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CONTACT: [Katie Niederee](#), [Julia Lawless](#)

(202) 224-4515

Hatch Statement at Senate Finance Committee Hearing Considering Trade, Health & Human Services Nominations

WASHINGTON – Senate Finance Committee Chairman Orrin Hatch (R-Utah) today delivered the following opening statement at a hearing to consider the nominations of Gilbert B. Kaplan to be Under Secretary of Commerce for International Trade, Matthew Bassett to be an Assistant Secretary of Health and Human Services, and Robert Charrow to serve as General Counsel of Health and Human Services:

I would like to extend a warm welcome to each of the nominees here today. Congratulations on your nominations, and thank you for your willingness to serve in these important positions.

In today's hearing I want to stress two major themes: Integrity and Responsiveness. These are both important elements for any position in government, particularly for a Senate-confirmed position. They are absolutely essential for the positions under review today. The Under Secretary of Commerce for International Trade is responsible for promoting American trade around the globe and enforcing U.S. trade laws.

If confirmed, Mr. Kaplan will need to be a strong advocate for American exporters, while holding our trading partners accountable for improper trade practices. There is a good deal of work that needs to be done to improve compliance with our nation's anti-dumping and countervailing duty laws, but that mission should not come at the expense of seeking to expand opportunities for U.S. goods and services providers. It will be critical that the Department of Commerce work with Congress and consult closely with members of the Committee. Frankly, there is room for improvement here, but I am confident Mr. Kaplan understands the importance of the Department's responsibilities to Congress and will work with Secretary Ross to ensure those responsibilities are met.

As for the nominees to the Department of Health and Human Services, your responsibilities are similarly connected to themes of integrity and responsiveness.

Mr. Bassett, has been nominated to serve as an Assistant Secretary with the specific function of performing legislative affairs. This means that both the agency as well as Congress will rely on you to ensure that we are kept well informed of the goings on at HHS. This will be critical over the next few months.

Obviously, the effort to fix our nation's healthcare system suffered a setback recently. The recent series of events intensifies the importance of this position as cooperation between Congress and HHS will likely be more essential than ever.

Members of the Finance Committee expect to be in constant contact with HHS and need timely and responsive answers to questions and submitted inquiries. We hope that Mr. Bassett will commit today to providing answers.

Finally, I'd like to highlight the critical importance of integrity for the position of General Counsel at HHS, for which Mr. Charrow has been nominated. While Mr. Charrow certainly has a considerable amount of experience as a practicing lawyer, the position of General Counsel at HHS brings with it challenges that are sure to be new.

There are likely to be times where the officials in the Department and the White House may disagree on how to proceed in a specific course of action. If confirmed, your responsibility will be to ensure that the laws on the books, as written, are followed and implemented.

We've seen some thorny issues at both Commerce and at HHS as the administration has, in some ways, gotten off to a rocky start. That is all the more reason for the committee to move as quickly as possible to consider and report these nominations.

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