OPENING STATEMENT BY

U.S. SENATOR CHARLES E. SCHUMER

- U.S. Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs
- Mark-Up: "Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability and Divestment Act of 2009"

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AS PREPARED

- Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member Shelby.

- Mr. Chairman, I would like to commend you for putting forth a comprehensive plan to arm the administration with the tools they need to put a stop to Iran's rogue nuclear program.

- I believe that when it comes to Iran, we should never take the military option off the table.

- But I have long argued that economic sanctions are the preferred and probably most effective way to choke Iran's nuclear ambitions.

- The Obama administration has recently begun direct diplomatic negotiations with Iran, and while IT APPEARS THAT Iran has made some important concessions, they have yet to prove their commitment to suspending their nuclear weapons program. These negotiations should continue, but they do not supplant the need for action by this Congress. Iran, when it is caught red-handed, has a habit of promising just enough to avoid a strong response from the international community. Not this time.

- We should continue to talk to the Iranians, but we should not trust them. The threat of new sanctions will only serve to strengthen the President's hand as we pursue a diplomatic solution.

- By giving the administration the capability to impose crippling sanctions on Iran should they continue to pursue a nuclear weapons program, this Committee today is putting forth a tough and smart plan to address the real threat Iran poses to the U.S. and our allies, particularly Israel.

- First, Mr. Chairman, I want to commend you for including in that plan key provisions of the Iran Sanctions Enhancement Act of 2009, a bill introduced by Senator Evan Bayh of which I am an original cosponsor.

- This bill sanctions companies that export gasoline to Iran. This is one of the few pressure points where we can act unilaterally and have a real effect. The world knows that Iran does not currently have the refining capacity to meets its domestic gasoline needs and is dependent on imported gasoline. So now is the time to reduce Iran's energy supply if they fail to suspend their nuclear enrichment program as called for in several UN Security Council resolutions.

- I am also glad that we will be strengthening export controls to stop the illegal export of sensitive technology to Iran. During the recent Iranian elections we witnessed the Iranian regime go as far as to block the internet and mobile phone communications of their own citizens.

- That is why I and Senator Lindsey Graham introduced "The Reduce Iranian Cyber Suppression Act" or "RICA", a bipartisan bill that would bar companies that export sensitive communications technology to Iran from applying for or renewing procurement contracts with the United States Government. I am pleased that this bill has also been included in our plan.

- Our comprehensive plan will also address the role that global financial institutions play in enabling Iran to develop a nuclear program.

- Last year, 27 Democrats joined me and called for the Iranian central bank, known as Bank Markazi, to also be included in our economic sanctions, as they have been heavily involved in terrorism and helping finance acquisitions of nuclear and conventional weapons technology. The central bank has also played a role in helping other Iranian banks circumvent U.S. financial sanctions.

- That is why I am pleased that included in this legislation is a Sense of Congress urging the President, in the strongest terms, to consider immediately using his authority to impose sanctions on the Central Bank of Iran and any other Iranian bank engaged in proliferation activities or support of terrorist groups.

- Mr. Chairman, you have done an excellent job crafting a comprehensive plan to arm the administration with the tools they need to put a stop to Iran's rogue nuclear program. I strongly urge this committee to support this plan and I look forward to working with the Chairman and the Ranking Member to passing this important legislation when it comes to the floor in what I hope to be in the very near future.