



Profiles in Courage

**LEADERS EMPOWERING
UNDERSERVED POPULATIONS
IN CONGRESS**



HEALTH EQUITY COLLABORATIVE

White Paper

March 2025

The Health Equity Collaborative

healthequitycollaborative.org



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About the Author

The Health Equity Collaborative (HEC) is a diverse community comprised of dozens of national, public health, patient advocacy, and multicultural organizations that are committed to supporting equity and combating disparities experienced by underserved populations. HEC is officially a project of MANA Action Fund, a 501c4 not-for-profit organization.

Introduction

Healthcare champions in Congress are crucial for addressing systemic disparities in health access and outcomes. In the 118th Congress, we have seen lawmakers champion policies that prioritize underserved communities, advocate for increased funding for preventive care and social determinants of health, and hold healthcare institutions accountable for equitable practices. By amplifying the voices of marginalized groups and pushing for evidence-based solutions, healthcare champions play a vital role in creating a more just and equitable healthcare system for all Americans. Their dedication to ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to achieve optimal health is essential for building a healthier and more prosperous society.

This report highlights members of the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate who have led notable initiatives in the 118th Congress and will continue to champion the priorities of underserved populations in the year ahead.

COMMITMENT TO
EXPANDING ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE SERVICES



Senator Cory Booker (D-NJ)

BIOGRAPHY

Cory Booker, a northern New Jersey native, earned undergraduate and master's degrees from Stanford University, where he also played varsity football, volunteered for the peer counseling center, and wrote for the student newspaper. After Stanford, he was awarded a Rhodes Scholarship and went on to study at the University of Oxford, and then Yale Law School, where he graduated in 1997. After law school, Cory moved to Newark, New Jersey and launched a nonprofit to provide legal service for low-income individuals. He was elected to the Newark City Council and later as Mayor. In 2013, he won a special election to be U.S. Senator.¹

COMMITMENT TO

EXPANDING ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE SERVICES



IN CONGRESS

Senator Booker has been a tireless leader and champion for health equity in America. As U.S. Senator, he was the lead sponsor of the Black Maternal Health Momnibus Act, which combines 13 pieces of legislation supported by the Maternal Health Caucus aimed at improving the healthcare system in areas of workforce, payment, and social risk, among others for people in need. The force of support for this legislation has led to substantial investments in critical areas.² “It’s time to prioritize the well-being of all, eliminate racial and ethnic disparities for Black and Brown moms, and create a brighter and healthier future for all families,” Booker stated at the time of the bill’s introduction.³

Booker has also been the lead sponsor of the Health Equity and Accountability Act, of which he said would “help address poor health outcomes, increase the availability of mental health services, address diseases that disproportionately impact minorities, and strengthen our health infrastructure -- all of which will help make sure quality health care is a right, not a privilege.”⁴ He is also the lead sponsor of the Supporting Innovative Global Health Technologies (SIGHT) Act, and a co-sponsor of the Health Equity Innovation Act. Booker serves on the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry, and the Small Business Committee, among other assignments.

COMMITMENT TO
EXPANDING ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE SERVICES

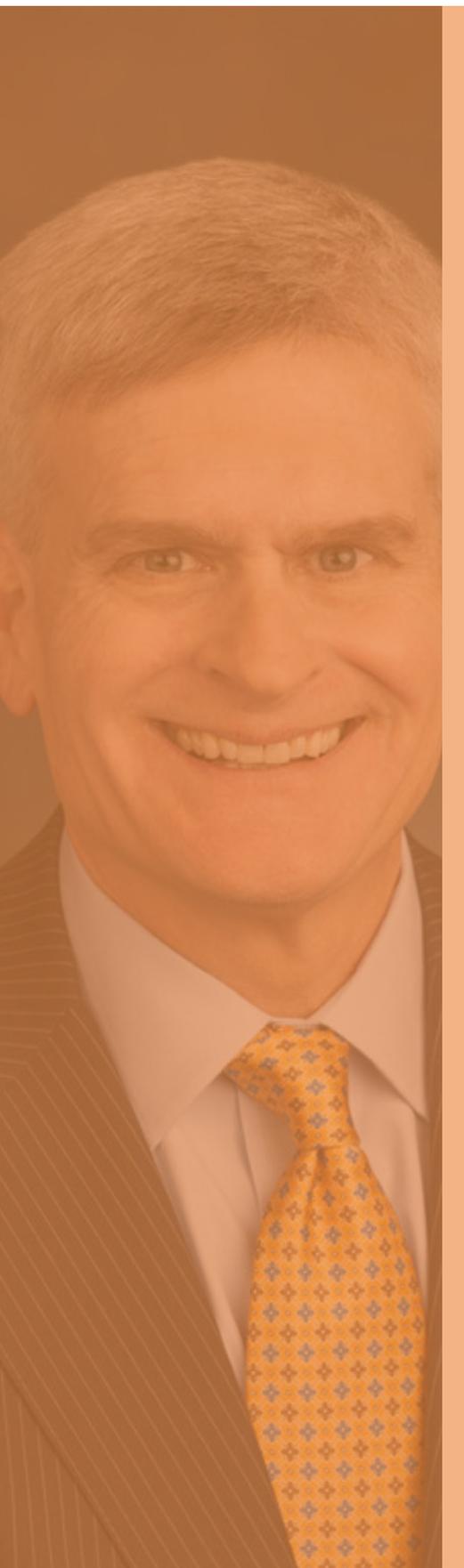


Senator Bill Cassidy, MD (R-LA)

