

Attorney General Becerra is a leader in protecting reproductive rights. He is a leader in expanding mental healthcare services. He is a leader in the fight against the opioid epidemic. He is a leader for LGBTQ health and for ending the disparities.

We are in a racial justice movement now, a racial justice movement that is seeking to end those deep disparities, causing twice as many people in communities of color to die during the pandemic and only half as many now to have the vaccine so far because we have lived through 4 years of dishonesty and disregard for science and 4 years of attacks on our healthcare system, particularly for the underserved.

That is the challenge, among others, that Attorney General Becerra will confront. He will be vigorous, brave, and tough, and he will work to lower the cost of prescription drugs. He will take on those interests that may be against the healthcare goals and purposes of the American people. And we need him now more than ever in this critical position. I urge my colleagues to vote for him tomorrow when we have the chance to do so.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. OSSOFF). The Senator from California.

GEORGIA SHOOTINGS

Mr. PADILLA. Mr. President, I want to begin by joining with so many of our colleagues and leaders around the country expressing our condolences to the victims of the senseless shootings in Atlanta yesterday, in sharing our thoughts and prayers to their families and friends. Our heart goes out to the greater community, and, of course, we stand here to not only try to understand better what happened, how it happened, but do the work necessary to try to ensure that it doesn't happen again—not in Atlanta, not anywhere in the United States of America.

NOMINATION OF XAVIER BECERRA

Mr. President, I rise today to speak in support of the nomination of my friend California Attorney General Xavier Becerra to serve as Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services.

As we all know, as we all feel, our Nation is going through one of the toughest health crises in our history. The COVID-19 pandemic has taken an incredible toll on our country. Every State has been impacted. Every community has suffered, especially working-class communities and communities of color, like the very neighborhoods that Attorney General Becerra and I grew up in. These communities are hurting and people are dying at alarming rates, and they desperately need someone who knows these communities to their core.

Throughout his career, Xavier Becerra has always fought to improve the lives of his constituents. As the first Latino attorney general of California, he made it his mission to tackle the structural inequalities in our healthcare system. As has been ref-

erenced already, Attorney General Becerra was the leading force behind the lawsuit to protect the Affordable Care Act. Yes, he had the audacity to maintain protections for people with preexisting conditions and for those suffering from a mental illness. Over the course of this past year, he has also fought to protect frontline healthcare workers from further exposure to COVID-19.

Xavier Becerra's parents emigrated from Mexico, just like my parents did, with a dream of building a better life for themselves and their family. Just a few days ago, I spoke in this Chamber about my family's history and journey in this country. A hard-working short-order cook and housekeeper raised the son who now serves in the U.S. Senate. The same is true for Xavier Becerra's family. He, the son of a construction and clerical worker, is on the verge of becoming the most important health official in our Nation. That is the American dream.

But, unfortunately, tragically, over half a million Americans have had their dream cut short by COVID-19, over half a million lives lost and millions more lives upended by this pandemic. We need to act with urgency to end this crisis—urgency.

But as I rise today to address this Chamber, urgency is severely lacking. While millions of Americans continue to struggle, our Republican colleagues are dragging things out, playing politics with the confirmation of Attorney General Becerra, one of the most qualified nominees to lead the Department of Health and Human Services that this Chamber has ever considered. They have distorted his record.

Let me point out that many Members of this Senate have worked alongside Xavier Becerra here in Congress for decades. Republicans and Democrats know Xavier Becerra is both a thoughtful leader and someone who is always willing to listen to both sides of an argument. He built an outstanding reputation in the House, both as a legislator and as a colleague.

As attorney general of California, overseeing the largest department of justice in the Nation, second only to the U.S. Department of Justice, Xavier showed no fear in working across the aisle. In fact, he partnered with Republican attorneys general to increase access to lifesaving drugs to treat COVID-19. He worked across the aisle to protect drug discounts for health centers.

I can't help but point out the obvious. In fact, I am prepared to make this abundantly clear to the American people. The cynical delays and political games that we see being played are not actually about Mr. Becerra's qualifications. He is just as qualified as any of his predecessors. Sadly, Xavier Becerra is being held to a different standard—a different standard than other nominees this Chamber has supported and confirmed over the last 4 years, including our most recent Health and Human Services Secretary.

