Opening Statement of Ranking Member Jeff Merkley
Senate Budget Committee Hearing: "The Nomination of Mr. Hal Duncan, of Texas, to be Deputy Director of the Office of Management and Budget"
June 16, 2026

Sen. Merkley's remarks, as prepared for delivery, follow:

Thank you, Chairman Graham.

And thank you, Mr. Duncan, for joining us.

Today, we will consider your nomination to be Deputy Director of the Office of Management and Budget.

This is a position of immense responsibility.

The Deputy Director serves as the Number Two official at OMB and its Chief Operating Officer overseeing day-to-day operations as well as helping to manage budget formulation regulatory oversight and policy implementation across the Executive Branch.

Since 1974, the Deputy Director of OMB has been a Senate-confirmed position.

The 22 previous Deputy Directors have brought decades of budget, management, or legislative experience to this role.

So, I'm concerned about your comparatively thin resume that includes less than two years as Associate Director of OMB's Office of Legislative Affairs, just two years as Legislative Director for a member of the House, and, prior to working on the Hill, less than two years at the Republican Senate Campaign Committee.

For the next fiscal year, OMB is requesting a budget of $179 million and 645 employees.

In other words, this is a massively complex agency with hundreds of employees using a variety of highly technical skillsets to cover many different fields of expertise.

Furthermore, in your current role as Associate Director of OMB's Office of Legislative Affairs, OMB has stonewalled Congress and this Committee by not responding to a single letter I have sent.

And I'm concerned that, in addition to your lack of management experience, you have not been successful

in persuading OMB Director Russ Vought to respond to legitimate Congressional requests, including answering questions for the record by the April 24 deadline following his testimony before this committee.

That raises troubling questions about how you will operate as Mr. Vought's deputy.

Candidly, Mr. Duncan, I'm concerned your policy and legislative experience are not commensurate with the responsibilities of this office.

Instead, your chief qualification seems to be loyalty to President Trump and OMB Director Russ Vought.

So, I am concerned that, if confirmed to this position, you will not oppose their illegal and unconstitutional actions.

Since President Trump and Mr. Vought have returned to office, they have repeatedly violated the Constitution's separation of powers by:

Usurping Congress' power to declare war through President Trump's war of choice in Iran.

Usurping Congress' power to tax through the President's tariffs, which the Supreme Court have ruled unconstitutional.

Usurping Congress' power of the purse through illegal impoundments, which the Government Accountability Office found the Trump Administration did on seven separate occasions last year through so-called "pocket rescissions" to 'run out the clock' on the fiscal year; through firings of thousands of federal workers, who then had to be rehired because DOGE had no idea what it was doing; and through the dismantling of federal agencies, including the U.S. Agency for International Development.

At a recent hearing with Secretary of State Marco Rubio, I noted that public health experts at Harvard and Boston University estimate that at least 500,000 children have died as a result of USAID being shut down.

And the budget proposal put out by OMB for the coming fiscal year does nothing to address these problems.

Absolutely nothing to help American families struggling with affordability. No plan to bring down

gas prices, no plan to bring down grocery prices, no plan to save Social Security, which will start

running out of money in just six years, and no plan to help farmers hurt by Trump's tariffs and rising energy and fertilizer costs.

It's also irresponsible budgeting, with no meaningful revenue proposals, no credible plan to reduce the deficit, which is now over 100 percent of GDP, and no plan to pay for the war in Iran.

Throughout all this, Mr. Duncan, you have been serving at OMB, which raises serious concerns

that you will be a rubber stamp for President Trump's and Russ Vought's continuing efforts to violate the Constitution and centralize power in an authoritarian presidency.

The American people deserve qualified individuals overseeing their tax dollars.

So, I look forward to hearing from you today and learning more about your previous management experience. As well as how you plan to work with Congress to ensure we get the information we need on behalf of our constituents.

I also hope you will commit to following the letter of the law, something that, unfortunately, President Trump and Russ Vought have refused to do.

I look forward to our discussion today.

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