

BUSINESS MEETING

Thursday, January 30, 2025

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

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:31 a.m., in Room SD-416,

Hon. James E. Risch presiding.

Present: Senators Risch [presiding], Shaheen, Coons, Merkley, Schatz, and Van Hollen.

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

The Chairman: I would be remiss if I did not recognize the tragedy that happened here in Washington, DC, last night.

I take the privilege of speaking for the Ranking Member and the rest of the committee in expressing our condolences to the family and loved ones of those who were lost.

These kinds of things are stunning and happen so quickly and remind us how precious every single day is that we have here.

So, I would ask all of you to join in a moment of silence as we say a prayer and remember those who went before and especially their families.

[Moment of silence.]

The Chairman: OK.

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With that, we will proceed to committee business meeting script, and we have before us the nominations of Elise Stefanik to be U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. and U.S. representative to the U.N. Security Council and General Assembly.

Is there a motion to favorably report the nominations?

Senator Barrasso: So moved.

The Chairman: Is there a second?

Senator Ricketts: Second.

The Chairman: It has been moved and seconded that we proceed to send these to the floor with a recommendation that they be confirmed by the floor.

So, is there debate?

There being no debate--

Senator Shaheen.

Senator Shaheen: Mr. Chairman, I intend to vote for Congresswoman Stefanik.

I was -- particularly appreciated her response to my question about UNFPA and her willingness to review that because UNFPA does three times more work for women and children around the world than we do through our bilateral relationships.

I do not agree with all of Representative Stefanik's positions, but I was pleased to hear her talk about her interest in supporting the work of the U.N. and trying to ensure that it operates better, and so I intend to support her.

The Chairman: Thank you very much.

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Is there further debate?

Senator Coons.

Senator Coons: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

This is a close call for me. I was inclined to vote for Elise Stefanik for U.N. Ambassador but I -- frankly, as the days have unfolded I have become more and more alarmed at the scope and reach of the impact of the freeze on funding for activities for USAID around the world and have said I am not going to vote for nominees until this is reversed, and in her confirmation hearing in response to a question from Senator Schatz she said she supported it.

I hope we can still work together and she will represent us well, but I will vote against her really more in protest of that particular action.

The Chairman: Thank you, Senator Coons.

Is there further debate?

Senator Schatz: Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Senator Schatz.

Senator Schatz: I am going to vote for her. It is also a close call. I am going to vote for her because I told her I was going to vote for her, and my word is my bond.

But I am in a similar place to Senator Coons, and I do think there has been bipartisan support for helping Secretary Rubio to clarify the foreign aid freeze.

But just so everybody understands, money is not flowing. The Secretary is saying the right things, and that implementation memo as amended is helpful.

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But on the ground in the places where 5 days ago we were describing medicine spoiling at the dock, clinics being closed, people being furloughed, the Secretary's amended memo has not effectuated the change that we are expecting it to.

And so we really just on a nonpartisan basis, on a bipartisan basis, have to keep the pressure on the State Department to effectuate the Secretary's policy because right now there is a ton of confusion, and these are faraway places, and the original stop work orders are still being observed in some places and not in others.

The furloughs are some -- in some places being undone and not in others, and this is not some policy question anymore. It is a question of executing what the Secretary has asked.

So I just ask that we continue to put pressure on a bipartisan basis and just to understand the urgency of the moment. Four days ago I asked how bad is this and they said babies dying by the weekend.

And so this is not the kind of thing that we can get back to on Monday. We all have to exert pressure and make sure that the State Department gets this right, and I am talking about in the next 24 hours.

The Chairman: Thank you very much, Senator.

I have spoken to Secretary Rubio on numerous occasions starting the end of last week on this subject due to input from all of you, from the media, from everyone else.

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This is, obviously, a work in progress. It was intended to underscore the fact that we are going into debt at a rate of \$1 trillion every hundred days. I think that has, certainly, been underscored as a result of this.

