

Republican Leader Cathy McMorris Rodgers
Health Subcommittee Hearing
“Averting a Crisis: Protecting Access to Health Care in the U.S.
Territories”
March 17, 2021
As Prepared for Delivery

INTRO

Thank you to the witnesses for being here.

Increased funding for Puerto Rico, Guam, Virgin Islands, Northern Mariana Islands, and American Samoa expires September 30th.

I am committed to reauthorizing funding in a way that is best for the people who get Medicaid care in the territories.

I hope that we can work together on this issue and to ensure Medicaid is caring for our most vulnerable in the territories and across America.

As I’ve said many times before, we should be coming together in a bipartisan way to modernize and improve Medicaid— especially for pregnant women and people with disabilities.

However, I want to be sure that we discuss three problems I have with this hearing before we have a discussion about extending these important programs.

WITNESSES AND LACK OF INFORMATION

First, it’s important that we hear from the territories themselves and get to ask them questions about their programs.

There are serious and valid concerns about how we oversee the Medicaid programs in the territories.

If this hearing was later in the year, the OIG could provide an update on their audits and we could review Puerto Rico’s report that is due in June.

Over the last decade, there has been a dramatic increase in the amount of federal taxpayer dollars going to Medicaid programs in the territories.

I want to know, are we seeing health outcome improvements with that spending?

And, if we don't have the data to answer that question, that is a gap we should address in this reauthorization.

CONCERNS WITH LEGISLATION

Second, we are going straight to a legislative hearing on two partisan bills that were drafted without any input from the Minority.

These bills do not address program integrity, or getting better data on health care outcomes for those that are in the Medicaid program.

In addition, the last time this committee met on these programs, it reported out bipartisan legislation.

I would request that the Majority work with us on this moving forward..

Let's not forget that it was this Committee who moved a bipartisan bill out of Committee two years ago that would have funded Puerto Rico for four years and the other territories for six years.

That work should be our model of how to proceed this year.

NURSING HOME DEATHS

My third and final concern is not related to the territories but to request that we do some work on additional challenges in the Medicaid space.

We should be investigating the devastating reports about New York underreporting COVID-19 deaths in nursing homes.

Families deserve justice.

As I wrote to the Majority two weeks ago...

.... we should also be working together to understand more about the troubling reports regarding certain states undercounting--and potentially falsifying-- reports of COVID-19 deaths in nursing homes...

It appears that a few states took actions early on that exacerbated the COVID-19 crisis in nursing homes...

...Washington was one of the first states with an outbreak of COVID-19 and nursing homes were particularly hard hit.

Washington State provided additional Medicaid dollars to nursing homes accepting COVID-19 patients. We should investigate whether the incentive of increased Medicaid dollars made this crisis worse.

CLOSING

This is an important hearing, and I'm disappointed that we will not hear from, and get to ask questions of, the territories themselves.

We should be.

Instead, we are going straight to a legislative hearing on partisan legislation...

....when we should be gathering the facts and working together on legislation to continue federal support for these vital programs.

I also implore the Majority to schedule a hearing as soon as possible to learn more about what tools are available to ensure states accurately report nursing home deaths from COVID-19 or any infectious disease, and to ensure in future pandemics Medicaid dollars aren't used as an incentive that ends up further endangering nursing home patients.

We owe the families of who lost someone to COVID-19 nothing less.