



American Security Project

December 16, 2021

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Majority Leader
United States Senate
S 221, United States Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
United States Senate
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Robert Menendez
Chairman
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
423 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable James Risch
Ranking Member
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
423 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Leader Schumer, Leader McConnell, Chairman Menendez, and Ranking Member Risch:

As members of the Board of Directors of the American Security Project—a bipartisan national security and foreign policy think tank established by Republicans, Democrats, and dutifully non-partisan retired flag officers, as well as former Senators John Kerry, Chuck Hagel, Gary Hart and Warren Rudman, all of whom revered the institution of the Senate—we write to express our profound concern that so many non-controversial, highly qualified nominees for critical diplomatic and foreign policy positions have been denied a vote on the Senate floor. While filing cloture to advance several nominees for crucial diplomatic posts, including for China and Japan, is a welcome and important development, dozens of other nominees are stalled, and we respectfully suggest a path forward.

A co-equal branch of government should cherish and deliver nothing less than rigorous scrutiny of nominees. But in the end, when the Senate doesn't efficiently confirm qualified individuals to serve, the institution is actually weakening its own power. Rather than Senate-confirmed appointees, work at the State Department and in our embassies overseas is led by those the Senate has never approved, and those whom foreign governments know are only in temporary roles. That benefits neither the Senate, nor America's foreign policy.

Moreover, we worry that a dangerous precedent is being set today. Nominees who received overwhelming bipartisan support from the Senate Foreign Relations Committee are being sidelined, in flagrant disregard of the Committee's prerogatives, for issues that have nothing to do with these nominees' qualifications to serve.

We write to share with you the broad support of the national security community if you deploy every parliamentary procedure available to facilitate consideration of these nominees on the floor. This is a matter of national security, as we know you all recognize, and it is a shared responsibility of the Majority and Minority together.

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We know the Senate schedule is a complex one and we would never presume that we know better than you how to set priorities on the floor, but perhaps it is time to work within the established Senate rules, by using otherwise idle floor-time, including holding weekend and late-night sessions, to facilitate floor consideration for nominees who have been favorably referred out of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Those opposing the nominees and insisting on floor debate will have to make themselves available for these weekend and night sessions – or forego their right to insist. If votes are not scheduled until the full Senate returns, the impact on the Senate in general should be limited, but the pressure on those objecting, strong.

There are deep differences between the two parties on many issues, but it benefits neither our foreign policy nor Senate precedent to see one or two Senators effectively tie America's hands behind its back at a time of high security risk and global competition. We offer our support for any effort to break this blockade.

Sincerely,

The Honorable Gary Hart

Chairman Emeritus, American Security Project Board of Directors

Lieutenant General Daniel Christman

United States Army, Retired
Former Superintendent, United States Military Academy
Member, American Security Project Board of Directors

Vice Admiral Lee Gunn

United States Navy, Retired
Former Inspector General, Department of the Navy
Member, American Security Project Board of Directors

Mr. Matthew Bergman

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