If you think this is bad, when our debtors come and want their money and we cannot pay it that is going to be really bad, and so it has caused everyone to take a breath and look at how we are spending our money, where we are spending our money, seeing that it is done as efficiently as possible.

Admittedly, there have been some inconveniences along the line, but they are continuing to work on this, and I think everyone is committed.

All of us know Secretary Rubio well and he is committed to make this work.

Senator Shaheen.

Senator Shaheen: Mr. Chairman, I appreciate that. I think you and other members of this committee who I have talked to have expressed their concerns about it.

But I will tell you that I resent hearing not from Secretary Rubio but from other members of the Administration that the only people who care about these issues are Democrats and this is a Democrat versus Republican issue.

I do not happen to believe that. I have been on this committee as have you since I got to the United States Senate, and I believe that most of us are on this committee because we understand how important what we do around the world is to our own national security here.

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And I hope that all of you on the other side of the aisle will share your concerns with the Administration and point out that this is not a partisan issue.

This is about what are we going to do to ensure that our influence continues around the world in the interests of our own national security.

So thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you very much, and I agree with you. This is, certainly, not a partisan issue and neither is the other side of the coin, and that is the debt that we are going in.

I know that you all share the same views that we do, that this is a -- the biggest challenge to national security that there is, really, is the internal debt that we are gathering at the rate of a trillion dollars every hundred days.

So, we are in agreement that neither one of these issues are partisan issues but we are all Americans. We have got to get through these.

Senator.

Senator Merkley: Mr. Chairman, I will be voting no.

I am very concerned about the point of view that the nominee expressed regarding Israel's right to the entire West Bank.

I think there have been such an unleashing of attacks on Palestinian settlements in the West Bank and that this viewpoint perpetuates a cycle of war and hate and is exactly the wrong approach for us to have an enduring peace and stability that will free the next generation from dealing with the same conflicts we are dealing with now.

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Senator Van Hollen: Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you.

Senator.

Senator Van Hollen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

So, I will oppose this nomination for the reasons Senator Coons mentioned but also because I think that Ms. Stefanik is the wrong person for this job at the United Nations.

If you look at her record in the House, she voted to terminate U.S. funding for the U.N. On one occasion she voted against funds to the United Nations. On another she apparently did not vote.

So her current position, which is that she thinks the United States should fully engage at the U.N., which I agree with, seems to be a nomination eve conversion.

She also supports the President's decision to withdraw from the World Health Organization, which is going to simply cede that ground to China, and I also am opposing this nomination because I was very troubled -- very troubled -- by the witness' response to questions I asked regarding the situation in the Middle East that Senator Merkley has identified.

Her answers are way out of the mainstream of American bipartisan foreign policy for years and will make it impossible to achieve any kind of light at the end of this dark tunnel that we find ourselves in if she continues to hold those views

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and my view is she cannot be effective at the U.N. with the positions she has taken.

The Chairman: Further debate?

There being no further debate we will proceed to a vote.

Are we satisfied with a voice vote with people registering a no or do you want a roll call vote?

If there is no objection we will do a voice vote.

All in favor of the two nominations for Ms. Stefanik please signify by saying aye.

Opposed, nay.

And do Senators wish to be recorded?

Senator Van Hollen, Senator Merkley, Senator Coons will be recorded as noes. Thank you very much. Appreciate the cooperation.

And with that --

Senator Shaheen: Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: I am sorry.

Senator Shaheen: I have also received some requests from members who wish to be recorded as no and so we will submit them to the clerk.

The Chairman: That is -- without objection those will be entered.

[Editor's note: Senators Coons, Murphy, Kaine, Merkley, Van Hollen, and Duckworth recorded as no.]

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The Chairman: With that, the business meeting will be adjourned, and we will proceed to our hearing on the PRC malign influence at home and abroad.

[Whereupon, at 10:42 a.m., the meeting was adjourned.]