

Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
Chairman Richard G. Lugar
Opening Statement for Nomination Hearings of
Ambassador Nicholas Burns, Mr. John Bellinger, and Ambassador David Welch
March 11, 2005

The Committee on Foreign Relations meets today to consider three important nominations for positions in the Department of State. President Bush has nominated Ambassador Nicholas Burns to be the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, Mr. John Bellinger to be State Department Legal Advisor, and Ambassador David Welch to be Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs. We welcome these three distinguished nominees and look forward to our discussions with them.

Ambassador Burns is highly qualified to take on the critical position of Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs. Since the beginning of his career in the Foreign Service in the early 1980s, Ambassador Burns has served five Presidents and ten Secretaries of State. Most recently he has served as our Ambassador to NATO. Before that he was Ambassador to Greece and Spokesman and Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs.

The Under Secretary for Political Affairs is considered the third ranking position at the State Department, and its occupant often functions as the day-to-day manager of regional and bilateral foreign policy. In this position, Ambassador Burns must pull together the political, economic, and security issues that affect our relationships with other nations into a coherent and integrated foreign policy.

He will face many diplomatic challenges, including building on the efforts of President Bush and Secretary Rice to strengthen U.S.-European relations. He must help find new ways to work with other nations to prevent Iran from becoming a nuclear weapons state, to rebuild Iraq and Afghanistan, to support the Middle East peace process, and to address the ongoing North Korean nuclear crisis. In addition, Ambassador Burns will be occupied with such problems as the possibility that Europe will lift its arms embargo on China, the escalation of tension between China and Taiwan, threats to democracy and stability in Latin America, and Syria's presence in Lebanon. We look forward today to discussing these and other foreign policy challenges.

The second nomination to be considered by the Committee today is that of John Bellinger to be State Department Legal Adviser. Mr. Bellinger brings to this position experience in several U.S. government agencies. During the last four years, he served as the chief legal adviser to the National Security Council. In that position, he worked as a close adviser to then-National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice.

Mr. Bellinger began his government career in 1988 as Special Assistant to the Director of Central Intelligence. Following a brief stint in private practice, he returned to the government, where he held positions with the Commission on the Roles and Capabilities of the U.S. Intelligence Community and the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. In 1997, he joined the Department of Justice, where he served as Counsel for National Security Matters. He then became Senior Associate Counsel to the President and the Legal Adviser to the National Security Council in 2001.

In this position, Mr. Bellinger worked with the Legal Adviser at the State Department on a myriad of issues, as well as with lead counsels of other agencies involved in national security and foreign policy matters. By virtue of his experience at the NSC, Mr. Bellinger is already familiar with a broad array of legal matters that will be relevant to his work as the Legal Adviser at the Department of State.

Mr. Bellinger has acted as a Senior Adviser to Secretary Rice since making the transition with her from the NSC to the State Department earlier this year. The Secretary's continued trust and confidence in Mr. Bellinger is made clear by her recommendation that he be appointed as Legal Adviser.

The Legal Adviser oversees all legal aspects of U.S. foreign affairs, including those involving: relations with foreign countries, economic affairs, legislative matters, international organizations, the use of force and laws of armed conflict, international claims, human rights, law enforcement, oceans and environmental matters, treaty matters, and the protection of American citizens overseas.

Our final nominee, Ambassador David Welch, has been nominated to be Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs. Ambassador Welch has served as U.S. Ambassador to Egypt since August 2001 and has been involved in the Near East region for much of his career as a Foreign Service Officer. He served as Assistant Secretary of State for International Organization Affairs, developing and implementing U.S. policy towards the United Nations. He also has served as Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State in the Near Eastern Affairs Bureau, and in diplomatic posts in Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Syria, Pakistan, Iraq, and Libya.

The Near Eastern Affairs Bureau has responsibilities that stretch from Morocco to the Persian Gulf, covering eighteen nations. The Assistant Secretary must manage our bilateral relationships with these nations with an understanding of our strategic interests, as well as sensitivity for the history, culture, and traditions of the people of the region.

Iraq has been at the top of the list of priorities of U.S. foreign policy over the past several years. The elections last January offer encouragement that Iraqi democracy can succeed, but there is more work to be done. As the new Transitional National Assembly drafts a constitution and prepares for future elections, the U.S. must remain committed to Iraq's stability and security over the long-term.

The Assistant Secretary also must be fully engaged in achieving a settlement of the Israeli - Palestinian conflict, seizing the opportunities presented by the election of Mahmoud Abbas as President of the Palestinian Authority. Concrete benefits of peace must be delivered quickly to meet the growing expectations of moderate Palestinians and Israelis alike and defuse the extremists on both sides.

With almost 4,500 personnel in the Near Eastern Affairs Bureau and regional offices, the Assistant Secretary must be a keen manager, as well as a diplomat. Attention needs to be paid to the shortage of Arabic and Farsi speakers in the Department, to recruiting and retaining personnel willing to serve in uncertain security environments, and to the safety of our embassy staffs.

I congratulate each of you on your nominations. I ask that you deliver your statements in the order that you were introduced. If you are summarizing a statement, the text of your entire presentation will be included in the hearing record. Also, please introduce family and friends that may have accompanied you on this important occasion.

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