

BUSINESS MEETING

Wednesday, April 2, 2025

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

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:18 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, Kaine, Schatz, Van Hollen,
and Rosen.

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

The Chairman: All right. The Foreign Relations Committee will come to order.
We have got business today. We have got four nominees to move. Is there a motion?

Voices: So moved.

The Chairman: En bloc?

Voices: So moved.

Senator Shaheen: No. I would like a roll call.

The Chairman: We will do a roll call, but do you object to doing it en bloc, or do
you want all four of them individually?

Senator Shaheen: I want all four of them individually.

The Chairman: Okay. We will honor that, and we will start with the Honorable
Ron Johnson of Florida. Is there a motion?

Voices: So moved.

The Chairman: Is there a second?

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Voices: Second.

The Chairman: That has been moved and seconded. Is there debate? Seeing no debate --

Senator Shaheen: I -- yes.

The Chairman: Senator Shaheen.

Senator Shaheen: I would like to raise concerns about Ambassador Johnson's lack of judgment based on his relationship when he was Ambassador to El Salvador with their authoritarian leader at the time, democratic backsliding and allegations of corruption by the government, as well as personnel decisions that were made about who got fired on the American staff because of that relationship. I think Ambassador Johnson did not adequately address those concerns at his hearing, and I intend to vote no.

The Chairman: Further debate?

[No response.]

The Chairman: Being no further debate, the clerk will call the roll.

The Clerk: Mr. Ricketts?

Senator Ricketts: Aye.

The Clerk: Mr. McCormick?

Senator McCormick: Aye.

The Clerk: Mr. Daines?

Senator Daines: Aye.

The Clerk: Mr. Hagerty?

Senator Hagerty: Aye.

The Clerk: Mr. Barrasso?

Senator Barrasso: Aye.

The Clerk: Mr. Lee?

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Senator Lee: Aye.

The Clerk: Mr. Paul?

Senator Paul: Aye.

The Clerk: Mr. Cruz?

The Chairman: Aye by proxy.

The Clerk: Mr. Scott?

Senator Scott of Florida: Aye.

The Clerk: Mr. Curtis?

Senator Curtis: Aye.

The Clerk: Mr. Cornyn?

Senator Cornyn: Aye.

The Clerk: Mrs. Shaheen?

Senator Shaheen: No.

The Clerk: Mr. Coons?

Senator Coons: No.

The Clerk: Mr. Murphy?

Senator Shaheen: No by proxy.

The Clerk: Mr. Kaine?

Senator Shaheen: No by proxy.

The Clerk: Mr. Merkley?

Senator Shaheen: No by proxy.

The Clerk: Mr. Booker?

Senator Shaheen: No by proxy.

The Clerk: Mr. Schatz?

Senator Shaheen: No by proxy.

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The Clerk: Mr. Van Hollen?

Senator Shaheen: No by proxy.

The Clerk: Ms. Duckworth?

Senator Shaheen: No by proxy.

The Clerk: Ms. Rosen?

Senator Rosen: No.

The Clerk: Mr. Chairman?

The Chairman: Aye.

The Clerk: Mr. Chairman, the ayes are 12, the nays are 10.

The Chairman: The motion is passed.

Let's take Kevin Cabrera next. Is there a motion?

Voices: So moved.

Second.

The Chairman: Is there debate?

[No response.]

The Chairman: Being no debate, the clerk will call the roll.

The Clerk: Mr. Ricketts?

Senator Ricketts: Aye.

The Clerk: Mr. McCormick?

Senator McCormick: Aye.

The Clerk: Mr. Daines?

Senator Daines: Aye.

The Clerk: Mr. Hagerty?

Senator Hagerty: Aye.

The Clerk: Mr. Barrasso?

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Senator Barrasso: Aye.

The Clerk: Mr. Lee?

Senator Lee: Aye.

The Clerk: Mr. Paul?

Senator Paul: Aye.

The Clerk: Mr. Cruz?

The Chairman: Aye by proxy.

The Clerk: Mr. Scott?

Senator Scott of Florida: Aye.

The Clerk: Mr. Curtis?

Senator Curtis: Aye.

The Clerk: Mr. Cornyn?

Senator Cornyn: Aye.

The Clerk: Mrs. Shaheen?

Senator Shaheen: Aye.

The Clerk: Mr. Coons?

Senator Coons: No.

The Clerk: Mr. Murphy?

Senator Shaheen: No by proxy.

The Clerk: Mr. Kaine?

Senator Shaheen: No by proxy.

The Clerk: Mr. Merkley?

