

Business Meeting

Thursday, June 5, 2025

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

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:42 a.m., in Room S—116, the Capitol,
Hon. James E. Risch, chairman of the committee, presiding.

Present: Senators Risch [presiding], Ricketts, McCormick, Daines, Hagerty,
Barrasso, Lee, Paul, Scott, Curtis, Cornyn, Shaheen, Coons, Murphy, Merkley, Schatz,
Van Hollen, and Rosen.

The Chairman: The committee will come to order. We have business to do this morning. We have three nominees on the agenda and a number of pieces of legislation. I am going to start on the three nominees. I am going to remove Joel Rayburn from the calendar. We are going to take up Chris Pratt and Michael DeSombre.

Do you want us to take them individually——

Senator Shaheen: Please.

The Chairman: Or do you want to take them up en bloc?

Senator Shaheen: No, I would like to——

The Chairman: Let's start with Chris Pratt. Is there a motion to send him to the floor?

Senator Ricketts: So moved.

The Chairman: Seconded?

[Chorus of seconds.]

The Chairman: Is there debate?

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Senator Shaheen: No, but Mr. Chairman, I actually intend to vote for Mr. Pratt.

The Political-Military Affairs Bureau considers and approves arms sales to our allies and partners. It supports vital demining efforts, negotiates international security agreements. I think it is important to have someone with national security experience, who appreciates the need for a continuing relationship with this committee. I think Mr. Pratt has that experience. I welcomed his commitment to work with the committee, so I intend to support him.

The Chairman: Thank you. Is there further discussion?

[No response.]

The Chairman: Thank you. Roll call, or will you accept a voice vote?

Senator Shaheen: Yes, please.

The Chairman: All those in favor, please signify by saying aye.

[Chorus of ayes.]

The Chairman: Opposed, nay.

And you want to be recorded as——

Senator Murphy: [Inaudible.]

The Chairman: How about if we do [inaudible].

Senator Murphy: Whatever you want.

The Chairman: We will leave it be if that is what you want.

Thank you, and the motion is passed. Chris Pratt will be referred to the floor affirmatively.

Michael DeSombre, is there discussion about that nomination?

Senator Shaheen: No.

The Chairman: Thank you.

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Senator Shaheen: Well, again, I am going to support Mr. DeSombre, because I think he has got the qualifications to serve as Assistant Secretary. But I hope he is going to advocate across the Department for more resources to be able to do his job, to empower those in the East Asian and Pacific Bureau, because I am concerned about the reorganization and the limited toolkit that this Administration is providing to the people who work in the State Department.

The Chairman: Thank you, Senator. Is there further debate? Senator Coons.

Senator Coons: Could I, at the appropriate time, just make some brief comments about State reorganization?

The Chairman: In relation to this?

Senator Coons: Once we are done.

The Chairman: All right. We will get to it. Is there further debate on Mr. DeSombre?

If not, will you accept a voice vote on this?

Senator Shaheen: Yes.

The Chairman: All those in favor, signify by saying aye.

[Chorus of ayes.]

The Chairman: All those opposed?

[Chorus of noes.]

Senator Schatz: Could I be recorded as a no?

The Chairman: Yes. Senator Schatz will be recorded as a no. Senator Merkley and Senator Murphy will all be recorded as no.

We are doing so good, do you want to [inaudible].

Senator Shaheen: Yes, go ahead.

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The Chairman: I will continue to keep Mr. Rayburn in my pocket here.

All right. We will now move to the legislation, and we have seven bills.

Senator Hagerty: We are not going to vote on Rayburn? I just didn't—

The Chairman: No. I removed him for reasons I will discuss with you later, Senator Hagerty, if that is all right. You wouldn't like the result.

Senator Hagerty: I am sorry.

The Chairman: You wouldn't like the result. All right. Let's see. We have seven—do we have a Manager's Package on one of these to start with? And that is on 1397.

And we have eight—seven bills and one resolution which our staffs have put together, and there is a Manager's Substitute Amendment on, let's see, six of the pieces of legislation. And I think we can take the whole thing up en bloc, unless there is an objection.

