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Hatch Opening Statement at SSA Nomination Hearing

WASHINGTON – Senate Finance Committee Chairman Orrin Hatch (R-Utah) today delivered the following opening statement at a hearing to consider the nomination of Andrew Saul to be Commissioner of the Social Security Administration:

This morning we are meeting to discuss the nomination of Andrew Saul to be Commissioner of Social Security. This is a long overdue nomination. Mr. Saul, if confirmed, will become the first confirmed Commissioner at the Social Security Administration since 2013. I believe that most, if not all, of my colleagues here agree that having a confirmed Commissioner, and sustained leadership, will benefit the Social Security Administration, its operations, its employees and the American people who rely on their checks arriving on time.

Mr. Saul, if confirmed, you will be taking charge of an agency facing many challenges, including persistent information technology modernization issues and large work backlogs. Last week, I laid out some of these challenges at a nomination hearing for another important position at the agency. This agency needs someone in charge to help reduce disability-determination backlogs and workload backlogs. Those backlogs at the Social Security Administration are unacceptable to many, if not most, of us here in the Senate, and are not fair for the American people and Social Security beneficiaries. Operational issues at the agency need your immediate attention, and we look forward to your leadership in addressing them.

I am pleased to see in your background, Mr. Saul, that you have decades of experience in both financial decision-making and in successfully managing and growing organizations. I believe that this experience helped you understand that you cannot run the Social Security Administration by spending all of your time in Woodlawn, Maryland and D.C. Understanding what is happening in field and regional offices is critical in the role of executive leader of the agency.

Before turning to my friend, Ranking Member Wyden, let me briefly address the fact that the President has nominated Mr. Saul to serve the remainder of the six-year term that expires January 19, 2019, and also to serve the following six-year term that expires January 19, 2025.

We will be considering the first nomination today, to serve the remainder of the six-year term that expires January 19, 2019. Today's hearing will not consider the second nomination,

which involves service for the following six-year term that expires January 19, 2025. Let me be clear that we are not considering the second nomination with respect to Senate procedure, and not with respect to your qualifications to serve.

In particular, the second nomination would involve the Senate acting on a nomination which, strictly speaking, would be properly before the next Senate. Setting a Senate precedent that we could consider a possible sequence of future terms could bind future Senates improperly. Therefore, we will not be setting such a precedent today.

Once again, to be clear, the issue is Senate procedure and precedent. The issue is not whether you would be qualified to serve as Social Security Commissioner for both the duration of this term and the following six-year term. I am confident, and I expect, that if you are confirmed today for the first nomination, your nomination before the 116th Congress will be taken up as promptly as possible next year.

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