

BRUSSELS FORUM 2009

Remarks by the Co-Chairmen of the U.S. Congressional Delegation

Craig Kennedy

President, The German Marshall Fund of the United States

One of the things that makes the Brussels Forum, I think, useful and important is the very strong interest we've had from members of Congress in attending this event. We're very privileged that I have the two Co-Chairs of the delegation, which I think is maybe one of the largest delegations that have been brought to Europe in some time. Senator Robert Casey of Pennsylvania, who's in his first term as a Senator, Chairs the Subcommittee on Middle Eastern Affairs of Senate Foreign Relations and has really been a very important force in pulling together this year's delegation. He was also the Co-Chair last year and we very much appreciate it, and Senator Bob Bennett who many of you know from his many visits here to Brussels and his active involvement in TPM.

So with that I'm going to turn it over to you Senator Casey.

The Hon. Robert Casey

Member, U.S. Senate

Well thank you very much. I'm greatly honoured to be here tonight and I don't know if I can fully express how grateful we are, because last year we tried to get here but we didn't ever make the trip. We got about, Senator Bennett might correct me but, probably about a third of the way before we had mechanical difficulties. I'll spare you're the details but we're really grateful for this opportunity. I'm especially honoured tonight to be able to stand before you as the Co-Chair of this delegation with Senator Bob Bennett, whom I'll introduce in a few moments. We have a delegation, a total delegation, of twelve and I'll introduce by name each of the delegation members in a moment.

I wanted to highlight a couple of issues that face all of us, whether we come here from the United States, or Europe, or anywhere in the world, all of these issues in one way or another confront us. They are but two or three of many but I wanted to spend just a couple of moments on three.

First of all, of course, the urgent economic and financial challenge we have. It's hard in a few words to encapsulate what this means to families in the United States of America and around the world. Suffice it say, that in America, unlike any other time in our history, maybe since the thirties and maybe not even then in terms of a short period of time, we've lost millions of jobs in just six months, an unprecedented job loss. Our financial system has been badly damaged to the point where I'm not sure anyone in Washington is quite sure where that will end up and we've got a lot of work to do on both. I know I speak in concert with so many people here. This isn't just limited, as you know, to the United States, it's a worldwide economic recession, call it what you will, but it is traumatic in the lives of so many families. People are losing their jobs, losing their homes in many cases and because of retirement savings, as well as other losses, really their hopes and their dreams.

But even in the midst of that challenge we have other urgent challenges. I'll just mention two; Afghanistan and Iran. We know what the objective was when the military forces went into Afghanistan back several years ago; it was to make sure that extremists in that part of the world did not have a sanctuary or a safe haven in Afghanistan. We have to be very clear, however, as we go forward to make sure that we clearly articulate, identify and then communicate well that objective and that's going to be a challenge for our country as it is for the world. We know the high price that's been paid already by the United States, but also by the Alliance. We know, as well, that if we can create conditions in Afghanistan over time that bring about some stability, some real enduring stability, that that sanctuary or that safe haven will be interrupted or at least comprised and we hope eliminated as a threat.

The United States has plans and we're going to hear more detail from the President, to make sure that 17,000 more troops are committed. We don't know if that's the final number, it hasn't been formally ratified yet, but we know the President's going to be talking about this in the next couple of days. But beyond the contribution of troops we obviously need more than just boots on the ground. We do need a common strategy and we also need a common agreement and an exit strategy. That, of course will be very important to this, the reason why we're here today which is the Transatlantic relationship.

Let me just mention a couple of things about Iran, another challenge for the region and for the world. We know now that Iran possesses some degree, depending on how you analyse it, of nuclear capability, low-enriched uranium. We know also that they've made progress on their missile systems, the delivery mechanism, so to speak. We also need a consensus on this issue as well and that's not presently before us. We need to work on that consensus, it's going to require a lot more work that we've been

doing in the last couple of years. We have to combine, I believe, as we have in the past but we still have to keep this on the table, both sanctions and incentives if we're going to get this right and just as is true in Afghanistan we have to get this right. The margin for error here on what we do with regard to Iran and Afghanistan is very small if not at a zero number. We cannot fail and we cannot make a mistake.

We know that this transatlantic relationship has been tested over many years. In the last century tested in the crucible of world wars, tested by the seismic and really transformational change that has taken place with regard to our economy in the United States, the economy of Europe and really the economy of the world. It has been tested. It's been tested by terrorism and division and disease and, go down the list, and more recently tested by the challenge of climate change. But we also know that even as that relationship has been tested year after year and decade after decade, it has endured and it has been a bright light. Our job, those of us who play any role at all, whether it's as a citizen, as an elected official, as a diplomat or as an advocate, we have an obligation to make sure that that relationship is enduring and is very strong. I have great confidence, not only in our ability to do that together, but I have an awful lot of confidence in this new Administration.

