

Agriculture, Commodity Futures Trading Commission and Farm Credit Administration.

#### AUTHORITY FOR COMMITTEES TO MEET

##### COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

Mr. JEFFORDS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Foreign Relations be authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on Tuesday, May 12, 1998, at 2:00 p.m. to hold a hearing.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

##### COMMITTEE ON INDIAN AFFAIRS

Mr. JEFFORDS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs be authorized to meet during the session of the Senate to conduct a hearing on Tuesday, May 12, 1998 at 9:30 a.m. on Indian gaming, focusing on lands taken into trust for purposes of gaming. The hearing will be held in room 106 of the Dirksen Senate Office Building.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

##### COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY

Mr. JEFFORDS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on the Judiciary be authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on Tuesday, May 12, 1998 at 10:30 a.m. in room 226 of the Senate Dirksen Office Building to hold a hearing on "Raising Tobacco Prices: the Consequences."

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

##### A CRITICAL TIME IN THE MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS

• Mr. WELLSTONE. Mr. President, as a long-time strong supporter of Israel and her security, and a fierce advocate of the Middle East peace process, I want to commend President Clinton, Secretary Albright, Ambassador Ross and Assistant Secretary Indyk for their ongoing efforts to preserve, and even reinvigorate, the stalled peace process. I was encouraged to read this morning that President Clinton has asked Secretary Albright to forgo the G-7 meeting in Germany in order to meet with Prime Minister Netanyahu while he is here this week in the United States.

While they have come under fire recently, as a Member of the Foreign Relations Committee who has for years followed closely the peace process, I believe they should be supported in their efforts to help forge a just and lasting peace for the region by helping the parties to move forward urgently on the Israeli-Palestinian track.

About a month ago 81 Senators joined in a letter to President Clinton expressing concern about the Administration's ideas for the next phase of re-

deployment being made public, about certain of Israel's security concerns, and about final status talks. I did not sign that letter, in part because I believe the Administration should be commended, not criticized, for sticking with this process at a critical time, and for its willingness to press for Israel's legitimate security concerns while recognizing the legitimate claims of the Palestinians.

I have watched with growing concern over the past week or so as some critics of the Administration's policy toward Israel here in Congress have launched fierce, often partisan, attacks on that policy. The Speaker, late last week, was even quoted as saying, in a press conference in which he criticized the Administration's recent handling of the peace process, that "America's strong-arm tactics would send a clear signal to the supporters of terrorism that their murderous actions are an effective tool in forcing concessions from Israel."

That is, simply put, Mr. President, a scandalous and demagogic accusation to level at the President, who has been engaged for over a year, along with his senior foreign policy advisors, in a vigorous effort to bring the two sides together at a critical time in the peace process, and to help bridge the gaps that exist between them by offering constructive, creative ideas for each to consider. I understand that this proposal was crafted over many months, and was designed to address many of the Israeli government's most pressing security concerns and to meet many of its criteria for evaluating real progress on these issues.

The President has repeatedly made clear that he is not trying to impose a solution on the parties, nor could he. And that he is not issuing ultimatums to anyone—as further evidenced by his willingness to have Secretary Albright reach out again to Mr. Netanyahu this week. After months of on-and-off negotiations, with U.S. envoys shuttling back and forth among the parties, the major points of disagreement have become clear, and President Clinton is now simply offering ideas for them to consider—an approach consistent with America's role at virtually every other critical point in the Middle East peace process over the years. At Camp David, in Madrid, and at subsequent major negotiations, American attempts to bridge the gaps between the parties have played a critical role in reaching final agreement. I have talked with senior American officials involved in the discussions, and remain hopeful that a final agreement will soon be reached. The parties must not miss this key opportunity to move forward in the peace process.

Over the weekend Mr. Netanyahu rejected the Administration's offer, which Mr. Arafat had accepted, to come to Washington this week for a summit to agree on terms for a further withdrawal from the West Bank, and to agree to accelerate final status talks

provided for in the Oslo Agreement. I understand from news reports that alternative proposals are now being considered by the Israeli government for a 13 percent withdrawal which could happen in two stages—a substantial withdrawal immediately, followed by an additional 2-4 percent withdrawal once Mr. Arafat makes good on certain tough new security commitments he has reportedly agreed to make as a part of the overall agreement.

