

Opening Statement of Republican Leader Greg Walden
Subcommittee on Health
“The Fiscal Year 2020 HHS Budget”
March 12, 2019
As Prepared for Delivery

Secretary Azar, welcome back to the Energy and Commerce Committee. Thank you for being so generous with your time here today, and for your leadership at the Department of Health and Human Services.

On a bipartisan basis, this committee has led the way in delivering meaningful health care reforms and policies for the American people. Last year we passed into law the SUPPORT for Patients and Communities Act, the most comprehensive bill to address a single drug crisis in our nation’s history. That bill gave HHS unprecedented resources and tools to stem the tide of the addiction crisis that is still devastating our communities. CDC data tells us there were over 70,000 overdose deaths in 2017, and overdoses take the lives of more Oregonians than traffic accidents. Whenever we pass a major piece of legislation, I think it’s important to dive back in and do oversight to find out what’s working, what projects are still ongoing, and what we need to

do better. I would love to hear from you today on the department's work to combat addiction and how we can continue to be partners in getting help to those in need.

We also extended and funded a number of important public health programs, including the longest extension of the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP)—10 years--in history and record funding for community health centers, which are both important for my Oregon district. I just met with a community health center over the weekend in Klamath Falls, Oregon, and there are 12 community health centers with 63 sites that serve more than 240,000 Oregonians in my district. We also extended funding for teaching health centers and the special diabetes programs in the last Congress. Some of those are whose funding expires at the end of at the end of this fiscal year, and I look forward to working with my colleagues across the aisle to ensure these programs are extended and responsibly paid for.

We also need to continue our work on the cost of health care, from one end of the supply chain to the other. I appreciate your personal interest in moving aggressively to bring down the costs of prescription drugs down for patients. Last year the FDA approved a record number of generic drugs, bringing more competition into the market and driving down prices at the pharmacy counter. We have more work to do, and I look forward to continuing this committee's partnership with HHS to reign in excessive costs for health care.

I was also encouraged to see a focus in the President's budget on moving towards value-based care. As a country, we must move into a health care system that pays for value and quality of care, but those changes will require major shifts in policy and reimbursement. We must work together on those changes to get them right.

The budget also provides new funding dedicated to the President's goal of ending the HIV epidemic – a goal I think all of us on this committee share.

In closing, Mr. Secretary, I appreciate your commitment to appear before our committee today. I look forward to engaging in a thoughtful and meaningful discussion.