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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6225

June 23, 2006

The Honorable Condoleezza Rice
Secretary of State
United States Department of State
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Rice:

I write regarding the recent unexpected nomination of a replacement for Ambassador John Marshall Evans, the current U.S. Ambassador to Armenia. The process of vetting, confirming, and installing a new United States ambassador entails considerable effort on the part of the Senate and substantial expense on the part of American taxpayers. As a result, I am concerned whenever the Senate is called upon to repeat this process before the end of an ambassador's traditional three-year term. In this case, I am particularly troubled by reports that the decision to recall Ambassador Evans may have been motivated by statements he made to American citizens in which he accurately described the Armenian Genocide as genocide.

The State Department's own historical records provide ample evidence that the Ottoman Empire's slaughter of 1.5 million ethnic Armenians constituted genocide. Henry Morgenthau, who served as the United States Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire from 1913 to 1916, described a brutal "campaign of race extermination" perpetrated by Ottoman forces and was commended for his efforts to call attention to these atrocities by then Secretary of State Robert Lansing. To punish an American official for correctly describing any historical event raises serious questions about the United States' commitment to the values of transparency and honesty. In this instance, the allegation that the Department would retaliate against an official whose only apparent offense was discussing an act of genocide with American citizens also damages our country's reputation for upholding human rights and democratic values.

Ambassador Evans is a highly respected diplomat with a record of service and accomplishment stretching from Tehran to Moscow to NATO Headquarters in Brussels. I will not be prepared to move forward with any Senate action that would prematurely end his tenure in Yerevan until I receive answers to the following questions:

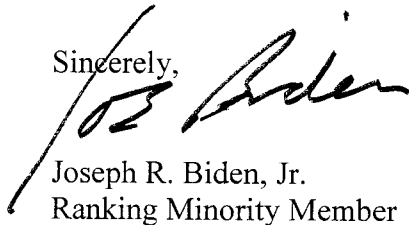
1. Why is Ambassador Evans being replaced before the expiration of the customary three-year ambassadorial term?
2. Has the State Department received any communication – written, electronic, or spoken – from the Turkish government concerning Ambassador Evans? What

was our response? If there were diplomatic exchanges related to the matter, how did they factor into the decision to recall Ambassador Evans?

3. Why has the State Department apparently refused to provide a substantive response to other Congressional inquiries concerning this matter?
4. If it is in fact the policy of the United States not to characterize the systematic killing of 1.5 million Armenians as genocide, please explain why these events do not meet any of the five definitions in the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.

Recalling an accomplished American diplomat for speaking truthfully about genocide could feed widespread cynicism about United States' foreign policy. I hope that you will carefully reconsider the long-term implications of this decision on the United States' ability to promote freedom and respect for human life.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joe Biden". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "J" and "B".

Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
Ranking Minority Member