

U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
Chairman John F. Kerry
Opening Statement for Nomination Hearing Ambassadors To India, Tunisia, and Oman
July 7, 2009

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman John Kerry (D-MA) released the following opening remarks at the nomination hearing for Timothy Roemer, nominee for Ambassador to India; Gordon Gray, nominee for Ambassador to the Republic of Tunisia; and Richard J. Schmierer, nominee for Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman.

Full text as prepared is below:

is a pleasure to welcome to our Committee three outstanding public servants. Congressman Tim Roemer has been selected to be Ambassador to India, Gordon Gray has been named Ambassador to Tunisia, and Richard Schmierer has been appointed Ambassador to Oman.

Between them, these three nominees have five advanced degrees, nearly ninety years in government, and a staggering amount of institutional knowledge and on-the-ground wisdom. You also have several members of your families with you today, and I'd like to welcome them as well – I hope each of you will take a minute to introduce your family to the Committee.

I am pleased that President Obama has nominated Congressman Tim Roemer to be Ambassador to India. Tim has been a longtime colleague and good friend to many of us—and I would like to submit for the record a strong statement from Senator Kennedy in support of your nomination.

Congressman Roemer served six terms in Congress, and was a key sponsor of legislation to establish the 9/11 Commission—which he later served on with distinction. Along the way he managed to earn a doctorate, and help his wife Sally raise four great kids. He currently serves as the president of the Center for National Policy.

If confirmed, Ambassador Roemer will be representing our country at an exciting and potentially pivotal moment in U.S.-India relations. Sometimes it seems like an unwritten law around here that all government officials dealing with India must trumpet ties between “the world’s oldest democracy and the world’s largest democracy.” But the truth is, the Obama Administration does have a genuine opportunity to forge a true strategic US-India partnership—not as a threat or counterweight against any other nation—but based on shared interests and shared values. If we get this right, it will benefit not only our nations, but also the region and the world.

There are many areas where we can make real progress. First, we have to help India to break with the perilous politics of South Asia’s past. India needs no lectures: virtually no nation has suffered more from terrorism than India. South Asia is also a volatile nuclear flashpoint. The Senate has passed legislation, which Senator Lugar and I sponsored, to recast our relationship with Pakistan. This will help us to secure not only the long-term safety not only of the US and Pakistan—but of India as well.

On climate change, America and India are two of the world’s key players. If India can find a greener path to economic development, that can lead the way for other large, populous nations like Mexico and Indonesia. It is vital to both our nations that we help India to do so.

In fact, I supported a civilian nuclear deal with India in part because it will help India grow its economy with clean energy. I hope this will now open the door to greater cooperation on nonproliferation.

Finally, there are the personal and cultural ties that are the lifeblood of our partnership: the international visits and phone calls, and the small businesses, software engineers, and educational exchanges that have flourished in Massachusetts and across America.

I know Secretary Clinton will be carrying a message of friendship to India during her visit later this month to engage with India's newly reelected leadership. I hope that my colleagues will ensure that Ambassador Roemer is in place for her visit. We will be keeping the record open for all three nominees until noon on Wednesday.

Gordon Gray brings to his new posting as Ambassador to Tunisia decades of experience with the State Department in Baghdad, Cairo, Ottawa, Amman, Washington, and Karachi—and also as a young Peace Corps volunteer in Oued Zem, Morocco. Most recently he served as Senior Advisor to our Embassy in Baghdad, and before that as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs in Washington.

In Tunis, he will be managing our relationship with an important partner in counterterrorism efforts. He will face the challenge of promoting greater freedoms in a country that has made significant gains in economic development, and family law—but lagged far behind even some of its neighbors in its respect for human rights.

Robert Schmierer has been representing the United States across the Middle East for nearly three decades, with extensive experience in both public diplomacy and American Middle East policy. Today he has been selected as America's Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman.

This is an important posting in one of the world's most strategically vital regions—nearby is a bottleneck in the world's supply of oil in the Straits of Hormuz, a failing state of great concern to many of us in Yemen, and a test case for the world's nuclear nonproliferation regime in Iran. Historically, Oman has maintained close ties with both Iran and the US. We also have close military-to-military ties, which our Ambassador in Muscat will support and hopefully build on.

Finally, Ambassadors Gray and Schmierer will both be well positioned to contribute to our efforts on an issue of great importance to me and many other Senators: Arab efforts to normalize relations with Israel. Oman and Tunisia have historically been among the leading Arab states in this effort: until 2000, both countries hosted Israeli Interests Offices to enhance trade ties. In 2005, Israel's Foreign Minister visited Tunisia. Small steps toward normalization can carry great symbolic weight and help build momentum for peace—and I am eager to hear from each of you on what potential you see for progress.

All three of the nominees here before have long, distinguished records representing Americans and thinking deeply about the diplomatic and national security challenges our country faces. I am eager to hear their thoughts today, and hopeful that we can quickly dispatch them to serve in their important new roles in America's foreign policy.

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