

Johnson Opening Statement on Iran Sanctions Oversight Hearing

WASHINGTON – Today, Senate Banking Committee Chairman Tim Johnson (D-SD) held a hearing entitled “Addressing Potential Threats from Iran: Administration Perspectives on Implementing New Economic Sanctions One Year Later.”

Below is Chairman Johnson’s statement as prepared for delivery:

“Good morning, I call this hearing to order, and I welcome my colleagues and our witnesses.

“In the wake of the alarming announcement this week of an Iranian-government supported plot to assassinate the Ambassador of Saudi Arabia to the US, and US announcements of criminal prosecutions coupled with Treasury sanctions against key plotters, we are reminded once again of Iran’s relentless support for terrorism, which has now reached our own shores.

“Today we will hear from key administration officials who implement US policies to minimize potential threats from Iran, including through vigorous enforcement of the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability and Divestment Act developed by this Committee and enacted last year. That bill broadened and strengthened current US sanctions law with respect to Iran; provided for voluntary divestment from firms active in Iran’s energy sector; and strengthened limitations and penalties on illegal diversion of sensitive technologies to Iran.

“When he took office, President Obama took an aggressive dual-track approach to Iran—offering high-level engagement coupled with sustained pressure through economic sanctions. Since then, Iran has continued to defy the demands of the International community to halt its illegitimate nuclear activities, or even to answer questions about them. And it has continued to support terrorist activity throughout the world. In response, the President has refocused US policy to intensify pressure on Iran’s government, through new US sanctions and multilateral sanctions adopted by the UN Security Council.

“Iran’s leaders confront the same choice today that they have faced for some time: they can agree to end Iran’s illegitimate nuclear program and stop supporting terrorists around the world. Or they can continue on their present course, ignoring the legitimate demands of the international community on their nuclear program, repressing their people, and supporting terrorists—deepening Iran’s isolation and further threatening their economy.

“Today we are fortunate to have before the Committee Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Wendy Sherman; Under Secretary of Treasury for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence David Cohen; and Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Export Enforcement David Mills. Under Secretary Sherman will elaborate on ongoing diplomatic efforts, assess our chances for success, and survey policy options. Under Secretary Cohen, will discuss the targeted financial measures employed against Iran and explore with us other pressure points in the global financial system that could be employed against Iran. Assistant Secretary Mills will update us on progress in efforts to combat blackmarket networks throughout Asia and the Middle East which help to illegally supply Iran with sensitive technologies.

“While unfortunately Under Secretary of Commerce for Export Administration Eric Hirschhorn was unable to join us today, I want to reiterate my strong support for his immediate confirmation. Under Secretary Hirschhorn has been unanimously approved by this Committee twice for his position, but his nomination has been blocked. Last year, President Obama granted Mr. Hirschhorn a recess appointment. If his nomination is not approved by the Senate prior to the end of this session of Congress, his appointment will expire. I urge all my colleagues to support this extremely well-qualified nominee.

“With enactment of new Iran Sanctions last year, Congress equipped the Administration with new tools to confront the threats posed by Iran. It is clear that US sanctions, as well as those imposed by the UN, European Union, and others have further isolated Iran and had some impact on its economy, though that impact has been mitigated by continuing high oil prices. But it’s also clear that the multilateral sanctions imposed so far have not deterred Iran from pursuing its nuclear ambitions.

“I am eager to hear a description of the full range of US efforts to pressure Iran. I hope our witnesses will also discuss any challenges in implementing the new law, the status of ongoing consultations with allies on these issues, and any additional legislative tools they believe will help to increase the pressure on the government of Iran.

“Our approach must continue to be targeted and strategic, maximizing the economic leverage of the US, our partners and allies, and US and international investors. But make no mistake: If Iran were to acquire a nuclear weapons capability, it would pose a significant threat to peace and security in the Middle East, and especially to our close ally Israel. We must continue to do all we can to avoid that result. If new tools are needed, and I think they are, then we will provide them. The sanctions bill we passed last year was an important step in the right direction. The additional layer of UN Security Council sanctions was another, though they should have been stronger. New bills in Congress this year to tighten sanctions further enjoy broad bipartisan support, and contain some interesting ideas on ways to increase pressure.

“We must not let up until the government of Iran comes clean on its nuclear program and stops its support for terrorism.”