

Nomination of Governor Michael O. Leavitt to be Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

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MIKE LEAVITT

Presidential Nominee of HHS Secretary

Testimony

Good morning. Mr. Chairman, Senator Kennedy, and members of this Committee: Thank you for inviting me to discuss my nomination to be Secretary of Health and Human Services.

I would like to begin by expressing my immense admiration for Tommy Thompson. We have been friends for many years, but my admiration is broader than just friendship. I admired his leadership as Governor of Wisconsin. The two of us worked together on many of the issues we will talk about today. He also brought an aggressive agenda to HHS, and his four years at the helm have made America healthier and safer.

Consider: Medicare is providing more comprehensive care to more American seniors than ever before. HHS is better prepared than ever to respond to public health emergencies. More children receive immunizations and health care, and fewer use drugs. The Food and Drug Administration is inspecting seven times as much imported food as it did four years ago. And, thanks to the leadership of President Bush and Secretary Thompson, the United States leads the struggle against AIDS around the world.

Tommy has earned the affection and respect of the people of HHS, and I pledge to him and to you that, if confirmed, I will build on his legacy.

I have enjoyed every stage in my career, from business, to being Governor of Utah, to protecting the environment as Administrator of EPA. Now, President Bush has asked you to confirm me as Secretary of Health and Human Services. I want to thank him for his confidence and thank you for assessing my fitness to serve.

As a prelude to answering your questions it may be helpful if I tell you what I believe, what issues and opportunities I see confronting our nation, and how I view the Department of Health and Human Services.

I believe conducting the public's business is a sacred trust. I pledge that I will serve with fidelity and full effort.

I believe collaboration trumps polarization every time and that solutions to complex problems have to transcend political boundaries.

I believe that information technology is challenging old institutions, bridging great

distances, and giving people more control over their own lives. To survive, governments will have to be more flexible and more competitive.

I believe market forces are superior to mandates. People do more, and do it faster, when they have an incentive to do the right thing.

I believe we should reward results, not efforts. Our focus should always be the outcomes we are striving to achieve.

I believe that to change a nation, you have to change hearts. And you change hearts through education and example.

I believe government must care for the truly needy and foster self-reliance and personal charity. Helping others is good for the soul. Government can augment this compassion and provide services, but it can never replace the love that makes us help each other.

I expect the Department of Health and Human Services to achieve our nation's noblest human aspirations for safety, compassion, and trust.

When we gather our families for dinner at night, we rely on HHS to ensure the food we put on the table is safe.

When we are alone at night caring for a sick child, we trust HHS to ensure that the medicine we give her is effective.

Our poor, disabled, and elderly have health insurance because this nation has made it a priority; another powerful stewardship that has been given to HHS.

The Department of Health and Human Services helps to strengthen marriages and families, protects children, and fights disease. For example, we are often called upon to protect neglected and abused children. But we can never replace the love of a parent.

And if, God forbid, terrorists should ever unleash a biological agent on American soil, we would rely on the dedicated men and women of HHS and the plans they have developed already to stop the disease in its tracks and protect Americans.

We all know that HHS spends nearly one out of every four dollars collected by the federal government in taxes. I am humbled by the prospect of shouldering that responsibility.

I would like to thank the members of this Committee for the kindness you showed me as I visited your offices. Our conversations have been helpful as I contemplate this task. One of you said, only partly joking, "Why would you want a hard job like that?" There are so many reasons. Let me mention a few, beginning with welfare and Medicaid.

Welfare reform

In the late 1990s, in my role as Chairman of the National Governors Association, I worked closely with Congress and other governors in building the federal-state partnership we called welfare reform. We can all be proud of this dramatic American success story. We set a tone of compassion for this country by caring for those in need and fostering self-reliance. Now I look forward to working with you to ensure that welfare reform is reauthorized and improved.

Medicaid

During the same period, Congress worked hard at reforming Medicaid, but ultimately failed. I vowed then that if the opportunity ever arose again, I would seize it. Delivering health care to the needy is important, but Medicaid is flawed and inefficient. We can do better. We can expand access to medical insurance to more people by creating flexibility for our state partners and transforming the way we deliver it.

Medicare

When you and your colleagues approved the Medicare Modernization Act, Mr. Chairman, that was a great achievement. And you asked us to implement the Medicare prescription drug benefit on January 1, 2006. This is a great challenge.

I have no illusions about the size of the task. It is immense. But I recognize that the President and the Congress made a solemn commitment to America's seniors. I have the responsibility of delivering on that commitment. Our work will not be without flaw, but we will not fail.

Global

This nation's compassion is not limited to America. We live in a prosperous country. And our prosperity is not only a blessing—it's also an obligation. While the world sometimes envies or resents us, it always respects us. And when we do the right thing, others emulate our example.

In international health, one of our Nation's greatest strengths is our considerable convening power—it's our ability to inspire, to set an example, and to call upon the best knowledge, experience, and resources, from individual experts, private institutions, and government agencies.

I resolve to use this convening power to meet our obligation as human beings to improve health and well-being. We will reach out to reduce suffering, to promote understanding, and to inspire compassionate action.

FDA, NIH, and CDC Brands

HHS is the trustee for a number of our nation's most treasured brands. A brand is a promise. Over decades, the dedicated scientists and researchers of HHS have earned the public's trust, especially in three brands: FDA, NIH, and CDC. To millions of people, these brands are seals of quality, safety, and best in the world research. If they lost their reputations, they would take years to recover. HHS always needs to keep in mind the ethical implications of its decisions, to ensure that Americans can be proud, not only of

the Department's scientific expertise, but also of the moral judgment of its leaders.

At FDA, our goal must be to inform consumers about risks and benefits. Our foundation must be sound science. Our motto must be independence.

At NIH, we must march forward with life-saving research, and always hold the scientists, universities, and laboratories accountable for results.

At CDC, our guiding focus must be disease prevention and control, sharing generously the best health and safety information in the world.

Liability

Most doctors make a sincere effort to do a good job, but medical errors do occur. People who are harmed by medical errors absolutely deserve prompt and fair compensation. Unfortunately, the capricious liability system that prevails in many states helps no one. Senators, I look forward to working with you to pass comprehensive medical liability reform.

Twenty-first century health care

Most broadly, Americans deserve the health care of the twenty-first century. We've earned it. That includes modern medical technology. Modern information technology. And modern, consumer-focused delivery systems.

I see a world that is rapidly moving toward personalized medicine. People will own their own health savings, health insurance, and health records.

I see a world in which a doctor can write a prescription on a handheld device and transmit it to the patient's pharmacist, who can start filling it before the patient leaves the doctor's parking lot—and with less chance of error or delay.

I see a world where doctors heal our loved ones when they are sick, but focus more of their energies on keeping them well in the first place.

I see a world where good health care makes America more productive, not less competitive.

And I see a world where premier health research serves the betterment of mankind.

Conclusion

Mr. Chairman, I have always had three goals in public service. I followed them as Governor of Utah. I've followed them as Administrator of EPA. And I will follow them as Secretary of Health and Human Services.

The first goal is to leave things better than I found them.

The second goal is to plant seeds for future generations.

And the third goal is to give it all I have.

I promise to work with this committee in a responsive and transparent manner so we can do just that.

Thank you for your attention, Mr. Chairman. I look forward to answering your questions.