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**Wyden Statement at Finance Committee Hearing on the Nomination of Alex Azar to Lead HHS**  
*As Prepared for Delivery*

The same Donald Trump who said almost exactly one year ago that price-hiking drug companies were “getting away with murder” has nominated a drug company executive with a documented history of raising prescription drug prices to captain the administration’s health care team. Mr. Alex Azar is here with the Finance Committee today, nominated to serve as the next Secretary of Health and Human Services.

It’s my view that the issues he’ll work on, if confirmed, will be defining domestic issues in 2018. That’s because Americans heard a lot of promises two years ago about how great their health care would be under Trump, and how the era of skyrocketing drug prices was over. Americans are going to want to know, come November, if the big guarantees they heard in 2016 ever came to fruition. To say this administration hasn’t yet delivered would be a wild understatement.

Mr. Azar was the president of Eli Lilly’s U.S.-based subsidiary, Lilly USA, from 2012 to 2017. He chaired its U.S. pricing, reimbursement and access steering committee, which gave him a major role over drug price increases for every product Lilly marketed in this country.

Let’s look at the track record. The price of Lilly’s bone-growth drug Forteo, used to treat osteoporosis, more than doubled on Mr. Azar’s watch. The price of Effient, used to treat heart disease, more than doubled. The price of Strattera, used to treat ADHD, more than doubled. The price of Humalog, used to treat diabetes, more than doubled. And those are just some of the drugs that were under his purview as head of Lilly USA.

Mr. Azar told committee staff that while he chaired the company’s pricing committee he never -- not even once -- signed off on a decrease in the price of a drug.

This morning the committee will likely hear that this is just the way things work -- it’s the system that’s to be blamed. My view is, there’s a lot of validity in that. The system is broken. Mr. Azar was a part of that system.

Given ample opportunity to provide concrete examples as a nominee of how he’d fix it, Mr. Azar has come up empty.

And if Mr. Azar is confirmed, it won’t be the first time the president and his health care team broke their promises.

A virtual parade of Trump health care officials have come before this committee and the Health Committee and promised they'd uphold the law with respect to the Affordable Care Act. Right out of the gate, it was Tom Price telling us it would be his job to "administer the law" at HHS, not to be a legislator.

The track record there looks miserable, too, because the sabotage agenda went into effect on day one. Along with their allies in Congress, the Trump team wasted no time undermining the private health insurance markets. They cut the open enrollment period in half. They slashed advertising budgets. They made it harder for people having difficulty signing up for coverage to get in-person assistance. They attacked a rule that says women have to have guaranteed, no-cost access to contraception, but fortunately that move has been held up in the courts.

They made it easier to sell junk insurance that fails people when they have a health emergency. All in all, the Trump administration has made millions of people's health care worse, and they've got no serious plan to undo the damage.

Mr. Azar is going to have to explain today whether he'll continue the sabotage agenda as HHS Secretary. And he should, because it stands in stark contrast to what he did as a member of the Bush Administration to help launch Medicare Part D. He participated in a bus roadshow, public events, and local media appearances. So when it came to promoting the Medicare prescription drug benefit, he toured like he was in the Grateful Dead. Now he's set to join an administration that's tweeted less about open enrollment than Thanksgiving safety.

There's also been a lot of talk about "welfare reform" in 2018. Mr. Azar told me he believes Medicaid counts as welfare. But everybody you ask seems to have a different answer for what exactly "welfare reform" means. The common thread to all the Republican talk is this: deep, draconian cuts to programs like Medicare and Medicaid, Social Security, anti-hunger programs, support for struggling families.

With respect to Medicaid, this program is at the heart of health care in America, and it spans generations, from newborn infants to two out of three seniors in nursing homes. Today, Medicaid is built on a guarantee. The Trump team wants to end it. They've set in motion plans that would make it harder for a lot of people to get the care they need. In some cases it's older Americans and people with disabilities who need long-term care. In other cases it's adults of limited means -- people who struggle to climb the economic ladder. As the one-time director of the Oregon Gray Panthers, I came up as an advocate for seniors, and any policy that risks nursing home care they need is a non-starter. And furthermore, my view is, you can't get ahead in life if you don't have your health, so endangering the health care of low-income Americans is the absolute wrong way to go.

Some of the other issues that might fall under this "welfare reform" umbrella are on the human services side of HHS' jurisdiction -- issues Mr. Azar has no experience managing. Those are all areas that the committee will need to discuss further today.

One final point -- the leaders of both sides of this committee previously had regular meetings and calls with sitting HHS Secretaries, Republicans and Democrats. The last HHS Secretary broke with that tradition to the detriment of bipartisanship, so I was glad to hear Mr. Azar commit to me that he'd revive it. Thank you for being here today, Mr. Azar. I appreciate your willingness to serve, and I look forward to questions.

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