

U.S. Senator Debbie Stabenow
Chair of the Democratic Policy and Communications Committee
Opening Statement
January 19, 2017

I am so happy to welcome you all here today to share your stories and concerns about President-elect Trump's nominee to lead the Department of Health and Human Services, Congressman Tom Price.

You are here at a critical time.

Just last week, Republicans in both the House and Senate pulled the first thread that will unravel the entire health care system, voting to adopt a budget resolution that will allow for repeal of the Affordable Care Act.

If this happens, according to the Congressional Budget Office, 32 million people, including many of you on this panel today, would lose health insurance coverage, and individual market premiums would double in the next 10 years.

And unfortunately the damage doesn't end there.

Another 52 million adults, including 1.7 million in my home state of Michigan, could become uninsured due to pre-existing conditions.

48 million people could lose mental health parity protections, which make sure that diseases are treated above the neck the same as they are below the neck.

We could be sent back to the time when being a woman was a pre-existing condition or when insurance companies would cut you off when you hit an annual or lifetime limit on coverage – even if you needed more care. 105 million Americans no longer face bankruptcy when they get sick because these caps were eliminated.

The Medicare trust fund has been extended by 11 years, preserving future benefits, and 11 million seniors have saved an average of \$2,000 because the “donut hole” has been phased out.

I could keep going on with numbers, but as you can all attest, health care is not about numbers: it is about families like yours.

If confirmed by the Senate, the Secretary has tremendous power. His or her decisions in office will affect all of us.

Their advice will strongly influence the President's decision to promote, sign, or veto legislation.

We should expect that our Secretary, no matter what party is in charge, fights for you, and fights to improve health care not rip the entire system apart.

Unfortunately, I am not confident that President-elect Trump's nominee, Congressman Price, will fight every day for the Americans who are counting on him.

With a long career in politics, Congressman Price has consistently and vigorously sought to privatize Medicare, cut Medicaid, and take away health care from millions of Americans.

We don't have to speculate -- he has put these plans on paper and vocally supported them.

Donald Trump campaigned on not cutting Medicare or Medicaid, and just over the weekend said "We're going to have insurance for everybody."

But actions speak louder than words, and soon after Trump released his plan last year, we found out it would have caused 21 million people to lose their health insurance all while increasing the national debt.

And the policies and agenda of the man he wants to put in charge of HHS go even further.

Just this fall, Congressman Price said he expects Medicare to be overhauled "within the first six to eight months" of Trump's administration. He also believes "the age of eligibility needs to increase" and that "the better solution is premium support."

When it comes to covering pre-existing conditions, Congressman Price thought that was a "terrible idea."

So this is why it is so important to have you all here today – to share with members of Congress and your fellow citizens what repeal really means, and what a Secretary Price could mean for your family. We asked the Chairmen of the Senate HELP and Finance Committees to include you in the official confirmation hearing, but when they refused, we set up this forum to make sure your voices were heard. We are also collecting written testimony from people around the country.

I'd like to introduce our panelists...