Washington, D.C. *– Nevada Senator Harry Reid discussed the importance of the Iran nuclear deal today in a speech to the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington. Below are his remarks:*

When the Senate is gaveled into session a few hours from now, a debate that has ignited passions from Tehran to Tel Aviv, from Beijing to Berlin, and from coast to coast across the United States will take center stage in the world's greatest deliberative body.

The question at hand is no small matter: Is the agreement between Iran and the international community, led by the United States, the best pathway to peace and security for America, Israel and our partners and interests?

I believe the answer is yes. And today I am gratified to say to my fellow Americans, our negotiating partners, and our allies around the world: this agreement will stand. America will uphold its commitment and we will seize this opportunity to stop Iran from getting a nuclear weapon.

While the formal debate begins this afternoon, the private negotiations that brought us to this point have been going on for years – and the public's review of the agreement has gone on for months.

During that long period, President Obama and Secretary Kerry were clear in their goals: above all, that the United States will not allow Iran to obtain a nuclear weapon.

The United States also would not sign any agreement that takes Iran at its word or relies on trust Iran has not earned.

And at the most difficult crossroads of this time-consuming and technical negotiation, President Obama and Secretary Kerry made clear that the hard choices belonged to Iran.

Now it's our turn. Now the United States has a choice to make: We can enforce an agreement that forces Iran to walk away from any nuclear-weapons program, or we can walk away from that agreement and assume responsibility for the consequences.

We can take the strongest step ever toward blocking Iran from getting a nuclear bomb, or we can block this agreement and all but ensure Iran will have the fissile material it would need to make a bomb in a matter of months. But we cannot have it both ways.

Make no mistake: blocking the bomb and blocking this agreement are two distinct choices that lead to very different futures.

I've spent a lot of time talking, listening, and thinking about the various elements of this agreement, and so have my colleagues. I've heard from nuclear scientists, the intelligence community and our military leaders.
I've listened to diplomats and experts.

I've been briefed by Secretary Kerry and Undersecretary Sherman, by Secretaries Lew and Moniz – the brilliant nuclear physicist who knows more than almost anyone of the reality of this threat, the science behind the agreement and the agreement itself.

I've heard ardent supporters and passionate opponents. I've talked with Nevadans from all walks of life. I've spoken with Israel's leaders, including Prime Minister Netanyahu and Ambassador Dermer. And I've read the text of this agreement carefully.

In all my years, I cannot think of another debate with so much expertise, passions and good faith on both sides.

It is clear to me and to the overwhelming majority of my caucus that this agreement gives us the best chance to avoid one of the worst threats in today's world – a nuclear-armed Iran. In fact, I believe this agreement is not just our best chance to avert what we fear most – I fear it is our last best chance to do so.

Before I explain why, let me first acknowledge some of the people who helped us get to this historic moment.

I mentioned President Obama and his Cabinet Secretaries, who achieved a remarkable diplomatic breakthrough.

I also want to acknowledge my colleagues, led by Senator Menendez, who helped set the stage for those negotiations by rallying the Senate and the world behind sanctions that brought Iran to the negotiating table.

I also acknowledge Senators Cardin and Corker for their leadership. The legislation they wrote created the process to review the agreement in the Congress.

I support this agreement – and the United States Senate will support President Obama's veto of any effort to undermine it – for two simple reasons:

First, this agreement will do a tremendous amount of good.

And second, blocking this agreement would lead to a tremendous amount of bad outcomes.

The bottom line is that enforcing this agreement can prevent the things we most dread – but undermining it would permit those very same dreadful consequences.

And those consequences are, in fact, unacceptable.

We all recognize the threat Iran poses to Israel, with powerful weapons and hateful words, with anti-Semitic smears and pledges of the Jewish state's destruction. No one can underestimate this menace. And no one should dismiss how much more dangerous Iran would be in this regard if it were armed with a nuclear bomb.

We also recognize the threat of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps – the threat from Iran's support for Hezbollah and Assad – of Iran's brazen human rights violations toward its own people and the Americans it holds as political prisoners and those who have disappeared. We recognize the danger Iran poses to our allies, our interests, and our own troops and diplomats serving in the Middle East.

No one is blind to the threat Iran poses. But again, no one should forget that Iran would become a threat of an entirely different magnitude if it ever were to have a nuclear weapon. I cannot think of a single challenge in the region that wouldn't get worse in that nightmare scenario.

That is why our goal, first and foremost, must be to keep Iran from getting its hands on one.

We have no illusions about the Iranian regime – which is exactly why when we are presented with the best way to stop its nuclear ambitions, we must not let that chance slip through our fingers. We must support and enforce the agreement we have reached.

The agreement that Congress now assumes the responsibility to review does a better job than any other proposal of reducing Iran's chance to get a bomb.

