

NOMINATIONS OF THE 110TH CONGRESS—FIRST SESSION

HEARINGS

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS UNITED STATES SENATE

ONE HUNDRED TENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

JANUARY 30 THROUGH DECEMBER 19, 2007

Printed for the use of the Committee on Foreign Relations



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110TH CONGRESS—FIRST SESSION

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KENNETH A. MYERS, Jr., *Republican Staff Director*

*Note: Reassigned to Committee on Finance January 24, 2008.

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS
110TH CONGRESS—SECOND SESSION

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KENNETH A. MYERS, Jr., *Republican Staff Director*

*Note: Appointed February 12, 2008.

NOMINATIONS

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 17, 2007

U.S. SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS,
Washington, DC.

Obsitnik, Vincent, to be Ambassador to the Slovak Republic
Speckhard, Daniel V., to be Ambassador to Greece
Stephenson, Thomas F., to be Ambassador to the Portuguese Republic

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:36 p.m., in room SD-419, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Robert P. Casey, presiding.

Present: Senators Casey, Feingold, Menendez, and DeMint.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. ROBERT P. CASEY, JR.,
U.S. SENATOR FROM PENNSYLVANIA**

Senator CASEY. This Committee on Foreign Relations will come to order.

The committee today will consider the nominations for three key U.S. Ambassadorships in Europe. President Bush has nominated the Honorable Daniel Speckhard to be Ambassador to Greece, Mr. Thomas Stephenson to be the Ambassador to Portugal, and Mr. Vincent Obsitnik to be the Ambassador to Slovakia.

I want to congratulate all of you on your nominations, and express the gratitude of the Senate at your willingness to engage in public service on behalf of the Nation.

The relationship that we have—the Trans-Atlantic relationship, while somewhat neglected, in my judgment, in recent years—remains paramount to our national security interests.

Greece, Portugal, and Slovakia are all NATO allies, and NATO continues to bind the United States together with its partners in Europe, and still constitutes the most important alliance for the United States. NATO today plays a crucial role in supporting our objectives in Afghanistan for a representative government that can exert sovereign control, and ensure that al-Qaeda never again uses its territory as a launching pad for terrorist activities and acts.

NATO, along with the European Union, continues to facilitate the consolidation of democratic reforms, and economic prosperity in Eastern Europe, one of the last areas of the world where regard for America remains very strong. We stand together with our European allies against any effort by Russia to intimidate its neighbors or otherwise engage in hostile acts.

So, there's a broad agenda for the United States and Europe to undertake together in a spirit of cooperation and partnership.

And, of course, Greece, Portugal, and Slovakia will play crucial roles in the evolution of the Trans-Atlantic Alliance in coming years. So, it is especially important that the United States be represented by our finest public servants in Athens, Lisbon, and Bratislava.

Greece, of course, remains central to hopes for political and economic stability in the Balkans, especially as the talks on Kosovo's final status come to a conclusion at the end of this year. While the Greek Government will not always agree with aspects—or every aspect of American foreign policy, our two nations share cherished democratic values and retain a common heritage of liberty and freedom. Three million Americans call Greece their ancestral home.

The Honorable Daniel Speckhard, the nominee to be the Ambassador to Greece, has cultivated a distinguished civil service career in the United States Government that dates back to 1982; from 1997 to 2000, he ably represented the United States as Ambassador to Belarus, even as relations between the two nations deteriorated over antidemocratic behavior of the Lukashenko regime.

From 2000 to 2005, he served in a vital leadership position within the NATO Alliance, as Deputy Assistant Secretary General for Political Affairs, and the Director of Policy Planning.

For 2 years—for the past 2 years, I should say—Ambassador Speckhard has served in an especially important position in Baghdad, first as Director of the Iraq Reconstruction Management office, and more recently, as Deputy Chief of Mission at our embassy. He is an accomplished public servant, and I'm grateful he's been nominated for this vital position in Athens.

Next, Portugal has long been a steadfast ally to the United States. Portugal's contributions to NATO-led peacekeeping operations in the Balkans and Afghanistan have been significant, especially in light of the modest size of its military. The American air base in the Azores Islands remains essential to our military deployments around the world.

As a current holder of the rotating presidency of the European Union, Portugal has maintained its 500-year-old tradition of leadership as the center of the trans-Atlantic relations.

The nominee who's with us today for the post of Ambassador to Portugal, Mr. Thomas Stephenson, is an accomplished venture capitalist, and investment banker. For the past 19 years, he's been a prominent member of the business community in Silicone Valley as a venture capitalist there. He has served on, I should say, dozens of private and public corporate boards, including the Hoover Institution, and the Woodrow Wilson Center.

Although this position would represent his first opportunity for government service, Mr. Stephenson has shown an admirable commitment to public service through his community and volunteer activities.

Finally, Slovakia is a recent addition to NATO, having only entered the alliance in 2004. Today, Slovakia is governed by a ruling coalition that is quite outspoken in its criticism of United States foreign policy. The United States and Slovakia must continue to co-

operate on a range of issues, ranging from energy security in Central and Eastern Europe, to the final status of Kosovo.

My home State of Pennsylvania happens to be one of those States that can boast the largest population of Slovak-Americans in the United States, and I might add, so is our nominee.

Mr. Vincent Obsitnik can speak the language, possesses a special understanding of the Slovak culture, he's an equally qualified to make an immediate and positive impact on popular perceptions in Slovakia of the United States and the actions we undertake, and he's a graduate of the United States Naval Academy, and a veteran submariner. His post-naval career saw him become a senior executive in the information and telecommunications systems industry.

And with Americans dying in combat in foreign lands today, and our international prestige, in my judgment, at an all-time low—this country demands capable representatives to advocate for our interests overseas. And I speak to each of you when I say this, as well: If you are confirmed for your respective positions, I trust you'll dedicate yourselves fully to your positions, even as this administration enters its final months in power.

I look forward to hearing your views, and how you intend to serve as ambassadors of our great Nation.

At this time, I will turn to my colleague, Senator Feingold, for his introduction, and then I'll go back to Senator DeMint when he's here, and also Senator Menendez.

**STATEMENT OF HON. RUSS FEINGOLD,
U.S. SENATOR FROM WISCONSIN**

Senator FEINGOLD. Thank you very much, Senator Casey, for chairing this hearing and thanks to all of the witnesses for your willingness to serve the U.S. Government overseas. These are challenging positions, and I have great admiration for those who are willing to spend years abroad, serving as the eyes and ears—and sometimes mouth—of the U.S. Government.

Senator Casey, I'm especially pleased to be here today to introduce Ambassador Dan Speckhard, the nominee for the position of Ambassador to Greece. As I'm sure you will know from his resume, Ambassador Speckhard and I share a number of commonalities—we are both Wisconsinites, we share the same great alma mater, and we believe we can serve U.S. citizens by working in the Federal Government.

Ambassador Speckhard—it's good to see you again.

Mr. Chairman, I had the opportunity to meet with the Ambassador when I traveled to Iraq in 2006, when he was taking on a very challenging responsibility involving the reconstruction of Iraq. As always, I was pleased to encounter a Wisconsinite so far from home. But I was even more pleased to know the Ambassador was following a long and proud tradition of Wisconsinites committing their lives to public service, and I could tell from his presentation how, not only dedicated and capable he was, and is.

Senator Casey, I don't know whether you've ever visited Wisconsin, but if you have, your time was more than likely in Madison or Milwaukee. Well, the Ambassador, here, grew up in Wausau, a north-central town that is a little bit less known than those other two cities. Wausau is not only one of the most scenic towns in our

State; it is also vibrant, and eclectic members of the Wausau community strongly believe in the importance of community service, and understand the impact world affairs plays in their day-to-day life. I am proud that the Wausau community has generated such a committed and dedicated public servant.

Given his long history with the Department of State serving in a range of offices and embassies, I am confident that Ambassador Speckhard will dutifully and effectively represent our interests in Greece.

Thank you, Ambassador, for your ongoing commitment to public service. I would also like to thank your family—and I see your wife, Ann—for the sacrifices they have made to support you and your career.

So, Mr. Chairman, thank you again for chairing this hearing, and thank you to all the nominees here today. I wish you all the best of luck.

