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**Wyden Statement at Finance Committee Hearing on the Nominations of John Bartrum and
Lynn Johnson**
As Prepared for Delivery

The committee meets this morning to discuss the nomination of two individuals to serve at the Department of Health and Human Services:

Mr. John Bartrum, nominated to the role of Assistant Secretary for Financial Resources, and Ms. Lynn Johnson, nominated to the role of Assistant Secretary for Family Support.

Since child welfare would be under Ms. Johnson's purview at HHS, I want to start my remarks with some major concerns I have over the Trump Administration blocking key rules meant to help foster kids.

Everybody wants foster kids to be safe and well cared-for. In order to evaluate whether our foster care programs are succeeding at protecting our most vulnerable youth and giving them a chance to get ahead, the federal government needs key information from states, which run each individual program.

For example, if you want to do a better job of keeping foster kids out of the world of sex trafficking, you need information about how widespread a problem trafficking is today, who it's victimizing, and so on.

Over three years ago, Congress passed a bipartisan law to fight trafficking, and HHS finally got underway revamping its out-of-date foster care reporting requirements, including reporting on sex trafficking. In fact, the last time HHS updated any of these requirements was in 1993. Those updates were supposed to be getting up and running right about now. But just in the last few days, the Trump administration made the baffling decision to step in and block the Administration for Children and Families from moving forward with implementation.

Now, I've warned the Trump administration against interfering with this process. By torpedoing these rules, the Trump administration is standing in the way of helping some of the most vulnerable kids in the country. But they've got their deregulation blinders on, and they decided not to listen to any warnings about how this action could hurt kids.

If confirmed, Ms. Johnson would be in charge of these decisions, so I plan to discuss this further with her today. But I want to make one thing clear: I am not going to let this go. This committee has put in a lot of bipartisan work on child welfare, including very recently passing the biggest improvements to the system in decades. I want to be able to continue this type of bipartisan work, including with the administration.

I've also got serious concerns about the fact that Ms. Johnson has supported legislation to allow Colorado to send foster kids to juvenile detention facilities. While this may be a common practice in Colorado, and somewhat similar approaches may be taken in other states, it's contrary to federal law as I read it. If the rules on this need updating, policy makers ought to make that happen. But this is an area of the law that Ms. Johnson will be in charge of interpreting and enforcing if she is confirmed. I look forward to hearing from her directly about this issue in questions.

With that, I'll turn to Mr. Bartrum's nomination to be the HHS assistant secretary for financial resources. This is a big job that has a lot of influence over how HHS spends taxpayer dollars.

To say the person in this role is just a "numbers guy" is a serious understatement. When you've got major decisions affecting the spending of Medicare, Medicaid, the Children's Health program and more coming across your desk, you've got a lot of influence over policy. That's particularly relevant in the Trump administration, which takes a slash-and-burn approach to health care budgeting no matter how many millions of Americans it stands to harm.

Mr. Bartrum has a long career as a public servant, and his qualifications are strong. But these bigger questions dealing with health care budgeting are what I'm hoping to discuss with him today.

I want to thank both nominees for being willing to serve and appearing before the committee today.

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