BIOGRAPHY

Bill Cassidy grew up in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. He attended Louisiana State University for both undergraduate and medical school. In 1990, he taught at the medical school and at Earl K. Long Hospital, which serves uninsured patients. During his time teaching, he co-founded the Greater Baton Rouge Community Clinic, a clinic providing free dental and health care to the working uninsured. Bill also created a private-public partnership to vaccinate 36,000 greater Baton Rouge area children against Hepatitis B at no cost to the schools or parents. In 2006, Cassidy won a seat in the Louisiana State Senate, and in 2008 he was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives (LA-06). In 2014, he was elected to the U.S. Senate. He is married to Dr. Laura Cassidy, and they have three children and one grandchild. Laura is a retired general surgeon specializing in breast cancer. She helped found a public charter school to teach children with dyslexia. The Cassidy family attends church at the Chapel on the Campus in Baton Rouge.⁵

COMMITMENT TO
EXPANDING ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE SERVICES



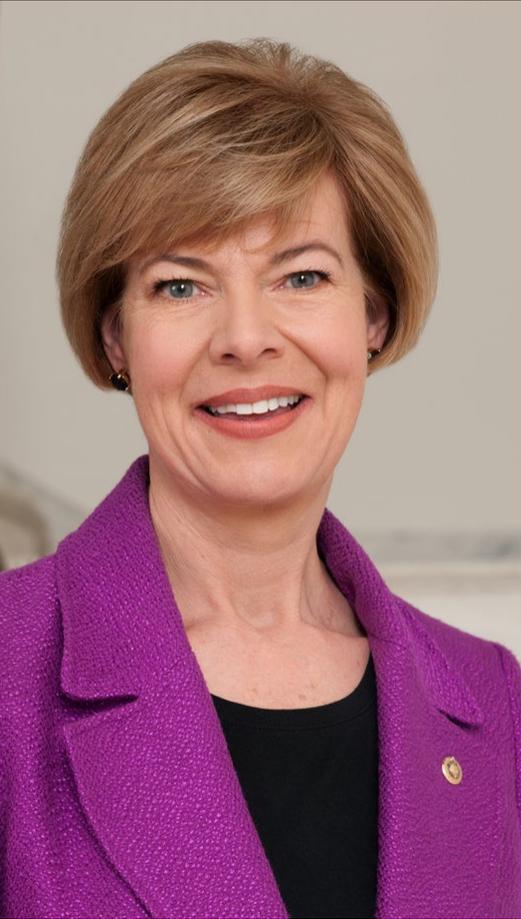
IN CONGRESS

Senator Cassidy has made improving the U.S. healthcare system a top priority. He now serves as Chairman of the Health, Education, Labor, & Pensions Committee, and is a senior member of the Senate Finance Committee. Together, these two committees play an enormous role setting and overseeing federal healthcare policy.

Senator Cassidy has been a lead sponsor of the John Lewis National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities Research Endowment Revitalization Act, to invest in critical research on the subject and to help increase diversity in the scientific community. Upon introduction of the legislation, Senator Cassidy said, “As a doctor who worked in Louisiana’s charity hospital system and now a senator, providing quality health care to underserved communities is a priority. Universities like Xavier in Louisiana are doing great research to address minority health disparities. This legislation supports their efforts.”⁶

In 2024, Senator Cassidy released a white paper with recommendations on how to improve the National Institutes of Health (NIH). The paper’s recommendations aim to ensure patients gain access innovative medical treatments in a timely fashion, increase transparency at the NIH, reduce unnecessary obstacles to research, and help recruit top biomedical researchers.⁷

