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Representative Jared Huffman (D-CA)”**

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WELCOMING REMARKS  
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U.S. House Committee on Natural Resources*

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JARED HUFFMAN:

All right. Well, thank you for that introduction. And thanks to both CSIS and the Stephenson Foundation for convening such an important conversation.

As your morning keynote, my job is to kind of get things started, make sure everybody's awake and alert and engaged. I could – I could do that, I guess, by leading us in some yoga or tai chi – (laughter) – but I thought I'd do something even more invigorating: tell you a little bit about the great congressional district that I represent. (Laughter.) I hope you will indulge that.

Members of Congress do this. They brag about their district, and sometimes they believe the things that they say. And in my case, how could you not? I represent a third of the California coast, from the Golden Gate Bridge to the Oregon border, and it is a spectacular and amazing place. The iconic ocean views, the marine fisheries that support working waterfronts from Sausalito to Crescent City. I've got amazing pristine rivers where you'll find me fishing for salmon and steelhead every chance I get; incredible landscapes that include old-growth redwood forest, oak woodlands, some of the finest wine country in the entire world. And if you're into this sort of thing, I'm told that the best cannabis in America is grown right in the heart of my district, so. (Laughter.) Probably a subject for a different conference.

They won't let me spend my entire time in this speech bragging about my district, but I do want you to know that if you need more information on where to have your next vacation we've got a little bit of a ringer here at CSIS. The vice president of the organization for congressional and governmental affairs is Louis Lauter. He is a native of Marin County. And if you want some information on where to take your next vacation, talk to Louis. Or if you need to be hooked up with that cannabis, talk to Louis. (Laughter.) Yeah. Yeah.

All right. Getting back to our regular scheduled program, I am here today in my role as the chair of the Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and Wildlife. And I want to talk to you about an issue that we've been investigating in my subcommittee that I think has significant global implications for the security of our country, and that issue is illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing. Illegal, unreported, unregulated: we refer to this as IUU fishing. So when I use that term "IUU fishing," that's what I'm talking about this morning.

It might surprise some of you to learn that my little environmental Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and Wildlife has jurisdiction over several topics, I believe, with implications for international and security issues. I see those implications in each part of my subcommittee's title, starting with water.

I have worked on sustainable water policy since I started my political journey as a member of my local water board in Marin County back in the 1990s. I've continued that work on water as a senior attorney at the Natural Resources Defense Council; as a state legislator, where I chaired the Water Committee in Sacramento; and of course, my whole time here in the United States Congress. And in California, as with so many other things, we are a national leader or at least an early indicator of the water challenges that many parts of the world are going to experience as a result of climate change. You wouldn't know it now from our good snowpack so far this year, but it's just two years since we emerged from the worst drought of record, a seven-year event that tested the resilience of our ecosystems, our water infrastructure, and our legal institutions, as well as our economy. And the water scarcity that California has grappled with over the last decade, as difficult as that was, actually pales in comparison to what we have seen around the world. From Cape Town to Australia, Jakarta, the water-scarce regions of the Arabian Peninsula, drought is driving instability and economic disruption all over the world. And climate models, of course, have been predicting this. They've been telling us for some time that droughts are going to be more frequent and more severe. We know now that that's true because it is already happening. And our security, I believe, depends on our ability to prepare and adapt.

That brings us to the other part of my subcommittee's jurisdiction, oceans and wildlife. And what we've learned at hearings that I've held over the last year, including one on the extinction crisis, is that the global loss of biodiversity is very much a problem for human societies around the world. So the extinction crisis, I hope you will agree, is also a human crisis, if you think about it. More than 75 percent of our global food crops rely on animal pollination. An estimated 4 billion people rely primarily on natural medicines. Illegal wildlife trafficking and poaching correlate with corruption and poor governance, and in many cases with terrorism.

The intersection of oceans and wildlife, of course, is at the heart of my subcommittee's jurisdiction, and that's what leads me to the very serious and growing problem of IUU fishing that I want to discuss in detail with you. Oceans are truly the last frontier – the wild, wild west of our planet. The remoteness of the open ocean, combined with limited data, difficulty with monitoring fishing vessels, the lack of law enforcement capabilities, all of this creates a perfect storm for illegal activity. The pirates had this figured out a long time ago.