Senator Shaheen: No by proxy.

The Clerk: Mr. Booker?

Senator Shaheen: No by proxy.

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The Clerk: Mr. Schatz?

Senator Shaheen: No by proxy.

The Clerk: Mr. Van Hollen?

Senator Shaheen: No by proxy.

The Clerk: Ms. Duckworth?

Senator Shaheen: No by proxy.

The Clerk: Ms. Rosen?

Senator Rosen: No.

The Clerk: Mr. Chairman?

The Chairman: Aye.

The Clerk: Mr. Chairman, the ayes are 13, the nays are 9.

The Chairman: The motion has passed.

We will now take up Mr. Huckabee to be Ambassador to Israel. Is there a motion?

Senator Rosen: I would like to make some remarks, please.

The Chairman: I will --

Voice: So moved.

The Chairman: It has been moved. Is there a second?

Voices: Second.

The Chairman: So moved and seconded that we send Mr. Huckabee to the floor for consideration. Is there debate?

Senator Rosen: Yes.

The Chairman: Senator Rosen.

Senator Rosen: I am extremely frustrated by today's events and not honoring the holdover. But before we vote on Governor Huckabee's nomination, I would like to say a few words.

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This is a difficult vote for me as I believe we need a strong U.S. Ambassador to Israel as soon as possible. I have no doubts that if Governor Huckabee were to be confirmed he would work tirelessly to meet Israel's defense needs and to create and to free all of the remaining hostages held by Hamas. I appreciate his clearly deep commitment to Israel's security.

I do have serious doubts, however, about Governor Huckabee's commitment to ensuring that support for Israel remains bipartisan and does not become a political football. And if support for Israel becomes a partisan issue it will undermine not only the U.S.-Israel relationship but Israel's security and security of the U.S. interests in the region.

Moreover, Governor Huckabee's support for fully annexing the West Bank, his opposition to a two-state solution, his responses during his confirmation hearing give me serious reservations about his ability to safeguard the U.S.-Israel relationship for years to come.

For these reasons, and after much contemplation, I will be opposing Governor Huckabee's nomination to be the U.S. Ambassador to Israel. I will, however, commit to working with Governor Huckabee to develop a relationship and maintain solid bipartisan support for Israel, if he is confirmed. Thank you.

The Chairman: Thank you.

Senator Shaheen.

Senator Shaheen: Well, again I would just like to register my concerns about the failure to be willing to hold over Governor Huckabee's vote until tomorrow. I think one day would have been helpful in terms of registering -- addressing concerns, legitimate concerns that I think Democratic members of this committee have. And if we are really going to try and make this committee work better then we all need to be engaged in how to

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do that. And having the White House pull the strings on how this committee operates I do not think gets us to where we need to go.

So I intend to vote against Governor Huckabee, but I have to say I worked with him as Governor. We worked on a number of things together. I admire his years of public service. I admire the work that he did as Governor. And I am, however, concerned about his well-documented statements and rhetoric with respect to the region, the potential for inflammatory language, which we know can make an already delicate situation worse. I am concerned about the current Administration's policy in Gaza and the West Bank. I think any effort to allow the Israelis to go in and take over the West Bank will lead to a wider regional war, and that is not in America's interest.

So, sadly, I intend to oppose Governor Huckabee, though I expect to work with him, and he has given us assurances that he will work with everyone if he is confirmed.

Senator Cornyn: Mr. Chairman?

The Chairman: Yeah, go ahead, Senator Cornyn.

Senator Cornyn: Mr. Chairman, I share Senator Rosen's concerns about our policy toward Israel becoming a partisan football and it needs to remain bipartisan. But the best way our colleagues can ensure that is to vote for the President's nominee. The President is, I think, entitled to some deference when it comes to who his personal representatives are in countries like Israel.

So I would just respectfully ask our Democratic colleagues to support the President's choice since he will be confirmed, and I think that would be the best demonstration of continued bipartisan support for Israel. Thank you.

Senator Coons: Mr. Chairman, if I might --

The Chairman: Mr. Coons.

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Senator Coons: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I admire my colleague, Senator Shaheen's hard work with you, Mr. Chairman, to make this a functional committee after a number of years where we struggled to hold business meetings and to move nominees.

I associate myself with Senator Rosen's comments. I had a constructive personal conversation with Governor Huckabee. I was not able to attend the confirmation hearing. I share many of the same concerns about his history of statements, and I am greatly concerned about where we are in terms of Israel's security, sustaining bipartisan support for Israel's security, the moment of enormous opportunity we have in the region with significant changes on the ground, in Lebanon and in Syria, and the real risk to Israel's security.

