

U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

Business Meeting

Thursday, May 26, 2022

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

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 11:11 a.m., in Room S-116, The Capitol, Hon. Robert Menendez presiding.

Present: Senators Menendez [presiding], Cardin, Shaheen, Coons, Kaine, and Risch.

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

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

Today, we were supposed to be considering two nominations and two FSO lists. We received a holdover request for all 17 legislative items that were originally on the agenda for today.

We also received a holdover request for Ambassador Elizabeth Richard, the nominee to be Coordinator for Counterterrorism at the Department of State.

And, of course, as I have in the past, I will honor those requests and we will take those items in the June work period.

But let me speak for a moment on the holdover of every legislative item on the agenda. As I was compelled to explain many times last year in relationship to blanket obstruction on nominees, the holdover was never intended to be used in such a comprehensive fashion.

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In this committee, it has always been treated as a courtesy -- it is not written in the rules -- afforded to a senator who sought additional time to consider a specific matter, not to delay the entire business meeting of the committee.

The rules of this committee require a seven-day advance notice for business meetings unless, of course, the chairman, in consultation with the ranking member, determine there is good cause to proceed with less than seven days.

However, I have ensured that this committee abides by this rule. Every markup this Congress has been noticed seven days in advance. This business meeting should not have been a surprise to anyone. It has been the subject of informal negotiations between majority and minority staff for weeks and, through those staff, shared with Democratic and Republican offices.

At our business meeting on May the 18th, I informed the committee that we would be holding a legislative markup on May 26th.

So, if we continue to see members go down this path, I will have a different view about observing this courtesy. I have been incredibly tolerant. But it makes no sense. If somebody had a specific problem with a piece of legislation, they needed more time to figure out whether they wanted to offer amendments or what not, that is fine.

But to take the whole calendar and throw it all out, that is ridiculous, and because we do not have enough people here today as well --

Senator Risch: Mr. Chair? Mr. Chair?

The Chairman: If I may finish.

Senator Risch: I am sorry.

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The Chairman: Because we do not have enough people here as well, I am going to hold over the entire rest of the agenda so that nobody else can hold it over the next time, and we will consider it at the next business meeting. But I have had enough.

Senator Risch?

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

Senator Risch: Mr. Chairman, fair points made. Obviously, as ranking member I did not do this and I can tell you that it was not the majority of the minority that did this. I understand the chairman's frustration and many fair points made. Thank you.

The Chairman: Senator Kaine, you had something you wanted to --

Senator Kaine: Yeah. I just wanted to let committee members know the State Department yesterday asked if I would lead a group of Senators to the Summit for the Americas in L.A. on Thursday, June 9, Friday, June 10.

The summit is the 8th, 9th, and 10th and we would leave here after the last vote on Thursday, fly out Thursday, Friday, and then red-eye back Friday night to Andrews.

So, it is last minute. I was asked at the last minute. I would love anybody to go and I will distribute cards. I know we do not have full attendance but I will give everybody cards with that information.

I think it is an important opportunity. The U.S. has not hosted the summit since 1994 in Miami and it would be good to have a good showing.

The President and Vice President will be there. We will arrive in time for a reception that Secretary Blinken is having for foreign ministers who attend.

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The Chairman: Senator Shaheen?

Senator Shaheen: Yes, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate your frustration and I know that, as Senator Risch says, that this is not the majority of the minority.

But I am sure I speak for all of us when I say I am really tired to getting jerked around in this body by one or two senators who have their own agenda that has nothing to do with foreign policy of this country.

And I do not know if we have the capacity on this committee to change the rules. But I would encourage that we look at that and that we see that there need to be some other safeguards put in so that we cannot have this continue to happen meeting after meeting.

I do not think anybody wants to go out of here and have the press write that we were not willing to pass a resolution recognizing, honoring, and commending the women of Ukraine or expressing the Senate's support for Finland and Sweden's accession to the NATO, or all the other items that are on here.

These are not controversial. These are things that we all ought to be able to support, and I hope for all of you who may be here, staff members who represent those senators who have this on hold, that you will go back and report to your senators that we had this conversation.

Because I think we should be done with this now. It is time for us to behave like adults who are responsible for the future of this country and that is not what we are seeing from certain individuals.

The Chairman: Anyone else?

Senator Coons: Mr. Chairman?

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The Chairman: Senator Coons?

Senator Coons: I served on another committee that has, frankly, ground to a halt due to an inability to make any progress on its meetings, its agenda, and I have to agree with my colleague from New Hampshire. A resolution welcoming the prime minister of Greece to address the joint session of Congress when that has already happened --

Senator Shaheen: Embarrassing.

Senator Coons: -- a resolution recognizing the 75th anniversary of UNICEF, these are not -- I respect that every member has the right to have an extra week to look at complicated, pressing, authorizing pieces of legislation.

But we have had precious few markups. This committee is at risk of grinding into irrelevance. I think we ought to be able to take a bipartisan three-quarters vote of the committee to proceed with certain issues where we have got one or two holdouts who just do not reflect the overwhelming majority of the committee.

Otherwise, we are going to be at risk, going forward, of being able to get nothing done.

Senator Cardin: Mr. Chairman?

The Chairman: Senator Cardin?

Senator Cardin: Just to underscore what Senator Shaheen and Senator Coons are saying.

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Senator Risch, I appreciate your working with us and trying to make sure that this committee's agenda moves forward. I really do. We know that it is not always easy with the pressures that you have within your own caucus -- the same thing with Senator Menendez, the pressure he has with his caucus.

But I just really want to underscore the point you both have made. We are now seeing the floor of the United States Senate of Senators holding up the process of moving forward with legislation in order to get their particular issue considered not by a vote on the floor of the United States Senate but by edict that it is automatically adopted.

That has happened to us now at least twice that we have had to deal with that type of a situation where the Senators were offered a democratic process on the floor of the Senate for the consideration of their legislation. They did not even want that.

So, this is an abuse of the rights of an individual Senator. We know that any one Senator can stop the process of the Senate operating in an orderly way. We know that.

But over the history of the United States Senate we have seen comity where we have been able to work together. I am getting to where Senator Shaheen is, who has expressed her frustration.

We are getting to the point where we need to look at the leadership of the Senate, Democrats and Republicans, to recognize we want to protect the rights -- legitimate rights -- of the minority, the legitimate rights of the committee, the legitimate rights to have issues considered.

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But the abuse of individual members here has gone beyond the limits and we really need to think about where we are in that regard.

The Chairman: Anyone else?

[No response.]

The Chairman: This meeting is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:20 a.m., the hearing was adjourned.]