

**Chairman Roy Blunt Opening Statement
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services,
Education, and Related Agencies**

**Subcommittee Markup of the FY2018 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education,
and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill**

September 6, 2017

(As prepared for delivery)

Good morning. I am pleased to be here today with Senator Murray, the Ranking Member of this Subcommittee, to present the fiscal year 2018 Labor/HHS bill.

This is the second year in a row we have a bipartisan bill and I believe it is important for us to show that we are able to work together, even on arguably one of the most challenging appropriations bills. A pattern begins in a second year, and I am hopeful that we have started a pattern of bipartisan Labor/HHS bills. I want to thank Senator Murray for working with me and I ask all Subcommittee Members to hold their amendments until Full Committee markup on Thursday.

We faced many challenges in writing this bill. The Labor/HHS bill is not easy to put together for either side of the aisle. We had to compromise, find priorities we could both agree on, and do so in an environment when our effective discretionary funding level is approximately \$800 million below last year. This is not the bill I would have written just on my own, but Senator Murray and I made a choice to work together, reflect Member priorities, and find a path forward we could both agree to. The bill continues funding for core activities and prioritizes programs that impact and improve the lives of Americans.

Importantly, this year's bill reflects my top priority as Chairman – a \$2 billion increase for the National Institutes of Health. Without continued investment in the NIH, we jeopardize our current scientific progress, risk losing a generation of scientists, and stunt our nation's global competitiveness.

As Chairman for the last three years, we have been able to reflect a \$2 billion increase in every Labor/HHS bill this Subcommittee has put forward. That is a 20 percent increase for the agency during that time, which has fundamentally changed the trajectory of biomedical research funding in this country and the prospects of scientists looking to cure our most deadly and costliest diseases.

In particular, as Chairman I have focused NIH funding toward finding a treatment and ultimately a cure for Alzheimer's disease. This bill provides an additional \$414 million, and over the past three years, we have more than tripled the amount of research funding toward that goal. Finally, we prohibit the Administration from moving forward with their proposal to cap indirect costs at 10 percent. These costs are not optional for the research community; they are a fundamental component of doing research.

We were also able to reach agreement to find modest increases for other high priority programs. The bill includes \$816 million to address the opioid crisis. This is 14 times more funding than when I took over as Chairman in fiscal year 2016. Nearly 2 million adults in this country have an opioid use disorder related to prescription pain relievers and almost 600,000 have an opioid use disorder related to heroin. Understanding that prevention of opioid abuse is critical to this fight going forward, the bill includes a new \$15 million opioid prevention grant that will go directly to communities affected by this crisis.

The bill continues to prioritize funding for rural health and the need for increased access to care for medically underserved and rural populations. It includes increases for telehealth initiatives and for grants to the eight states in the Mississippi River Delta region for network and rural health infrastructure development, targeting healthcare disparities across this region.

We were also able to target important training resources to workers who have lost their jobs in some of the hardest-hit rural areas over the last few years. The bill devotes \$30 million to addressing unemployment challenges in the Appalachian and Delta regions.

The bill increases funding to assist separating servicemembers as they enter the civilian workforce, and we include new funding to implement the new HIRE Vets legislation enacted earlier this summer.

This bill provides the first discretionary increase in the maximum Pell grant in over a decade, a 1.7 percent increase from \$5,920 to \$6,020. This will ensure the maximum grant will continue to increase next school year, which will help students keep up with rising costs and reduce the need for student loans.

It also provides more than sufficient funding to continue Year-Round Pell, which this Subcommittee reinstated last year to help students complete college faster, enter or re-enter the workforce sooner, and graduate with less debt. This is expected to provide over 900,000 students an additional Pell grant of over \$1,600 annually.

The bill continues to prioritize funding for elementary and secondary education programs that provide the most control and flexibility for states, school districts, schools, and parents to make education decisions impacting students and families. It includes increases for title I grants to low income schools and title IV grants to provide flexibility to schools to fund a range of activities, including: STEM, arts education, and school counselling. Further, the bill increases funding to charter schools and Impact Aid.

Finally, the Subcommittee maintains critical funding for key programs that benefit every State, including:

- LIHEAP (Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program);
- Community Health Centers;
- Workforce training grants;
- AmeriCorps;
- Meals on Wheels; and
- Public Health Preparedness.

As we move to conference with the House, Senator Murray and I have already discussed that we will readdress two of the decisions made in the Senate bill—the level of funding for operational expenses at the Social Security Administration and the Pell grant rescission.

Given our overall discretionary funding level, reflecting bipartisan priorities required difficult decisions, including these two.

While both sides approached this bill differently, it was important to reach agreement and present a bipartisan bill. I want to thank Senator Murray for her help in determining priorities, deciding how to best use limited resources, and working toward a common goal. Even in this difficult fiscal environment, we were able to come together and write a bill that addresses the most important priorities for Americans.

I now recognize Senator Murray for her opening statement.

###