Senator CASEY. Thank you, Senator Feingold, and I appreciate that introduction. I haven't been to Wisconsin yet, but I apparently have to get there now. [Laughter.]

Thank you.

Senator Menendez.

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

Senator MENENDEZ. Mr. Chairman, I appreciate all of our nominees coming before the committee, I appreciate their willingness to serve, and I'm looking forward to the question and answer session. I have several questions, particularly to Ambassador Speckhard, who I had the privilege of meeting the other day.

United States-Greece relationships are something I've followed for the last 15 years in the Congress, I think it's an important post, particularly what's happening in the Balkans, our relationships with Turkey, a whole series of issues there, so I look forward to some of his answers.

As well as Ambassador Stephenson—we have a very large Portuguese-American community in New Jersey who have done exemplary things, and Portugal has played a very constructive role in Europe for us, and with us, so they're both very important assignments, as well as, of course, Mr. Obsitnik, who is going to be the Ambassador to the Slovak Republic.

But those are two interest points, and I'll have an opportunity to ask questions at that time.

Senator CASEY. Thank you, Senator.

We'll turn to our nominees now, and I'd ask you to deliver your statements in the order you were introduced, so I guess we're going right to left, if I'm correct. And I'd encourage you to keep your remarks as brief as you can, and succinct, so we can move to questions. If you're summarizing your statement, of course, the full text of your statement will be included in the hearing record.

But, I have to say, because of where you sit today, I know this is a very proud moment for each of you, and I would hope that, if you're able to do it, when you're making your statements today that you would introduce your family in whatever way is suitable for you. Because it's an important day for you and your families we

want to make sure that we give you that opportunity, or a reminder—I've been in places where I should have introduced my family and didn't, so—

[Laughter.]

Senator CASEY. If you want to take that as part of your statement, we'd certainly encourage that.
Ambassador.

**STATEMENT OF HON. DANIEL V. SPECKHARD,
NOMINEE TO BE AMBASSADOR TO GREECE**

Mr. SPECKHARD. Thank you, Mr. Chairman and distinguished Senators. It's an honor to appear before you as the President's nominee for the United States Ambassador to the Hellenic Republic.

I would like to thank Senator Feingold for his generous introduction, and taking the time to be here today. I'm proud to be a fellow Wisconsinite and appreciate the personal devotion and attention that he's given to representing our State, and I'm proud to be a colleague in that respect.

I would like to introduce—and thank you for the reminder—my wife, Ann, who is sitting here behind me, and she's with me here today. And, unfortunately, my children—Leah, Jessica, and Daniel, who weren't able to be here—because they have made a lot of personal sacrifices to support me in my public service career, most notably over the last 2 years when I was in Iraq, and was not able to live with them. Ann carried much of the burden of the family during that period, and has done so, actually, during much of my public service career.

So, any small contribution that I've been able to make to public service, and to my country, really starts with the support they've given me.

Mr. Chairman, I'm humbled that the President and Secretary Rice have placed their confidence in me for this important post. If confirmed, I will put all of my energy towards strengthening our relations with Greece, and working together to promote regional stability and tackle global problems.

I believe my career has helped me prepare for this important assignment. For 25 years as a public servant, and nearly a decade of that overseas as Ambassador of Belarus, Deputy Chief of Mission to Iraq, and a Senior Official at NATO, I have honed my diplomatic and leadership skills. And, I've worked closely during those periods with Greek diplomats and have spent time working on trying to promote stability in the Balkans, and consolidating democracy across Europe. And I think that experience will put me in a good starting point to begin work, if confirmed, in Athens.

Our partnership with Greece stems from our close ties that our nations share as allies and members of the Euro-Atlantic community, and from the millions of Americans who can trace their ancestry to the Hellenic Republic. Both Greeks and Americans share a common heritage, based on a belief in values such as liberty, freedom, and equality. We have stood together with the Hellenic Republic time and time again to defend those values across the globe.

As we look to the future, the Balkans in particular, require continued attention to ensure peace, economic transformation, and in-

tegration of all of the countries into the region, and Euro-Atlantic institutions.

The unresolved nature of the future status of Kosovo remains a barrier to development of the region, and in the coming months it will be critical to see a resolution as envisaged by the special U.N. Envoy Antisaari.

As an anchor in the region, Greece has an important interest in seeing this resolved. Greece is one of the largest investors in Balkan economies, and its leadership will be crucial to seeing history there unfold on a positive course.

If confirmed, I will work closely with the Government of Greece to increase our cooperation to bring stability to this critically-important region.

Greece also has an important interest and role to play in bringing diversified sources of energy to the European market. The United States wholeheartedly supports these efforts to diversify and to introduce true market competition to this vital economic sector.

Development of the Turkey-Greece-Italy pipeline is a significant step in that direction, and as well as a sign of the improved relations between Greece and Turkey. Both countries recognize the vital interests they share. Greece's support for closer bilateral relations with Turkey, as well as its support for Turkey's integration into the European Union, is further recognition of their common interests.

By bridging the divides that are left between those two countries, the conditions can be created to solve other longstanding problems. In the case of Cyprus, I hope a just and lasting resolution and settlement acceptable to majorities in both communities, can be achieved through the efforts of Cypriots, and the support of the international community.

Greece's location at the crossroads of Asia, the Middle East, the Balkans and Europe, along with its preeminent global shipping industry, make it a crucial ally in combating terrorism, and trafficking in persons. It is also well-situated to be an important partner in the international communities' effort to curb the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and to fight trafficking in drugs and illicit arms.

But cooperation should not be limited to regional or global matters. My family and I were deeply saddened, along with our fellow Americans, while watching the wildfires ravage Greece. I'm pleased that the United States provided \$1.9 million to assist the Government of Greece, and improving firefighting capabilities, meet humanitarian needs, and for rehabilitation and reforestation efforts.

If confirmed, I look forward to working closely with the Greek Government, other United States agencies, Congress and the Greek-American community in strengthening our cooperation in what is a common threat and challenge for both our countries.

I would like to close, Mr. Chairman, by mentioning the important role that Greek-Americans play, both in our own country's history, and in ensuring that our relationship with the Hellenic Republic is strong. In my career as a diplomat, I've come to realize that nothing is more important, or effective, in presenting the best face of

America than the personal ties and connections that private Americans establish every day on their own.

Mr. Chairman, it's been an honor to appear before you today, and if confirmed, I want to assure you that I look forward to working with you, members of the committee and the Congress in representing my fellow Americans as the Ambassador to Hellenic Republic.

Thank you, and I welcome any questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Speckhard follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. DANIEL V. SPECKHARD,
NOMINEE TO BE AMBASSADOR TO GREECE

Mr. Chairman and distinguished Senators, it is an honor to appear before you today as the President's nominee for the United States Ambassador to the Hellenic Republic. I am humbled that President Bush and Secretary Rice have placed their confidence in me for this important post. I look forward to earning the confidence of this committee and the Senate as you fulfill your important responsibilities as part of our democratic system. If confirmed, I will put all of my energy and experience toward strengthening our relations with Greece and working together to promote regional stability and tackle some of the global problems that we face together.

Mr. Chairman, as you know Greece is a strategic partner of the United States. Our partnership stems from the close ties our nations share as members of the Euro-Atlantic community, as NATO allies, and from the millions of Americans whose ancestry can be traced back to the Hellenic Republic. Both Greek and American people share a common heritage, based on a belief in values such as liberty, freedom, and equality. The concept of democracy originated in Ancient Greece and the ideals the Ancient Greeks embodied profoundly influenced the founders of our great Nation. Since then, we have stood together with the Hellenic Republic time and time again to defend democracy across the globe: in both world wars, on the Korean Peninsula and in the Balkans. Today the Greek people are allied with us in combating terrorism, including in Afghanistan where they have contributed troops and resources.

While humbled by the prospect of representing our country, I believe my career has helped prepare me for this important assignment. I have spent 25 years as a public servant—nearly a decade of that overseas. As Ambassador to Belarus, the Deputy Chief of Mission in Iraq, and a senior official at NATO, I have honed my diplomatic and leadership skills in both bilateral and multilateral affairs. At NATO, I worked closely with senior Greek diplomats to promote stability in the Balkans and strengthen and consolidate democracy across Europe as part of NATO's Partnership for Peace program and NATO enlargement. This experience provides a good basis to begin my work in Athens should the Senate confirm me in this position.

