Schedules: White House and Congress

WHITE HOUSE:

- The president will remain in Rehoboth Beach, Del. and has no public events scheduled.

CONGRESS:

- Out of Session.

Congressional, Health Policy, and Political News

- **Bloomberg Government:** Biden has signed the $768.2 billion defense policy bill for fiscal 2022, the White House said in a statement yesterday. The legislation, which carried $25 billion more than what the president sought, also sidestepped on multiple controversial issues that threatened to derail the must-pass bill that authorizes pay for U.S. troops. It omits congressional action to add sanctions on Russia’s Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline or penalize Saudi Arabia for the murder of a U.S.-based journalist, and it waters down more sweeping changes to the military’s justice system.

- **Bloomberg Government:** The Biden administration yesterday nixed a Trump-era rule tying U.S. drug payments to cheaper foreign rates amid an ongoing government push to curb rising pharmaceutical costs. The Trump-era rule matched Medicare reimbursement for drugs administered in doctors’ offices — which are usually expensive and often for serious illnesses — to lower costs paid in other countries. The rule was finalized in 2020, but it was blocked by federal judges.

- **Bloomberg Government:** People who have Covid-19 can leave isolation after five days if they’re no longer experiencing symptoms, U.S. health officials said, reducing the earlier recommended period in half as the omicron variant spurs a jump in infections. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said in a statement yesterday that following the initial five-day isolation period, people with Covid-19 still should wear a mask for five days when around others. The new guidance supplants previous recommendations that said people who have tested positive for the virus should isolate for 10 days.
  - Covid-19 cases are expected to rise across the U.S. following the holidays, threatening to upend the lives of workers and students who are infected or exposed to the virus. Shorter isolation and quarantine periods will allow people to return to work or to school sooner, potentially helping reduce widespread disruptions that could close schools or snarl supply chains.
  - The omicron variant is leaving the administration without a coherent message on pandemic safety as new data rolls out and health officials issue broad proclamations on vaccine efficacy, policy analysts argue. The administration is struggling to persuade more Americans to get vaccinated, but those efforts are being complicated by evolving information on how much protection vaccines and boosters offer against omicron.

- **Bloomberg Government:** Biden’s top health adviser said a domestic travel vaccination rule should be considered as the omicron variant fuels record Covid-19 case loads in some states. Anthony Fauci told MSNBC yesterday it would be “reasonable to consider” a requirement to be vaccinated for coronavirus
before getting on a domestic flight. Later, in an interview on CNN, he said people should consider avoiding larger New Year’s Eve parties. “When you make vaccination a requirement, that’s another incentive to get more people vaccinated,” Fauci said.