Senator Shaheen: I thought there were some amendments that people—

The Chairman: Well, they are in the Substitute Amendment. Are there—well, let's do this. I want to take up Senate Bills 1397, 1463, 1579, 1731, 1883—

Senator Shaheen: Ok, I am sorry. I am talking about different—not about the en banc.

The Chairman: So what I would propose is we take up those seven bills and the one resolution en bloc, together with their substitute amendments, all in one package. Is there an objection to doing that?

Senator Murphy: Can you clarify—

Senator Shaheen: Tell us again what you—

The Chairman: I should. 1397, 1463, 1579, 1731, 1883, 1780, 1900, and Senate Res. 227. These have all been negotiated by the Ranking Member.

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Senator Murphy: Is 1801 on the list?

The Chairman: On the list—1801 is not on the list.

Senator Shaheen: No.

Senator Rosen: And there is one other not on the list, 1478.

Senator Shaheen: There are a number that are not.

The Chairman: No, those two we are going to take up separately. So 1478 and 1801 we will take up separately.

All right. So are we good?

Senator Shaheen: Yes.

The Chairman: Is there a motion to send these en bloc?

Senator Ricketts: So moved.

The Chairman: Is there a second?

Senator Shaheen: Second.

The Chairman: It has been moved and seconded that the seven bills that I read, plus the Senate Res, together with their Substitute Amendments, be sent to the floor.

All those in favor, signify by saying aye.

[Chorus of ayes.]

The Chairman: Opposed, nay.

The ayes have it and the motion is passed.

Senator Scott of Florida: Mr. Chairman, could I be recorded as a no on two of them?

The Chairman: Which ones?

Senator Scott of Florida: 1463 and 1397.

The Chairman: You will be recorded as no.

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Senator Scott of Florida: Thank you.

Senator Shaheen: Mr. Chairman?

The Chairman: Yes.

Senator Shaheen: I just wanted to speak to the process a little bit, because I know people will be leaving because they have other commitments. So while we have a quorum here, I think this is a really positive business meeting where people have contributed, members have contributed. I think the staffs have done a really good job of working together to get bills to the committee that we can pass and we can discuss. And that is the way this Committee is supposed to work. So I just want to applaud everybody on the committee and the staffs who have helped to make that happen and say I hope that we can continue to work, going forward, in this way.

The Chairman: Thank you, Senator, and I would concur with those remarks.

Senator Hagerty: Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Senator Hagerty.

Senator Hagerty: Sorry to interrupt. I also want to be recorded as a no on S. 1397.

The Chairman: Senator Hagerty will be recorded on 1397.

Senator Shaheen: Should I take that personally, Senator Hagerty?

Senator Hagerty: No. It just has to do with the funding at this stage.

Senator Shaheen: Ok.

The Chairman: All right. So let's take up S. 1478. Where are we on that? Anybody got amendments they want to add?

Senator Coons: Mr. Chairman, while you wait for amendments——

The Chairman: Go ahead, Senator. I am sorry.

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Senator Coons: It has been a positive experience working with you on this. This is one of a package of four bills, the practice of taking hostage of Americans, that I have worked with four different Republicans on to address the IRS imposing fees, fines, penalties, impact on credit scores, impact on Social Security. This is a broader strategy bill about countries that are engaging in unlawful and lawful retention of Americans as a strategy, and I appreciate your partnership in helping it move forward.

The Chairman: Thank you, Senator Coons.

We will first take up the Manager's Amendment, which has again been negotiated.

Is there debate?

[No response.]

The Chairman: There being none we will take a motion to adopt.

Senator Coons: So moved.

Senator Ricketts: Second.

The Chairman: It has been moved and seconded.

All those in favor, signify by saying aye.

[Chorus of ayes.]

The Chairman: Opposed, nay.

The ayes have it.

Are there other amendments to this bill proposed?

There are no other amendments to the bill proposed, so I would accept a motion to send the bill to the floor with a do pass recommendation.

I am going to pull back. Senator Paul, do you wish to propose your amendments?

