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**Wyden Statement on the Children's Health Insurance Program**

**Delivered at the Senate Finance Subcommittee on Health Care Hearing on CHIP**

I'd like to start by pointing out that in time of partisanship and dysfunction in Washington, it's important to draw attention to government programs that genuinely help people and answer a real need.

One of them is the Children's Health Insurance Program. Better known as CHIP, it provides essential medical and dental care to millions of children nationwide and thousands of Oregonians who otherwise are at risk of falling through the cracks. It's reduced disparities in health coverage for economically vulnerable folks in this country and provided broader benefits that travel alongside kids who are healthy.

Those facts are well known and well established.

But there is a second set of facts, a more personal set, that isn't as well known, but that today, of all days, must be recognized.

It's the critical role our chairman, Senator Rockefeller, played in bringing CHIP into existence back in 1997. I should add that Senator Hatch was instrumental in guiding CHIP into law too. Together, their contributions were significant in what truly was a bi-partisan effort to solve a big problem.

CHIP wasn't a lone exception or a lucky aberration for Senator Rockefeller, though. It was, in fact, but one touchstone in a long and impressive a career driven by humility and a powerful, relentless, admirable desire to help those most in need.

The spectrum of issues and causes in which Senator Rockefeller has been an influential voice is broad and deep. It ranges from measures to preserve retirement benefits for miners and their families to working to beef up cybersecurity protections and finding ways to moderate gratuitous violence on TV.

He pushed the Veterans Affairs Department to revisit disability claims arising from what has become known as "Gulf War Illness" and worked to keep our intelligences agencies in line.

But his work on health care is where Senator Rockefeller's imprint may be most lasting and important. In addition to his crucial role on CHIP, he has been an effective agent in the fight against Alzheimer's disease and other neurological conditions. He was a powerful and persistent voice in the long, difficult march to passing the Affordable Care Act.

And as everybody on this committee knows, his work to protect and expand Medicaid was without peer.

Despite his last name and the opportunities it provided, Senator Rockefeller's life is distinguished by service to others; a boots-in-the-mud ethic that includes a stint with the Peace Corps and time with Volunteers In Service to America, or VISTA, that brought him to West Virginia.

That opened the door to his new home and a life in politics that we're recognizing today.

A lot of that career is directly connected to this committee, where his roots run especially deep. Senator Rockefeller is the fourth senator from West Virginia to serve on the Finance Committee and is the longest serving of any senator from that state. That is no small footnote from a state that included the legendary Robert Byrd.

He also can stake a claim to another bit of Finance Committee trivia – he is one of seven sets of relatives to serve on the committee. His great-grandfather Sen. Nelson Aldrich, a Republican from Rhode Island no less, served on the committee at the end of the 19th Century and beginning of the 20th Century. Aldrich rose to chairman where he served for a decade.

Equally notable, he is the only Democrat to serve as Chair or Ranking Member of the Health Care Subcommittee since Sen. George Mitchell in 1988.

That's quite a record.

But I'll add one more citation of my own making of which I'm particularly fond – he is a charter member of the Tall Chairman Caucus.

Through it all Sen. Rockefeller has acted with tenacity and dignity, effectiveness and grace.

I cannot close without making one final point that is the most personal of all. Senator Rockefeller's selfless decision to decline the opportunity to chair the full Finance Committee allowed me to accept the job and the responsibility that goes along with it. My gratitude for that act is profound and my goal as chairman is to live up to the standards you've set.

Those are the standards and temperament this committee – and the entire Senate – will miss when Jay retires. I know I will.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for all your work, your partnership and friendship all these years. I wish you nothing but good luck and all the good fortune you so richly deserve.

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