

# BUSINESS MEETING

*Thursday, February 4, 2021*

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

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:00 a.m., in Room SR-325, Russell Senate Office Building, Hon. Bob Menendez, chairman of the committee, presiding.

Present: Senators Mendez [presiding], Cardin, Shaheen, Coons, Murphy, Kaine, Markey, Merkley, Booker, Schatz, Van Hollen, Risch, Romney, Barrasso, Young, Cruz, Rounds, and Hagerty.

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

**The Chairman:** This business meeting of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee will come to order. Welcome everybody.

First, I want to thank Senator Risch for working with us to get to this point so that we can consider the nomination of the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, Linda Thomas-Greenfield. And I appreciate his work with us in this

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regard, and I look forward to working with him in common cause in the bipartisan tradition that the committee has had for a very long time.

Let me welcome two -- well, four new members to the committee. Senator Schatz and Senator Van Hollen, we look forward to your participation and insights and experience, and Senator Booker is extremely thrilled that you have been added to the committee so he is not at the end of the roster. And let me also welcome Senator Rounds and Senator Hagerty, who served our country in Japan. We appreciate you bringing your experiences and expertise to the committee as well, and we look forward to working with you.

I want to first recognize Chairman Risch for his stewardship of the committee during the last Congress, and I look forward to an opportunity in the near future to discuss our priorities for the 117th Congress and to hear yours. And today I will simply note how honored I am to once again have the opportunity to have the gavel as the chairman.

Today we will consider the nomination of Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield to be the U.S. representative to the United Nations and to the Security Council and General Assembly of the U.N. Senator Risch, as I said, I want to

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thank you again for helping us put on Ambassador Greenfield's hearing last week and this business meeting today.

It is an understatement to say that Ambassador Thomas-Greenfield is eminently qualified for the position of U.S. representative to the United Nations. For over 35 years, she has served this country faithfully and ably under both Democratic and Republican Administrations: Ambassador to Liberia, Director General of the Foreign Service, Assistant Secretary of State for African affairs. Her record of service in the senior and Senate-confirmed positions of the State Department has been extraordinary. Our country is lucky that the ambassador has agreed to return to public service. We face an array of formidable challenges, both around the world and at the United Nations, that demands someone with her skills and commitment to democracy, good governance, human rights, and anti-corruption efforts.

Let me briefly address the issue of the Ambassador's speech to Savannah State University, which was the focus of much questioning last week. She was invited by the oldest historical black college and university in Georgia, a college with which she had a longstanding relationship. She accepted because of her

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commitment to diversity, a subject that has long been close to my own heart and that I pressed her on when she was the Director General. We heard important remarks from our colleague, Senator Booker, one of only 11 African-American senators in our Nation's history, about the importance of HBCUs in producing African-American leaders.

Ambassador Thomas-Greenfield spoke at Savannah State to encourage young black and brown Americans, who are underrepresented in our Foreign Service, to take their considerable talents and consider careers in U.S. national security, and especially to enter our Foreign Service so they can help spread American values around the world. While she acknowledged regret over the speech, particularly given the involvement of the Confucius Institute, Ambassador Thomas-Greenfield has a long history of expressed opposition to China's use of debt trap tactics in Africa and elsewhere and its increasingly malign presence in world governance bodies. She has also spoken plainly about China's authoritarian ambitions and open hostility to universal human rights and democratic values, and has committed to confronting them every step of the way, including at the United Nations.

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Last week I went over some examples from her storied career as it relates to China specifically and entered a long list into the record, leaving no question where she stands. I have no doubt that Ambassador Thomas-Greenfield is someone who is clear-eyed about the challenges we face from China's government, about regaining U.S. leverage and influence on the Security Council, about re-engaging our allies and holding Iran accountable, and about standing up when Israel is subjected to biased attacks. And I have no doubt that upon confirmation, she will skillfully and forcefully represent the United States. She has my full support, and I urge my colleagues to support her nomination.

With that, let me recognize the distinguished ranking member for his comments. Senator Risch?

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

**Senator Risch:** Thank you, Senator Menendez, and thank you for those kind remarks at the beginning. I want to address for a moment Ms. Greenfield's nomination before we vote here.

First of all, let me say that I have absolutely no disagreement with you that she is eminently qualified. She has an outstanding, long record of statecraft and

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service in the Department. I think that -- I really do not think that that is the issue. I mean, she is -- she impresses me both when I met with her individually and I think when she appeared before the committee. She is a very kind person and a gentle person. Generally, we like somebody a little tougher than that actually over at the U.N., but I think she will be able to hold her own over -- in that regard.

