Schedules: White House and Congress

WHITE HOUSE:

• Biden holds a call with Russia’s Putin at 10 a.m.

CONGRESS:

• The Senate is in at 10 a.m. with plans to vote on Biden’s pick to lead the Federal Communications Commission.

• The House meets at noon, with its floor schedule still to be determined.

Congressional, Health Policy, and Political News

• The Hill: Biden Points To Drug Prices In Call For Senate Social Spending Vote: President Biden on Monday touted the Build Back Better Act’s provisions to lower prescription drug prices in his latest call on the Senate to act on the House-passed legislation. Biden called prescription drugs "outrageously expensive in this country," saying, "It doesn't need to be that way." "To really solve this problem, we need the Senate to follow the House of Representatives' lead and pass my Build Back Better bill," he said.

• Axios: Drug Pricing Coalition Documents Reveal Data-Blocking Against Employers: American businesses spend hundreds of billions of dollars a year on prescription drugs, and the bills keep getting bigger. But some of the companies promising to help rein in those costs prevent employers from looking under the hood. Documents provided to Axios reveal a new layer of secrecy within the maze of American drug pricing — one in which firms that manage drug coverage for hundreds of employers, representing millions of workers, obscure the details of their work and make it difficult to figure out whether they're actually providing a good deal.

• Bloomberg Government: Biden’s Supreme Court study commission bought him a year of cover from progressive calls to expand the court. Now Biden’s time is up, the court is considering a rollback on abortion and a broadening of gun rights, and those calls are only getting louder. The panel is set to vote today on a draft final report that, by design, makes no recommendations on the kind of fundamental changes liberals say are needed. Its completion means that Biden will face renewed pressure to try to neutralize the conservative-dominated court and its ambitious agenda, though it’s far from clear the president will yield to it.

• Stat: Targeting Prices For Accelerated Approval Drugs May Have Limited Impact On Overall Drug Spending: Medicare and Medicaid continue to spend more on treatments that
come to market through an accelerated approval pathway, even though the clinical benefits remain unproven, according to two new analyses. Accelerated approval refers to early endorsements of medicines that treat serious conditions and fill an unmet medical need based on a surrogate marker that is “reasonably likely” to predict clinical benefits. From 1992 through 2020, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration issued more than 250 accelerated approvals, mostly cancer treatments.

- **Bloomberg Government: Lawmakers Search for Path for Health Provisions:** Congressional leaders looking for ways around a partisan impasse on raising the debt ceiling and automatic medicare cuts are considering procedural maneuvers linking them with a must-pass defense policy bill. One option being discussed is for the House to pass the defense bill agreed upon by Democrats and Republicans in both chambers, according to the aide, then separately pass a second bill with a one-time debt-ceiling increase with fast-track procedures in the Senate, which would also lift the so-called Paygo law to avoid automatic cuts in Medicare at the start of next year.

- **Bloomberg: GSK Antibody Treatment Works On Omicron Mutations, Study Shows:** GlaxoSmithKline Plc said research shows its Covid-19 antibody treatment is effective against the full combination of mutations in the new omicron variant. Tests done in-vitro against a pseudo-virus that recreates a synthesized version of omicron showed that sotrovimab, Glaxo’s antibody treatment, stands up to all mutations in the spike protein of the omicron variant and not just the key mutations, the drugmaker said in a statement Tuesday. The tests included all 37 mutations identified to-date in the spike protein.

- **Bloomberg Government: Lawmakers Eye Debt Ceiling-Defense Bill Plan:** Congressional leaders looking for ways around a partisan impasse on raising the debt ceiling are considering procedural maneuvers linking it with a must-pass defense policy bill. “I don’t know that it’s a probability, but it’s a possibility,” House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-Md.) said yesterday on a conference call with reporters.
  - A senior Democratic aide said last night that leaders are considering procedural moves that would tie the National Defense Authorization Act and raising the debt ceiling among three possible courses of action to advance both and other priorities, to the House floor as early as today.
  - Republicans had insisted that Democrats would have to deal with the debt limit on their own, but the annual defense authorization bill generally passes with bipartisan support.
  - Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.) and Minority Leader McConnell have been conducting private talks on how to avoid the government defaulting on its obligations. But neither has given any indication of progress or where those discussions were headed. “Schumer has kept that very close to the vest,” said Sen. Dick Durbin (D-Ill.), the chamber’s No. 2 Democrat. “He’s discussing it with McConnell. I don’t know what it is.”
  - The Treasury Department has warned that the government could hit the debt limit and have difficulty meeting its obligations after Dec. 15, though outside analysts have said the government has a bit more time.

- **Axios: Gov. Hochul Will Order Some NY Hospitals To Halt Elective Surgeries:** New York Gov. Kathy Hochul announced on Monday that some state hospitals will be ordered to halt certain elective surgeries in an effort to combat a recent COVID-19 surge, Hochul said at a
press conference. New York has struggled with hospital capacity throughout the pandemic and postponed nonessential procedures before. Hochul said the program to end elective surgeries will be "targeted" and affect around 30 facilities, which are expected to be announced late Monday.