Last year my subcommittee held a hearing focused on a form of modern-day piracy you might say, IUU fishing, and we heard about the systematic evasion of global fishing laws. The things we heard, I believe, are shocking. As with any international criminal enterprise, it's really hard to say exactly how much IUU fishing is taking place. But experts estimate that it ranges from 15 to 30 percent of the annual global seafood catch,

that it generates between 10 (billion dollars) and 23 ½ billion dollars per year.

At our hearing we heard from an amazing New York Times investigative reporter named Ian Urbina, and this gentleman risked his life to go undercover and tell this story. He testified not only about the environmental damage from IUU fishing, but about appalling human rights abuses that often accompany these criminal enterprises, and how in many parts of the world the problem is far worse than we thought. His powerful testimony underscored the need to act and to act quickly, and I want to share just a portion of what he said.

He is talking about the world's oceans here, and I quote: "The bottom line is that this realm, which happens to cover two-thirds of the globe, is home to an assortment of extralegal actors. They range from traffickers and smugglers to pirates and mercenaries, wreck thieves and repo men, vigilante conservationists and elusive poachers, seabound abortion providers, clandestine oil dumpers, shackled slaves, and cast-adrift stowaways. Many of these actors flourish in the absence of governance. And importantly, many of them – many of the urgent problems that they are either countering or creating involve an interplay between human rights and environmental abuses."

So the solutions, of course, to this problem are not simple, and that's why I'm glad that an organization like CSIS is here to help bridge the gaps. One thing seems clear: it's going to take a lot of multilateral coordination and cooperation among countries big and small. And from what I've been able to see so far, I think there's reason for both alarm and a little bit of hope in that regard.

Just last month I joined Speaker Pelosi as part of a bicameral delegation to Madrid, Spain, for the Conference of Parties, referred to as COP-25. This is the climate conference. As the – at the request of our host countries – the host was originally going to be Chile. It had to be moved to Spain. So think of Chile and Spain as joint hosts of COP-25. But at their request, this was the blue COP, the first climate conference ever to focus on how oceans play a central role in our climate problem. And it turns out oceans actually have been absorbing a lot of the global warming and the increased atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> that the past century of fossil-fuel burning has inflicted on the planet. As a result, we're seeing devastating phenomena like coral bleaching, toxic algal blooms, deoxygenation, fishery crashes, and ocean acidification that is already making it hard to sustain shellfish in some areas. And that's in addition to the obvious threats of rising sea levels and what that poses to coastal communities.

There was also a new focus, though, on how our oceans' energy can be harnessed to replace some of that fossil-fuel burning; and how natural systems like coastal mangroves, eelgrass, and salt marshes can sequester huge amounts of carbon to fight the problem; and how restoring these

habitats is actually a double win – it helps the climate and it helps keep coastal communities safer and more resilient.

I was impressed with how many countries are connecting the dots, realizing that the health of our oceans and climate are inextricably linked, and that confronting this crisis is a matter of national and global security. But it's also hard not to be discouraged by the fact that the world's most essential player on all of these issues, the United States, under the Trump administration, is not only missing in action, but is actively working to undermine global collaboration and block progress in confronting these problems.

In Madrid, even though the United States nominally did have a small State Department negotiating delegation – because technically we don't leave the Paris Agreement until the end of this year – it was nevertheless – the backward leadership of the United States right now, it was nevertheless palpable. Everybody was talking about it, every country. It caused other leading countries to hold back on their climate commitments. It was the primary reason why COP-25, at a time when the world's scientists are telling us we're running out of time to take dramatic action to prevent the worst impacts of the climate crisis, and nevertheless this conference was unable to produce anything beyond a very weak and disappointing agreement that doesn't take us very much closer to the solutions we know we need.

The growing international consensus about how our oceans fit into this problem was one of the few bright spots I saw in Madrid, and some world leaders seem positively woke on this subject. A great example is King Felipe VI of Spain. And when we met with him privately, he specifically brought up ocean security and the need to do more to combat IUU fishing. He was very knowledgeable on the subject. It seemed to be a personal passion of his. And it's great to hear that coming from Spain, which of course has one of the largest – the largest fishing fleet capacity in Europe. It represents more than a fifth of the European fishing capacity by gross tonnage. And more importantly, Spain used to be one of the biggest offenders when it came to IUU fishing. They have taken action and they are now a leader in the European Union, and that is a model that I think we should build on.

