

Opening Statement
Chairman Frank Pallone, Jr.
Committee on Energy and Commerce
Subcommittee on Health
Hearing on “The Fiscal Year 2021 HHS Budget and Oversight of the Coronavirus Outbreak”
February 26, 2020

Today’s hearing serves two critical purposes. First, we will examine the Trump Administration’s proposed budget for the Department of Health and Human Services for fiscal year 2021. And second, we will get a critical update on the Administration’s ongoing response to the coronavirus.

I am disappointed, though not surprised, that the Administration’s budget proposal completely contradicts the health care promises that President Trump repeatedly makes to the American people.

When it comes to ensuring the American people have access to affordable and quality health care, the Trump Administration has failed them, and this budget proposal continues that sorry record.

Two years after showering the wealthy and large corporations with major tax breaks, the President’s 2021 budget proposal slashes \$100 billion from the Affordable Care Act (ACA), \$500 billion from Medicare and more than \$900 billion from Medicaid over the course of 10 years. The president also wants to make it easier for states to take away people’s coverage, undermine their care, and cut critical benefits. This puts the health and well-being of tens of millions of children, parents, pregnant women, and people with disabilities at risk. Medicaid is a lifeline for millions of working-class families, and it’s unconscionable that the president wants to cut it to pay for tax cuts for millionaires.

These budget cuts also fly in face of President Trump’s own words – promising that, as president, he would NOT cut Medicare or Medicaid. And promising in his State of the Union Address earlier this year that he would continue to protect the more than 130 million Americans with pre-existing conditions. As Secretary Azar well knows, this Administration is now suing in the federal courts to strike down the ACA and all of its consumer protections.

Overall, the President is proposing a 12 percent cut to HHS’s budget – one of the largest cuts to any federal agency. The devastating cuts don’t end at Medicare, Medicaid and the ACA, the President’s proposal, cuts the National Institutes of Health (NIH) by \$3 billion, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) by \$675 million. Keep in mind this is the very agency that is now responding to the coronavirus.

I’m also concerned by the proposal to move tobacco regulation out of the Food and Drug Administration’s (FDA) authority altogether. Instead, the Administration would create a new, untested agency to oversee tobacco products while we are in the midst of a youth tobacco epidemic. After years of regulatory uncertainty, the Tobacco Control Act clearly and unambiguously ensured that FDA would regulate tobacco products for the protection of public health. Over the last decade, the agency has worked to develop the expertise, workforce, and scientific basis to effectively regulate these products. I’m concerned that this proposal would only serve to further politicize tobacco regulation by stripping

away FDA's sound scientific and evidence-based approach and replacing it at the whims of political appointees. This is nothing more than a gift to big tobacco companies.

Now, let me move to the second topic at hand today. After we discuss the budget, we will ask questions of the Secretary and other top public health officials on the Administration's efforts to address the coronavirus outbreak. It is critical that we get an update on the scale of the outbreak, its repercussions in the United States, and how we can be working together to ensure the safety of all Americans. We have one of the strongest public health infrastructures in the world, and it is more than capable of coming to an effective solution. We should be supporting that system with all available resources.

Thank you, and I yield back.