

TO: UNA-USA Leaders, Member and Friends

FROM: Steven Dimoff, Director of UNA-USA Advocacy

SUBJECT: Results of the 2010 Mid-Term Elections and Implications for US-UN Relations

Tuesday's mid-term election results will have significant repercussions for United States relations with the United Nations system going forward. While the Obama Administration will certainly continue to pursue its policy of active engagement in international organizations, a Republican-dominated House of Representatives will likely view the more than \$2 billion annual appropriation of US assessed and voluntary contributions to the UN system and peacekeeping with a critical eye. In the Senate, a Democratic majority will be forced to find ways of accommodating the views of Republican members who, in recent years, have been able to postpone action on controversial issues before they can ever be voted on by the chamber. Finally, the election of House and Senate members affiliated with the "Tea Party" movement will inject a new variable into the debate over America's role in the world manifested by the movement's suspicion of international institutions that are seen to diminish American sovereignty.

#### House of Representatives

With the Republican victory in the House, the key development will be the expected election of Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL) as incoming chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee. Rep. Ros-Lehtinen was first elected to Congress in 1989; she is a longtime member of the Committee, also having served as a congressional representative to the United Nations General Assembly. During the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress, she introduced H.R. 557, The United Nations Transparency, Accountability, and Reform Act. In a January 2009 press release announcing the introduction of her legislation, Rep. Ros-Lehtinen said, "Our reform legislation seeks to provide greater leverage and control over how US contributions are spent to better ensure our taxpayer dollars will fund only accountable, transparent and effective agencies and programs."

A key element of H.R. 557—some form of which will likely be introduced at the outset of the 112<sup>th</sup> Congress in January 2011—is to shift the funding mechanism for the regular budget of the United Nations from an assessed to a voluntary basis. In the absence of implementation of significant reforms called for in the legislation, US assessed contributions would decline by 50 percent within two years of enactment of the bill into law. During the current Congress, the bill has attracted 106 co-sponsors, including Rep. John Boehner (R-OH) and all of the current members of the House Republican leadership.

In the House Appropriations Committee, Rep. Kay Granger (R-TX) will likely succeed Rep. Nita Lowey (D-NY) as chair of the Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs. This important subcommittee has jurisdiction over the State Department budget, including both assessed and voluntary contributions to the UN system and UN peacekeeping operations. Rep. Granger has been supportive of

Administration commitments to international institutions generally, but she will face pressure from those in the new majority who wish to cut program expenditures in a bid to reduce the overall federal deficit. While foreign affairs-related spending is a small portion of overall federal expenditures, it often comes under great scrutiny in time of budgetary stringency. During the campaign leading up to yesterday's election, Rep. Eric Cantor (R-VA), a member of the House Republican leadership, called for a complete overhaul of US foreign assistance programs that would undoubtedly affect UN-related expenditures.

## Senate

While the Senate retains a Democratic majority, the ability of the Democratic leadership to move legislation will become more difficult. During the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress, the Democratic-controlled Senate has struggled to identify the required 60-vote majority that makes it possible to invoke cloture, that is, to obtain enough votes to prevent a filibuster of legislation. It will likely prove more challenging for Democrats to identify as many as ten Republican votes to enable floor debate on specific legislation to move forward under circumstances that include the arrival of senators who will be less likely to cross party lines on controversial legislation.

In the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Sen. John Kerry (D-MA) will retain the chairmanship. It is also expected that Sen. Richard Lugar (R-IN) will retain his position as senior Republican on the committee. Beyond these two individuals, however, the make-up of the committee in the 112th Congress is less clear. Sen. Russ Feingold (D-WI), a progressive lawmaker who was third in seniority on the panel, lost his bid for re-election. Sen. Christopher Dodd (D-CT), second in seniority, will retire at the end of this Congress. Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-CA), a longtime supporter of international engagement who won re-election last evening, is poised to move into Sen. Dodd's position as the second ranking Democratic member of the Committee. With the retirement of Sen. Ted Kaufman (D-DE), several new Democratic members will be named to the panel.

The potential Republican side of the Committee's membership roster is less than clear. While Sen. Lugar will likely remain the senior member, there has been speculation that Sens. Bob Corker (R-TN), Johnny Isakson (R-GA), and James DeMint (R-SC) may decide to seek membership on several other key committees which could require their departure from Foreign Relations under Senate procedures. Decisions on committee membership will likely be made in December.

On the Senate Appropriations Committee, Sen. Daniel Inouye (D-HI) should remain as chairman of the panel, and Sen. Thad Cochran (R-MS) as senior Republican member. The key subcommittee with jurisdiction over US-UN funding, the Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs, will likely retain as its chairman Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-VT), a longtime supporter of active US engagement in the UN. It is unclear who will serve as senior Republican on this subcommittee.

## The Election's Potential Impact on US-UN Relations

While the mid-term election campaign focused on domestic issues such as the state of the economy, efforts to lower unemployment and initiatives to reduce the size of the federal deficit, there was relatively little discussion of international issues. The election of a new, more fiscally conservative majority in the House will almost certainly lead to a re-examination of current budgetary priorities, including the expenditure of US taxpayers' dollars at the United Nations. It is not unreasonable to assume that continued funding of UN activities, whether in the areas of peacekeeping, humanitarian aid, or disaster relief, among so many others, will come under increased scrutiny and, ultimately, under attack.

For members and supporters of UNA-USA, it will be as important as ever for all of us to be able to articulate the case for active US engagement in the work of the United Nations both locally and nationally. We can count on the continued support of the Obama Administration, but it is clear that the Obama Administration will depend on us to make the case for sustained involvement in the UN in order to muster the necessary support on Capitol Hill to make our country's continued involvement possible as well as to enhance it. In our new role as an integral member of the United Nations Foundation family, UNA-USA will be on the "front line" in the effort to inform and educate the public about America's stake in an effective United Nations. Working in communities across the country and in the nation's capital, UNA-USA will be called upon to play a prominent and visible role—as it has done on so many occasions in its history-- in the coming national debate concerning our country's role in the United Nations.