Confronting IUU fishing is one of the keys to improving fishery management in every country. And the reason is because IUU fishing reduces the reliability of our stock assessments, which are the essential tool for setting quotas and managing the health of fisheries. It threatens the survival of endangered and threatened species that are often caught as bycatch. It compromises the functioning of healthy ecosystems and creates unfair advantages for lawbreakers who undercut countries and fishing communities that play by the rules. And by undermining good, sustainable fishery management in all these ways, it threatens global economies and food security.

So IUU fishing makes it harder to ensure that fish stocks aren't fished beyond the point of recovery. And because it is so often coupled with other problems like human trafficking and slavery and other human rights abuses, we know that confronting this problem is not just about protecting fish, it is about human safety and human rights as well.

I think we owe this fight to our domestic American fishermen. They fish in some of the best-managed fisheries in the world, yet they compete in markets with imported fish that are difficult to trace, poorly labeled, and too often are caught using forced labor and illegal fishing practices. The human trafficking side of this story in particular needs more attention because we have a growing body of evidence that it is pervasive. Forced labor and the associated crime of trafficking persists in the global seafood supply chain despite increased international scrutiny and several high-profile media exposés. If you talk to the NGOs that are working on this issue, they continue to report shockingly high levels of labor exploitation associated with IUU fishing.

There are tens of thousands of men and women from Thailand, Burma, Laos and elsewhere that have been kidnapped, forced to work aboard commercial fishing vessels, often toiling without pay for months, years, or even decades. And in many cases, without ever setting foot on land during that time. Some of them just disappear or are murdered at sea. And many of the vessels that are involved in these illegal operations escape government notice because on the high seas it truly is the wild west. They can offload their catch onto larger ships. They can come into port, seemingly with their papers in order. And it becomes very difficult for government officials to trace the supply chain.

Don't think that we're immune here in the United States to this problem. We of course assume a high level of accuracy and integrity in our food labeling. And yet, here in America most consumers really have no idea what kind of seafood they really bought, who really caught it, where it really came from. And that's especially troubling since the most popular catches, talking about things like tuna and shrimp, are among the most reliant on imports to meet demand. And a lot of those imports come from countries with serious IUU fishing problems.

So here's one of the expert witnesses at our hearing last year, a woman by the name of Ame Sagiv of Humanity United. And I want to quote what she told us at the hearing. So I'm reading from her testimony, "A large portion of workers in fishing are migrants. In Thailand, that number's estimated to be as high as 82 percent of the 172,430 fishermen crewing their boats. These workers, primarily from Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos, often migrate informally and thus fall outside of the protection of the law. The unfortunate fact is that many workers who migrate for work find themselves in trouble even before they have left home. It's not uncommon for unethical middlemen to charge workers exploitative fees

in order to obtain a job, passing that debt along to the employer so that the workers arrive at the job already in a state of heavy debt bondage.

One such jobseeker, a man named Soe, left his village in Myanmar hopeful of finding gainful employment in Thailand in order to help his family back home. Tricked and taken far out to sea, Soe was trapped. Suffering from sea sickness and back-breaking labor, he and his friends were forced to work on the boat for two years and eight days. During those years Soe wasn't paid and he wasn't allowed to go ashore. This is one man's story, but it's important to note that he is one of likely millions like him on fishing vessels out there on our seas, catching our food." End quote.

So as challenging as it's going to be to confront the scourge of IUU fishing, climate change is going to make it even harder because it's going to lead to shifting fishery stocks, sometimes fishery crashes due to changing ocean conditions. And this will mean more international disputes. Here in the United States, some of the most economically important fish are already moving out of their current geographic habitats to cooler waters. As the oceans heat up, fish stocks move further and further toward the poles. Coastal communities that have depended on them for generations are engaging in increased fights over who has the rights and the ownership over these various shifting fish stocks.

These conflicts are escalating. We see them today in many regions of the United States. And as these fights begin to cross international borders, sometimes involving countries who are our adversaries, it's going to get even more complicated. So there's obvious national security implications here, and these implications are being felt across the globe. I mentioned earlier that the king of Spain brought up IUU fishing in his remarks with us in Madrid.

