American Nephrology Nurses Association

Daily Capitol Hill Update – Friday, February 26, 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

- 9:40am: President Biden, First Lady Jill Biden depart White House en route to Houston to meet with local leaders and discuss recovery
- 1pm: Bidens arrive in Houston
  - 1:55pm: President Biden tours Harris County Emergency Operations Center
  - 3:20pm: Bidens tour Houston Food Bank, meet volunteers
  - 6pm: President Biden delivers remarks at FEMA Covid vaccination facility at NRG Stadium
  - 7pm: Bidens depart Houston en route to Washington
  - 10pm: Bidens return to White House
- 11:00am: White House Covid-19 response team holds briefing

CONGRESS

- U.S. House meets at 9am, first votes predicted as early as 10am
  - 9:30am: House Rules Committee to hold meeting, vote on H.R. 1319 — American Rescue Plan Act of 2021
  - House is poised to pass Biden’s $1.9t stimulus legislation, with vote in chamber expected today that will bring most Americans one step closer to receiving $1,400 relief payments
    - Senate parliamentarian ruled late Thursday that a minimum wage provision didn’t qualify for action under a fast-track procedure that would let Democrats pass stimulus with only 50 votes in evenly divided Senate
- U.S. Senate next convenes March 1 at 3pm

Congressional, Health Policy, and Political News

- **Bloomberg Government: Relief Plan Threatens to Trigger Medicare Cuts:** The coronavirus relief package would trigger cuts to Medicare and other programs early next year unless Republicans agree to a waiver — a hurdle that could give the GOP leverage over Democrats’ slim majorities. The Congressional Budget Office said in a letter yesterday to House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-Calif.) that Medicare would face a $36 billion cut, and as much as $90 billion in other programs would be slashed.
  - The spending cliff is entirely of the Democrats’ making. Under the 2010 Pay-As-You-Go law passed by Democrats and signed by then-President Barack Obama, spending increases and tax cuts that add to the deficit — like Biden’s plan — trigger automatic cuts the following calendar year. It takes 60 votes in the Senate to
declare the new outlays an emergency and avoid the cuts, which means Democrats would need 10 Republicans.

- **The Washington Examiner: FDA Greenlights Pfizer Vaccine To Be Stored At Normal Freezer Temperatures, Instead Of Ultra-Cold**: The U.S. Food and Drug Administration agreed to allow Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine to be temporarily stored in normal freezer temperatures, relieving a constraint that has made it hard for some communities to access the vaccine. The agency announced on Thursday that the Pfizer vaccine can now be transported and stored for up to two weeks at "conventional temperatures" usually found in pharmaceutical freezers.

- **Bloomberg Government: U.S. Expands Unemployment Insurance Eligibility**: More Americans will be able to qualify for unemployment insurance, including those who refuse to work because they are afraid of contracting coronavirus on the job. New guidance issued by the Labor Department expands eligibility for jobless benefits, which also applies to people who have had their hours cut and those working in schools without a contract.

- **Bloomberg Government: House Vote Today**: The House is poised to pass the $1.9 trillion Covid-19 stimulus, but a ruling late yesterday by a Senate official dealt a major blow to prospects that the final legislation will include a hike in the U.S. minimum wage to $15 per hour. Today’s vote in the House will bring most Americans one step closer to receiving $1,400 relief payments and move action to the Senate, where disagreements among Democrats over the minimum wage had been the biggest obstacle to turning the pandemic relief plan into law.

- **Bloomberg Government: Hospital Admissions Fall 72%, Led by Elderly**: Covid-19 hospital admissions plummeted 72% in a month in the U.S. as the virus ebbed and the vaccination push accelerated. Americans 85 years old and over saw the most pronounced drop, down 81% from January to February, data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention show. The rate was 23.4 hospitalizations per 100,000 residents 85 and over for the week of Feb. 7-13, the latest data available. That was down from 120.3 per 100,000 four weeks earlier.

- **Bloomberg Government: Insurers Urge SCOTUS to Review Damages in ACA Pay Case**: The federal government must repay health insurers in full for money they lost by decreasing members’ deductibles, copays, and coinsurance under an Obamacare program designed to make plans more affordable, two health insurers said to the Supreme Court. The insurers are seeking review of a court decision that they argue “allows the government to escape billions of dollars in binding commitments” owed to those who participated in the Affordable Care Act’s cost-sharing reduction initiatives.