



Why we support Dr. Price to lead HHS



Patrice A. Harris, MD
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The AMA supports the nomination of Dr. Tom Price based on decades of interactions with him as a member of the AMA House of Delegates, Georgia state senator and as member of the House of Representatives since 2005. Over these years, there have been important policy issues on which we agreed (medical liability reform) and others on which we disagreed (passage of the Affordable Care Act). Two things that have been consistent is his understanding of the many challenges facing patients and physicians today, and his willingness to listen directly to concerns expressed by the AMA and other physician groups.

An orthopaedic surgeon for nearly twenty years, Dr. Price would be the first physician to serve as secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services since President George H.W. Bush appointed Louis W. Sullivan, MD, in 1989, and only the third doctor to serve as secretary of the department in its 63-year history. That physician background will provide important perspective within the president's cabinet. Too often, health policy makers and regulators give short shrift to the real-world impact their plans and decisions can have on how patient care is delivered.

Even prior to his 2004 election to Congress, Dr. Price brought his physician experience to bear on health policy as a member of the Georgia Senate, where he served on the Health and Human Services Committee and supported efforts to improve child safety and expand patient choice. The AMA recognized his state legislative work with the Dr. Nathan Davis Award. More recently, Dr. Price has taken part as a speaker in AMA-organized policy events, such as a 2015 tele-town hall that prompted conversation on how to [chart a better course](#) on electronic health records.

An open door

A mainstay through the years has been Dr. Price's commitment to seek out and hear the concerns expressed by the AMA and other physician organizations. Even so, our support for Dr. Price to lead HHS should not be taken as an endorsement of every policy position he has advocated.

The conversation surrounding President-elect Trump's HHS choice caused me to reflect on a similar episode in the history of U.S. health care. When Ronald Reagan named pediatric surgeon C. Everett Koop, MD, as surgeon general, the move prompted a flurry of opposition based on Dr. Koop's fervent opposition to abortion.

Despite that early resistance, Dr. Koop went on to become a powerful and constructive voice during the AIDS epidemic, helping to advance education, prevention and treatment responses that reduced stigma, deaths and suffering. He also released eight reports on tobacco use's baleful health consequences and promoted the goal of a smoke-free society. Dr. Koop's one-time opponents later cited him as a role model for how the U.S. surgeon general can help the nation face serious health care challenges.

The AMA will actively engage Dr. Price, other leaders in the incoming Trump administration and Congress in discussions on the health system's future direction. We remain devoted to improving health insurance coverage so that patients receive timely, high-quality care, preventive services and other necessary medical treatments. And for us, a core principle with regard to any proposed [health system reform](#) is that it [should not cause anyone who has health insurance coverage now to lose it](#).

We look forward to a continuing conversation with Dr. Price as we work together on the health care priorities where we share common ground.

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