

American Nephrology Nurses Association

Daily Capitol Hill Update - Thursday, March 25, 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

- 1:15pm: President Biden holds his first news conference at the White House
- 3:45pm: Biden meets virtually with EU leaders at European Council Summit
- 5:50pm: Vice President Harris will participate in White House's virtual Passover celebration

CONGRESS

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

Congressional, Health Policy, and Political News

- **Bloomberg Government: Democrats Eye Rollback of Short-Term Plan Rule:** Sens. Tammy Baldwin (D-Wis.), Debbie Stabenow (D-Mich.), and Bob Casey (D-Penn.) yesterday unveiled legislation that would seek to "overturn the Trump-era rule expanding junk health insurance plans that don't have to provide health care coverage for people with preexisting conditions," according to a statement. The "junk" plans refer to short-term health insurance plans former President Donald Trump made easier to purchase on Affordable Care Act marketplaces.
- **Bloomberg Government: Virus Hospitalizations Cost Medicare \$10B:** Traditional Medicare spent \$10.3 billion on Covid-19 hospitalizations for more than 447,000 beneficiaries in 2020. That's an average of almost \$23,000 per patient, according to figures released by the federal government yesterday. The total taxpayer toll is probably higher. That figure doesn't include nearly half of Medicare recipients on private Medicare Advantage plans, where data on individual costs isn't as easily obtainable.
 - Over 2.7 million Medicare beneficiaries were infected with the coronavirus in 2020. American Indian/Alaska Native beneficiaries suffered the highest average infection rates, according to the new Medicare coronavirus data snapshot. Hispanic people saw the next highest infection rate, followed by Black people, White people, and Asian American/Pacific Islanders.
- **NBC News: Biden To Direct \$100 Million To Medical Support Network Key To Vaccine Strategy:** President Joe Biden plans to make the country's biggest investment ever in an all-volunteer army of doctors, nurses and medical support teams that has been a pillar of his strategy to accelerate the pace of Covid-19 vaccinations in the U.S., two administration officials said. Biden plans to direct \$100 million from the recently enacted \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan to bolster the Medical Reserve Corps. Created shortly after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, the corps is a network of about 200,000 health professionals who can rapidly deploy to respond to public health emergencies.

- **Bloomberg Government: Sanders Proposes Big Tax Hikes:** Senate Budget Chairman Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) is proposing tax increases that are even bigger than the ones Biden is considering. Sanders, in an interview with NPR, said that he is planning to introduce legislation today that would raise the corporate tax rate to 35%, higher than the 28% that Biden has proposed. The corporate rate is currently 21%, which was cut from 35% in President Donald Trump's 2017 tax overhaul.
- **AP: Lawmakers: Require Nursing Homes To Disclose Vaccine Data:** Nursing homes have to publicly disclose their vaccination rates for flu and pneumonia but there's no similar mandate for COVID-19 shots, even though the steepest toll from the virus has been among residents of long-term care facilities. Now lawmakers of both parties are urging the Biden administration to require disclosure of coronavirus vaccination rates for residents and staff, and to make it easy for family members, advocacy groups and researchers to access such potentially critical details.
- **Bloomberg Government: Biden Press Conference:** Biden will host his first formal news conference at the White House on Thursday, a high-stakes test for a president facing questions about two recent mass shootings, a surge in migrant children at the U.S. southern border and the ongoing pandemic. Biden could also be pressed on the subject of whether vaccinated teachers should be forced to return to the classroom, even if their students haven't yet received shots. Biden will likely seek to sidestep the issue by noting his administration earlier this month ordered pharmacies participating in a federal vaccine program to prioritize shots for school staff.
- **Bloomberg Government: Biden Boosts Vaccine Efforts:** The Biden administration will steer nearly \$10 billion toward bolstering Covid-19 vaccine access for vulnerable U.S. communities that have suffered the most from the pandemic -- including funding aimed at encouraging people to get inoculated. The money, largely from the \$1.9 trillion relief package passed earlier this month, will expand Biden's efforts to help disadvantaged parts of the country, including Black and Latino communities where people are more likely to fall ill with coronavirus and die from it.
- **Bloomberg Government: HHS Deputy Pick Levine Wins Senate Confirmation:** Biden's nominee to lead a key public health office within the HHS, Rachel Levine, was confirmed yesterday by the full Senate. The Senate voted 52-48 for Levine to serve as assistant secretary for health of the Health and Human Services Department under Secretary Xavier Becerra. The votes came one week after the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee voted to advance her nomination. She is the first openly transgender person ever confirmed for any Cabinet post.
- **Bloomberg Government: Loan Fraud Hunt to Take 10 Years, SBA Watchdog Says:** Fraud probes in the Small Business Administration's pandemic-relief loan programs will take 10 years to resolve, according to the agency's watchdog. SBA Inspector General Hannibal Ware said yesterday fraud is so pervasive in the Paycheck Protection Program and Economic Injury Disaster Loan program that it'll take a targeted effort to oversee them and crack down on fraudulent acts.
- **Stat: With Amazon And Ro On Its Heels, Uber Expands Prescription Delivery:** After steering into prescription delivery in two cities last summer with digital pharmacy startup NimbleRx, ride-hailing giant Uber hitched itself a new and more expansive ride with

medication delivery service ScriptDrop on Wednesday. The deal makes Uber the default delivery app for thousands of pharmacies and health systems in 37 states. It also comes at a critical time for the digital pharmacy sector, which has boomed alongside virtual care amid the pandemic.