

American Nephrology Nurses Association

Daily Capitol Hill Update – Monday, February 3, 2020

(The following information comes from Bloomberg Government Website)

Schedules: White House and Congress

WHITE HOUSE

- 12:30pm: President Trump has lunch with Vice President Michael Pence

CONGRESS

- House meets at 1:30pm in pro forma session
- Senate at 11am resumes consideration of the articles of impeachment against Trump
 - Senators hear closing arguments from lawyers for both sides, then have two days for debate before voting at 4 p.m. Wednesday

Congressional, Health Policy, and Political News

- **Medicaid Block Grant Vote Coming:** House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-Md.) and Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) announced Friday that the chamber will vote on a resolution to disapprove of the administration’s proposed Medicaid block grant plan. The vote is set for Thursday, the two said in a statement. “Congress has a responsibility to protect Medicaid beneficiaries from the harm that would be caused by this new guidance,” the statement said. “The goal of this new waiver is clear: reduce access to health care for millions of low-income Americans, including access to affordable prescription drugs.”
 - The administration’s plan, announced in a letter released Thursday, lets the federal government give states a lump sum to spend on Medicaid instead of the currently unlimited amount of funding it can give, which grows and shrinks based on state need.
- **HHS Targeting Automatic ACA Re-Enrollment:** Low-income enrollees in the Affordable Care Act wouldn’t be automatically re-enrolled in free health plans in 2021 under a Trump administration proposal released on Friday. The proposal, known as the payment notice, contains an array of generally small changes to Obamacare regulations. But some of the policies carried in it could have a major impact on Obamacare enrollees, and they drew sharp criticism from Democrats and ACA supporters.
 - The notice is an annual regulation governing the ACA exchanges. In prior years, the Trump administration took a host of actions to reshape the ACA, expanding access to cheaper plans that don’t meet all coverage requirements and trying to ensure that people receiving subsidies are eligible for them. The 2021 proposal pushes back against a ban on eliminating automatic re-enrollment lawmakers enacted in the fiscal 2020 spending bill (H.R. 1865) that Trump signed last year.

- **How Last-Minute Maneuvers Could Tilt Iowa Outcome:** After months of campaigning, the outcome of the Iowa caucuses could come down to spur-of-the-moment decisions by thousands of voters. It's that dynamic that makes Iowa hard to predict. Polls show Sanders is the first choice of an increasing number of Democrats going into tonight's meetings. But the result in Iowa, unlike states with primary elections, often turns on voters' second choice, a quirk that could boost Joe Biden when supporters of other, low-performing moderate candidates seek a safe harbor from Sanders' progressivism.
 - Iowans are also notoriously late deciders. That's why organization and training can make a difference. In some precincts, the outcome of the delegate selection comes down to an impassioned appeal, the smell of baked goods — or even a coin flip.
- **Biden 'Anything But Doomed':** Top advisers to Biden sought to temper expectations for his performance tonight, projecting a close result and insisting that any outcome won't doom the former vice president's campaign. "Joe Biden is anything but doomed," former Sen. Chris Dodd (D-Conn.), a longtime Biden friend who has endorsed his former colleague, said yesterday in Des Moines. Biden's team has long played down the importance of Iowa to its strategy, arguing that contests later in February in Nevada and South Carolina, followed quickly by Super Tuesday on March 3, are critical to demonstrate that a candidate is capable of defeating President Donald Trump.
- **Biden Opens Lead in Texas, Slips in South Carolina:** Biden is opening a daunting lead over the rest of the field in the March 3 Texas primary, but his advantage has slipped in South Carolina, where the primary later this month is crucial for his campaign, according to two polls released yesterday. The former vice president leads Sanders, his closest competitor, in Texas by 17 points in a poll by the Dallas Morning News and the University of Texas at Tyler.
 - The good news for Biden in one of the biggest "Super Tuesday" states was tempered by results of a Charleston Post and Courier poll in South Carolina. His lead there ahead of the Feb. 29 primary has slipped to a mere 5 points over Sanders, after having been as large as 31 points last May in the newspaper's poll. South Carolina is supposed to be Biden's firewall, giving him a reliable tranche of delegates after harder-fought contests in Iowa, New Hampshire and Nevada.
- **Big Money Makes a Big Comeback:** Biden, Sanders, Warren and Buttigieg have all touted the depth and breadth of their grassroots support and modest size of their average donation, but contributors writing big checks dominated fourth-quarter financial reports. The shift comes as the Democratic National Committee on Friday adopted new rules for earning a spot in its debates, dropping a requirement that candidates develop a broad donor base. Now, candidates need only to reach 10% in four approved polls.
 - That could allow low-polling candidates who self-finance their campaigns more exposure on the debate stage. Michael Bloomberg has risen to fourth in the RealClearPolitics average of national polls, but is still in single digits at 8%, while Tom Steyer tallies 1.8%. But campaign finance experts aren't ruling out either candidate.

