

American Nephrology Nurses Association

Daily Capitol Hill Update - Wednesday, March 24, 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

- 7:30am: VP Harris appears on “CBS This Morning”
- 12:30pm: Biden, Harris have lunch
- 2pm: Biden, Harris meet with HHS Sec. Xavier Becerra, Homeland Security Sec. Alejandro Mayorkas and immigration advisers
- 3:30pm: Harris, joined by Chair of Council of Economic Advisers Cecilia Rouse and Member of Council of Economic Advisers Heather Boushey, convenes roundtable discussion on Equal Pay Day with women leaders of advocacy groups
- 4:15pm: Biden holds event with members of U.S. Soccer Women’s National Team to mark Equal Pay Day
- 10:30am: White House Covid-19 response team holds press briefing
- 12:30pm: White House Press Sec. Jen Psaki holds press briefing with Rouse, Boushey

CONGRESS

- U.S. House next meets on March 26
- U.S. Senate meets at 10:30am

Congressional, Health Policy, and Political News

- **Bloomberg Government: Pelosi May Revive Drug Pricing in Infrastructure Package:** House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) said yesterday that Democrats are discussing adding a provision to upcoming infrastructure legislation that would let the federal government negotiate drug prices, a move that would take a big bite out of pharmaceutical companies, but help pay for expanded health programs. It would allow the government to use its buying power to bargain with drugmakers in order to lower costs for the Medicare program. Pelosi cited estimates from the Congressional Budget Office for a previous bill put forward by Democrats but never passed by Congress that negotiating drug prices would save the federal government \$456 billion over a decade.
- **The Hill: Biden Administration Extends Special ObamaCare Enrollment Until August:** The Biden administration announced Tuesday it is expanding the special pandemic enrollment period for ObamaCare plans for three additional months, until Aug. 15. The move means signups on the Healthcare.gov website will remain open for the majority of 2021. New and current enrollees will have an additional three months to enroll in coverage or change their plans, and to have access to additional subsidies from the American Rescue Plan that could make coverage cheaper.
- **Stat: Senate Reaches Deal To Boost Medicare Pay For Providers Through 2021:** Senate leaders have reached an agreement to extend a Medicare pay bump for health care

providers through 2021, a major lobbying win for hospitals. Senate leaders cut a deal on Tuesday, just days ahead of the March 31 deadline when the 2% pay boost is set to expire, according to bill text obtained by STAT. Congress last year gave providers the boost to help their bottom lines during the Covid-19 pandemic.

- **AP: Newly Confirmed Surgeon General To Focus On COVID, Opioids:** The Senate confirmed a soft-spoken physician as President Joe Biden's surgeon general Tuesday. While Dr. Vivek Murthy says ending the coronavirus pandemic is his top priority, he's also raised concerns over a relapsing opioid overdose crisis. The vote on Murthy was 57-43, giving him bipartisan support. Biden's coronavirus response can already count on plenty of star players, but Murthy has a particular niche. As a successful author he's addressed issues of loneliness and isolation that have been exacerbated by the pandemic. For Murthy, this will be his second tour as America's doctor, having previously served under former President Barack Obama.
- **The Wall Street Journal: Hospitals Stung Financially By Covid-19 Pandemic Seek Remainder Of Relief Fund Payouts:** Hospitals are pressing the Biden administration to pay out the remaining relief funds that Congress granted last year to cover financial losses from the Covid-19 pandemic, saying it has been more than three months since the government's last announcement of a large disbursement. Congress last year approved \$178 billion to create a relief fund for health providers. The last announcement about payouts from the Department of Health and Human Services, which oversees the disbursements, was Dec. 17, when the department said it would send about \$24.5 billion to 70,000 health organizations.
- **AP: Alternatives To Nursing Homes Get \$12B Boost In COVID Bill:** With the memory of the pandemic's toll in nursing homes still raw, the COVID-19 relief bill is offering states a generous funding boost for home- and community-based care as an alternative to institutionalizing disabled people. Advocates hope the estimated \$12.7 billion will accelerate what has been a steady shift to supporting elderly and disabled people and their overwhelmed families in everyday settings. But the money for state Medicaid programs, long in coming, will only be available over four calendar quarters this year and next. That's raising concerns it will have just fleeting impact, and prompting calls for permanent legislation.