

American Nephrology Nurses Association

Daily Capitol Hill Update - Monday, December 7, 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

- Noon: President Trump presents the Presidential Medal of Freedom to Olympic wrestling champion Dan Gable; Vice President Mike Pence attends
- 12:45pm: Trump has lunch with Pence
- 2pm: Pence leads a White House Coronavirus Task Force meeting

CONGRESS

- House meets at noon; first vote expected from 2pm
 - Will vote on seven bills under suspension of the rules including H.R. 8428, which would provide expedited legal protections for Hong Kong residents fleeing persecution in China
- Senate meets at 3pm
 - Resumes consideration of Stephen Schwartz to be a judge on the U.S. Court of Federal Claims

Congressional, Health Policy, and Political News

- **Bloomberg Government: Biden Picks California AG Becerra for HHS:** White President-elect Joe Biden has chosen Xavier Becerra as his Health and Human Services secretary, tasking the California Attorney General with curbing the coronavirus pandemic and expanding the Affordable Care Act. Becerra, a former congressman from the Los Angeles area, emerged as a candidate as others Biden had considered fell out of contention, including another candidate, New Mexico Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham, backed by the Congressional Hispanic Caucus. His forthcoming nomination solves one of the highest-stakes selections outside of the traditional four top cabinet positions, in part because Biden has placed a heavy emphasis on the coronavirus outbreak, which has set records for new cases, daily deaths and current hospitalizations over the past week.
 - Becerra would have a long list of priorities in tackling the pandemic, including expanding testing, improving access to personal protective equipment and distributing a Covid-19 vaccine. He would also be responsible for another top goal of the Biden administration -- strengthening and building up the Affordable Care Act.
- **Politico: To Rebuild CDC, Biden Picks Rochelle Walensky:** President-elect Joe Biden has selected Rochelle Walensky, the chief of infectious diseases at Massachusetts General Hospital, to run the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, according to two people with knowledge of the decision. Walensky, who is also a professor of medicine at Harvard

Medical School and an expert on AIDS and HIV, will... replace Robert Redfield, who assumed the role of director in March 2018, and take a top role in helping the Biden administration curtail the coronavirus pandemic.

- **Bloomberg Government: Azar Sees Vaccine for All Americans by Second Quarter:** All Americans who want to get a coronavirus vaccine should be able to do so by the second quarter of next year, Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar said yesterday. With the Food and Drug Administration set to decide as early as Thursday on emergency authorization for a shot developed by U.S.-based Pfizer and Germany-based BioNTech, Azar and Moncef Slaoui, the head of the federal government's program to accelerate a vaccine, signaled confidence the FDA would clear the way.
- **Bloomberg Government: This Week's Health-Care Legislation:** The House is scheduled to consider several health-related measures this week under expedited procedure.
 - Aid for Maternal and Child Malnutrition: The House would reaffirm that food security and good childhood nutrition "saves lives and lays the foundation for healthy physical and cognitive growth and development," under H. Res. 189. The nonbinding resolution would call for "transformative" efforts by the U.S. Agency for International Development to accelerate progress to end child and maternal hunger. The Agriculture Committee approved the measure on March 10 by voice vote. The Foreign Affairs Committee also approved it on Oct. 30, 2019.
 - ALS & Disability Insurance: The waiting period for Social Security Disability Insurance would be eliminated for individuals with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, or ALS, under S. 578. The Senate passed the bill 96-1 on Dec. 2.
 - Marijuana Research: Marijuana research regulations would be eased for researchers and manufacturers by a modified version of H.R. 3797. It also would allow researchers to study state-approved marijuana products. The House Energy and Commerce Committee approved the bill by voice vote on Sept. 9, 2020.
 - Electronic Health Data Standards: The Health and Human Services Department inspector general's authority to investigate technology developers and health-care providers that impede access to electronic health information would be clarified under a modified version of H.R. 7898. The measure also would require HHS to consider whether health-care entities have recognized cybersecurity practices in place when it makes determinations for fines and audits related to data standards. The House Energy and Commerce Committee hasn't acted on the bill, which was introduced July 31 by Rep. Michael Burgess (R-Texas).
 - Colonoscopy Cost Sharing and Drug Information: Medicare coinsurance would be waived for certain procedures done during a colon cancer screening test under a modified version of H.R. 1570, which also would require drugmakers to report certain pricing information to Medicare. Rep. Donald Payne Jr. (D-N.J.) introduced the bill on March 8.
- **Bloomberg: Details of \$908 Billion U.S. Pandemic Relief Plan Set for Release:** Bipartisan negotiators on a \$908 billion pandemic relief package are planning to unveil more details of their proposal on Monday, aiming to settle on language that can satisfy enough Republicans and Democrats to secure passage of one final tranche of Covid-19 aid before Congress breaks for the year. The outline of the plan spurred a flurry of optimism last week when it won the endorsement of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Senate Minority leader Chuck Schumer and a number of Republican senators as a basis for fresh talks after a half-year of stalemate.

- Louisiana Republican Senator Bill Cassidy, part of the group behind the proposal, said Sunday he was confident President Donald Trump and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell “will come on board” with the plan, which he emphasized was a short-term boost for a nation still reeling from the pandemic.
- **Kaiser Health News: Demand for COVID Vaccines Expected to Get Heated — And Fast:**

A new poll by the Pew Research Center found that by the end of November 60% of Americans said they would get a vaccine for the coronavirus. This month, even as a federal advisory group met to hash out guidelines for vaccine distribution, a long list of advocacy groups — from those representing home-based health workers and community health centers to patients with kidney disease — were lobbying state and federal officials in hopes their constituents would be prioritized for the first scarce doses.

 - “As we get closer to the vaccine being a reality, there’s a lot of jockeying, to be sure,” said Katie Smith Sloan, chief executive of LeadingAge, a nonprofit organization pushing for staff and patients at long-term care centers to be included in the highest-priority category.
 - Initially, vaccine supplies will be tight, with federal officials planning to ship 6.4 million doses within 24 hours of FDA authorization and up to 40 million doses by the end of the year. The CDC panel recommended that the first shots go to the 21 million health care workers in the U.S. and 3 million nursing home staff and residents, before being rolled out to other groups based on a hierarchy of risk factors.