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**Wyden Statement at Finance Committee Hearing to Examine the President's Budget with HHS  
Secretary Burwell  
*As Prepared for Delivery***

Thank you, Secretary Burwell, for appearing before the Finance Committee to outline President Obama's budget proposal for Health and Human Services one final time. Today I'd like us to begin to talk about how Congress and the administration can build on the Affordable Care Act. And I use that term because the list of the ACA's achievements is long and growing.

People can no longer be discriminated against and denied health coverage because of a preexisting condition. The number of Americans without health insurance is at or near its lowest point in half a century.

Expanding Medicaid has put a big dent in the cost of uncompensated care, which has long been a major economic drag on hospitals across the country and a cause of rising premiums. So beyond the fact that expanding Medicaid is an opportunity to extend coverage to millions of people who struggle to get by, the numbers show that it has proven to be a good economic deal for states.

And although there is certainly more work to be done, the rate of growth in national health care costs – the line on the graph that used to have budget economists quaking in their boots – has dropped significantly from where it was a handful of years ago. The law is not perfect, but that is undeniable progress to build on in ways that address the next big challenges in health care.

For example, there are going to be a lot of spectacular cures available in the future. You're already seeing it with certain cancer treatments and Hepatitis C drugs. There is a real question, after the bipartisan investigation Senator Grassley and I conducted that looked into the pricing of one Hepatitis C treatment, as to whether our health care system will be able to afford these blockbuster drugs. Solving this issue is going to take bipartisan work, but I strongly believe that Democrats and Republicans can work together on health care.

I think you're seeing an opening for bipartisanship on an ACA initiative called section 1332. It was born out of a proposal I first authored with former Senator Bennett – Bennett with two T's. It is all about fostering innovations in the states, and it says they should be allowed to forge their own paths on health care as long as they meet the high bar set by the ACA – bringing high-quality, affordable health care to millions of Americans who didn't have access before.

A recent op-ed ran in the Washington Post calling for all sides to come together and make these State Innovation Waivers work wherever possible. That op-ed was co-authored by Senator Tom Daschle and Speaker Newt Gingrich, who nobody would accuse of being two peas in a pod on most issues.

This committee is also making bipartisan progress with respect to Medicare. It comes down to this: Congress has a responsibility to take Medicare's historic guarantee and reinforce it for a new generation of Americans. Too many older people in the program are one serious accident or illness away from a huge medical bill. And seniors too often are weighed down by a mountain of paperwork having to coordinate their own care – particularly those with chronic conditions.

I believe this committee is closing in on a bipartisan plan of attack when it comes to improving chronic care. I want to thank Chairman Hatch for his partnership and Senators Warner and Isakson for being at the forefront of this issue. Bottom line, it's time to move Medicare away from a one-size-fits-all approach and begin doing more to take into account the individual needs of patients with chronic diseases.

Now to step away from health care, I'd like to address the administration's important efforts to reduce poverty and help families. There has been real success over the past few years helping people who can find work climb out of poverty. In particular, making the expansions of the Earned Income Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit permanent as part of last year's tax deal is right up there with the ACA as some of the biggest anti-poverty achievements in decades. However, there's more that needs to be done helping families who remain struggling to find work. I was pleased to see that the administration acknowledged this issue and boosted the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program in the budget.

Finally, I should also note there is a real effort underway on this committee to improve the child welfare system in a number of areas that need urgent attention. Last fall, I introduced the Family Stability and Kinship Care Act to prevent traumatic foster care stays by helping parents keep their children safely at home. Right now, Chairman Hatch and I are working to wrap that bill into a broader child welfare proposal to reduce unnecessary foster care stays, lessen congregate care stays, and put in place stronger protections to keep kids in foster care safe. It's about making sure the system works better for the children, and I hope the committee is able to act very soon.

Thank you again for joining us here today, Secretary Burwell, and I look forward to working with you on all these important issues over the year ahead. And thank you once more, Chairman Hatch – particularly for scheduling these three budget hearings this week.

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