

CABINET APPOINTEE: DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

California Attorney General [Xavier Becerra](#), a 12-term member of Congress, has been nominated to lead the Department of Health and Human Services. If confirmed, he will be the first Latino to hold the position. [Roy Herrera](#), a Phoenix-based member of Ballard Spahr's Government Relations and Public Policy and White Collar Defense/Internal Investigations groups, shared his thoughts as to what Mr. Becerra's near future may hold.

Attorney General Becerra's nomination was something of a surprise. Did it strike you that way?

"Yes, it was a little bit of a surprise, not so much because he got picked for something in the cabinet, but a surprise in that he was picked for this particular role, given that he does not directly have a background in health care. Usually, that's what you see. I think a lot of people expected it to be someone who had background there."

"If you ask anyone in D.C., all you'll hear is that he's super smart, super confident, and super hard-working. So, I think the consensus is that while he may not have the technical background, his experience in Congress and his work ethic will make him a good choice."

The coronavirus pandemic has brought a lot of attention to how the government approaches health and human services. Do you think it will shape Attorney General Becerra's approach?

"I view his role as having two parts. In the long term, strengthening the Affordable Care Act, lowering health care costs, and improving our health care delivery system are things he's going to want to focus on. In the short term, everything is going to be about 'How do we get past this COVID pandemic?' We'll be talking about how to get the vaccine distributed quickly and getting it to the populations that need it most. He's going to jump in to overseeing that on Day One."

"What we've seen in the past year is just how important a federally coordinated response is—a federally coordinated response that's effective, that is. We didn't have that, and we paid the price. The pandemic was worse than it needed to be, and because of that, we can't work on the economy or anything larger-scale because we haven't solved this issue yet."

Given that overcoming the coronavirus pandemic is such a big hurdle, do you think Attorney General Becerra will get to work on those longer-term priorities, or will COVID be the issue that defines his tenure?

"I have some optimism, from hearing how effective the vaccine is, that we may be able to get this under control quickly. If we're able to do that, maybe mid-next year. If it isn't done properly, it will take a lot longer."

Are there any final observations about Attorney General Becerra you'd like to make?

"One of the things that we have seen with COVID is that it has made even more clear the types of inequality we have in our society. That can mean that underrepresented populations don't have the same access to health care that wealthier people do, for example. We've seen our communities of color disproportionately affected by this. Having him in this leadership position is really important, because I think he will understand the very real challenges that the Latino community and other communities of color face. He has been a trailblazer his whole career, and seeing a good person like him selected for this is really profound."