COMMITMENT TO
REFORMING THE HEALTH CARE DELIVERY SYSTEM



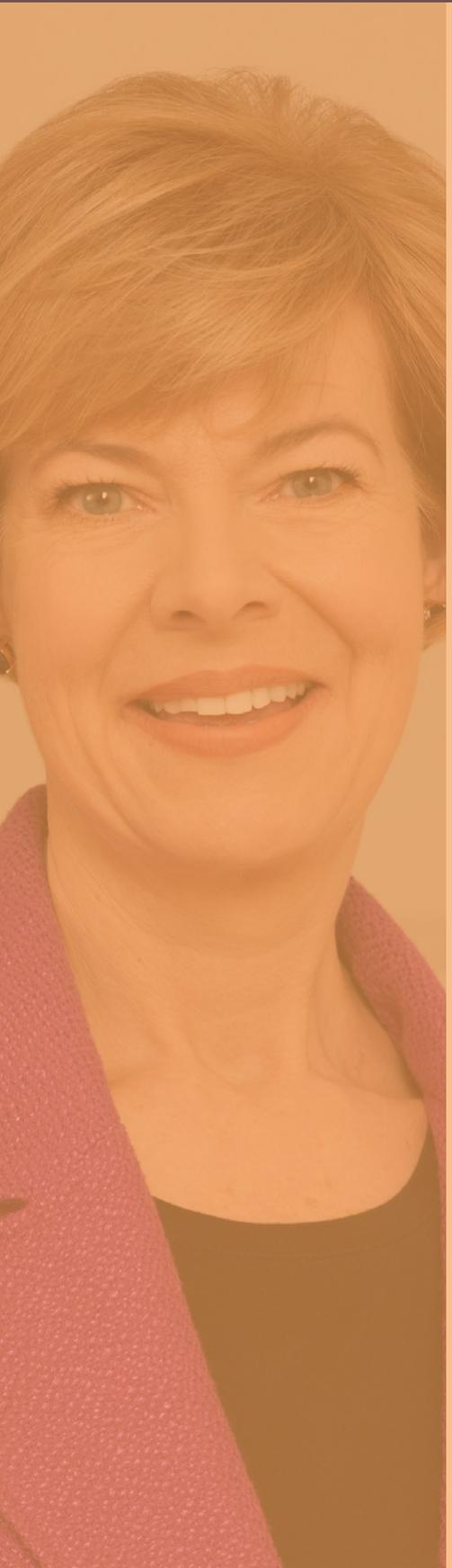
Senator Tammy Baldwin (D-WI)

BIOGRAPHY

Tammy Baldwin was raised by her grandparents in Wisconsin. When she was nine years old, she was diagnosed with a serious childhood illness similar to spinal meningitis that required her to stay three months in the hospital. Because she was ineligible to be covered as a dependent through her grandparents' health insurance, they had to make great sacrifices to pay for her care. After Tammy recovered, her grandparents were unable to find an insurance plan that would cover her, due to her prior illness. Tammy thus has firsthand experience of being denied coverage due to a "pre-existing condition."

Tammy later served as her grandmother's primary caregiver. Her experiences have given her extensive personal knowledge of the healthcare system, and have been a motivating force behind her public service. While a student at the University of Wisconsin Law School, she served on the Madison Common Council. She was subsequently elected to four terms on the Dane County Board of Supervisors, and in 1992, elected to the Wisconsin State Assembly. In 1998, she was elected Wisconsin's first female member of Congress. While representing Wisconsin's 2nd Congressional District, she led the successful effort to include the provision in the Affordable Care Act that allows young people to stay on their parents' health insurance plans up to age 26. In 2012, she was elected to the U.S. Senate.

COMMITMENT TO
REFORMING THE HEALTH CARE DELIVERY SYSTEM



IN CONGRESS

As a U.S. Senator, Tammy Baldwin has fought to reform the 340B prescription drug pricing program, which has veered away from its intended mission to help make prescription drugs affordable to people in need. In 2020, she signed a bipartisan letter to the Obama Administration calling for an end to drug manufacturers obstructing the program and even denying discounts to entities that are essential to the program's success. The letter read, in part: *"In the midst of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, where providers have seen drops in revenue and available resources, it is critically important that 340B covered entities, including federally qualified health centers (FQHCs), FQHC Look-Alikes, children's hospitals, Ryan White HIV/AIDS clinics, and other safety-net hospitals and providers are able to continue to serve the individuals who seek out their care."*⁸ Because of these and other efforts to shed light on abuses of the 340B program, critical reforms are closer than ever to being implemented.

Senator Baldwin has also led in fighting to keep the interests of private equity from interfering with healthcare quality, cost, and access. In 2024, she introduced the Health Over Wealth Act, legislation that would require greater transparency for private equity firms and for-profit companies that own health care entities, including hospitals, nursing homes, and mental or behavioral health facilities. The legislation would also establish safeguards for both patients and healthcare workers, putting their well-being ahead of private equity profits. Upon introducing the legislation, Baldwin stated, "Private equity firms use the health care system Wisconsinites rely on as just another way to make a quick buck, prioritizing profits over people – leading to worse care for patients and worse treatment of health care workers."⁹

COMMITMENT TO
REFORMING THE HEALTH CARE DELIVERY SYSTEM



Representative Diana Harshbarger (R-TN-01)

BIOGRAPHY

A native Tennessean, Congresswoman Diana Harshbarger was the first in her immediate family to graduate from high school and college. She attended East Tennessee State University and graduated from Mercer University College of Pharmacy with a Doctor of Pharmacy degree. After graduation, she started a business and raised her family in Tennessee. In 2020, she was elected to represent Tennessee's First Congressional District.¹⁰

Diana is an active member of her Kingsport community, teaching Sunday school, and helping with her church's mission work and the work of other local non-profits. Further, she is a member of the local Chamber of Commerce and a former board member of the International Academy of Compounding Pharmacists. Diana and her husband have one son and two grandsons.¹¹

