

Opening Statement

Today we consider an important bill to confront a serious threat to the security of our nation, of Israel and our other allies in the Middle East and Europe – the prospect of a nuclear-armed Iran.

Last year, after careful consideration and thoughtful hearings, this committee reported out a bipartisan bill to put pressure on the Iranian regime to come clean on its nuclear program.

Unfortunately, that bill never was considered on the Senate floor because of the obstruction of a handful of Senators.

Earlier this year, I think all of us were deeply troubled to see the Iranian regime violently punishing its own citizens for calling for fair elections.

And we have watched with growing concern the illicit nuclear activities of this troubled regime, including their deception about the previously secret enrichment facility at Qum.

And so today, Senator Shelby and I have worked with all of you to put together the comprehensive legislation before us.

The President has rightly adopted a two-track policy of engagement backed by the prospect of further sanctions, and I support his approach. Our legislation strengthens what has come to be known as the “pressure track.”

We must send a clear signal to Iran’s leaders that, if they continue to defy the will of the international community, our nation is prepared to confront them.

We must convince them that they face a clear choice. They can end the suppression of their people, come clean on their nuclear program, suspend enrichment, and stop supporting terrorists around the world. Or they can face sustained, progressively intensifying multilateral economic and diplomatic pressure – including tougher sanctions -- thus deepening their international isolation. And if they continue to refuse, they will then face the unilateral sanctions contained in this bill.

Our approach acknowledges the gross human rights abuses that Iran's people suffer at the hands of Iran's security forces – with the approval of its political leadership – and the widening chasm that has opened between the regime and the people of Iran.

It contains a number of human rights provisions, including Senator Schumer's bill to impose a sweeping ban on US government contracts on companies which provide communications monitoring or jamming technology to the government of Iran.

Those who help Iran's government to suppress the everyday speech and internet communications of its people will be punished.

More broadly, the bill imposes a range of tough new sanctions on Iran, facilitates divestment from firms working in its energy sector, and addresses the growing black market in dual use technologies going to Iran from the United States via third countries.

It is clear that recent progress on the nuclear issue is attributable to Iran's leaders feeling the heat of increased international pressure and the specter of biting sanctions. But further progress is needed, and will depend on that same pressure.

Tehran has now provided international inspectors with access to the nuclear site at Qum, and their report will be forthcoming soon. Iran's government had committed to sending most of its low-enriched uranium abroad for processing for medical purposes – but now seems to be delaying, and wavering on this commitment. Whether this commitment will be kept or prove to be yet another stall tactic remains to be seen. Given their track record, nailing it down and then tightly verifying its implementation will be critical.

Just as we did last year, we have incorporated ideas from many of our Senate colleagues into one Committee bill.

Senators Bayh, Lieberman, and Kyl have proposed penalties on companies that support Iran's import of refined petroleum products or bolster its domestic capacity.

Senators Brownback and Casey proposed authorizing state and local governments to divest from companies involved in critical business with Iran.

As I mentioned, Senator Schumer proposed banning government contracts to firms that provide technology used by the Iranian regime to monitor or disrupt communications of its citizens with one another and the outside world.

Senator Menendez proposed targeting sanctions against Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps, its affiliates and front organizations for supporting terrorism and contributing to proliferation, and Senator Johanns pressed for renewed targeting of Iran's proxy Hezbollah in the same way. Senator Bunning urged tight reporting requirements on sanctions. I am grateful to all my colleagues for their efforts, and know that if the Senate's parliamentary rules did not preclude cosponsors for an original committee bill – which I will technically present to the full Senate on behalf of the committee in my role as chair – that they would all want to be included as original cosponsors of this measure.

In addition, we have incorporated our own proposals to tighten our trade embargo, enhance Treasury's mandate to freeze assets tied to terrorism and proliferation, crack down on the black market export of technology to the regime, and expand the scope of other sanctions.

All of these ideas are included in our bill. In recent weeks, our staff has worked to accommodate concerns from various members, enabling us, I hope, to move forward with broad bipartisan support, so that we can send an overwhelmingly clear signal of our resolve here in Congress that Iran must finally come clean on its nuclear program and rejoin the community of responsible nations.

Senator Shelby?