

Prepared Statement of Ranking Member Richard Burr
Nominations of Lisa Gomez, Assistant Secretary for Employee Benefits Security, Department of Labor and Jose Javier Rodriguez, Assistant Secretary for Employee and Training, Department of Labor

October 7, 2021

The purpose of this hearing is to consider the nominees to serve at the Employee Benefits Security Administration and Employment and Training.

To the nominees, welcome.

In my role as Ranking Member this is usually where I either raise concerns about your qualifications or raise concerns about some of the terrible things that the Administration is doing.

There are enough concerning things being done by this White House and the National Labor Relations Board to fill whole volumes of the Congressional Record.

But today I have to address the reckless tax and spend agenda of a partisan majority that calls for \$3.5 trillion dollars in additional spending and a massive transformation of the size and scope of the federal government.

That's on top of the \$3.5 trillion spent combatting COVID last year, all of which passed on a bipartisan basis. It may seem like a distant memory, but Republicans and Democrats actually worked together on those bills.

That's on top of the \$1.9 trillion splurge by a partisan majority less than seven months ago, during its first taxpayer-funded spending spree.

So in the past 18 months, Congress has added \$5.4 trillion dollars to the nation's ledgers and to its \$29 trillion national debt.

Social Security actuaries say Social Security will become insolvent in 2034, leading to cuts by as much as 24 percent in the retirement benefits of approximately 65 million retired Americans.

And Medicare is in equally dire shape. Medicare's hospital trust fund is set to run out of money in 2026, just a few years down the road.

The Medicare trustees, which include Secretaries Becerra, Yellen, and Walsh, admit that when Medicare can't pay its bills, beneficiary access to health care services could be rapidly curtailed.

But instead of working to make those programs solvent, a narrow, partisan majority wants to grow government even more and add another \$3.5 trillion, at least, in a massive socialist redesign of our society.

We should be honest that this is a socialist agenda. You can dress it up with the label "progressive," but when you put government at the center of every decision a family makes about: child care and education, health care, energy production, where to live and how to work, how much you can earn and how much you can save, and how much you can pass on to your children.

That's not making a free society freer or fairer – that's making government control bigger.

Rammed into this vision for a progressive socialist America is an instruction to this committee to report legislation spending \$726 billion dollars. Three quarters of a trillion dollars.

On August 23, every Republican on this committee wrote asking for a hearing and markup of any proposal to meet those instructions within this committee's jurisdiction.

Because if this committee is tasked with spending three quarters of a trillion dollars when we are in an evenly divided Senate, you'd think hearings and markups would be on the docket.

Based on the committee's public calendar and this week's letter from Senator Schumer, I suspect that we aren't going to be given that opportunity.

I'd like to remind my friends on the other side of the aisle, and many of you are my friends, that Democrats have the barest of majorities.

Democrats have just a three seat majority in the House. And only with the Vice President breaking a tie do Democrats run the Senate.

That is not a mandate for grand sweeping partisan legislation to reshape every aspect of the American family.

That is not a mandate for a grand socialist expansion of government designed and driven by the furthest left reaches of the Democratic Socialists in your party.

Why am I so frustrated?

It wasn't that long ago that the Senate came together in a bipartisan fashion to work on child care. I remember. I was there.

In 2014, Barbara Mikulski and I led reauthorization of the Child Care and Development Block Grant, a bipartisan law that has been the foundation of access to child care for the past 30 years.

Barbara and I held three hearings on the legislation. We marked it up. We worked out all of the issues and then we passed it unanimously in our hearing room. Unanimously.

We passed it in the Senate overwhelmingly 96-2 and the final agreement with the House 88-1.

So, Republicans and Democrats in this Committee have proven overwhelmingly that we both care about child care and that we both want to help families have the opportunity to get high quality care for their children.

In 2007, this Committee reauthorized the Head Start and Early Head Start programs to make major improvements to those critical programs.

And as recently as 2015, this Committee included in the Every Student Succeeds Act, signed by President Obama, the Preschool Development Grants to help states further their efforts to improve and coordinate child care and early childhood education.

More proof that Republicans and Democrats can work together on these issues, if given the chance.

Last year alone, the federal government spent \$21.4 billion on child care and early education, in addition to the \$53.5 billion provided in child care and early education funding provided through the CARES Act and other legislation.

We also have nine federal programs and three tax expenditures with early childhood and preschool as their explicit purpose and 35 additional federal programs that support early education and child care.

And without a hearing and without a committee vote, the progressive socialists are saying that Congress should ignore all that bipartisan work, that bipartisan support, that bipartisan foundation for millions of families across the country for a poorly conceived government takeover.

We have massively successful programs that support a rich, mixed delivery system of providers – from family child care providers, to Mom and Pop operations, to churches, synagogues, and mosques, to employer based care and larger center-based programs that span the country.

Ending that successful system, destroying it from within and especially shutting down faith-based providers as the House proposal does, is not worthy of a great country and not worthy of this Senate.

In higher education the House bill again throws away decades of bipartisan effort and collaboration.

In higher education, we fund the student, not the institution. We give students Pell Grants and student loans and they pick the colleges they want to attend. That started with the GI Bill after World War II and continues to this day.

The House proposes to subvert that entirely and fund just some schools while commandeering state authority to advance this partisan objective of Washington control over more of our educational systems.

Community colleges are the backbone of our communities, and I'm proud to support them. We have some of the nation's best community colleges in North Carolina. Our tuition is already affordable and is essentially free to people with a Pell Grant.

But as I look across the country most of these institutions have terrible completion rates. We shouldn't just pour money into schools that can't get their students out with a degree or certificate. And we shouldn't make that the only affordable option for lower income students.

Republicans and Democrats agree that college should be more affordable, that our graduation rates are too low, and accountability in higher education is lacking.

We agree that our student loan repayment programs are too complex, and I'm grateful that Senator Angus King, an Independent who sits on the Democratic side of the aisle, and I agree on a bipartisan solution on how to fix that problem.

We don't need to control state higher education policy from here. We don't need the federal guardrails from the bad old days of No Child Left Behind in higher education.

We could, heaven forbid, work together.

That's the model this committee famously stands for. Two previous chairman, my good friends Ted Kennedy and Mike Enzi called it the 80-20 rule. We usually agree on 80 percent and disagree on 20 percent, so we work on the 80 percent.

But these partisan efforts will change that. If Democrats succeed in ramming through partisan legislation like this, Republicans and Democrats will no longer agree on higher education, or child care, or national service.

Instead, we will see saw back and forth in support and opposition. The cycle of anger will grow, and the very fabric of our society will continue to tear itself apart.

We've shown we can work together on the bipartisan infrastructure bill.

One trillion in spending, including \$500 billion in new spending. \$110 billion for roads. \$65 billion for high speed internet. \$40 billion for bridges and \$39 billion for transit.

There's even \$66 billion in funding for Amtrak for the President

But the answer from the far, far left, from the admirers of socialism and total government control of our lives, is no.

If they can't get everything they want, they'd rather have nothing. They've even proudly said that last Friday – that nothing is better than something.

Tell that to the families who were relying on jobs created by the bipartisan infrastructure bill. Tell that to the school children and rural communities that were going to get high speed internet.

You know, they used to say it was my way or the highway. I guess now it's their way or no highway.

And when traffic jams mount up, when commutes get longer, you can thank the Democratic socialists who don't understand that most of America doesn't want to live in a worker's paradise.

I say to my colleagues, let's set aside this disastrous budget. Let's set aside this reckless tax and spend agenda designed by progressive socialists.

Let's tackle these challenges together, which is what the American people sent us here to do.

I yield back.