

Committee on Energy and Commerce

**Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of
Ranking Member Frank Pallone, Jr.**

***Hearing on Insights from the HHS Inspector General on Oversight of Unaccompanied
Minors, Grant Management & CMS***

April 18, 2023

Today, the Subcommittee has a real opportunity to conduct important oversight of the Department of Health and Human Services. I just hope we take advantage of this opportunity to put people over politics.

After all, HHS's work is crucial to the everyday lives of Americans. It is tasked with ensuring the health of our families, the safety and development of new drugs, the response to public health emergencies and pandemics, and much, much more. We are joined today by HHS Inspector General Grimm, whose office has the tremendous responsibility of overseeing the agency's critical work.

It is this Committee's responsibility to ensure that HHS has the support it needs to carry out its work.

Over the last couple of years, Congressional Democrats have worked to provide HHS with the funding and authorities that it needed to address the pandemic and to make health care more affordable and accessible for American families.

The American Rescue Plan provided HHS the tools and resources necessary to combat the pandemic by ramping up the distribution and administration of lifesaving vaccines.

The American Rescue Plan and the Inflation Reduction Act expanded health care coverage and lowered costs through the Affordable Care Act Marketplaces, saving the average family \$2,400 in premiums a year. The Inflation Reduction Act is also lowering prescription drug prices for America's seniors.

These laws are making a real difference in the lives of the American people, and while we are still losing far too many Americans every day to COVID-19, we have come a very long way thanks in large part to the hard-working public servants at HHS.

The key point of conducting Congressional oversight is to examine how best we can improve and support government agencies to ensure they work effectively for the American people. This is particularly important as the Public Health Emergency ends. On that day, emergency programs and authorizations will wind down and return to pre-pandemic operation. It is critical that during this transition, this Committee, the IG, and the staff at HHS focus on how to support states and localities, as well as families emerging from the public health crisis.

And while we are talking about HHS oversight, I must take this opportunity to say that HHS, and in particular the Food and Drug Administration, face serious threats from extremist Republican-appointed judges. In a case challenging FDA's decades-old approval of the drug mifepristone these extreme judges are making unprecedented decisions that are not grounded in science or in law. The case is now sitting before the Supreme Court, and on Friday, 253 members of Congress filed an amicus brief seeking to protect the FDA against this unwarranted judicial intrusion.

Two decades of science and FDA analysis have clearly demonstrated that the drug mifepristone is safe. And it is imperative that women have access to medication abortion as some states implement increasingly draconian restrictions on women's reproductive health care.

But this lawsuit by right-wing extremists seeks to completely undermine FDA's authority to approve drugs and to damage FDA's hard-earned reputation as the international gold standard in drug approval. Our agencies need to be the ones making the important decisions based on data and science, not partisan judges. And doctors must be able to prescribe safe, approved drugs to their patients without the interference of lawyers.

These decisions attempt to undermine FDA's drug approval process and to restrict access to FDA-approved medication. That's why all 23 Committee Democrats have requested an immediate hearing on the unprecedented decisions threatening our health care institutions. Scientists are against this radical judicial intervention, the pharmaceutical industry is against it, doctors are against it, and patients are against it.

So, while I appreciate today's hearing with Inspector General Grimm, the Republican majority should immediately schedule a hearing on this existential threat to FDA's drug-approval authority. We simply must examine the impacts of these extreme decisions that place ideology, politics, and judicial activism above science.

Thank you, I yield back.