

PREPARED TESTIMONY OF MARY K. WAKEFIELD
NOMINEE TO BE DEPUTY SECRETARY
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE HEARING

February 4, 2016

Chairman Hatch, Senator Wyden, and members of the Committee, thank you for considering and inviting me here today to discuss my nomination to serve as Deputy Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services.

Each and every day, the Department is working on behalf of the American people. It conducts cutting edge research through the National Institutes of Health. It protects our food and medicine through the Food and Drug Administration. It fights outbreaks of disease at home and abroad through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. It supports the health for our nation's children and those in need through human service programs like Head Start.

Internationally, we have worked closely with global leaders to create the systems that will help us prevent and respond quickly to global health threats like Ebola. We have convened leaders from every state, including your home states, to respond to the rise in opioid addiction and overdoses. And we continue to push forward new frontiers in medical science, so that medicines can be delivered precisely tailored to patients' genetic makeup.

Over the past few months, I have been privileged to serve as Acting Deputy Secretary alongside the committed and hard-working employees of the Department. I have seen how the work they do helps to safeguard the health and security of our communities and our nation.

I am honored that President Obama has nominated me to serve as their Deputy Secretary and I am deeply appreciative of this committee's consideration of my nomination. I believe that my commitment to the people that our Department serves, as well as my background and experience have prepared me for this position.

The first steps on my path toward being seated here today began in a small rural Catholic hospital in North Dakota in the early 1970s when I was balancing nurse aide jobs working the night shift in a newborn nursery and an evening shift working in a local nursing home. In those settings I had the opportunity to see nurses, physicians, pharmacists and others helping to improve, and even save, people's lives. I found hometown heroes in those buildings and I was particularly drawn to the impact that nurses had. So, I chose that career path. Over time, I recognized that a nurse can contribute to the care of 2-3 patients working in ICU or to 400,000 or 4 million people by working in health policy and executing health programs as effectively and efficiently and creatively as possible.

While I've worked in urban health care settings, I've always been particularly drawn to the strengths and challenges facing rural health care. Where others might see slow moving backwaters, I saw health care headwaters dotting the rural health landscape-from new and innovative applications of telehealth technology to coordinated, team based care.

These experiences are foundational to how I approach my work today. Even today I maintain my license as a registered nurse, but more importantly I bring a nurse's patient-centered perspective to virtually everything I do. With an eye toward efficiency and innovating, and with every decision made asking myself, first-what difference will this decision make to a patient, a family or a community.

That was true when I had the privilege of working as a Legislative Assistant and Chief of Staff for Senator Burdick from my home state of North Dakota and it was true when I served as Chief of Staff to Senator Kent Conrad, who sat on this Committee and whom I'm privileged to call a friend. Across over eight years on the Hill, particularly when working on rural health issues, I learned some of our best partners sat on both sides of the aisle. I worked with Democrats offices and, I worked alongside of terrific staff supporting Senators Dole, Grassley, McCain and you, Chairman Hatch.

I also brought that patient-centered orientation and knowledge of rural perspective when I served on the Medicare Payment Advisory Committee and when I served on the Institute of Medicine's ground-breaking quality panel. And, for the past 6 years, I've brought this perspective to the job of Administrator of the Health Resources and Services Administration, improving access to health care for millions of Americans through HRSA's community-based and health care workforce programs.

THE ROLE OF DEPUTY SECRETARY

If confirmed as Deputy Secretary, these experiences will inform both how I approach my work, as well as my focus on performance improvement across our wide breadth of programs. I will work as hard as I possibly can because I know that people depend on what we do and how well we do it. And because I work for a Secretary that is fully dedicated to doing everything she can through the end of this Administration to make our Department stronger and to deliver effectively for the American people.

At HHS, the primary focus of the Deputy Secretary role is to help manage the department's operations from organizational structures to infrastructure to personnel, and to do it with priority focus on effectiveness and efficiency. If confirmed, I will continue to work with senior leaders and front line staff to prioritize data security. I will work to build out strategies that ensure our next generation of senior leaders have the skills and knowledge they need to execute the

department's mission. I will make sure that we continue to drive organizational process improvements forward and keep people accountable for measurable performance.

And, I will continue to work to strengthen HHS' culture as a learning organization that constantly works to adopt good ideas – no matter where those ideas are found. The approach that I bring to this role recognizes the value of finding common ground. Those of you who have worked closely with Secretary Burwell know that it is her orientation and it is mine as well. It is in a nurse's DNA to work collaboratively and to address problems fully and quickly. It's in a nurse's DNA to search for and execute on opportunities for performance improvement. If confirmed, that's the same approach I'll bring to my work and to working with you and your colleagues on behalf of the health of the American people. Chairman Hatch and Senator Wyden, thank you again for the opportunity to testify and I look forward to answering your questions.