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Hatch Statement at Finance Hearing Considering Treasury and Health & Human Services Nominations

WASHINGTON – Senate Finance Committee Chairman Orrin Hatch (R-Utah) today delivered the following remarks during a Senate Finance Committee considering nominations for the U.S. Departments of Treasury and Health and Human Services:

Today the Finance Committee is considering three nominations for posts at the Treasury Department and the Department of Health and Human Services.

These positions are important, and I'll discuss them specifically in a few minutes, but since this is our first nomination hearing in the 114th Congress, I want to reiterate some information on how this committee processes nominations.

In this new Congress, the Finance Committee will continue to use the same basic procedures for processing nominations that we have followed in the past, a process that, except in very rare circumstances, has always been bipartisan.

Let me say that I believe the President is entitled to have the people he wants working in his administration, so long as there are not ethical or significant issues in their background. While I respect the President's right to nominate people of his choosing, the President also needs to respect the constitutional advice and consent role of the Senate as well as this committee's part in that overall process.

On that issue, I want to highlight some guidelines that then-Majority Leader Reid put into the Congressional Record on January 20, 2009. The document he asked to be printed in the record was titled "Employment Guidelines for Potential Presidential Appointees in Subcabinet Positions."

I'm not going to go through the full document here, but it concerns the common practice of presidential nominees being brought on as advisors or counselors in the agencies where they have been nominated to serve while their nominations are being processed. I refer to these guidelines because I want to make it clear that, while a nominee may do certain activities in

these advisory positions, they may not take on responsibilities related to policy-making or representing the administration. I expect all nominees, and particularly those being processed through this committee, to respect these boundaries and respect the constitutional role of the Senate and this committee.

By most accounts, I'm a pretty reasonable guy. I don't think we've mistreated any of the nominees that have come through the Finance Committee or subjected them to any unnecessary delays. And, like I said, while our procedures for moving nominations through the committee may be rigorous, they are bipartisan and fair. So, I hope the administration will acknowledge that and work within the proper guidelines going forward.

With that out of the way, I want to thank the three nominees for appearing here today. First we will hear from Anne Elizabeth Wall, who, if confirmed, will serve as Assistant Secretary for Legislative Affairs at the Treasury Department. The person in this position will deal with this committee on a regular basis, and has the important job of facilitating communication between the Treasury Department and Congress.

On that topic, I want to say up front that it is very important to me that requests for information submitted to the Treasury Department, whether they come from me or from any other members, are responded to in a fulsome and timely manner. Too often, the responses we receive from Treasury are not at all informative, and that's if we receive responses at all. For example, Secretary Lew testified on the President's budget request on February 5 – more than two months ago – and the Committee still has not received answers to questions we submitted to the Secretary in writing. The same is true for IRS Commissioner Koskinen, who testified on February 3.

My hope, Ms. Wall, and we'll talk about this more today, is that you'll commit to improving the lines of communication between Treasury and this committee.

Next we will hear from Brodi L. Fontenot, nominated to be Chief Financial Officer of the Treasury Department. This is an especially important position in an environment of scarce resources and short-term continuing resolutions. Mr. Fontenot brings a wealth of experience, including time at the Department of Transportation, with managing a large federal workforce and balancing multiple critical priorities.

The committee will also hear from Rafael J. López, nominee for Commissioner on Children, Youth, and Families and the Department of Health and Human Services. This is a critical position that oversees programs dealing with the most vulnerable among us.

The Senate Finance Committee has been extremely productive in crafting bipartisan, bicameral legislation aimed at improving outcomes for vulnerable children and families. In my time as the senior Republican on the committee, we've produced two major bills that were enacted into law making improvements to foster care and adoption assistance.

When Senator Grassley was the Chairman and Ranking Member, the committee reported several bipartisan bills as well that made improvements to child welfare.

I am committed to continuing this bipartisan effort to improve the lives of vulnerable children, youth and families. I hope that, if confirmed, Mr. Lopez will be an active and engaged partner in these endeavors.

Thank you all for being here today, and for your willingness to serve.

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