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Wyden Hearing Statement on Commerce, USTR, SSAB Nominees
As Prepared for Delivery

The committee has before it today five nominees, all of whom have exceptional backgrounds and expertise in their fields. Their commitment to public service is truly admirable and an example for all to follow.

First up is Stefan Selig, who is nominated to be Under Secretary of Commerce for International Trade. In this role, Mr. Selig would oversee the International Trade Administration at the Department of Commerce. ITA's focus is on the competitiveness of American businesses. The agency plays a key role in American trade policy by working with the private sector to identify export and investment opportunities and by enforcing our trade remedy laws that are central to combating unfair trade.

Mr. Selig is well-suited to take on this challenge. He knows how to navigate the global economy and understands what businesses need to be competitive. If confirmed, he must ensure that we step up enforcement of our trade remedy laws.

Next we have Darci Vetter, a Finance Committee alum, who has been nominated to be Chief Agricultural Negotiator at the Office of the United States Trade Representative.

If confirmed, Ms. Vetter will have the important task of being the lead trade negotiator to take on the tariff and non-tariff barriers that are imposed all over the world on American agriculture exports. The U.S. has an ambitious trade agenda with important agriculture negotiations taking place among the world's biggest and most dynamic markets. It will be important for the United States to have a skilled hand in these negotiations, and Darci is the right person at the right time.

Right now, for example, the U.S. is in the middle of important, yet difficult, negotiations with Japan and other Trans Pacific Partnership participants regarding America's most important agricultural crops: wheat, dairy, poultry. We will be relying on Darci to push for the comprehensive and ambitious outcome that our farmers and producers expect and our economy needs.

Also with us today are three nominees for the Social Security Advisory Board: Drs. Henry Aaron, Lanhee Chen, and Alan Cohen. The board is responsible for advising the President and Congress on Social Security policy, and regularly makes important policy recommendations to enhance economic security for individuals, maintain the solvency of Social Security programs, and improve service for beneficiaries.

All three have excellent credentials and, if confirmed, will bring an impressive and diverse set of perspectives to the board.

The board plays a key role in the Social Security policy process, producing top-notch, bipartisan reports on a range of issues. And yet, the board has not had a full seven members since September 2008. This is unacceptable given the numerous challenges facing the program today and in the future. Congress certainly shares some of the blame, but we now have a chance to set things straight.

First, we have Henry Aaron. Dr. Aaron has had an illustrious career in both the public sector and academia, including over 45 years with the Brookings Institution. I commend the President for his excellent choice. Dr. Aaron is one of the country's foremost experts on Social Security, and his many publications and contributions to the program make him an invaluable asset.

I'm also disappointed to note that this is Dr. Aaron's second appearance before the committee. His previous SSAB nomination was the first ever to have votes against in committee, and I think that is unfortunate. We have three SSAB nominees before us today. They are all well-qualified and hold strong views. We may disagree with those views, but that disagreement should not cause us to oppose their service on this important, bipartisan advisory board. I urge my colleagues to support all three nominees so we can get the board back to full strength.

Next is Lanhee Chen, also nominated to the SSAB. Dr. Chen has a stellar academic record and has made valuable contributions in a number of policy fields, including Social Security. If confirmed, he will bring a distinct and valuable perspective to the board.

Finally, we have Alan Cohen. Dr. Cohen has had a long and prestigious career in public service, including over a decade here on the Finance Committee. His knowledge of budgetary matters and Social Security is simply unmatched. And his wide range of experiences in both Congress and the federal government give him a level of expertise and insight the board will surely benefit from.

In short, all of the nominees here today are well-qualified to take on the challenging tasks before them. I hope to see them confirmed as soon as possible.

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