

American Nephrology Nurses Association

Daily Capitol Hill Update - Thursday, September 30, 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

- The president has no public events scheduled.

CONGRESS:

- The Senate is scheduled to vote on a stopgap measure to fund the government past midnight tonight.
- The House is scheduled to vote on the Senate-passed bipartisan infrastructure bill. The chamber could also vote on the government funding measure, if the Senate passes it first.

Congressional, Health Policy, and Political News

- **Bloomberg Government: HHS Looks to Avoid Funding Lapse:** The Senate will vote this morning – the eve of the new fiscal year – to extend government funding until Dec. 3, sending the package to the House and ultimately to Biden’s desk for signature with just hours to spare. Stripped of Republican-opposed language suspending the debt ceiling, the stopgap funding bill is expected to pass both chambers with bipartisan support.
 - Health agencies’ efforts to combat the Covid-19 pandemic would likely continue even in the event of a government shutdown, but other key work – including enrolling patients in clinical trials, drug and disease surveillance, and rulemaking – could come to a halt.
- **Bloomberg Government: Vulnerable Democrats Warn Bill Failures Spell Defeat in 2022:** The Democrats most in danger of losing their seats in next year’s midterm elections are warning their fellow lawmakers that Congress must find a way forward on the infrastructure and social spending bills or risk losing the House.
 - Lawmakers from swing districts said in interviews they’re growing concerned about the current deadlock among Democrats on how to proceed with these massive spending measures. Progressives are insisting that both bills be considered at the same time, while some moderates want to vote on infrastructure as leaders continue negotiating the social spending package.
 - “Quite honestly if we can’t deliver we can lose the majority,” Rep. Susan Wild (D-Pa.) said. “And we’ll be the minority party, and we’re not going to be talking about working on any of these things. The Republicans will be working on tax cuts for the super wealthy.”

- Bloomberg Government: FDA Updates Guidance on Data Backing Potential New Drug Uses:** Researchers using electronic health records to show that an FDA-approved drug can have a different use than it was intended for should make sure their data is both relevant and complete, the agency advised in a draft guidance released yesterday. The draft guidance aims to help researchers use “real-world data” to show the Food and Drug Administration that a proposed use is safe and effective.
- AP: Agonizing Choices As Dems Debate Shrinking Health Care Pie:** Democrats are debating how to divide up what could be a smaller serving of health care spending in President Joe Biden’s domestic policy bill, pitting the needs of older adults who can’t afford their dentures against the plight of uninsured low-income people in the South. “There’s always a battle of where you place your priorities,” Rep. Jim Clyburn, the No. 3 House Democratic leader, said Wednesday. “We don’t means-test Medicare, which means that pretty wealthy people will be getting both dental care (and) vision care while poor people will be denied. ... I don’t know that that’s a real good choice.”
- Bloomberg Government: FCC Approves More Pandemic Telehealth Program Funds:** The Federal Communications Commission has approved \$41 million in a second round of funding for telehealth services during the pandemic. The COVID-19 Telehealth Program was established by the CARES Act (Public Law 116-136) to reimburse health-care workers providing telecommunications services, information services, and connected devices needed to enable telehealth during the Covid-19 public health crisis.
- Bloomberg Government: Lawmakers Tackle Antitrust, IP Barriers to Cheaper Drugs:** House lawmakers advanced legislation to crack down on seemingly anticompetitive conduct aimed at lowering drug costs, the latest move geared toward making prescription drugs more affordable for Americans. The House Judiciary Committee yesterday approved three bills honing in on drugmaker activity involving patents and FDA communications – areas that have come under scrutiny as potential factors in undermining lower-cost generic drugs.

 - The bills, introduced by House Democrats, are related to measures advanced by the Senate Judiciary Committee over the summer. Those have yet to come to the floor for a vote. Among the measures is H.R. 2891, which would ease the way for the Federal Trade Commission to go after drugmakers for paying generic and biosimilar manufacturers to delay their cheaper products from going to market. Both the FTC and the Justice Department enforce the U.S.’s antitrust laws.
- The Washington Post: Federal Employees Health Benefits Program Enrollees Face An Average 3.8 Rise In Rates For 2022:** Premiums for federal employees will rise by 3.8 percent on average in 2022, the second straight year of moderate increases despite the coronavirus pandemic, the government announced Wednesday. The pandemic has led to increased costs in the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program (FEHBP), the Office of Personnel Management said, including roughly \$1 billion to test and treat coronavirus patients. But those costs have been partly offset by enrollees skipping routine medical procedures, the OPM said
- Bloomberg Government: House Advances Debt Limit Bill:** The House passed stand-alone legislation to suspend the federal debt limit through December 2022, but the bill is expected to go nowhere in the Senate in the face of solid Republican opposition. The measure was passed on a mostly party-line vote of 219-212. Senate Republicans have twice blocked debt ceiling

measures from advancing in the 50-50 chamber, where 60 votes are needed to proceed on most legislation.

- The debt ceiling was suspended for two years under the Trump administration and snapped back into place in August. Although much of the recent increase in federal debt occurred when Republicans controlled the White House and Congress, the GOP is tying the debt limit increase to Democratic efforts to pass a tax and spending package of as much as \$3.5 trillion.
- **NPR: Weight Gain And Obesity Up In 2020 In The U.S.:** It is official: The pandemic's effect on America's waistline has been rough. New data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention showed 16 states now have obesity rates of 35% or higher. That's an increase of four states – Delaware, Iowa, Ohio and Texas – in just a year. The findings confirm what several recent research studies have found: Many Americans have gained significant weight since the COVID-19 crisis started, likely fueled by an increase in sedentary behavior, stress and troubles such as job and income loss that make healthy eating harder. And those rates are rising faster among racial minorities.