



January 17, 2017

The Honorable Senator Lamar Alexander
Chair, Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
428 Senate Dirksen Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Alexander:

On behalf of the 1.6 million members of the American Federation of Teachers, I urge you to oppose the nomination of Rep. Tom Price (R-Ga.) to be Secretary of Health and Human Services. AFT teachers, paraprofessionals and school-related personnel know that students learn better when they have access to healthcare and remain healthy. AFT nurses and healthcare professionals know that to deliver high-quality care to patients and communities on a daily basis, their patients need access to programs like the Affordable Care Act, Medicare and Medicaid. Yet at every turn, Price has disregarded these facts and fought against the policies that have helped provide Americans with healthcare coverage.

Throughout his six terms in the House of Representatives, Price's record demonstrates that he intends to strip access to healthcare for millions of Americans by turning healthcare into a commodity instead of maintaining it as a right. His agenda includes privatizing Medicare and block-granting Medicaid, repealing the ACA, increasing medical debt, limiting the authority of nurses and health professionals, denying healthcare services to women, and not supporting key early childhood programs under the jurisdiction of HHS.

Medicare/Medicaid

Just two weeks after the election, acting in his role as Budget Committee chairman, Price announced that he and his colleagues would be moving forward with an overhaul of Medicare "within the first six to eight months" of the Trump administration taking office. The House Republican healthcare plan, authored by Rep. Paul Ryan (R-Wis.) and supported by Price, would replace traditional Medicare with a "premium support" system, giving seniors a voucher to buy private health insurance. The value of the voucher would rise more slowly than healthcare costs, shifting more costs to seniors and violating President-elect Trump's promise not to damage Medicare.

Price also supports block-granting Medicaid and shifting control of the program to states. While the federal government currently provides a set percentage of a state's Medicaid costs, under a block grant, a state would receive a fixed dollar amount that would reduce in value over time, putting at risk eligibility, covered medical services

American Federation
of Teachers, AFL-CIO

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The American Federation of Teachers is a union of professionals that champions fairness; democracy; economic opportunity; and high-quality public education, healthcare and public services for our students, their families and our communities. We are committed to advancing these principles through community engagement, organizing, collective bargaining and political activism, and especially through the work our members do.

and access to healthcare for tens of millions of low-income families, senior citizens and people with disabilities.

Repeal of the Affordable Care Act

While not perfect, the ACA provides insurance to millions of Americans who would not otherwise have access, including those with pre-existing conditions. According to the Department of Health and Human Services, thanks to the Affordable Care Act, “76 million Americans with private health insurance gained preventive service coverage with no cost-sharing, including 2,358,000 in Georgia.”

Despite the increased coverage, even in his home state, Price has voted repeatedly to eliminate the Affordable Care Act. In October 2015, serving as chairman of the House Budget Committee, he steered a reconciliation bill to President Obama’s desk that sought to dismantle the ACA and included repealing the Medicaid expansion and federal subsidies that support the purchase of coverage. Outside of his role as Budget Committee chair, Price also introduced his own repeal bill that would weaken the ACA’s protections for people with pre-existing conditions, in addition to increasing costs for older and sicker Americans—those who depend on health insurance the most.

Increasing Consumer Medical Debt

Price is also a proponent of balance billing. Balance billing allows physicians and other providers to bill patients for an outstanding balance after an insurance company pays its portion of a medical bill. According to a report in *Politico*, “Price has spent years arguing that physicians should be allowed to contract with Medicare patients on a fee and then bill those patients for any additional charges that go beyond Medicare’s allowable limits. The proposal has alarmed patient advocates who say it would lead to surprise out-of-pocket bills for seniors.” It alarms us as well, as seniors with fixed incomes and low-income workers are too often devastated by surprise bills.

In 2015, a nationwide study from Consumers Union found that nearly one-third of privately insured Americans received an unanticipated bill when their health plan paid less than expected for medical services. President Obama’s 2017 budget for HHS sought to protect consumers from surprise out-of-network billing on the federal level by mandating that providers accept appropriate in-network rates as payment in full. Given Price’s position, it is unlikely consumers will find relief from excessive medical bills under his leadership.

Diminished Access to Family Planning Resources

Price co-sponsored the Title X Abortion Provider Prohibition Act in 2015 to prohibit federal funding for family planning assistance to an entity that provides abortion

services. In 2007, he co-sponsored a bill that would have extended constitutional protections to the unborn under the 14th Amendment.

Restrictions on Scope of Practice for Registered Nurses

Price also supports limiting the scope of practice for advanced practice registered nurses. He signed a letter to the Department of Veterans Affairs opposing a plan to let APRNs work independently without physician supervision. The Veterans Affairs Department plan would have expanded veterans' access to care and shortened their long wait times for appointments. APRNs are capable providers for primary care services and are essential to providing access to care in rural and other underserved areas. A 2007 study in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* found that physicians and APRNs practicing with the same level of authority and responsibility had comparable patient outcomes.

Children

Early education has gained broad support from Democratic and Republican legislators and governors in cities and states. The expansion of these programs in cities and states has pushed the federal government to discuss additional funds for child care and prekindergarten programs. The Administration for Children and Families is housed at HHS and oversees the implementation of the federal early education programs, including the Child Care and Development Fund, Head Start and the Preschool Development Grants under the Every Student Succeeds Act. But these federal programs still fail to provide early education services to all eligible children.

We need a secretary of HHS who is also a secretary of early education. Yet in Congress, Price has opposed expanding funding for these programs that would allow more children and families to gain access to affordable and safe child care. He has proposed turning Head Start over to the states without guaranteeing the requirements of safety and quality, and he also supported an amendment that would make religion part of the hiring process for Head Start workers.

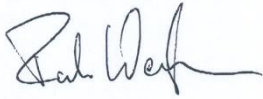
At HHS, families need an advocate for affordable, safe, high-quality early education to ensure appropriate child development, provide parents with work support and prepare children for kindergarten. We need to level the playing field so all families, regardless of income or ZIP code, will have the opportunity to send their children, from birth to age 5, to a high-quality child care and pre-K program. Tom Price is not that advocate.

Similarly, Price has shown little interest in the Children's Health Insurance Program, which serves more than 8.1 million children. While CHIP is currently authorized through 2019, funding expires Sept. 30, 2017. This program and the children it

serves need a strong advocate in the Department of Health and Human Services, not someone who has voted against expanding children's insurance.

The healthcare policies supported by Price pose an existential threat to Americans' ability to receive the care they need to achieve a meaningful and secure life in 21st-century America. I call on you to vote against the confirmation of Rep. Tom Price as secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Randi Weingarten". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Randi Weingarten
President

RW:emc opeiu#2 afl-cio