COMMITMENT TO

REFORMING THE HEALTH CARE DELIVERY SYSTEM



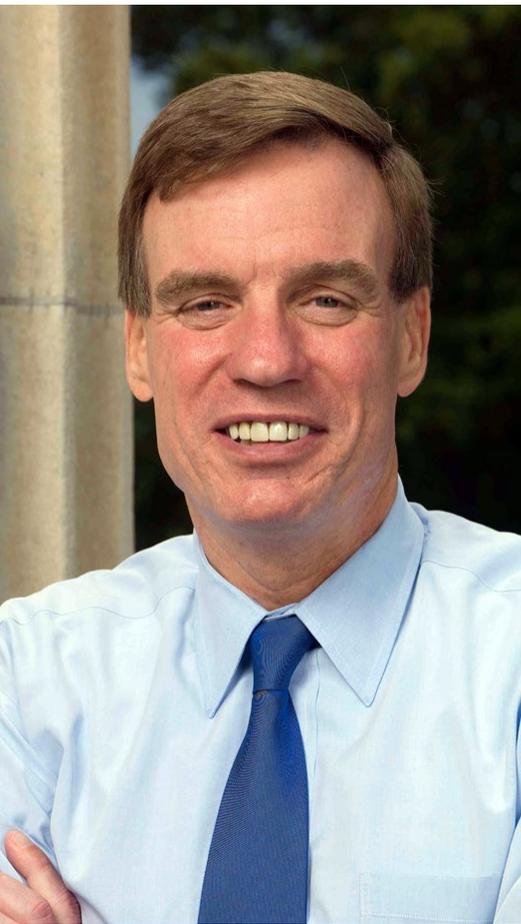
IN CONGRESS

As a pharmacist with firsthand knowledge of the inner workings of the healthcare system with regards to prescription drugs, Congresswoman Harshbarger has sought reforms of the 340B prescription drug discount program. In 2024, she co-introduced the *340B Affording Care for Communities and Ensuring a Strong Safety-Net Act (340B ACCESS Act)*. This legislation would establish much-needed oversight and transparency of the 340B program - while providing clear, practical, and achievable solutions to ensure the 340B program to ensure it benefits the people in need that it is intended to serve.

Upon the bill's introduction, Harshbarger stated, "The 340B program is a vital resource for safety-net providers serving low-income and vulnerable patients, but current loopholes have allowed the benefits of discounted drug costs to be misused and siphoned off instead of helping disadvantaged patients afford their treatments. [This legislation] will put in place much-needed reforms to protect and strengthen the 340B program for rural and safety-net providers, and the communities in Tennessee and across the country that rely on it."¹²

Harshbarger is a member of the House Energy and Commerce Committee's Subcommittee on Health. She is also a member of the GOP Doctor's Caucus.

COMMITMENT TO
LOWERING THE PRICE OF MEDICINES



Senator Mark Warner (D-VA)

BIOGRAPHY

Mark Warner was the first in his family to graduate from college (George Washington University, 1977). In 1980, he graduated from Harvard Law School. After his schooling, he spent 20 years as a successful technology and business leader in Virginia before moving into public service. From 2002 to 2006, he served as Governor of Virginia. He was first elected to the U.S. Senate in 2008. Sen. Warner and his wife live in Alexandria, Virginia. They have three daughters.¹³

COMMITMENT TO
LOWERING THE PRICE OF MEDICINES



IN CONGRESS

Senator Warner has been a leader in efforts to reform the PBM system to make prescription drugs more affordable for people in need. Warner has stated, “For too long, and without any transparency, pharmacy middlemen have moved away from their origins negotiating to bring prices down on behalf of insurers and consumers and have instead moved toward extracting profit, leading to higher drug prices, more federal spending, and bigger out-of-pocket costs.”¹⁴

With badly needed reforms to the Pharmacy Benefit Manager (PBM) program near the finish line in 2024, Senator Warner sent a letter to his Senate colleagues urging these reforms to be included in an end-of-year legislative package. These reforms would improve payments for prescription drugs in Medicaid, and help ensure the Medicare Part D program works better for seniors.¹⁵ Senator Warner has also been the lead sponsor of the PBM Reporting Transparency Act. This legislation would require PBMs to report their spending, to help ensure savings from prescription drug discounts are passed along to patients in need.¹⁶

Senator Warner is a member of the Senate Finance Committee.

