

Crapo Statement at Nomination Hearing

April 15, 2021

WASHINGTON – U.S. Senator Mike Crapo (R-Idaho), Ranking Member of the U.S. Senate Finance Committee, delivered the following remarks at a nomination hearing for Andrea Palm to be HHS Deputy Secretary, and Chiquita Brooks-LaSure to be CMS Administrator.

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

“When we held our hearing for Xavier Becerra to be the Secretary of Health and Human Services, I noted the size and importance of the Department he would lead.

“In normal times, HHS and its agencies provide health care coverage to nearly 150 million people, and those agencies affect the lives of many more on a daily basis.

“The COVID-19 pandemic has raised the salience of the Department.

“The Department’s leadership, including the Deputy Secretary, will continue to play a key role in bringing us out of the Public Health Emergency.

“Similarly, Medicare and Medicaid are providing essential health care to patients who have suffered disproportionately from the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Looking to the future, the Secretary, the Deputy Secretary and the CMS Administrator must carefully evaluate how best to use the resources available to them to promote the health care of our citizens.

“They must do so carefully, constructively, and creatively.

“Two months 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 make 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 and Medicaid beneficiaries and other patients receive care during the pandemic.

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

“Going forward, Medicare and Medicaid patients must 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.

“However, media reports about certain health care policies that may come before Congress, or enacted through executive actions, are concerning.

“Some of these policies, such as including additional benefits under Medicare, could experience bipartisan support if considered through a transparent, cooperative process.

“Unfortunately, reconciliation does not afford Congress the opportunity to work together to evaluate these changes and make necessary reforms to protect the long-term financial viability of the program.

“Other policies, such as expanding Obamacare’s premium subsidy to everyone, regardless of income, would be incredibly expensive for taxpayers without taking appropriate steps to lower the cost of health insurance.

“Creative, bipartisan ideas to lower the cost of insurance in the individual market have been raised by states and my colleagues on this Committee.

“I welcome the opportunity to work together on some of these ideas, such as allowing states to use waivers to their full potential, diversifying benefit designs and incentivizing competition.

“Finally, I am concerned about paying for some of these policies through changes to our drug pricing system that could stifle innovation.

“We can see the end of the COVID-19 pandemic approaching, thanks to groundbreaking vaccines developed by pharmaceutical manufacturers.

“In this crisis, industry responded to the nation’s call-to-arms, codenamed ‘Project Warp Speed,’ developing powerful and effective vaccines in record time.

“This success was possible because of the private sector.

“I strongly agree with my colleagues that this innovation is only valuable if patients can afford it.

“We should establish an out-of-pocket spending cap and reform Medicare Part D with the market-based principles of competition and transparency in mind.

“Ms. Palm and Ms. Brooks-LaSure, if you are confirmed, I look forward to working with you to improve our health care system.

“I ask you to commit to careful assessments of the risks and considerations in every policy decision you make.

“Political pressures may make unilateral action seem attractive, but you should also consider how the market, individual choice, public policy, and incentives play vital roles in the development and delivery of health care.

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

“The positions to which you have been nominated have substantial influence over policy.

“The members of this Committee need to understand how you will implement the Administration’s agenda.

“We expect your answers, here and in response to QFRs, to be detailed and candid.”

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