

U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
Chairman John F. Kerry
Opening Statement for Representative Tauscher Nomination Hearing
June 9, 2009

Chairman Kerry Statement at Nomination Hearing for Representative Tauscher

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman John Kerry (D-MA) released the following opening remarks at the nomination hearing for Representative Ellen Tauscher, President Obama’s nominee to be the Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security.

Full text as prepared is below:

It is a pleasure to welcome a respected colleague and friend from the other side of the Capitol. Long a leading Congressional voice on national security issues, Ellen Tauscher has now been chosen by the President to serve as Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security.

Congresswoman Tauscher faces a great many challenges. Terrorists are actively seeking to obtain sensitive materials and technology in an effort to launch catastrophic attacks with nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons. Governments that cannot feed their populations and cannot find jobs for their young people can still produce weapons-grade fissile material, test weapon designs, and field long-range missiles—threatening other countries with destruction on an unimaginable scale.

Recognizing the urgency of the threat, Congress created the position of Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security in 1998, to ensure that the President and the State Department could always call upon a senior-level official squarely focused on “assist[ing] the Secretary and the Deputy Secretary in matters related to international security policy, arms control, and nonproliferation.”

America must pursue the long-term goal of a world without nuclear weapons, and I applaud the President for affirming our commitment in his April speech in Prague. This is not a dreamy vision built on naïve optimism—it is a cool calculation based on the national security interests of the United States, endorsed by steely-eyed Cold Warriors like Henry Kissinger and George Shultz. They recognize a fundamental truth: we face a fork in the road, and if we don’t dramatically transform our policies to aim in the direction of a world free of nuclear weapons, we will face a world in which more diverse actors wield ever more dangerous weapons – and the chances of nuclear weapons being used will steadily grow.

The ultimate goal will not be reached quickly, and possibly not in our lifetimes. In the meantime, our security will not be left only to the sunny side of our imagination. So long as other actors possess nuclear weapons, we will too.

But this moment presents ample opportunities for significant progress and perhaps even a major breakthrough in the coming months and years. While the goal may be far-off, there is increasing agreement that prudent, practical near-term steps in that direction will make us safer along the way. We can and should be working on a number of such steps immediately—steps that Congresswoman Tauscher, if confirmed, will be charged with overseeing:

- Dealing with North Korea’s and Iran’s unacceptable defiance of their nonproliferation commitments;
- Negotiating a replacement for the expiring START treaty, on which, I’m pleased to note, we are reportedly making progress;
- Securing vulnerable nuclear material around the world within four years;

- Working toward a global treaty to ban the production of fissionable material for nuclear weapons, now that the Administration has broken the nearly decade-long impasse at the UN Conference on Disarmament;
- Consulting with the Committee and the Senate as we re-examine the case for ratifying the CTBT.

Of course, along with all of these duties, she will also be charged with guiding our international security assistance, peaceful nuclear cooperation, and military export control policies, to ensure that they conform to our larger foreign policy objectives. In these areas, too, there will be international agreements for which she will have to seek the support of either the Senate or the full Congress.

Fortunately, we have someone before us who has demonstrated an admirable commitment to public service and bipartisanship, and to America's security and ideals. Given her seven terms in Congress, I am confident that, if she is confirmed, the Undersecretary will seek a close working relationship with this Committee, keeping the Senate fully informed and involved.

Given the urgency of her work, I intend for the Committee to move quickly on Congresswoman Tauscher's nomination, and I hope that the full Senate will also approve her in a timely manner.

Before we ask our witnesses to speak, let me turn to the Senator who, when it comes to matters of nonproliferation and international security, continues to set the standard in this body for putting principle before partisanship: Senator Lugar.

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