COMMITMENT TO
LOWERING THE PRICE OF MEDICINES



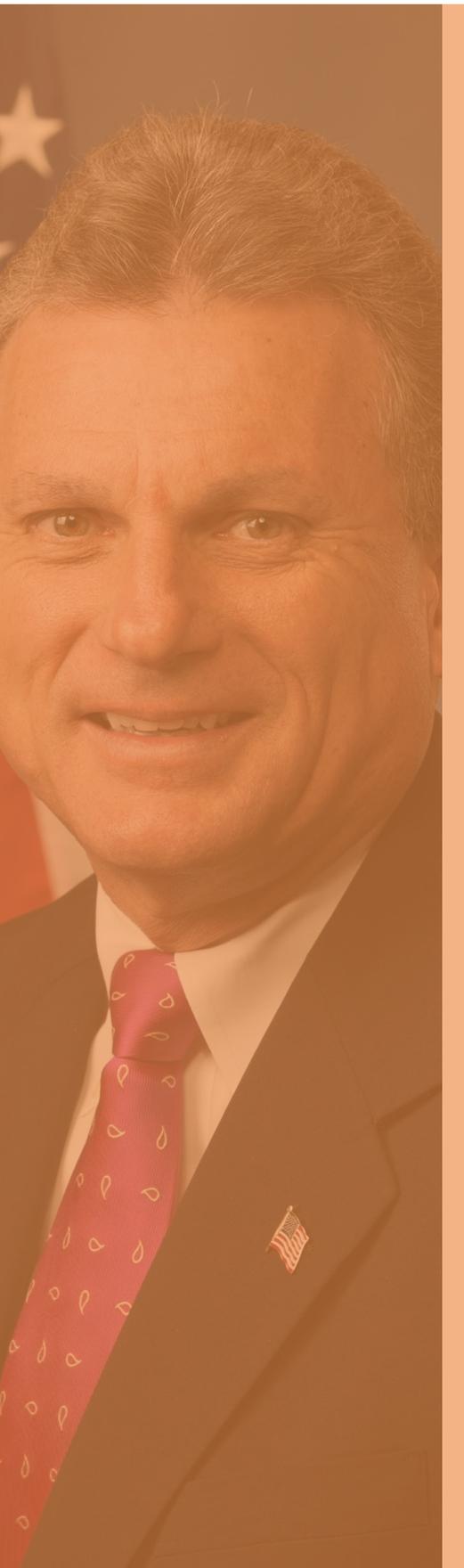
Representative Buddy Carter (R-GA-01)

BIOGRAPHY

A lifelong Georgia resident, Earl L. “Buddy” Carter attended Young Harris College and the University of Georgia where he earned his Bachelor of Science in Pharmacy. For over 30 years, he owned Carter’s Pharmacy, Inc. Before being elected to represent

Georgia’s First Congressional District in 2014, he served as Mayor of Pooler, Georgia and in the Georgia General Assembly. He is married to his college sweetheart, Amy. They have three sons, three daughters-in-law and eight grandchildren.

COMMITMENT TO
LOWERING THE PRICE OF MEDICINES



IN CONGRESS

Representative Carter sponsored the Lower Costs, More Transparency Act, which passed the U.S. House of Representatives. Among other measures, this bill would require PBMs to report spending, fees, and rebates, to help ensure discounted prescription drug prices resulted in lower costs for people in need.¹⁷

Carter has also sponsored the Drug Price Transparency in Medicaid Act, which would establish oversight of, and accountability for, PBM tactics that are threatening patient access to health care and increasing prescription drug spending in Medicaid programs. Upon the bill's introduction, he stated, "PBMs have been allowed to rob patients, small businesses, and taxpayers blind for decades. As a pharmacist, I've seen firsthand how patients have been forced to stay sick and forgo medication due to the broken process. With this bill, we can hold PBMs accountable for their role in increasing the cost of health care and pocketing taxpayer money. I am proud to have bipartisan support and commitment to protecting the lives, health, and pocketbooks of patients across America."¹⁸

Representative Carter is the Chair of the House Energy and Commerce Committee's Subcommittee on Health.

COMMITMENT TO
PROMOTING HEALTHCARE INNOVATION



Representative Nanette Barragán (D-CA-44)