The main objection to her from those who are objecting comes from the speech that she made to the Confucius Institute. I said at the hearing, and I have not changed my position, in that I am not willing to allow one speech to define a person's career, and I think, Senator Menendez, you underlined and underscored the many speeches she has made other than that were -- that were very different than that. So given that, I am willing to set that aside. And, most importantly, she came here, unlike a lot of people do, and she acknowledged the mistake. She acknowledged that she wished she had not given that speech, and if she had it to do it over again, she would not do it.

The only other thing I would point out is her strength certainly is on the African continent, which is, no question, a big issue for us as we go forward. I

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think her qualifications are a little lighter on China and on the Middle East, which we all know is critical at the U.N.

Let me let me just say that I think that the takeaway I have from the speech at the Confucius Institute is not as much what she said because she has acknowledged that it was an error. But probably if there is a silver lining in this - - Congress ought to take a look at this -- we do not allow foreign governments to infect our political candidates by contributing to their -- to their campaigns, yet we do allow tens of millions of dollars of foreign governments' money, including notably the Chinese, to infiltrate these institutions of higher learning, which are absolutely critical to our culture and the continuation of our culture. And she was paid \$1,500 for this speech, and she acknowledges that the speech that she gave was softer on China and ignored the horrible record that China has on human rights and many other things.

So I think probably as a body, Congress ought to take a look at this type of payment by foreign governments to colleges and universities. I mean the question is, what are they getting for this? Well, it certainly is not a contribution they are making out of the goodness of their heart, and it certainly is not a

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contribution that they are making to purchase technology or license technology or something like that, and I think what we see here with that speech that she gave is the result of it. So maybe if there is a silver lining that has come out of this, it underlines the malign influence that this cash infiltration into our universities has.

In any event, I am going to support her nomination. I think she has got an outstanding record. She is a good person, maybe too good a person for this job, as I said, because the people she is going to have to wrestle with up there are not necessarily good people sometimes, but we will all wish her well. We will all stand behind her in discussing the issues. We have very little daylight between us on issues such as Turkey and those kinds of things, with the exception, of course, of Iran. She is carrying the position of the current Administration on Iran, which we are going to get to, I am sure, which we do have differences on.

But in any event, I am going to vote for the nomination, and with that, I will yield the floor. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

**The Chairman:** Well, I thank the ranking member, and we will look forward to working with you about -- and I know Senator Portman and others

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worked on the Confucius Institute report, and we look forward to working with you on that. And I would just say she is -- I saw a little steel when she was challenged in her hearing, so I think she has a velvet glove and an iron will. So are there any other comments? Senator Cruz?

**Senator Cruz:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Congratulations on becoming Mr. Chairman.

I intend to vote against this nominee. I have been growing increasingly concerned over the last 2 weeks by what appears to be a concerted, coordinated pivot towards China by the new Biden Administration. We have been seeing nominee after nominee embracing China more closely. We have seen multiple nominees refuse to answer whether they would keep Huawei or other listed companies on the entities list. One after the other, the nominees are all refusing to answer that.

With Ms. Thomas-Greenfield, her speech at the Confucius Institute, I think, raises very serious concerns. Now, we saw her come before this committee and apologize for speaking to the Confucius Institute, say it was a mistake, say she was horrified by what she saw. I think there are several observations that are

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important. Number one, this speech was not something given decades ago with the innocence of youth. This speech was given in October of 2019, just over a year ago. Several of the defenders of this nomination have spoken of the wonderful virtues of Savannah State and historically black college and universities. Unquestionably, historically black colleges and universities play a pivotal role in our country, and speaking at Savannah State or any other university is a terrific thing. But she did not go speak at Savannah State or any other university. She went to a Confucius Institute.

And as the members of this committee knows, Confucius Institutes are controlled and are paid for by the communist government of China. They engage in rampant espionage and propaganda paid for by China, and there are multiple members of this committee, Republicans and Democrats, with whom I have worked to pass legislation that has shut down dozens of Confucius Institutes across this country. And so to go and speak at a Confucius Institute -- I ask each member of the committee, would you speak at a Confucius Institute? I do not think there is a member of this committee that would. It is not complicated to know that this is an organ of the Chinese communist government.

