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Opening Statement

Health Subcommittee Hearing, “ Fiscal Year 2024 Department of Health and Human Services Budget”

As Prepared for Delivery

Today we are here to discuss the fiscal year 2024 budget for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The President’s unserious budget represents the largest budget request in our nation’s history, lacks accountability for agency-wide failures in responding to emerging issues, and is filled with the ideological inconsistencies that have now become routine since President Biden took office at the expense of the American people.

The HHS budget is littered with partisan proposals that include handouts to wealthy Americans, unfunded mandates on state Medicaid programs, and one of the largest ever proposed increases in funding for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, despite public mistrust of the agency being at an all-time high due to their botched and highly political response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The President also claims his budget increases Medicare solvency for another 25 years, which would be done through *increases* in taxes on American households and *more* socialist price controls on pharmaceutical drugs, ultimately leading to even less life-saving cures for our seniors than we are already seeing because of the Inflation Reduction Act.

The purpose of the latter policy is to save the Medicare program \$160 billion, despite the mislabeled “Inflation Reduction Act” already having saved the Medicare program almost \$300 billion. ***Why would these savings be needed if the IRA already achieved Medicare savings?***

On fentanyl, the President recently stated that [quote] “MAGA House Republican proposals would slash funding for border security – a move that could allow nearly 900 pounds of fentanyl in our country.” [end quote] Clearly, the President and his team failed to check the Customs and Border Patrol’s website before releasing his budget proposal.

Under the President’s watch, Customs and Border Patrol has seized nearly 11,000 pounds of illicit fentanyl at our Southwest Border **in this fiscal year alone - almost the total amount seized in all of FY22 and in less than 6 months**. Meanwhile, drug overdoses eclipse 107,000 in 2021, the highest ever in the United States, more than 70,000 of which were from synthetic opioids, like fentanyl.

President Biden cannot claim he is focused on the fentanyl crisis, given the fact his budget only mentions the word “fentanyl” twice compared to the 42 times it mentions “climate change.” This alone is a complete slap in the face to the thousands of families across the country who have lost a loved one to fentanyl poisoning.

If this Administration were serious about fighting the fentanyl crisis, they would join House Republicans in passing the HALT Fentanyl Act, which was passed out of this committee less than a week ago and on a bipartisan basis. House Republicans urge President Biden and Secretary Becerra to come to the table on

the HALT Fentanyl Act, which help play a small role to ensure illicit fentanyl doesn't continue flooding our streets.

The Administration has also claimed to be working to increase access to care and promote health equity. However, their actions speak louder than their words.

In just the last year, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services declined to fully cover an entire class of FDA-approved Alzheimer's treatments, significantly reducing access to care for minority and rural patient populations with no other options to treat this treacherous disease.

They have proposed cutting health care benefits for millions of Americans who receive health insurance through the ACA exchanges and most recently proposed slashing Medicare payments for drugs approved through the Accelerated Approval pathway, which have significantly improved access to care for cancer patients over the past decade.

These aren't efforts to drive equity or promote access to care. They are *ruthlessly* designed to reduce health care spending and only decrease access to quality care for millions of Americans and seniors in the process.

I agree we need to address the rising costs of health care and that's why this Committee held our first of many hearings yesterday on the issue of health care affordability. One of the ways we can achieve this is by increasing transparency in the marketplace. This will empower patients to know the true value of the care they're receiving, resulting in more choices and lower costs without having to slash access to care.

Unfortunately, the HHS budget fails to mention anything the Administration is doing on price transparency. I urge the Secretary to work with this committee in increasing transparency across the health care system to lower costs and promote access to higher-quality health care services.

In closing, I do thank the Secretary for being here today and know that, although we disagree on how to achieve our goals, we do share similar goals. To that end, I believe we can work on each of these pressing issues in a bipartisan fashion and hope you feel similarly.

Thank you, and I yield back.