

American Nephrology Nurses Association

Daily Capitol Hill Update – Monday, March 22, 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

- 9:30am: Harris swears in Isabel Guzman as Administrator of the U.S. Small Business Administration
- 9:50am: President Biden receives the President's Daily Brief
- 11am: Press Briefing by White House COVID-19 Response Team and public health officials
- 11:50am: Harris travels to Jacksonville, Fl., where she will visit a vaccination center
- 12:30pm: Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jen Psaki
- 7pm: Biden meets virtually with the Senate Democratic Caucus during their annual retreat
- Second Gentleman Doug Emhoff, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack travel to Iowa to promote the coronavirus stimulus package

CONGRESS

- U.S. House next meets March 23
- U.S. Senate convenes at 3pm
 - 5:30pm: Senate to hold confirmation vote on Marty Walsh's nomination to be Labor Secretary

Congressional, Health Policy, and Political News

- **Bloomberg Government: House Drug Pricing Bills on Hold for Now:** Passage of two measures meant to address drug prices will have to wait as House leaders grapple over Congress' schedule. The House was expected to take up the two measures along with more than a dozen others under suspension of their rules, used largely to wave through minor or non-controversial legislation, earlier last week, but Republican lawmakers signaled they planned to object, according to a spokesperson for House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-Md.). The House has not floor activity scheduled for this week, and is scheduled for a recess the following two weeks.
 - One the bills (S. 415) would alter the criteria for a drug to receive exclusivity as a new chemical entity, narrowing which medicines get a five-year monopoly. That measure would help lower drug costs by boosting competition and closing loopholes that prevent generics from coming to market. The other bill (S. 164) would direct the Department of Health and Human Services to establish a central website for educational materials on biosimilars. Both bills passed the Senate earlier this month.
- **The New York Times: House Votes To Avert Deep Medicare Cuts To Pay For \$1.9 Trillion Stimulus Plan:** The House voted on Friday to avert an estimated \$36 billion in cuts to Medicare next year and tens of billions more from farm subsidies and other social

safety net programs, moving to stave off deep spending reductions that would otherwise be made to pay for the \$1.9 trillion stimulus bill enacted last week. The action, opposed by the vast majority of Republicans, would effectively exempt President Biden's pandemic aid package from a deficit-reduction law that requires that all spending be offset by automatic, across-the-board cuts to certain government programs. It passed by a vote of 246 to 175, with 29 Republicans joining Democrats to support it.

- **Bloomberg Government: Democrats Inch Toward Possible Filibuster Move:** The fatal shootings in Atlanta last week have led one of the Senate's long-standing supporters of the filibuster rule to say she is now open to discussing potential changes to that process. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) is framing her potential shift as a back-up plan if a bipartisan deal can't be struck on legislation passed by the House to improve background checks for gun purchases and to reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act.
 - On Friday, Biden called on Congress to send him new legislation on hate crimes and for Americans to "change our hearts" to combat racially motivated attacks on Asian people following the murders of eight people in shootings this week in the Atlanta area. Biden asked lawmakers to send him the Covid-19 Hate Crimes Act to sign, which would boost government reporting of the crimes and make its information more accessible to Asian Americans.
- **Bloomberg Government: Leaders Mull \$2 Billion for Capitol Security:** Congressional leaders are putting together a \$2 billion special funding bill to strengthen security at the Capitol in the wake of the Jan. 6 attack, according to multiple people familiar with the plan. The discussions and drafting of the bill are not yet finished, and the total is approximate and subject to change, said two officials familiar with the talks. There is no set timing for release of the proposal and a vote on the funds.
- **Bloomberg Government: Pandemic Cost NIH Billions in Delayed Research:** The National Institutes of Health delayed and lost about \$16 billion worth of research due to the pandemic, the agency said Friday. That amount constitutes more than a third of the NIH's current spending level of \$42.9 billion. It's a \$6 billion increase from the amount agency director Francis Collins estimated last May when he told a Senate panel the pandemic will cost about \$10 billion.
- **KHN: The Hype Has Faded, But Don't Count Out Convalescent Plasma In Covid Battle:** Six months after it was controversially hailed by Trump administration officials as a "breakthrough" therapy to fight the worst effects of covid-19, convalescent plasma appears to be on the ropes. The treatment that infuses blood plasma from recovered covid patients into people newly infected in hopes of boosting their immune response has not lived up to early hype. Some high-profile clinical trials have shown disappointing results. Demand from hospitals for the antibody-rich plasma has plunged. After a year of large-scale national efforts to recruit recovered covid patients as donors and the collection of more than 500,000 units of covid convalescent plasma, known as CCP, some longtime advocates of the therapy say they're now pessimistic about its future.
- **Politico: CDC Cuts School Distancing Requirements To 3 Feet:** The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says that students attending in-person instruction only need to stay 3 feet apart, rather than 6, as long as universal masking is maintained. The agency's new guidance, released Friday, recommends 3 feet of separation at elementary, middle and high schools in communities with low, moderate or substantial transmission. But the agency says middle school and high school students should stay 6 feet apart in

communities where test positivity rates are 10 percent or higher and cohorting – when groups of students are kept together with the same staff throughout the day – is not available.

- **The Hill: Fauci: COVID-19 Variant Likely Accounts For Up To 30 Percent Of US Infections:** Anthony Fauci, the government’s leading infectious disease expert, warned that variants of the coronavirus could account for up to 30 percent of infections in the U.S. Fauci specifically sounded the alarm at a White House press conference Friday over the B.1.1.7 variant, which was first discovered in the United Kingdom and has since spread across the globe. “This variant, as you know, is every day getting more and more dominant in our own country,” Fauci said.
- **The Wall Street Journal: Hospitals Hide Pricing Data From Search Results:** Hospitals that have published their previously confidential prices to comply with a new federal rule have also blocked that information from web searches with special coding embedded on their websites, according to a Wall Street Journal examination. The information must be disclosed under a federal rule aimed at making the \$1 trillion sector more consumer friendly. But hundreds of hospitals embedded code in their websites that prevented Alphabet Inc.’s GOOG 0.34% Google and other search engines from displaying pages with the price lists, according to the Journal examination of more than 3,100 sites.