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## **Hatch Opening Statement at Azar Nomination Hearing**

**WASHINGTON** – Senate Finance Committee Chairman Orrin Hatch (R-Utah) today delivered the following opening statement at a Finance Committee hearing to consider the nomination of Alex Azar to serve as the secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS):

*I'd like to welcome Mr. Azar to the Finance Committee this morning. Thank you for being here and for your willingness to serve in this important capacity.*

*Mr. Azar certainly has his work cut out for him. Health and Human Services is a massive, sprawling department that oversees trillions of dollars in spending and liabilities and encompasses all areas of our nation's health care system. As a result, if confirmed, Mr. Azar's work will impact the lives of every single American.*

*That's a big job. It requires knowledge, experience, and, most important, strong leadership.*

*Fortunately, our nominee brings all of this to the table, having nearly two decades of experience in the health care sector, including about six years working at the highest levels of HHS.*

*During his time at HHS, Mr. Azar played key roles in implementing new policies, including Medicare Part D and the Medicare Advantage program. He was also a leader in HHS's responses*

*to the anthrax attacks shortly after 9/11, the SARS and monkeypox crisis, and Hurricane Katrina, among others.*

*If confirmed, Mr. Azar will be Congress's primary contact on all matters relating to our nation's health care system. He will be responsible for the ongoing effort to bring down costs, provide greater access to care, and give patients more choices when it comes to coverage. Whether we're talking about work to modernize federal health programs like Medicare and Medicaid in order to preserve them for future generations, innovating the CHIP program, or reforming the private market, Mr. Azar will be the administration's primary policy driver.*

*He has made clear his intention to address the growing opioid epidemic that continues to ravage communities across the country, including in my home state of Utah. This crisis is robbing families of loved ones, employers of productive and able workers, and communities of the safety and security they once enjoyed.*

*This is an important issue to me and other members of the committee and I look forward to working with Mr. Azar to figure out how HHS and CMS can make improvements to save lives.*

*As many know, I co-authored the Ensuring Patient Access and Effective Drug Enforcement Act, which has recently come under scrutiny in relation to the opioid epidemic. This law requires HHS to submit a report to Congress regarding obstacles to legitimate patient access to controlled substances and issues with diversion of controlled substances.*

*The required report is long overdue, and so, today, I'd like to impress upon Mr. Azar the importance of getting this report to Congress so that we can have an opportunity to review and make any necessary changes to the law that may help turn the tide of this epidemic. I hope to get his commitment to produce and releasing this report as soon as possible, once he's confirmed.*

*He has expressed his commitment to succeeding in these important endeavors. And, I believe his record shows that he is more than capable of leading HHS through these next few consequential years.*

*Of course, there are some on the committee who have already made up their mind about Mr. Azar and are committed to opposing his nomination. This is essentially par for the course for the high-profile nominees that have come before us under this administration. And, as in previous cases, none of the attacks leveled at Mr. Azar are focused on his record, his experience, or his qualifications. Instead, we're hearing talk about supposedly revolving doors and non-existent conflicts of interest.*

*While I believe Mr. Azar is more than capable of responding to his critics on his own, I'd like to take just a moment to address some of the more prominent attacks we've heard thus far.*

*Opponents of this nomination have claimed Mr. Azar's work in the pharmaceutical industry – he's been a senior executive for the past 10 years – disqualifies him to serve in this position.*

*I would hope that my colleagues would want to avoid creating standards or setting new precedents where work in the private sector is somehow a knock against a nominee. That certainly wasn't a standard they applied to nominees from the previous administration, and it shouldn't apply to this one.*

*Mr. Azar has committed to fully adhering to all necessary ethics requirements, including the Trump Administration's requirement prohibiting nominees from participating in matters involving their former employers and clients for two years after the end of their government service. In addition, he has committed to divesting any financial holdings that could present a conflict of interest or even the appearance such a conflict.*

*So, we're not talking about anything unethical. We're not talking about a nominee attempting to unduly profit off his government position.*

*Experience in the private sector and dealing with the policies and regulations that come from government agencies is, in my view, a mark in favor of a nominee's qualifications. Mr. Azar's work in the pharmaceutical industry will give him important insights regarding the impact of policies designed and implemented by HHS. And, when you add that knowledge and background to the years he spent as a senior official at HHS, you have an exemplary resume for an HHS Secretary.*

*Once again, I believe Mr. Azar is more than capable of responding to what have so far been empty criticisms. By any objective standard, Mr. Azar is well qualified to serve as Secretary of HHS. My hope is that we can have a productive hearing today and report his nomination in short order.*

*Thank you, once again, Mr. Azar, for being here today. Thank you for, again, for returning to the call to serve the American people. I look forward to your testimony.*

*Before turning to Senator Wyden, I would like to reemphasize my support for the Children's Health Insurance Program and my commitment to making sure it gets reauthorized. We have a bipartisan agreement that was reported out of committee, and I believe that it improves CHIP for the long-term. Congress has passed patches and fixes, but the time for short-term solutions is over. CHIP needs to be extended by January 19, and I'm going to do all I can to make sure we get it done. Children, their families, and states are counting on us.*

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