

American Nephrology Nurses Association

Daily Capitol Hill Update – Wednesday, January 12, 2022

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 White House Covid-19 response team holds a press briefing at 11 a.m.
- Biden will deliver remarks at the funeral of Gen. Raymond Odierno at Fort Myer, Va., at 12:45 p.m.
- Press Secretary Jen Psaki holds a press briefing at 3 p.m.

CONGRESS:

- The Senate at 3:30 p.m. plans to vote on Biden's nominee to lead Federal Railroad Administration.
- The House meets at noon and plans to vote on a bill to expand eligibility for veterans' benefits.

Congressional, Health Policy, and Political News

- **Bloomberg Government: The most common prediction among political pundits for 2022** is that Democrats will lose control of the House of Representatives in November. But political handicappers and strategists in both parties can envision plenty of scenarios for how Democrats might pull a rabbit out of their hat. Any upset would be predicated on one thing: a return to normalcy. Insiders agree that inflation would have to fall and Covid subside to the point where schools stay open and masks are an afterthought. "It needs to feel like 2019, not 2021," says Liam Donovan, a Republican strategist.
 - Still, social-media sites are full of photographs of empty grocery-store shelves, and the head of one of the biggest U.S. supermarket chains says the situation will take weeks to improve. Albertsons had been expecting that supply outages would be improving by now, but "omicron has put a bit of a dent" in that, CEO Vivek Sankaran said yesterday. As a result, the company is still contending with a range of products that are out of stock after months of similar headaches.
 - And, workers in most states paid nearly 12% of median income for health insurance premiums and out-of-pocket expenses in 2020, up from 9% in 2010, according to a study published today. The costs of premiums and annual deductibles – expenses health plan enrollees need to pay before health-care claims are covered – consume a greater share of income in every state than they did a decade ago, the Commonwealth Fund study found.

- **Bloomberg Government: Health Costs Seen Taking Bigger Chunk of Pay:** Workers in most states paid nearly 12% of median income for health insurance premiums and out-of-pocket expenses in 2020, up from 9% in 2010, according to a study published today. The costs of premiums and annual deductibles — expenses health plan enrollees need to pay before health-care claims are covered — consume a greater share of income in every state than they did a decade ago, the Commonwealth Fund study found. It found that those health-care costs take up 10% or more of median income in 37 states.
- **NPR: U.S. COVID Hospitalizations Hit Record High:** The omicron-driven surge has sent COVID-19 hospitalizations skyrocketing across the U.S., reaching a new pandemic high this week with 145,982 patients hospitalized. This exceeds the previous high recorded in January last year, according to data tracked by the Department of Health and Human Services, from more than 5,400 hospitals in the country. Patients with COVID now fill about 30% of ICU beds in the nation and pediatric COVID hospitalizations are also at the highest rate of the pandemic.
- **Bloomberg Government: Test Plan Seen to Address Concerns on Price Gouging:** The Biden administration’s mandate that health insurers and employer health plans cover free over-the-counter Covid-19 tests for beneficiaries was “thoughtful,” and addressed their primary concerns about price-gouging by test providers, an executive with a major industry trade group said. “The guardrails that were included in that guidance will protect consumers and patients and will help employers to operate efficiently,” according to James Gelfand, an executive for the ERISA Industry Committee. ERIC represents large employers on employee benefits.
- **Bloomberg Government: FDA Nominee Vote:** The Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee postponed its plans to vote on nominations including Robert Califf to be commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration until Thursday, according to a statement. In prepared remarks, Califf said the FDA must have infrastructure in place reflecting lessons learned from the pandemic “so it is ready for the next one.” Find his remarks here.
 - Sen. Maggie Hassan, a member of the committee, earlier yesterday said she’ll vote no on his nomination. “New Hampshire has been hit especially hard by the substance misuse epidemic,” Hassan (D-N.H.) said. “It is imperative that we have a strong FDA Commissioner in place who recognizes the role that the agency’s decisions played in fueling this crisis,” Hassan wrote. She joins Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) in opposing Califf, who now needs three GOP votes.
 - According to the committee’s website, the hearing won’t be live-streamed. That’s spurred Sen. Mike Braun (R-Ind.) to urge Murray in a letter to open up the meeting to the public or use a livestream because the panel “will consider nominations of great significance to the everyday life of Americans.”