Senator Paul: Yes, probably.

The Chairman: This is on 1478.

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Senator Paul: Yes, I do.

The Chairman: Senator Paul, you have the floor.

Senator Paul: My amendment is First Degree 5 to Senate Bill 1478. And in general I guess my concern about the bill is that if we are going to be sanctioning countries that have detained U.S. citizens we should look at what is on the list. The James Foley Foundation put out a list of the countries that we will be potentially interrupting travel or banning travel for. Some of these countries, you know, most people do not like, so you may not care. But some of them like Egypt, you know, tens of thousands of Americans go to Egypt a year and spend millions of dollars on tourism.

And I am a human rights critic of Egypt. I think they do a lot of things bad, and they have detained some American citizens, according to the James Foley Foundation. Are we going to ban travel to Egypt? I think the bill would allow banning travel to Egypt because they have detained American citizens.

Same way with the Palestinian Authority. At first you think, well yes, of course. Hamas is terrible. They detained and they killed American and Israeli citizens. So yes, I think they are terrible, but what about USAID workers going to Gaza, who have an exemption in the bill for USAID workers going to Gaza.

So this bill creates just a number of things that are not really explained or taken care of.

Pakistan and Egypt both get money from us, hundreds of millions of dollars in foreign aid. Egypt gets billions of dollars in foreign aid. Now, if we are going to stop Americans from traveling to those countries, maybe we ought to think about stop sending them money. But if we are going to keep sending them money and then ban people from traveling there, that just does not make any sense at all.

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Saudia Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are on this list, as well, the James Foley list, James Foley Foundation list of countries that have wrongfully detained people abroad. But we give arms to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. They are both on this list for detaining Americans. So is Turkey. They are a NATO ally. Are we going to ban travel to a NATO ally? There are just a lot of questions that are raised by this.

An example. Saudi Arabia, in 2023, Saudi Arabia finally released a 72-year-old, dual U.S.-Saudi citizen who was arrested and sentenced to 19 years in prison for making tweets critical of the Crown Prince. Well, I can't imagine anybody here supporting that, and it is like, well, are we going to cut off trade with them? Then are we going to cut off people visiting Saudi Arabia? Even though I think that should be criticized, I am not really for banning Americans from going to Saudi Arabia.

Senator Coons: Senator, if I might? My understanding is this legislation does not ban travel anywhere. It requires U.S. citizens to confirm that they have received and read the travel warning before traveling to a country that has a practice of detaining Americans.

Senator Paul: I think it—let me reclaim for a second. That may not be disputable in the sense that I think the State Department would be allowed to impose sanctions and travel restrictions. I do not think they are exactly clear whether that precludes the State Department from having a ban on travel.

Senator Merkley: Mr. Chairman.

Senator Paul: I am just open for questions. I am not quite done. Do you want to ask a question?

Senator Merkley: It is kind of a question, in that I completely agree with the point that is being made that it should not be the job of the government to ban [unclear] from traveling to these countries. The first part of your amendment, if I understood, says that

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[unclear]. If that were [unclear] I would totally support that. My understanding is that this would not empower. But if there is confusion about that, it needs to be clarified, and if that was in your amendment I would support that. But the second half—

Senator Coons: It is the second half that takes away the notification to U.S. citizens traveling that I object to.

Senator Paul: Yes, I think I would be willing to do it if we could actually pass the amendment, would be to take off the second half. The reason we put the second half in there is, in general, I do not like the idea of the government creating policemen in the private sector. I don't like them saying to the airlines, "You are now the police of people. You have got to tell them this," and "You have got to tell them that. And if you don't we are going to punish the airlines," kind of thing.

But if I can't get agreement on that, but if we can get the first, I think it would protect some freedom of travel to get the first part in.

So I would ask—there was one other point I was going to make. Oh, the only other point I was going to make is let's say you decide to restrict travel. There is a certain irony that, you know, we have 5,000 troops in the United Arab Emirates, but they do not have a perfect human rights record. They have detained Americans in the past.

