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August 3, 2017

**Wyden Statement at Finance Committee Hearing on Health and Trade Nominees**  
*As Prepared for Delivery*

The Finance Committee meets this morning to discuss three nominations. First is Mr. Robert Charrow's nomination to serve as the general counsel of the Department of Health and Human Services. This is a tough job under normal circumstances, but it's especially tough in the Trump administration. That's because the HHS general counsel's role is to enforce the law, and right now the president and his team are determined to undermine the law.

A few examples – the law on the books tells the administration to make cost sharing payments that help keep down the cost of health insurance for millions of Americans. But the president keeps threatening to cut those payments off to score a misguided political win. The lack of certainty this is causing in the private markets is already setting up to hit Americans directly in the pocketbooks with premium hikes on January 1. If the payments do stop, the markets will go into a tailspin.

Additionally, the administration is taking taxpayer dollars that are intended to help get individuals and families signed up for health coverage, and it's using those funds to stifle enrollment. That means more people are living without access to the care they need.

I recall sitting right here during Secretary Price's nomination hearing when he said, quote: "...My role will be one of carrying out the law that you all in Congress pass. It's not the role of the legislator..." Everything the administration has done to undermine the law tells a different story.

Bottom line, the general counsel needs to ensure the department is faithfully executing the law, meeting the highest standard of ethics and cooperating fully with congressional oversight. Mr. Charrow is going to face tough questions today as to whether he's prepared for that task.

Next is Mr. Matthew Basset's nomination to serve as assistant secretary for legislation at the Department of Health and Human Services. It's my hope that the Senate moves in a bipartisan direction with respect to health care and the many other issues under the HHS umbrella.

If the two sides are going to come together around lasting proposals that can pass with big majorities, it'll be necessary to have partners at HHS who are willing to work with members regardless of party.

So I'm looking forward to hearing from Mr. Bassett, who would be the liaison between HHS and the Congress if confirmed, how he plans to accomplish that. I am also looking for his commitment that he will respond to requests from all members of this committee, both Democrats and Republicans.

Finally, Mr. Gilbert Kaplan is nominated to serve as the undersecretary for international trade at the Department of Commerce, which would put him at the top of the International Trade Administration.

So far in this administration, there's been a lot of tough talk on trade enforcement, but there hasn't been much in the way of action. And there is a real cost to all the overhyped rhetoric when the follow-through isn't there. For example, in response to all of the tough talk on steel, countries have shipped even more steel to the U.S. in a rush to get in ahead of any hike in tariffs.

My friend Leo Gerard, President of the United Steelworkers, recently informed me that imports have surged 18% since the president launched his Section 232 investigation. Meanwhile, the administration appears to be backing off. This episode demonstrates how tough talk without a real strategy hurts American workers.

Mr. Kaplan's background suggests he will be a tough trade enforcer, and that's exactly what's needed right now at ITA. I expect he'll refrain from making promises on trade enforcement unless and until the administration has done its homework and is prepared to follow through. Beyond enforcement, it's also critical that ITA is as committed to growing American exports. But the administration's budget proposals would slash funding for a host of programs within ITA that American small businesses depend on to break into foreign markets. So I look forward to hearing how Mr. Kaplan, if confirmed, would ensure that American workers and manufacturers don't lose out on opportunities to sell to consumers around the world because the administration insisted on self-defeating budget cuts.

I want to thank all three nominees for being here today, and I look forward to hearing their testimony. Thank you, Chairman Hatch.

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