



August 10, 2021

The Honorable Benjamin Cardin  
Chairman  
U.S. Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship  
428A Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Rand Paul  
Ranking Member  
U.S. Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship  
428A Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Re: National Civil Rights, Jewish, and Faith-Based Groups and Community Organizations Call  
for an End to Historic Republican “Boycott” of Highest-Ranking Muslim in Biden  
Administration

Dear Chairman Cardin and Ranking Member Paul:

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, a coalition of more than 220 national organizations committed to promoting and protecting the civil and human rights of all persons in the United States; Bend the Arc: Jewish Action, the country’s largest national Jewish organization devoted entirely to domestic issues; and prominent undersigned civil rights, Jewish, and faith-based organizations and leaders, we call on the U.S. Senate Small Business and Entrepreneurship Committee (SBC) to expeditiously bring a vote in consideration of eminently qualified businessman Dilawar Syed for the position of deputy administrator of the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA).

Endorsed by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Mr. Syed’s well-established record of working successfully with a cross-section of entrepreneurs from all walks of life makes him a natural choice for the position of deputy administrator of SBA.<sup>1</sup> As his credentials clearly illustrate, Mr. Syed is an experienced entrepreneur, business executive, and leader.<sup>2</sup> An immigrant with an Ivy League education, he has been propelled by passion, hard work, and ingenuity that have all helped him become the proven business

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<sup>1</sup> The U.S. Chamber of Commerce states “Dilawar Syed has an impressive background as an entrepreneur and understands the operational challenges of scaling a start-up to meet increased market demand....” “Senate Small Business Committee Republicans Playing Politics with American Small Businesses.” *U.S. Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship*. July 15, 2021. <https://www.sbc.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/2021/7/senate-small-business-committee-republicans-playing-politics-with-american-small-businesses>.

<sup>2</sup> “President Biden Announces Key Nominee for the Small Business Administration.” *The White House*. March 3, 2021. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/03/03/president-biden-announces-key-nominee-for-the-small-business-administration/>; “Dilawar Syed.” *Crunchbase*. Accessed August 5, 2021. <https://www.crunchbase.com/person/dilawar-syed>.

leader and public servant he is today.<sup>3</sup> Mr. Syed has served in the private sector and, more notably, as a public servant in roles at the federal, state, and local levels. He supported entrepreneurs across the country after the 2008 Great Recession as a White House Asian American and Pacific Islander commissioner and, more recently, has been driving COVID-19 recovery efforts in the rural heartland, including throughout underserved communities in California. Indeed, Mr. Syed's success is the very embodiment of the "American dream" and all that makes our nation a beacon of hope to so many. And it is his belief in the promise of our great country that has compelled him to serve and give back.<sup>4</sup>

If confirmed, Mr. Syed would become the highest-ranking Muslim American in the Biden administration to date.

Because of the incontrovertible evidence affirming Mr. Syed's business acumen and qualifications to serve in this role, it appears that committee Republicans have, sadly, turned to character assassination in the form of anti-Muslim bias and bigotry to stymie his confirmation.<sup>5</sup> Mr. Syed's nomination was favorably voted out of committee by voice vote on June 16, 2021 with Republican support, but the publicly reported vote was unceremoniously canceled when Republican senators, in a rare move, vaguely raised a "technicality."<sup>6</sup> As it turns out, we now know that the cancellation and "technicality" were informed by an internal strategy email circulated by SBC Republican Senate staff weaponizing Mr. Syed's Muslim religion and place of birth against him.<sup>7</sup> The email contained not a single substantive statement, action, or even political position taken by Mr. Syed on policy or business matters.<sup>8</sup>

The next day, a press release put out by a Republican senator on the SBC alleged that Mr. Syed's work as a board member of Emgage, a moderate Muslim American organization that empowers voters and works with an array of respected Jewish and multi-faith groups, made Mr. Syed unfit for the office based on statements that Emgage made.<sup>9</sup> This deeply offensive and unsubstantiated allegation has been met with a barrage of denunciations from across the country, not only from Muslims, but also and especially from Jewish communities.<sup>10</sup> The American Jewish Congress issued a pointed rebuke, stating that it "rejects the charge that simply an affiliation with Emgage would reflect negatively on an individual, organization, or

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<sup>3</sup> "Testimony of Dilawar Syed, Nominee for Deputy Administrator, U.S. Small Business Administration." *U.S. Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship*. April 21, 2021.