And then you get a Secretary of State who says, "Oh, we want to punish them." I mean, right now you probably do not have that. Everybody loves them. We love having our troops there. Let's say you get a President who doesn't necessarily like it, and all of a sudden we are banning Americans from traveling there while we have 5,000 troops that actually are stationed there.

So I think there are a lot of problems with this bill. I think it is ill-conceived. I think it could be made less bad, and I would ask, if I am able to introduce my amendment using

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only the first clause, which is nothing in this act or amendment made by this act may be construed as limiting the freedom of travel of American citizens. And I ask for a recorded vote.

Senator Hagerty: Mr. Chairman, I would be able to support this as amended. I have problems with the full amendment. But as amended I can support it.

The Chairman: Senator Coons, do you want to speak to this?

Senator Coons: Look, I am perfectly comfortable with our making a statement that the intention of this bill is not to prevent Americans from visiting other countries or traveling to other countries. But an intention of this bill is to require that Americans who are intending to travel to a country that has a practice of taking Americans hostage, certify that they have read the fact that there is a State Department warning. In a number of cases that the Special Presidential Envoy for hostage affairs brought to a group of us, the folks who we dedicated a lot of time, effort, and money to getting back out of that country said, "I had no idea I was traveling to a place that was dangerous for Americans." Because the State Department posts things on a website and folks go to visit their great-uncle and don't think about the consequences.

Senator Paul: So Egypt would be on your list then, of countries?

Senator Coons: It depends on what the current State Department warnings are in terms of travel.

Senator Paul: Which could be arbitrary.

Senator Coons: We should not be preventing. But I agree with your core principle. We should not be preventing Americans from choosing to travel. We just wanted to ensure they were better informed.

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The Chairman: Senator Paul, I think the overall purpose of the legislation is to really get people to acknowledge that they have an understanding of the risk. When we get somebody that is held—I don't care where they are—it becomes a real problem for us. And if the American makes that decisions after being fully informed, that is bad. On the other hand, we should at least put the stuff under their nose and make them acknowledge it. I mean, that is where we are with the purpose.

Senator Hagerty: Mr. Chairman, just one addition. I have had constituents in the exact same boat, that they were not informed. This is, as I read it, it is an informed consent measure or not. I would appreciate it. I had people that were in situations, they had no idea. That is exactly what they said to me, because the State Department website is arcane. I don't know what it is. But having informed consent, I think, would help some of the situations I have dealt with personally.

The Chairman: I think, too, Senator Hagerty, sometimes those people get in the positions and say they did not have an idea, where they really did have an idea. This is going to make sure that we all have got an understanding that the people knew what they were doing.

Are you willing to accept Senator Paul's amendment, Senator Coons?

Senator Coons: If revised in a way that does not undermine the entire bill. This is a complicated list of amendments that have a variety of impacts. Some of them contain language which essentially guts the rest of the bill. Others are merely giving—I am having trouble detecting which one is which.

The Chairman: Well——

Senator Coons: And he basically said, and you cannot prevent travel.

The Chairman: Ranking Member.

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Senator Shaheen: Well, as I understand, and see if this works for you, Rand, if you left the second rule of construction, "Nothing in this act or the amendments made by this act may be construed as limiting the freedom of travel of United States citizens," does that work for you, and does that work for you?

Senator Coons: Again, it depends on whether the Senator views——

Senator Shaheen: You eliminated all the other pieces that said you can't do the informed consent.

Senator Coons: As long as the Senator agrees that the term "limiting the freedom of travel" can include being required to say, "I have read this warning." It doesn't stop me from traveling at all, preventing or prohibiting.

Senator Paul: So you want to change the word "limiting" to "preventing"?

Senator Coons: Good.

Senator Paul: That is fine with me.

Senator Coons: Good.

The Chairman: Are we in agreement?

Senator Coons: Yes.

The Chairman: Which amendment is this? Is this the only one you are going to call up on this bill?

Senator Paul: That is all from me.

The Chairman: Ok. Given that, by unanimous consent of the committee——

Senator Cornyn: Can we restart the amendment, please?

