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NEWS

U. S. SENATOR FOR KANSAS

FROM:

SENATE REPUBLICAN LEADER

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MIDDLE EAST PEACE

MIDDLE EAST PEACE FACILITATION ACT EXTENSION IMPORTANT; ADMINISTRATION REFUSES TO DEAL SERIOUSLY WITH SENATE MAJORITY; DOLE URGES BIPARTISAN COOPERATION TO REACH AGREEMENT

Tonight at midnight, the Middle East Peace Facilitation Act ("MEPFA") will expire. Last night at 8:20 p.m., a written request for a short-term extension was faxed to my office by the State Department. This morning at 7:30 a.m., I spoke to Secretary of State Christopher about the issue. Until the letter and phone call, my office had received no communication about the need for the latest extension. I know the Secretary is concerned that a delay in extending the Act could be read as lack of support for the Middle East peace process. I share that concern, but I am also concerned that we have an administration that refuses to deal responsibly with Congress.

Senate On Record Supporting Middle East Peace Process

I want to be very clear: the United States Senate has gone on the record on repeated occasions supporting the Middle East Peace process. We have extended "MEPFA" three times this year: on June 23, on August 11, and on September 29. Each time the Congress acted promptly. I hope we are able to act today as well.

We support the peace process. We understand the risks being taken by both sides. We understand that peacemaking is not easy, and that the process is subject to disruption. As I speak today, Israel's withdrawal from the West Bank town of Jenin has started. Our lead negotiator in the Middle East, Dennis Ross, called my office this morning from Israel to express his concern over the consequences of not extending "MEPFA."

Extending "MEPFA" allows the President to waive certain provisions of law concerning the Palestine Liberation Organization. It allows the provision of U.S. assistance to the Palestine authority, and it allows a Palestinian office to operate in the United States. The Foreign Operations Appropriations Conference Report provides for a long-term extension of "MEPFA" but it is not likely to be enacted soon. If Congress does not act today to provide another short-term extension, the President's waiver authority will lapse. Under these time constraints, unanimous consent is required to proceed.

Today, I am informed the Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, Senator Helms, will object to any unanimous consent agreement extending MEPFA unless the terms of a previous agreement entered into by the full Senate have been met. The last time the Senate extended MEPFA, Senator Helms and Senator Kerry worked out an agreement providing for consideration of S. 908, the Foreign Relations Reorganization Act.

Events Show Administration Unwilling to Negotiate

For the benefit of all senators, I would like to briefly review what happened over the last month. On September 29, the Senate passed an extension of MEPFA, and entered into an agreement providing for consideration of S. 908 after the managers agreed on an amendment. On October 10, Senator Helms wrote to Senator Kerry and urged him to make some kind of offer. The next day, Senator Kerry responded that "progress was being made" in developing an offer.

On October 19, Senator Kerry met with Senator Helms and provided an outline -- not legislation -- of a proposed managers amendment. Later that day, Senator Helms made a counter offer to Senator Kerry -- changing the amount of savings from reorganization from \$1.2 billion over 4 years to \$2.5 billion over five years. Senator Kerry's response was to propose

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twenty-five additional changes in the bill and to request unprecedented guarantees about the outcome of a House-Senate conference. Until this morning, Senator Helms had heard very little from Senator Kerry or his staff. While staff negotiations have begun, there is no agreement on the central issue of cost savings. Once again, the administration has refused to provide information to the Congress about cost savings. I hope the Democratic manager, Senator Kerry, is able to make a legislative agreement today -- whether the administration is willing or not.

Final Action on Foreign Relations Reorganization Act

The State Department wants Senator Helms to lift his objection to proceeding with "MEPFA" despite the almost total lack of effort over the last 32 days. Senator Helms is completely within his rights to object to any unanimous consent agreement. I would hope as the day proceeds that Senator Kerry and the administration decide it is finally time to deal seriously with the Senate majority. Contrary to some of the statements by the administration, Senator Helms is not insisting on "getting his way." What he is insisting on is that the will of the Senate majority be heard, and that the Senate simply have a chance to vote on whether to save money by reorganizing our international affairs agencies.

I believe in the importance of bipartisan cooperation. Let me point out that if the administration had not orchestrated a filibuster of S. 908 earlier this year, the Middle East Peace Facilitation Act would have been permanently extended by now -- in that same legislation. Unfortunately, due to the administration's intransigence and refusal to negotiate, MEPFA is once again a last minute demand on a busy Senate schedule.

I hope we are able to work together on MEPFA, and I hope it happens today. I hope a managers amendment is filed today. However, it is going to be very difficult if not impossible to work together on one issue today if there is no cooperation from the other side on moving to conference on the Budget Reconciliation Bill.

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* Remarks delivered on Senate floor, approximately 2:45 p.m.