

BUSINESS MEETING

Thursday, April 27, 2023

U.S. SENATE
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS
Washington, D.C.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:07 a.m., in Room 116, The Capitol Building, Hon. Robert Menendez, chairman of the committee, presiding.

Present: Senators Menendez [presiding], Cardin, Shaheen, Coons, Murphy, Kaine, Merkley, Booker, Schatz, Van Hollen, Risch, and Ricketts.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. ROBERT MENENDEZ, U.S. SENATOR FROM NEW JERSEY

The Chairman: Good morning, everyone. This business meeting of the Foreign Relations Committee will come to order. We will be lining up for the joint session of Congress shortly, so I would like to keep the meeting as short as possible.

I know we have our colleagues who are coming, so I figured we would do the introductory portions to get them out of the way. Today, we are considering ten nominations. Each nominee is well qualified. Several of them have been pending for quite some time, some even dating back to the last Congress.

So, I urge all my colleagues to support them today. Before I recognize the Ranking Member, I have three items to touch on briefly. First, as you know, I am committed to moving meaningful bipartisan legislation through the committee.

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We have a legislative markup scheduled for next Wednesday, and as discussed with the Ranking Member, I plan to hold an additional legislative markup towards the end of the work period.

So, we ask all of you to share any legislative priorities so that we can build a robust agenda. Obviously, to the extent that we have bipartisan bills, it is very helpful, both for the product itself, I believe, as well as for the process to be able to get more of these on the agenda.

Second, as you all know, the Ranking Member and I are working together on China legislation. It is a top priority of the committee for this Congress, and we want and need all of your input. I understand some of you have asked about how stand-alone China legislation will be handled.

I can tell you that there are a lot of great ideas out there. I have seen some of them. Some of them are already being worked into our larger bill. I know some are already in standalone bills, and surely others will be incorporated through the amendment process.

I am committed to an open process and look forward to integrating those ideas, Republican and Democratic alike, into the bigger bill for purposes of markup so that this committee can move a comprehensive product on China.

Consistent with that, I do not anticipate marking up separate stand-alone China bills prior to the committee acting on comprehensive legislation. I also understand that there have been questions on what will happen to your contributions if the comprehensive bill does not end up moving.

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And my response to that is simple. If the bill does not have a chance to move forward, the comprehensive bill, I would support members pursuing their priorities from the bill as they see fit. Which means if you want to move it individually at that time, we certainly will consider it, and I am available to discuss the China bill further at any time with any member.

Finally, and regretfully, I need to note that the pace of our work on nominations has been unacceptably slow. To date, we are at the first third of the year, the committee has reported out only eight nominees this Congress. I repeat, eight.

That is far less than one nominee per week, and only three SFRC nominees have been confirmed this Congress. Those numbers are an embarrassment, particularly when we have 30 nominees ready for hearings. These are national security positions. Leaving them empty has serious consequences.

So, I urge us all to reach back to a time in the not so distant past, a time when this committee routinely moved dozens of qualified nominees per work period without delay. A time when comity truly meant working together to get things done. That needs to be the practice moving forward.

I appreciate that yesterday, the Ranking Member told me that there are ten more nominees that will be agreed to on the legislative markup, and we appreciate that. But I really believe, as we saw in Sudan, the lack of an African Union representative from the United States would be a critical player in trying to work in that region.

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If we did not have an ambassador in Sudan—I know we wouldn't have successfully organized the departure of all of our personnel. We need to get people in place. With that, let me turn to the ranking member for his remarks.

**STATEMENT OF HON. JAMES RISCH,
U.S. SENATOR FROM IDAHO**

Senator Risch: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. First of all, as you know, we are going to do ten nominees today, and the ten nominees next week. We will continue to work in good faith. We sometimes get bogged down in negotiations, but we—I will commit to you that we will work in good faith as we go forward.

China bill, I—we are going to continue to talk about this and work in good faith. This issue is way too big to get bogged down in politics and way too big to get bogged down in small details..

We—this is a real high priority for this committee, certainly one of the highest priorities for the United States of America, and I think we need to treat it as such. And so, I commit to you to continue to work in good faith to try to get the products, hopefully one solid bipartisan product we can take to the floor and get behind it and move.

On the noms again, like I said, we will continue to work in good faith and try not to get those mixed up with the legislative packages, which sometimes they do and the result is not happy. There are a handful, as always, that we are going to have issues with. But overall, I am with you.