Let me also say this. As some of the first Latinos in our respective positions, both Xavier and I are not unfamiliar with being held to a different standard. It is a different standard today that is so stark that our colleagues are willing to delay his confirmation through the night. Yes, in the middle of a global health pandemic, Republicans are holding up the nominee for Secretary of Health and Human Services. They are holding up the first Latino nominee to head this critical agency during a pandemic that has disproportionately devastated the Latino community.

It is time to let Xavier Becerra get to work. I urge my colleagues to end the delay on Xavier Becerra's confirmation for Secretary of Health and Human Services.

Thank you, Mr. President.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. PADILLA. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to legislative session and be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

(At the request of Mr. SCHUMER, the following statement was ordered to be printed in the RECORD.)

VOTE EXPLANATION

● Ms. HIRONO. Mr. President, I was necessarily absent for votes on March 17, 2021, so I could return to Hawaii to tend to a family matter.

On March 17, had I been present, I would have voted yea on confirmation: Katherine C. Tai, of the District of Columbia, to be United States Trade Representative, Rollcall vote 123.

Mr. President, I was necessarily absent for votes on March 17, 2021, so I could return to Hawaii to tend to a family matter.

On March 17, had I been present, I would have voted yea on cloture motion: Xavier Becerra, of California, to be Secretary of Health and Human Services, Rollcall vote 124.●

(At the request of Mr. SCHUMER, the following statement was ordered to be printed in the RECORD.)

CONFIRMATION OF KATHERINE C. TAI

● Ms. HIRONO. Mr. President, I rise to support the nomination of Katherine Tai to serve as the next United States Trade Representative. When confirmed, Ms. Tai will be the first woman of color and first Asian American to lead the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative.

Katherine Tai's story is America's story. Her parents came to the United

States as graduate students and remained here to make a better life for themselves and their family, her father as a researcher at the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center and her mother as a scientist for the National Institutes of Health.

Given her parents' background, Katherine is no stranger to public service, and through her parents' hard work and dedication to make a better life for their daughter, she was able to attend Yale University and Harvard Law, became a talented trade lawyer, and was nominated by President Biden to lead the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative. I have a deep appreciation for the Tais, their work ethic and their commitment to family, Representation matters, and Ms. Tai will be a representative for the United States in more ways than one.

Ms. Tai is a highly-qualified nominee with the experience to lead the U.S. trade policy at a critical time for our country, specifically as we continue to recover from the damage wrought by the coronavirus pandemic and rebuild our relationships with our allies abroad. She is a person who can help mend relationships and restore alliances.

Supporters have described her as a knowledgeable, tenacious trade expert who will work with a cross-section of advocates and stakeholders with the goal of bettering the lives of the American people and strengthening our economy at all levels. They have described her willingness to build coalitions across party lines, highlighting her broad support from both Democrats and Republicans, and from the labor, business, and environmental communities. They have referred to her time as a trade lawyer at the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, where she worked to enforce trade agreements with China to hold that country accountable before the World Trade Organization. They have highlighted her time as a lawyer with the House Ways and Means Committee, where she built partnerships and crafted agreements that received broad bipartisan approval. These included the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Trade Agreement, which passed the Senate by an 89-10 vote and the House by a 385-41 vote. Ms. Tai played a key role in crafting the agreement, which speaks to her skills and experience.

Perhaps more importantly, however, Ms. Tai will prioritize trade policies that promote workers, families, the environment, and local communities. I met with Ms. Tai just after President Biden nominated her, and during our conversation, it was clear she understands that trade policies have real world implications for everyday people. She knows that if trade deals are not working for people, then they need to change. People need to come first as we develop trade deals. At a time when people are still working to recover from the coronavirus, Ms. Tai is the Trade Representative we need for the United States.

A family emergency has prevented me from being here for today's vote, but if I were present, I would have voted to confirm Katherine Tai as U.S. Trade Representative.

