

**Senator Cantwell Questions for the Record for
Sarah Bianchi, Jayme White, and Melanie Egorin**

Question for Melanie Egorin– Basic Health Plan

- Will you work with me to promote the Basic Health Plan and help more states to implement it?

Answer: The Basic Health Plan is an innovative option for States to improve access to care and in line with the Biden Administration goals of affordability and coverage for all. If confirmed, I would be happy to work with you on this.

Question for Melanie Egorin – Telehealth

- How would you approach the issue with payment parity for the various telehealth services? Which metrics would you use to evaluate the appropriate amount for reimbursements?
- Which methods would you use to promote telehealth literacy and expand access to technology for people who don't have them?
- How would you evaluate the quality of services provided and what do you plan to do to enforce these standards?

Answer: Telehealth is an important tool to improve health equity and access to health care. Health care should be accessible, no matter where you live. If confirmed, I would look forward to working with you and my colleagues at the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services on this issue.

United States Committee on Finance

Hearing to Consider the Nominations of Sarah Bianchi, Jayme White, and Melanie Egorin

Senate Committee on Finance

June 24, 2021

Questions for the record for Melanie Egorin

Senator Whitehouse

Question 1

Although COVID-19 increased health care utilization in 2020 and 2021, the Congressional Budget Office's February 2021 projections estimate that federal health spending over the next decade will be \$6 trillion lower than it predicted in August 2010 for the same budget window. While a portion of the difference in health care spending relates to the repeal of the individual mandate and other policy changes, much of it appears to result from a sustained slowdown in health spending growth in recent years. Despite this slowdown in spending, the Congressional Budget Office recently updated their projections for the Medicare Hospital Insurance Trust Fund, now estimating that the trust fund will face insolvency in 2024.

What delivery system reforms will the Administration advance to lower health care spending and address Medicare insolvency before 2024?

Answer: Medicare solvency is an incredibly important, longstanding issue. If confirmed, I look forward to working with Congress, and in concert with the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, on a bipartisan basis to address this. We will need both short-term and long-term strategies – including delivery system reform – to make sure Medicare remains a bedrock of our health care system. It is essential that we protect and strengthen this program for Americans who have spent their lives paying into it.

Question 2

The Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services, through the Medicare Care Choices Model and Center for Medicare & Medicaid Innovation through a number of care models including the Primary Care First – Seriously Ill Population model and the NextGen ACO program, offers a number of waivers that would make the delivery of end of life care more patient focused. I've spoken with Center for Medicare & Medicaid Innovation Director Liz Fowler repeatedly about making it easier for states like Rhode Island to access the waivers available in these demos. I have legislation, the Removing Barriers to Person- and Family-Centered Care Act, to allow health agencies, ACOs and other groups of providers to access these current waivers and to expand Medicare payments for additional end-of-life care services.

Will you work with me to ensure that providers who take on adequate risk can deliver patient-centered end-of-life care?

Answer: Thank you for your leadership on this issue. Making sure that all Americans have access to quality, affordable health care is one of the Biden Administration's top priorities. If confirmed, I commit to working with you and my colleagues at the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services to examine rules and other policies to ensure all Americans can access the care that they need and choose, including at the end of life. I look forward to working with you on this important issue.

Questions for the Record from Senator Crapo

Question for Melanie Egorin (Congressional Consultation)

The primary responsibility of the HHS ASL is to be a conduit of information between the Department and Congress.

- Will you commit to us to always communicate in a timely, clear, and responsive way to our inquiries?

Answer: I deeply respect the oversight function of this Committee for improving current policies and programs. If confirmed, I am committed to ensuring that the Department is responsive to oversight requests and provides Congress with the information that it needs consistent with appropriate law and regulation.

Question for Melanie Egorin (Roles of Majority and Minority)

As a longtime GAO staffer and a House staffer through periods in both the majority and minority, I trust that you have well-developed views regarding the role of Congress in formulating health care policy.

- How do you see the role of Congress in influencing and shaping HHS' policymaking, including on the roles of both the Congressional majority and minority of such policymaking?

Answer: From my experience at GAO, and in my work at the Committee on Ways and Means, I understand the importance of taking a bi-partisan, bi-cameral approach to policy making and implementing the laws consistent with Congressional intent. I recognize the importance of asking questions about current policies and programs to build on them and improve the health of the nation, and our health care system.

Question for Melanie Egorin (Health Care Innovations)

Bipartisan collaboration, particularly among Committee leadership, is important during crises. We saw this last year, when a divided Congress and the Trump Administration took decisive action early in the year to make possible health care innovations to mitigate the pandemic, despite the restrictions imposed by the national lockdown.

- As we approach the end of the public health emergency, which policy innovations do you think we should retain, and potentially make permanent in statute, as we continue to look to improve our health care system?

Answer: If confirmed, I will take a careful look at these policy innovations and other responses to the public health emergency along with my colleagues across the Department. I look forward to hearing more from you about what existing flexibilities you view as especially important and working with you to determine what legislative or resource needs there may be at HHS.

Question for Melanie Egorin (Response Review and Timeliness)

Concerning the White House, we have had several instances where we have sent letters to agencies and the responses have been delayed because the White House is reviewing the drafts. In another instance, shortly after a productive bipartisan conversation with a nominee about the value of waivers, the Administration rescinded a previously granted waiver without notifying Congress. That circumstance demonstrated the importance of the ASL position, and how lack of communication can exacerbate the effects of a policy decision.

