Health Law Daily Wrap Up, SENATE NEWS—Is HHS Secretary too high for Price?, (Jan. 19, 2017)

Health Law Daily Wrap Up

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By Bryant Storm, J.D.

The presumptive nomination of Rep. Tom Price (R-Ga) to lead HHS as the agency’s Secretary was considered on January 18, 2017, by the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions. The committee’s chair, Lamar Alexander (R-Tenn), praised the nomination of Price, calling him an "excellent nominee" and highlighting how he will "build a better bridge" to repeal and replace the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA) (P.L. 111-148). The top Democrat in the committee, Senator Patty Murray (D-Wash) questioned Price on policy, conflicts of interest, and past statements, including one suggesting cost is not an issue for women buying birth control.

Opening statement. In his opening statement, Price talked about his passion for medicine, experience as a physician, and fascination with "fixing things." He pointed to problems in the health care industry, recalling the point when he noticed "more individuals within our office who were dealing with paperwork, insurance filings, and government regulations than there were individuals actually seeing and treating patients." He highlighted his goal of returning the focus of health care to the patient.

ACA. Price also noted his belief that the ACA should be repealed and replaced simultaneously and concurrently—a position that is consistent with the most recent stances of President-elect Trump (R) and House Speaker Paul Ryan (R-Wis). Price and Alexander both expressed a desire to avoid a "quick-fix" and to, instead, develop health care reform "that’s done in the right way, for the right reasons, in the right amount of time."

Critique. Murray challenged Price’s qualifications and positions, including Price’s prior opposition to allowing Medicare to negotiate drug prices and plans to shift $1 trillion in Medicaid costs onto states. Additionally, Murray suggested that Price did not meet a basic, necessary qualification to lead HHS, namely the ability to put science before ideology. Finally, Murray condemned the Senate’s decision to move forward with Price’s confirmation hearings amidst an ongoing investigation into Price’s allegedly unethical medical stock trades during his time in the House.