

American Nephrology Nurses Association

Daily Capitol Hill Update - Friday, March 19, 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

- 10:45am: Biden departs White House, headed to Atlanta
- 2:15pm: Biden, Harris visit CDC in Atlanta
- 3:35pm: Biden, Harris meet with Asian-American leaders in Atlanta
- 4:40pm: Biden delivers remarks, Emory University
- 7:10pm: Biden departs Atlanta
- 12:30pm: White House Covid-19 response team holds press briefing

CONGRESS

- U.S. House meets at 9am
 - House lawmakers to consider H.R. 1868, a measure that would waive a requirement for \$36 billion in cuts to Medicare in 2022
 - Bill would waive the need for automatic spending cuts known as sequestration, triggered under statutory “pay-as-you-go” requirements because Democrats didn’t offset the cost of their stimulus bill
- U.S. Senate next meets March 22

Congressional, Health Policy, and Political News

- **Bloomberg Government: Medicaid Expansion Push Gains Momentum:** Billions of dollars in new incentives to boost Medicaid programs are re-energizing advocates in the dozen states that have turned down the federal assistance so far – and potentially aiding Democrats in future elections. GOP-led legislatures or governors in 12 states refused to take advantage of the 2010 Affordable Care Act’s broadening of Medicaid. Now, Medicaid expansion advocates have something new to offer: extra money from Washington.
- **Modern Healthcare: Two-Thirds Of Insurers In 32 States Now Have Copay Accumulators, Study Says:** Most health plans across the country now include an opaque policy that prevents drug manufacturer coupons and copay assistance from counting against a plan's deductible or out-of-pocket limit, a trend patient advocates say is alarming and limits access to treatment. "The money that is covered by copay assistance is still money that is being paid out and kept by the insurer for the plan," said Stephanie Hengst, manager of policy and research at The AIDS Institute.
- **Bloomberg Government: States Shift Quickly to May 17 Deadline:** A growing list of state revenue agencies hustled to extend their individual tax filing and payment deadlines a day after the Treasury Department and Internal Revenue Service gave individual taxpayers one additional month to submit their tax returns.

- Meanwhile, IRS Commissioner Charles Rettig said the IRS hopes it can work through its backlog of millions of unprocessed returns by this summer, but stopped short of giving any concrete date. The backlog includes returns filed last year. Rettig said some returns are suspended because the IRS is waiting for responses from taxpayers responding to questions.
 - The IRS will automatically process refunds for individuals who paid taxes on their unemployment benefits before Congress passed a law making those payments tax-free, Rettig said yesterday.
- **Bloomberg Government: Democrats Pressed on Drug Pricing in Reconciliation:** Lower Drug Prices Now – a customer advocacy group fighting high prescription drug prices – urged Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) and Schumer in a letter to pass a stronger version of H.R. 3 “to make prescription drugs more affordable and hold the pharmaceutical industry accountable for price gouging and pandemic profiteering.”
- **Modern Healthcare: Competition Heats Up For Advanced Practice Practitioners:** Competition for clinical staff is heating up as healthcare companies bolster their primary-care offerings, but industry observers expect the growing supply of nurse practitioners and physician assistants to meet the ballooning demand for advanced practice clinicians. Payers, providers, tech companies and private-equity backed ventures are building out primary-care oriented services, which rely on a steady supply of advanced practice practitioners.
- **The New York Times: Xavier Becerra Confirmed As Health Secretary:** The Senate on Thursday confirmed Xavier Becerra, a son of Mexican immigrants who became a member of Congress and California’s attorney general, as President Biden’s secretary of health and human services after a bitter partisan fight that centered on his qualifications and support for abortion rights. The vote was 50 to 49. Senator Susan Collins of Maine was the only Republican to support his confirmation. Mr. Becerra will become the first Latino to oversee the sprawling agency.
- **AP: Biden Says US To Hit 100 Million Virus Goal On Friday:** With the U.S. closing in on President Joe Biden’s goal of injecting 100 million coronavirus vaccinations weeks ahead of his target date, the White House said the nation is now in position to help supply neighbors Canada and Mexico with millions of lifesaving shots. The Biden administration on Thursday revealed the outlines of a plan to “loan” a limited number of vaccines to Canada and Mexico as the president announced the U.S. is on the cusp of meeting his 100-day injection goal “way ahead of schedule.”
- **Bloomberg Government: HHS Delays Trump-Era Drug Rebate Rule:** The HHS yesterday delayed until 2023 a Trump administration rule that would have changed payments from drug companies to pharmacy middlemen. The HHS delay follows a court order that also holds litigation about the rule in abeyance pending a review by the department. A pharmacy liaison group had claimed that the changes would significantly disrupt negotiations with drugmakers.
- **Bloomberg Government: Division on Medicaid Work Rules Seen on High Court:** Also in Medicaid policy, the Supreme Court canceled plans to hear arguments on work requirements for Medicaid beneficiaries, but it didn’t dump the cases entirely, signaling that the court may be divided over what to do with the dispute. The parties in the case are waiting for justices to rule on an unusual request from Biden’s White House. The Justice

Department asked the court to toss two lower court verdicts invalidating work rules in Arkansas and New Hampshire.