The Chairman: Senator Paul?

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Senator Paul: The amendment would, in the end, read, "Nothing in this act or the amendments made by this act may be construed as preventing the freedom of travel of United States citizens."

Senator Cornyn: Thank you.

The Chairman: Is there objection to that amendment?

Senator Hagerty: No.

Senator Shaheen: And strike——

The Chairman: And strike the remainder of what is proposed on Paul First Degree Five.

Are we all in agreement? All right. Given that, by unanimous consent we will adopt Senator Paul's Amendment, as amended by the committee at this point in time.

So with that, let's——

Senator Shaheen: Is that the first, Rand?

Senator Paul: No. I think you did one of my other amendments today.

Senator Shaheen: No, by UC, by UC.

The Chairman: I don't think it was from this decade.

[Laughter.]

The Chairman: All right. So the bill is 1478. Is there a motion to send 1478 to the floor as a do pass, given the amendment that we have adopted?

Senator McCormick: So moved.

Unidentified Voice: Second.

The Chairman: It has been moved and seconded.

All those in favor, signify by saying aye.

[Chorus of ayes.]

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The Chairman: Opposed, nay.

The ayes have it, and it has so passed.

We will now take up Senate Bill 1801, the INEA. This is Risch, Coons, Lee, Heinrich. We have a number of amendments here. The first one I have is a Manager's Amendment, which includes Paul 2 and Merkley 1, and these have been negotiated, I understand. Am I correct on that? Also Shaheen 1 and 2 on the Manager's Amendment.

So on the Manager's Amendment, is there a motion to accept the Manager's Amendment?

Senator Shaheen: So moved.

Senator Murphy: Second.

The Chairman: Moved and seconded.

All those in favor of the Manager's Amendment please signify by saying aye.

[Chorus of ayes.]

The Chairman: That leaves two, Murphy 2 and Schatz 1. Senator Murphy.

Senator Murphy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. So this amendment is pretty simple. It has been a bipartisan priority on this Committee to apply 123 Agreements, what we call the gold standard with additional protocol, to countries with which the United States is entering into nuclear agreements. And this amendment would simply state, or restate, what has been bipartisan policy, that with respect to Saudi Arabia we would require that they abide by the gold standard and the additional protocol in order to secure the benefits of this act.

This is of critical importance, in part, because the UAE has signed these protocols, Egypt has signed these protocols, and those agreements would likely have to be reopened

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if the agreement with Saudi Arabia did not have the additional protocols. Obviously, it potentially sets the entire region on a very dangerous course.

That being said, Mr. Chairman, I am not going to ask for a vote on this amendment because, you know, I think it would be good for the committee to continue to talk about this and preserve a bipartisan consensus around applying the additional protocols to Saudi Arabia, and I know that the sponsors of this bill want to move it forward, and that might end up with us being on a different side of this amendment when probably, in the end, it is good for us to maintain that consensus.

So I just hope that we can continue to talk about this bipartisan commitment, making sure that we apply those additional protocols on any nuclear agreements with countries, especially in this very volatile region. And with that I will postpone this debate for a later time.

The Chairman: Well, thank you, Senator Murphy. I appreciate that. I think the bill's sponsors, namely myself and Senator Coons, are of the frame of mind that if Saudi are going to do this, it is better that they do this with us than the Russians or the Chinese, who we may be competitors. And so we are going to leave this to negotiations as they move forward. But we are not in conflict on this. I think we all want to get to the same point.

Senator Coons: Thank you, Senator Risch, and thank you, Senator Murphy. I strongly agree with your initiative here to just reinforce that a 123 Agreement and signing the additional protocol is, and should be required, civil nuclear partners. That, in fact, is in the 2024 SFOPS statute, and is an important and I think bipartisan commitment that I intend to work with you to carry forward. And I appreciate you respecting for us to have a constructive markup. It is helpful for us to move forward. Thank you, Senator.

Senator Merkley: Mr. Chairman.

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The Chairman: Senator.

