

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 2, 2018

President Donald Trump  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Trump:

We write to express our serious concerns regarding the continued absence of a U.S. Ambassador to South Korea and the reported removal from consideration of a highly qualified candidate, Dr. Victor Cha, for that position. We ask that you provide clear reasoning and justification for his removal from consideration.

The challenge posed by North Korea's nuclear and missile programs is perhaps the most significant foreign policy challenge our nation has faced in decades. It is therefore shocking that the Administration – a full year into its term – has yet to formally nominate someone to be the ambassador, which is the highest-ranking U.S. government official in South Korea. It is equally disturbing that the individual being considered for this position, Dr. Victor Cha, who has extensive qualifications and experience, has been removed from consideration after receiving Agrément from South Korea.

We may or may not agree with Dr. Cha on every issue, and of course an administration is entitled to the nominees of its choosing, but it is our understanding that the White House conducted lengthy vetting, including security and financial background checks on Dr. Cha and that the Administration had formally notified Seoul of its intent to nominate Dr. Cha. According to reports, South Korean officials quickly approved Dr. Cha through its formal process and South Koreans lauded his potential nomination.

While we reserve our rights to provide advice and consent on ambassadorial nominations, it is our understanding that he is an eminently qualified individual to serve at a senior level in the U.S. Government. As you know, Dr. Cha previously served as director for Asian affairs on the National Security Council under the George W. Bush administration. Dr. Cha also served as the Deputy Head of Delegation for the United States at the Six Party Talks in Beijing. Currently, Dr. Cha is the Director of Asian Studies in the School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University and is also a Senior Adviser and Korea Chair at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

Despite Dr. Cha's qualifications, it is being reported that Administration officials are asserting that the removal of Dr. Cha from consideration was based on a flag that was raised only after the lengthy background checks and other vetting that, typically, an individual under consideration for nomination undergoes prior to their name being submitted for the formal diplomatic process

of Agrément. As a result, we respectfully request that you provide the justification for his removal from consideration.

According to some media reports, the real reason for Dr. Cha's removal was his disagreement with a "bloody nose" strategy under consideration by the White House. Like many, we are deeply concerned about the potential consequences of a preemptive military strike on North Korea and the risks of miscalculation and retaliation. Ultimately, it is an enormous gamble to believe that a particular type of limited, preemptive strike will not be met with an escalatory response from Kim Jong Un and neither the United States nor our allies should take that step lightly. In a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing on North Korea on January 30<sup>th</sup>, 2018, each of the expert witnesses believed that such a "bloody nose" strategy carried extreme risks. Moreover, without congressional authorization a preventative or preemptive U.S. military strike would lack either a Constitutional basis or legal authority.

Tensions on the Korean Peninsula are as high as they have ever been, and the Olympics are fast approaching. While we must always be ready to respond with decisive action to a North Korean provocation, it would be extremely irresponsible to instigate military conflict prior to exhausting every diplomatic option.

We request your immediate attention to ensure the United States has in place its highest-ranking diplomat to serve as Ambassador to South Korea. We urge you to nominate a qualified individual for this critical position as soon as possible.

Sincerely,



Martin Heinrich  
United States Senator



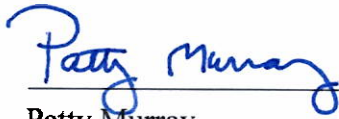
Benjamin L. Cardin  
United States Senator



Jack Reed  
United States Senator



Tim Kaine  
United States Senator



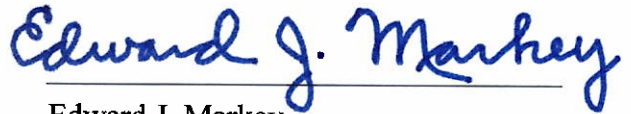
Patty Murray  
United States Senator



Christopher A. Coons  
United States Senator



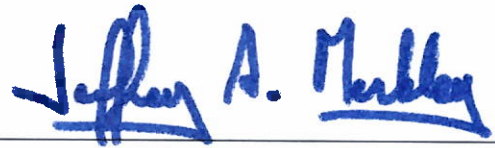
Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator



Brian Schatz  
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley  
United States Senator



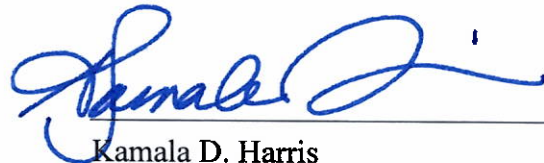
Bernard Sanders  
United States Senator



Jeanne Shaheen  
United States Senator



Catherine Cortez Masto  
United States Senator



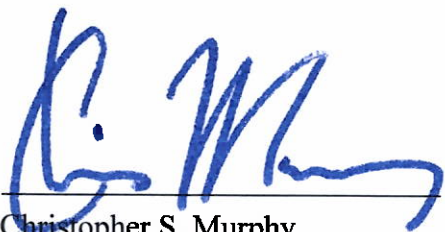
Kamala D. Harris  
United States Senator



Mazie K. Hirono  
United States Senator



Sheldon Whitehouse  
United States Senator



Christopher S. Murphy  
United States Senator



Chris Van Hollen  
United States Senator