



Senate Committee on Finance
U.S. Senator Orrin Hatch (R-UT), Chairman

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 4, 2016

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Hatch Statement at Finance Nominations Hearing

WASHINGTON – Senate Finance Committee Chairman Orrin Hatch (R-Utah) today delivered the following opening statement at a hearing considering a number of pending nominations for the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the Social Security Administration (SSA) and the U.S. Tax Court:

Today we will consider the nominations of four individuals selected by the President for positions throughout the government.

Though many people are already transfixed by election-year politics, it is important that we remain focused on being productive in this committee and, hopefully, throughout Congress. This committee has a long history of being able to set aside politics and achieve results that promote effective government, no matter what party happens to be in power.

While Executive Branch nominations are often the subject of political wrangling, my position has always been that the President is entitled to appoint the people he wants to work with him in his administration, barring serious ethical lapses or extraordinary circumstances. With that in mind, I do acknowledge the trust the President has placed in each of the nominees before us today and I respect their reasoned opinions on the issues, even if I do not always share the same perspectives.

I would like to take a few moments to speak briefly about each of the nominees that are here with us today.

First, we have Dr. Mary Wakefield, who has been nominated to serve as the Deputy Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services. Dr. Wakefield has an impressive background, including several years of service as a staffer here in the Senate.

I hope no one holds that against her.

Her legislative background and training as a nurse have, in my opinion, prepared her for dealing with the crises she will almost certainly have to deal with as HHS Deputy Secretary. Dr. Wakefield has a reputation for being a problem-solver, and, given the breadth and depth of

issues she'll be dealing with in this position, I suspect her biggest challenge will be determining which problems need to be solved first.

I look forward to hearing more about why Dr. Wakefield wants to take on this very demanding job, and what qualities she hopes to bring to it.

Today we will also consider the nomination of Andrew LaMont Eanes to be the Deputy Commissioner of the Social Security Administration. Currently, Mr. Eanes serves as Senior Advisor in the Office of the Acting Commissioner and has a vast background in management, technology, and a demonstrated history of simply getting things done.

We can always use more of that in our government.

Social Security is currently the largest single item in the federal government's budget. Roughly 60 million people – or around one-fifth the total population of the United States – currently receive Social Security benefits. In fiscal year 2015, spending for Social Security benefits totaled \$877 billion – that's one out of every four dollars spent by the federal government.

And, despite the success we had last year in averting impending benefit cuts in the Social Security Disability Insurance program, Social Security overall remains on an unsustainable fiscal path, with the combined trust funds projected to be exhausted in just 13 years.

Even with these fiscal challenges, operationally speaking, the Social Security Administration, or SSA, has fared better than most agencies in terms of budget allocations. Of course, we generally don't hear that from them. Instead, we tend hear persistent claims from many SSA officials that any and all problems at the agency are caused by Congress's supposed refusal to provide adequate funding.

Fortunately, however, there are also those at SSA who work hard, day in and day out, to ensure that taxpayer funds are used as efficiently as possible for the sake of beneficiaries. And, everything that I've seen thus far indicates that Mr. Eanes is one of these diligent officials working to protect taxpayer resources and to make sure the benefit programs can be run as efficiently and effectively as possible.

That is precisely what hardworking taxpayers and beneficiaries of these important programs deserve.

Last but not least, we will also hear from two nominees to the U.S. Tax Court: Elizabeth Ann Copeland and Vik Edwin Stoll.

As we all know, the U.S. Tax Court plays an important role in our tax system as it is the only venue for taxpayers to challenge an assessed tax liability before being forced to remit payment.

Judges on the Tax Court are some of the very few government officials that deal face-to-face with individual taxpayers on issues relating to their taxes. Therefore, it is important that we keep the court staffed with qualified judges to ensure greater accountability to taxpayers and to ensure timely access.

And, as with our other nominees, everything we've seen thus far indicates that both Ms. Copeland and Mr. Stoll are highly qualified, with reputations for fairness and integrity.

In short, it appears that we have strong slate of nominees before us today and I look forward to more discussion about their qualifications during today's hearing.

I want to thank all of the nominees for being here today and for their willingness to serve.

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