

AFL-CIO

LEGISLATIVE ALERT

November 28, 2017

The Honorable Orrin Hatch, Chairman
The Honorable Ron Wyden, Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Committee on Finance
219 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington DC 20510-6050

Dear Chairman Hatch and Ranking Member Wyden:

On behalf of the AFL-CIO, I urge you to oppose the nomination of pharmaceutical executive Alex M. Azar II to be Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). We believe he is absolutely the wrong choice for this position.

An HHS core mission is to improve the health of all Americans and that means improving access to quality affordable health care, including prescription drugs. It is well-documented that Americans face the highest prescription drug prices in the world and that these prices are driving up both health insurance costs and what patients must pay out of pocket.

There is, thus, no doubt that it is in the best interest of nation's working families that whoever is at the helm of HHS be committed to restraining the escalating costs of prescription drugs. But, to say the least, Mr. Azar's private sector employment is marked by efforts to thwart the achievement of this objective.

Until last January, for some ten years prior, Mr. Azar held a number of senior positions at Lily USA, the U.S. arm of the behemoth pharmaceutical company Eli Lilly and Co; for the last five years, he served as Lily USA company president. It was while Mr. Azar was at Lily that the company raised the price of an in-demand insulin product by over a thousand percent. During his tenure, the company also spent millions of dollars on state and federal lobbyists to block any legislative efforts that would require more transparency in prescription drug pricing—his company consistently opposed a mere requirement that drug companies justify their prices or explain their price hikes.

Further, Mr. Azar has been a member of the Biotechnology Innovation Organization (BIO), the primary lobbying group for the biotech industry in their effort to fight drug price transparency and defend their patents to keep prices high, and the head of a biopharmaceutical and health care consulting firm, Seraphim Strategies LLC. As HHS Secretary, his charge would include overseeing agencies that regulate companies run by his former colleagues and clients. Nothing in his record suggests that he is committed to challenging the interests that he has been paid to represent."

The American people need and deserve an HHS Secretary who understand that the solution to soaring health care costs is not to make working people and retirees pay more for needed health services and medicine, or to go without. Based on his record, Mr. Azar is not that person. Because we believe that working people should be the beneficiaries, not the targets, of our health care policies, we urge you to vote against this nomination.

Thank you for your consideration of our views.

Sincerely,



William Samuel, Director
Government Affairs Department

Cc: all members, Senate HELP Committee

American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations

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