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Senate Foreign Relations Committee Moves United States a Step Closer to Approval of Critical Treaty

Joint Ocean Commission Initiative Applauds Senate Committee for Supporting Law of the Sea Convention

Washington, D.C. – The non-partisan Joint Ocean Commission Initiative applauds today’s Senate Foreign Relations Committee vote in favor of United States’ participation in the Law of the Sea Convention. The Committee’s actions bring the United States one step closer to becoming a party to the treaty, reinforcing President Bush’s statement on May 15, 2007, in which he asserted that joining the Convention would protect U.S. national security interests, secure sovereign rights over extensive marine areas and promote U.S. interests in the environmental health of the oceans.

“U.S. participation in the Law of the Sea Convention is critical to our national security interests, particularly our country’s ability to move freely through international waters during a time of conflict and in support of global trade,” said Admiral James D. Watkins (U.S. Navy, Ret.), former Chief of Naval Operations and co-chair of the Joint Ocean Commission Initiative. “Thanks to the bipartisan leadership of Committee Chairman Joseph Biden (D-DE), and Ranking Member Senator Richard Lugar (R-IN), the treaty has been given another chance today. Now the Senate has an obligation to our military and U.S. businesses to bring the Convention to the floor for a vote.”

Joining the Convention would secure many benefits for the United States, including a stable legal regime that supports freedoms of navigation for the U.S. military and commercial vessels, the enhancement of U.S. economic interests along our coasts and abroad, and the protection and preservation of important marine environments, while providing a seat at the table for resolving international disputes. Currently, 155 nations are party to the Law of the Sea Convention. Despite a high level of bipartisan support across all major interest groups and among high level representatives from prior administrations, the United States remains the primary industrialized nation that has not joined the Convention.

“The time has come for the United States to strengthen its international leadership role by joining this important treaty,” said Leon Panetta, former Congressman, White House Chief of Staff and co-chair of the Joint Ocean Commission Initiative. “The vote today creates an opportunity for the Senate to bolster our national security, fortify our global economic presence and allow the United States to play a prominent role in global environmental issues. Given pending claims to vast territories in the Arctic, for example, we simply must be at the table when critical decisions on the

use of international waters are being made.”

The continuing delay of U.S. accession to the treaty threatens our sovereign interests, jeopardizes national and economic security, compromises efforts to conserve and restore ocean living marine resources, and limits our leadership role in international ocean policy. Given President Bush’s personal statement of support for the Convention, and broad bipartisan backing from all major U.S. ocean industries, the environmental community, and national security experts, it is clearly time for Senate leadership to capitalize on the opportunity provided by the Committee and vote to support U.S. participation in the Law of the Sea.

The Joint Ocean Commission Initiative is a collaborative effort of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy and Pew Oceans Commission to catalyze ocean policy reform. The Initiative is guided by a ten-member Task Force, five from each Commission, and led by Admiral James D. Watkins and the Honorable Leon E. Panetta, chairs of the U.S. Commission and Pew Commission, respectively. The primary goal of the Joint Ocean Commission Initiative is to accelerate the pace of change that results in meaningful ocean policy reform. For more information, visit www.jointoceancommission.org.