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Hatch Opening Statement at Finance Committee Graham-Cassidy Hearing

WASHINGTON – Senate Finance Committee Chairman Orrin Hatch (R-Utah) today delivered the following opening statement at a hearing on the Graham-Cassidy-Johnson-Heller healthcare proposal.

I'd like to welcome everyone to this afternoon's hearing where we will discuss and examine the Graham-Cassidy-Johnson-Heller healthcare proposal.

Given the relatively unique circumstances we're facing with regard to healthcare generally and this proposal in particular, the Senate Republican leadership as well as members of the conference have asked for a hearing on this proposal so that we can all get a better sense of how it is intended to work.

Toward that end, we have two distinguished panels of witnesses before us today.

The first panel will feature statements from two of our distinguished Senate colleagues.

The second panel will feature another one our colleagues, who is also a member of this committee. We'll hear from a friend and former Senate colleague on the second panel as well. Joining them at the table will be experts and stakeholders who are here to share their views on the proposal from Senators Graham, Cassidy, Heller, and Johnson.

The purpose of a hearing is to respectfully discuss ideas and become better informed on particular issues. It does not mean that everyone shares the same views and opinions.

In fact, I expect that quite a few disagreements will be expressed today. And that is OK.

I've been in the Senate for four decades now. And, in that time, I've been a part of some very difficult and contentious debates.

Early on, I was part of a fierce debate over labor law reform.

Over the years, I've participated in some of the most heated Supreme Court hearings in our nation's history.

I was here to take part in drafting, debating, and passing the Americans with Disabilities Act, one of my proudest accomplishments.

I was around when the debate over the war in Iraq became extremely combative.

And, of course, I was here when we debated Obamacare before it passed, and I've been here for every debate we've had about it since that time.

So, I understand that there are some strong opinions about this issue. And, more importantly, I understand why opinions are so strong.

When we talk about healthcare policy, we're not just talking about a theoretical concept or legislation that impacts a single isolated industry. This topic has a significant impact on the lives of every person in this country in ways that can make or break both their health and their livelihoods.

Frankly, because this issue is so personal, everyone has strong feelings.

To members of the committee, to those in the audience today, and to any person who may watch or read about today's hearing at some point in the future, let me say this: I respect your opinions on these issues.

But, while I wish that expressions of goodwill could, on their own, fix our nation's problems, that is just not the case. We have to do the work. And, on these issues, the work is particularly hard.

Today, we're here to discuss the most recent healthcare proposal drafted by some of our colleagues. I commend them for their efforts and their willingness to put forward ideas to address these problems.

My hope is that we can spend our time today questioning our witnesses about substance and policy and not on scoring political points, particularly when we have distinguished colleagues and a former colleague at the witness table.

I know that, for both sides of this debate, passionate demonstrations and righteous indignation – particularly when there are cameras in the room – make good fodder for Twitter and TV commercials, especially when the subject is healthcare. Our committee is generally regarded as being above such shenanigans, though we haven't been entirely immune to these types of theatrics in the past.

For today, let me say this: If the hearing is going to devolve into a sideshow or a forum simply for putting partisan points on the board, there's no real reason for us to be here. I won't hesitate to adjourn the hearing if it gets to that point. I'm saying this for the benefit of my colleagues on the committee and everyone in the audience.

Let's have a civil discussion.

I have no objection to having a spirited debate on these issues. My hope is that, in the end, our efforts will generate more light and less heat than we've seen in the most recent episodes of the healthcare debate. If we can't have that, we should all be spending our time on something more productive.

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