One of the reasons that I think Spain's success is so exciting is that the European Union has come up with a pretty good idea for tackling this IUU problem. It's a carding system that identifies countries who are pursuing, or at least allowing, IUU practices to take place. And it's a little bit like managing bad behavior in a soccer game. The referee identifies the countries who have poor IUU fishing protections. They are issued a yellow card. And if the yellow carded countries improve their regulations to match EU standards, they are given a green card and delisted. If they don't fix the problem there are consequences. They get a red card. And that gets their attention, because it means that they are banned from EU markets.

Now, here in the United States our system for addressing IUU fishing is far less robust. In the United States, NOAA is charged with identifying countries engaged in IUU fishing and working with those countries to improve their practices. NOAA then certifies whether the countries have adequately addressed the problem and reports these findings to Congress

every two years. The problem is the system just is not working, in part because NOAA has a pattern of warning IUU offenders, and then giving them positive certificates – certifications for making promises to change, and then restarting this cycle of warning and recertification over and over, without ever imposing consequences for repeat offenders.

Not only is this system ineffective at discouraging violations, but NOAA is stubbornly using a very narrow definition of IUU fishing, far more narrow than the internationally agreed upon definition used by food and agriculture organizations – the Food and Agriculture Organization of the U.N. Their definition includes forced labor, human trafficking, and money laundering, for example. NOAA's definition does not. We know all those problems, by the way, are associated with IUU fishing. So I think we should use the broader definition that the EU does. And I believe it's time for NOAA to get its head out of the sand and join our European allies at the forefront of IUU reform and ocean security practices.

Congress is starting to nudge NOAA in that direction. This year's National Defense Authorization Act included some important IUU fishing provisions, which are a good start. But there is a lot more work to do. Specifically, the NDAA included the Maritime SAFE Act, which supports a whole-of-government approach to address IUU fishing by improving collaboration and coordination among agencies. It establishes a standing federal interagency working group. This builds on a presidential taskforce on IUU fishing and seafood fraud that President Obama had previously created but was allowed to go defunct under the Trump administration. So we're glad to have that back. The new law also directs federal agencies to improve information sharing and improve seafood import traceability.

In addition to improving agency coordination and strengthening NOAA's work in this area, I think we should use one of our strongest tools for leveraging good practices by other countries, I'm talking about our trade agreements, to deter IUU fishing. Looking at the EU model, the United States could impose stronger and more meaningful sanctions against negatively certified countries such as limiting imports from entire countries engaged in IUU fishing, and not just individual vessels. That's part of the problem with our current approach.

We often talk about our trade agreements as important tools to level the playing field for American workers and businesses. That principle should apply to more than just auto manufacturers, agriculture, and high-tech companies. Importing illegally caught seafood doesn't just hurt the environment: it hurts American fisheries and businesses who compete in the marketplace against dirty, unsafe, and illegal products.

I am encouraged that two of my colleagues who serve on the Ways & Means Committee – Chairman Richie Neal and Trade Subcommittee

Chair Earl Blumenauer – recently wrote a letter to U.S. trade officials seeking review of the prevalence of IUU products in the U.S. important a market and also an analysis of how IUU fishing is impacting the U.S. fishing industry. That’s another positive step forward.

This will be important information that we get back from these efforts, as Congress continues to look at ways to strengthen not just our fisheries management but how we use markets to ensure that the seafood we import in America and consume in America is what it purports to be and is not the result of illegal fishing or human trafficking.

I’m currently leading a nationwide listening tour to gather feedback on how we can improve the Magnuson-Stevens Act. This is the venerable old federal law that governs marine fisheries management in U.S. federal waters. And overall, I can tell you that the feedback I’m getting is that the Magnuson Act is working pretty well, but there’s room for improvement and modernization.

The problem of shifting stocks due to climate change, for example, which I discussed a moment ago, that was not even part of the conversation in prior Magnuson authorizations, but it is a growing reality in many regions, and we need to address it. Many conservation groups and conservation-minded fishers are also advocating for ecosystem-based fishery management – EBFM – which they believe is a better way to not just establish sustainable fishing regulations but to better manage the entire ocean ecosystem.