I understand these new arrangements include the kind of strong new Palestinian commitments to fight terrorism which the Israeli government has long been seeking, strengthening the terms of the Memorandum of Understanding negotiated at the end of last year, and providing for a test period before this phase of withdrawal is completed. That is a major victory for Israel, and should help to address legitimate Israeli concerns about the Palestinian Authority's commitment to fighting terrorism.

Now I am not an expert, and I acknowledge that I do not know all the details of the various land parcels that are being discussed. But it is clear that on the issue of land, some progress is possible. Let us not forget that the Palestinians had originally sought a 30 percent withdrawal from the West Bank, as the first in a 3-phase withdrawal to which Israel agreed—though the timing and extent of each withdrawal were not explicitly established. So the Palestinians had sought a 30 percent withdrawal, the Israelis offered just under ten percent, and the Administration has been pressing for a compromise of 13 percent. Mr. Netanyahu has reportedly now privately agreed to a withdrawal of about 11 percent.

I understand that Mr. Arafat has also agreed, as a condition for attending a Washington summit meeting with President Clinton and Mr. Arafat, to allow the next redeployment to be considered alongside final status talks, by a joint Palestinian-Israeli Committee, operating on a parallel track. The American proposal also reportedly contemplates greater flexibility on the Oslo timetable, which had been set to conclude by May 4, 1999. Each of these changes would be significant achievements for Israeli negotiators.

Let me make four points about this situation, Mr. President. First, despite all of the recent (frequently partisan) criticism of the Administration, recent polls both here and in Israel show substantial support for further progress in the peace process. And this includes polls of Jewish Americans, of which I am proud to be one. Indeed, I read about a poll last week which noted that a substantial majority of Jewish Americans polled agreed that the U.S. in this process was doing just what we should be doing—offering ideas, facilitating discussions, working with the parties on alternative formulations which could meet all of their legitimate security and other interests.

Second, let me remind my colleagues, especially those who have offered such fierce criticism of the Administration's efforts in recent days, of the need for a sense of proportion. Let me point out that the Administration is not threatening, as the Bush Administration did with settlement assistance, to cut off any kind of aid to Israel in this dispute. It is simply playing the role mediators should play in offering creative ideas, and allowing the parties to make their own decision about whether those ideas are acceptable to them.

Third, let me commend the Administration on remaining engaged in the peace process, a process for which many Israelis—including most recently Prime Minister Rabin—have given their lives. President Clinton has been a strong friend of Israel, and the Administration is right to press the parties to come to a final agreement, to offer solutions which can bridge gaps, to ensure that proposals are on the table from a neutral mediator which one side could perhaps not accept from their adversary, but could accept from a third party.

The administration has done so, I believe, because it knows that the success of these efforts is crucial to fulfilling longstanding American commitments to preserve the peace process, ensure Israel's security, enhance regional stability, and protect U.S. interests in the Middle East. Most urgently, the President recognizes that without a peaceful permanent resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Israel's security—clearly a vital U.S. interest—can never be guaranteed. Let us not forget one thing in all of this, Mr. President: peace is the ultimate guarantor of Israel's security.

Finally, let me ask my colleagues to contemplate what could happen if the Administration did not press to preserve this process, and it collapsed—as it almost surely would without such intervention. An alternative scenario, with the peace process in a shambles—an escalation in terrorist attacks, Israel facing newly hostile Arab neighbors on all sides, and increased pressure from the Arab street for violent action against her—is frightening to consider.

Some here in Washington act as if the Israeli-Palestinian stalemate of the past fifteen months does not pose dangers for all sides. I think they are wrong. It poses very grave dangers to Israel, to the Palestinians, and to the whole region. That's why the President's approach of urging the parties to uphold their commitments, facilitating ongoing contacts and negotiations, helping each side understand the other's legitimate security and other needs, and presenting creative ideas intended to help bridge gaps between the parties, makes sense.

