

**Opening Statement of Republican Leader Greg Walden
Subcommittee on Health
“Strengthening Health Care in the U.S. Territories for Today and Into the
Future”
June 20, 2019**

As Prepared for Delivery

Today marks an important step forward in our work to address the health care challenges faced by our Territories.

We have the honor of having before this committee a representative from each of the U.S. territories’ Medicaid programs. We are thrilled to have each of you here as we thought it imperative to hear directly from each of you about the challenges you face due to the coming funding cliff in September. I know some of you had to quite literally fly around the world to join us here today, so thank you. We are also pleased to have before us Anne Schwartz, the Executive Director of MACPAC. You and your team’s work on the territories has been invaluable over the years, and we are so glad you are able to join us today.

As we know, the additional funding for the territories that they have received over the last decade expires September 30th, and this could have detrimental effects for each of the five territories here today. Those consequences are not lost on me. It is my commitment that

we will work together, in a bipartisan way, to find a solution that avoids this cliff and gets these programs on a more sustainable path.

Last Congress, under my leadership, this committee led a robust bipartisan response to the damage inflicted by hurricanes Maria, Harvey, and Irma. I led a bipartisan delegation of members to Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands to see the devastation firsthand. I was thankful then and am thankful now to Rep. Gonzales Colon for her work and help on this important issue. Among other visits, the health care facilities we saw on both islands were in dire conditions, not only because of the direct damage sustained during the storms, but also because of the sustained lack of power to the islands after the storms.

It was also our committee that pushed for the two years of 100% funding included in the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018 to help respond to the crisis, and we are interested to know how that funding has helped the recovery. Included in the BBA was an incentive for both Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands to draw down additional funds should those territories improve data reporting and program integrity measures, conditions that both territories met. That's good progress, but I would also like to hear from you both on what else we can do to improve program integrity as we look for ways to fund the existing shortfalls.

Another reason this hearing is so important is that we need you all to help differentiate your territories' specific needs. Too often in Congress you all get lumped together, but as each of your testimonies make clear, we have five distinct programs with five distinct sets of challenges and program designs. Understanding those differences will be key.

We know how critical this situation is, and we are very thankful to each of you for being here and for your willingness to work with us over the coming months. I look forward to your testimony.

I mentioned the work of Representative Gonzalez Colon. She is attending today's hearing today but cannot participate due to committee rules. I would recommend that any member that has questions regarding the current circumstances in Puerto Rico talk with Ms. Gonzalez Colon. There is no better authority and no fiercer advocate for the people of Puerto Rico.

Thank you, and I yield back.