

Trump's HHS pick brings physician, policy experience to role

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President-elect Trump has announced that he will nominate Georgia Rep. Tom Price, MD, to serve as secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). If confirmed by the Senate, Dr. Price would be the first physician since fellow Georgian Louis Sullivan, MD, a hematologist, to serve as HHS secretary.

Dr. Price, an orthopaedic surgeon who represents Georgia's 6th congressional district, would be only the third doctor to fill the top spot in the six-decade history of the agency, stretching back to when it was structured as the Department of Health, Education and Welfare. Family physician Otis Bowen, MD, appointed by Ronald Reagan in 1985, was the first doctor to serve as HHS secretary. The HHS secretary oversees nearly 80,000 employees at agencies such as the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Food and Drug Administration.

AMA Board of Trustees Chair Patrice A. Harris, MD, said the Association "strongly supports" Dr. Price's nomination.

"His service as a physician, state legislator and member of the U.S. Congress provides a depth of experience to lead HHS," she said in a statement. "Dr. Price has been a leader in the development of health policies to advance patient choice and market-based solutions as well as reduce excessive regulatory burdens that diminish time devoted to patient care and increase costs."

"We urge the Senate to promptly consider and confirm Dr. Price for this important role," Dr. Harris added.

Prior to his election to Congress in 2004, Dr. Price—an AMA member—served as assistant professor of medicine at Emory University School of Medicine and as medical director of the orthopedic clinic at Grady Memorial Hospital, in Atlanta. He completed his surgical residency at Emory, and earned his medical degree from the University of Michigan Medical School. Dr. Price currently chairs the House Budget Committee. He previously chaired the House Republican Policy Committee and Republican

Study Committee.

Dr. Price in May introduced the Empowering Patients Act to fully replace the Affordable Care Act with a combination of age-adjusted refundable tax credits, incentives to encourage use of health savings accounts, medical liability reforms, \$1 billion in federal funding for state-run high-risk insurance pools, and other health system changes. In a statement issued at the time, Dr. Price said the bill would “get Washington out of the way while protecting and strengthening the doctor-patient relationship.”

In October, Dr. Price joined two other members of the House GOP Doctors Caucus to contribute their views on the ACA’s “flaws” and outline health system reform alternatives as part of the JAMA Forum weblog. “No one is talking about returning to the pre-ACA status quo,” they wrote, “but there is a better way to achieve health system reform in this country.”

At the 2016 AMA Interim Meeting, the House of Delegates adopted a resolution voicing “firm commitment” to current AMA policy on health system reform. “The AMA remains committed to improving health insurance coverage so that patients receive timely, high-quality care, preventive services, medications and other necessary treatments,” AMA President Andrew W. Gurman, MD, said at the time, pointing to the comprehensive policy framework the Association has refined over the last two decades. A core AMA policy principle, Dr. Gurman added, is that proposed reforms should not cause patients currently insured to become uninsured.

During the presidential campaign, Donald Trump pledged to “repeal and replace” the Affordable Care Act. But following a 90-minute meeting with President Obama days after the Associated Press declared him the electoral college winner, the real-estate magnate and former reality TV star said he would be open to maintaining elements of the ACA. Those reportedly include ACA provisions such as the one that bars insurers from denying coverage or setting rates based on a patient’s pre-existing health condition and another that allows parents to cover their children as health-plan dependents through age 25.