

American Nephrology Nurses Association

Daily Capitol Hill Update - Tuesday, December 8, 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

- 2pm: Trump delivers remarks at Operation Warp Speed vaccine summit
 - Moderna, Pfizer not attending in order to avoid the appearance of a conflict of interest, as FDA officials will be in attendance.

CONGRESS

- Senate meets at 10am, is scheduled to vote on the appointment of Nathan Simington to the FCC, who is opposed by Democrats
- House meets at noon for legislative business, first vote predicted between 4pm and 5pm

Congressional, Health Policy, and Political News

- **Bloomberg Government: McConnell Refuses to Endorse Stimulus Plan:** Almost a week after Democratic congressional leaders climbed down from their demand for a multi-trillion dollar stimulus package, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) continued to tout his own plan, endangering prospects for a compromise. McConnell's top priority -- federal limits on Covid-19 related lawsuits against businesses -- has emerged as the key potential deal-breaker. Republicans have balked at the six-month moratorium proposed in a bipartisan stimulus package, saying it's too limited, and talks have stalled.
- **New York Times: Pfizer's Vaccine Offers Strong Protection After First Dose:** The Food and Drug Administration's first analysis of the clinical trial data also found that the coronavirus vaccine worked well regardless of a volunteer's race, weight or age. The finding is one of several significant new results featured in the briefing materials, which include more than 100 pages of data analyses from the agency and from Pfizer. Last month, Pfizer and BioNTech announced that their two-dose vaccine had an efficacy rate of 95 percent after two doses administered three weeks apart. The new analyses show that the protection starts kicking in far earlier.
- **Bloomberg Government: U.S. Says It Will Meet Vaccine Need:** U.S. officials insisted they'll have enough Covid-19 vaccine doses to let most Americans get inoculated by next summer, downplaying reports that they passed up a chance to secure more of Pfizer's shot. The Trump administration is confident that the U.S. will have enough supply to vaccinate everyone, a senior administration official said yesterday on a call with reporters. The government signed a deal last summer to obtain 100 million doses of Pfizer's experimental vaccine with partner BioNTech -- enough for 50 million people, given the two-dose regimen -- and also has agreements in place with Moderna, AstraZeneca, Johnson & Johnson and others.

- **Bloomberg Government: House Floor:** The House today is scheduled to consider several health-related bills, including:
 - Medicare Secondary Payments: The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services would have to tell liability insurers and workers' compensation plans when a claimant is enrolled in certain Medicare plans under a modified version of H.R. 1375. The bill would apply when Medicare is the secondary payer for those beneficiaries and a third party requests the information. Rep. Ron Kind (D-Wis.) introduced the bill on Feb. 26, 2019.
 - Medicare Enrollment & Other Changes: Enrollment procedures for Medicare beneficiaries would be modified by an expanded version of H.R. 2477, which would eliminate some coverage gaps depending on when a beneficiary enrolls. The expanded bill also would remove a 36-month limit on Medicare coverage following a kidney transplant for immunosuppressive drugs, increase penalties on hospice programs that don't comply with Medicare standards, and require CMS to share information with certain third parties that are primary payers for enrollees. The House Energy and Commerce Committee approved a version of H.R. 2477 with only the enrollment provisions by voice vote on July 15.

- **Bloomberg Government: Senate Floor:** The Senate last night by unanimous consent passed an amended version of H.R. 1503, the Orange Book Transparency Act which would amend the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act. Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Chair Lamar Alexander (R-Tenn.) introduced the legislation's substitute amendment to reconcile difference between House and Senate versions.
 - The legislation tries to improve a Food and Drug Administration database of drug approvals and patents, often used to check the availability of generic medicines. H.R. 1503 passed the House in May 2019.
 - Its main sponsor, Rep. Robin Kelly (D-Ill.), has said it would bolster competition among drugmakers. The Congressional Budget Office didn't score it as saving money or having a significant impact on approvals or the availability of new generics.

- **STAT: Biden's health picks signal a bottom-up approach to the Covid-19 pandemic:** President-elect Biden's pandemic-response strategy took clearer shape this week with the rollout of several surprising appointments – a list that underscores that his Covid-19 response will be led far more by career government scientists and lower-level health agency deputies than has been the case during the Trump administration. For his highest-profile health care positions, Biden tapped longtime Washington insiders, Xavier Becerra, a congressman of two decades and California's attorney general, and Jeffrey Zients, an Obama administration economist. They are Biden's health secretary nominee and coronavirus coordinator, respectively.
 - But the mechanics of the government's response, pandemic experts told STAT, will likely fall increasingly to health agency deputies focused on pandemic response as well as longtime agency scientists at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.