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**Wyden Statement at Finance Committee Hearing on Graham-Cassidy-Heller Bill**  
*As Prepared for Delivery*

Nobody has to buy a lemon just because it's the last car on the lot. The Graham-Cassidy-Heller bill is a health care lemon; a disaster in the making. The fact that it's the last Republican repeal plan standing doesn't make it acceptable. It'll be a nightmare for tens of millions of Americans. It makes a mockery of the Trump promises of better insurance for everybody at much lower costs.

This bill's sponsors aren't even waiting for the official facts and figures from the independent scorekeepers. Version after version after version of the bill is floating around, and the pork parade is up and running. The process that has brought Graham-Cassidy-Heller to the brink of passage would be laughable if the well-being of tens of millions of Americans wasn't hanging in the balance.

I want to blow the whistle on a few key points right at the outset of today's hearing. First off, the American people do not want this bill. In the last few days, the committee has received more than 25,000 comments from people who want it stopped. As with every other version of Trumpcare, this proposal is about as popular as prolonged root canal work.

There's just one group cheering this bill on -- the right-wing Republican donor class. The big donors wanted the entire ACA thrown in the trash can from the beginning. But that didn't work, since it turns out it's bad policy to take health coverage away from tens of millions of Americans and raise costs for virtually everybody else.

So the new strategy you see in Graham-Cassidy-Heller is repeal by a thousand cuts. It'll be national repeal and state-by-state repeal. The heart of this bill is a scheme that punishes states that have worked hard to build strong private markets and make health care more affordable. It rewards the states where lawmakers have sat on their hands -- where they've spent years loudly rejecting the opportunity to improve the lives of millions of the people they serve.

But that's obviously not a proposition that will garner much support. So instead, what the committee will hear today is a lot of hocus-pocus talk about "flexibility." The story goes, it's flexibility for the states, more control at the local level, and everybody will somehow be better off. But let's be up-front about what that'll mean in practice.

The real flexibility created by this bill is the option for states to do worse -- so that Americans are forced to pay more money for less care.

Right off the top, Graham-Cassidy-Heller guts funding for health care in its new block grants. Then, governors and state legislators building new health insurance systems will have to make Hunger Games choices, deciding which vulnerable groups will get the care they need and which will not.

The ironclad, loophole-free, guaranteed protection for those with pre-existing conditions under the Affordable Care Act will be gone. The bill's sponsors will tell you otherwise, but the facts are the facts.

The guaranteed protection that nobody will be gouged due to a catastrophic illness like cancer will be gone. That's because this bill reopens the door to annual and lifetime limits on care.

The guarantee of essential health benefits will be gone. That means prescription drug coverage will be on the chopping block.

Maternity care will be on the chopping block. Mental health and substance abuse treatment will be on the chopping block, along with much more.

The guarantee that nobody can be charged higher premiums because of their health status or their job will be gone under this bill.

So bottom line, this bill is an attack on vital consumer protections. It revives some of the worst insurance company abuses that were banned under the ACA. And it will make the health care that many people need unaffordable. So no, it does not protect people with pre-existing conditions.

What this bill does include are a few toothless lines about affordability and access. That's supposed to be enough to protect those with pre-existing conditions. But there's no enforcement mechanism -- no tough standards or strict definitions. And the watered-down protections that states put together for new insurance systems will get a rubber stamp from Team Trump.

Once again in Graham-Cassidy-Heller, the attack on women's health continues. Hundreds of thousands of women will lose the right to see the doctors of their choosing - that's what happens when you defund Planned Parenthood.

The traditional Medicaid program -- which is a lifeline for people with disabilities, seniors, kids and pregnant women -- suffers draconian cuts. An aging baby boomer who's suffered a stroke might be told they can't get the help they need -- nursing home care might no longer an option for them. The community-based program that offers care to people at home where they're most comfortable might disappear. Special education programs funded by Medicaid for vulnerable kids could be put in jeopardy.

A few final points. The process that's led to this moment has been an abomination. What's happening this afternoon isn't a serious hearing -- it's a talking point. This is a scheme to allow Senators to go home to fearful constituents and offer false reassurances that the Graham-Cassidy-Heller bill got a fair examination and went through regular order. But it won't be true.

Senate Republicans haven't gotten answers to the most basic questions about the real-world effects of their bill. How many people will lose coverage? By how much will premiums increase? Will health care markets survive next year? The independent scorekeepers at the budget office have told us that it'll be several weeks before they can put forward estimates of coverage and costs. And their job keeps getting tougher. The bill is changing by the hour as the majority throws around in the scramble for votes.

And why the rush job, you might ask. It's because the coach turns back into a pumpkin at the end of the month. That's when the reconciliation fast-track to pass this partisan bill expires.

Finally, this committee right now ought to be working on bipartisan priorities, such as getting our CHIP bill over the finish line. There's work to be done on stabilizing the private insurance markets, that ought to be happening with our sister committee. Instead, what's on offer with Graham-Cassidy-Heller would trigger a health care disaster -- a death spiral in the insurance markets as tax credits and cost sharing payments go away, as healthy people flee and costs go into the stratosphere.

My Democratic colleagues and I have done and will continue to do everything we can to stop this dreadful proposal in its tracks.

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