

U.S. Senate Panel Backs John Tefft as New Ambassador to Russia

July 30, 2014



U.S. Ambassador John F. Tefft delivers a speech on “The Importance of Economic Reform to Ukraine,” April 23.

U.S. President Barack Obama's nominee to be the new ambassador to Russia could be on his way to Moscow in days, after U.S. senators put aside partisan differences to hold a quick vote backing his appointment.

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee held an unscheduled meeting on Tuesday evening to unanimously approve the nomination of John Tefft, a career diplomat and former ambassador to Ukraine, Georgia and Lithuania, to be the new envoy to Moscow.

After five months without an American in the position, both Republicans and Democrats said the dire state of U.S. relations with Russia made it imperative to confirm Tefft before Congress leaves on Aug. 1 for a five-week recess.

There was no immediate word on when the full Senate might hold that vote.

Tefft had painted a dire picture of relations with Moscow as he sailed through his confirmation hearing before the Senate Foreign Relations panel earlier on Tuesday.

"Our relations with Russia today are in serious trouble and their future is uncertain," he testified to the committee. "We cannot ignore the fundamental challenge to the international order posed by Russia's actions in the Ukraine crisis."

While the hearing was going on, Obama announced wider sanctions on Russian industries over Russian President Vladimir Putin's support for rebels in eastern Ukraine blamed for downing Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 this month. Washington also accused Moscow of violating a nuclear weapons treaty.

"In my view we cannot afford to wait to send an ambassador to Russia," said Democratic Senator Robert Menendez, the committee's chairman.

Senator John McCain, an Arizona Republican and frequent critic of Obama's foreign policy, called for unanimous approval of Tefft by the committee.

Tefft served as ambassador to Ukraine under Obama, a Democrat, and to Georgia and Lithuania under President George W. Bush, a Republican. He agreed to come out of retirement to take up the position in Moscow.

Dozens of Obama's other nominees to be ambassadors have been held up for months amid bitter partisan fighting in the U.S. Senate.

The previous U.S. ambassador to Moscow, Michael McFaul, left the position in February.

See also:

[Washington Asks Moscow to Approve John Tefft as new U.S. Ambassador, Report Says](#)

[Kremlin Approves John Tefft as U.S. Ambassador to Russia](#)

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