- **Bloomberg Tax Plan Would Raise \$5 Trillion:** Michael Bloomberg said Saturday he would raise taxes on the wealthy, increase the corporate tax rate, and curb tax-free inheritances of large estates, elements of a tax plan that he says would raise \$5 trillion over a decade. Tax rates on low-income and middle-class Americans set by the 2017 Republican tax law would remain the same. Bloomberg's plan serves to show how he'd pay for an array of proposed new spending initiatives, which so far top \$3 trillion. But his campaign cautioned that the tax plan could still change as the former New York mayor rolls out even more policy plans in the near future.
- **Trump Features in Super Bowl Ads:** This year's Super Bowl ads, representing the costliest showcase on TV, included Trump's presidential campaign. The game, which the Kansas City Chiefs won 31-20 against the San Francisco 49ers, was close until the final minutes -- a boon for advertisers since many viewers likely stayed riveted to the screen.
 - The Trump ad -- his first Super Bowl commercial -- was about criminal justice reform and featured a woman who was sentenced to serve life in prison for a nonviolent drug offense. "Thanks to President Trump people like Alice are getting a second chance," the ad reads. Trump followed up with a tweet showing the commercial and asking his followers to text if they liked the ad.
 - Mike Bloomberg also aired a Super Bowl commercial on the crisis of children dying from gun violence.
- **Senate Set to Acquit Trump:** A momentous, if anticlimactic, few days lie ahead in Washington as the Senate hears closing arguments today in Trump's impeachment trial, then holds two days of debate before voting for an all-but-guaranteed acquittal.
 - The vote would come one day after the president delivers the annual State of the Union address to Congress, set for tomorrow night.
 - Trump's path to a speedy acquittal was sealed when Republican senators voted Friday to rebuff Democrats' efforts to call new witnesses.
 - A vote to acquit Trump on the two articles of impeachment approved by the Democratic-led House -- alleging abuse of power and obstruction of Congress -- is set for Wednesday afternoon.
 - With 67 votes needed to convict, Trump is expected to be easily acquitted, even after some Republican senators allowed that he erred in his dealings with Ukraine.
 - Sen. Lamar Alexander (R-Tenn.) said Trump crossed a line by withholding U.S. aid to the nation as a way to "encourage" an investigation into former Vice President Joe Biden. But Alexander said voters, not senators, should decide what to do about it. "I'm going to vote to acquit. I'm very concerned about any action that we could take that would establish a perpetual impeachment," the Tennessee Republican who's retiring this year said Sunday on NBC.
 - Rep. Adam Schiff (D-Calif.), the Democratic impeachment manager, promised a spirited closing argument in today's session, which starts at 11 a.m. Washington time. It was "remarkable" that "you now have Republican senators coming out and saying, 'Yes, the House proved its case -- the House proved the corrupt scheme that they charged in the articles of impeachment,'" Schiff said yesterday on CBS.

- **Ernst Warns of GOP Push to Impeach Biden:** Sen. Joni Ernst (R-Iowa) warned yesterday that Republicans could immediately push to impeach Joe Biden over his work in Ukraine as vice president if he wins the White House. "I think this door of impeachable whatever has been opened," Ernst said in an interview with Bloomberg News. "Joe Biden should be very careful what he's asking for because, you know, we can have a situation where if it should ever be President Biden, that immediately, people, right the day after he would be elected would be saying, 'Well, we're going to impeach him.'" The grounds for impeachment, the first-term Republican said, would be "for being assigned to take on Ukrainian corruption yet turning a blind eye to Burisma because his son was on the board making over a million dollars a year."
- **U.S. Acknowledges Paper Trail on Trump's Ukraine Role, CNN Says:** The Justice Department, in a court filing late Friday, said it has two dozen emails related to Trump's involvement in withholding millions of dollars in security assistance to Ukraine, CNN reported. The filing, made in response to a lawsuit by the Center for Public Integrity, was the first official acknowledgment from the Trump administration of the existence of such emails.
 - CNN said a lawyer with the White House's Office of Management and Budget wrote to the court that the emails, dated between June and September, describe "communications by either the President, the Vice President, or the President's immediate advisers regarding Presidential decision-making about the scope, duration, and purpose of the hold on military assistance to Ukraine."
- **'Badly Flawed' Tax Law Blamed for Rules Called Giveaways:** The U.S. Department of Treasury has come under fire from Senate Democrats for giving away too much to companies in its regulations implementing the 2017 tax law's international changes. The retort: blame your colleagues. More than two years after the law passed, Treasury officials say they still have about 100 pieces of guidance to complete on how to interpret parts of it. Some are needed to resolve gaps, poor writing and conflicts in the legislation.
 - Remaining items include guidance on changes to carried interest, a big issue for the compensation of private equity and hedge-fund managers, and final regulations carving out exceptions to a new tax on global intangible low-taxed income, or GILTI. The GILTI rules address one of several problems with the law that Treasury officials raised to congressional staff before it was passed, seven people involved in the drafting process said.
- **Officials Feared Trump's Dorian Response Would Hurt Public:** Officials at U.S. weather agencies warned that fallout from the Trump administration's messaging on Hurricane Dorian in 2019 would politicize scientific agencies and undermine public trust in their information. "You have no idea how hard I'm fighting to keep politics out of science," Neil Jacobs, then the acting director of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, wrote at the time.

