

**TESTIMONY OF XAVIER BECERRA
BEFORE THE U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON
HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR AND PENSIONS
FEBRUARY 23, 2021**

Thank you, Madam Chair, Ranking Member Burr, Members of the Committee. I'm grateful for the opportunity to speak with you.

And a sincere "thank you" to Senators Feinstein and Padilla for their kind introduction.

I also want to thank my family – my wife, Dr. Carolina Reyes, who is here with me, and my daughters Clarisa – along with her husband Ivan, Olivia and Natalia – for their constant love and support.

I am here because my parents Manuel and Maria Teresa – who had only their health and hope when they settled in Sacramento – were tireless believers in earning the American Dream. A construction worker with a sixth-grade education and a clerical worker who arrived in her teens from Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico. They never saw the inside of a college classroom, but they sent all their kids to one, or to the military.

We lost my dad last year on New Year's Day. When the end came, my dad knew we were there with him – at his side, in our home.

Sadly, hundreds of thousands of Americans haven't had that closure this past year. That, Senators, is why I'm here today.

The COVID pandemic has killed 500,000 Americans, many of them alone without their families. Millions more have lost their jobs and health care. That is not the America my parents would believe possible.

To meet this moment, we need strong federal leadership. That's what President Biden is demonstrating. If I'm fortunate to be confirmed, I look forward to joining the President in this critical mission.

I understand the enormous challenges before us and our solemn responsibility to be faithful stewards of an agency that touches almost every aspect of our lives. I'm humbled by the task. And, I'm ready for it.

The mission of HHS – to enhance the health and wellbeing of all Americans – is core to who I am. When I was a child, my mom had a health scare: she was rushed to the hospital after hemorrhaging at home. The image is seared in my memory.

We were lucky: my mom is now 87 years old.

Better put, we were blessed: my dad had insurance – through his union, Laborers’ Local 185. We didn’t have much, but we didn’t have to face the threat of unpaid medical bills or even bankruptcy.

Over two decades in Congress, I worked to ensure every family had the assurance of care that mine had. I helped expand the Children’s Health Insurance Program. I helped write the Affordable Care Act. From the Ways and Means Committee, I fought to strengthen and modernize Medicare and how we finance it.

As California’s Attorney General, I created a health care rights and access unit and cracked down on Medicare and Medicaid fraud. I worked to protect people’s health – holding opioid manufacturers accountable for the addiction crisis, and successfully taking on hospitals and drugmakers who unfairly jacked up prices on patients. I protected patients’ privacy.

If confirmed, I’ll work with you to continue this type of work, and to address HHS’ biggest challenges:

First, COVID. The President has ambitious goals – 100 million vaccine shots in arms in his first 100 days, increasing access to testing, sequencing the virus so we’re prepared for the variants, and reopening schools and businesses. HHS has a central role in meeting these goals – safely and equitably.

As Attorney General, I saw the importance of this on the frontlines. I worked with colleagues in other states – both Republicans and Democrats – to make COVID treatments more readily available. I am ready to work with you, our state and local partners, and across government, to get this right.

Second, we must ensure people have access to quality, affordable health care. If confirmed, I will work with you to strengthen our Medicare and Medicaid lifelines, reduce the cost of health care and prescription drugs, and ensure we are accountable, spending resources wisely and effectively.

I won’t forget the other “H” in HHS: human services. I want to work with you supporting our vulnerable kids, those in foster care, strengthening Head Start, and expanding access to child care.

Third, we must restore faith in our public health institutions. That starts with putting science and facts first and showing respect for our career workforce.

No one understands your states and communities better than you. We may not always agree, but if I’m fortunate enough to be confirmed, I will always listen to you and keep an open mind...find common cause...and work with you to improve the health and dignity of the American people.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my vision.