And there’s some new technologies that we need to look seriously at. They can help us manage fisheries through electronic monitoring, for example, reducing costs and regulatory burdens to our fishermen and fisherwomen. Some of these technologies have obvious implications for helping us reduce IUU fishing as well.

So I hope all of this is part of a robust conversation going forward with a goal of making our oceans as secure as possible and bringing the United States into a position of leadership on ocean security. And I want to thank all of you in this conference for focusing on this important issue. I look forward to the discussion that I think is going to now follow. So thank you very much. (Applause.)

WHIT SAUMWEBER:

Thank you, Congressman, for those excellent remarks. I think that was a really tremendous overview of sort of the diversity of issues that we face when trying to deal with IUU.

I believe you’re hearing the reference to November. You talked about how there is this real multifaceted nature of the challenge affecting not only ocean health but human well-being, as you referenced. And I think one of the challenges that we face here in the U.S. government in dealing with these things is that our agencies tend to be really restricted in their

mandates. They tend to think in stovepipes. NOAA is a wonderful agency. They've got great mandates. But they think about fish. But what we are really learning, as you pointed out, is that this issue is really broader than that, that we have a really diverse array of issue sets that come together around this problem. So how do we get an agency like NOAA to think beyond those kind of mandates, or perhaps more importantly, get other agencies to come work with NOAA on these challenges?

REP. HUFFMAN: It is, I think, one of the most important questions, and what's why I think the revival of this interagency working group is a good step forward so we can address some of that siloing problem that you mentioned. But I think there's going to have to be political pressure as well. No matter how much agencies talk to each other, if there's not a pretty clear policy direction, either from the administration or Congress or ideally both, it's going to be hard to get them to take the stronger actions that I think are necessary, whether that is using existing tools that they have to do more about IUU fishing, or helping us build better trade agreements that take us further on this issue.

MR. SAUMWEBER: Right. There should be a real opportunity with those trade agreements I think in building in these kind of priorities.

REP. HUFFMAN: Absolutely.

MR. SAUMWEBER: I'll add one more question and then maybe we'll turn to the audience for a couple here.

So you mentioned our own seafood monitoring program, which is our traceability program here in the States, and it does differ quite a bit in how it's implemented versus the European system. But it does have some advantages, I think. Are there specific things that you're looking at in the coming year, maybe looking towards a new administration in terms of adding in components or how we might improve that program?

REP. HUFFMAN: Well, if we want to believe that the existing seafood import monitoring program is an adequate tool to address this problem, at some point we are going to need to see some consequences for the repeat offenders, and so if NOAA wants to avoid, you know, new laws and new actions of Congress that push it further into this space they should step up and, for example, address the repeat offenses from Mexico and other countries that are just on this treadmill of getting warned and then getting a clean certification and starting over and over again without ever having any consequences and having full access to our markets the whole time.

MR. SAUMWEBER: Another quick point on that before we turn to the audience. I think the — you mentioned expanding the definition of IUU. I think that could go a long way to improving that as well.

OK. Great. So I think maybe we'll turn – we have opportunity for, I would say, just a few questions. Are there folks in the audience who'd like to ask the congressman a question?

Do we have mics? Let's go over here first and then we'll go over there.

Q: Richard Coleman, retired from Customs and Border Protection.

Marine mammal protection. Japan whaling. Is there any prospect of pressure on the Japanese to curtail their whaling operations?

REP. HUFFMAN: I think there's some international pressures that we'll continue to apply. But you're not seeing any significant pressure – at least I'm not seeing any – from this administration on Japan. And it's not just Japan. I mean, I mentioned Mexico a moment ago. The vaquita is probably going to be the next – it's a little dolphin about yea big – it's going to be the next marine mammal to go extinct because Mexico allows the illegal trafficking of a certain fish bladder in a species of fish that the vaquita feeds on in the Sea of Cortez, and we have been completely ineffective in getting them to step up and save this marine mammal.

So I'm glad you asked the question. I don't have a lot of good news that I'm aware of on progress dealing with it.

Q: David Helvarg. I'm an author, executive director of Blue Frontier.

