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Wyden Statement at Finance Committee Markup on Social Security Commissioner Nomination

As Prepared for Delivery

Today, the Finance Committee will consider the nomination of Martin O’Malley to be Commissioner of Social Security.

When I first met the nominee in my office, I said to him that this position—above all else—is about service, not politics. He agreed.

My first question to him at his hearing was whether he agreed that this job is about service, not politics. He responded that improving customer service was the main reason why he said yes to this opportunity. As he noted in his testimony, there is no “Republican or Democratic way” of fixing customer service problems.

Service. Not politics.

Service means tackling the problems beneficiaries are facing, including long wait times, mile-long ribbons of red tape, outdated technology and a beleaguered workforce.

Like several members on the committee, I raised a top issue for Social Security in need of reform: overpayments and their impact on beneficiaries. For the millions of Americans who live on fixed incomes, any change in benefits can have a substantial impact on their daily lives. That’s true everywhere from Albany, Oregon to Zionsville, Indiana. Getting a letter from Social Security saying you owe tens of thousands of dollars through no fault of your own is life-altering to say the least.

A mistaken overpayment can be the difference between affording rent, having electricity or heating in your home, or buying groceries when your benefits are later cut to make up the difference.

When Americans are trying to resolve a problem with a mistaken overpayment, they don’t care about the party the Commissioner belonged to.

Yesterday’s Fox Business story had it right in its reporting on Social Security and Supplemental Security Income beneficiaries who have been hit with overpayments because of the COVID stimulus checks.

After recent reports saying some beneficiaries were hit with the Social Security Administration claims of overpayments and even lost their benefits, I, along with Senators Brown and Casey, wrote a letter to Social Security demanding answers on the scope and magnitude of this oversight and what the agency was doing to fix this problem.

We were told in the past that Social Security was fixing the problem. That clearly has not been the case.

This Committee, on a bipartisan basis, is going to watchdog Social Security's overpayment program, and will meet with Social Security every month until it is fixed.

Tackling this along with Social Security's other challenges is going to take a fresh approach to leading the agency, and working hand-in-hand with Congress to improve this bedrock program for all Americans.

Martin O'Malley has spent the bulk of his career in public service transforming government organizations from bureaucratic morasses into driven, dynamic, and efficient machines to best serve the public.

I believe Martin O'Malley is the right person for the job at the right time. I will support his nomination and I encourage all my colleagues to support him as well.

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