American Nephrology Nurses Association

Daily Capitol Hill Update – Thursday, May 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

• President Biden travels to Cuyahoga Community College in Cleveland, Ohio, where he will discuss the economy at 2:20 p.m.

CONGRESS:

• Republican Senators Shelley Moore Capito (R-W.Va.), Pat Toomey (Pa.), John Barrasso (Wyo.), and Roy Blunt (Mo.) will hold a press conference at 9:05 a.m. announcing another infrastructure counteroffer that will have a top-line figure of almost $1 trillion.

Congressional, Health Policy, and Political News

• Bloomberg Government: Democrats Eye Public Health Insurance Bill: Democratic leaders in Congress took the first step toward creating a public health insurance option, soliciting ideas from colleagues for a government-run insurance plan that could cut Americans’ health care costs. A public insurance option was a major plank of President Joe Biden’s health agenda during the campaign, though Biden recently has focused on his infrastructure and tax plans, not health care. “This is an opportunity to lower health care costs,” Sen. Patty Murray (D-Wash.), chair of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, told reporters yesterday. She and Frank Pallone (D-N.J.), who leads the House Energy and Commerce Committee, said in a letter that they’ll take comments until the end of July. A Senate Democratic aide familiar with the planning said Murray plans to have a bill together by the end of 2021, making passage possible in 2022.
  o The move puts the two committee leaders at the heart of a policy debate that’s been raging among Democrats for years: how to lower health-care costs as the government increasingly takes on the expenses of Americans’ health insurance. And the country’s aging population is adding to Medicare’s rolls, while millions of Americans are enrolled on subsidized coverage plans through the Affordable Care Act’s marketplaces. That has left the government playing a larger role than ever in paying for insurance coverage and care.
  o Murray’s and Pallone’s letter asks colleagues for input over who should be eligible to join a government-run plan, how to structure its benefits and how to maintain a network of doctors. But their plan could be a tough sell to Republicans concerned about market impacts, with the announcement already seeing pushback from the health-care industry.

• Bloomberg Government: NIH Research Center’s Head Expected to Have ‘Gravitas’: The head of Biden’s proposed biomedical research agency will hold an empowered, five-year position, allowing future administrations to shape their own visions as the science evolves.
Francis S. Collins, director of the National Institutes of Health, said he expects the head of the Advanced Research Projects Agency for Health to be named by either the White House or the HHS secretary.
  o “This needs to be somebody with gravitas, who is recognized as having the kind of authority that you’re going to need to have to move swiftly and not have too many things in the way,” Collins said in an interview after a Senate hearing yesterday on NIH funding.

- **Bloomberg Government: Medicaid Gap Fix Sought in Biden Package:** Sens. Raphael Warnock (D-Ga.) and Jon Ossoff (D-Ga.), urged Senate leaders to include provisions in future federal relief legislation, including Biden’s proposed American Jobs Plan and Families Plan, to close coverage gaps in states that haven’t yet expanded Medicaid, according to a statement.

- **Bloomberg Government: Hospital Pay for Uninsured Under Medicaid at Risk:** Federal funds to cover the cost of hospital care for uninsured people could end up on the chopping block in states that haven’t expanded Medicaid eligibility to include poorer adults. Several of the largest states that haven’t expanded Medicaid, including Texas and Florida, operate uncompensated care pools in their Medicaid programs that direct money to hospitals to help cover health services for the uninsured.

- **The New York Times: Immunity To The Coronavirus May Persist For Years, Scientists Find:** Immunity to the coronavirus lasts at least a year, possibly a lifetime, improving over time especially after vaccination, according to two new studies. The findings may help put to rest lingering fears that protection against the virus will be short-lived. Together, the studies suggest that most people who have recovered from Covid-19 and who were later immunized will not need boosters. Vaccinated people who were never infected most likely will need the shots, however, as will a minority who were infected but did not produce a robust immune response.

- **Stat: Drug Makers Argue An HHS Rule Would Penalize Them For Co-Pay Coupons:** After months of controversy, the pharmaceutical industry’s biggest trade group has filed a lawsuit accusing the federal government of issuing an “invalid” rule that it argues would penalize drug makers for providing financial assistance to patients. At issue are widely used promotional tools such as co-pay coupons and discount cards, and whether these should be included when calculating the so-called ‘best price’ that drug makers must offer the government to participate in the Medicaid program.