Our country's relationship with Greece clearly is important for our interest in stability in Southern and South Central Europe. The Balkans, in particular, require continued attention in the coming years to ensure peace, economic transformation, and integration of all countries in the region into Euro-Atlantic institutions. The unresolved nature of the future status of Kosovo remains a barrier to the development of the region, and in the coming months it will be critical to see a resolution as envisaged by the U.N. Special Envoy, Maarti Ahtisaari. As an anchor in the region, Greece has an important interest in seeing this resolved. Greece is one of the largest investors in Balkan economies, and its leadership will be crucial to seeing history there unfold on a positive course. If confirmed, I will work closely with the Government of Greece to increase our cooperation to bring stability to this critically important region.

Greece also has an important interest and role to play in bringing diversified sources of energy to the European market. The United States wholeheartedly supports these efforts to diversify, and to introduce true market competition to this vital economic sector.

The inauguration of the Turkey-Greece-Italy Pipeline (TGI) between Greece and Turkey will allow Caspian gas to be directly transported to the European market via a new, diversified route. It is a positive step in the development of relations between Greece and Turkey, reflecting the constructive relations they have developed in recent years. By recognizing the vital interests they share in the 21st century and displaying strong political will, the Government of Greece has supported closer bilateral relations with Turkey as well as championing Turkey's integration with

the European Union. If confirmed, I will strongly support Greece as it continues to increase its engagement with Turkey.

By bridging the divides that are left between these two countries, we can create the conditions in the region to resolve other, longstanding problems. In the case of Cyprus, I hope a just and lasting settlement, acceptable to majorities in both communities, can be achieved through the efforts of Cypriots and the support of the international community.

I also look forward to working with Greek officials on issues of global importance which threaten the safety and well being of all. Greece's location at the crossroads of Asia, the Middle East, the Balkans, and Europe, along with its preeminent global shipping industry, make it a crucial ally in combating both terrorism and trafficking in persons. Greece is also well situated to be an important partner in the international community's efforts to curb the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and to fight trafficking in drugs and illicit arms. These are some of the greatest challenges of our world today, requiring diligence and significant effort from all countries.

In the same vein, the stability and health of the environment and the challenge of climate change will become increasingly important in the next few years. Greece's natural beauty is well known the world over, and to ensure it remains a treasure for Greeks and all those who visit, we need to work together to find new and creative ways to sustain the soundness of global and local environments alike.

Cooperation on issues should not be limited to regional or global matters though. The recent, devastating wildfires that ravaged Greece remind us that natural disasters can strike anywhere and at any time. As a good partner and friend, I am happy to say that the United States has provided over \$1.9 million in assistance, including cash donations to the Hellenic Red Cross, nonperishable commodities, and funding for a team of experts to provide technical assistance and build the foundation for robust cooperation in the future. I have met with the members of the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance and United States Forest Service who traveled to Greece to offer technical assistance to their Greek counterparts. The team's message to me was clear: Greek firefighters are some of the best in the world, and they performed admirably under rigorous conditions. Our common experience in dealing with forest fires and the similarity between the landscapes in Greece and the western United States means that there is a great benefit to continued cooperation and mutual support. My hope is that the constructive dialog between Greek and American firefighting and burned-aren experts, initiated as a result of this tragedy, continues to deepen as Greece begins to focus on vital reconstruction, reforestation, and rehabilitation.

In that vein, I would like to mention the important role that Greek-Americans play, both in our own country's history and in ensuring that our relationship with the Hellenic Republic is so strong. In my career as a diplomat I have come to realize that no matter what we, in our capacity as public servants, do to represent this great country, nothing is more effective at presenting the best face of America than the personal ties and connections Americans establish every day on their own. I would note the beneficial role Greek-Americans have played by contributing to all sectors of our own society, and the continuing role they play in strengthening relations between the United States and Greece.

Mr. Chairman, it has been an honor to appear before you today, and it would be a privilege to represent my fellow Americans as the United States Ambassador to the Hellenic Republic.

Thank you again and I welcome any questions.

Senator CASEY. Thank you, sir.

Mr. Stephenson.

**STATEMENT OF THOMAS F. STEPHENSON, NOMINEE TO BE
AMBASSADOR TO THE PORTUGUESE REPUBLIC**

Mr. STEPHENSON. Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, thank you. I would like to introduce my wife, Barbara, and my son, Alexander, who will be going with me to Portugal, who are very excited about the prospect, and doing it as a family.

I am honored to appear before you today as the President's nominee to be the next Ambassador to Portugal. I want to express my deep appreciation to President Bush and Secretary Rice for the trust and confidence they have placed in me to perform this impor-

tant job. If confirmed, I will work hard to promote and defend American interests in Portugal.

In some ways, I have been preparing to be an ambassador for many years. I am an avid student of foreign policy, and have had the great advantage of being actively involved at the Hoover Institution for some time. Frequent exposure to, interaction with, and in some cases, close friendships with many Hoover Fellows, have provided me with a wonderful opportunity to learn from some of the brightest minds in their fields.

I feel particularly fortunate to be close to former Secretary Shultz, and current Secretary Condoleezza Rice, and have had the great opportunity to learn about and see through their eyes, so many of the important issues of the day. In addition, several outstanding economists and former administration officials now at Hoover have had a huge impact on my understanding of both domestic and international economic issues. I'm currently working with Secretary Shultz to mobilize an energy task force at Hoover that will explore all aspects of what we hope will be a comprehensive and coherent set of recommendations for policy makers.

Portugal and its fellow European Union members are wrestling with many of the same complex energy and climate issues that we face in this country, and I hope to be better able to contribute in various ways to that important dialog, as a result of my engagement with the Hoover Energy Taskforce. I'm also hopeful that my almost 40 years in the venture capital business, working mostly with technology companies, will enable me to make a meaningful contribution as an ambassador for United States business and commercial interests in Portugal.

Portugal and the United States share a long tradition of close political and cultural ties. Uniquely placed on the far western edge of Continental Europe, Portugal has demonstrated in word and action, its solid commitment to the trans-Atlantic relationship. Portugal has personnel serving in Afghanistan, Lebanon, the Balkans, Timor-Leste, and Iraq. In addition, thousands of United States aircraft annually transit Portugal's largest airbase in the Azores, in support of our armed forces around the world.

Portugal has been an outstanding partner in the war on terror, and collaborates actively with us, as a member of the Proliferation Security Initiative, the Container Security Initiative, and the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism.

Last month, Portugal ratified the United States-European Union Extradition and Mutual Legal Assistance agreements. These agreements will markedly improve our counterterrorism and law enforcement cooperation.

I come before you during an opportune time in our bilateral relationship. Portugal's 6-month European Union presidency, Lisbon has traditionally exhibited its strongest influence over the European Union agenda when it serves in this capacity. If confirmed, I will use the time remaining in Portugal's presidency—and afterwards—to continue the outstanding work of Ambassador Hoffman and his embassy—his U.S. Embassy team, to promote our interests in Lisbon, both bilaterally, and in the European Union context.

We congratulate Portugal on the excellent work it is doing as European Union president—it is no easy task. In holding the Euro-

pean Union presidency, Portugal is working hard to help resolve the situation in Kosovo, and bring long-term stability to this volatile region. It also widely recognizes that some of the European Union's biggest foreign policy concerns are along its southern and southeastern borders, which are threatened by radical Islam and poverty. The Portuguese are reaching out to develop a strategic partnership with Africa, and strengthen European Union ties with Brazil, India, China, Russia, and Ukraine, through high-profile summits.

With the European Union, Lisbon's primary goal is to secure endorsement of a final text of the European Union treaty by December.

Both before, and during, its presidency, Portugal has kept open the lines of communication. Prime Minister Socrates' meeting with President Bush in September maintained this excellent record of close collaboration.

As United States Ambassador to Portugal, I will continue to deepen and broaden our dialog.

Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. If confirmed, I look forward to working with you and your colleagues in Congress to serve the American people, and advance our national interests overseas. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Stephenson follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF THOMAS F. STEPHENSON, NOMINEE TO BE
AMBASSADOR TO THE PORTUGUESE REPUBLIC

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, I am honored to appear before you today as the President's nominee to be the next United States Ambassador to Portugal. I want to express my deep appreciation to President Bush and Secretary Rice for the trust and confidence they have placed in me to perform this important job. If confirmed, I will work hard to promote and defend American interests in Portugal.

In some ways, I have been preparing to be an ambassador for many years. I am an avid student of foreign policy and have had the great advantage of being actively involved at the Hoover Institution for some time. Frequent exposure to, interaction with, and, in some cases, close friendships with many Hoover fellows have provided me with a wonderful opportunity to learn from some of the brightest minds in their fields. I feel particularly fortunate to be close to former Secretary George Shultz and current Secretary Condoleezza Rice, and have had the great opportunity to learn about and see through their eyes so many of the important issues of the day. Outstanding economists and former administration officials have had a huge impact on my understanding of both domestic and international economic issues.

I am currently working with Secretary Shultz to mobilize an Energy Task Force at Hoover that will explore all aspects of what we hope will be a comprehensive and coherent set of recommendations for policymakers. Portugal and its fellow European Union members are wrestling with many of the same complex energy and climate change issues that we face in this country, and I hope to be better able to contribute in various ways to that important dialog as a result of my engagement with the Hoover Energy Task Force. I am also hopeful that my almost 40 years in the venture capital business, working mostly with technology companies, will enable me to make a meaningful contribution as an ambassador for United States business and commercial interests in Portugal.

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around the world. Portugal has been an outstanding partner in the war on terror and collaborates actively with us as a member of the Proliferation Security Initiative, the Container Security Initiative, and the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism. Last month, Portugal ratified the United States-European Union Extradition and Mutual Legal Assistance Agreements. These agreements will markedly improve our counterterrorism and law enforcement cooperation.

I come before you during an opportune time in our bilateral relationship: Portugal's 6-month European Union Presidency. Lisbon has traditionally exhibited its strongest influence over the European Union agenda when it serves in this capacity. If confirmed, I will use the time remaining in Portugal's Presidency—and afterwards—to continue the outstanding work of Ambassador Hoffman and his United States Embassy team to promote our interests in Lisbon, both bilaterally and in the European Union context.

We congratulate Portugal on the excellent work it is doing as European Union President. It is no easy task. In holding the European Union Presidency, Portugal is working hard to help resolve the situation in Kosovo and bring long-term stability to this volatile region. It also wisely recognizes that some of the European Union's biggest foreign policy concerns are along its southern and southeastern borders, which are threatened by radical Islam and poverty. The Portuguese are reaching out to develop a strategic partnership with Africa, and strengthen European Union ties with Brazil, India, China, Russia, and Ukraine through high-profile summits. Within the European Union, Lisbon's primary goal is to secure endorsement of a final text of a new European Union "treaty" by December.

Both before and during its Presidency, Portugal has kept open the lines of communication with us. Prime Minister Socrates' meeting with President Bush in September maintained this excellent record of close collaboration. As United States Ambassador to Portugal, I will continue to deepen and broaden our dialog.

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. If confirmed, I look forward to working with you and your colleagues in Congress to serve the American people and advance our national interests overseas. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.

STATEMENT OF VINCENT OBSITNIK, NOMINEE TO BE AMBASSADOR TO THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

Mr. OBSITNIK. Thank you, Senator Casey, Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, thank you for the honor to appear before you, as President Bush's nominee to represent the United States in Slovakia.

I would also like to express my appreciation to the President and Secretary Rice for the confidence they have showed in me, by putting my nomination forward.

With me today is my wife, Anna Marie, whom I would also like to thank for her support and encouragement throughout our over-46 years of marriage and the raising of our four sons, who are not here because they are out making a living. Without doubt, but with some humility, I would like to say that I have been privileged to live the American dream, and I'd like to take a minute just to address that.

Although I was born in Slovakia, my roots go back to Western Pennsylvania. My grandparents immigrated there in the late 1890s, where my father was born in 1901. A year later, his parents returned to Slovakia, where he grew up and married. My parents then decided that America was the country in which they wanted to live and raise their family, and in March 1938, 2 months after I was born, we immigrated to the United States. I give great credit to my parents for the wisdom of this decision, so that I could appear before you today, especially back at that time in 1938, of approaching crisis and war in Europe.

We settled in Nanty-Glo, Pennsylvania, where my father worked as a coal miner. In 1946, we moved to Lilton, New Jersey, where I graduated from high school, after which I received an appointment to the U.S. Naval Academy which was, for me, a life changing experience.

After graduating from the Academy, I had the honor of serving in the U.S. Navy for 5 years as an officer, and my time in the Navy taught me about service, and the true meaning of duty, honor, and country.

After serving the Navy, I went out to have successful corporate careers with the IBM, Unisys, and Lilton/PRC Corporations, after which I established my own consulting firm. At these corporations, I was involved with providing electronic systems for our armed forces during the cold war, and also had international responsibilities in manufacturing and marketing.

As you can see, I truly have lived the American dream from an early age and throughout my career. I believe that my personal background and professional experience have prepared me well for the duties of United States Ambassador to Slovakia, should I be confirmed by the Senate.

Mr. Chairman, the United States-Slovak relationship is a strong one that has weathered challenges over the years, but continues to move forward on a range of key issues of importance to the United States. It is a relationship that is also enriched by generations of Slovak-Americans, and the enduring ties they maintain with their land of origin.

United States-Slovak relations are defined, to a large extent, by our common membership in NATO, and by the fact that Slovakia is part of the European Union. One of our key challenges, however, is to underscore to the government and the people of Slovakia, that as allies with shared values and thriving democracies, our national interests do coincide.

The United States-Slovak relationship does have its challenges. A new leftist coalition government in Slovakia has taken slightly different directions than the previous government. Our foreign policy, in particular, the Iraq war, has caused disagreement, and Slovaks are increasingly looking to travel and study in the European Union, rather than the United States.

Despite our differences, however, I believe that the United States and Slovakia can and must work together on our disagreements, thus maintaining our strong relationship.

If confirmed, my No. 1 priority will be to foster and sustain such a relationship, by reaching out personally to the Slovak Government and people, to explain the United States' perspective, to promote United States policy interests, to remind the young people of our common history and the support that we provided to the Slovak people during Communism, and to ensure that—above all—American goodwill is understood.

In addition, I will continue to support our embassy's efforts to expand academic, scientific, and cultural exchanges, all of which will serve to bring our people closer together.

Slovakia has been a proud European Union and NATO member since 2004, with all that this implies with privilege and obligation. It has approximately 525 troops deployed overseas in NATO, Euro-

pean Union, and U.N. missions. Slovakia has joined us and sacrificed with us in the war on terror. Its troops have been deployed in Iraq, Afghanistan, and in Kosovo.

If confirmed, one of my top priorities will be to continue strong Slovak and United States cooperation in the fight against terror, and to encourage the Slovak Government to further deepen its commitment to NATO by increasing its participation in NATO missions, particularly in Afghanistan.

And, I'd just like to add that we've just received a cable this morning from our Embassy in Bratislava, and apparently the Slovak Government, under Prime Minister Fico, has agreed, and decided to increase their participation substantially in Afghanistan, which still must be approved by their parliament, so that is a step in the right direction.

One of the difficult issues that affect United States and Slovak relations is admission to the visa waiver program. Slovakia is working constructively to meet the list of requirements that will enable us to join the visa waiver program.

Should I be confirmed, one of my top priorities will be to assist the efforts of the Slovak Government to meet these standards as soon as possible. In my public outreach, I will reinforce the administration's commitment to facilitating travel between our two countries while, however, maintaining the security of international travel. Such a development, I'm convinced, will enhance understanding between our peoples, and serve our bilateral relations.

On the economic front, Slovakia's economy is the fastest-growing in Europe, with a growth rate of 9.4 percent in the second quarter of 2007. Economic reforms and a corresponding influx of foreign investment have led to impressive growth. A dramatic decrease in unemployment, and a healthy macroeconomy that has put Slovakia on target to adopt the Euro on January 1, 2009.

