

American Nephrology Nurses Association

Daily Capitol Hill Update – Tuesday, July 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

- Biden will address the intelligence community workforce during a visit to the Office of the Director of National Intelligence this afternoon.

CONGRESS:

- The House is scheduled to begin consideration of a seven-bill fiscal 2022 spending package.
- The Senate plans to vote on Biden's nominee to lead the Justice Department's environment division.

Congressional, Health Policy, and Political News

- **The New York Times: V.A. Issues Vaccine Mandate For Health Care Workers, A First For A Federal Agency:** The Department of Veterans Affairs will require 115,000 of its frontline health care workers to be vaccinated against the coronavirus in the next two months, making it the first federal agency to mandate that employees be inoculated, government officials said on Monday. The move comes as concern is growing that the substantial portion of the population that has not been vaccinated is contributing to the rapid spread of the highly contagious Delta variant. While it was a sharp departure from the Biden administration's reluctance to embrace mandates, it was part of a broader shift in which New York City, many hospital chains and some private employers are deciding that the time has come to make being vaccinated a requirement.
- **Modern Healthcare: Anthem, Humana Drop Nearly \$140 Million To Launch New PBM:** Anthem and Humana have invested nearly \$140 million to form a new pharmacy benefit manager, as criticism over traditional PBMs' operations kickstarts business at startups that promise transparency. The insurers will hold a minority stake in the new joint venture, named DomaniRx, which is being championed by SS&C Technologies. The Windsor, Conn.-based fintech company owns approximately 80% of the new business, according to a filing submitted to the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission on July 15. SS&C's existing claims processing platform – RxNova – will serve as the new PBM's technological backbone. By combining claims administration with data analytics, DomaniRx aims to offer payers more transparency into their drug costs and help them better comply with changing government regulations. Payers use PBMs to manage their benefits and negotiate drug pricing with pharmaceutical companies and drugstores.

- **The Hill: Four Senators Call On Becerra To Back Importation Of Prescription Drugs From Canada:** A bipartisan group of four senators requested Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Xavier Becerra's support to allow less costly prescription drugs to be imported from Canada. Sens. Amy Klobuchar (D-Minn.), Charles Grassley (R-Iowa), Angus King (I-Maine) and Susan Collins (R-Maine) sent a letter to the secretary on Monday asking him to back policies permitting states and tribes to import certain prescription drugs from Canada.
- **Bloomberg Government: Republicans to Gain in Texas After Redistricting:** Texas has won two new congressional seats thanks to a surge in the population of people of color, who vote more often for Democrats. But the state's Republicans will benefit because they'll draw the maps allocating political power for the next decade. The GOP-controlled legislature is expected to do what it did a decade ago when growth in minority communities earned the state four new congressional districts: try to benefit White Republicans. They'll do so through the dark art of gerrymandering, by either crowding the other party's voters into a limited number of districts or splitting them up so they're outnumbered. Packing or cracking it's called, respectively.
- **CNBC: Long Covid: Biden Says Some Qualify For Federal Disability Resources:** President Joe Biden on Monday announced that some Americans experiencing long-term effects of Covid may qualify for disability resources and protections from the federal government. The announcement came as the president marked the 31st anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act in a speech at the White House Rose Garden with Vice President Kamala Harris. It also comes as the long-term symptoms of the virus, what some call "long Covid," shapes up to be a major public health issue.
- **Politico: High-Stakes Infrastructure Talks Stall Out As Deadline Passes:** Senators capped off a day of trading blame and stalled efforts on their bipartisan infrastructure proposal with a Monday meeting that quickly broke up, signaling a tough path forward as negotiators missed yet another self-imposed deadline. The core 10 senators huddled in the office of Sen. Rob Portman (R-Ohio), the lead Republican negotiator, hoping to get past a rough weekend of fruitless talks. Discussions are expected to resume later in the evening, though not in person, and negotiators claimed they were still making progress.
- **Modern Healthcare: Providers Push Congress To Repeal In-Person Telemental Health Requirement:** Congress has made steps to improve Medicare's telehealth coverage, but there are still restrictions that provider groups, advocates and lawmakers across the aisle argue will impede access to mental healthcare. The \$2.3 trillion government spending bill passed in December permanently allowed Medicare to cover mental health services delivered virtually but with a catch: beneficiaries must see the practitioner in person within six months before virtual treatment begins. Lawmakers added the requirement amid concern over potential Medicare fraud and waste. But some congressional aides say the restriction was added to bring down the cost of the bill, the biggest spending package passed in congressional history.
- **Bloomberg Government: U.S. to Maintain Rules on Travel Amid Delta Surge:** The Biden administration is keeping foreign travel restrictions in place amid concern about rising Covid-19 case levels as the delta strain spreads, a White House official said yesterday. The administration has faced calls from foreign governments, airlines and some members of Congress to ease the limits on foreign nationals entering the country, but the official insisted the U.S. position will be guided by public health.

- **Bloomberg Government: Huge Barriers Seen Barring Employers From Reporting Drug Costs:** Employer health plan sponsors and health insurers aren't able to comply with a requirement that they report detailed drug pricing information to the government later this year. Three prominent industry groups across the private health insurance sector told the Labor Department that they don't have all the data needed to report information about prescription drug prices, rebates, and other things that affect consumer and employee premiums and out-of-pocket drug costs. The comments, due July 23, showcase monumental barriers to complying with a requirement in December 2020's government spending bill.