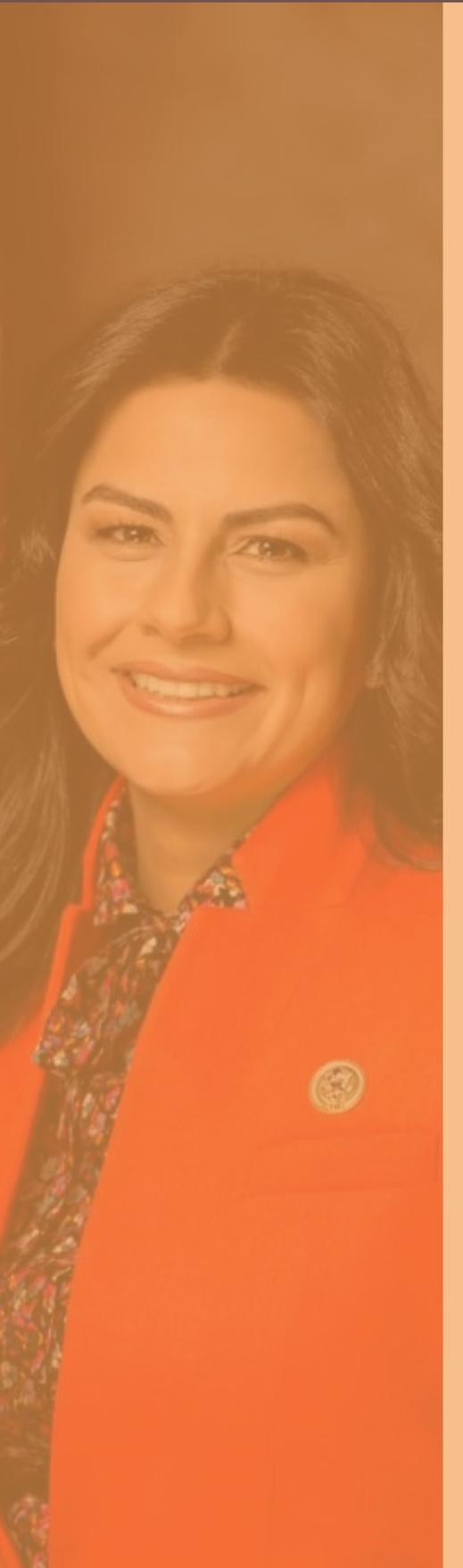
BIOGRAPHY

Nanette Barragán was born and raised in the Harbor Gateway, California, as the youngest of 11 children raised by immigrant parents from Mexico. She earned her undergraduate degree from UCLA and her Juris Doctor from USC Gould School of Law.

She began her career in public service in the late 1990s, working in the Office of Public Liaison for the Clinton White House and worked for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) focusing on racial health disparities and discrimination. She also served as an extern to Justice Carlos Moreno of the Supreme Court of California and, at the Los Angeles Legal Aid Foundation, she fought for justice for low-income families.

Barragán was the first woman in ten years to be elected to the Hermosa Beach City Council, and was then elected by her peers as the first-ever Latina to serve as the city's Mayor. She was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in November 2016, becoming the first Latina ever to represent California's 44th Congressional district.¹⁹

COMMITMENT TO
PROMOTING HEALTHCARE INNOVATION



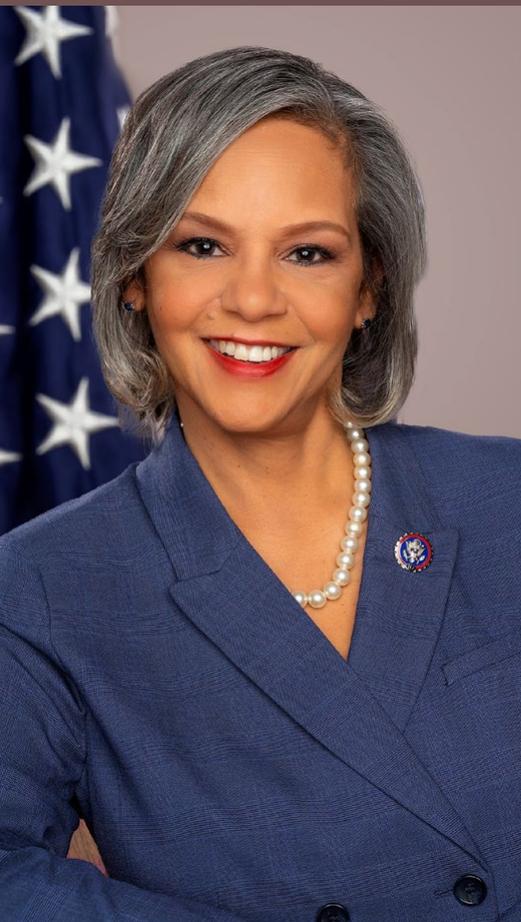
IN CONGRESS

Representative Barragán has been a champion for medical innovation and making that innovation available to patients in need. She has sponsored the Access to Alzheimer’s Treatments Act, which would help ensure Medicare coverage of innovative Alzheimer’s treatments that have demonstrated effectiveness. Upon the bill’s introduction, Barragán stated, “We must work to ensure these breakthrough therapies are accessible. This legislation is a crucial step forward for ensuring that Medicare beneficiaries have access to new drugs when enough data is collected on the product.”

Representative Barragán has secured \$469,000 in federal funding for the Lundquist Institute for Biomedical Innovation to provide research internships. She has also sponsored the Improving Social Determinants of Health Act, which would authorize the Centers for Disease Control to address indirect causes of poor health outcomes such as lack of housing, food security, transportation, and education.

Representative Barragán is a member of the House Energy and Commerce Committee’s Subcommittee on Health.

COMMITMENT TO
PROMOTING HEALTHCARE INNOVATION



Representative Robin Kelly (D-IL-02)

BIOGRAPHY

Robin Kelly moved to Illinois to attend Bradley University in Peoria, where she earned her B.A. in psychology and an M.A. in counseling. She later received a Ph.D. in political science from Northern Illinois University. She remains an active member of

Sigma Gamma Rho, a historically Black sorority. Prior to her election to Congress in 2013 (a special election), Kelly was a member of the Illinois House of Representatives, served as Chief Administrative Officer of Cook County (the second largest county in the United States) and was Chief of Staff to Illinois State Treasurer Alexi Giannoulias - becoming the first African American woman to serve as Chief of Staff to an elected constitutional statewide officeholder. She lives in Chicago and has two adult children.