We certainly need good people in place to be at these—you mentioned Sudan. I was afraid you were going to take that as kind of—what was happening in the

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committee is compared to—so thank you for not going there. And with that, I do agree with you, we need to get—we certainly need to get --

The Chairman: After 31 years of doing this, I have some diplomatic skills.

[Laughter.]

Senator Risch: I will agree with that.

The Chairman: Senator Risch, thank you for your comments, and I appreciate the spirit in which you have spoken, and hopefully we can make it happen in our practice. And I would just say about any nominee for which there is an issue, my only request is, let us bring the nominee before the committee and raise the issues in front of them.

You know, they have submitted themselves to a process. If there are things in their background or issues that they have created in their background, that should be explored at a full committee hearing when their nomination is being considered, and they will have to answer both at the hearing, as well as in questions for the record.

And then a decision can be made about whether they are worthy of approval of the Senate. I just commend that to you, to your attention as a way to move forward in some of the more, maybe what you consider some of the more problematic individuals, but --

Senator Risch: There are not many, but there are a handful.

The Chairman: Yes. Okay. Senator Shaheen.

Senator Shaheen: I really appreciate the conversation you and Senator Risch just had, because as we look at competition with China, the PRC, one of the most

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important areas where we can compete with China is by having our diplomats on the ground, in-country.

I just came back from South America, as I know you did, Senator Menendez, and unfortunately, there are still countries in South America where China is making inroads and we do not have diplomats in position.

So, I would hope that we could all commit to trying to move these folks, nominees as soon as possible. The second point I would like to make, I just met with former women members of the Afghan Special Forces operation. So, they are Afghans who got evacuated when we withdrew from Afghanistan, who are still having significant challenges with their status in the United States.

These are people who have been vetted. They still cannot go to work freely and improve their skills. And one of the things that they brought to my attention is that we still have a number of Afghans in the UAE, and it is very difficult to get information out about them. And one of the people we are confirming today is the U.S. Ambassador to the UAE.

So, I would hope that we would all encourage that ambassador, when she is on the ground, to work with the Emirati state to get the Afghans to the United States or to wherever they are going, so that they are not in limbo for many more years in the future.

The Chairman: Well, thank you, Senator Shaheen, for your engagement, your leadership in this regard. And I would be happy to echo your concerns, upon the confirmation of the nominee. Maybe even before, especially if she knows she is going there with that. Is there any member who wishes to speak to any of the nominees?

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[No response.]

The Chairman: If not, without objection, we will now consider en bloc the ten nominations that have been noticed for the business meeting.

Senator Risch: Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Senator Risch.

Senator Risch: I intend to vote for all of these, but I have members that do want to enter a no, so I ask unanimous consent that they be able to put a no in the record.

The Chairman: Without objection, they will be recorded—just make sure we have them tell the clerk which nominees they want to vote no on. Without any other members wishing, is there a second to the first of all, can I entertain a motion to consider en bloc?

Senator Cardin: So moved.

The Chairman: So moved. Is there a second?

Senator Shaheen: Second.

Senator Coons: Second.

The Chairman: All those in favor will say aye.

[Chorus of ayes.]

The Chairman: All those oppose will say no.

[No response.]

The Chairman: The ayes have it. With a majority of members presented having voted in the affirmative, the ayes have it. The nominations are agreed to. With that, they shall be reported to the Senate with a positive recommendation. And with the

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thanks of the Chair and the Ranking Member, thank you all for being here. See you at the joint session.

Senator Shaheen: Mr. Chairman —

The Chairman: Senator.

Senator Shaheen: I really think that before everybody leaves, that you should lead us in happy birthday to your colleague.

[All members singing happy birthday to Senator Booker.]

The Chairman: Happy birthday to you. Happy birthday to you. Happy birthday, dear Cory. Happy birthday to you.

[Applause.]

Voice: That was very quick.

Senator Booker: [Technical problems] — the record, for being very loud in this —

The Chairman: Well —

[Laughter.]

Voice: I saw you taking his picture. I thought maybe you were trying to intimidate him to not sing. It does not work.

[Laughter.]

The Chairman: I am calling Senator Risch for his birthday. Thank you, everybody. The meeting is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 10:18 a.m., the committee was adjourned.]