

Crapo Statement at Nomination Hearing for the Secretary of Health and Human Services

February 24, 2021

WASHINGTON – U.S. Senator Mike Crapo (R-Idaho), Ranking Member of the U.S. Senate Finance Committee, delivered the following remarks at a hearing to consider the nomination of Xavier Becerra to be Secretary of Health and Human Services.

The text of Ranking Member Crapo's remarks, as prepared, is below.

“The Department of Human Health and Services (HHS) is a sprawling department, with over 80,000 employees and responsibility for over \$1 trillion in annual spending.

“HHS and its agencies directly affect everyday life, including running programs that provide health care coverage to nearly 150 million people.

“The HHS Secretary will shape Medicare, Medicaid, Obamacare and many other important programs in the Finance Committee's jurisdiction.

“These responsibilities are formidable in normal times, but the COVID-19 pandemic has made the HHS mission even more critical as these programs will play a key role in the pandemic response.

“This hearing is important for us to understand how Attorney General Becerra would carry out these monumental responsibilities.

“A few weeks ago, I outlined several issues in the health care space where I intend to focus my efforts as Ranking Member, including fostering innovation to improve patient care and making our health care system more efficient.

“The COVID-19 pandemic has threatened Americans' physical and economic health, but it has also reinforced the value of innovation and provided an opportunity to test changes that foster it.

“HHS has used its authority under the Public Health Emergency to waive numerous requirements to ensure Medicare beneficiaries and other patients receive care during the pandemic.

“Patients have benefited from expanded access to telehealth and expedited approval of COVID-19 vaccines, diagnostics and treatments.

“Going forward, Medicare and Medicaid patients should have the same access to innovative items and services as those with commercial insurance.

“We must carefully evaluate our response to the pandemic and implement appropriate reforms based on the lessons we have learned.

“HHS should partner with this Committee in that effort.

“Another long-term priority for many on this Committee is to finally address Medicare’s looming financial problems.

“Medicare’s financial stability was a key issue discussed by the bipartisan Bowles-Simpson Commission on which I served with Attorney General Becerra a decade ago.

“Although the Commission’s proposal did not reach the required supermajority of 14 of 18 votes for adoption, it did produce a constructive, bipartisan blueprint to reform and secure our entitlement programs.

“Medicare’s finances remain unsettled, with the Medicare Trustees currently projecting that the Hospital Insurance (HI) Trust Fund will go broke in 2026, and unforeseen circumstances could move the insolvency date even closer.

“The new administration should work with Congress in a bipartisan way to ensure that Medicare is able to serve current and future beneficiaries.

“In yesterday’s hearing before the HELP Committee, many of my colleagues raised concerns about the enforcement of California’s restrictive actions related to COVID-19, including the ban on indoor religious services that was rejected by the Supreme Court.

“They also raised questions about challenges to HHS’s authority to provide a conscience exemption from the Obamacare contraception coverage mandate.

“A coalition of pro-life Americans sent a letter to all senators in opposition to the nomination of Xavier Becerra to be Secretary of Health and Human Services.

“I ask that the letter be included as part of the record.

“Nearly a year ago, this Committee worked together to expand unemployment-compensation programs in response to the economic devastation caused to workers by shutdowns.

“As time has passed, there has been substantial reporting of fraud perpetrated against California’s unemployment insurance program.

“Fraudsters, including international criminal organizations, have siphoned off perhaps more than \$11 billion dollars.

“That raises questions regarding what specific steps were taken to combat unemployment fraud, and when those steps were taken.

“Finally, you have long been an advocate for moving all Americans to a government-run ‘Medicare for All’ plan, raising concerns that your policy preferences could undermine the Medicare programs that rely on private insurance

“You and I have talked about this privately, and I will discuss it further with you in the question period.

“I strongly support private insurance so patients can choose the coverage option that best meets their needs.

“The popular Medicare Advantage program that covers 24 million beneficiaries must be allowed to continue to thrive.

“And the successful Medicare Part D program must continue to serve its 47 million enrollees without government interference.

“The number of issues I have raised indicate the scope and importance of this position.

“I look forward to hearing your testimony and your responses to questions.”

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