American Nephrology Nurses Association

Daily Capitol Hill Update - Wednesday, September 8, 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 deliver remarks in honor of labor unions at 11:20 a.m.

- Biden at 2:45 p.m. is to receive a briefing from members of the White House Covid-19 response team.

- White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki, Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack, and Director of the National Economic Council Brian Deese will give a press briefing at 2 p.m.

CONGRESS:

- Out of Session

Congressional, Health Policy, and Political News

- Modern Healthcare: Congress Faces Breakneck Pace To Address Medicare Pay, Telehealth This Year: Congress faces a lengthy to-do list when it returns from recess later this month, with action needed on major issues affecting healthcare providers. From dealing with the threat of Medicare payment cuts to trying to pass a $3.5 trillion "human infrastructure" bill that seeks to extend healthcare coverage to millions of Americans, there will be a mad scramble to get it all done by the year-end.

- Bloomberg Government: Employer Groups Press Democrats on Drug Price Bill: Employer groups say Democrats must include private insurance plans in their drug pricing legislation or they’ll try to sink the legislation, Alex Ruoff reports. The groups want private plans to be able to take advantage of lower rates negotiated by the government for Medicare, something Democrats have backed in the past, and a cap on drug price increases pegged to inflation.
  - “If these two provisions protect employer sponsor coverage we will support the drug bill, if not we will oppose it,” James Gelfand, executive vice president of public affairs for ERIC, which represents large employers, said. Gelfand said the expectation is drugmakers will raise prices for private plans if a drug pricing plan only applies to Medicare. The group estimates cutting out employer-sponsored plans will cost them $125 billion over 10 years.
  - “We’ve seen this playbook before,” said Elizabeth Mitchell, chief executive officer for the Purchaser Business Group on Health, said. “If price protections aren’t extended to employers and employees, the cost balloon will be pushed down for Medicare and everyone else will pay for it.”
**Bloomberg Government: GOP Senators Call for Full Finance Markup of Democratic Tax Plan:** Senate Republicans are pushing Senate Finance Chair Ron Wyden (D-Ore.) to allow for a chance to amend the tax portions of the $3.5 trillion budget reconciliation bill that congressional Democrats and the Biden administration hope to advance this month.

- The House Ways and Means Committee yesterday released part of its reconciliation package in advance of a markup later this week. But Wyden has yet to announce his markup plans for the tax measures, which are expected to include rate increases on corporations and the wealthy to help fund new spending in the broad bill.
- Meanwhile, House Democrats proposed requiring companies to automatically enroll workers for IRAs or 401(k)-type retirement plans under a provision tucked into the draft legislation. The plan would direct 6% of each employee’s pay into a retirement savings plan, gradually escalating to 10%, unless they took action to opt out or change their contribution rate. The idea is a pet cause of House Ways and Means Chair Richard Neal (D-Mass.) and his counterpart Kevin Brady (R-Texas), who jointly introduced legislation last year to bolster retirement savings through automatic contributions.

**KHN: Telehealth’s Limits: Battle Over State Lines And Licensing Threatens Patients’ Options:** If you live in one state, does it matter that the doctor treating you online is in another? Surprisingly, the answer is yes, and the ability to conduct certain virtual appointments may be nearing an end. Televisits for medical care took off during the worst days of the pandemic, quickly becoming commonplace. Most states and the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services temporarily waived rules requiring licensed clinicians to hold a valid license in the state where their patient is located. Those restrictions don’t keep patients from visiting doctors’ offices in other states, but problems could arise if those same patients used telemedicine. Now states are rolling back many of those pandemic workarounds.

**Bloomberg Government: More Details of Paid Leave Plan:** A new national paid medical and family leave plan would begin July 2023 under the Ways and Means Committee’s bill. The plan would provide up to 12 weeks of federal benefits to replace lost wages because time off for medical or caregiving for an ill family member. Benefits would be awarded on a sliding scale based on a worker’s annual income. Eligible employees can apply for benefits if they have or anticipate having at least four caregiving hours in a week.