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CONTACT: [Aaron Fobes](#) , [Julia Lawless](#)

(202) 224-4515

Hatch Statement at Finance Hearing on Congressional Trade Priorities

WASHINGTON – Senate Finance Committee Chairman Orrin Hatch (R-Utah) today delivered the following opening statement at a committee hearing on Congressional trade priorities:

I would like to thank everyone for attending today's hearing on Congress and U.S. Tariff Policy.

And, welcome to the distinguished panel of witnesses we have before the committee today: Ambassador Froman, Secretary Lew, and Secretary Vilsack.

Each of you gentlemen serve in key positions and make decisions every day on important trade issues. We look forward to your testimony and appreciate your contributions to this debate.

My hope is that this hearing will help kick-start the first real opportunity we've had to debate U.S. trade policy in a number of years as we get closer to introducing and enacting legislation to renew Trade Promotion Authority, or TPA.

Let me start by stating one simple premise: U.S. trade with other countries is a good thing.

Trade creates new opportunities for America's workers, enhances the standard of living for our citizens, helps our national security by solidifying alliances with like-minded nations, advances America's values abroad, strengthens the rule of law, and helps lift people across the globe out of poverty.

To effectively achieve these goals, Congress must be an effective partner with the administration.

Our nation's constitutional framework is complex. Article I of the Constitution grants to the Congress the power to regulate commerce with foreign nations. But, Article II grants the President the power to conduct foreign policy.

I think most would agree that trying to negotiate an agreement among many different parties with different priorities and vague objectives is an inherently difficult, if not impossible, proposition. Most would also agree that it would be even more difficult to reach an agreement if the parties are unsure if their negotiating partners will be able put the agreement into force.

Given those realities, it's pretty easy to understand why TPA is so important. No potential trade partner will give our negotiators their best offer unless they know what issues matter to us most and whether we can deliver on the deal. Simply put, for America to be able to succeed at the trade negotiating table and to set the rules for a fair international marketplace, we must speak with one voice in our demands and provide assurance that we will deliver what we promise.

Now, people may have different theories about how to best achieve those goals, but there is only one legislative tool with a proven track record, and that is TPA.

TPA is the most powerful tool in Congress's trade arsenal. For decades now, robust TPA laws have ensured that Congress plays a leading role in setting our country's trade agenda and providing our trade negotiators with the necessary tools to reach the best deals possible.

Currently, the Obama Administration is in the midst of negotiating some of the most ambitious trade agreements in our nation's history. I commend them for that. But, as I've stated on a number of occasions, those negotiations will almost certainly fail if Congress does not renew TPA.

And, make no mistake, failure in these negotiations would have a negative impact on our economy.

More than 96 percent of the world's consumers live outside the United States. In order to be competitive, American businesses need to be able to sell more American-made products and services to those overseas customers.

Put simply, if we want to create more opportunity and high-paying jobs here at home, we need to open more foreign markets to U.S. goods and services. We should be doing all we can to tear down barriers to American exports while, at the same time, laying down enforceable rules for our trading partners so we can be sure that American workers and job-creators are competing on a level playing field.

We need to be leading the world on trade, writing the rules and setting the standards. If we don't, other countries – countries like China – most certainly will.

We can address all of these concerns by passing strong TPA legislation. Senator Wyden and I are currently working to do just that.

I want to thank Senator Wyden for his efforts to help us get as far as we have. I also want to once again thank the three cabinet officials who are here to share their views on the role of Congress, U.S. tariff policy, and what our work means to our nation's international trade agenda.

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