

Ralph Abraham Remarks to Media
Baton Rouge, LA
September 5, 2019

Thank you to everyone for coming out this morning.

I'm here today to draw attention to John Bel's department of health, one of the most ineffective and poorly run government agencies in Louisiana - which is saying something.

Before I begin, let me be clear that our problem is not with the workers within the department. They can only do what they are instructed to do. Our problem is with the people in charge - The governor, the division of administration and the secretary of health, Dr. Gee.

Let's walk through a brief timeline of the biggest debacle in the department right now, Medicaid expansion, what our governor calls his greatest accomplishment.

The governor made the decision to take one of the worst versions of Medicaid expansion available, and rushed it to market knowing full well that they did not have the tools available to administer or ensure the people that were enrolling were even eligible.

This led to hundreds of millions dollars being spent on individuals who were not eligible for Medicaid.

They got caught. And instead of stopping, acknowledging the problem and fixing it, they rushed again to cover up their failures and ended up kicking people off who were actually eligible.

Then they got caught doing that and instead of stopping, acknowledging the problem and fixing it, they made more excuses and ended up canceling the largest MCO contract in the state – for what I will add, was clearly political retribution.

From the first day of John Bel's administration there has been an overwhelming lack of transparency and honesty from this governor and Secretary Gee.

I've spent the last year meeting with our hospitals, administrators, doctors, and patients talking to them about what works, what doesn't, and listening to their concerns about the department of health.

Here's what I've heard over and over again: the Department of Health under John Bel Edwards is failing us.

I've spent my entire career as a family doctor, treating some of the poorest people in our state – many of whom are on Medicaid. I understand our health care system. I understand that there are many who need it and I understand the unwillingness of this governor and secretary of health to do the right thing.

Let's quickly talk about the massive waste fraud and abuse within the department.

- The Department of Health has wasted nearly 500 million taxpayer dollars. To put that into context – that's equal to the ½ cent sales tax that John Bel passed.
- The Governor and Department of Health have enrolled more than 1,600 individuals on Medicaid who make six-figure incomes. Just think about that.
- While this is going on, John Bel has killed every attempt to fix the problem. He won't use accurate data like state income tax to verify income and has killed every measure to reform the department.
- The Governor's goal is to get as many people on state sponsored health care as possible. You know who this hurts more than the taxpayers? The people who actually need the services.

Now let's talk about the unsustainable pace of spending.

The Louisiana Department of Health's budget has grown more than a billion dollars every year of this administration. That's a faster rate than any other state in America and completely unsustainable.

.The Louisiana Department of Health's Budget now makes up nearly half of our total state budget.

.Right now the total state budget including federal, is 34.7 billion dollars. \$14.8 billion of that goes to the Department of Health.

This will only get worse in 2020 when the federal match rate goes down.

Additionally, John Bel refuses to give the legislature or the public any real answers about how much state general fund money this massive program is going to cost our state.

We have yet to hear a plan from John Bel on how he intends to pay for that. I'll tell you what the plan is – it's his plan for everything - more taxes.

And after spending ALL of this money, what have we actually gotten for it? I'll tell you what we've gotten for it – we are one of the worst states in the country for health care.

Something has to change.

Earlier this year, the department of health admitted to underestimating expansion costs by more than \$400 million. They tried to hide this alarming fact by slipping it into a legislative Medicaid subcommittee hearing.

The dishonesty and the lack of transparency from the governor and secretary of health is appalling and unacceptable.

Finally, what might be the worst of all, is the apparent political retribution of this administration

It appears the Edwards' administration disrupted health care for more than one million of our most vulnerable citizens for political retribution and partisan retaliation.

We recently submitted a public records request to get to the bottom of this.

The governor's office responded that they would get the information we requested two days after the election. We have those correspondences available for the media today.

The path we are on will destroy our state. As the state burden for health care grows, so do our taxes. That means personal income tax, corporate tax, sales tax – up up up.

As those taxes go up our economy will continue to shrink.

As that happens we have fewer and fewer people paying into the system and more and more people that are reliant on government to survive. Which leads to higher taxes, a slower economy, more people leaving, and it goes on and on and on.

Before you know it, we're Venezuela.

Here's my commitment to every Louisianian.

We will reform this department from the top down, starting with Secretary Gee.

On day one we will be transparent, accountable and honest with the legislature and the public.

We will stop, acknowledge that we have a very real, unsustainable problem, and begin to fix it.

The second step is removing ineligible people from the rolls while making sure the people who need the care are getting it.

I believe a major solution to this problem is a vibrant economy and good, high paying jobs which will allow people to get off of Medicaid and get good, quality health insurance.

The solutions are not complicated.

You just have to have leadership that's willing to do what's right, be transparent and honest. That's exactly what I will do.