When our negotiators came to the table, they did so with Andrew Carnegie's advice in mind. The man who gave his name and fortune to this institution once said that "our duty is with what is practicable now – with the next step possible in our day and generation."

In our day, we know it is not practical to bomb away knowledge of how to build a nuclear weapon or erase that knowledge with sanctions. So our negotiators said, even though we cannot take away the recipe to build a bomb, we can take away both the ingredients and the use of equipment to cook one. That's what we're doing – but only if the United States upholds and enforces this agreement.

The good news is this agreement does more than take away Iran's ability to build a bomb – it gives us the ability to watch its every move.

Through strict limits and intrusive inspections, this agreement takes away Iran's highly enriched material, and takes away Iran's ability to make more of it.

This agreement takes away Iran's ability to build any facilities or fissile material secretly and with impunity.

The agreement Iran signed forbids it from pursuing, building, or having a nuclear weapon ever. There is no expiration date on that commitment – and it is not grounded in any way in trust.

This isn't a peace treaty with Iran or a gift out of the goodness of our hearts. If we trusted Iran, we wouldn't need the video cameras and inspectors and seals and all manner of technology to make sure Iran complies.

We're not asking Iran to promise us anything and taking it at its word – we are demanding Iran prove to us it is complying with every last letter of this agreement.

Before it gets sanctions relief, Iran has to take specific actions. And if it doesn't happen, as some fear, sanctions will be imposed on Iran.

We have done everything possible to make sure that if Iran cheats, we'll know, we'll know quickly, and we'll act immediately and with the international community behind us.

That makes us safer. That makes Israel safer. That makes the world safer. That's what nuclear experts around the world know, what diplomats know, and what the overwhelming majority of my caucus knows. That is why this agreement will stand.

And to make sure this agreement succeeds, Congress must provide the oversight to ensure monitoring and enforce verification. At the same time, Congress must continue to hold the line against Iranian arms trafficking, its funding of terrorism, and demanding the return of Americans who have been taken as political prisoners and those who disappeared – priorities that were never meant to be part of this negotiation but must never be forgotten.

This agreement offers a number of different ways to cut off Iran's pathways to a bomb. There is, on the other hand, one surefire way to open Iran's path to destruction – and that is to reject this agreement.

As I mentioned, the second reason I support this agreement is because of what happens if we walk away from it. That would leave Iran with no limitations on any nuclear weapons program and leave the United States with no leverage to do anything about it.

If we walk away from the agreement we helped secure, think about what happens the very next day: Iran gets to keep as many centrifuges as it wants, and build as many more as it would like. Iran gets to build its stockpile of the kind of uranium and plutonium you'd need to build a bomb. Iran gets to test more advanced technologies that bring it closer to a bomb – and to do so as quickly as it wants. And when those weapons are ready, Iran gets to point them at Israel – or worse, launch them and make good on its threat to wipe Israel off the map.

Iran also gets to kick out the inspectors and hide all of this from the world.

Forget worries about 15 years or 20 years from now. All of this is what would happen tomorrow.

If we walk away from this agreement, the international sanctions regime also falls apart, meaning the tool Congress imposed to bring Iran to the table disappears from our arsenal.

Sanctions don't work if it's our idea alone – the world has to be on the same page. Here's why: America doesn't do business with Iran.

We haven't for decades. But other countries made their own economic sacrifices in the name of pressuring Iran – and now they want to buy Iran's oil and trade with it.

So as much as we'd like for the sanctions that brought Iran to the table to also bring Iran to its knees, it's only with international cooperation that sanctions actually do anything. Like it or not, we need our partners in this effort. And our partners have told us in no uncertain terms that if the United States walks away, we'll walk away alone.

Sanctions have isolated Iran and brought us to this moment. But if we squander it and turn our backs on our international partners, it is we – the United States – who will be isolated. And worse, we would surrender our leverage to negotiate in the future.

Put it all together, and what does it mean if America blocks this agreement instead of blocking Iran's pathways to a bomb? It means Iran gets more money and more impunity to develop a nuclear weapon. It means we get far less scrutiny and far less security. It means we'll have put ourselves at a disadvantage at the very moment we let Iran become more dangerous.

Of course we still have the military option. President Obama has been crystal clear about that. But military strikes cannot solve this problem nearly as effectively as the solution before us today. Clearly, a military option could also come with significant costs and risks for both Israel and the United States. After all, that's why diplomacy is our first resort and the military option is our last.

This is why I believe blocking the agreement would actually achieve the opposite of what opponents intend. Instead of being tougher on Iran, voting against this agreement is a vote against a

smart international sanctions regime, against inspections, against any international requirement that Iran backs off its nuclear program in any way. Blocking this agreement pushes the Iranians closer to a bomb rather than pushing it farther away.

