

# American Nephrology Nurses Association

Daily Capitol Hill Update - Wednesday, December 23, 2020

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

- 4pm: Trump and First Lady Melania Trump leave the White House en route for Palm Beach, Fla.
- 6:35pm: Trump and first lady arrive at Palm Beach International Airport
- 6:55pm: Trump and first lady arrive at Mar-a-Lago; Palm Beach

### CONGRESS

- House and Senate on recess
- Both chambers plan to hold pro forma sessions on Thursday

## Congressional, Health Policy, and Political News

- **Bloomberg Government: Trump's Demand Imperils Virus Bill:** President Donald Trump's surprise attack last night on Congress's historic coronavirus relief package left aid for millions of Americans hanging in the balance as the pandemic continues to batter the nation. The famously unpredictable president slammed the \$2.3 trillion bill as a "disgrace" less than 24 hours after Congress approved the legislation with overwhelmingly bipartisan votes. Trump demanded larger stimulus payments for individuals and called for eliminating "wasteful and unnecessary items," but he didn't say whether he would veto it.
  - Trump's last-minute demands nonetheless sent shockwaves through Washington. In addition to \$900 billion in pandemic-related measures, the package includes \$1.4 trillion to fund government operations through next September. If the president doesn't sign the legislation by Dec. 28, government funding would lapse after midnight that day, triggering a partial shutdown.
  - The angst might run deepest among the president's fellow Republicans, who preferred a smaller pandemic relief package closer to \$500 billion. They agreed to a \$900 billion effort in the end, pressured by the political costs of holding up the relief package just weeks before a crucial runoff election for Georgia's two Senate seats, which will determine control of that chamber.
  - Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) quickly seized on Trump's call for \$2,000 in individual stimulus payments -- well above the \$600 included in the relief bill -- and said the House would try to pass this additional measure during a pro forma session on Thursday, a move that could be blocked by a single member of Congress. That bill would be a standalone measure to strike all references of \$600 in the current legislation, to be replaced with \$2,000, according to two people familiar with the plan.

- Boston Globe: ‘Surprise’ Medical Billing Banned After Richard Neal Gets On Board:** Congress banned the surprise, sky-high medical bills patients get when they use an out-of-network service on Monday, after Massachusetts Representative Richard Neal dropped his objections to earlier proposals and prevailed with his version of a fix. The legislation will prevent doctors, hospitals, and air ambulance providers from charging eye-popping rates to patients who were provided out-of-network care without their knowledge, such as when patients are transported to an emergency room for treatment after an accident.
- Bloomberg Government: Health Insurers Fret Over Losing Federal Antitrust Exemption:** Legislation that would subject health insurance companies to federal antitrust laws is headed to Trump’s desk despite insurers’ claims that it would reduce competition and make coverage less affordable. The bipartisan bill, which the Senate passed yesterday by unanimous consent, would amend the McCarran-Ferguson Act, a 1945 law that exempted insurance companies from federal antitrust laws and gave states regulatory authority over them. Trump is expected to sign the bill into law, according to a spokeswoman for Sen. Steve Daines (R-Mont.), a cosponsor of the measure.
- Bloomberg Government: ‘Skinny’ Health Plans Bid to Face Obstacles:** The Trump administration’s efforts to boost cheaper, less comprehensive health plans as an alternative to Obamacare may be difficult for Biden to fully unwind. Health policy experts say Biden could face political and legal backlash if he pushes Americans off the short-term limited duration plans – often dubbed “skinny” plans – unless he can also take steps to bring down the price of Obamacare.
- The Hill: Trump Slams Relief Bill, Calls On Congress To Increase Stimulus Money:** President Trump on Tuesday evening blasted Congress over the already-passed COVID-19 relief package and called on both chambers to send him a new bill increasing stimulus checks from \$600 to \$2,000. The president expressed dismay with the \$2.3 trillion package that Congress passed Monday, which includes \$900 billion in coronavirus relief and \$1.4 trillion to fund the government until October, conflating the two bills and saying the spending goals were misguided.
- The Hill: Fauci: Assume New COVID-19 Strain Is In US:** Anthony Fauci, the nation's top infectious diseases expert, said early Tuesday that Americans should assume a new, more contagious strain of the coronavirus detected in the U.K. is already in the U.S. It’s “certainly possible” that the strain is already present within the U.S., Fauci said on ABC’s “Good Morning America.”
- Modern Healthcare: Walmart Ignored Red Flags In Illegitimate Opioid Prescription Orders, Feds Allege:** Managers across Walmart's 5,000 U.S pharmacies denied its pharmacists the authority to refuse to fill prescriptions from known "pill mills" and withheld related compliance data from their workers, federal regulators alleged in the complaint filed in federal court. While Walmart stopped distributing controlled substances in 2018, it had received hundreds of thousands of suspicious orders that it failed to report to the Drug Enforcement Agency, according to the lawsuit, which is seeking what could be billions of dollars in damages and limitations on its prescribing privileges.