

Opening Statement
Nomination Hearing for Dr. Robert Kadlec, M.D.
Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee
Chairman Lamar Alexander
August 1, 2017

Chairman Alexander and Ranking Member Murray, Members of the Senate HELP Committee, it is both a privilege and special opportunity to appear before you today as you consider my nomination for the important position of Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response (ASPR) at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

Mr. Chairman there are many I need to thank for this opportunity: President Trump and Secretary Price for their confidence in my abilities and nominating me for this position; the many who have encouraged and assisted me through this process; and my family—my wife Ann, daughters Margaret and Samantha—who have supported me and will enable me to take on this responsibility should I be confirmed.

I would also like to acknowledge classmates, colleagues, friends and fellow committee staff who are here or watching from their offices. I want to specifically recognize my colleagues at the Senate Intelligence Committee who, like many Congressional staff, get far too little recognition for their dedicated, selfless and important service to our nation.

As I sit here, the prospect of becoming the ASPR is both exciting and daunting. Having been a HELP Committee staffer who assisted drafting the original position description under the great leadership of Senator Richard Burr and the late Senator Ted Kennedy, I have firsthand insight into the rationale why HHS and the nation needed a single leader to be responsible for coordinating medical and public health preparedness and response.

Ten years ago, incidents like the September 11, 2001 attacks on our country, the deadly anthrax letters, Hurricane Katrina, and the potential for an influenza pandemic all demanded that we improve the federal government's ability to assist state and local health authorities and mobilize the private sector in responding to future events. The need now is as real and urgent as it was then.

To distill the ASPR mission to just a couple of words, it is to "save lives." As a physician, I can conceive of no greater honorable duty or higher calling than this. If confirmed, I fully accept the responsibility to ensure that we do everything reasonable and appropriate to prepare for and respond to a spectrum of 21st century threats that endanger Americans, our national security, and our way of life. If confirmed, I pledge to you my all in pursuit of this mission and will work 24-7-365 days a year to fulfill the ASPR's duties.

Having spent the last two and half years working on the Senate Intelligence Committee, I have had the unique privilege to learn in exquisite detail the many threats and challenges that confront our country, in particular those emerging as clear and present dangers today. The threat landscape before us is more diverse and more lethal than the one that we confronted after September 11th.

When I last sat in this hearing room in 2006 as a HELP staffer ISIL did not exist; North Korea did not possess both nuclear weapons and the missiles to attack our homeland; the use of chemical weapons by

terrorists and by the Syrian Government on defenseless citizens was a concern, not a routine occurrence; and the risks of cyber warfare were still largely hypothetical. Today, all these and other challenges exist in a way that makes the mission of ASPR more important and urgent. We must redouble our readiness efforts and improve capabilities for these and other threats.

There are five priority issues that I will pursue if confirmed. First, provide strong leadership, including clear policy direction, improving threat and situational awareness, advocating for and securing adequate resources.

Second, seek the creation of a “national contingency health care” system. There is an urgent need to better organize, train and equip our state and local healthcare systems, facilities and providers to ensure that they can not only better respond to routine emergencies but to extraordinary events that are likely to occur. Here we have an opportunity to better integrate Emergency Medical Services, the “tip of the spear” of our national medical response into these efforts and to increase effective coordination across HHS and the federal departments, such as the Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans Affairs, to support state and local responders.

Third, support the sustainment of robust and reliable public health security capabilities that include an improved ability to detect and diagnose infectious diseases and other threats, as well as the capacity to rapidly characterize and attribute them.

Fourth, re-invigorate and advance an innovative medical countermeasures enterprise. We must capitalize on advances in biotechnology and science to develop and maintain a robust stockpile of safe and efficacious vaccines, medicines and supplies to respond to emerging disease outbreaks, pandemics, and chemical, biological, nuclear and radiological incidents and attacks.

Finally, work with you and your staff on the reauthorization of the Pandemic and All-Hazards Preparedness Act in 2018 to strengthen our nation’s readiness and response for 21st century threats.

Lastly, I simply wish to thank you all for your consideration and the prospect of continuing to serve our great nation.