

RELEASE IN PART
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From: Mills, Cheryl D <MillsCD@state.gov>
Sent: Wednesday, October 7, 2009 7:57 AM
To: H
Subject: FW: My Op-Ed in The Hill

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From: Nelson W. Cunningham [redacted]
Sent: Tuesday, October 06, 2009 6:22 PM
To: Mills, Cheryl D
Subject: My Op-Ed in The Hill

Cheryl –

I thought you'd be interested in my op-ed in The Hill. It's on the web today and will be in the print edition tomorrow.

Doing my small part. Ruth Marcus is writing in tomorrow's Post.

Nelson

THE HILL

Holds, delays on Cabinet picks hurting American businesses

By Nelson W. Cunningham - 10/06/09 03:45 PM ET

You may never have heard of the Under Secretary of Commerce for International Trade, or the Under Secretary of Treasury for International Affairs. You may have vaguely assumed there was a Deputy United States Trade Representative, and an Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs, and an ambassador to Brazil, but never thought much of them or what they do.

But ask American CEOs and business leaders who they turn to in Washington for help getting a fair shake in foreign markets or untying global trade knots, and you will learn that these are the very officials they rely on. Yet today, when every export dollar and trade-supported job is essential to America's economic recovery, these key positions sit empty. And, surprisingly, these five seats are empty because of stalls and behind-the-scenes maneuvers by Senate Republicans — usually key allies of U.S. business.

In each case, the names went up months ago. The nominees have strong credentials and many have demonstrated strong bipartisan support. The reasons for the holds and delays vary. But even if the blocking actions are unrelated, collectively they deny American businesses their most effective overseas advocates.

- Miriam Sapiro, who was unanimously approved by the Finance Committee in July to be Deputy United States Trade Representative with responsibility for trade agreements and enforcement with Europe and the Americas (including NAFTA), has a one-man hold by Sen. Jim Bunning (R-Ky.) over a Canadian tobacco bill.

- Arturo Valenzuela, nominee for Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere, was overwhelmingly approved by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in July, but Sen. Jim DeMint (R-S.C.) has a one-man hold on Valenzuela as a protest against the administration's Honduras policy.

- Thomas Shannon, nominee for ambassador to Brazil, is also being blocked by Sen. DeMint over Honduras. Shannon is hardly political, but is a career foreign service officer who was President Bush's top official for Latin America at the NSC and then the State Department.

- Francisco Sanchez, nominated in April to be Under Secretary of Commerce for International Trade, responsible for advancing U.S. export and trade opportunities around the world. Republican staff under Sen. Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa) on the Finance Committee have repeatedly delayed a hearing.

- Lael Brainard, nominated in March to be Under Secretary of Treasury for International Affairs, is also being held up by the Republican staff on the Finance Committee. With an empty chair in this powerful position — it was previously held by future Treasury Secretaries Timothy Geithner and Lawrence Summers — our ability to coordinate a response to the financial crisis is hampered at a time when we can't afford it.

Who is hurt by these holds and staff delays? Certainly the president, who is facing the worst economic crisis in 50 years, a stalled trade agenda, and economic and political turmoil in many parts of Latin America, including the hot-button crisis in Honduras.

But U.S. businesses are also hurt. When American companies find themselves in commercial or trade disputes abroad, or face unfair competition from foreign companies or discriminatory practices from regulators, they turn directly to the roster above. With all these chairs empty, U.S. businesses with problems abroad find themselves facing a classic Goldilocks problem — the Cabinet secretaries above are too big (and too busy), and the officials below are too small to have an impact at the right levels.

Moreover, the international economic issues of greatest interest to U.S. businesses are precisely the ones that are being hampered by these vacancies: balanced and coordinated growth out of the Great Recession, promotion of job-generating U.S. exports, delayed trade agreements with Colombia and Panama, barriers into Brazil's huge market, trade tensions with Canada (our largest trading partner) and security and border issues with Mexico (our second-largest), among many others.

And while all U.S. business interests overseas are affected by these vacancies, it is our business and political interests in the Americas that are being hit most directly, because of the responsibilities and expertise of the five nominees. Predictably, this lamentable situation is renewing cries from our neighbors that even under a promising new president, they continue to be neglected. And as importantly, our ability to help shape political and economic events in our hemisphere to advance U.S. interests is suffering greatly. Who wins when we can't act? Our foreign competitors; not just foreign companies, but Hugo Chavez and his anti-democratic allies.

All this is not to cast blame on the United States Senate, which has a constitutional duty to provide "advice and consent" on presidential nominations (though it may cause one to question the tradition that permits a single senator to put an indefinite hold on a nominee). Nor is it to cast blame solely on Republican members or staff. Democratic senators and their staffs used these same parliamentary maneuvers under Republican presidents.

But it is to say that those who engage in those tactics now — at a time of global economic crisis and with growing financial, trade and political frictions in our own hemisphere — should be reminded of the harm done to important U.S. interests. In the days after 9/11, the Democratically-controlled Senate moved swiftly to confirm the U.N. ambassador and other stalled security-related posts. Today's circumstances are not the same by any means, but as we confront the worst economic crisis in over 50 years, these are surely no ordinary times.

The time has come for the Senate to carry out its constitutional duty and to end the delays on these five key commerce and trade nominations. American business deserves an A Team by its side.

Cunningham is managing partner of McLarty Associates, which advises U.S. and multinational businesses on their international strategies. He was a Democratic White House and Senate aide.

Source:

<http://thehill.com/opinion/op-ed/61849-holds-delays-on-cabinet-picks-hurting-american-businesses>

Nelson W. Cunningham | Managing Partner | McLarty Associates |

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