Senator FEINSTEIN observed on the floor last week that the Administration's attempts to facilitate an agreement between the parties efforts were

“principled, worthy efforts . . . grounded in a deep commitment to Israel's security.” I agree with that assessment, and join her, Senator LAUTENBERG, and others in calling for restraint by my colleagues who have unfairly criticized the Administration during this difficult and sensitive time in the peace process. Of course, offering principled, thoughtful critiques of Administration foreign policy-making is a legitimate role of Congress, an important aspect of our system of checks and balances. But it is a right accompanied by a responsibility to be fair and informed.

Mr. President, the recent crisis in the peace negotiations coincides with Israel's celebration of her 50-year jubilee, an occasion of great joy for all of us who love Israel. With the founding of modern Israel, the Children of Abraham and Sara, survivors of over 2000 years of persecution and exile, were home at last and free at last. But Israel's founder David Ben-Gurion's dream, and that of his allies, was not simply to provide a safe haven from centuries of Jewish suffering. It was also about fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy of making Israel “a light unto the nations,” a powerful sign and symbol of justice and compassion to all peoples of the world.

Although it's fitting that we pause this year to celebrate all that the people of Israel have accomplished over these past 50 years, we must also look forward to the tasks which face her in the next millennium, chief among them the task of building a just, secure and lasting peace. It is my deepest prayer that our children and grandchildren, fifty years from this year, will be able to say with gratitude that we were the generation which overcame ancient hatreds, and enabled them to achieve a just and lasting peace which has by then embraced the entire region and all its peoples. That is a vision worthy of Israel's founder, and of all those who come after. It is a vision for which we should and must be willing to struggle, to fight for, for which all must continue to take risks.

Prime Minister Netanyahu is coming to the U.S. this week, and will be meeting with Secretary Albright. I have heard from sources both in the Administration and in Israel that the Israeli government is actually close to reaching internal agreement on a variation of the Administration's proposed plan. I hope that is true, and that all the parties will reassess their positions in light of recent developments, and agree this week to take one more important step toward resolving this longstanding and bitter dispute, thereby helping to forge a just and lasting peace for the region worthy of Israel's founders' dream.●

#### CREDIT UNION MEMBERSHIP

● Mr. ABRAHAM. Mr. President, I rise to support legislation protecting the 70 million Americans who belong to credit unions from being stripped of their

financial security and to allow tens of millions of others, who currently are denied access to a credit union, to become members.

One of the most important financial assets our country has, Mr. President, is our extensive system of not-for-profit, community-based credit unions. Credit unions provide unique and valuable services to members, most of whom work for small businesses. Credit unions offer their members lower costs, higher returns, lower loan rates and greater convenience. They nonetheless provide important benefits to their members and crucial competition in the financial services marketplace.

But credit unions have been put in significant danger by a recent Supreme Court decision. That Court ruled that attempts by the National Credit Union Administration during the Reagan Administration to more broadly interpret the 1982 “common bond” requirement for membership are beyond the scope of original intent.

The Court's interpretation of this requirement could result in over 10 million Americans being forced out of their credit unions. It also means that small businesses with fewer than 500 employees—the engine of economic growth in this country—are barred from offering credit union memberships to their employees.

Clearly, in the wake of the Court's ruling, the laws pertaining to credit union membership must be modified. Credit Unions have a proud history of providing important benefits without cost to either businesses or taxpayers. In Michigan alone 4 million people avail themselves of these benefits, and they should be protected against unfair limitations on credit union membership. What is more, the growth of credit unions in America has coincided with a significant expansion of earnings for community bankers, another crucial financial services asset for our people and our economy. As reported by the ABA Banking Journal's Annual Community Banking Earnings Report, the vast majority of community bankers believe that earnings will continue expanding, seeing no threat from credit union expansion.

There is no reason, in my view, to see credit union expansion as anything but a significant benefit for our people and our economy. That is why I am supporting legislation authored by Senator D'AMATO, modelled after H.R. 1151, legislation that already has passed the House. This legislation will grant credit unions authority to add Select Employee Groups of 3,000 or less to their membership.

This legislation also sets a moderate cap on commercial loans in the interest of fairness and consensus. In my opinion, such a requirement was necessary to respond to some of the concerns raised in response to extended membership.

The critical issue, Mr. President, is whether we are going to allow credit unions to continue to provide important services at reasonable cost to a