

**Statement of Senator Patrick Leahy
State and Foreign Operations Subcommittee
Hearing on FY 2009 Budget Request
April 9, 2008**

Madam Secretary, we appreciate you being here.

This is the last time you will appear before us and I want to take this opportunity to thank you for your service. While we have had some strong disagreements with this Administration's handling of foreign policy, you have always been willing to discuss those differences with us. You and your staff have also been helpful on issues when there was a problem and we needed the added weight your office brings.

I also want to take this opportunity – on behalf of myself, my staff and this Committee – to express our gratitude to Cindy Chang in your office of Legislative Affairs.

Many dedicated, very capable people have preceded Cindy in this position, but Cindy set a new standard. She has been absolutely tireless, extraordinarily efficient, and totally devoted, day and night, seven days a week, to her work and to the people she has served – at the State Department, in the Congress, the American people, and people around the world. My staff has relied on Cindy every day. I saw her in action when she accompanied me to the Middle East. She has done an outstanding job.

Madam Secretary, when I think about what the world looked like at the beginning of this Administration – and our image in the world – and compare that to what it looks like today, it does not give me a good feeling.

Our international reputation is a shadow of what it was seven years ago. Each time we raise issues of democracy or human rights – with Iran, Sudan, Russia or China – they want to talk about what has occurred, and continues at the U.S. prison in Guantanamo Bay and the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq.

Each time we vote for another United Nations peacekeeping mission, which this Administration has done many times and I applaud you for it, we then don't see enough money in the budget to pay for it.

Each time we challenge nations to protect the environment and reduce global warming, they ask who are we to lecture them when the United States wastes more energy than entire other countries use.

The next President will inherit two of the most vexing foreign policy challenges in half a century, in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Virtually everything this Administration predicted in Iraq has proven false. And what a terrible price the American people are paying for it.

In Afghanistan, we have seen the resurgence of the Taliban and Al Qaeda, and a reconstruction program that suffers from too many problems to count.

And throughout this period, the Department of Defense has steadily taken over more and more of the job of nation building, which had been the State Department's job before the President said he didn't believe in it.

I know the Administration sees things differently, that progress is being made. And there are examples of progress.

But the credibility, enduring principles and image of this country have been and need again to be sources of great strength and leadership for the United States, and I am deeply concerned that in a few short years we have lost much of what our predecessors fought and died for.

That might be tolerable if we were safer for it, but we are not.

This budget, which we are here to discuss today, is a statement of our priorities, and the decisions we make offer tangible opportunities to help show the world another face of America.

Your fiscal year 2009 budget request has much in it that I support. It also contains some disturbing shortcomings, which we need to discuss. I would like nothing more than to pass our bill on schedule. Simply writing this year off because there is an election in November would be a mistake, in my view, and I am sure you agree.

So let us work together these next few months and get as much done as we can.

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