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HATCH STATEMENT AT SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE HEARING CONSIDERING TREASURY, HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES NOMINATIONS

WASHINGTON – U.S. Senator Orrin Hatch (R-Utah), Ranking Member of the Senate Finance Committee, today delivered the following remarks during a Senate Finance Committee hearing considering the nominations of Karen Dynan to serve as Secretary for Economic Policy at the Department of Treasury and Richard G. Frank to be Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation at the Department of Health and Human Services:

Today we are here to discuss two nominees. Each one, if confirmed, will conduct important policy analysis, but for different agencies.

Let me first address Dr. Karen Dynan, President Obama's nominee to be Assistant Secretary for Economic Policy at the Department of Treasury, who appears to me to be well qualified for the position.

She has a long career history of providing careful economic analysis. If she is confirmed, I hope that this will continue during her time at Treasury.

That said, I do want to comment on an unfortunate trend we've seen as this committee has processed nominees to various positions in the administration. I want to mention it now as I hope that this practice will stop with Dr. Dynan's nomination.

As the committee processes nominees, it is customary for Senators to submit written questions for the record. Unfortunately, in recent years, the answers we've been receiving in response to these questions have been lacking. Indeed, responses we've received from nominees – particularly Treasury nominees – have been incomplete, at best, and are becoming increasingly vacuous, often having little bearing on the real policy questions that are being asked.

The situation seems to be getting worse, despite complaints I have registered in this committee for years now. And, it's not just with nominees – sitting Treasury officials have answered questions in a similar manner, if they answer them at all.

I am pleased to see in Dr. Dynan's testimony an acknowledgement of the utility of using "data driven" approaches to policy analysis.

Such an approach is consistent with repeated requests I have made for data and information about Treasury's debt and cash positions as we near a debt limit.

Unfortunately, Treasury has not been willing to work with me thus far to improve data flows and availability to Congress, including the Congressional Budget Office, on debt-related matters.

Lack of information here in Congress leads to a situation where the Majority Leader in the Senate has recently said that we have until May to increase the debt limit, while the Treasury Secretary says something else, based on what he says is the "best data."

I have repeatedly asked Treasury for answers relating to those data, only to have my requests ignored. And, this, sadly, is par for the course with this administration.

Now, this doesn't bear directly on Dr. Dynan's nomination. But, I do hope that I've adequately communicated the level of frustration I have with the communication we've received from the Treasury Department.

Dr. Dynan, if you are confirmed, I hope you will commit to working with members of this committee – from both parties – to provide the best information possible on matters under your jurisdiction.

Next, let me turn to President Obama's nominee to be Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation at the Department of Health and Human Services.

If confirmed, Dr. Frank will run the policy-setting arm of HHS.

Congress, the Secretary, and others rely on the Assistant Secretary to produce fact-based, impartial analyses of important policy problems, not least of which will include an accurate assessment of Obamacare enrollment.

With the difficulties facing HHS as it implements the Affordable Care Act and administers health care programs for millions nationwide, ASPE needs thoughtful and experienced leadership, and, from what I've seen, Dr. Frank appears ready and able to provide that type of leadership.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing. It appears that we have two qualified nominees before us today. I look forward to their testimony.

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