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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6225

June 11, 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 understand that you are considering no longer seeking to have the Secretary of State testify in front of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on the President's Budget request for FY2021. This would be an unprecedented step and represent a significant failure in the Senate carrying out its most fundamental and basic duties as a separate and co-equal branch of government.

The Secretary of State has appeared in front of the Committee just three times during his two year tenure. The last time was more than a year ago, in April 2019. So we fully supported your efforts beginning in February to have him appear before this Committee for this, his most basic duty to the American people.

Most other cabinet secretaries have already appeared in front of their oversight committees, as listed at the end of this letter.

Indeed, prior to this year the appearance of the Secretary for this annual hearing was so routine and normal that it was never even an issue of controversy or that required multiple efforts and invitations by the Chairman. It was broadly understood as a necessary element to maintain the proper functioning of our Founder's "machine that would go unto itself".

Acquiescing to Secretary Pompeo's rejection of his responsibility to defend the President's budget before the American people would send a terrible message about the Committee's constitutional role of oversight, and indeed the Congress' role in general. Given the myriad challenges confronting the United States, rising tensions with China, a global pandemic, and emboldened actors continuing to threaten U.S. interests, we must understand the Administration's request, including its proposals to significantly cut investments into critical relationships, international institutions, and soft-power tools. Members of this committee deserve to have the Secretary in front of them. On behalf of our constituents, and all the American people, we deserve the right to ask questions and to seek clarity on this President's agenda on the global stage.

We strongly urge to continue to press for the Secretary to uphold his duty and appear before this Committee.

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

- Secretary Mnuchin, Senate Finance Committee, 2/12/20
- Secretary Azar, Senate Finance Committee, 2/13/20
- Secretary Brouillette, Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, 3/3/20
- Secretary Esper, Senate Armed Services Committee, 3/4/20
- Secretary Bernhardt, Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, 3/10/20
- Secretary Wilkie, Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, 6/3/20