Despite these positive developments, corruption continues to be a problem, and just recently, the embassy cohosted an anticorruption conference that was opened by the Prime Minister of Slovakia, Mr. Robert Fico. If confirmed, I will continue to work diligently with our Slovak partners on anticorruption initiatives and efforts, to benefit not only the people of Slovakia, but also American businesses.

There are, today, approximately 120 United States companies with investments, and/or sales offices in Slovakia, and it is estimated that United States investments total more than \$3 billion. There are various efforts underway to deepen our economic cooperation, and just last month, Commerce Assistant Secretary Hernandez led a trade mission on renewable energy and alternative fuels to Slovakia, and other countries in Central Europe.

If confirmed, I will work to increase opportunities for U.S. companies, and further expand our trading and investment relationship, resulting in benefits to both our peoples.

Mr. Chairman, if confirmed, I look forward to pursuing these and other goals, to leading an embassy that represents the finest values of the United States, and do everything that I can to increase the friendship, warmth, and strength of our ties with Slovakia.

I thank you again for this opportunity to appear before you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Obsitnik follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF VINCENT OBSITNIK, NOMINEE TO BE
AMBASSADOR TO THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, thank you for the honor to appear before you as President Bush's nominee to represent the United States in Slovakia. I would also like to express my appreciation to the President and Secretary Rice for the confidence they have shown in me by putting my nomination forward. With me today is my wife, Annemarie, whom I would also like to thank for her support and encouragement throughout our over 46 years of marriage and the raising of our four sons.

Without doubt but with humility, I would like to say that I have been privileged to live the American dream. Although I was born in Slovakia, my roots go back to western Pennsylvania. My grandparents immigrated there in the late 1890s, where my father was born in 1901. A year later, his parents returned to Slovakia, where he grew up and married. My parents then decided that America was the country in which they wanted to live and raise their family and, in March 1938, 2 months after I was born, we immigrated to the United States. I give great credit to my parents for the wisdom of this decision, especially at a time of approaching crisis and war in Europe.

We settled in Nanty-Glo, PA, where my father worked as a coal miner. In 1946, we moved to Linden, NJ, where I graduated from high school. I then received an appointment to the U.S. Naval Academy which was, for me, a life-changing experience. After graduating from the Academy, I had the honor of serving in the U.S. Navy for 5 years as an officer. My time in the Navy taught me about service and the true meaning of duty, honor, and country.

After serving in the Navy, I went on to have successful corporate careers with the IBM, Unisys, and Litton/PRC Corporations, after which I established my own consulting firm. At these corporations, I was involved with providing electronic systems for our Armed Forces during the cold war and also had international responsibilities in manufacturing and marketing.

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If confirmed, my No. 1 priority will be to foster and sustain such a relationship by reaching out personally to the Slovak Government and people to explain the United States' perspective, to promote the United States' policy interests, remind young people of our common history and the support that we provided to the Slovak people during Communism, and to ensure that American goodwill is understood. In addition, I will continue to support our embassy's efforts to expand academic, scientific, and cultural exchanges, all of which will serve to bring our peoples closer together.

Slovakia has been a proud European Union and NATO member since 2004, with all that this implies in privilege and obligation. It has approximately 525 troops deployed overseas in NATO, European Union, and U.N. missions. Slovakia has joined us and sacrificed with us in the war on terror. Its troops have been deployed in Iraq, Afghanistan, and in Kosovo. If confirmed, one of my top priorities will be to continue strong Slovak and United States cooperation in the fight against terror and to encourage the Slovak Government to further deepen its commitment to NATO by increasing its participation in NATO missions, particularly in Afghanistan.

One of the difficult issues that affect United States-Slovak relations is admission to the Visa Waiver Program. Slovakia is working constructively to meet the list of

requirements that will enable it to join the Visa Waiver Program. Should I be confirmed, one of my top priorities will be to assist the efforts of the Slovak Government to meet VWP standards as soon as possible. In my public outreach, I will reinforce the administration's commitment to facilitating travel between our two countries, while maintaining the security of international travel. Such a development will enhance understanding between our peoples and serve our bilateral relations.

Mr. Chairman, Slovakia has a unique set of experiences in democratization and economic reform that its vibrant and talented NGO community is now sharing with countries in transition, from Ukraine to Belarus to Cuba and the Balkans. Consistent with our transformational diplomacy goals, we will continue to support the NGO community in Slovakia by offering diplomatic support, grants, and other resources to the extent United States Government funds are available.

On the economic front, Slovakia's economy is the fastest growing in Europe with a growth rate of 9.4 percent in the second quarter of 2007. Economic reforms and a corresponding influx of foreign investment have led to impressive growth, a dramatic decrease in unemployment, and a healthy macroeconomy that has put Slovakia on target to adopt the euro on January 1, 2009. Despite these positive developments, corruption continues to be a problem. Just recently the Embassy cohosted an anticorruption conference that was opened by the Prime Minister of Slovakia, Mr. Robert Fico. If confirmed, I will continue to work diligently with our Slovak partners on anticorruption initiatives and efforts, to benefit not only the people of Slovakia but also American businesses.

Slovakia's strong economy presents many opportunities for United States businesses. There are approximately 120 United States companies with investments and/or sales offices in Slovakia and it is estimated that United States investment totals more than \$3 billion. There are various efforts underway to deepen our economic cooperation. Just last month, Commerce Assistant Secretary Hernandez led a trade mission on Renewable Energy and Alternative Fuels to Slovakia and other countries in Central Europe. If confirmed, I will work to increase opportunities for U.S. companies, and further expand our trading and investment relationship, resulting in benefits to both our peoples.

Mr. Chairman, if confirmed, I look forward to pursuing these and other goals, to leading an embassy that represents the finest values of the United States, and to doing everything I can to increase the friendship, warmth, and strength of our ties with Slovakia. I thank you again for this opportunity to appear before you.

Senator CASEY. Thank you, sir, very much. I appreciate all of the statements that were made.

I'll turn now to my colleague, Senator DeMint, who is the ranking member of the European Affairs Subcommittee of the Committee on Foreign Relations.

**STATEMENT OF HON. JIM DEMINT,
U.S. SENATOR FROM SOUTH CAROLINA**

Senator DEMINT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I want to thank all three of you for your willingness to serve our country in this way, and I know it involves sacrifices of your family, and we very much appreciate it. And I, frankly, heard what I wanted to hear today. I appreciate the mention of American interest—I think there's sometimes a perception that, because the United States is the largest and most powerful country that—whether it's our State Department or trade office, we tend to give more than we get back.¹²¹ And, to know that—while building good relationships, and supporting other countries, that your job is to represent American interests in these countries, is very important.

I also appreciate the emphasis on economic ties—that we know that many times government gets in the way of good relations, but businesses—doing business together and people doing business together, often is the best way to grow that relationship and it's probably a true statement that when products cross borders, armies don't have to. So, I appreciate the emphasis on economic ties, and hopefully you can—as ambassadors—be a part of facilitating a

growing trade. It's a way to create a win-win situation for both countries.

I think if I have a question of the three of you, and I've only had a chance to meet with Mr. Speckhard about this—around the world, we found out in person as we visit other countries and we hear the perception of the United States is not as positive as we would like, on many fronts, particularly in Europe.

And I would just maybe ask each of you to briefly, just comment on things we need to do in each of your respective countries that might help develop the respect of other countries and cooperation and maybe in addition to what we're already doing.

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. JIM DEMINT,
U.S. SENATOR FROM SOUTH CAROLINA

Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this hearing today and moving the process forward on these important nominations.

Nominees, good afternoon to all of you, I appreciate you being here today and for your willingness to serve our Nation as ambassadors. I know the role of an ambassador is daunting; I am humbled by your desire to serve, and your families' support to go through this process.

Without a doubt, there are many challenges and opportunities in Europe and each of the countries you have been nominated to lay at the crossroads on many of these issues. You will be in very crucial positions to help foster the trans-Atlantic relationship. Your willingness to listen and be passionate advocates is crucial.

Despite the diplomatic issues and political posturing that occurs in the international arena, economic relations are always an undercurrent that makes progress possible.

Often European leaders express how the United States and Europe share a common set of values. I agree with them; we have a long history of common values that include the ideals of freedom and economic opportunity.