President Obama is someone I know pretty well, I've worked with him and campaigned hard for him. I know his character, I know his heart and I know his commitment to getting these challenges lined up the right way so that we can work together on them. I also know that he is someone who takes very seriously the obligation that has been given to him, the obligation to serve the United States of America at a terribly difficult time in our nation's history. So I have a lot of confidence in him and when you talk about foreign policy I have a lot of confidence in the team he's got around him. Just two I'll mention, two former colleagues from the Senate; Vice President Biden and Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton. Two very strong figures both of whom have broad experience in Foreign Affairs. It's a good team and there are many others we can mention, the envoys and the other diplomats who are going to help. They are committed, as all of us are, to making sure that this transatlantic relationship is strong and enduring.

So let it be said of us, many years from now, that in our time when we had the obligation but also the power to do something positive, to foster stronger relationships and make sure this relationship is ever strong, may it be said of us that we did all we could to keep that bright light burning ever, ever brightly.

With that I wanted to introduce my colleague and just to make sure that everyone knew who else was in the room with us, I just wanted to mention our other colleagues who are with us today. Senator Voinovich of Ohio is with us, Senator Risch of Idaho is with us, Senator Martinez of Florida, Senator Shaheen of New Hampshire and we have several members of the United States House of Representatives; Congressman Issa, Congressman Mike Turner, Congresswoman Ellen Tauscher, Congressman Ron Kind and finally, Congressman Alcee Hastings. We wanted to make sure that you

knew the kind of commitment that this delegation has to this very important responsibility that we all share to keep this relationship strong.

And with that I want to introduce my colleague, Bob Bennett, who has served in the United States Senate since, I believe, 1992, or at least elected in '92. He's been a great voice in the Senate for bipartisanship, but also a great voice for those newer members coming in the door to help us learn more and more every day about the Senate and I'm honoured to serve with Senator Bob Bennett.

The Hon. Bob Bennett

Member, U.S. Senate

When I got to the Senate in 1993, Bob Dole took a group of us up to New Jersey to sit down and spend the day with Richard Nixon. A fascinating experience because he no longer had his ego on the table, he could simply demonstrate his intellect and he gave us a fascinating and very illuminating tour around the world. But among the other things he said to us was, 'You cannot do your job as a senator if you don't travel. There's no substitute for being on the ground and meeting people on their own home territory to get an understanding of what's going on.' Then he said, speaking accurately and prophetically 'The press will attack you for spending your time travelling but it makes great speech material when you get home.' I have found that that is true and I have tried to follow that advice and travel and in the process of travelling you begin to understand which groups are worth going to and which groups you can be too busy to go back to.

I simply want to pay tribute to the German Marshall Fund and all of the sponsors whose names you see here for putting together something that I've come back to. I was here at the first one where they had John McCain as the keynote speaker to open and John Edwards as the speaker to end. They got it half right in terms of picking the nominees. I'm sure that John McCain would rather be here in another capacity, but the fact that he continues to come back demonstrates that he too recognises, as do I very much, the value of the Brussels Forum. I want to say thank you for all you do, thank you for the job you have done and thank you to all of you who help educate us and make us want to continue to come back.

The Hon. Robert Casey

Member, U.S. Senate

I have an apology to make. John I'm so sorry. I feel terrible. I have some notes here and when I got to Afghanistan, John McCain just wrote a very important op-ed in The Washington Post about Afghanistan and it was my intention to include him in that part of my remarks. I went through it, didn't mention the op-ed and then didn't have him on my list. John I'm so sorry about that.

Let me just say, and I know I'm taking more time than I should but, one of the reasons why I think a lot of the American people are not sure yet about where we're going in Afghanistan is because we haven't had enough of a debate about it. We've spent a lot of time, appropriately so, on Iraq the last couple of years, we haven't spent nearly enough time, in America, I won't speak for other parts of the world, in a full and vigorous debate in terms of what we do in Afghanistan. John McCain, not just in that opinion piece he did this past week in The Washington Post, but in other times as well, has been very thoughtful about this. One of the ways we're going to get it right is by making sure that voices of experience like John's, not only on the military challenge but also on diplomacy and the other challenges we have with regard to Afghanistan, not to mention Iran and in other places. We have to make sure that we listen to those voices and John we greatly respect the work you've done to make sure that we're focussed in an appropriate way on the challenge in Afghanistan. I can't tell you how sorry I am about not mentioning your name here, and I'm grateful.

Thank you.

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