

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard. The Senator from Ohio.

Mr. BROWN. Mr. President, I am disappointed that we can't confirm the Ex-Im nominees today. I know many other Senators want to resolve this situation.

I will continue to push to reopen the Ex-Im Bank.

We were willing—the majority of the Banking Committee was willing to flip and put Mr. Garrett as one of the members, one of the four members, and make Mr. Bachus, another former House Member, who is qualified and is a supporter of the Ex-Im Bank Chairman. We were willing to have Scott Garrett on this Board but not as Chairman because the Chairman sets the agenda. Mr. Garrett would not, when questioned by Senator HEITKAMP, who asked him tough questions, would not commit to the committee that he wasn't out to destroy and undermine the Bank. We were willing to put Mr. Garrett there, just not in the Chairman's position. It is clear Mr. Garrett, on behalf of the Vice President and a small number of Members of this body, want to undermine and destroy the Ex-Im Bank. There is no question about that.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Pennsylvania.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. TOOMEY. Mr. President, I would like to point out that included in the list of nominees who my colleague from Ohio asked unanimous consent for confirmation, was the inspector general for the Export-Import Bank. That is a different function. That is a function I supported in committee, and I would support today. As far as I am aware, there is no objection whatsoever on this side of the aisle and no objection to confirming the inspector general to this post. Therefore, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the consideration of Executive Calendar No. 585; that the Senate vote on the nomination with no intervening action or debate; that if confirmed, the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table; that the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action; that no further motions be in order; and that any statements relating to the nomination be printed in the RECORD.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Ohio.

Mr. BROWN. Mr. President, I reserve the right to object.

Mr. President, how does it make sense to confirm an inspector general for an agency that really isn't an agency that is actually in operation doing its best? So we are not going to appoint the members of the Board. We will have zero Board members. They will not be able to conduct the quality and the quantity of business that they used to, and that they could if we had no objection to the motion earlier, and then we are going to have an inspector gen-

eral to watch over them? That simply doesn't make sense.

I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from North Dakota.

Ms. HEITKAMP. Mr. President, I am here representing a special interest group called the workers of America.

Mr. INHOFE. Will the Senator yield for a unanimous consent request?

Ms. HEITKAMP. Yes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oklahoma.

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that at the conclusion of remarks by our leader, Mr. MCCONNELL, I be recognized for 45 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Illinois.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, I would like to insert an opportunity to speak for 5 minutes after Senator MCCONNELL and then yield to the Senator from Oklahoma for 45 minutes.

Mr. INHOFE. I have no objection.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, the request, as modified, is agreed to.

The Senator from North Dakota.

Ms. HEITKAMP. Thank you, Mr. President.

EXPORT-IMPORT BANK

I just want to say I am representing a special interest group, too, the workers of this country—the workers who have lost jobs because we do not have a functioning Ex-Im Bank; the workers whose opportunity to earn a living has been compromised because we don't have an Ex-Im Bank that is functioning; the workers who are now handed a big 50-pound weight against a Chinese worker, when the Chinese are pumping money into their export agencies and competing unfairly because we don't have an Ex-Im Bank.

Can we just for a minute be for the workers?

The Ex-Im Bank does not cost the taxpayer and has not cost the taxpayer a dime. In fact, it returns money to the Treasury. It is a win-win, but yet here we are, based on strictly ideological grounds, arguing the value of the Ex-Im Bank.

My colleague from Pennsylvania said he wants reform. I will state that we passed an effort I led in order to reauthorize the Ex-Im Bank. That was a big fight. That was not a little deal; that was a big fight. In fact, we had to hold up votes on TPA so we could get a commitment on reauthorizing the Ex-Im Bank because you can't authorize trade agreements and then take away an integral part and necessary part of the trade structure, which is the Ex-Im Bank.

So let me state, all of these reforms that we agreed to were critical, such as the appointment of a chief ethics officer, appointment of a chief risk officer, forming the risk management committee—pretty important to carry out responsibility.