European societies and their economies currently face many hurdles that we may face in the future. There are lessons we can learn from them, but also ideas we can share. The ideas of free markets and free societies can unleash creative solutions.

I believe the three countries we are discussing today have incredible potential to grow and be even more productive. However, it requires a willingness to draft policies that unleash their people and trust what they are capable of.

Mr. Obsitnik, the structural reforms and economic success of Slovakia is something to be applauded. However, it will be important that they know economic freedom cannot be separated from other freedoms. And that the road to success is not through the welfare state.

Maintaining a similar path of reform in Portugal is just as important. And with their leadership of the European Union right now, Mr. Stephjenson, you will be in a unique position to advocate for issues including Sudan and Western Sahara.

Mr. Speckard, as you know, recent developments in the region will put even more importance on the United States-Greek relationship. You will have important matters to address the second

you arrive. I found our discussion a couple weeks ago very enlightening and believe you will do well.

As ambassadors, it is important you share and advocate the values that serve as the foundation to our prosperity. With your influence, Europe can be an even larger driving force in the world economically and socially and that would benefit everyone.

I also hope you will spend more of your time outside of the embassy and government offices in Bratislava, Lisbon, and Athens than inside. American culture is loved in Europe, but the same is not always true of American policy. However, the two cannot be conveniently separated.

And successful diplomacy is no longer an activity just between heads of state, but between the people of each nation. If you are committed to fostering even stronger relations and be successful American advocates, you will need to deliver your messages to the Slovak, Portuguese, and Greek public directly.

I look forward to working with each of you.

And, I'll start with Mr. Speckhard, and just a brief comment would be helpful.

Mr. SPECKHARD. Thank you, Senator. I think we did have a chance to talk before, and wanted to emphasize, again, that I think one of the most important things I can do, if confirmed as ambassador, is to try to start changing some of those perceptions, which have been a legacy of some of the more modern history between our country and Greece and, I think don't actually fairly reflect some of the fundamental values that we share.

So, I guess, to be real brief, I would focus on trying to move the understanding between our countries beyond just the foreign policy issue of the day, or the particular problem or challenge that we face, that we have different perspectives on how to address, and try to get our attention back to the fundamental relationship, and what is in common between our countries, which are some of those common values, and the strength of the U.S. system in, sort of, dealing with issues in a democratic fashion, which we share a lot with them.

And I would focus, in particular, on the young generation—there and here—in terms of building that dialog, because I do believe that in Greece, that's where, oftentimes, change starts. And I think that's where you have the most opportunity to start—generating new thinking.

Thank you.

Senator DEMINT. Excellent, excellent.

Mr. Stephenson.

Mr. STEPHENSON. Senator, our current Ambassador, Ambassador Hoffman, I know has focused very much on outreach for—

Senator DEMINT. Is your microphone on?

Mr. STEPHENSON. Sorry. Thank you. Ambassador Hoffman, our current Ambassador, I know has placed a lot of emphasis on reaching out to a cross-section of communities within the Portuguese community, specifically students. He's had a number of programs at the embassy where he's gone out, given a lot of speeches to a lot of different groups, worked with some of the charitable institutions in Portugal, worked with a number of the, strictly the small business groups, and with a number of minorities, as well.

He's particularly focused on an outreach to the Muslim community. There are 35,000 or 40,000 Muslims in Portugal, and he specifically has reached out to them.

So, it's an important part of his agenda, and I certainly hope to be able to build on the efforts that he's made to create an openness and a perception, a different kind of perception on the part of the Portuguese people about what a wonderful country and what a wonderful people we are, and how we reach out and will try and help all those we can.

Thank you.

Senator DEMINT. Thank you.

Mr. Obsitnik.

Mr. OBSITNIK. Yes, thank you, Senator. I think that in addition to all the efforts that are currently ongoing in the embassy to reach out to the Slovak people, of which there are a number of efforts in place. I think, if confirmed by the Senate, that my ability to go there, given my background, given my ability to speak the language, should give me some leverage to meet people very aggressively, very directly, which I plan to do. I plan to be, if confirmed, very visible in the country, to explain United States policy, to make them understand that our policy really is for the benefit of Slovakia, as well. It's not, we're not looking there to take anything out of there for our own interests. We're there to serve the—to work with that country.

So I think, with my unique background, I can add a lot to that and add to all the efforts that are currently going on in the embassy with the, such things as public diplomacy, ensuring that all people in the embassy get out and have contacts with the local people, to make sure that they understand America at every level.

Senator DEMINT. I thank you all.

And Mr. Chairman, I'm very satisfied with my answers, so I'll yield the rest of my time.

Senator CASEY. Senator, thank you very much.

I wanted to move into a round of more questions. And I, we'll try to limit ourselves to 10 minutes on each round. I'll start and turn it over to Senator Menendez and Senator DeMint for any questions they might have.

Mr. Speckhard, I think I'll start with you. Just in terms of the—some of this is redundant ground that you've plowed a little bit today already—but the relationship between the United States and Greece today. We've seen some evidence, I guess,—which has been referred to before—as some anti-Americanism. What's your sense of that, generally, the relationship itself, but also that particular concern that we have?

Mr. SPECKHARD. Thank you, Senator. I do think that it reflects some of the recent history between our two countries. And it has its roots there, which are, from the Greek perspective, understandable, and sometimes there are also differences, honest differences of opinion over foreign policy approaches and problem solving.

At the same time, I think that's sort of a latent anti-Americanism, that needs to be addressed again. Because if you look at our interest, both the long-term ones and the values that I talked about earlier, in terms of common values on democracy, liberty, freedom, and so forth, and then you compare it with also our real

interest today, in terms of stability in the Balkans, the stability or insecurity of the international community, and against the threat of terrorism, global challenges, energy issues, and so forth, we really do share common challenges and common interests.

So, my sense is that if we can start improving the dialog and having people take a step back and saying, "Why do they think that and how much of that is due to a particular approach to a particular problem, and how much of that is something more significant?" we'll find that perhaps we can bridge some of that gap.

So, I hope over the three years, that I can make, start to make a turn in that particular challenge with our Greek partners.

Senator CASEY. And just in terms of your own experience, especially as a diplomat, but also your work with NATO, what in your experience do you think will help you deal with that—that kind of fundamental question, about how our two countries relate to each other?

Mr. SPECKHARD. Well, I think being a diplomat, the starting point has to be to understand the arguments and views of the other partner that you're dealing with. And so, having worked in NATO, I've had an opportunity to understand the views of the Greek Government many times. And more generally, I've come to understand that once I understand where they're coming from, I'm a better—better presenter of the U.S. interests and the U.S. position on issues. And then I can find, oftentimes, more common ground than one would have thought at the beginning of the process.

We do have very strong interests that are common in the Balkans. We have some differences on some specific issues, but the fundamental issues in the Balkans are the same. We have common interest in the broader region more generally, and in the Middle East, where Greece is really at the front lines of some problems that are emanating from that area.

And so, again working together with them on that issue, I think, is one we're going to find a lot of common ground, even if sometimes we disagree on the approaches.

So, my experience, I think, will help me to develop that as I go along, when I get to Athens.

Senator CASEY. I may have a chance to come back to you about energy dependence on Russia and also the question of Kosovo, but I'll move on because I'm going to try to get, in this round, to each of our nominees.

Mr. Stephenson, I guess one of the concerns that we all have, beyond just the fundamental concern we have about terrorism, is how we relate to, interact with, work with, and establish working relationships with countries around the world to combat the worldwide threat of terrorism.

What's your sense of where that relationship is with Portugal now, in terms of our cooperation on terrorism? And if it's not where it ought to be, what steps do you think we need to take and what steps would you take to try to strengthen or develop that relationship? Just on the question of terrorism.

Mr. STEPHENSON. Senator, my sense is that the—the relationship with regard to those issues with Portugal is outstanding. They are, as I mentioned in my remarks, a signatory to most of the critical

agreements that we have around the world today, dealing with various elements of security and terrorism and so forth.

Portugal is arguably one of our best friends and most loyal allies and supporters in Europe. They have been very responsive, overall, to everything that we have asked of them. They have budgetary constraints that are a constant hurdle or obstacle for them to do all the things we'd like them to do. But I think that there is very little that we have asked them to do, that they haven't taken a lot of the initial steps.