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In explaining what she said, she also suggested -- I know that she used this phrase, but her answer suggested that, well, she went to speak truth to power. I wish that were the case. I would actually feel quite encouraged if that had been what she had done, but we have the transcript of the speech she gave, and that transcript is not speaking truth to power. The speech she gave does not have one single critical word about China. By the way, she did not give a speech about historically black colleges and universities. She was talking about China to the Confucius Institute. She knew who she was talking to. And the text of the speech, I do not believe it would have read differently if the Confucius Institute had written it, because the text of the speech, not only does she not call out China's genocide, not only does she not call out the murder, the torture, the lies, not only does she not call out the debt traps and captivity that China is using in Africa and throughout the developing world, but she praises China's Belt and Road Initiative. This committee has worked together on the Build Act, which this committee moved forward, which was designed to combat the Belt and Road Initiative. Her speech praises the Belt and Road Initiative and says that America needs to follow China's example.

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I would also note that her speech was not a one-off. I put out a whole series of remarks that Ms. Thomas-Greenfield has made over the decades repeatedly apologizing for China, saying we are not competing with China, which she said multiple times. At another time, she said that she viewed her role as "to ensure that they have the capacity to strike and negotiate better deals with the Chinese." And I ask the members of this committee, at a time when China, I believe, poses the single greatest geopolitical threat to the United States over the next century, we need a U.N. ambassador who will stand up to China, to China's pervasive influence at the United Nations. And given her record, I have no confidence that this nominee would do so.

Now, for those who are listening and watching and wondering, well, is the speech really as described, I would encourage folks, read for yourself. The text of the speech -- and, Mr. Chairman, I would ask unanimous consent that the transcript of Ms. Thomas-Greenfield's October 25th, 2019 remarks at Savannah State's Confucius Institute be entered into the record.

**The Chairman:** Without objection.

**[The information referred to follows:]**

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**[COMMITTEE INSERT]**

**Senator Cruz:** So I would encourage folks, read the speech for yourself and ask yourself this: would you be proud to see the representative for the United States of America giving that speech at the United Nations? I do not think the answer is yes, and I think confirming this nominee is a mistake.

**Senator Coons:** Mr. Chair?

**The Chairman:** Senator Coons?

**Senator Coons:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the opportunity to speak somewhat in rebuttal of the comments by my colleague from Texas. For those who might have just heard a call to read the speech or watch the speech, I urge you to also listen to her testimony, and listen to the testimony of now Secretary of State Blinken, and listen to recent remarks and speeches by President Biden.

The situation we are in as a Nation is this: you can reach back and find speeches, comments, addresses by presidents, CEOs, senators, and diplomats of both parties over decades saying positive and complimentary things about China and its future. And if we want to play a game where we reach back and pull out

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and point to something that was done here or there that is positive about China, we can play Punch and Judy almost indefinitely on a partisan basis.

Why I am supporting Linda Thomas-Greenfield for U.N. ambassador is she knows personally from service across the continent of Africa the impact of the Belt and Road Initiative, the impact of debt trap diplomacy, which she spoke to in her confirmation hearing. And it is my hope that members of this committee, Republican and Democrat, can find the clarity of purpose to recognize that if we do not achieve bipartisan consensus -- I agree with what my colleague said, and with what she said, and with what the Administration has been saying, which is China is the greatest challenge to this Nation of this Century.

I believe the path forward to addressing that challenge is by recognizing we have to develop a sustainable, bipartisan strategy, not endlessly pick at each other by pulling out of a pile things that were mis-said days or months or years ago, because, frankly, there is no end to that strategy and no positive purpose.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**Senator Kaine:** Mr. Chair?

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**The Chairman:** Senator Kaine?

**Senator Kaine:** Mr. Chair, a procedural suggestion that I make respectfully. There is an Armed Services hearing going right now about a really important topic, the murder of Vanessa Guillen at Fort Hood, and a HELP Committee hearing on the nomination of Marty Walsh to be Labor Secretary. And many of the members around the table are involved in one or the other. Might I suggest that we allow a vote, but then certainly allow members who want to speak on the nomination continue to be heard once the vote is taken?

**The Chairman:** I have no objection to that. The ranking member has no objection to that. We will allow -- and I will stay as long as anyone wishes to make a comment. I know that Senator Shaheen wants to do this. So at this point, therefore, I will entertain a motion to approve the nomination by voice vote. Is there a second?

**Senator Shaheen:** Second.

**Voice:** Mr. Chairman?

**The Chairman:** Yes?

**Voice:** I ask for a recorded vote.

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**The Chairman:** A recorded has been asked for. The clerk will call the roll.

