

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

Chairman Alexander, Ranking Member Murray, Members of the Committee: Thank you for the invitation to testify before you today. I also wish to thank President Trump and Vice President Pence, Governor Holcomb and the Indiana Congressional Delegation, my family, friends, and supporting organizations.

It is a tremendous honor and opportunity to appear before you today as the President's nominee to be our nation's next Surgeon General. If confirmed I would serve as our country's 20<sup>th</sup> Surgeon General, representing 180 years of public health leadership from the position. I assure you I do not take this legacy lightly.

Both the position of Surgeon General, and the United States Public Health Corps that the Surgeon General leads, are an extremely important component of our national health education and response capabilities. The Commissioned Corps of the United States Public Health Service Corps is one of the seven Uniformed Services, and is an elite team of over 6,500 highly qualified health professionals. The Health Service Corps serves as our National Health Army, ready to deploy whenever a man-made or natural crisis has placed our public's health at risk.

Whether we are facing infectious diseases like Ebola and Zika, or natural disasters like earthquakes and Hurricane Katrina, or human-caused tragedies like 9/11 and the opioid epidemic, our country and our World deserve and need this ready to respond Army of Health experts. And this Army deserves and needs a qualified leader- the US Surgeon General.

Many people call the US Surgeon General the nation's "Top Doctor." This moniker doesn't do justice to the diversity of professions represented in the Health Corps- nurses, pharmacists, therapists, scientists, and many others, in addition to some of the country's best doctors. The further insinuation that one person can be all things to health also doesn't give proper consideration to the vital role partnerships play in the success of this position.

The position of Surgeon General carries with it a tremendous power to convene supporters (as well as detractors), and to facilitate important health and wellness discussions. The power of the position comes not merely from the individual occupying it, but rather from the even wider array of health crusaders that can be mobilized from a multitude of sectors across our country, if the platform is used properly.

Having shared a little of what I think the position of Surgeon General represents, I'd next like to share with you why I feel I can make a unique contribution in this role. The position of Surgeon General must have "specialized training or significant experience in public health programs." Not only have I earned a Master's Degree in Public Health with an emphasis in Chronic Disease Prevention from UC Berkeley, but I have served as the Indiana State Health Commissioner- in essence the Surgeon General for Indiana- for the past 2.5 years. In that role, I have overseen our State's response to Ebola, Zika, and a rural HIV outbreak related to injection drug use, and also overseen Indiana's tobacco cessation efforts, the State's Public Laboratory, and its Health Care Quality and Regulatory division.

In addition to serving as Health Commissioner, I continue to practice as a physician anesthesiologist at Eskenazi Hospital- a level one trauma center with a busy obstetrical service- and serve as Clinical Associate Professor of Anesthesia at Indiana University School of Medicine. In this dual role as both clinician and educator, I see the impact of health policy decisions on both providers and the patients we serve, and I have been honored to receive awards from my institution and peers for my ability to educate, empower, and excite, our next generation of health leaders.

My final and toughest, but also my most important, job is to serve as father and mentor, to my 7, 11, and 13 year old children. My status as a father is significant as you consider my nomination, because for every policy discussion I take part in, I not only sympathize, but empathize, with parents regarding the potential impact. When making decisions, I literally have no choice but to think about both the immediate impact on our nation's children- my own children included- and the world I am leaving for future generations.

With a bit more of your indulgence, I will now briefly address what I hope to be my priorities if I'm confirmed. Our nation is facing a drug crisis. The addictive properties of prescription opioids is a scourge in America and it must be stopped. Secretary Price has declared addressing the opioid epidemic, and untreated mental illness, which lie at the root of much of the current situation, as among his top priorities. I share the Secretary's urgency at addressing this crisis and feel I bring to this discussion a unique perspective, and a proven track record of bringing together various groups to address the problem.

I also would make wellness and community and employer engagement a centerpiece of my agenda, if confirmed. We will not successfully tackle the opioid epidemic, or obesity, or healthcare access and cost, if we continue to focus on how we handle these problems after they've taken hold. Much of our national focus is on providing care after a person has already developed a disease, but far too often this represents multiple missed -and more cost effective- opportunities to have mitigated or even prevented the problem.

We also won't be able to solve these problems from Washington, DC. Our health starts in the communities where we live, learn, work, play, and go to school. We need to get out into those communities, learn about their obstacles and successes, share best practices, and help empower them to implement local solutions to their toughest problems. I know it may sound like a cliché but if confirmed, I hope to make America healthier. Healthy people and communities are more productive, and profitable, and in turn attract more jobs and prosperity.

Poor health, however, is proving to be a drag on our country's prosperity and worldwide competitiveness. Major corporations know this, and in many ways are doing better than our own health institutions to address the health and wellness of their employees. We need to work with the business community in a reciprocal relationship, to share best practices, and go beyond the workplace. Our goal should be to truly develop and rebuild communities around wellness, and prosperity.

I'd like to close my remarks by saying that I can't promise you that we will be in agreement on all health and health policy matters- we won't. I can't promise you that the office of the Surgeon General can fix all of the health and healthcare problems plaguing our nation. What I can in fact promise you is my unwavering commitment to finding and presenting the best scientific evidence, in both internal policy discussions, and external health education endeavors. I promise you that I will continue my strong and

well documented track record of reaching out to EVERYONE- regardless of their politics, beliefs, culture, or geography. And I promise you that, if confirmed, I will truly seek to be the Surgeon General for all of our United States- to the best of my ability a champion for everything our country aspires to and can be in terms of health and wellness.

I look forward to your questions, and, if confirmed, I look forward to working closely with all of you to improve our country's health.