And I share concerns that Ambassador Huckabee, Governor Huckabee will not be the right person to carry this forth. So I will vote against him today.

The Chairman: Senator Shaheen.

Senator Shaheen: I just wanted to respond to Senator Cornyn's comments, because I agree with you. I think the Executive should have a chance to pick their own people. That does not mean, however, as the opposing party, that I need to support them. That is why I have not opposed trying to move people through this committee, because I think there is a need to get our folks on the ground.

But part of the role of the Senate and this committee is advise and consent, and if there are legitimate concerns that I have about nominees, I think it is appropriate that I should vote them either up or down, based on those legitimate concerns.

So I am not suggesting that we need to hold these nominees. I have not advocated for that. But I know that there are members of the minority who do feel that way, and as the Ranking Member I think it is important for me to try and represent those concerns to the rest of the committee.

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Senator Cornyn: Mr. Chairman, it is clear that the Senator is right.

Senator Coons: If I might, Mr. Chairman, I also share my Democratic colleagues' concerns that we did not respect the wishes of several committee members to simply hold over by one day two nominees.

The Chairman: Well, I will tell you, let me close this off. First of all, Senator Rosen, I agree with you 100 percent. This should never be a partisan issue. And I commit to you, on behalf of my party, this will never be a partisan issue. We are dialed in for Israel. We are strongly committed to Israel. We are always going to be committed to Israel. So from our side, it will never become a partisan issue.

As far as the time on this, it is unfortunate this has gotten to where it is. There is going to be a business meeting tomorrow. It could have been held over until tomorrow. It really is not going to make any difference as far as this vote, in all likelihood. I do not see any way the floor is going to be able to get to them.

However, we are in a messaging situation. I understand the other side is talking about messaging to their base about fighting. Our side wants to message to Israel that we support them, that we want your ambassador in place. We are going to move him there as quickly as we possibly can. And for that reason we are going to vote on him today.

I am going to hold Rubinstein, pursuant to the request that has been made, and in neither of these cases is it going to affect the ultimate outcome on the floor.

So with that, debate being closed, the question is shall Mr. Huckabee be --

Voice: So moved.

The Chairman: Second?

Voice: Second.

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The Chairman: There is a motion and a second to move him to the floor with the recommendation that he be confirmed. The clerk will call the roll.

The Clerk: Mr. Ricketts?

Senator Ricketts: Aye.

The Clerk: Mr. McCormick?

Senator McCormick: Aye.

The Clerk: Mr. Daines?

Senator Daines: Aye.

The Clerk: Mr. Hagerty?

Senator Hagerty: Aye.

The Clerk: Mr. Barrasso?

Senator Barrasso: Aye.

The Clerk: Mr. Lee?

Senator Lee: Aye.

The Clerk: Mr. Paul?

Senator Paul: Aye.

The Clerk: Mr. Cruz?

The Chairman: Aye by proxy.

The Clerk: Mr. Scott?

Senator Scott of Florida: Aye.

The Clerk: Mr. Curtis?

Senator Curtis: Aye.

The Clerk: Mr. Cornyn?

Senator Cornyn: Aye.

The Clerk: Mrs. Shaheen?

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Senator Shaheen: No.

The Clerk: Mr. Coons?

Senator Coons: No.

The Clerk: Mr. Murphy?

Senator Shaheen: No by proxy.

The Clerk: Mr. Kaine?

Senator Shaheen: No by proxy.

The Clerk: Mr. Merkley?

Senator Shaheen: No by proxy.

The Clerk: Mr. Booker?

Senator Shaheen: No by proxy.

The Clerk: Mr. Schatz?

Senator Shaheen: No by proxy.

The Clerk: Mr. Van Hollen?

Senator Shaheen: No by proxy.

The Clerk: Ms. Duckworth?

Senator Shaheen: No by proxy.

The Clerk: Ms. Rosen?

Senator Rosen: No.

The Clerk: Mr. Chairman?

The Chairman: Aye.

The Clerk: Mr. Chairman, the ayes are 12, the nays are 10.

The Chairman: The motion is passed.

The last one on the agenda is Reed Rubinstein of Maryland to be Legal Advisor to the Department of State. I have received a request to hold that over. We will have a

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business meeting tomorrow. It will be the next regular business meeting. We will consider Mr. Rubinstein at that time. And so I will hold that over.

Is there further business to come before the meeting? If not, this meeting is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 10:31 a.m., the hearing was adjourned.]