

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First, I would like to congratulate Senator Brownback on his appointment as Chairman of the Helsinki Commission. It will be an honor to work alongside you in the interest of trans-Atlantic dialogue, human rights and democratic freedom. With the concerns that you have consistently demonstrated for the protection and the nurturing of democratic development around the world, the Helsinki Commission is more than fortunate to have a Chairman with your expertise, energetic devotion and leadership.

As I have mentioned to you before, you are, Mr. Chairman, a fine statesman and I wish you the very best as you begin your Chairmanship.

I would also like to take this opportunity to welcome my good friend, the Slovenian Foreign Minister and Chairman-in Office of the OSCE, Dr. Rupel to Washington, D.C. Although this is the Foreign Minister's first official visit to Washington as Chairman-in Office he is certainly no stranger to our nation's capital. Dr. Rupel spent a considerable amount of time in Washington at the Slovenian Embassy on New Hampshire Avenue as the former Slovenian Ambassador to the United States.

As my colleagues are aware, I have the pleasure of serving as the President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE, and I am well aware of the challenges that we face today in order to protect and promote human rights and democracy among the 55 participating nations and I know personally that Chairman Brownback stands along side me in this great challenge.

Mr. Chairman, you will be glad to know that more than 200 parliamentarians from 46 OSCE participating States met from February 24-25 in the OSCE premises in Vienna for the fourth Annual OSCE PA Winter Meeting. The Winter Meeting consisted of two Joint Sessions as well as separate meetings of the three General Committees. On the first day, parliamentarians heard welcoming remarks by our distinguished witness today, Dr. Rupel, who took questions from the floor, the President of the Republic of Austria, Dr. Heinz Fischer, and myself in the capacity as President of the Assembly.

The Chairman-in-Office highlighted the importance of the election-monitoring work of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, and encouraged parliamentarians to contribute actively to the current debate on reform of the OSCE.

I am confident that the Foreign Minister and Chairman-in Office is aware of the fact that the Parliamentary Assembly was not represented among the Eminent Persons Group appointed by the Chairmanship, even though we recommended two people, each of whom is as qualified as anyone else that was appointed. I am curious to know the Chairman-in-Office's views of the Parliamentary Assembly and if they will be conveyed to the Group of Eminent Persons?

Recently there has been criticism by certain member states that the OSCE functions in a manner that favors “Western countries.” I beg to differ with this assertion. The OSCE through its election monitoring, its promotion of human rights, and conflict prevention has been on the side of democracy and human rights. If there are certain member states whose domestic or foreign policies run in contradiction to these goals, then those member states need to seriously investigate why their policies run counter to the goals of individual freedom. As long as the opposition to individual freedom, democracy and human rights is present in any of the 55 OSCE member states than security will always be a problem. As long as there is no individual security, how can there be national security, or regional security? This past Christmas when I was in Kiev, Ukraine, I gazed down Kiev’s main street and noticed that the citizens of Kiev were not chanting “O-S-C-E”, but they were chanting words such as “democracy” and “freedom”, and they were demanding it now.

Mr. Chairman I would like to take this time to thank my good friend, the Slovenian Foreign Minister and Chairman-in Office of the OSCE, Dr. Dimitri Rupel for appearing before this commission, I welcome him again to our nation’s capital, and I look forward to his remarks.