Guess why these reforms aren't being done. Because we don't have a functioning Ex-Im Bank. We do not have what we need to get these actions approved. So when we go through this whole process and we begin to talk about this and we say this is about reform—no, it is not. Is this about saving the taxpayers money? No, it is not. This is about an ideology. This is about third-party interest groups making this their chief whipping boy, inappropriately, and stopping American jobs.

We are in some pretty tough times right now with China, potentially in a trade war, with the potential to really, I think, hurt our country moving forward for decades to come—think about that—at a time when we are trying to drive this economy into the 21st century to provide an opportunity for us to actually win in trade.

Now, I like to tell young people who come into my office: If you don't remember anything else that I have talked about, remember the number five—five. Now, 95 percent of the people on this Earth do not live in this country. If we are not trading with them, if we are not aggressively using every tool in the toolbox to reach out and trade with them, we are going to lose. We are not going to lose just in the next 2, 3, or 4 years, but we are going to lose a whole generation of opportunity and get left behind.

So it is time for us to step up and get a fully functioning Ex-Im Bank. How do we do that? Well, we approve the four nominees whom Ranking Member BROWN has advanced and who have been stopped. The four nominees are incredibly well qualified. They had a great hearing. The Presiding Officer sits on that committee with me and knows how incredibly qualified they are. Yet, because of a minority opinion, we are held off again.

We don't have a Bank that is working, and the people who work for that Bank, who have developed relationships, developed expertise, they have waited too long. We are losing every day. We are losing this piece of trade infrastructure that is absolutely critical to the competition for American businesses.

Let's talk about what we are up against. The lack of the Ex-Im Bank board quorum has left \$44 billion of exports on the table. They can't get approved because we don't have a quorum. OK, so it is a big number. Do you know what is a bigger number? When you take that and you translate it into American jobs, there are a quarter of a million American jobs that are going to be lost, that are going to be diverted to other countries because we are in this petty squabble right here with a minority group of people.

I want to add some other pieces. Every day that passes without a quorum, Congress is risking these deals, so let me tell you about some of these deals. Mack Trucks can't export Pennsylvania-manufactured vehicles to Cameroon. A U.S. engineering company

can't build a highway in Mozambique. A major petrochemical company in Egypt is on hold, and an energy project in Mozambique cannot be finalized. Hoffman International, a small business in New Jersey, can't finalize a deal with the Government of Cameroon.

If we are not trading, we are losing in this country. And if we don't have an Ex-Im Bank, we don't have a fully functioning trade apparatus. That is truth. So it is time to put aside this petty squabble.

I want to remark briefly that when we started the reauthorization effort, I was told: There is no way; you can't get the majority opinion.

The Ex-Im Bank got almost 70 votes here—almost 70 votes for reauthorization. When it went over to the House, where we were told once again that we could never get the political support for reauthorization, that it is too toxic, too high profile, guess what—well, 70 percent of the House of Representatives voted for the Ex-Im Bank.

We are being held captive. There are 250,000 American workers being held captive by an ideology that is going to fail us and doom our export effort to failure for not just the next couple of years but for a generation to come. The whole while, do you know what China is doing? When China's growth took a little dip, they pumped even more billions of dollars into their ex-im bank, into their ex-im credit agency. Do you think they did that because they thought it was a worthless gesture? No. They did it because they knew they could compete against us.

Let's not fail these 250,000 workers. Let's not fail to be smart in our competition with China. Let's get this done. The only way to get it done is to get a quorum on the Ex-Im Bank, and the only way to get a quorum is to break the deadlock that is here, stop leading with ideology, start leading with common sense, and start leading with the opportunity to respond to one of the most significant special interests groups in this country; that is, the American workers.

Thank you, Mr. President.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to legislative session for a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

SENATE NATO OBSERVER GROUP

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, today the Democratic leader and I are

proud to reestablish the Senate NATO Observer Group. The group was originally established in 1997 to provide a focal point for addressing NATO issues that cut across committee jurisdictions and to help educate Senators on the issues involved in any decision to enlarge NATO and to permit close interaction between the executive branch and the Senate during negotiations on NATO enlargement. Following the Senate's ratification of the protocols of accession in April 1998, the group ceased to function until it was reestablished on June 17, 2002. Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle of South Dakota and Minority Leader Trent Lott of Mississippi announced the formation of a new Senate NATO Observer Group to follow NATO's decision to formally invite additional new countries to join the Alliance at the Prague Summit. In his floor announcement, Senator Daschle said the bipartisan Senate NATO Observer Group would "advise the full Senate" on NATO and the next round of NATO enlargement. The Senate NATO Observer Group remained active through 2007, but was ultimately disbanded due to a lack of NATO enlargement rounds.

