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Wyden Statement at Finance Committee Hearing on Need for Congress to Address America's Child Care Crisis

As Prepared for Delivery

Today, the Congressional Budget Office is out with its 2024-2034 Budget and Economic Outlook. It seems like a perfect time to take stock of our priorities, especially when it comes to the wellbeing of working families. Firefighters, nurses, and scores of other hard working Americans all have something in common: they pay taxes with every paycheck, but millions of families can't afford a basic necessity like child care.

Contrast that with billionaires in America. Three words describe how billionaires pay little to no taxes: Buy, borrow, and die.

Something is out of whack with this picture. America is at its best when everyone can get ahead, not just those already at the top.

This committee can vote to close unfair tax loopholes to make that possible, and give us the revenue needed for priorities like child care that will level the playing field for working families.

So today, the committee will consider smart, targeted ways to help working families for whom good, quality, affordable child care is out of reach.

As the Chair of this Committee – which has jurisdiction over the Child Care Entitlement to States – I am holding this hearing to make it as clear as Crater Lake that I mean business when it comes to making sure working families have access to quality, affordable child care.

Democrats fundamentally understand this issue, and that is why we passed the American Rescue Plan Act. In that historic legislation, Democrats kept the child care industry afloat by securing 24 billion dollars in funding for child care providers.

Unfortunately, Republicans blocked the extension of this funding, and as a result, providers are struggling to pay staff and keep their doors open.

In that law, Finance Committee Democrats also secured a permanent increase of \$633 million annually to the Child Care Entitlement to States for the first time in decades. That doesn't cover every need, but it was a start, and I have a bill with Senator Warren called the *Building Child Care for a Better Future Act* to go further.

My *Building Child Care for a Better Future Act* would increase Child Care Entitlement to States funding by \$6.45 billion, totaling a \$10 billion guaranteed yearly investment. This would make child care more affordable and available.

There will be more vouchers for families who currently qualify, but are left out because the program is underfunded.

Our bill would help build new child care facilities, increasing slots.

Our bill would also secure, for the first time, a permanent program to plus up wages for child care workers. The child care workforce has seen unprecedented turnover in the last few years, and it's clear we need to find a way to recruit new providers, and help them stay in these roles. The best way to do that is make sure these workers are getting paid a fair wage for their hard work.

The committee will hear from our witnesses today that bills like mine which guarantee robust, sustained, and predictable federal funding for child care are desperately needed to address these three major issues – affordability, availability, and workforce.

The tax code is another big tool in the Finance Committee's toolbox that can help give working families a fair shake. Democrats want to put it to work.

In 2021 we expanded the child tax credit and cut child poverty in half. It was a game-changer for tens of millions of families. But that ended when the expanded CTC expired, and Republicans blocked its renewal.

My bill with Chairman Smith of the Ways and Means Committee would help the families of 16 million low-income kids. It's more modest than the 2021 expansion, but it'd be a big help, particularly for larger families of modest means. Republicans have blocked that bill for five months too.

Meanwhile, Republicans are already drawing up plans to double down on Donald Trump's tax giveaway to the wealthy and multinational corporations in 2025. They'd run up the deficit and national debt so high, it would be impossible for Congress to do anything about child care or address any other issue driving up the cost of living.

That's what's at stake this November: Democrats are focused on finding smart solutions for issues like child care. Republicans are cooking up tax handouts that will help billionaires buy larger yachts and beach houses.

In a country that's making it increasingly difficult for parents to decide when and how they start a family, Congress isn't doing nearly enough to meet them with the resources they need to support those families. Families need more help to grow and get ahead, and child care is an essential part of getting that done. I look forward to working with my colleagues on this committee to make it happen.

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