

Rep. Joseph R. Pitts
Opening Statement
Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Health Hearing:
“Examining the United States Preventive Services Task Force”
Wednesday, November 30, 2016 (10:30 AM)

Today’s hearing will be taking a close look at the United States Preventive Services Task Force, created in 1984 as an independent, volunteer panel of 16 national experts in prevention, primary care, and evidence-based medicine and tasked with making recommendations about clinical preventive services which could work to improve the health of all Americans.

The Affordable Care Act required the Task Force to issue annual reports to Congress to include information on gaps in the evidence-based research related to clinical preventive services and recommend areas that need further examination through targeted research. The Affordable Care Act also tied some of the Task Force recommendations directly to reimbursement requirements for private insurance. Recommendations do not consider cost-effectiveness, and are based solely upon evidence of medical benefit to the patient, no matter how expensive it is.

The Task Force independently evaluates the medical evidence on clinical preventive services to inform health care professionals, health care systems, and the American people to make careful decisions about their health and health care. It is believed that by identifying evidence gaps and highlighting them as priority areas for research will inspire public and private researchers to collaborate and target their efforts to generate new knowledge and address important health priorities.

However, experience has shown that a number of the Task Force recommendations have the effect of limiting access to preventive care. For example, one recommendation was against screening for prostate cancer in healthy men with a prostate-specific antigen blood test. Another

recommendation was against routine annual mammogram screenings for women ages 40-49.

Such recommendations contradict clinical guidelines based on medical literature and experts in the field. The concerns are that these recommendations could undermine new models of care delivery.

Our colleague, Vice Chairman of the full Committee, Rep. Marsha Blackburn, has a legislative discussion draft, entitled “USPSTF Transparency and Accountability Act of 2016” which would require specialists and subspecialists to be involved in reviewing the preventive services examined by the task force. The legislation would allow a wide range of patient groups, providers and federal agencies to be involved in the important review process of preventive services.

Furthermore, any evidence reports and recommendations would be available for public comment. Transparency is further enhanced by establishing a preventive services stakeholders board to provide feedback on Task Force activities.

We have before our committee today some of the very stakeholders who can answer our questions surrounding the proposed legislation.

I look forward to hearing more about the work conducted by the Task Force and how it might be improved with passage of this legislation.