



A Union of Professionals

## Tom Price—Secretary of Health and Human Services

Six-term U.S. Rep. Tom Price (R-Ga.) is Donald Trump's choice for secretary of health and human services. Price has been one of Congress' leading critics of Obamacare, and his record on health issues suggests that his leadership of HHS will negatively impact working families:

### OBAMACARE REPEAL

Trump's appointment of Rep. Price to head the Department of Health and Human Services shows that the president-elect is serious about repealing the Affordable Care Act. In October 2015, serving as chairman of the House Budget Committee, Price steered a reconciliation bill that sought to repeal the ACA. President Obama vetoed the bill.

### DIMINISHED PROTECTIONS FOR PEOPLE WITH PRE-EXISTING CONDITIONS

Tom Price proposed the Empowering Patients First Act to replace Obamacare. Price's bill weakens Obamacare's protections for people with pre-existing conditions by allowing insurers to charge sick people more if they fail to maintain continuous insurance coverage. The bill also would allow insurance plans to charge young people lower rates.<sup>1</sup>

### TAXES ON EMPLOYEE HEALTH BENEFITS

Price's ACA replacement bill would increase healthcare costs for those covered by an employer-sponsored health plan by limiting the employer tax exclusion for insurance to \$8,000 for individuals and \$20,000 for families. This is likely to hit teachers and other government employees the hardest. According to a 2016 Kaiser Family Foundation report, the average cost of an employer-sponsored health plan for individuals is \$6,435 and \$18,142 for families.<sup>2</sup> Public employee plans typically provide better benefits, which causes their average price to exceed the cost of private sector health plans.<sup>3</sup>

### MEDICARE PRIVATIZATION

Donald Trump's selection of Tom Price to head HHS signals that Trump is also likely to back congressional efforts to privatize Medicare. Two weeks after the election, acting in his role as Budget Committee chairman, Price announced that he and his congressional colleagues would be moving forward with an overhaul of Medicare "within the first six to eight months" of President-elect Donald Trump's administration.<sup>4</sup> The Republican House plan, authored by Paul Ryan, would replace traditional Medicare with a "premium support" system, under which seniors would get an allotment of money—a voucher—they can use to buy health insurance.<sup>5</sup>

### AN INCREASE IN CONSUMER MEDICAL DEBT

*Politico* has called Price, an orthopedic surgeon, a "fan of balance billing." Under balance billing, physicians and other providers can bill patients for an outstanding balance after an insurance company pays its portion of a medical bill. According to *Politico*, "Price has spent years arguing that physicians should be allowed to contract with Medicare patients on a fee and then bill those patients for any additional charges that go beyond Medicare's allowable limits. The proposal has alarmed patient advocates who say it would lead to surprise out-of-pocket bills for seniors."

In 2015, a nationwide study from Consumers Union found that almost one-third of privately insured Americans received an unanticipated bill when their health plan paid less than expected for medical services.<sup>6</sup> The 2017 budget for HHS sought to protect consumers from surprise out-of-network billing on the federal level by mandating that providers accept appropriate

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in-network rates as payment in full.<sup>7</sup> Given Price's position, it's unlikely consumers will find relief from HHS under Price's leadership.

## **DEFUNDING OF PLANNED PARENTHOOD AND DIMINISHED ACCESS TO FAMILY PLANNING RESOURCES**

Tom Price has a 100 percent voting record with the National Right to Life Center<sup>8</sup> and a 0 rating from Planned Parenthood<sup>9</sup> and NARAL Pro-Choice America.<sup>10</sup> Price co-sponsored the Title X Abortion Provider Prohibition Act in 2015 to prohibit federal funding for family planning assistance to an entity that provides abortion services. In 2007, Price co-sponsored a bill that would have extended constitutional protections to the unborn under the 14th Amendment.<sup>11</sup>

## **RESTRICTIONS ON ADVANCED PRACTICE REGISTERED NURSES SCOPE OF PRACTICE**

Price is firmly aligned with the positions of the American Medical Association, including its campaign to limit the scope of practice for advanced practice registered nurses, and has received significant campaign support from the AMA and other physicians organizations.<sup>12</sup>

Price sided with the AMA when he signed a letter to the Department of Veterans Affairs opposing a plan to let advanced practice registered nurses (APRNs) work independently without physician supervision.<sup>13</sup> The VA plan would have expanded veterans' access to care and shortened veterans' long wait times for appointments. APRNs are capable providers for primary care services and are essential to providing access to care in rural and other underserved areas. A 2007 study in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* found that physicians and APRNs practicing with the same level of authority and responsibility had comparable patient outcomes.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/house-bill/2300> See Also <http://www.vox.com/2016/11/28/13772342/trump-tom-price-obamacare> and <http://www.cnbc.com/2016/11/29/by-picking-tom-price-to-lead-hhs-trump-shows-hes-absolutely-serious-about-dismantling-obamacare.html>

<sup>2</sup> <http://files.kff.org/attachment/Report-Employer-Health-Benefits-2016-Annual-Survey>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/benefits/pages/employee-health-costs.aspx>

<sup>4</sup> <http://thehill.com/policy/healthcare/306540-house-gop-eying-major-medicare-overhaul-in-2017>

<sup>5</sup> <http://budget.house.gov/uploadedfiles/pathtoprosperityfy2012.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <http://consumersunion.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/CY-2015-SURPRISE-MEDICAL-BILLS-SURVEY-REPORT-PUBLIC.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/fy2017-budget-in-brief.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> <http://nrlc.capwiz.com/bio/id/2572&lvl=C&chamber=H>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.plannedparenthoodaction.org/congressional-scorecard#/georgia/301>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.prochoiceamerica.org/assets/download-files/2015-congressional-record.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.congress.gov/bill/110th-congress/house-bill/618>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.opensecrets.org/politicians/summary.php?cid=N00026160>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/863848>

<sup>14</sup> [http://content2.learntoday.info/shu/NU550\\_Summer\\_11/media/Mundingerprimary%20care%20outcomes%20in%20pt%20treated%20by%20NP%20or%20MD.pdf](http://content2.learntoday.info/shu/NU550_Summer_11/media/Mundingerprimary%20care%20outcomes%20in%20pt%20treated%20by%20NP%20or%20MD.pdf)