

American Nephrology Nurses Association

Daily Capitol Hill Update - Wednesday, March 17, 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

- 8am: Biden attends mass in honor of St. Patrick's Day
- 9:40am: President Biden departs Wilmington, Delaware en route the White House
- 10:35am: Biden arrives at the White House
- 1:00pm: Biden hosts Ireland's prime minister for a virtual bilateral meeting
- First Lady Jill Biden travels to Concord, N.H. to promote the coronavirus stimulus package
- 11am: White House Covid-19 response team holds press briefing
- 3:00pm: White House Press Sec. Jen Psaki holds press briefing

CONGRESS

- U.S. House meets at 10am
- U.S. Senate meets at 10:30am
 - Senate resumes consideration of Katherine Tai to be U.S. Trade Representative

Congressional, Health Policy, and Political News

- **Stat: 4 Health Care Startups Racing To Shake Up Diabetes Treatment:** If you're a digital health startup looking to make an impact, it makes sense to tackle diabetes. More than 34 million American adults – over a tenth of the population – live with the metabolic disorder, which costs the nation roughly \$400 billion every year. The earliest crop of digital diabetes management startups – including Onduo, Omada Health, Virta Health, and Livongo – made their mark by combining remote monitoring with virtual diabetes coaching.
- **Bloomberg Government: Obamacare Insurers Inflate Claims to Reduce Refunds, Study Says:** Obamacare insurers have short-changed their consumers by hundreds of millions of dollars, according to a study released yesterday by university researchers.
 - Fourteen percent of health insurers, particularly publicly traded insurers, are inflating the medical claims they report paying in order to avoid rebates required under the Affordable Care Act, according to a paper to be published in the Accounting Review. The paper is by Andrew Van Buskirk of Ohio State University, Evan Eastman of Florida State University, and David Eckles of the University of Georgia.
 - Under the ACA, health insurers are required to spend at least 80% of premium revenue on benefits, and they must refund the difference to policyholders if they don't.

- **Bloomberg Government: Sanders' Panel to Hold Drug Pricing Hearing:** The Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee's Primary Health and Retirement Security Subcommittee, led by Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.), announced it will hold a hearing on drug prices March 23. The event is titled, "Why Does the U.S. Pay the Highest Prices in the World for Prescription Drugs?"
- **Bloomberg Government: HHS Retracts Part of Insurer Drug Coverage Model:** The HHS yesterday withdrew a piece of a voluntary payment model introduced by the Trump administration allowing insurers to cut back the types of drugs they're required to cover in Medicare. The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services said that based on stakeholder feedback, it won't move forward with providing flexibility for Medicare plans to treat five of the six protected classes of drugs the same as they would for other drug types.
 - The Trump administration first announced the model in January 2019. Plans had until March 1 of this year to submit their notice that they intend to apply to participate in the model.
- **Bloomberg Government: Biden Backs Filibuster Rule Change:** President Biden signaled a willingness to overhaul the Senate rule that allows the minority party to block legislation, saying he'd support the return of the "talking filibuster" for senators seeking to stall a vote.
 - "I don't think that you have to eliminate the filibuster, you have to do it what it used to be when I first got to the Senate back in the old days," Biden said in an interview yesterday with ABC News. "You had to stand up and command the floor, you had to keep talking." The original rule for the filibuster was "what it was supposed to be," Biden said. "It's getting to the point where, you know, democracy is having a hard time functioning."
- **The Washington Post: House Democrats Bring Back Medicare-For-All, Seeking To Push Biden Left:** House Democrats on Wednesday will renew their effort to enact Medicare-for-all, arguing the year-long pandemic was a "wake-up call" to replace the nation's fragmented health insurance system — and betting they can pressure President Biden to embrace a government-run program that he famously rejected. "Everybody is seeing the chaos and the destruction that the pandemic has caused," said Rep. Pramila Jayapal (D-Wash.), the chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus and one of the bill's lead authors. "And it's really making people look and [ask], could we have had something different had we had a Medicare-for-all system in place?"
- **Bloomberg Government: House Extends Small-Business Rescue:** The House approved a two-month extension of a popular U.S. small-business rescue program that still has almost \$93 billion left to distribute, giving companies until the end of May to apply for the forgivable loans. The Paycheck Protection Program was initially set up a year ago as lockdowns stemming from the coronavirus paralyzed the American economy. Lawmakers expanded and extended it as the Covid-19 crisis continued. The House voted 415-3 on a bill extending the PPP for two months from its current expiration date of March 31.
- **Modern Healthcare: Two-Thirds Of Largest Hospitals Aren't Complying With Price Transparency Rule:** Around two-thirds of the country's largest hospitals are not complying with the new price transparency regulations, a new study found. CMS compelled hospitals Jan. 1 to publish "a machine-readable file" of rates they negotiated with payers, which the agency hoped would exert downward pressure on higher-than-

average prices. But 65 of 100 of the largest U.S. hospitals did not meet the criteria as of early February, according to research published Tuesday in Health Affairs.

- **Bloomberg Government: Biden to Hold First News Conference:** Biden will hold his first formal news conference as president on March 25, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said, as he promotes his \$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief measure and efforts to accelerate coronavirus vaccinations. Biden signed his “American Rescue Plan” into law last week, and he and other top Democrats are fanning out across the nation this week to tout its benefits.
 - Biden today will attend mass in Wilmington, Del., in honor of St. Patrick’s Day. He will then return to Washington, and host Ireland Prime Minister Micheál Martin at the White House this afternoon.