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Wyden Statement on USTR, ITC Nominees
As Prepared for Delivery

Today, the committee is considering the nominations of three nominees for critical trade positions: Mr. Jeffrey Gerrish to be deputy United States trade representative; Mr. Gregory Doud to be chief agricultural negotiator at USTR, and Mr. Jason Kearns to be a member of the United States International Trade Commission.

I want to start with a serious matter with respect to Mr. Gerrish's nomination. As I understand the facts, Mr. Gerrish moved residences from Virginia to Maryland in June of last year. Though he no longer lived in Virginia, he voted there in the 2016 general election. Virginia provides a 30-day grace period to former residents. This was way outside what the law allows. Now, I have a hard time understanding how an attorney as accomplished as Mr. Gerrish can walk out of his house in Maryland, travel all the way to Virginia and cast his vote in that state without thinking there may be an issue. You obviously can't flash a Maryland driver's license when a Virginia polling place worker asks where you live. This seems to me to be a serious error in judgement on a part of the law that's pretty unambiguous. As of now, it's especially noteworthy that the Republican and the Democratic member of the Fairfax County Electoral Board have called for an investigation by the prosecutor in this case. The issues a deputy USTR has to deal with on a daily basis are a lot more complicated than voting.

And there's another reason why this issue just takes my breath away. This administration has fabricated out of thin air a crisis of widespread voter fraud in this country without one shred of evidence to back up their claims. They've launched a so-called Commission on Election Integrity, which looks a lot to me like an attempt to justify taking the vote away from millions of American citizens, particularly black and Latino citizens. Bottom line, the administration makes illegal voting out to be widespread and far reaching, almost an existential threat to the country, and here they are nominating someone who appears to have cast an illegal vote in a highly-contested state.

I would say it boggles the mind, but the fact is, there's hypocrisy as far as the eye can see in this administration. They're all about belt tightening and budget cuts, but every day there's a new story about a cabinet official or aide jetting around the country in a cushy private plane. Senior White House officials have reportedly used private emails hosted on private servers for official business. It sounds like the head of the EPA doesn't eat a meal or take a meeting unless it's with some industry insider right out of the swamp. With all that, perhaps it should be no surprise that the Trump team is willing to look the other way on illegal voting when it comes to their own nominee.

Turning to the critical trade challenges that are facing us today, after hearing a lot of tough talk on trade, the administration has disappointed. In April the president ordered the launch of investigations into steel and aluminum imports. He called it an historic day, but so far, it's been an historic blunder.

Failing to follow through on this tough talk has led to steel imports jumping by 21 percent. You're seeing the same pattern in softwood lumber after the administration delayed imposing duties on unfairly traded imports from Canada. This is having a real impact on the U.S. and red-white-and-blue jobs. By the president's own preferred metric - the trade deficit - the U.S. is worse off this year. The deficit rose by about 28 billion dollars in the first seven months of 2017.

This administration has also produced disappointing results in its engagement with China. Although administration officials touted a limited deal with China in late spring, labeling something a good deal is very different from actually getting a good deal. The U.S. has serious and far-reaching trade issues with China, including with respect to cloud computing, and again, what's needed isn't more talk. What's needed is a concrete strategy.

I also have concerns about where the NAFTA renegotiations are heading. As I'm sure Mr. Doud can attest, trade is complicated. Entering into trade agreements may create winners and losers, but so does withdrawing from them, or fundamentally changing their nature. There are lots of farm and manufacturing jobs that depend on existing relationships, and the goal should be to improve those relationships for everyone. It'd be a big mistake to leave whole sectors of our economy behind.

I worry that this is a trade policy built on hostage-taking and headlines, not the hard work of getting trade done right through tough enforcement and a comprehensive strategy to open up markets for the American-made brand.

Finally, Mr. Jason Kearns has been nominated to serve on the International Trade Commission. Those of us who've had the opportunity to work with Mr. Kearns here on Capitol Hill know that he understands the ins and outs of this country's trade policy as well as anybody. I'm confident that he's committed to policies that pay off for American workers and communities, so I look forward to supporting his nomination.

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