COMMITMENT TO
PROMOTING HEALTHCARE INNOVATION



IN CONGRESS

Among her efforts to improve healthcare for everyone, Congresswoman Kelly has been a champion of increasing diversity in clinical trials, which is critical for ensuring new treatments work for all people. She sponsored the NIH Clinical Trial Diversity Act to increase the diversity of participants in all National Institutes of Health (NIH)-funded trials. Upon introducing this legislation, she stated, ““The data are clear – underrepresented communities are disproportionately suffering and dying from certain illnesses and conditions. We’re not going to be able to address these disparities or help these communities unless we know how new drugs and therapies work in communities that are disproportionately impacted by disease. The way we learn more is by increasing clinical trial diversity.”²⁰

Congresswoman Kelly is a member of the House Energy and Commerce Committee’s Subcommittee on Health. She is a co-founder of the Congressional Digital Health Caucus, and a member of the House Democratic Steering and Policy Committee. The Congresswoman also serves as Chair of the Congressional Black Caucus Health Braintrust, and she Co-Chairs the Congressional Caucus on Black Women and Girls.

COMMITMENT TO
IMPROVING COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND EDUCATION



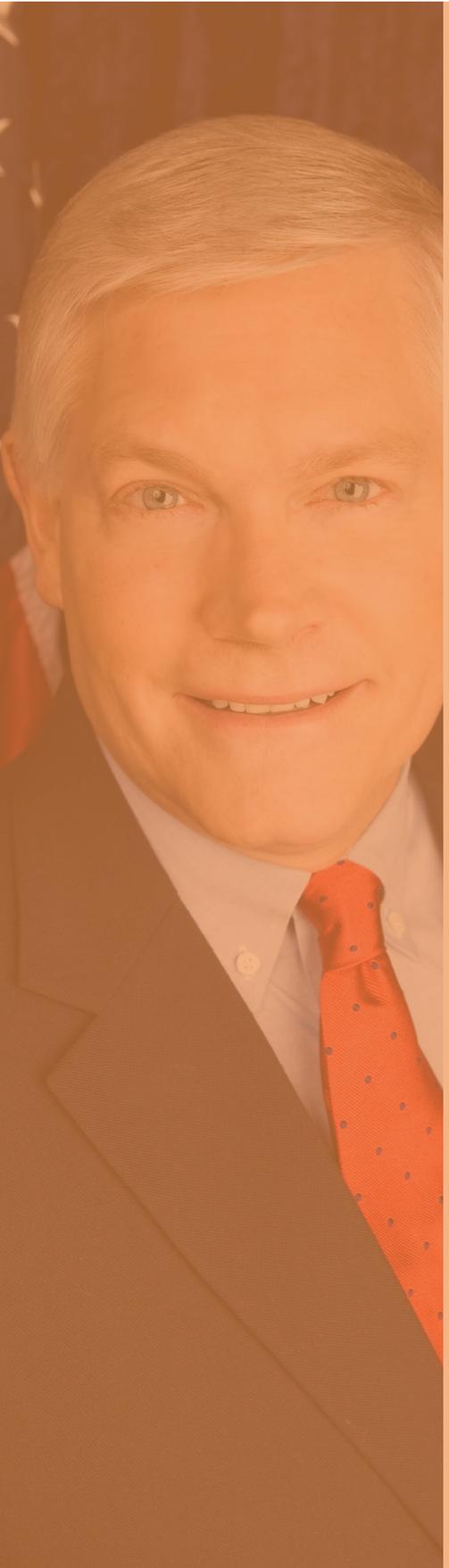
Representative Pete Sessions (R-TX-17)

BIOGRAPHY

A native of Waco, Texas, Pete attended high school in San Antonio and graduated from Southwestern University in 1978. After college, he began working for the Southwestern Bell Telephone Company. He was first elected to Congress in 1996. He, his father, and two sons are Eagle Scouts. Over the years, he has served in various leadership roles with the Boy Scouts of America, disability assistance, and local conservation groups. He also devoted twelve years to serving on the Board of Trustees at his alma mater, Southwestern University. He and his wife live in Waco, and they have five grown sons.

COMMITMENT TO

IMPROVING COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND EDUCATION



IN CONGRESS

Throughout his 24 years in Congress, Pete has been an integral player within the Republican Party, serving in a leadership role for over a decade. One of many accomplishments was sponsoring and passing the Family Opportunity Act of 2005, which enables families of medically stressed children to receive comprehensive healthcare. The bill became law in 2006 after the Congressman and his son who has Down syndrome, Alex, worked with then-President Bush.²¹ He has also sponsored the Words Matter Act, which would remove more than two dozen instances of “mentally retarded” from federal law, replacing the outdated language with terminology that is appropriate for people with Down syndrome and other intellectual and developmental disabilities.²²

Representative Sessions has also been the lead sponsor of the Blind Americans Return to Work Act, bipartisan legislation that would allow blind Americans to professionally develop without complete loss of financial aid. The act would thereby remove a disincentive for Americans to participate in the workforce.²³ He is currently Chairman of the House Oversight and Accountability Subcommittee on Government Operations and the Federal Workforce.

