

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 16, 2018

President Donald J. Trump
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

As Senators who believe that diplomacy is critical to the national security and prosperity of the United States, we write once again to express our concern regarding the large number of key diplomatic positions that remain vacant and the reduction in the ranks of the Foreign Service.

According to the American Foreign Service Association, since January 2017, the ranks of Career Ministers, three-star equivalents, has declined from 33 to 19. Following Labor Day, the number of Minister Counselors, two-star equivalents, declined from 431 to 369 and continues to decline.

This decline, coupled with an ongoing external hiring freeze and lower than average Foreign Service Officer intake, compromises American global leadership and undermines our national interests. The absence of U.S. ambassadors in critical parts of the world leaves a number of our allies and strategic partners seeking assurances that America is committed to diplomacy.

For instance, the North Korean nuclear crisis presents one of the gravest threats to our national security. The Director of the Central Intelligence Agency Mike Pompeo recently asserted that North Korea could be capable of striking the United States with a nuclear weapon in a “handful of months.” In this perilous moment, the United States must urgently work with our regional allies to exert the pressure needed to get North Korea to the negotiating table. However, the administration has not nominated a U.S. Ambassador to South Korea.

In the Middle East, the Islamic State and other terrorist groups threaten the security and stability of individuals, institutions and governments. Now more than ever, it is in our interest to maintain strategic partnerships in the region, including with Egypt, Jordan, and the members of the Gulf Cooperation Council. Yet, our ambassadorships in Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia are currently vacant. To support U.S. interests and our allies in the region, including Israel, these positions must be filled.

Although Turkey is a longtime NATO ally, bilateral ties have been strained in recent years due to Turkey’s role in the conflict in Syria and Iraq and the systemic, anti-democratic consolidation of power by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Persistent anti-American rhetoric emanating from Turkish leaders and state media outlets has increased our concerns about the future of our bilateral relationship. At a time when American influence is vitally needed in Turkey, we lack an ambassador.

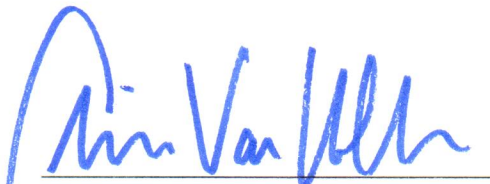
The administration has also not nominated a U.S. Ambassador to the European Union (EU). European leaders are struggling with domestic challenges, including independence movements and populism, and transnational issues such as the ongoing refugee crisis and Russian

aggression. However, they are also seeking to move forward with key EU priorities, including NATO, trade, climate change, and the preservation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action with Iran. While the administration may not align with EU members on every issue, a strong ambassador to the EU could highlight and build upon shared values and priorities, and reassure nations that are concerned about the strength of the transatlantic relationship.


In Washington, there are critical posts that urgently need filling including the Under Secretary for Civilian Security, Democracy and Human Rights, and the Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asian Affairs, who is now responsible for both Afghanistan and Pakistan. Like too many high-level positions at the State Department, both are currently filled by “acting” assistant secretaries rather than permanent appointments.

We urge you to consult with Congress regarding measures that impact the recruitment, staffing and retention of State Department. We ask that you quickly put forward qualified nominations for all vacant diplomatic posts, including those referenced above.


Respectfully,



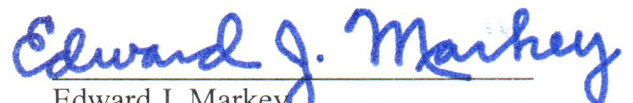
Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator




Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator




Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



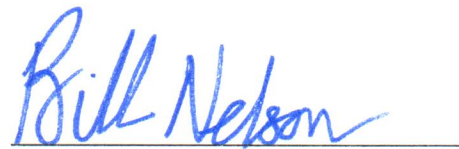
Edward J. Markey
United States Senator




Jack Reed
United States Senator



Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator

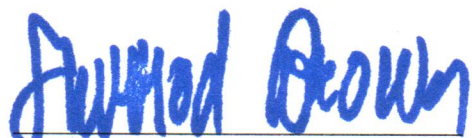


Bill Nelson
United States Senator



Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator





Sherrod Brown
United States Senator



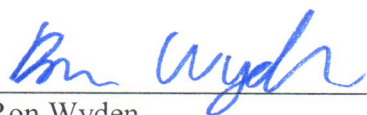
Mark R. Warner
United States Senator



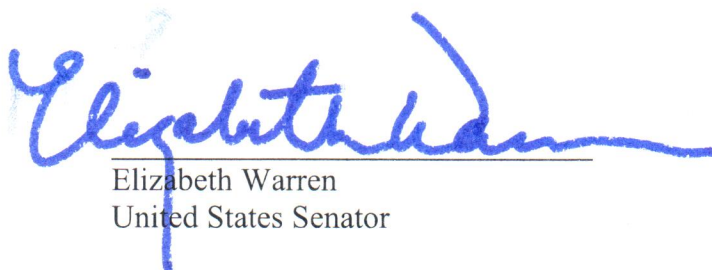
Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator




Tina Smith
United States Senator



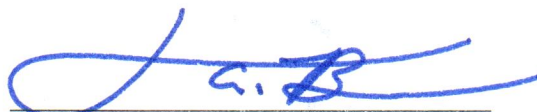
Ron Wyden
United States Senator



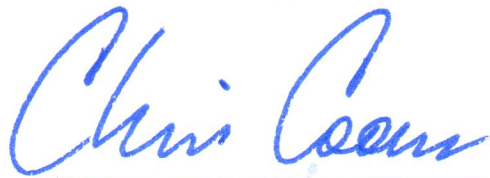
Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



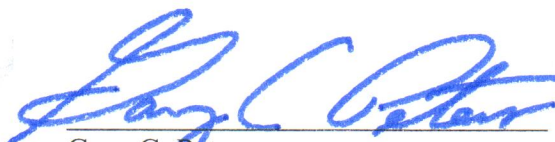
Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator



Gary C. Peters
United States Senator