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ROBERT MENENDEZ, NEW JERSEY
BENJAMIN L. CARDIN, MARYLAND
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CHRISTOPHER A. COONS, DELAWARE
TOM UDALL, NEW MEXICO
CHRISTOPHER MURPHY, CONNECTICUT
TIM Kaine, VIRGINIA
EDWARD J. MARKEY, MASSACHUSETTS
JEFF MERKLEY, OREGON
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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6225

May 7, 2020

The Honorable James E. Risch
Chairman
U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
423 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Risch,

We write today regarding your proposal for a business meeting next week. We have a number of concerns about this business meeting including the health and wellbeing of everyone in attendance, as well as substantive concerns about what we understand to be the proposed agenda. We therefore ask you to postpone this business meeting until we can work out these concerns.

We understand that almost 50 people will likely attend this meeting. Given the continued and unfortunate rise in the number of COVID-19 cases in the DC-Maryland-Virginia region, there is no justification to bring this large of a group together unless it is to contribute to the fight against COVID-19.

As the Senate Foreign Relations Committee we have a unique and important responsibility to set out the framework for a comprehensive global response to COVID and ensure that the Department of State and USAID are well-equipped to exert U.S. leadership in this crisis. We have proposed legislation to you that would help build that framework and are finalizing a package of critical proposals. Unfortunately, we understand that you are not willing to consider most of these legislative items and, instead, plan to move forward with an almost entirely non-COVID related agenda that you originally proposed in early March, prior to the crisis unfolding in full.

We also understand that you are seeking to add the nomination of Michael Pack to this business meeting. As you and the White House are aware, on the eve of his hearing last year, a number of issues emerged regarding his taxes (in addition to other background issues). Mr. Pack has refused to provide the Committee with information necessary to resolve these matters, and he has also refused to correct false statements to the IRS and provide that agency with legally-mandated disclosures, despite his own acknowledgement that he gave the IRS false information.

Putting Mr. Pack up for a Committee vote under these circumstances would be a shocking departure from Committee practice and an abdication of the Committee's role to vet nominees and ensure only those who are fit to serve get our stamp of approval.

We ask that in light of Mr. Pack's refusal to answer questions in writing, you convene another hearing where members can ask him questions. Additionally, you should hold a Closed Session so that we can collectively discuss Pack's nomination and how to best move forward in a manner that maintains committee standards with regard to nominations. As you have previously

indicated – it is critical for the Committee to have all the information it needs in order to make a judgement about a nominee. We do not have that information because of Mr. Pack’s refusal to cooperate. As a result and in light of his serious background issues, he should not be considered at a business meeting at this time.

Finally, to the extent that you decide to move forward with the business meeting despite the concerns expressed above, we request that you and the Ranking Member jointly consult with the Attending Physician to develop and implement agreed-upon guidelines such that the meeting could occur in the safest manner possible despite the serious risks due to COVID-19.

Sincerely,



Robert Menendez
Ranking Member



Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator




Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator



Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator



Tom Udall
United States Senator



Christopher S. Murphy
United States Senator



Tim Kaine
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator