

Opening Remarks, Labor-HHS hearing, February 5, 2011  
Senator Tom Harkin

The Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies will now come to order.

Good afternoon, everyone. This subcommittee normally meets in Washington, D.C., of course, but from time to time I hold field hearings in Iowa on matters of critical importance to our State. This is one such occasion.

Here in Cedar Falls, and across America, there is serious concern about record-high budget deficits. We all understand that these deficits, ultimately, are unaffordable and unsustainable. We know that, in the years immediately ahead, we must take aggressive, painful, and unpopular steps to bring the deficit under control – both by cutting unnecessary spending and by ending unaffordable tax breaks for the wealthy.

Certainly, we took an important first step by passing the new health reform law, which will reduce the deficit by nearly a quarter-trillion dollars in the first decade and nearly \$1 trillion in the second decade. I intend to push for a wide range of additional spending cuts, including eliminating expensive Cold War-era weapons systems.

However, I will strenuously oppose attempts to balance the budget on the backs of the most vulnerable and powerless people in our society. And I will insist that we continue to make prudent investments in education, infrastructure, and biomedical research – the things that will help us, as President Obama put it in his State of the Union address, “to win the future.”

Yes, government should make tough decisions to live within its means – just as ordinary working families do, sitting around the kitchen table. But if you are a family trying to reduce debt, that doesn’t mean you pull your daughter out of college. It doesn’t mean you forgo replacing worn-out brakes on your car, or that you stop taking your diabetes medication. These things would put you and your family at risk. Well, likewise, we need to maintain investments that are critical to the future of our American family, even as we reduce spending overall.

This is exactly my approach as chair of the Senate Appropriations subcommittee that funds education, labor, health and human services. There are places within my jurisdiction where we can reduce spending – in fact, I have proposed eliminating more than 20 duplicative or inefficient programs in these areas.

We also must continue to root out waste, fraud and abuse in Medicare and Medicaid. Every dollar that we spend on this effort returns six dollars to

the U.S. Treasury, so we need to do more in this area. My subcommittee will examine this issue later this month at a hearing in Washington.

However, I will insist on adequate funding for critical initiatives that help Iowans and all Americans to get a good education and acquire the skills they need to find jobs, while also meeting the basic needs of seniors, children, those living in poverty, and people with disabilities.

Those investments are at risk today. This past week, House Republicans announced that they will make drastic reductions to Federal health, education, and labor programs – a cut of more than \$13 billion below the President’s request for the current fiscal year. They didn’t specify yet which programs they will cut – we should know more details next week – but we can be sure the cuts will be deep, and they will hit Americans right where they live.

Just one example: We know that, overall, House Republicans want to roll back Federal funding to fiscal year 2008 levels. For a program like Head Start, that could mean cutting services to 120,000 disadvantaged children across the country – 960 in Iowa.

Today we will hear from a local Head Start director, as well as other Iowans who are providing critical services to people in this State with the help of Federal funding. I hope we will learn a little more from them about

the impact of this funding in Iowa, and what it would mean if that funding were drastically cut.

Before I introduce the witnesses, my staff handed out notecards as you signed in. If you have a question for me or for the witnesses, please write it out on that card. My staff will collect the cards near the end of the hearing, and we'll try to answer some of the questions as time allows.