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Wyden Statement on Deputy USTR, Treasury Counsel, PBGC Nominations

As Prepared for Delivery

The Committee meets this morning to discuss three important nominations. General Counsel of the Treasury, the head of the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation -- a little-known agency that's a financial backstop for millions of American retirees -- and deputy U.S. trade representative.

I'm going to start off with the nominee to be Treasury's top lawyer. Brian Morrissey is a well qualified nominee who's got the right experience inside the federal government and in the private sector.

The real question is, how does somebody approach being in-house counsel for an administration that makes a sport of violating the law?

The Trump administration has illegally fired thousands of Treasury employees.

The president is determined to crack down on free speech by weaponizing the IRS.

It is stomping all over taxpayer privacy laws in incredibly dangerous ways.

I have serious concerns about the Trump administration watering down a key anti-money laundering law called the Corporate Transparency Act. Senator Whitehouse and I wrote that legislation with the current Secretary of State. It was a bipartisan priority, and it took years to get it passed. Undermining it is a gift to financial criminals. Mr. Morrissey's credentials really aren't the issue. The issue is, if he's confirmed, he'll be surrounded by corruption and lawlessness the minute he walks through the door on day one. He can expect to face some hard-hitting questions on these issues and others today.

Next up, Janet Dhillon's nomination to be director of the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation, also known as the PBGC.

The PBGC is not a hot topic in coffee shops and restaurants across America, but this agency gets the job done month after month, year after year. There are millions of American workers and retirees out there

who probably don't realize this agency is a lifeline that ensures they're able to enjoy a dignified retirement. It's key to guaranteeing people receive the benefits they've earned through many years of hard work.

In 2021, Democrats passed a law called the Butch Lewis Act that strengthened the PBGC and saved the pensions of more than a million and a half retirees, workers and beneficiaries. In the process of implementing that law, the agency has done important work in cutting down on improper payments and recovering dollars that shouldn't have gone out. These payments account for less than one percent of the funds that have rescued the pensions of so many American workers under Butch Lewis. There's been an effort by some Republicans in Congress to attack the Butch Lewis Act and undermine the PBGC's finances. It's a recipe for disaster for millions of Americans. My Democratic colleagues and I want to make sure nobody meddles with that law, because if they do, they'd be driving millions of Americans into destitution and endangering the retirements of many more.

Ms. Dhillon has some experience in federal service, but even more in private practice. During the first Trump administration, she was appointed chair of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. Senators have raised big concerns about her tenure in that role. The end effect was that a whole lot of vulnerable Americans had nowhere to turn when they faced discrimination in the workplace. It was a win for big corporations that wanted to get away with sweeping discrimination cases under the rug.

My colleagues on the Senate HELP committee were denied an opportunity to get answers about Ms. Dhillon's work at the EEOC, as well as her plans for the PBGC if she's confirmed. My hope is we'll be able to begin to make up for that today.

Finally, Joseph Barloon's nomination to serve as Deputy U.S. Trade Representative to the World Trade Organization in Geneva.

Donald Trump is charging ahead with poisonous tariffs and erratic trade threats that have raised prices for families and wrecked supply chains for American businesses.

A better strategy would be fixing the trade system to make sure U.S. workers, farmers and companies get a fair shake. That includes fixing the World Trade Organization.

There's been a lot of talk about how the WO needs reform. What I want to hear today is whether the Trump administration and Mr. Barloon have any plan to move past platitudes and threats and actually get something done.

I also have concerns about whether Mr. Barloon was fully forthcoming about his work for foreign entities. He gave inconsistent answers to questions by my staff about whether he advised a foreign government-owned client on trade matters. The Committee needs a clear answer from the nominee on what work he did and why he didn't fully disclose it during the vetting process.

A web version of this statement is [here](#).

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