

Opening Statement of the Honorable Robert B. Aderholt

Budget Hearing of the Secretary of HHS

March 28, 2023

Good Morning, Mr. Secretary. It is my pleasure to welcome you to the Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services and Education for our very first budget hearing of the year, which happens to also be my first budget hearing as Chairman. We are looking forward to hearing your testimony.

Mr. Secretary, as I've been coming up to speed as the new Chairman, I've been learning more about the incredible breadth of programs under your jurisdiction. From overseeing research that we hope will cure diseases like cancer and Alzheimer's, providing childcare and early learning for our littlest Americans, training our next generation of medical professionals, and administering health insurance for our Nation's poor and aging populations, it is clear that your responsibilities are many.

There are many programs in your budget that I think we all agree are priorities we can collectively support. I share your concerns about maintaining our biodefense and preparedness for threats both from abroad and arising from natural means. I support biomedical research that will help cure cancers, dementias and the other chronic health diseases that cut so many lives short, especially in rural America. I support programs that provide quality early education,

access to quality healthcare, and programs to help people with disabilities live independent lives on their own terms.

And then, of course, there are other policy areas that I know we will disagree on. It is the responsibility of this Subcommittee to determine how we can support the most critical programs, identify the investments that will give us the greatest return, and face head-on the challenge of the limited resources that we will have available to us. Hard decisions will have to be made.

I look forward to having a discussion with you this morning about what the areas of top priority are, from your perspective, so that we can invest the taxpayer dollars most wisely given our expected funding constraints.

I must say at the outset that I was disappointed to see that your budget continues to double down on out-of-control government spending, which only adds to our already-high inflation rates. Inflation is a burden on every American, and it hurts those at the margins of our society the hardest.

Taxpayer spending for partisan priorities like a Sexual and Gender Minority Research Office within the National Institutes of Health and nearly doubling funding for the title X *[ten]* program, which under this Administration is making grants to abortion providers, does not seem to be the best use of taxpayer dollars.

In addition, the President's failure to secure our southern border is resulting in billions of dollars in taxpayer spending to care for unaccompanied teenagers who illegally cross our border to look for work. While border security is the jurisdiction of DHS, these minors are the responsibility of HHS through the Office of Refugee Resettlement. Sadly, many of them are ending up in dangerous and abusive situations at the hands of so-called "sponsors" that YOUR agency is releasing them to. This must come to an end.

I would also be remiss if I did not point out the many management challenges facing you at the helm of HHS. From the continuing problems with administering the provider relief fund, to overseeing a public health agency that has almost totally lost the public's trust, there seems to be no shortage of areas in need of some improvement. I hope to learn more this morning on what you are doing to take positive steps in these areas.

Finally, there are the many external challenges facing your agency. Threats to cybersecurity, threats from new and evolving diseases, and the many challenges of poverty and access to care also land on your doorstep. I look forward to hearing your ideas to combat these this morning as well.

I was pleased that you agreed to send an agency witness to our hearing tomorrow on the challenges facing rural America. This is an important topic for many members of this Subcommittee, and your agency is responsible for many programs that can help our citizens.

We look forward to learning more about them. I am hopeful that we will continue to hear from your agency in the coming months on other timely topics that will help inform our spending decisions.

As a reminder to the subcommittee and our witness, we will abide by the 5-minute rule so that everyone will have a chance to get their questions asked and answered.

Before we begin, I would like to yield the floor to our Ranking Member, the Gentlelady from Connecticut, for her opening statement.