**The Clerk:** Mr. Cardin?

**Senator Cardin:** Aye.

**The Clerk:** Mrs. Shaheen?

**Senator Shaheen:** Aye.

**The Clerk:** Mr. Coons?

**Senator Coons:** Aye.

**The Clerk:** Mr. Murphy?

**Senator Murphy:** Aye.

**The Clerk:** Mr. Kaine?

**Senator Kaine:** Aye.

**The Clerk:** Mr. Markey?

**Senator Markey:** Aye.

**The Clerk:** Mr. Merkley?

**Senator Merkley:** Aye.

**The Clerk:** Mr. Booker?

**Senator Booker:** Aye.

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**The Clerk:** Mr. Schatz?

**Senator Schatz:** Aye.

**The Clerk:** Mr. Van Hollen?

**Senator Van Hollen:** Aye.

**The Clerk:** Mr. Risch?

**Senator Risch:** Aye.

**The Clerk:** Mr. Rubio?

**Senator Risch:** No by proxy.

**The Clerk:** Mr. Johnson?

**Senator Risch:** Aye by proxy.

**The Clerk:** Mr. Romney?

**Senator Romney:** Aye.

**The Clerk:** Mr. Portman?

**Senator Risch:** Aye by proxy.

**The Clerk:** Mr. Paul?

**Senator Risch:** Aye by proxy.

**The Clerk:** Mr. Young?

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**Senator Young:** Aye.

**The Clerk:** Mr. Barrasso?

**Senator Barrasso:** No.

**The Clerk:** Mr. Cruz?

**Senator Cruz:** No.

**The Clerk:** Mr. Rounds?

**Senator Rounds:** Aye.

**The Clerk:** Mr. Hagerty?

**Senator Hagerty:** No.

**The Chairman:** The clerk will report.

**The Clerk:** Mr. Chairman?

**The Chairman:** Aye.

**The Clerk:** Mr. Chairman, the ayes are 18; the noes are 4.

**The Chairman:** The nomination is approved and sent to the Senate for its full consideration.

With that, I am happy to entertain -- I know Senator Shaheen had her hand up.

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**Senator Shaheen:** I just wanted to make one brief comment about Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield. She is an African-American woman who has risen to the highest ranks in the State Department. She has served in very difficult conflict areas around the world, including Africa and many other posts. She is absolutely tough enough to be United Nations ambassador.

**The Chairman:** Senator Cardin?

**Senator Cardin:** Mr. Chairman, I also just want to underscore the qualifications here. We are talking about a person who has made a career in foreign service and in public service. As Senator Shaheen pointed out, she has broad experience in the African desk as well as being an ambassador to Liberia. She served in Switzerland, Pakistan, Kenya, Gambia, Nigeria, Jamaica. She brings broad experience to this position, but it is her commitment to the values that make America the great Nation it is -- her commitment to human rights and to use diplomacy and engage our colleagues, her colleagues around the world, with American values -- that I think make her uniquely suited to be our U.N. ambassador. So I just really wanted to underscore how I think it is just so important that President Biden has nominated a person with broad foreign

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policy experience and a service -- foreign service to this incredibly important position.

**The Chairman:** Thank you, Senator Cardin. Let me just briefly, and then unless there is anything else, we will adjourn, a couple of items for the record. Number one, she was invited by Savannah State University, and that is who she accepted the invitation from. And secondly, she was given her honorarium, the \$1,500, by Savannah State University, not by the Confucius Institute. And as I had said previously, she has a history, which I have included in the record, going back to 2007, of expressing concern over China's rapidly-increasing lending to poor nations in Africa, where she also encouraged African governments to understand why it is important in their dealings with the Chinese to make sure that human rights and political freedoms and press freedoms are preserved and pursued; that the Chinese did not have the values of good governance and transparency; that, in fact, she asked about China's presence in Africa in 2013, and she said our own values on human rights is so much better than what they are getting from the outside by the Chinese; and the list goes on. I will have it again included for the record.

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**[The information referred to follows:]**

**[COMMITTEE INSERT]**

**The Chairman:** So I would just say that she has a very clear record of challenging China, of believing that China is a threat to our interests. And the last point I would make, we do have to compete with China. It is not enough just to confront China. We have to compete with China. So when China shows up at these African nations, in Latin America and elsewhere and we do not, well, there is going to be a challenge to that. So we have to work together to find a way of how do we, yes, challenge China, but also compete with it.

With that, if there are no further comments, this meeting is adjourned.

**[Whereupon, at 10:28 a.m., the committee was adjourned.]**

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