COMMITMENT TO
IMPROVING COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND EDUCATION



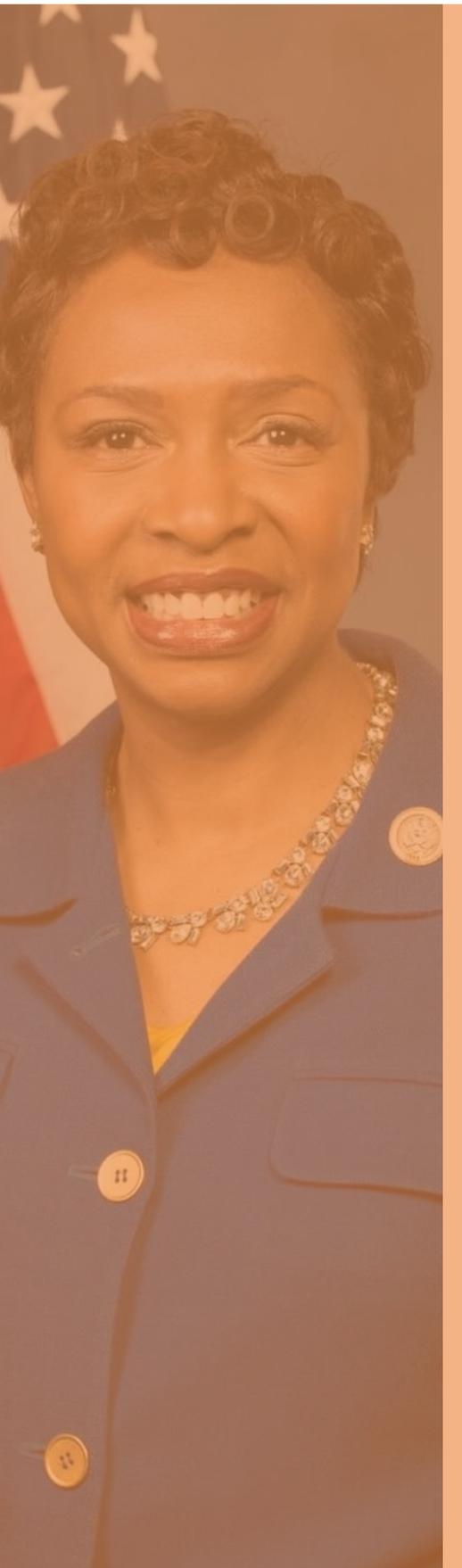
Representative Yvette Clarke (D-NY-09)

BIOGRAPHY

The daughter of Jamaican immigrants, Yvette Diane Clarke grew up in Brooklyn. She is a graduate of Oberlin College and was a recipient of the APPAM/Sloan Fellowship in Public Policy and Policy Analysis. She received the Honorary Degree of Doctor of Laws Honoris Causa from the University of Technology, Jamaica, and the Honorary Doctorate of Public Policy from the University of the Commonwealth Caribbean.²⁴

Before being elected to Congress in, Clarke served on New York's City Council, representing the 40th District. She succeeded her pioneering mother, former City Council Member Dr. Una S. T. Clarke, making them the first mother-daughter succession in the City Council's history. First elected to Congress in 2007, Clarke represented New York's 11th Congressional District until 2013 when, following redistricting, she began representing New York's 9th Congressional District. She resides in the Flatbush neighborhood of Brooklyn and is an active member of the Brooklyn Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.²⁵

COMMITMENT TO
IMPROVING COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND EDUCATION



IN CONGRESS

Representative Clarke has led on women’s health issues, including by sponsoring the Menopause Research Equity Act, the Stephanie Tubbs Jones Uterine Fibroid and Education Act, and the Uterine Cancer Study Act.²⁶ She has sought to prevent Medicaid cuts to New York hospitals.²⁷ She has also fought to restore of funding to reduce health disparities, stating in a letter, “The costs imposed by inadequate investment in basic health care services – such as flu shots, screenings for diabetes and cancer, and the preventions of sexually transmitted diseases – are enormous, both on our health care expenditures and, more important, on our quality of life. If we provide adequate support for programs that have been demonstrated to reduce the disparities that now exist in access to health care, we will increase both our life expectancy and our quality of life as instances of chronic disease are reduced.”²⁸

Representative Clarke is a Senior Member of the House Energy and Commerce Committee. She is Chair of the Congressional Black Caucus, co-chairs the Congressional Caucus on Black Women and Girls, and co-chairs of the Medicare for All Caucus.

Conclusion

The Health Equity Collaborative applauds these leaders for their consequential efforts to make the U.S. healthcare system more effective for all patients, regardless of their backgrounds. Access, innovation, transparency, delivery, education, and pricing all play critical roles, and all are in need of considerable improvement. These



leaders have focused on these components of the system, and we are grateful for their efforts.

Much work remains before healthcare in America reaches its potential, both in terms of quality and fairness. We stand ready to work with these and other committed leaders throughout the 119th Congress to help make the U.S. healthcare system work for all Americans, because a healthier America is a stronger America.

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