

American Nephrology Nurses Association

Daily Capitol Hill Update - Wednesday, March 31, 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

- 1:40pm: Biden departs White House en route Pittsburgh
 - White House principal deputy press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre to meet with reporters aboard Air Force One
- 4:20pm: Biden delivers remarks on his economic vision for the future and the Build Back Better plan during a speech in Pittsburgh
- 7:30pm: Biden returns to White House
- 1:30pm: Vice President Kamala Harris meets with faith leaders to discuss efforts to encourage Covid-19 vaccination
- 11am: White House Covid-19 response team holds press briefing

CONGRESS

- Senate is adjourned until April 12, plans April 1 pro forma session
- House plans next meeting for April 1
- 5:30pm: House Speaker Nancy Pelosi holds a virtual community roundtable with leaders of the San Francisco Asian American Pacific Islander community

Congressional, Health Policy, and Political News

- **Bloomberg Government: FCC OKs Process to Distribute Telehealth Funds:** The Federal Communications Commission unanimously approved a process for distributing nearly \$250 million to help fund health care providers' telehealth costs during the Covid-19 pandemic. The agency said it expects to begin accepting health care providers' applications for the funds, which Congress appropriated last December, in 30 days. The funds will cover costs of health care providers' telecommunications services and connected devices.
- **Bloomberg Government: Plan Includes \$621 Billion for Highways, Transit:** The \$621 billion Biden plans to lay out for transportation focuses on roads, bridges, transit and electric vehicles.
 - The administration hasn't laid out a plan to reauthorize surface transportation programs, which expire Sept. 30. It's not clear how those programs will be addressed in the administration's legislative push.
 - The sweeping proposal, which must be enacted by Congress, is unlikely to garner the support of Republicans, who have previously called for a narrower package focused on traditional infrastructure. Democrats and the Biden administration are considering advancing an infrastructure package using budget reconciliation, a process that could allow them to pass the legislation without Republican votes.

- Bloomberg Government: Jayapal Seeks Lower Medicare Age in Infrastructure Bill:** The co-chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus is seeking to add a reduced age to join Medicare and an expansion of the program's benefits as part of Biden's infrastructure legislation. Rep. Pramila Jayapal (D-Wash.) told reporters yesterday she supports Sen. Bernie Sanders' (I-Vt.) call for Medicare expansion in the next major piece of legislation coming through Congress. She said she's seeking a meeting with White House advisers to talk about health care policies that may be part of an infrastructure package.

 - However, she said her caucus is still working on a list of demands for that package. "We are polling our members on a number of options that we want to settle on for the next package," she said. Democrats are eyeing ways to expand insurance coverage but haven't settled on a unified vision. Biden has supported reducing the age to join Medicare and creating a public insurance option to lower health costs.
- Modern Healthcare: Threat Of Medicaid Cuts Weighs On Outlook For Safety-Net Providers:** It's budget season in most states, meaning safety-net hospitals are anxiously waiting to hear whether their Medicaid payments will be cut. The concerns regarding Medicaid reimbursement reductions are greater given the pandemic-related threat of an economic downturn, which generally translates to more people being added to the program when tax revenue may be falling. "It's this perfect storm that leads to states having to make some very difficult decisions," said Matt Salo, executive director of the National Association of Medicaid Directors, who saw this pattern play out during the Great Recession of 2008 and the 2001 recession.
- Bloomberg Government: HHS Looking to Undo Medicaid Coverage Limits Beyond Work Rules:** Trump-era state Medicaid experiments that result in loss of enrollment will likely hit the chopping block under Biden. Medicaid work requirements, a top priority of the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services under President Donald Trump, are already being rolled back, but the policy review is unlikely to stop there, analysts say.

 - That's because a variety of other add-ons to the Medicaid program – including premiums and cost-sharing, coverage delays until premiums are paid, elimination of retroactive coverage, and requiring people to earn benefits through healthy behaviors – also result in coverage losses without providing any counterbalancing benefits to beneficiaries, according to Sidney Watson, director of the Center for Health Law Studies at the Saint Louis University School of Law.
- The Hill: House Democrats Target HHS 'Sunset' Rule With Congressional Review Act:** House Democrats are eyeing the Congressional Review Act (CRA) to overturn a controversial Department of Health and Human Services rule passed in the final days of the Trump presidency that would require the agency to review thousands of regulations to prevent them from expiring. Reps. Raja Krishnamoorthi (D-Ill.) and Anna Eshoo (D-Calif.) on Monday introduced a resolution of disapproval over the HHS "sunset" rule, which requires all 18,000 agency regulations to be reviewed every 10 years, or else they expire.
- Modern Healthcare: Hospital, Nursing Home COVID-19 Liability Protections Poised For Repeal:** New York legislation nixing broad legal protections for healthcare providers during the pandemic stands ready to become law after receiving the approval of veto-proof majorities in the Assembly and state Senate. The vote drew the condemnation of healthcare and nursing home industry representatives, who called the move premature. "What if the variants do something unexpected? What happens if something goes awry in the near future?" asked Southern New York Association President Neil Heyman, whose group represents long-term-care facilities in New York City, Long Island and Westchester.

"I think people should still be protected until we reach herd immunity and this thing is gone."