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Wyden Statement at Finance Committee Hearing on Need for Guaranteed Paid Leave to Better Support American Workers and Families

As Prepared for Delivery

The Finance Committee meets this morning to talk about a pressing issue - paid leave.

Why are we holding this hearing? Because low- and middle- income workers are falling through the cracks – people like construction workers, nurses, or cashiers who are trying to juggle work obligations with families who need them.

The American people understand this and know what is needed to make sure everyone has a chance to get ahead. According to poll after poll, over 70 percent of Americans want national paid leave. They know that too often, without it, workers are forced to make the impossible choice of a paycheck or caring for a loved one in need.

Paid leave is so crucial for American workers that a recent poll from the Bipartisan Policy Center showed that paid family and medical leave benefits are just as important as pay when considering starting or returning to work. Americans want to work. They want to pay their bills and provide for their families. But life can intervene and sometimes family has to come first. In fact, that same Bipartisan Policy Center poll shows that 72 percent of Americans who are not currently working say that it's because of a personal health or family caregiving situation. Congress talks lots about America's worker shortage crisis. This is an opportunity to do something about it.

In a nation as powerful and prosperous as ours, somehow the United States is the only developed nation in the world without a national paid leave program. Today, only one in four workers in America have access to paid leave. Progress has been made. Fourteen states and the District of Columbia now have comprehensive paid leave laws on the books, but major gaps still remain.

It doesn't have to be this way, and it shouldn't be this way. America has an opportunity to better support America's workers – and better support America's economy. We just need to roll up our sleeves and do what my mother always said – take out our sharpest pencils – and get to work on paid leave.

And because Oregon is a small business state, I'm happy that today the Finance Committee will have the opportunity to hear from Ben Verhoeven who owns a small family farm in Albany, Oregon. If you are

looking for a community that encapsulates taking out a sharp pencil and making things work, look no further than Albany.

Colleagues, today you will hear Mr. Verhoeven say that providing paid leave has helped him hang onto incredible employees and helped his business to grow and thrive. He will also tell us how new government programs back home have made providing paid leave to his employees easy and affordable. In the Finance Committee, let's work together to make sure all small businesses across America can do what Mr. Verhoeven has done. When small businesses thrive, our economy thrives.

I'm looking up and down the dais and have heard members on both sides talk about how America needs to successfully compete against China. Well, if you want to compete, we've got to be in a position to have people go to work. Guaranteed paid leave is a missing piece of the puzzle.

When you're competing against China, every dollar counts. The National Partnership for Women and Families estimates overall that our economy is missing out on \$650 billion in economic activity by not providing paid leave and other caregiving supports to women. If we are going to out-compete China, we need to put policies in place that leverage our economy at all levels.

Our country is strong enough and good enough to make paid leave happen for all Americans, so let's get out our sharpest pencils.

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