

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Scott (VA-03)

Full Committee Hearing

Examining the Policies and Priorities of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

2175 Rayburn House Office Building

Wednesday, May 15, 2024 | 10:15 a.m.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

Secretary Becerra, good morning, and thank you for being with us today. It is always a pleasure to welcome you back to the Committee.

You are familiar with this room, not only from your previous appearances before us as Secretary but also because you and I started our congressional careers right here in this room 30 years ago. It is great to see you back on Capitol Hill, and I thank you for your dedication to public service.

Under your leadership, the Department of Health and Human Services has made historic progress in helping workers and their families access quality, affordable care.

In the last Congress, Congressional Democrats passed the *American Rescue Plan Act* without a single Republican vote. That law enhanced premium tax credits to lower monthly costs for low-income Americans, especially by eliminating the subsidy “cliff” so that more individuals could get coverage and get help getting coverage.

We also passed the *Inflation Reduction Act*, which was enacted into law to extend these tax credit enhancements, cap the cost of insulin for people on Medicare, and—for the first time ever—direct the Federal government to negotiate lower prices for prescription drugs covered by Medicare.

These decisive actions yielded positive results. For example, during the 2024 open enrollment period, a record 21.4 million signed up for *Affordable Care Act* coverage. That’s not all. Just last week, the Administration took further steps to improve access to coverage by announcing a final rule that would expand health care coverage to Dreamers.

We also know that protecting our nation’s health goes beyond improving access to health insurance. Recently, the Department updated several regulations that will improve the lives of workers and their families. For example, the updated Section 504 regulations will protect disabled individuals from discrimination in programs that receive federal funding through HHS. This will ensure that people with disabilities have equal access to quality care and are treated fairly in systems that are supposed to protect the health and welfare of *all* Americans. Additionally, the Department issued a number of final regulations that support the health care workforce, seniors in nursing homes, and people with disabilities who rely on Medicaid. Taken together, these rules will work to improve access to and quality of healthcare.

Unfortunately, my colleagues on the other side speak frequently about their commitment to our nation’s health and safety, but they have not backed up their words with actions.

For example, my colleagues may talk about child labor problems today. However, the reality is that Republican state legislators in many states across the country are working to reverse child worker protection laws. And, despite our multiple requests for a hearing on this persistent and growing problem, the Majority on this Committee has yet to schedule a hearing or advance legislation to address child labor violations.

Moreover, we have seen Republicans attempt to:

- Sabotage quality health care coverage and undermine access to health care and other services that our constituents need;
- Restrict or criminalize a woman's access to an abortion, jeopardizing the health of women; and,
- Work against the necessary care that supports the health of transgender individuals.

Despite these efforts, Congressional Democrats and the Biden Administration will continue working to lower prescription drug prices, strengthen the ACA, and improve transparency for health care consumers.

Committee Democrats remain focused on helping this Administration build on our progress to:

- Expand access to care for our most vulnerable communities;
- Lower the cost of quality care; and,
- Meet the changing health care needs of workers and their families.

The Biden Administration's proposed investments underscore your commitment to protecting the health and well-being of every American.

So, Secretary Becerra, thank you for all your work and for joining us today. I look forward to our discussion.