In arguing for reestablishment of the group, Senators TILLIS and SHAHEEN wrote to Senator SCHUMER and I that: "Exactly 10 years ago Estonia was one of the first countries to come under attack from Russia's modern form of hybrid warfare. In 2007, Russia conducted massive cyber-attacks on Estonia in response to Estonia's decision to relocate a Soviet Red Army memorial in Tallinn. One year later, as talks of eventual NATO membership for Georgia were debated, Russia activated its famed little green men in Georgia, invaded, and eventually occupied the Georgian regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. These regions are under Russian occupation to this day."

In 2014, Ukraine befell a similar fate as Russia instigated a conflict, resulting in the occupation of Crimea and continued bloodshed in Ukraine's Donbass or eastern region. Since April 2014, when war erupted in eastern Ukraine, more than 10,000 people have died, a number which is steadily rising. Despite successive attempts at international negotiations and peace, the Kremlin grew more aggressive in its stance and, in 2016, expanded its malign efforts into Western Europe and the United States.

During the 2016 U.S. Presidential elections, U.S. intelligence agencies were able to conclude that Russia interfered in the U.S. elections using a combination of hybrid tools. A similar pattern soon emerged across NATO states, where the Kremlin used both cyber attacks and disinformation to sow chaos and mistrust in Western democracies. Given these newfound challenges, increased engagement and assistance for transatlantic security was elevated as a critical priority for the Senate, as well as successive administrations.

The 2018 Senate NATO Observer Group will mirror the structure and make-up of previous Senate NATO Observer Groups with eight Members serving ex officio, the two leaders plus the chairman and ranking member of the Appropriations, Armed Services, and Foreign Relations Committees. In addition, the chairman and ranking member of the Senate Intelligence Committee would also be invited to serve as ex-officio members. Senators SHAHEEN and TILLIS, both Members of the Senate Armed Services Committee, would be named the cochairs, and a small group of Senators active on NATO issues would be named to the group jointly by the leaders and cochairs.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, today I am pleased to join my colleague the Republican leader in reestablishing the Senate NATO Observer Group. In the late 1940s, under the stewardship of President Harry Truman, the United States led our Western allies in the creation of an unprecedented arrangement to provide for our collective defense. Since then, NATO has guaranteed the security of our European allies and has come to our aid, protecting the United States in its darkest hours following the 9/11 attacks. Today, new threats are emerging from Russia and along NATO's southern border, making the alliance more necessary than ever. It is the responsibility of the Senate to be kept abreast of any and all factors affecting such a key component of our national defense.

The Senate NATO Observer group was first established in 1997 and oversaw the enlargement of our alliance to countries recently freed from Soviet domination in Eastern Europe. Following the reestablishment of the group in 2002 by Majority Leader Tom Daschle of South Dakota and Minority Leader Trent Lott of Mississippi, the Senate NATO Observer group had an oversight role during the NATO mission in Afghanistan—again, the only time a NATO member has invoked the right to collective self-defense.

Unfortunately, since talks of further enlargement of the alliance expired 10 years ago, the Senate Observer Group lapsed. Since that time, Russia has reasserted itself in Eastern Europe through the aggressive use of hybrid warfare, including cyber infiltration of our allies' political infrastructure, as well as our own. While Georgia considered eventual NATO membership, Russia invaded and occupied South Ossetia and Abkhazia, regions which remain in Russian hands today. A similar fate befell Ukraine in 2014, when Russia's "little green men" were inserted into a civil conflict that spilled over into a civil war in which thousands of people died.

As we learned during the 2016 Presidential election, the Kremlin's aggressive posture extends far beyond Russia's borders. American intelligence agencies have shown conclusively that Russia has interfered in elections at