General Brent Scowcroft's national-security expertise served four Republican presidents. As he said, we would be sowing further turmoil in the Middle East rather than seizing a chance and a responsibility to stabilize it. That would be a tragedy of our own making – one we cannot allow.

I respect greatly the concerns I've heard about what this agreement means for Israel. I believe this agreement makes Israel safer, and in no small part that is why I support it.

Over my decades in the Senate, my support for the safety and security of the Israeli people has been at the core of my views on the Middle East and the national security of the United States. From the Bonds for Israel dinners I attended 50 years ago, to the history of my own wife's family, my support for the State of Israel and the Jewish people has been personal and unimpeachable. And I have not been afraid to disagree with the President of the United States when it comes to Israel, whether on settlements or when the Administration opposed Congress passing specific sanctions.

We must build on our firm commitment to make sure Israel can defend itself. It will take more money and military support, but we must provide the one true democracy in the region and the one and only Jewish state in the world with the resources it needs.

The United States must also maintain its staunch support of Israel, including by using our veto in the United Nations for resolutions that isolate Israel unfairly or make it less secure.

I have read closely the letter that Secretary Kerry sent to the Senate on September 2. That letter lays out a number of important steps that the United States would take to support Israel's security.

One of those steps is protecting Israel's Qualitative Military Edge. Another is negotiating a new ten-year Memorandum of Understanding on military assistance. And yet another step is continuing to work with Israel on joint efforts to deal with shared threats, as well as confronting both conventional and asymmetric threats.

I've also closely reviewed the legislation that Senator Cardin is proposing, which will provide additional security assistance and assurances to Israel.

After looking at the letter and the legislation, I plan work with the White House and with both Democrats and Republicans to guarantee that the United States is doing everything possible to protect the safety and security of Israel.

And as the Administration has promised, we'll continue funding the missile-defense system that has already saved so many Israeli civilian lives. We'll also grow our strategic relationship even stronger, collaborating to detect and destroy tunnels used to terrorize Israeli civilians.

Now, after all the good this agreement will do in blocking Iran's pathways to a bomb – after all the dangers rejecting it will do by letting Iran grow more dangerous while our clout and credibility slip down the drain – after all the assurances that our commitment

to Israel's security is stronger than ever – after all that, some still say they want a better deal.

But there is no such thing. There is no more plausible alternative. There is no better deal.

Opponents of this agreement, who I respect, talk often about how very real the Iranian threat is to Israel and the region – and it absolutely is. But for all the talk about what is real, the idea that we can somehow get a better deal is imaginary.

Diplomats, scientists and our international counterparts tell us it is fantasy. The agreement before us is the result of many years of hard work. We live in the real world – and in the real world, this really is the best option to keep Iran from a nuclear bomb.

Let me say a brief word about the details of getting this done.

The Senate, of course, has an important oversight role to play. When we voted nearly unanimously for the Iran Review Act, we voted to give the Senate that role. We voted to consider three possible outcomes: no action at all, a resolution of approval, or a resolution of disapproval. It is absurd to argue – as some are doing now – that by voting for a process with three possible and very different outcomes, senators somehow obligated themselves to vote to advance a specific outcome. They did no such thing.

I hope we can avoid the usual and unnecessary procedural hurdles. Democrats have already agreed to forgo our opportunity to filibuster, and I've offered Leader McConnell the chance to go straight to a vote on passage of the resolution. But of course, as he has noted many times in the past, everything of importance in the Senate requires 60 votes. So passage will require 60 votes.

There is no precedent in recent history for an issue of this magnitude getting consideration in the Senate without having to secure 60 votes. This is not about how any one leader manages the floor – this is a precedent stretching back decades.

Finally, of all the many important things at stake here, American leadership is one of them.

After convening our international partners in common cause, rallying the world behind tough sanctions, after negotiating and negotiating and negotiating some more – the way America acts now will inform the way we are viewed on the world stage and the credibility with which we can negotiate in the future.

If America reneges on this agreement, we will lose more than the compliance of our adversary – we will lose the confidence of our allies.

America led the negotiations to stop any Iranian nuclear program, and now it is time for Congress to reaffirm America's leadership by supporting this agreement. We cannot and will not allow Iran to have a nuclear weapon. Neither the United States, nor Israel, our Gulf partners, a volatile Middle East, or anyone in the world can risk that danger. I believe it is our responsibility to avoid that threat.

Let's heed Andrew Carnegie's reminder of our duty to respect what is practical and to respond with pragmatic solutions – solutions like the one before us. As he said, "When a statesman has in his keeping the position and interests of his country, it is not with things as they are to be in the future, but with things as they are in the present."

The agreement on the table at present is good one.

It is our best chance to ensure Iran never builds the worst weapon on earth. I will do everything in my power to make sure it is enforced and effective – to make sure, in turn, we are safer and more secure – in our day and generation, and in the days and generations to come.