

**TESTIMONY OF CHIQUITA BROOKS-LASURE
BEFORE THE U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE
APRIL 15, 2021**

Chairman Wyden, Ranking Member Crapo, and members of the Committee, thank you for considering my nomination to be the Administrator of the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. And thank you to Senators Booker and Menendez for their kind words.

As a graduate student, one of my first internships was with the Senate Finance Committee. I remember being so awestruck the first time I saw the committee room and the important business being done on behalf of the American people. So, it's incredibly humbling to sit in front of this committee, this time to testify before you as President Biden's nominee to lead CMS.

My career in public service started at the Office of Management and Budget. My portfolio included CMS's budget, the Children's Health Insurance Program, and coverage options for the uninsured.

But after 9/11, everything changed. It did for the victims of that terrible tragedy, their families, and for first responders. It also changed for many of you, and for everyone in government service. For me, my work shifted toward finding coverage for dislocated workers in the wake of the attack. I worked closely with the Treasury Department and key members of the Bush Administration to ensure that those impacted by this senseless attack had health coverage during such a vulnerable time in their lives.

It was inspiring to be part of a bipartisan effort to ensure that people who lost jobs as a result of the attack and its impact on the economy were able to get the health care they needed.

I took that philosophy of bipartisanship and sense of mission to improve health care for patients and families with me to the House Ways and Means Committee – where I was privileged to work for the members of that Committee on five bills that eventually became law. It's the philosophy I took to HHS and CMS – where I led the development of policies needed to implement the Affordable Care Act and expand coverage to more than 20 million Americans.

I've approached my work in the private sector with the same philosophy – working with states and other stakeholders to expand coverage options, especially for those living in rural parts of the country and for traditionally marginalized communities.

Today, as we navigate this public health crisis and its aftermath, that philosophy guides me yet again. If confirmed, that is the collaborative, common-sense, results-oriented philosophy I'll take to CMS to address the complex challenges we face.

I am excited by the many opportunities we have to work together to improve health care quality, lower costs, and promote better access. I am committed to leading the agency in a way that ensures it acts with the utmost integrity and upholds its fiduciary responsibilities. This includes addressing Medicare solvency to protect Medicare for current and future beneficiaries.

We must get the pandemic under control. COVID-19 has put unbearable pressure on front-line health care workers, put vulnerable seniors and those with disabilities at great risk, and

unmasked inequities that persist in our health care system. I am committed to working with you and with leaders across government to ensure that CMS is supporting patients and providers, including communities of color who have been hardest hit by this pandemic.

But we cannot wait to deliver better care to patients and families. If confirmed, I will work to make the programs overseen by CMS work better together to help the people they serve. Medicare, Medicaid, and coverage on the Marketplaces remain the pillars of our health care system, and there is much we can do to strengthen those programs to improve quality, lower costs, and expand access.

That includes implementing the critical reforms in last December's appropriations bill and in the American Rescue Plan, particularly the prohibition on surprise medical bills, the new emergency rural hospital designation, and the expansion of financial help for working families to buy comprehensive coverage on the Marketplaces.

If confirmed, I am also committed to working with you to expand access to innovative therapies, procedures, and models of care. We are living in an era of incredible change as researchers find new ways to conquer disease and improve our quality of life. We must bear in mind though, that innovation is only effective if patients can actually afford it. I will also work with the Committee and all of Congress to rein in health care costs, including for prescription drugs.

Finally, we must think broadly about health equity. During my career, I've seen how communities of color too often experience worse health outcomes, which we've seen so acutely during this pandemic. Last year in April, my own hometown, a predominately black community where my parents still live, experienced higher rates of COVID-19 infections and deaths compared to much of the surrounding communities. If confirmed, I look forward to working with each of you to expand access to quality care for all communities.

I realize that members of this Committee may not always agree on the best approaches to solve these challenges. While there may be disagreements on policy, I pledge to work closely with all members of this Committee to ensure that our decisions are transparent, our team is accessible, and that CMS closely listens to and respects your views and ideas for how we can ensure that CMS's programs fulfill their mission to best serve patients, providers, and their communities.

Before I close, I'd also be remiss if I did not acknowledge the outpouring of support I've received from women of color from across the country. I am proud that, if I have the honor of being confirmed, I will be the first Black woman to lead CMS.

And I wouldn't be here without my family--my husband sitting behind me, my parents and siblings, and the many strong, smart Black women and men who came before me. Too often, they weren't given the opportunity to live up to their full God-given potential. But their selfless, often silent sacrifice paved the way for me and so many other women of color. Today, I'm proud that my daughter can see her mother nominated by the President of the United States to lead such a critical agency – and know that she can be anything she wants to be.

Thank you for considering my nomination and I look forward to answering your questions.