There will always be ways to improve that. Our relationship with the—with this government are excellent, hope to be able to build on the dialog that Ambassador Hoffman has helped create with this—with this government. I have every reason to believe that they will continue to be responsive, whether it's drug enforcement issues, whether it's port security, or whether it's illegal transportation of human beings.

The whole list of issues that are high on our agenda have been very—we've had excellent response from the Portuguese Government.

Senator CASEY. I know that from the reports we all see from Europe, over many, many months now, many years actually, the last several years especially, that several countries have had trouble just within their own population, with regard to Islamic extremism. We've seen it in Spain and Great Britain and others. What's your sense of that within Portugal? Do you think they're having similar problems when it comes to Islamic extremism, or have they dealt with it in a way that's been more effective, or do you think there's still a significant problem there?

Mr. STEPHENSON. Senator, I think they start from a better situation, certainly than their neighbors to the east. There is not as large an Islamic or a radical population in Portugal as there is in Spain. There has been, in recent months, some concerns that some of the Basque elements in Spain, have sought refuge and are using Portugal as a—as a base to stay away from some of the threats that they face in Spain. So, I think it something that we have to continue and they have to continue to be diligent on, but I think if you compare Portugal—not only with Spain, but some of its other neighbors in Europe—I think the situation is much less dire today than it is in many other countries.

Senator CASEY. Thank you. And I want to try to come back too.

But Mr. Obsitnik, we're—talking earlier, and your testimony referred to it and others have as well, the membership in the European Union for Slovakia and how that's impacted their economy. Can you comment on that, with regard to just the economic impact and how you think that's proceeding?

Mr. OBSITNIK. I think the economic impact from joining the European Union has been tremendously positive. There's no question about that. I—it's opened up markets to them that were not there before. They're a member of the European Union family of nations and they're working cooperatively together. It's done nothing but help—help that economy.

Senator CASEY. And I know you had tremendous experience as a naval officer, and in addition to your own experience as a citizen and as a business person, what do you point to in your own em-

ployment history or your life history that you think will help you be an effective Ambassador to Slovakia? Beyond the obvious ties of your ancestry.

Mr. OBSITNIK. Right. Well beyond the fact that I know the country well, I know the people, I know the history. In my career, I've had the good fortune of dealing with the international community in South America and the Far East and the responsibility I had with IBM International Manufacturing. We've been involved with countries that were developing and we negotiated with them, relative to what we wanted to do, in terms of putting manufacturing operations there, developing our business there. So, that experience, I think, has been tremendous and gives me a good sense of understanding what developing countries need and what directions they need to go in.

Relative to my experience working with IBM during the cold war years, I think I picked up a good sense of the geopolitics of the world, in terms of the threat, in terms of responses by—by the America to that threat. And I think it will help me very well to explain our foreign policy and our point of view to the Slovak people.

Senator CASEY. And I have to, before—I've got 10 seconds—but I'll just say, I wasn't aware of your roots in Western Pennsylvania. I think you mentioned in your opening, Nanty-Glo, Pennsylvania?

Mr. OBSITNIK. Nanty-Glo, yes sir.

Senator CASEY. Cambria County, right?

Mr. OBSITNIK. Cambria County, yes sir.

Senator CASEY. And I—how long did you live there?

Mr. OBSITNIK. We lived there about 8 years, 1938–1946. And then the great garden state of New Jersey attracted us away. [Laughter.]

Senator CASEY. Well, as I turn to Senator Menendez for his questions, I have to ask you today—your confirmation will not be dependent upon this—but I'd ask you to come back to Nanty-Glo, Pennsylvania, if you can.

Thank you.

Mr. OBSITNIK. I will.

Senator CASEY. Senator Menendez.

Senator MENENDEZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And, Mr. Obsitnik, I see you're covering all of the bases, are there any other members that you've lived in the States here? [Laughter.]

But, we're glad to see you've had success.

Ambassador Speckhard, I have several questions for you. First, the Balkans: would you agree with me that it's still a place where we've made progress? It's still a place of instability, a challenge for us?

Mr. SPECKHARD. I would, Senator.

Senator MENENDEZ. And, would you agree with me that NATO is particularly—from your experience at NATO—is particularly important to us, both in a security context, as well as stability in the Balkans, and throughout Europe?

Mr. SPECKHARD. I would, Senator.

Senator MENENDEZ. And, with that as a premise, you're going to a country which I think is incredibly important in both of those contexts. There is—I think it's fair to say, there is probably no

other country that invests more in the Balkans, than Greece. And, at the same time is part of NATO.

And so, if the Balkans is a place of instability and a challenge to the United States as one of its foreign policy challenges, and if NATO is very important to us for both security purposes and stability in Europe, and particularly the Balkans, then part of my challenge of understanding administration policy and an assignment that you're going to have, is puzzling.

And that's with the whole issue of Skopje, and the position the administration has taken, in November of 2004, to refer to FYROM as the Republic of Macedonia which, in essence, undermined the whole process of the Nimetz Proposal. And has placed a very serious issue forward for the United States and its relationships with Greece, and certainly with Greece's own national view, as to what is in their national interests.

How do you see yourself, as the nominee to be the United States Ambassador to Greece, playing a role in this regard, and what do you believe that role will be?

Mr. SPECKHARD. Well, thank you, Senator. I agree with you on all of those points in terms of the importance of the Balkans and the stability there, the challenges that remain, the importance of NATO as an institution that can help—and, I would add, the European Union, as well, in terms of promoting stability there.

I do understand the concerns of the Government of Greece, and the people of Greece, in terms of their desire to both be a stabilizing force in the region, as well as to protect some of their cultural patrimony, which they have such a rich background in.

So, in terms of the starting point on this particular issue, I would take where we are today as the starting point, and the issues that we're facing. I think the first point would be to help try to facilitate and promote direct dialog between the parties involved, and the name dispute. That is, in fact, part of the basis of the 1995 interim accord that was worked out between those two countries, in terms of the importance of direct dialog, and not looking to others to try to find the solution.

At the same time I would emphasize the importance to the Greek Government of finding a solution, while not doing anything to destabilize the situation in the Balkans, and I think that's why the administration has placed an important emphasis on the process of moving towards membership for the countries—in NATO—for the countries in the Balkan region. That there is a sense that membership in NATO in the future is a way to solidify that stability. That it's actually in Greece's interests, probably, as much as anyone's, that their neighboring countries become part of NATO, because in that way—

Senator MENENDEZ. But you understand that you are going in as have been given a challenge right off the bat. Because we are trying to promote the NIMITS proposal, and then we undermine that by having our government unilaterally call Skopje and FYROM the Republic of Macedonia.

This would be like if some people describe this as emotion, I think it's far beyond emotion, I think there are legitimate issues here. This would be like the United States facing Mexico, describing in its classrooms large swaths of the United States belonging

to Mexico. Or, for that fact, Canada. That's what happens in FYROM. Where large swaths of Greece are taught in Skopje as being part of what they consider Macedonia, their country.

Now, if I was living next door to that country, I'd have a real concern. I'd have a real concern if what you're teaching the next generation of FYROM schoolchildren is, in essence, an expansionist view, as you want me to vote—me, a country—to vote to let you into NATO, and to give you certain privileges and power, by virtue of doing so.

So, I know you didn't devise this policy, so my purpose here is by, via your nomination, to send a message to the State Department, that I think we're on a perilous course here.

President Karamanlis has not said that Greece will use its veto in NATO, but I've got to be honest with you, from my—as part of the Hellenic caucus in the House for 13 years, and the House International Relations Committee, I've spent a fair amount of time here in the Senate on United States-Greek relations. I have to be very honest with you—my sense of talking to members of their parliament, talking to their foreign ministers, talking to their ambassadors, talking to a wide cross-section of Greek society, it would be very hard for Greece to just simply accept FYROM into NATO without some accommodation on those names.

And, I think that's going to be an enormous challenge for you. I hope that you will tell the Department that there are Members of Congress who feel this way.

Mr. Stephenson, I know that you, various times in your testimony, cited the Hoover Institution as background. One of—the Mission Statement of the Hoover Institution, among other things, says "Ours is a system where the Federal Government should undertake no governmental, societal, or economic action, except where local government or the people cannot undertake it by themselves."