I strongly urge my colleagues to support her nomination.●

NOMINATION OF XAVIER BECERRA

Mrs. FEINSTEIN. Mr. President, I rise today in support of Xavier Becerra's nomination to be Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

I am proud to have known Xavier Becerra for many years as both a friend and colleague. He has spent decades serving California, including as the State's attorney general and as a 12-term Congressman from Los Angeles.

Mr. Becerra was the first in his family to receive a 4-year college degree, earning his bachelor of arts in economics from Stanford University and, later, his juris doctorate from Stanford Law School. As a member of the House of Representatives, he was a strong advocate for the healthcare of his constituents and fought to make the Affordable Care Act law. And as California attorney general he has been a staunch defender of the Affordable Care Act, leading 20 States and the District of Columbia in defense of the Affordable Care Act before the Supreme Court.

As part of his focus on protecting the health of Americans, Mr. Becerra has worked on a bipartisan basis with multistate coalitions of attorneys general on issues still affecting our country today. These include the need to reduce youth exposure to tobacco products like e-cigarettes, increasing access to COVID-19 treatments, as well as addressing the opioid epidemic and the considerable harm it has caused families.

As our State's attorney general, Mr. Becerra has led the Nation's second largest department of justice behind only the U.S. Department of Justice. His experience leading large and diverse organizations will position him to successfully lead the Department of Health and Human Services, which is the Nation's largest Federal agency by budget.

As Secretary, he will lead the Nation's top health agency charged with enhancing the health and well-being of all Americans. In this global pandemic, he will play a lead role in overseeing the implementation of President Biden's national strategy for COVID-19 response, which is vital to defeating the virus that has plagued our country for far too long. His history-making nomination as the first Latino to manage this Department comes at a time when this pandemic is affecting communities of color at much higher rates than white Americans. And those of us who know him personally know the level of his concern and the strength of his dedication to protect the health and safety of all hard-working Americans and their families.

In short, Xavier Becerra is the right candidate to lead the Department of Health and Human Services at this time, and I strongly urge the Senate to confirm his nomination. Thank you.

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Mr. President, today I rise to speak in support of Xavier Becerra's nomination to serve as Secretary of Health and Human Services, HHS.

Attorney General Becerra will bring a fresh perspective to HHS at a critical time during this pandemic. While there is light at the end of the tunnel with the distribution of the corona virus vaccines, there is still work to do to end this pandemic and put our country on a road to recovery, and that is where Attorney General Becerra's leadership will be crucial.

Attorney General Becerra's 12 terms in the U.S. House of Representatives gave him a solid foundation in knowing how to set agendas and achieve results, which we saw deployed in his work as a key leader on the Committee on Ways and Means ranking member of the Subcommittee on Social Security, and chair of the House Democratic caucus.

He helped to expand the Children's Health Insurance Program, modernize and strengthen Medicare, and helped pass the Affordable Care Act. His commitment to the letter and spirit of this law is something he carried into his role as California attorney general, fighting to maintain his State's ability to bring millions of previously uninsured residents under the Affordable Care Act's umbrella.

Last November, he led the defense of the Affordable Care Act in the U.S. Supreme Court on behalf of 20 States and the District of Columbia. His tweet after the oral arguments concisely sums up the national importance of his effort: "The ACA saves lives. It is the law of the land." He brings a strong commitment to using the law and regulatory tools to make access to health care and other vital services equitable—the very thing that makes our Nation strong.

I look forward to working with him on ensuring that everyone has access to quality and affordable healthcare, and I know he will be a partner in the fight against the corona virus and our goal of getting all eligible Americans vaccinated, even in hard-to-reach areas.

Last week, President Biden signed into law the American Rescue Plan Act, which included major funding to address the—Nation's worsening mental health and addiction crisis. This is a high priority of mine and an issue which Attorney General Becerra has firsthand experience. He started his career as a legal aid attorney in Massachusetts, supporting clients contending with mental health issues. I am eager to work with him on this issue.

Addressing the skyrocketing costs of prescription drugs is another area where Attorney General Becerra has shown key leadership. He and I share a belief that fairer competition means