[https://www.sbc.senate.gov/public/\\_cache/files/5/7/57387c28-e46f-4616-834e-d7222feee167/CD62D69D4B567675E67913493FAAFE31.syed-testimony.pdf](https://www.sbc.senate.gov/public/_cache/files/5/7/57387c28-e46f-4616-834e-d7222feee167/CD62D69D4B567675E67913493FAAFE31.syed-testimony.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

<sup>5</sup> Email from Senior Legislative Assistant, U.S. Senator James E. Risch, Small Business and Entrepreneurship Committee Strategy regarding Nomination of Dilawar Syed.

<sup>6</sup> Chris Riotta, FWC, *Vote delayed on Biden's SBA nominee amid GOP-led filibuster attempts* <https://few.com/articles/2021/07/13/riotta-spa-nominee.aspx>, July 13, 2021.

<sup>7</sup> Email from Senior Legislative Assistant, U.S. Senator James E. Risch, Small Business and Entrepreneurship Committee Strategy regarding Nomination of Dilawar Syed

<sup>8</sup> Email from Senior Legislative Assistant, U.S. Senator James E. Risch, Small Business and Entrepreneurship Committee Strategy regarding Nomination of Dilawar Syed.

<sup>9</sup> "Hawley Demands Biden SBA Nominee Renounce Anti-Semitic Rhetoric." *Office of Senator Josh Hawley*. June 17, 2021. <https://www.hawley.senate.gov/hawley-demands-biden-sba-nominee-renounce-anti-semitic-rhetoric>.

<sup>10</sup> "Senate Small Business Committee Republicans Playing Politics with American Small Businesses." *U.S. Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship*. July 15, 2021. <https://www.sbc.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/2021/7/senate-small-business-committee-republicans-playing-politics-with-american-small-businesses>.

agency.”<sup>11</sup> An editorial by interfaith leader Rabbi Jack Moline, penned in the *Times of Israel*, clearly lays out the “unconstitutional religious test” to which Mr. Syed has been unjustly subjected and calls for an immediate halt to this smear campaign.<sup>12</sup> And notable Jewish groups from across the spectrum, including the American Jewish Committee<sup>13</sup> and the Anti-Defamation League, among many others,<sup>14</sup> continue to support Mr. Syed because they recognize that the anti-Muslim bias against him stems from the same white nationalism that encouraged the insurrection against our democracy on January 6, 2021.<sup>15</sup>

Yet, despite overwhelming support for Mr. Syed from the nation’s largest, most prominent Jewish organizations and leaders, whose *raison d’être* is combatting the scourge of actual antisemitism, on June 30, 2021, Senate Republicans continued a smear campaign and sent an inflammatory letter to SBC Chairman Cardin, continuing to make baseless and bigoted allegations.<sup>16</sup> The same day, SBC Republicans also arbitrarily insisted on another hearing for Mr. Syed.<sup>17</sup> Since then, Chairman Cardin has set up two meetings to vote on Mr. Syed’s nomination, and SBC Republicans have refused to show up for the vote both times. This boycott, tinged with religious bigotry and xenophobia, must end.

Unfortunately, the delay of this confirmation has come with concrete losses to American small businesses — including tens of thousands of minority-owned businesses devastated by the pandemic. As Mr. Syed testified during his confirmation hearing in your committee, “small businesses have been impacted to a far greater degree [during the COVID-19 crisis]... entrepreneurs in Black and Brown communities, rural and underserved regions need our commitment and support more than ever.”<sup>18</sup> The longer the Senate delays its consideration of this nomination, the more that hard-working Americans will suffer irreparable damage at a time when they need your help the most.

Finally, to be clear, many of the undersigned organizations are 501(c)(3) organizations and do not endorse presidential nominees. This case is no exception in that regard. However, we weigh in on this rare occasion to denounce the flagrant anti-Muslim animus surrounding Mr. Syed’s historic nomination. As

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<sup>11</sup> “Forward: Jewish groups, pro-Israel Republican reject GOP efforts to block nomination of Muslim Biden nominee.” *American Jewish Congress*. July 12, 2021. <https://ajcongress.org/press-mentions/forward-jewish-groups-pro-israel-republican-reject-gop-efforts-to-block-nomination-of-muslim-biden-nominee/>.

<sup>12</sup> Moline, Rabbi Jack. “The unconstitutional bigotry of a religious test for Dilawar Syed.” *The Times of Israel*. July 2, 2021. <https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/the-unconstitutional-bigotry-of-a-religious-test-for-dilawar-syed/>.

