon-cutting ceremony in Texas today alongside Arnault, who is LVMH's leading shareholder, and Michael Burke, the chief executive officer of its best-known brand.
- **Nominations:** Trump announced his intent to nominate Todd Chappant to be U.S. ambassador to Brazil, according to a White House statement. Trump also plans to nominate Sarah Arbes to be assistant secretary of HHS for legislation and Robert Feitel to be inspector general of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. Additionally, Trump announced his intent to appoint former White House Press Secretary Sarah Sanders and Shahira Knight to be members of the J. William Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board.
- **GM's Ohio Plant Exit:** General Motors is proceeding with plans to part ways with the massive Ohio car factory it's operated for more than half a century, all but cementing the facility's status as a political liability for Trump. The automaker's Lordstown assembly plant, opened in 1966, is excluded from the at least \$9 billion of investment and 9,000 new or retained jobs GM agreed to yesterday in a deal with the United Auto Workers, according to people familiar with the agreement. The dismal-looking fate of the plant has been fodder for Trump's critics for almost a year, and the attacks are certain to continue on the campaign trail.
- **Reporting Aggressive Investigators:** The head of the Labor Department office that enforces minimum wage and overtime pay requirements wants private attorneys' assistance in flagging investigators who are improperly applying the law. "If you see something, say something. If you don't feel the law is being applied correctly

somewhere, we do encourage you to run it up the chain,” said Cheryl Stanton, administrator of the Labor Department’s Wage and Hour Division, on a conference call hosted by the Federalist Society. “We are trying to look at the best way to become one Wage and Hour Division instead of 54 district offices.”

- **Sage Grouse Plan Halted:** A federal court won’t allow the Trump administration to enforce its plans for managing sage grouse in Western states while litigation is still pending. The U.S. District Court for the District of Idaho issued a preliminary injunction yesterday that temporarily blocks the Bureau of Land Management from implementing its 2019 plans in Idaho, Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, Nevada, Oregon, and part of California. More protective Obama-era plans for managing the iconic birds will remain in place in the meantime.