Senator Merkley: I think we need to keep remembering that you have two powerful poles in the Islamic world. You have a Shiite power, which is Iran, you have Sunni power, which is Saudi Arabia. And if we are serious about restrictions that eliminate the risk of a nuclear weapon in Iran, we have to be serious about restrictions involving Saudi Arabia. Iran is not going to be able to agree to things if we give license that has no controls on what is happening with the nuclear materials in Saudi Arabia.

Senator Van Hollen: Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I also support the intent of the Murphy proposal, and as the author of the language that is carried now in the appropriations bills each year, to say that at least with respect to EXIM financing, that no EXIM financing will be provided unless Saudi Arabia meets these conditions. I do think we should expand that to cover everything else.

But I appreciate Senator Murphy offering an amendment, and I hope we can get together to make sure we accomplish the objective.

The Chairman: Is there further debate?

[No response.]

The Chairman: So we will remove that. Senator Schatz has one, but I understand you are pulling this down?

Senator Schatz: Yes. This is small, but I think it could create challenges for us in terms of enactment. There is a provision in this legislation that makes reference to the Energy Dominance Council, which was established by the President. That is a bit of a polarizing council, and it introduces, I think, arguments about energy policy. When I think the exciting thing about this bill is it is focused on where we agree, not where we disagree. So I tried to get just that little provision struck. It does not really undermine the point of

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the legislation, but if we were able to delete that as we try to move this along it might smooth passage on our side.

The Chairman: Thank you, Senator Schatz.

So with that we are done with the discussion, I believe, on Senate Bill 1801. So I would accept a motion to send it to the floor.

Senator Coons: So moved.

Senator Shaheen: So moved.

The Chairman: It has been moved and seconded that the bill be sent to the floor as a do pass recommendation.

All those in favor, signify by saying aye.

[Chorus of ayes.]

The Chairman: Opposed, nay.

The ayes have it. And I think that concludes——

Senator Scott of Florida: Mr. Chairman, I wish to be recorded as a no on 1801.

The Chairman: On 1801.

Senator Shaheen: Mr. Chairman, before we close I just wanted to note, everybody took notes that we postponed the hearing on transnational criminal organizations earlier this week. I think it is important for people to know why that got postponed, because I think it raises a real concern.

The reason, as I understand, is that the Department of Defense blocked your witness from discussing the topics. And, you know, this is a witness who was a professor at the National Defense University. I cannot imagine that anything she said was going to be objectionable to this Administration.

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And I just think we ought to register our concern about that, because if we are not getting the information we need then we cannot make good policy decisions. I think it is a problem when the Secretary of Defense says he has got to read the testimony, or clear the testimony of every single witness, that the majority, that you all want to have testify.

The Chairman: Thank you. Senator Coons.

Senator Coons: One other point if I might make on State Department reorganization. We just received the first detailed information on this proposed restructuring. And just briefly, I think we should work together to make sure we have more time and more consultation before the entire State Department is restructured. Particularly I am concerned about the ability of career State Department employees to seek reassignment to other offices, as a whole series of functions and offices are shut down or realigned so that the skill and knowledge and seniority of staff who have worked in a particular function are not just RIF'ed before they can apply to continue their service. And I frankly think in our appropriations process we need a robust top line for SFOPS so that it can carry out the USAID mission that is now going to be cut in half. I think this is something the entire Committee should be engaged on, because, frankly, without a highly functioning State Department that has bipartisan authorization we will find ourselves butting heads needlessly, and have a missed opportunity.

The Chairman: Thank you very much. I am assuming that you will discuss this with the Secretary of State.

Senator Coons: I will do so.

The Chairman: Thank you very much. With that, that concludes the committee business. And I ask unanimous consent the staff be authorized to make technical or

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confirming changes and that members of the committee be permitted to submit requests to the clerk, in writing, to be recorded as a no on any item on today's agenda.

Without objection, it is so ordered.

Senator Van Hollen: Mr. Chairman, I ask unanimous consent that I be recorded yes on [inaudible].

The Chairman: There will be no objection to record you as a yes.

The committee is adjourned.

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