

U.S. Senator

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Statement of Chairman Tom Harkin (D-IA)

At the Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, and Related Agencies Hearing to Examine the Department of Health and Human Services Budget Request

As Prepared for Delivery

“Madame Secretary, welcome back to the Subcommittee. I want to start by commending you for the outstanding work you’re doing to implement health care reform. It’s been just one year since President Obama signed the *Affordable Care Act* into law, and already, millions of Americans are reaping major benefits.

“Those benefits include very strong consumer protections. No longer can large health insurers use technicalities to cancel your policy if you get sick, or impose lifetime limits on your benefits. No longer can children be denied coverage because of a pre-existing health condition. Americans have greater access to preventive care than ever before. And young adults can now stay on their parents’ plan until age 26.

“In the past year, your department has also awarded the first grants from the Prevention and Public Health Fund, a new fund that will not only improve the health of the American people, but also help bend the cost curve on health care. This fund is already being used to help Americans stop smoking, as well as to reduce obesity and prevent costly chronic diseases like diabetes. Your plan for fiscal year 2011 expands on all of this work and adds an investment in childhood immunization, which saves \$6.30 for every dollar we spend.

“Your department is implementing these reforms with great skill and dedication, and I thank you for your leadership.

"I also want to assure you that as long as I am chairman of both this appropriations subcommittee and the HELP Committee, your department will continue to receive the resources you need to implement the *Affordable Care Act*. The American people will not allow the hard-earned protections and benefits in this law to be taken away. And neither will we.

"Reforming health care is not only the right thing to do, it will save taxpayers money and reduce the deficit – by \$210 billion in the first decade and more than \$1 trillion in the next. Those aren't my estimates. They're from the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office.

"I'm well aware that some opponents of health care reform say they intend to use the Labor-HHS appropriations bill as a vehicle for defunding the *Affordable Care Act*. Mark my words, that will not happen on my watch.

"Our topic, today, is the President's fiscal year 2012 budget request for the Department of Health and Human Services. Unfortunately, as we all know, Congress still hasn't closed the books on fiscal year 2011. That uncertainty makes it harder than usual to evaluate the President's request. For example, the House has proposed major reductions to key programs like community health centers, Head Start, and the National Institutes of Health. We don't yet know the outcome of negotiations to complete a budget for FY 2011, but one of the things I want to cover in this hearing is what the impact of those potential cuts would be.

"Overall, the President's proposed budget for fiscal year 2012 is a good start. It's a tight budget. Total funding for the Department is almost flat compared with fiscal year 2010. But it includes significant increases for key priorities like NIH, child care, Head Start and rooting out fraud and waste in Medicare and Medicaid.

"I also applaud the administration for proposing a new Early Learning Challenge Fund, which is intended to improve the quality of early childhood education programs. The money for this new fund would go through the Education Department, but HHS would be a partner in that effort.

"However, some provisions in the President's budget are cause for concern. I recognize that we're operating under significant fiscal constraints. But I am greatly disappointed by the proposed 50 percent cut to Community Services Block Grants. This funding is critically important for community initiatives that provide a safety net for millions of low-income people across the country. I will oppose that cut in any bill that comes out of this subcommittee.

"I'm also concerned by the proposed \$2.5 billion cut to the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program, as well as the \$30 million, or 72 percent, cut to the child traumatic stress network.

"But as I said, overall this budget is a good start. Madame Secretary, I look forward to hearing your testimony. But first I yield to Senator Shelby for any opening remarks he may wish to make."

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