

American Nephrology Nurses Association

Daily Capitol Hill Update – Tuesday, April 27, 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

- 1:15 PM: President Biden delivers remarks on the COVID-19 response.

CONGRESS:

- The Senate plans votes on two of Biden’s nominees: Jason Miller to be deputy director for management at the Office of Management and Budget, and Janet McCabe to be deputy administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency.
- The chamber could also hold a procedural vote on legislation to authorize more than \$35 billion in water resource development projects.

Congressional, Health Policy, and Political News

- **The Wall Street Journal: Prescription-Drug Price Cuts Set To Be Left Out Of White House Proposal:** The White House isn’t expected to include a measure aimed at lowering the price of prescription drugs in its coming antipoverty package, according to people familiar with the matter, in an omission likely to disappoint top Democrats on Capitol Hill. President Biden will detail the roughly \$1.8 trillion proposal during a speech to Congress later this week, rolling out another major spending plan weeks after he released a \$2.3 trillion infrastructure plan. While officials are still finalizing the plan, it is set to include funding for child care, universal prekindergarten and tuition-free community college, among other measures.
- **Bloomberg Government: Democrats Press Biden to Expand Medicare:** More than 80 progressives and moderates in the House Democratic caucus yesterday sent a letter to Biden requesting that he strengthen Medicare as part of his American Families Plan. Its signers include members of the moderate New Democrat Coalition and the Congressional Progressive Caucus. Their letter urges Biden to expand Medicare by lowering its eligibility age and giving the program negotiating power for drug prices.
- **Bloomberg Government: Bill Boosts Home Health Care:** Sens. Susan Collins (R-Maine), Ben Cardin (D-Md.), Roger Marshall (R-Kan.) and Jeanne Shaheen (D-N.H.) introduced a bipartisan bill that would provide Medicare reimbursements for audio “and video telehealth services furnished by home health agencies during the COVID-19 public health crisis” and for future public health emergencies.
- **Modern Healthcare: Employers, Payers Seek Transparent Pharmacy Benefit Models:** More employers and healthcare payers are carving out their pharmacy benefit

management as they seek more transparency, business groups said. Health plans typically administer pharmacy benefit services internally or contract pharmacy benefit managers, which negotiate rebates and discounts with drug manufacturers and pocket an undisclosed share. More employers and payers are contracting directly with PBMs, increasingly working with more transparent managers that pass all the drug rebates and discounts to employers and payers for a set fee.

- **Bloomberg Government: White House Greenlights Hospital Rule Plan:** The White House has completed its review of a proposed rule to revise the Medicare hospital inpatient and long-term care hospital prospective payment systems for operating and capital-related costs in 2022. The proposed rule (RIN 0938-AU44) can now be released at any time by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services.
- **Bloomberg Government: Republicans Emerge From Census With Upper Hand in Map-Drawing:** Republicans' bid to retake the U.S. House next year got a lift from new Census figures that added congressional seats in a handful of states, including Texas, that Donald Trump won in November's election.
 - With Democrats holding the House by a slim majority, the numbers released by the U.S. Census Bureau yesterday leave the GOP, for now, in a stronger position -- especially since Republicans control the legislatures that will redraw congressional districts in states with the biggest population changes. Texas, a Republican bastion, was the big winner with two new congressional seats, while GOP-dominated Florida and Montana each gained one. The swing states of Colorado and North Carolina also gained one each along with Democratic Oregon.
- **Bloomberg Government: Lawmakers Unveil 'Earmark' Requests for Infrastructure:** House members are pitching billions of dollars-worth of projects in their home districts ranging from marine terminals to hiking trails that they want folded into Biden's massive infrastructure package. Lawmakers have until the end of today to send proposals for district or community-level projects to the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee under rules that revived the practice of designated spending, or "earmarks." Over \$8 billion in such earmark requests are expected.
 - Both parties banned earmarks in 2011 after years of their association with wasteful projects and corruption. As part of the conditions for the revival, the committee plans to list all of the requests over the next several days in a nod to transparency. Members also are required to announce on their own congressional websites what they've asked for, as some have done.
 - Senate Appropriations Chairman Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.) said yesterday the panel will also accept requests for congressionally directed spending items for appropriations bills for the 2022 fiscal year. "In recent years, Congress has ceded too much of its Constitutional authority over spending to the Executive Branch to make decisions about how and where to invest Federal taxpayer dollars," Leahy said in a statement. "A rebalanced process will allow Members to better utilize their knowledge and experience to thoughtfully direct federal funds, and do so with transparency and accountability."
- **Bloomberg Government: CDC to Update Guidance on Masking Outdoors:** A mounting call for health officials to relax rules about mask-wearing outdoors could soon lead to one of the most significant changes in virus guidelines since the U.S. first told Americans to

don face coverings to curb the spread of Covid-19. Outdoor mask wearing has been the subject of controversy in recent weeks. There's evidence that vaccines not only prevent illness, but also transmission. And with the U.S. seeing about 2.74 million vaccine injections daily, even some public health experts are calling for less strict guidelines as warmer weather arrives.

- A response could come as early as today. Biden will deliver remarks at the White House at 1:15 p.m. on the administration's response to Covid-19. The White House Covid-19 Response Team will also hold a press briefing at 12:30 p.m.
 - U.S. trade chief Katherine Tai met with key officials at Pfizer and AstraZeneca about raising production of Covid-19 vaccines and a proposed waiver of intellectual-property protections as the daily number of confirmed cases keeps rising.
- **Politico: Biden Administration Advances Emergency Covid Workplace Safety Rules After Weeks Of Delay:** The Biden administration is advancing emergency workplace safety rules to prevent the spread of the coronavirus after weeks of delay and growing pressure from Democrats and safety advocates. The Labor Department sent the safety standards to the Office of Management and Budget for review Monday night, according to a DOL spokesperson, the first step before they are released publicly and go into effect.
 - **AP: House Passes Bill Allowing Cameras In Nursing Home Rooms:** The Connecticut House of Representatives on Monday overwhelmingly passed legislation that will let residents of nursing homes install cameras in their rooms, allowing them to be monitored virtually by their families. While the issue had been raised in previous legislative sessions, it took on new life this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to a visitation ban at nursing homes across the state to prevent the spread of disease.