

A Review of the President's Supplemental Request for the Departments of Health and Human Services and Homeland Security

Chair Patty Murray Full Question-and-Answer

November 8, 2023 - Senate Appropriations Full Committee Hearing

Chair Murray: Secretary Becerra, as I talked about in my opening remarks, we have a child care crisis in this country. And it is an economic crisis that is really worsening. When the pandemic hit, the childcare sector was pushed to the verge of collapse, Congress recognized the need to act and we delivered the stabilization funding to make sure those programs could stay open and keep prices down and continue serving our families.

It worked. And the stabilization program provided funding in 8 in 10 licensed child care programs across the country, and to nearly 7,000 programs just in my home state of Washington, and served nearly 10 million children nationwide. But that funding expired September 30. And unless we take action, more parents are going to be forced out of the workplace, small businesses are going to be left without the employees they need. And families along with our entire economy are really going to feel the consequences.

So it's important that the administration has requested this funding to continue to stabilize the childcare system. Can you talk to us about the consequences, that it will be working families and our economy if we fail to extend this funding?

Secretary Becerra: Absolutely Madam Chair, and again, thank you for all the work that you and your colleagues have done to place us where we are today with funds like this stabilization fund that you passed last year.

It's just in the definition of the word. If we don't have those stabilization funds, we destabilize not just families across America, but our economy. Because there will be people who have to leave the workforce, because they'll have to stay home to care for their kids. There are small businesses, the vast majority of our childcare programs are small businesses, they will go under.

There are people who are already telling us that they relied on the stabilization funds to be able to increase wages for their workers so that they wouldn't leave. Remember, they're competing against the fast food shops, the Walmarts of the world, who pay more in many cases than they do. They were able to increase wages a bit to try to keep those workers, who prefer to care for kids. It would be devastating. There is no doubt that Americans would lose not only income, but opportunities for their kids. And we would lose a lot of small businesses in America.

Murray: Thank you. And another one of my top priorities is the fentanyl crisis. And just last year, there were nearly 110,000 drug overdose deaths fueled in large part by fentanyl. In Washington state, fentanyl is driving the increasing rate of overdose deaths among children and teens. Making sure synthetic opioids like fentanyl do not cross our borders is really important and I know the administration is focused on this. It ramped up its efforts and conducted successful operations that have resulted in an additional 10,000 pounds of fentanyl seized over a two-month period. That's roughly a 17% increase above the preceding months.

But seizing those drugs alone will not solve the problem for communities that are really ravaged by this crisis. Secretary Becerra, I'll start with you and then to you Secretary Mayorkas. Talk to us about additional funding through the HHS will address the harm our communities are facing.

Becerra: Madam Chair, there's not a state or not a community in America that doesn't need more assistance to tackle the opioid crisis now driven mostly by fentanyl, some 70% of these overdoses as a result of opioids are really now driven by fentanyl. We need to do much more, they will tell you, we can help with the prevention and the treatment. Secretary Mayorkas I know will talk about the interdiction but without the help, we're going to lose Americans. We know it and we're doing everything we can from making Naloxone more available to people to save lives, but also working with those on the ground who have been saving lives from day one. We want them to have the resources they need.

Murray: Thank you and Secretary Mayorkas, what will the President's supplemental requests allow you to do to stop fentanyl from entering our country?

Secretary Mayorkas: Chair Murray, it will assist us significantly in our interdiction efforts. We already have done an extraordinary job, the men and women of US Customs and Border Protection and Homeland Security investigations have engaged in a number of operations. Operation Blue Lotus, Operation Artemis, which is surging our personnel in our technological resources to the ports of entry where the majority of the fentanyl is smuggled into our country. We are working with our international partners, the \$1.3 billion that the supplemental request calls for will assist us with additional personnel, additional technological resources and the ability to work with our international partners to really drive an encompassing approach to our interdiction efforts.

Murray: Thank you.

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