And, I'm just wondering—it's considered a very influential, conservative think tank on foreign policy—I understand the private sector aspects of this—but you do know that you're going to a government—to a country whose government has a ruling socialist government. And you, I hope, are bringing an open mind. Because economic questions are one thing, but certainly the U.S. Ambassador has many other roles to play beyond the economic engagement between our respective countries.

Mr. STEPHENSON. I'm well aware of that, Senator, and the overall views of the Hoover Institution may not necessarily be what mine are on certain issues. My particular focus and interests at the Hoover Institution have been in the areas of foreign policy, on economics on a worldwide basis, and particularly, in the energy area in recent years.

But, I am fully aware of the current government in Portugal. I have no philosophical problems or worries about my ability to work with them on a reasonable basis, and what my views of what the role of government are on a spectrum that's not the area of Hoover activity that I happen to be particularly interested or focused upon.

Senator MENENDEZ. I appreciate that answer.

Mr. Speckhard, let me go back to—in addition to the FYROM issue, and the NATO enlargement issue, that Greece is going to play a very important role in—Greece is involved, obviously, in the

Aegean, the United States relationships in that part of the world, with Turkey—which right now is strained for a variety of reasons—but also the relationship between Greece and Turkey, the issue of Cyprus and the reunification of Cyprus are important issues. I'd like to hear your perspectives on that part—clearly there has been a historical basis under which our U.S. Ambassadors to those countries have all interplayed with each other because of the interrelationship of these issues. I'd like to hear how you'll approach that, should you be successful in your nomination.

Mr. SPECKHARD. Thank you, Mr. Senator. I'm actually looking forward to the opportunity to support Greece, as it tries to improve, to further its relations with Turkey, and as it also plays an important role in the issue related to Cyprus.

I think the elections that recently took place, both in Greece and Turkey, do provide an opportunity for renewed momentum in the Greek/Turkish relationship. It allows them, in both countries, to set aside or diminish some of the effect of domestic politics, in terms of the bilateral relationship, and work toward the interests of both their communities.

I am pleased that what I've seen over the last few years is improved mechanisms for dialog, and diffusing of potential crises when they occur. I think NATO, again, is a key point, as you mentioned earlier, in that framework for how you resolve things between Greece and Turkey, as allies they've committed themselves to resolve disputes peacefully.

And, I guess, as an ambassador, I would be working closely with my counterparts in Ankara and Nicosia, to make sure that we're talking and working together in a mutually reinforcing way to allow the parties involved to have the most progress possible. I really see this as centering in Ankara and Athens, in terms of their bilateral relationship, and in Nicosia in terms of Cyprus, and think that the success is going to come from there, and the United States really can only play a helping and facilitating role when asked.

But, I'm going to be ready to do that, and I look forward to acting very energetically in that.

Senator MENENDEZ. Mr. Chairman, I have one final question and then I'll wrap up.

Do you foresee the, Greece being able, for example, to support Turkey's entrance into the European Union without a solution of the Cyprus question?

Mr. SPECKHARD. I would hate to speculate on that at this point. What I can say, is that Greece has been one of the most, as you know Senator, proactive supporters of Turkey's aspirations into the European Union, with recognition that Turkey needs to take additional steps to meet the criteria. I think that's been very helpful to that bilateral relationship, it's very helpful to the region, and it's a very enlightened policy on their part.

I think in part, how this all plays out, is that if they make progress on some of the bilateral issues, I think it will facilitate and help promote a resolution of the Cyprus issue. And vice versa, even in spite of some of the challenges that remain, they can, as well, work to support the Cypriots find a solution to their challenges.

So, my sense is that if we work on all fronts simultaneously, they will help each other and you'll get to success sooner than if there's some conditions involved in this process.

Senator MENENDEZ. Well, Mr. Chairman, I appreciate your answers. I think we should have a before and after picture, before your assignment there and after your assignment there.

Between the FYROM issue, the NATO enlargement issue, the issue of the cross-border Aegean issue, and the issue of Cyprus, that's a full plate and I find it very difficult for the Greek Government, at the end of the day, to deal with the FYROM issue, because it has, within its own country, a very significant part of Greek citizens who consider themselves Macedonians.

And second, for Greek Cypriots to believe that the Greek Government will not stand by them in an effort to reunify the country. So this assignment is very, very important and that's why I've pursued these questions with you, to get a sense of understanding administration policy, where you'll be on it.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity.

Senator CASEY. Thank you, Senator Menendez.

I have a few more and I'm sure we can wrap up soon.

Mr. Ambassador, I wanted to ask you about the question I left on the table but didn't have a chance to ask you, and that's the energy question as it pertains to Russia, and especially in light of the pipeline deal. What's your sense of how our administration in America views that—the relationship between Greece and Russia as it pertains to energy and the recent deal that's been entered into? And how do you perceive that yourself? I guess I'm looking for both what the administration thinks and whether or not you have a difference of opinion on that or not.

Mr. SPECKHARD. Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I think the starting point is that the United States actually welcomes the close ties between Greece and Russia on the energy sector. I think there's an understanding that, both for Greece and the European Union in general, the importance of Greek, of—excuse me—of Russian energy supplies is critical to the economic success of Greece and the European Union at large.

So, we welcome the development of those ties, the development of the strengthening of the gas produced, and developed for those markets, and the ties between Russia that make that happen.

Where sometimes we have a view that we try to make sure is understood, is that our sense is that the best way for Greece and the European Union to be successful in their economic future, is to ensure that they have diversified energy supplies. So, while it's important for them to have Russian supplies, it's important, as well, that those supplies are diversified beyond Russia, and that there are other producing states that also should be able to contribute to the needs and demands of the European Union and Greece.

So, the key point for Greece as they move forward, is to ensure that economic deals they conclude on the energy sector side, are done in a transparent way, and in a fair, market-based way, because that will be, in the long term, in their interest, and in the European Union's interest.

But there is no attempt on our part to try to develop a zero-sum game, in this respect. We feel that the market is large enough, and

the needs are great enough, that there should be plenty of room for multiple suppliers and multiples routes.

Senator CASEY. And just, by way of follow-up, how would you characterize the Bush administration's response to that deal, I mean, in a word or two?

Mr. SPECKHARD. I think, our sense is that it's important that this is done, as I said earlier, in a transparent way, and that we understand that it's going to be done, as it carries forward, in a market-based way. That there is some concern that, if this is done in any other way, it could jeopardize existing opportunities that, on a fair basis, perhaps would do better.

Senator CASEY. So, you think the administration is concerned mostly about how it's implemented, as opposed to the relationship itself? I just want to—

Mr. SPECKHARD. Absolutely, you know, absolutely. I honestly believe that the issue here is not the relationship. We recognize the importance of the Greece-Russia relationship in the energy sector, and it's a good one in the context of what the interests of Greece are, and the European Union. Our concern is that it does not become a monopolistic relationship. And, I think that would not be in the interest of Greece, or the European Union, and we think there's plenty of room for Russia, as well as other suppliers. So, this should not be seen as a competition between the United States and Russia, but, in fact, a regular market-oriented type of approach to ensuring diversified supplies of energy.

Senator CASEY. Thank you, and I know we're almost out of time, but I wanted to first of all, let everyone know that the record will be open, and it'll be open, actually for 2 days. Committee members can submit additional questions for the record.

I'd ask each nominee for your help in responding in as prompt a way as possible to these questions. I may have others, and I'm sure members of the committee who are not here today will have questions.

But, I mostly want to express our gratitude for, not just your testimony today, and your willingness to go through this process, but especially for your willingness to commit yourself to public service. In some cases, continued public service, and in other cases, beyond military and other civic engagement that you've had.

But this is a particularly notable and distinctive—and, I think important, kind of public service. And it comes at a time where we live in an increasingly more dangerous world, which both makes the service all that more admirable, but at the same time heightens or increases the responsibility that each of you will have if you're confirmed. And, I appreciate that and recognize that, and appreciate the commitment that you are making individually, and that your families are making and, in some cases, have already made.

Thank you very much.

Unless there's any additional comments, this hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 3:36 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]