

Opening Statement

Jim Esquea

**Nominee to be Assistant Secretary for Legislation,
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services**

Senate Committee on Finance

October 15, 2009

Chairman Baucus, Senator Grassley, members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me here today to discuss my nomination to be Assistant Secretary for Legislation at the Department of Health and Human Services.

It is an honor to be nominated, and I am grateful to President Obama and Secretary Sebelius for providing me this opportunity to serve the American people. It is especially gratifying to testify before this Committee. As a staffer for Senator Conrad, I have had the opportunity to work with the Committee's members and staff on a range of important issues over the years, including the reauthorization of programs like the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program and the Children's Health Insurance Program, as well as the recent effort to reform the nation's health care system. I want to commend you, Chairman Baucus and Ranking Member Grassley, for your leadership. I also want to give special thanks and praise to the Committee staff – both Democratic and Republican – which has been generous, even-handed in its approach, dedicated to excellence and good policy, and always a pleasure to work with.

The Assistant Secretary for Legislation serves as principal advisor to the Secretary with respect to all aspects of the Department's legislative agenda and congressional liaison activities. The agenda of the Department is driven by its main mission – protecting the health of all Americans and providing essential human services, especially for those who are least able to help themselves. It is a mission that the more than 65,000 employees are dedicated to fulfilling.

If I am confirmed, it will be my responsibility to work with this and other committees in support of the mission of the Department and the health and human services agenda of the Administration.

I believe my experiences at the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and the Senate Budget Committee will serve me well as the Assistant Secretary for Legislation.

From August 1994 to January 1999, I was a program examiner at the Health Division of OMB, where I helped to guide the formulation and review of the budget for HHS Public Health Service agencies, with my primary area of responsibility being the Food and

Drug Administration. Along with evaluating HHS agency programs to ensure program effectiveness and proper spending of funds, I also helped to coordinate and develop the Administration's position on bills and amendments and to review congressional testimony and reports for consistency with Administration positions and policy. This experience provided me with detailed knowledge of HHS and its agencies, as well as knowledge of how those agencies interact with Congress to provide members and congressional committees the best information possible.

For the last ten years, I have been the analyst for Income Security, Medicaid, the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), and discretionary health programs for the Senate Budget Committee. In that position, I have assisted in developing and drafting the annual congressional budget resolution, and in making program recommendations for my areas of responsibility as they affect the federal budget.

The position has also required me to track the cost of appropriation and authorization legislation to ensure compliance with the budget resolution and to enforce Budget Act points of order. Because of this important responsibility, I have worked with many member offices and committee staff to provide advice on how best to shape and draft legislation and amendments so that they are consistent with the budget resolution. Because considerable policy depth and knowledge of the budget are necessary in order to provide the best advice possible, I believe my work in this area highlights one my particular strengths – a clear understanding of the intersection between policy and budgeting.

If confirmed, I will be your liaison to the Department. I am well aware of how important the help and assistance of the professional staff in the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Legislation are to the legislative and oversight efforts of Congress. I will work to ensure that the office continues to focus on providing members the technical assistance they need on legislative priorities, answering oversight requests, and ensuring members have the information necessary to meet the needs of their constituents.

I also have a particular interest in ensuring that members are provided the most accurate information available and that it is presented in a manner that is useful. The only way information is of any use to members and policymakers is if it is timely delivered and clearly articulated.

Chairman Baucus, Senator Grassley, members of the Committee, thank you again for the opportunity to testify today. I am confident that my knowledge of health policy and programs and income security programs, my familiarity with the federal budget process, and my experience working with congressional offices and committees will serve me well if I am confirmed as the Assistant Secretary for Legislation. I look forward to the opportunity to apply this knowledge and experience in support of the mission of the Department of Health and Human Services.

I am happy to answer any questions.