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November 2, 2023

Wyden Statement at Finance Committee Markup
As Prepared for Delivery

The nominations the Finance Committee is voting on this morning are instrumental to the federal government's finances.

First is the nomination of Marjorie Rollinson to be Chief Counsel at the IRS. The Chief Counsel's office is responsible for ensuring the agency is implementing tax law by the books. I'm pleased that the President has sent the Finance Committee such a qualified nominee. Ms. Rollinson has decades of tax and management experience in both the public and private sector, including several years at the Office of the Chief Counsel that she has been nominated to run. If confirmed, Ms. Rollison would be the first woman to serve as Chief Counsel.

It's no secret that Democrats and Republicans have differing views about how the IRS should operate. But the position of the Chief Counsel has historically been one that has received bipartisan support, and it is my hope that will remain true today. The last Chief Counsel, Michael Desmond, was reported out of the Finance Committee with a 26-2 vote, and was confirmed by the Senate with an 84-15 vote. I urge all of my colleagues to maintain this bipartisan support.

Now, on to the public trustees. The Boards of Trustees of the Social Security and Medicare Trust Funds are responsible for issuing annual reports to Congress on the status of the Trust Funds that ensure Americans receive their earned benefits now and into the future.

The Board is made up of six members: the Treasury Secretary, the Secretary of Labor, the Secretary of Health and Human Services, and the Commissioner of Social Security, as well as two public trustees. The Board has been without public trustees for over eight years.

That's why I'm glad to have two qualified nominees before the committee. Demetrios Kouzoukas has been nominated to fill the Republican slot for the public trustee. Mr. Kouzoukas has extensive experience across our federal health programs, serving at both Health and Human Services and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, as well as a variety of roles in the private sector.

Tricia Neuman is a long-time leader at the Kaiser Family Foundation, and has worked in both the House and Senate.

Both nominees have the experience needed to represent the public and ensure the integrity of the Board's reports. I'd also like to reiterate that this role requires putting the public interest first, not the interests and values of outside employers or other financial relationships. The financial future of both Social Security and Medicare are on the minds of families across the country as well as lawmakers, and work will need to be done to chart a course that will protect and strengthen Americans' earned benefits.

Before I close, I want to take a moment to acknowledge the concerns my friend, Senator Warren, raised at the hearing and in subsequent letters regarding Mr. Kouzoukas's background and potential conflicts of interest serving as a public trustee while also serving on the board of Clover Health. I share her position that we should hold all public servants to the highest standards, and that current law governing government ethics may need to be re-examined. But the bottom line is the Office of Government Ethics reviewed Mr. Kouzoukas' position and found he doesn't need to resign from the board.

I also want to reiterate that the public trustee positions do not create policy or make policy recommendations; their role is making sure the American people are confident in the projections and reports produced by the Boards of the Social Security and Medicare Trust Funds.

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