- Will you commit to advocate within the Administration to be responsive to Congressional inquiries, no matter who is asking the questions?

Answer: I deeply respect both the majority and minority Members of this Committee. If confirmed, I am committed to ensuring that the Department is responsive to oversight requests and provides Congress with the information that it needs consistent with appropriate law and regulation.

- Similarly, will you commit to advising Congress before sudden policy shifts to ensure the full impact of the change can be assessed, and any rationales for and against understood, before the decision becomes irreversible?

Answer: If confirmed, I am committed to working with Congress on policy developments and implementation consistent with the law and appropriate regulations.

Senator Chuck Grassley's (IA) Questions for-the-Record
for Health & Human Services Assistant Secretary-Nominee
Melanie Anne Egorin
Submitted June 28, 2021

Questions for Melanie Anne Egorin (HHS Assistant Secretary for Legislation-Nominee)

1. I am committed to protecting access to rural health care by boosting doctor pay, expanding access to telehealth, and protecting funding for rural hospitals. Over the last decade, at least 100 hospitals across the nation have closed. Congress recently established the voluntary Rural Emergency Hospital (REH) designation for Medicare. REH allows a Critical Access Hospital (CAHs) or a small, rural hospital with less than 50 beds to convert to an REH. The goal is to preserve access to emergency medical care in rural areas that can no longer support a fully operational inpatient hospital. It will let hospitals maintain essential medical services in their communities like 24/7 emergency care, outpatient care, ambulance services, and more. It will also let certain rural hospitals right-size their health care infrastructure. Recently, Senator Klobuchar and I sent to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) a letter asking the agency to prioritize the implementation of this law.
 - a. Can you commit to a timely and fair implementation of the Rural Emergency Hospital Program?
 - b. Can I also have your assurance you will work with me to ensure the program is available to rural hospitals on January 1, 2023, as intended?

Answer: Thank you for your leadership on this issue. I commit that, if confirmed, I will work with the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services on its rulemaking regarding the Rural Emergency Hospital Program and keep you regularly updated on its implementation. I recognize that rural areas have unique needs and challenges and I look forward to working closely with you on this issue.

2. On March 8, 2021, I wrote to the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and asked several questions relating to the origins of the coronavirus. I also asked about what, if any, oversight was done on the coronavirus grants sent by Dr. Fauci's unit within the National Institutes of Health to EcoHealth Alliance which issued sub-grants to the Wuhan Institute of Virology. According to reports, \$600,000 to \$826,000 was sent to the Wuhan Institute of Virology by EcoHealth Alliance to study bat coronaviruses. On May 21, 2021, the Department of Health and Human Services responded to my letter but failed to answer whether any oversight was done. On May 26, 2021, I wrote a follow-up letter to HHS asking again what, if any, oversight was done. I have not received a response yet and the due date was June 9, 2021. At a June 10, 2021, hearing, I asked Secretary Becerra about what, if any, oversight was done. He failed to answer. The Department has failed to explain if any oversight was done on how that money was used to ensure, as one example, that it wasn't used for gain-of-function research.
 - a. Given I was not able to get an answer from Secretary Becerra when he was before this committee on June 10, I will ask you something related. If confirmed, what steps will you take to determine whether any oversight was done on the taxpayer money sent to the Wuhan Institute of Virology to ensure it wasn't used improperly and for gain-of-function research?

Answer: Thank you for sharing your concerns related to the origins of COVID-19. It is my understanding that Dr. Collins and Dr. Fauci have repeatedly said that the National Institutes of Health never approved funding for gain-of-function research at the Wuhan Institute of Virology. That said, there is a strong agreement for further investigation to understand the origins of COVID-19. As you know, the President has called for a report within 90 days from the Intelligence community regarding the origins of COVID-19 and Secretary Becerra has requested that the WHO conduct a thorough, independent phase 2 investigation of the virus' origins. If confirmed, I would work to support these efforts and ensure information is communicated to Congress consistent with appropriate law and regulation.

Senator Bill Cassidy QFRs

For Ms. Egorin

- Can you please describe your protocol for processing technical assistance or other requests for information? How will you prioritize Republican members on the HELP or Finance Committees who are making these requests? Trump's ASL processed TA requests by seniority on the Committees, regardless of party.

Answer: From my experience at GAO, and in my work at the Committee on Ways and Means in both the majority and the minority, I understand the importance of taking a bi-partisan, bi-cameral approach to policy making, including by providing technical assistance to make sure laws passed by Congress can be implemented by the Administration. If confirmed, I will review prior protocols to make sure we are providing timely and responsive technical assistance to Members and Committees of jurisdiction.

- How will you prioritize filling the roles that report to you, like the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Discretionary Health Programs, Mandatory Health Programs, and Human Services? What criteria are you looking for?

Answer: I agree that a full team at ASL is critical to our ability to respond to the needs of Congress. It is my understanding that all the positions you mentioned are now filled, and if confirmed, I will work to ensure my team is both supported and responsive.

- The Deputy Assistant Secretary for Oversight position was vacant for all of last year. How important is a full team?

Answer: I agree that a full team at ASL is critical to our ability to respond to the needs of Congress and recognize that the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Oversight is an important part of that team. If confirmed, I will work to ensure the position is filled as soon as possible.