

Committee on Energy and Commerce
Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of
Ranking Member Frank Pallone, Jr.

Health Subcommittee Hearing on “Fiscal Year 2024 Department of Health and Human Services Budget

March 29, 2023

I want to thank Secretary Becerra for being with us today to discuss President Biden’s fiscal year 2024 budget request for the Department of Health and Human Services.

I have to start out by saying that I hear my GOP colleagues criticizing the President's budget, but they don't have one. They don't have one. There's every reason to believe that we're never going to see one from them. They talk about Alzheimer's research, fentanyl, price transparency – well why don't you go to the House Republican leadership and say they should put a budget together that has more money for Alzheimer's research, more money for fentanyl enforcement, or for price transparency. I have to say, I don't think you should be criticizing something without an alternative. And there isn't one. And there is a lot of reason to believe there isn't going to be one.

Thank you for being here and defending something that exists. And if the criticism is that they don't like something that's in it, well then let us see what Republicans have as an alternative.

I don't want to repeat all the great things that the Biden Administration and Congressional Democrats delivered for the people in the last year, but I'm going to say a few things.

Thanks to the Inflation Reduction Act, we finally allowed Medicare to negotiate prescription drug prices, we have a Medicare cap on insulin, we built on the ACA. We now have 16.5 million Americans who signed up for coverage through the ACA marketplaces. Expanded subsidies are driving costs down – an average family is saving \$2,400 in premiums a year.

The President’s budget also increases the number of drugs Medicare selects for negotiation, extends the \$35 monthly cap for insulin to people with private insurance, and makes permanent the ACA enhanced premium subsidies.

This Administration is addressing the affordability issue, which is so crucial to Americans. The Biden budget also proposes to finally ensure that all low-income individuals have access to the benefits and protections of Medicaid regardless of the political decisions made by their governors and legislatures. North Carolina just became the latest state to recognize that Medicaid expansion is not only morally necessary but also a sound economic decision.

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And I'm also pleased to see that the budget would expand access to home- and community-based services because if people stay at home and out of hospitals and out of nursing homes we save money.

The budget would also require all states to provide Medicaid coverage to all low-income women for 12 months postpartum. We have a maternal mortality crisis, we need to do that.

There's a lot of progress in other areas, such as enhancing public health programs. I'm encouraged to see that the budget prioritizes funding for important public health and workforce programs. It invests in pandemic preparedness and biodefense to ensure that we are prepared for future challenges.

Now the Biden Administration lays all of this out, but I don't know what the other side is doing because they have no budget. But there is a leading Republican proposal that would cut trillions of dollars from Medicaid, including repealing Medicaid expansion. It would rip away health insurance from 17 million people by doing that. These proposed Medicaid cuts are going to hurt everybody. The Republicans have also talked about eliminating the ACA expanded tax credits and subsidies and more people would then be uninsured.

Now let me explain, the burden on the health care system when states don't expand Medicaid or when the federal government ACA subsidies are cut is severe. Red states that have not expanded Medicaid are seeing their hospitals starved for funding because of the number of patients receiving uncompensated care. Medicaid isn't just important to cities, it's important to hospital, nursing homes, or community health centers in rural areas in Republican districts.

All these things that we're hearing, we don't really know what they're doing because there's no budget, but all the things that we're hearing that they want to cut are going to hurt. Medicaid in particular and the ACA subsidies. These are going to starve the health care system. I know that on the one hand we hear the Republicans say we have to reduce spending, but on the other hand they talk about more spending for other things. So unless I actually see something, as the Administration has proposed, that really reduces the deficit, expands coverage, and makes things more affordable I have no reason that the Republican proposal would accomplish any of those things. And I fear, from what I hear, that in fact it does the opposite. If we ever even see it.

Thank you again for being here, and I yield back