- Emails from Jacobs and others were part of a trove released to the Washington Post and BuzzFeed News following a Freedom of Information Act request that sought to look into the White House response to Dorian, the Category Five storm that pummeled the Bahamas in September.

- **U.S. Offer to Send Experts Unanswered by China:** The U.S. has offered its top public health experts to help China with the coronavirus outbreak but so far Beijing hasn't responded, National Security Adviser Robert O'Brien said Sunday. "This is a worldwide concern -- we want to help our Chinese colleagues if we can," O'Brien said on CBS's "Face the Nation." "We've made the offer and we'll see if they accept."
 - O'Brien, head of Trump's National Security Council, said the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Institutes of Health have the best experts in the world. So far, Chinese health officials are providing information and the U.S. is "taking that for what it's worth, but at the same time we're monitoring ourselves," he said.
 - China said the U.S. "inappropriately overreacted" to the deadly virus that originated there and hasn't provided much help to counter the outbreak, disputing the claim the U.S. offered assistance. "The U.S. government hasn't provided any substantial assistance to us, but it was the first to evacuate personnel from its consulate in Wuhan, the first to suggest partial withdrawal of its embassy staff, and the first to impose a travel ban on Chinese travelers," Chinese foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying told reporters today.
 - Meanwhile, the White House National Economic Council and the Council of Economic Advisers are analyzing the potential short- and long-term impact of the coronavirus outbreak on the U.S. economy, the Washington Post reported, citing unidentified people familiar with the matter.

- **Virus Travel Restrictions Widen:** Restrictions on travel to and from China widened as rising fear of the Wuhan coronavirus prompted countries to bar entry and restrict flights, ignoring the guidance of the World Health Organization. The Philippines -- which on Sunday reported the first virus death outside China -- and New Zealand were the latest to deny access to foreigners traveling from China, while South Korea will prevent arrivals from some parts of the mainland. The U.S., Australia, Singapore, Israel and Russia have announced restrictions as well.

- **Trump to Meet Kenyan President Ahead of Trade Talks:** Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta will meet Trump in Washington this week as the two countries prepare to announce negotiations on a free-trade agreement, America's first such deal with a sub-Saharan nation. The pair will hold an "expanded bilateral meeting" on Thursday, according to Trump's official schedule, released yesterday. The East African nation's cabinet on Jan. 30 approved the commencement of talks with the U.S. for a trade deal that "would help Kenyan goods to have smooth access to the expansive U.S. market," especially as the African Growth Opportunity Act comes to an end, according to a statement.

- **Trump Bans Nigeria Travelers Days Before Cooperation Meeting:** The Trump administration's decision to add Africa's most populous country to its travel ban is sure to be an awkward topic at next week's meeting to foster relations between the U.S. and Nigeria. On the same day his government imposed visa restrictions on Nigeria and five other nations, the State Department announced a U.S.-Nigeria bi-national commission for Feb. 3-4. The event established 10 years ago is intended to "expand cooperation and advance shared goals" particularly in trade and investment, development, good governance, and security cooperation, the State Department said Friday.
- **New Taiwan VP to Make Trip to U.S.:** Taiwan's Vice President-elect will make the most high-profile visit to the U.S. by a Taiwanese politician in decades, a move likely to further strain ties between America and China as the world seeks a coordinated response to a deadly coronavirus outbreak. Lai Ching-te is slated to attend the National Prayer Breakfast in Washington Wednesday, setting up the possibility of a meeting with Trump.
- **Trump Set to Be Disruptor Post-Brexit:** Trump has spent the past four years lobbying unsolicited advice at British prime ministers on the best path forward for an exit from the European Union and holding out promises of a grand new trans-Atlantic trade alliance. Now that Brexit is official, though, Trump gets to really double down on a role he relishes: that of the geopolitical disruptor. Just as Prime Minister Boris Johnson wants to use talks with the U.S. as a way to increase his leverage in trade discussions with the EU, Trump has made clear he sees a deal with the U.K. as an irresistible opportunity to poke a finger in the eye of an EU he has labeled "worse than China."