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Hatch Statement at Finance Committee Executive Session on Social Security Advisory Board Nominations

WASHINGTON – U.S. Senator Orrin Hatch (R-Utah), Ranking Member of the Senate Finance Committee, today delivered the following opening statement at a committee executive session on Social Security Advisory Board nominations:

Thank you, Chairman Wyden, for holding today's session to consider nominations for the Social Security Advisory Board.

The Advisory Board is intended to be a bipartisan Board to advise Congress, the President, and the Commissioner of Social Security on policies related to Social Security's old-age, survivors, and disability insurance programs as well as the Supplemental Security Income program.

The charge to the Board is, essentially, to analyze, study, and make recommendations related to those programs. The Board has tried to focus on analyses of economic tradeoffs and examination of the activities taking place within those programs. The work of the Board can involve economics as well as actuarial science. For the most part, the Board has worked toward arriving at bipartisan analyses and recommendations and using positive economic analysis rather than normative economic analysis.

In my assessment, the quickest way for support in Congress for the Advisory Board to erode is for it to slip into partisan battles, and to make recommendations that rely on political views of Board members, rather than positive economic and actuarial analysis. The Board's Chair sets the tone of the Advisory Board's agenda and analyses, and too much partisanship, without adequate allowance for diverse, but reasoned, views is a threat to the relevance and continuation of the Board's activities.

There are, of course, differences in the way reasonable people assess tradeoffs that we face when considering something as complex and large as the Social Security system and the Supplemental Security Income program. The way to resolve reasoned differences is not to merely argue that the other side is wrong because they don't agree with certain assumptions or policy positions. Rather, the way to resolve differences is to weigh the facts and present

evidence-based tradeoffs that are relevant, so that Congress and others can make informed decisions.

I've expressed these concerns before, particularly in reference to one of the nominees we'll be considering today. I won't say much on that matter now, only that my previous comments and concerns still hold and that I will be voting accordingly.

Whatever is ultimately the composition of a full Social Security Advisory Board, I hope that all present and future members of the Board are clear about their mission and that they put bipartisan consensus at the top of their list of priorities.

I hope that the Board does not dissolve into a partisan battleground.

And, I hope that the Board does not spend undue energy in attempts to lobby Congress on our program funding decisions or on legislative priorities that do not represent the consensus of the entire Board.

Once again, thank you Chairman Wyden for holding today's session.

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