



COMMITTEE ON
EDUCATION AND
THE WORKFORCE

COMMITTEE STATEMENT

Opening Statement by Rep. Virginia Foxx (R-NC), Chairwoman, Committee on Education and the Workforce Hearing on “Examining the Policies and Priorities of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services”

Good morning, and welcome to today’s hearing. We’re pleased to welcome the Honorable Alex Azar, Secretary of the United States Department of Health and Human Services, to his first hearing with the Committee on Education and the Workforce.

I’m especially pleased to note that this hearing comes just after Secretary Azar has celebrated his three month anniversary in his new position. Mr. Secretary, we can’t find another cabinet secretary in recent memory that has made an oversight hearing with this committee such an early priority. Thank you.

This Committee’s dedication to oversight and building working relationships with the various administrative departments are well-known and well documented. So far in this Congress, we’ve been pleased to hear from Secretary Acosta and Secretary DeVos about their priorities for the management of those departments. The members of this Committee are responsible for a wide legislative jurisdiction that means that the work we do can impact Americans in all stages and walks of life. In many cases, the Department of Health and Human Services is tasked with carrying out some of the laws that have their origins right here in this room, and that is why it’s important we hear from Secretary Azar.

Programs such as Head Start, the Child Care Development Block Grant, and Preschool Development Grants, laws like the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act and the Older Americans Act, and many antipoverty initiatives require a productive and accountable relationship between this Committee and the Department of Health and Human Services.

In recent years, that relationship has become even more crucial as millions of Americans have suffered under the mounting failures of Obamacare.

Dwindling coverage options and soaring health care costs have left American employers and the families that rely on them with few choices and hard decisions. It's estimated that Obamacare's costs and mandates have resulted in roughly \$19 billion in lost wages for small business employees.

That's why this committee made H.R. 1101, the *Small Business Health Fairness Act*, one of our first orders of business in this Congress. This bill, offered by our own Health, Employment, Labor, and Pensions subcommittee chair Tim Walberg and Rep. Sam Johnson of Texas, allows small businesses greater freedom in banding together to offer association health plans.

In October, President Trump issued an executive order directing the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and the Treasury to use their regulatory authority to expand access to affordable health care options. Those options include association health plans, short-term limited duration plans, and health reimbursement arrangements.

As the *Small Business Health Fairness Act* continues to await long-overdue action by the Senate, we hope Secretary Azar can provide some update today on the status of his Department's efforts to reverse the damage of Obamacare and improve access to healthcare for millions of working families.

Just before and again shortly after Secretary Azar assumed leadership of the Department, this Committee held hearings about how the opioid epidemic is affecting communities and workplaces. To date, more than 11 million Americans have been impacted by the opioid epidemic, which has justifiably been classified as a public health emergency. While we know we didn't arrive at this problem overnight and we can't solve it all overnight, members of this Committee have worked together to find bipartisan legislative solutions that we all hope can bring some stability, health, and healing to our communities.

Secretary Azar, we know you are on the front lines of this fight, and we hope you have some positive developments to share with us.

I want to say at the outset that I've heard from some members, especially our Ranking Member, Mr. Scott, that some congressional inquiries to your office have gone unanswered. I hope if you see any of those members who have written to you here today, you can acknowledge those inquiries and provide some forecast as to when members can expect a response. We all

know what a high volume of mail looks like. Responding to constituent letters has kept me here many, many late nights over the years, but it's one of the most important parts of this job. I'm sure you would agree the same is true for you.

Secretary Azar, it's a pleasure to welcome you to the Education and Workforce Committee. Thank you, again, for making this hearing a priority. I understand that after this hearing was scheduled, President Trump let you know that he had plans for you today as well. Every Member of Congress knows how it feels to have to be in two, sometimes three places at once, so we're going to try to make the most of our time together.

I'll now yield to Ranking Member Scott for his opening remarks.

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