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Wyden Statement at Finance Committee Markup of Nominations to be Public Trustees for Medicare and Social Security
As Prepared for Delivery

Today the Finance Committee is holding a second business meeting to consider the nominations of two individuals to serve as public trustees of Medicare and Social Security, Dr. Charles Blahous and Dr. Robert Reischauer. Both nominees are up for second terms in that role. Because the committee had an opportunity in June to make statements and vote on these nominations, I'd like to keep my remarks brief today.

My bottom line remains the same as it was in June. When it comes to Social Security and Medicare, there is no inconsequential job, and there is no unimportant tradition. That includes the 30-year, bipartisan tradition of trustees serving only one term.

When you're a public trustee, you're in a position to influence the debate over future Medicare and Social Security policies. The one-term tradition means that public trustees always bring a fresh perspective, independent of politics.

In my view, that's a modest but meaningful way to protect these programs and the millions of Americans who count on them.

This isn't a wild, new idea -- it's been upheld by both sides of this committee. In 2006, when President Bush tried to re-appoint two public trustees who'd already served one term, this committee objected.

Chairman Grassley and Ranking Member Baucus wrote to the President that, "The position of public trustee was created in 1983 to bring new perspectives and provide greater public accountability to the annual Social Security and Medicare trustees' reports. No one has ever served more than one term as a public trustee. We believe this important precedent must be maintained."

It's true that Dr. Blahous and I have big policy disagreements. I am 100 percent opposed to privatizing Social Security. But I do not expect to see eye-to-eye with every public trustee.

I do, however, agree with the letter Senators Grassley and Baucus wrote a decade ago. This one-term tradition should be upheld. Accordingly, I will vote against confirming both nominees.

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