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Hatch Statement at Finance Hearing on Trade Promotion Authority

WASHINGTON – Senate Finance Committee Chairman Orrin Hatch (R-Utah) today delivered the following opening statement at a committee hearing on trade priorities and The Bipartisan Congressional Trade Priorities and Accountability Act of 2015:

I'd like to welcome everyone to the continuation of our hearing on Congress and U.S. Tariff Policy. Today, we have a very distinguished panel of witnesses that I hope will help us expand the ongoing discussion of our nation's trade agenda.

As everyone here knows, last week Senator Wyden and I, along with House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Ryan, introduced legislation to renew Trade Promotion Authority, or TPA. Our intention is to mark up the TPA bill – along with a handful of other trade-related bills – later this week.

This legislation is a long-time coming.

TPA expired in 2007. While talks for various trade agreements have gone on since that time, without TPA in effect, our negotiators have been effectively negotiating with one hand tied behind their backs because they have not been able to assure our trading partners that the deal they sign is the one Congress will vote on in the end.

Our legislation will fix that.

I want to thank Ranking Member Wyden for his support and assistance thus far. We've got a long way to go, but, working together, I am confident we can get there.

Now, some have expressed concerns about the process by which we're moving this bill forward. For example, I've heard arguments that we're moving too quickly, without adequate discussion or examination.

Those concerns are, in my view, unfounded.

First of all, the bill on which our current TPA legislation is based was first introduced in January of 2014, almost a year and a half ago. Since that time, it has been available for examination, dissection, discussion, and comment.

Thousands of organizations weighed in on the merits of that bill, including business associations, organized labor, think tanks, and advocacy groups.

Many members of Congress from both parties and in both chambers are on the record either praising or criticizing that bill. And, officials in the Obama Administration expressed their support for it.

True enough, in our discussions, Senator Wyden, Chairman Ryan, and I made some improvements to that original bill. But, the fundamentals remain the same and we've been very transparent as to what the changes have been.

Second, in the 113th Congress, the Finance Committee held nine hearings on trade, and TPA was brought up at virtually every one of them. I know this because, more often than not, I was the one bringing it up.

One of those hearings was devoted specifically and entirely to TPA and included the testimony of witnesses across the spectrum, including one representing organized labor.

Finally, since the 114th Congress convened just about three months ago, this committee has had three hearings in which trade and TPA was a major topic of discussion. Today's hearing is the fourth.

In other words, this is well-covered territory for this committee.

So, while I understand and respect that there are sincerely-held views on this topic, some of which are different than mine, any arguments that we've been less than forthcoming and transparent with this TPA legislation are, not to put too fine a point on it, nonsense.

I've been in the Senate a long time. And, I think I'm generally considered to be pretty reasonable. I am certainly willing to listen to and consider any genuine concerns that some may have about process. I want all sides to be heard and I want a fair and open debate. That's why we're having this additional hearing.

By all means, we should have a frank and open discussion about these issues and I hope we will continue to do so today. But, let's not dress up opposition to trade and TPA as concerns about process.

During our hearing last week, I made two assertions about trade.

I stated plainly that U.S. trade with foreign countries is a good thing. And, I said that TPA is the best tool Congress has in its arsenal to help influence and facilitate trade.

Those are pretty fundamental assertions. And, at the end of the day, people are either going to agree with them or they won't. More hearings and weeks of additional delays aren't going to change many minds one way or the other on those essential issues.

With that in mind, I welcome today's hearing. Like I said, we've got a very distinguished panel of witnesses who I think will speak to the heart of these matters. I look forward to a spirited discussion.

For my part, I just want to make clear – if it's not clear enough already – that I believe Congress should be working hand in hand with the administration to break down barriers to foreign markets in order to give our businesses and job creators a chance to compete in the global marketplace.

The United States should be a leader in international trade. We should be setting the standards and making the rules. We simply cannot afford to sit on the sidelines and let other countries dictate where the world goes on trade.

Trade is an essential element of a healthy economy. We should be doing all we can to advance a trade agenda that works for America and advances our interests on the world stage.

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