

Opening Statement

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**Nominee to be Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services**

**Senate Committee on Finance
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Chairman Baucus, Senator Grassley, members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to discuss my nomination to be Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. It is an honor to appear before this distinguished Committee.

I'd like to take a moment to thank my family. My brother Steven is here today to cheer me on as always. Both of our parents believed in public service. Our mother was a teacher who taught in some of the toughest neighborhoods in New York. Our father was an accountant who spent most of his career working in hospitals and nursing homes. In our own ways, we are following in their footsteps.

I am grateful to President Obama and Secretary Sebelius for providing me this opportunity to serve the American people. The Department of Health and Human Services is truly the "People's Department," providing assistance and support to virtually every American. If confirmed, I would have the honor of helping to fulfill the mission that was captured so well by the late Senator Hubert Humphrey, for whom the HHS headquarters is named:

"[T]he moral test of Government is how that Government treats those who are in the dawn of life, the children; those who are in the twilight of life, the elderly; and those who are in the shadows of life, the sick, the needy and the handicapped."

The Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs serves as the Secretary's principal counsel on public affairs, conducts national public affairs programs, provides centralized leadership and guidance for public affairs activities within HHS's Staff and Operating Divisions and regional offices, and administers the Freedom of Information and Privacy Acts. ASPA also leads the planning, development, and implementation of emergency incident communications strategies and activities for the Department.

My career has prepared me for the challenges of this position. I began my career as a working journalist, covering American health policy development. In fact, I spent many hours sitting at the press tables behind me. As editor of *Medicine and Health*, a respected weekly news publication, I was able to inform my readers on the important details of policy development. I continued those efforts as editor of the *Journal of American Health Policy* and as the author of three books.

From 1993 to 1998, I served as a Senior Communications Advisor for Health and Human Services Secretary Donna Shalala, working on such issues as health care reform, Medicare and Medicaid, HIV/AIDS, and quality improvement. I was particularly pleased to serve as the Deputy Director of the President's Commission on Consumer Protection and Quality in the Healthcare Industry. The commission created a blueprint for much of the quality improvement work that has occurred in the last 12 years.

From 1998 to 2001, I continued my work on these issues at Georgetown University, where I also conducted research on the optimal way to communicate complex health policy issues to federal and state lawmakers and policymakers.

For the last seven years, I served as Vice President for Public Policy and External Relations at the National Committee for Quality Assurance. NCQA's mission is to improve the quality of health care. I worked closely with Congress, federal agencies, the states, the media, and the numerous stakeholders in health care to advance that mission through education, communication, and outreach.

If I am confirmed, a major priority will be to maintain a strong partnership with this Committee and the Congress. The laws you write must be implemented in a manner that fulfills your intent and the very real needs of the people for whom they were written. While the Public Affairs division does not develop or set policy, it plays a critical role in communicating to the American people about the choices and benefits available to them. The division also plays a critical role in the President's agenda of transparency and open government.

Our nation's recent experience with the H1N1 flu epidemic reinforces the importance of quick and clear communication of information to empower people in this country and elsewhere to protect their health and the health of their families and neighbors.

Clearly, a major priority of the Department and its Public Affairs division is and will be the implementation of the Affordable Care Act and related legislation. Public Affairs can play a key role in making sure these critical reforms are implemented successfully. Helping people understand their rights and responsibilities under the Act is essential to its success. Today, millions of Americans who are eligible for such programs as Medicaid and CHIP are not enrolled. Many of them don't know that they are eligible. We need to find ways to prevent that from happening again. Fortunately, there is a long history of successful implementation of major changes in health care coverage going back to the creation of Medicare in 1965, the Balanced Budget Act of 1997, the Children's Health Insurance Program, and the Medicare Modernization Act of 2003.

The current information age provides us with many more tools and vehicles to communicate important information to millions of people. We have learned that the most successful communications efforts employ a variety of messages, messengers, and media to reach people where they live, where they work, and where they gather. We need clear and concise information that is developed with the audiences in mind.

If I am confirmed, I look forward to working with this Committee and others in Congress to ensure that health reform is implemented quickly, effectively, and consistent with congressional intent.

Chairman Baucus, Senator Grassley, members of the Committee, thank you again for allowing me to testify today. I am happy to answer any questions.

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