<sup>13</sup> “AJC Statement on Dilawar Syed Nomination to be SBA Deputy Administrator.” *American Jewish Committee*. July 7, 2021. <https://www.ajc.org/news/ajc-statement-on-dilawar-syed-nomination-to-be-sba-deputy-administrator>.

<sup>14</sup> “Senate Small Business Committee Republicans Playing Politics with American Small Businesses.” *U.S. Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship*. July 15, 2021.

<https://www.sbc.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/2021/7/senate-small-business-committee-republicans-playing-politics-with-american-small-businesses>.

<sup>15</sup> Statement of Wade Henderson, Interim President and CEO, The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, “Domestic Terrorism and Violent Extremism: Examining the Threat of Racially, Ethnically, Religiously, and Politically Motivated Attacks, Part I,” Senate Committee on Homeland Security & Governmental Affairs, August 3, 2021. [http://civilrightsdocs.info/pdf/policy/testimony/2021/Wade\\_Henderson\\_Testimony\\_08-03-21.pdf](http://civilrightsdocs.info/pdf/policy/testimony/2021/Wade_Henderson_Testimony_08-03-21.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> Letter from SBC Republicans to Chairman Cardin Re: Dilawar Syed Nomination. June 30, 2021.

<https://www.hawley.senate.gov/sites/default/files/2021-06/6.30.21%20-%20SBC%20Syed%20Letter%5b2%5d.pdf>.

<sup>17</sup> “Senator Hawley, Colleagues Call for Another Hearing on SBA Nominee After Ties to Anti-Israel Group Revealed.” *Office of Senator Josh Hawley*. June 30, 2021. <https://www.hawley.senate.gov/senator-hawley-colleagues-call-another-hearing-sba-nominee-after-ties-anti-israel-group-revealed>.

<sup>18</sup> “Testimony of Dilawar Syed, Nominee for Deputy Administrator, U.S. Small Business Administration.” *U.S. Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship*. April 21, 2021.

<https://www.sbc.senate.gov/public/ cache/files/5/7/57387c28-e46f-4616-834e-d7222feee167/CD62D69D4B567675E67913493FAAFE31.syed-testimony.pdf>.

leading civil rights organizations and Jewish, faith, and community groups and leaders, we believe in religious freedom for all people, and we urge Senate Business Committee members to assess Mr. Syed's nomination based on his credentials and qualifications for the job, not his religion or background. We call on you to bring a vote on Mr. Syed's nomination as soon as possible. Any additional delays raise serious questions regarding the impartiality of committee members.

Sincerely,

**Wade Henderson**  
**Interim President and CEO**  
**The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights**

**Rabbi Jason Kimelman-Block**  
**Washington Director**  
**Bend the Arc, Jewish Action**

**Joyce Ajlouny, General Secretary, *American Friends Service Committee***

**Jack Rosen, President, *American Jewish Congress***

**Dr. Munr Kazmir, VP, Board of Governors, *American Jewish Congress***

**Jonathan Greenblatt, CEO, *Anti-Defamation League (ADL)***

**John C. Yang, President and Executive Director, *Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC***

**Mara Rudman, Executive Vice President for Policy, *Center for American Progress (CAP)***

**Wa'el Alzayat, CEO, *Emgage Foundation Inc.***

**Rabbi Jack Moline, President, *Interfaith Alliance***

**Asifa Quraishi, Farah Brelvi, Interim Co-Executive Directors, *Muslim Advocates***

**Salam Al-Marayati, President, *Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC)***

**Derrick Johnson, President, *NAACP***

**Marc H. Morial, President and CEO, *National Urban League***

**Mary Novak, Executive Director, *NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice***

**Reverend Dr. Timothy Stewart, President, *Progressive National Baptist Convention Inc.***

**Mary Kay Henry, President, *Service Employees International Union (SEIU)***

**Reverend Adam Taylor, President, *Sojourners***

**Margaret Huang, President and CEO, *Southern Poverty Law Center & SPLC Action Fund***

**Reverend Dr. Susan Henry-Crowe, General Secretary, General Board of Church and Society, *The United Methodist Church***

CC:

The Honorable Charles Schumer  
Majority Leader  
U.S. Senate  
322 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Minority Leader  
U.S. Senate  
317 Russell Senate Office Building  
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