Schedules: White House and Congress

WHITE HOUSE:

- Biden will speak at 2 p.m. from the White House on his tax and spending agenda’s plans to address prescription drug costs.

- Tomorrow, Biden will hold a call with Russian President Vladimir Putin. The president on Wednesday will travel to Kansas City to tout the bipartisan infrastructure law. Biden will host a virtual Summit for Democracy on Thursday and Friday with more than 100 participants.

CONGRESS:

- The Senate meets at 3 p.m., and will hold a procedural vote on Biden’s pick to lead the Federal Communications Commission.

- The House is not in today, and returns tomorrow.

- Lawmakers in both chambers this week are working on a path forward on the annual defense policy bill, legislation to avoid breaching the debt ceiling, and Democrats’ roughly $1.75 trillion tax and spending plan.

Congressional, Health Policy, and Political News

- The Washington Post: U.S. Coronavirus Vaccine Demand Increases Amid Omicron Variant Concerns: Demand for coronavirus vaccines has spiked in the United States in recent weeks, as more Americans are eligible for booster shots and concerns grow over the omicron variant. Health-care providers administered 2.18 million doses of coronavirus vaccines on Thursday, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention — the “highest single-day total since May,” the White House said. According to the latest CDC report, over the week ending on Thursday, the average number of daily administered vaccine doses reported to the agency was 22 percent higher than the previous week.

- Bloomberg Government: Oversight Plans Drug Pricing Hearing: The House Oversight and Reform Committee scheduled a hearing Thursday to reveal findings in the panel’s three year investigation into pharmaceutical pricing and business practices. The hearing will also look at the need for structural reforms for the industry.

- Bloomberg Government: Answers Wanted on OSHA Health-Care Covid-19 Rule: Time is running out for OSHA’s original Covid-19 health-care emergency temporary standard. The standard is set to expire Dec. 21, six months after it was enacted June 21. While the
Occupational Safety and Health Administration issued the rule saying the mandate would be replaced with a permanent one within six months, as of Friday, OSHA hasn’t said when that permanent standard will be issued or how the measure will differ from the temporary version. Asked for guidance regarding the release, a Department of Labor spokeswoman said Friday that OSHA “does not have an update at this time.”

- **Modern Healthcare: Medicare Saw Telehealth Use Grow More Than 6,000% During Pandemic:** The Health and Human Services Department found that Medicare visits held via telehealth increased 63-fold from 2019 to 2020 as a result of flexibilities put into place due to the COVID-19 public health emergency, according to a new HHS study released Friday. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services will use the report’s results to inform future Medicare telehealth policy, CMS Administrator Chiquita Brooks-LaSure said in a news release. Providers have been eager to see how lawmakers and policymakers will regulate telehealth once the PHE ends. Medicare payment advisors have suggested a temporary extension of flexibilities to allow time to study telehealth’s impacts.

- **CIDRAP: COVID-19 Risk Factors In Healthcare Workers Spelled Out:** Close contact with COVID-19 cases outside of work is the biggest risk factor for infections among American healthcare workers, according to research published yesterday in Emerging Infectious Diseases. The case-control study was based on participants from 25 healthcare facilities across the country and included 33,644 healthcare workers (3,416 cases and 30,228 controls) who reported COVID-19 infections and exposures to Emerging Infections Program (EIP) sites. Among 3,416 COVID-19 cases, 1,172 healthcare personnel were interviewed.

- **The New York Times: After Success In Seating Federal Judges, Biden Hits Resistance:** After early success in nominating and confirming federal judges, President Biden and Senate Democrats have begun to encounter stiffer Republican resistance to their efforts to reshape the courts. Tennessee Republicans have raised objections to Mr. Biden’s pick for an influential appeals court there — the administration’s first judicial nominee from a state represented by two Republican senators — and a circuit court candidate is likely to need every Democratic vote to win confirmation in a coming floor showdown. The obstacles threaten to slow or halt a little-noticed winning streak for the Biden administration on Capitol Hill.

- **Houston Chronicle: More Than Half Of Houstonians Who Died From COVID Had Diabetes:** Half of Houstonians who died of COVID-19 had diabetes, a Houston Health Department review concluded late last month. The virus killed more than 3,600 city residents as of November, nearly 52 percent of whom had diabetes, according to health department data. One quarter were obese. Stephen Williams, director of the Houston Health Department, said the findings are not surprising, given the city’s high rate of diabetes. The chronic endocrine condition, which results from too much sugar in the bloodstream, is more prevalent in Houston than most other major cities. Diabetics account for 13.5 percent of the Houston-area population; the national average is 10 percent.

- **Bloomberg Government: Aging Research, Advocacy Group Launches with Gingrich Help:** A group trying to elevate age-related conditions and promote research into making humans live longer is getting help from former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, a long-time advocate for expanding the government’s research portfolio.
  - The Alliance for Longevity Initiatives — a nonprofit backed by several research organizations and companies — is hoping to make inroads in Congress to expand what
the government spends on aging research and to make it easier for companies to gain approval for medicines meant to help people live longer lives, Dylan Livingston, the group’s president and founder, said. “This is about keeping in better health for a longer period of time,” Livingston said. The group wants to work with the Food and Drug Administration to create a special pathway for therapies in the “longevity medicine” space and increase the budget for the National Institute on Aging, part of the National Institutes of Health, Livingston said.

- The Alliance on Thursday will host a talk with Gingrich and former Rep. Steve Israel (D-N.Y.). Gingrich is connected to the group by Joseph DeSantis, who is chief strategy office for Gingrich 360, a consultancy formed by Gingrich, and sits on the board of directors for the Alliance.