American Nephrology Nurses Association

Daily Capitol Hill Update – Friday, December 3, 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:**

- The president will deliver remarks at 10:15 a.m. on the November jobs report. The median projection in a Bloomberg survey of economists are for a 546,000 increase in payrolls -- which would be the most since a 1 million-plus surge in July -- and for the unemployment rate to fall slightly to 4.5%. While the job market is starting to make greater strides, labor supply remains well short of demand.

- Biden will depart at 5:30 p.m. for Camp David for the weekend.

**CONGRESS:**

- The House canceled plans to be in session today and Monday, and will return Tuesday. The Senate is also out until Monday.

**Congressional, Health Policy, and Political News**

- **Modern Healthcare: Federal Spending Deal Leaves Looming Medicare Cuts In Place:** Congressional leaders have struck a deal to avert a government shutdown, but they didn't include a major priority for healthcare providers: preventing significant Medicare reimbursement cuts that are slated to take effect next month. Medicare providers stand to lose about $36 billion in reimbursements stemming from a 4% cut set to take effect in January, according to the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office.

- **Bloomberg Government: Congress Clears Stopgap Spending Bill:** The Senate last night passed a stopgap spending bill to avert a U.S. government shutdown, sending the measure to Biden for his signature. The bipartisan 69-28 vote came hours after House passage of the legislation on a largely party-line basis.
  - The Senate vote followed day-long negotiations between Senate leaders and a group of conservative Republicans who demanded consideration of an amendment that would block Biden’s Covid-19 vaccine mandates. In exchange, they agreed to not throw up procedural obstacles for the spending bill, which threatened to trigger a partial closing of the government after midnight Friday. That amendment failed, 48-50, and the Senate moved quickly to passage of the temporary government funding.
  - The stopgap bill funds the government until Feb. 18. That will allow Democrats to move forward on Biden’s roughly $2 trillion economic agenda and to find a path to lifting the federal debt ceiling before the end of the month in the face of solid Republican opposition.
  - Both parties also will turn to a must-pass annual defense policy bill.
• **Bloomberg Government: Drug Rebate Fight to Proceed in D.C. Federal Court:** A trade association representing drugmakers can move forward with a case challenging a new rule for determining drug rebates they must pay to state Medicaid agencies, a federal court in the District of Columbia said. Materials incorporated into the Pharmaceutical Research & Manufacturers of America's complaint named several drugmakers and demonstrated how they’ll be harmed by the new rule, the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia said.

• **Crain's New York Business: New York Providers Push for Education-Related Reforms to Combat Nursing Shortages:** Nursing shortages in New York made headlines this fall when Lewis County General Hospital announced it would stop delivering babies for lack of vaccinated nurses in its maternity ward. Then Mount Sinai South Nassau temporarily closed its emergency department in Long Beach last week, blaming the same problem. Such events have shed light on what stakeholders said is a longstanding, statewide shortage of registered nurses and nurse practitioners. The shortage predates the COVID-19 pandemic, they said.

• **Modern Healthcare: 13M People Delayed Or Didn't Fill Prescription Drugs Pre-Pandemic:** An estimated 13 million adults delayed getting or didn't fill prescription drugs prior to the COVID-19 pandemic due to cost, according to a new survey. More than one-quarter of Medicare beneficiaries and 5.3% of privately insured adults spent more than 1% of their household income on their out-of-pocket prescription drug costs, according to the Urban Institute's estimated annual averages of 2018 and 2019 Medicare Expenditure Panel Survey data from nearly 30,000 Americans. More than 3% of Medicare beneficiaries — and nearly 7% of beneficiaries with unmet prescription drug needs — spent more than 10% of their household income on prescription drugs.

• **Bloomberg Government: Merck Pill Access Imperiled by Prescribing Rules:** The potential for Merck's Covid-19 pill to stave off severe disease could be thwarted by prescription requirements that will make access more difficult for some of the hardest-hit Americans, health researchers say. The drug gained a key recommendation from the Food and Drug Administration’s advisory committee in a 13-10 vote. Merck’s molnupiravir — if authorized — would offer for the first time in the U.S. an at-home treatment for patients with mild to moderate Covid-19 at risk of severe disease.

• **Bloomberg Government: Medicaid Funding for Soon-to-Be-Freed Prisoners Eyed in States:** Vermont and several other states are asking federal regulators to approve the use of Medicaid funds for health-care services to prisoners shortly before their release, setting up a debate over how much flexibility the states should have in running their Medicaid programs. Approval by CMS would mark the first break in the firewall that has kept Medicaid out of prisons, and would address the problem of interrupted care faced by newly released prisoners suffering from chronic illnesses, mental health problems, or substance use disorder as they transition to life beyond bars, some advocates say.