American Nephrology Nurses Association

Daily Capitol Hill Update – Thursday, December 23, 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:

- Biden at 3:30 p.m. plans to sign into law H.R. 3537, the “Accelerating Access to Critical Therapies for ALS Act,” which the Senate cleared last weekend. Health and Human Services Secretary Xavier Becerra is scheduled to participate in the signing.

- White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki is slated to give a press briefing at noon.

CONGRESS:

- Out of Session.

Congressional, Health Policy, and Political News

- **KHN: Record Number Of Americans Sign Up For ACA Health Insurance:** A record 13.6 million Americans have signed up for health coverage for 2022 on the Affordable Care Act marketplaces, with nearly a month remaining to enroll in most states, the Biden administration announced Wednesday. President Joe Biden’s top health advisers credited the increased government subsidies, which lowered out-of-pocket costs, for the surge in enrollment. They also said enhanced personal assistance and outreach helped connect more people to health insurance plans.

- **AP: Pfizer Pill Becomes 1st US- Authorized Home COVID Treatment:** U.S. health regulators on Wednesday authorized the first pill against COVID-19, a Pfizer drug that Americans will be able to take at home to head off the worst effects of the virus. The long-awaited milestone comes as U.S. cases, hospitalizations and deaths are all rising and health officials warn of a tsunami of new infections from the omicron variant that could overwhelm hospitals. The drug, Paxlovid, is a faster way to treat early COVID-19 infections, though initial supplies will be extremely limited. All of the previously authorized drugs against the disease require an IV or an injection.

- **Bloomberg Government: Federal government spending to distribute 500 million free, at-home Covid-19 test kits starting next month could result in new spending totaling $5.6 billion.** The Department of Defense in coordination with the Department of Health and Human Services issued a request for information yesterday for companies with an approved or pending Food and Drug Administration emergency use authorization for the kits, amid other parameters.
The Washington Post: Supreme Court Sets Special Hearing For Biden’s Vaccine Rules For Health-Care Workers, Private Businesses: It is highly unusual for the justices to schedule such hearings on emergency requests. Both will be considered Jan. 7, the Friday before the court was to resume its normal schedule of oral arguments. One of the cases involves a rule from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) that requires employers with 100 or more workers to have staff vaccinated or tested on a regular basis. The other is from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, and it requires vaccination for workers at facilities that receive federal funds tied to those programs.

Bloomberg Government: Fate, Health And Trump Will Guide If Biden Runs: President Biden left the door open to ending his presidency after just one term, saying it’s up to “fate” but that he’d run again if he remains in good health and would be even more likely to do so if Donald Trump is his opponent.

- Speaking to ABC’s “World News Tonight” in an interview broadcast yesterday, Biden said he plans to seek re-election, before adding caveats.
- “Yes, but look, I’m a great respecter of fate. Fate has intervened in my life many, many times,” Biden said. “If I’m in the health I’m in now, if I’m in good health, then in fact I would run again.”
- Asked by anchor David Muir what he’d do if Trump were the nominee in 2024, Biden smiled. “You’re trying to tempt me now,” he said. “Sure. Why would I not run against Trump, being the nominee? That’d increase the prospect of running.”
- The administration has taken steps to quell speculation of who Biden’s potential successor might be, including a joint trip early this month by two top potential rivals, Vice President Kamala Harris and Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg. They traveled to North Carolina to promote Biden’s infrastructure bill.

Bloomberg Government: Americans who were dreading the burden of resuming student-loan repayments in February got a reprieve from Biden, who yesterday extended forbearance until May 1, but they aren’t feeling entirely at ease yet. “It’s just kicking the can down the road, really,” said Bloomberg economist Yelena Shulyatyeva. “At some point, the administration will have to make a decision of what to do with student debt.” About one in eight people in the U.S. currently have student loans, with the federal total skyrocketing to a record $1.6 trillion in the third quarter this year.