

Chairman Michael C. Burgess, MD
Opening Statement
Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Health Hearing
“Oversight of the Department of Health and Human Services”
February 15, 2018

Today, we are honored to have Secretary Alex Azar before the Health Subcommittee to discuss the Department of Health and Human Services’ budget for the fiscal year 2019. First, Secretary Azar congratulations on your recent confirmation, and we appreciate your participation today, which I believe will be your third congressional testimony within the last 24 hours.

Earlier this week, President Trump and his administration released their budget which provides a blueprint on where federal investments could be made as well as areas of additional funding resources and efficiencies. We appreciate the administration sharing its vision for the upcoming fiscal year as all of us on the committee work to solve many of the health care issues impacting our respective communities across the country.

You see before you on the dais, men and women with a multitude of backgrounds and experience and different political philosophic approaches to solving these problems. But I can tell you everyone seated on this committee is committed to seeking solutions – and doing the work necessary.

The Energy and Commerce Committee, specifically this subcommittee, has the broadest jurisdiction in Congress over our nation’s health care matters, encompassing the major policies and operations under the Department of Health and Human Services. These issues include both private and public health insurance markets under Medicare, Medicaid, CHIP, and the Affordable Care Act; biomedical research and developments, particularly those emanating out of the National Institutes of Health; the regulation of food, drugs, medical devices, and cosmetics through the Food and Drug Administration; federal policies affecting substance abuse and mental health, which demand interagency collaboration, especially the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration; and oversight

of not only the nation's public health but also global health pandemics, including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Again, members on both sides of the dais on this committee do have our differences, I believe that we have the mutual goal of delivering for the American people and working together on issues that demand our full attention, such as combatting the opioid crisis, improving the quality and access to health care products and services, and harnessing the scientific and medical technologies of today to advance health care policies of tomorrow. What this committee has already accomplished under the previous and current administration is indicative of what is certainly possible – the passage of the Medicare and CHIP Reauthorization Act to repeal the SGR; the enactment of the 21st Century Cures Act; the reauthorization of several key user fees at the FDA last year; and the reauthorization of CHIP, community health centers, and other important public health and Medicare extenders last week. Just on this committee, we were able to include 19 member-led healthcare bills in the recent Bipartisan Budget Act that included both Republican and Democrat priorities.

The Health Subcommittee still has an extensive list of items to finish before the end of this year. These include holding hearings on legislative policies and developing a package of proposals to blunt the opioid epidemic, reauthorizing the Pandemic and All Hazards Preparedness Act and Animal Drug User Fee, and examining the cost drivers of the nation's health care infrastructure and offering solutions, and/or improvements, to programs like 340B drug discount under the Health Resources and Services Administration and Consumer eHealth at the Office of National Coordinator for Health IT.

I would also like to build upon the work our subcommittee initiated last year and continue assessing the ways our current health care infrastructure can more positively impact Americans in urban and rural areas, where illnesses like Alzheimer's disease and mental health disorders pose challenges for our loved ones and their families. As a physician who understands the demands and challenges of treating patients while maneuvering through reporting and other compliance requirements – which can often be barriers to providing better patient care – I am committed to relieving the burdens that have been placed on doctors

through commonsense, market-driven solutions. Many of the actions the current administration has taken thus far are encouraging and it is my hope we can continue to work together on this effort.

I want you to regard this subcommittee as a resource to you and your agency, and a partner to fulfill your mission and deliver for America. I again want to welcome Secretary Azar and thank him for being here. I look forward to hearing your vision for the Health and Human Services Department and exploring opportunities to work together on the many critical health care issues on behalf of the American people.