I'm talking to commercial fishermen. I'm just curious in your listening sessions how willing both commercial fishermen and the industry are to kind of reboot Magnuson-Stevens to incorporate issues of climate in terms of fish migration and loss of abundance – decline.

REP. HUFFMAN: Well, it's been interesting. I'm about halfway through this listening tour. I'm trying to go to every region of the country that has a Fisheries Management Council, and so far we've done a couple of meetings in California. We've been to the mid-Atlantic, in Baltimore. We have been to Seattle and we've got some more stops to get to.

I am hearing everywhere I go an acknowledgement that climate change is already having impacts on fisheries management and that we're going to have to address it. How we address it is not yet the subject of consensus. There's a huge amount of nervousness about making any changes to Magnuson because, you know, for whatever shortcomings it may have it is something that the entire community has gotten pretty comfortable with over several decades.

So we're going to, obviously, have to be very careful about how we do it. But I don't see any way to avoid the issue of shifting stocks and other implications of climate change in marine fisheries management.

MR. SAUMWEBER: Let's take two more but maybe we'll combine them because I think we want to be respectful of the congressman's time. So we'll take the back here and then in the middle.

Q: Thank you, Congressman. My name is John Brandon. I'm with the Asia Foundation here in Washington.

You gave an excellent overview of the problem of IUU fishing. But one subject that you didn't touch on, which I think still is important, is the issue of marine debris, not just – around the world and, particularly, plastics and microplastics and how they're infiltrating our diets in seafood. And I was wondering if you think the United States could work with Asian countries and other countries throughout the world to try to help mitigate that problem because it really is a food security issue and a health issue.

REP. HUFFMAN: Yeah. Thank you for that question, and I share your concern about plastics and marine debris. In fact, in my subcommittee we are going to be tackling these issues early in this new year. So stay tuned for some hearings and, hopefully, spotlighting, you know, if not only the problems, hopefully, some solutions to this serious problem.

Now, I am of the view because, you know, when I say there's a climate crisis I really mean it and I think if you believe there's a climate crisis you have to be willing to confront the elephant in the room, which is our desperate need to break from fossil fuels.

Plastics are very much a fossil fuel problem. It's a byproduct of fossil fuel synthesis and there's increasing evidence that fossil fuel companies get this and they are kind of doubling down on plastics as the future, the next frontier of how they're going to continue to make money. With all of the problems that that's caused in our marine environment, we got to make sure we don't let that happen.

MR. SAUMWEBER: And last question here.

Q: First, Congressman, congratulations on your leadership on the Defense Authorization Act.

REP. HUFFMAN: Thanks.

Q: That was the first time Congress has ever done anything like that on IUU and it's really remarkable.

REP. HUFFMAN: Thank you.

Q: The question I would have for you is one could argue that the pollution control laws in this country have been remarkably effective for enforcement and compliance in large part because of the right to know

elements. Essentially, whoever is polluting is very transparent to everybody in the world.

To what extent do you think there would be an appetite to bring these concepts of right to know and transparency to the fishing sector, both domestically and internationally?

REP. HUFFMAN:

I think you're correct about that, and there's a huge disconnect between the high standards that we have for other things that we consume and purchase in this country and our seafood, which is kind of a black box today. So it is something that we're going to have to continue to work on.

One example of this, and, you know, please don't call me anti-science because I'm not anti-GMO categorically. But I do think when it comes to something like GMO salmon, consumers want to know are they purchasing salmon or are they purchasing some, you know, hybrid, you know, grown in a laboratory in someplace that might have environmental problems, that might threaten wild fish stocks. And so I have long championed the idea of labeling GMO seafood and salmon in particular.

I happen to represent a lot of the folks who still fish on the water for wild salmon and I don't want them to be hurt by unfair competition from some of these – what they and many others view as Frankenfish. But that's been really difficult as well. So it is – it remains a disconnect. But I agree with the premise of your question and I want to continue to make progress when it comes to our seafood labeling.

MR. SAUMWEBER:

OK. Well, I think we'll close on that note. I want to thank, again, Congressman Huffman for giving us a really excellent overview and a great start to the day. I really appreciate your remarks and I think it was a really great start. So thank you.

REP. HUFFMAN:

Thanks for having me. (Applause.)

(END)