

Franklin Center & Ripon Society Hold Policy Conference in Vienna Examining U.S.-Austria Relations

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The Franklin Center for Global Policy Exchange and The Ripon Society held its annual policy conference, the TransAtlantic Capital to Capital Exchange (C2C), in Vienna, Austria from November 8-12, 2024.

The 38th edition of the conference included meetings, panel discussions, speakers, and briefings focused on United States relations with Austria, the EU, and several international organizations based in Vienna. Among the topics explored during these sessions were trade, taxation, energy and climate change, health care, AI and technology, workforce and immigration, defense of Europe, financial services and banking, and the geopolitical challenges of China.

“Each year we host our international conference, The Capital to Capital Exchange. We believe America must continue to lead around the world. The only way to know the world is to interact with the world,” said Jim Conzelman, the President and CEO of the Franklin Center and The Ripon Society. “We also affirm that politics should stop at the water’s edge, which is why we believe it is important that both Republicans and Democrats reinforce to our allies that there is more that unites us than divides us.

“We were honored to have 36 Members of Congress participate in our Vienna conference – 25 Republicans and 11 Democrats. We appreciate them taking time out of their busy schedules to join us after the 2024 elections. The Capital to Capital Exchange in Austria provided an opportunity for these lawmakers to take a step back from domestic politics and examine the relationships of the United States with not only Austria, but also the EU and the UN agencies based in Vienna.

“This year, we were also honored to meet with Austria’s Chancellor, Karl Nehammer and to engage with multiple ministers and senior officials from their government. The people of Austria fully showcased their unique country and its culture during our time in Vienna. We are very appreciative of their efforts.”

Participants in the C2C included top leaders from Austria’s government, leading officials from UN agencies, members of the U.S. diplomatic corps, and a bipartisan delegation of 36 Members of the United States Congress. The Members included U.S. Representatives Don Bacon (R-NE), Andy Barr (R-KY), Joyce Beatty (D-OH), Ami Bera (D-CA), Stephanie Bice (R-OK), Larry Bucshon (R-IN), Kat Cammack (R-FL), Mike Carey (R-OH), Buddy Carter (R-GA), Ron Estes (R-KS), Randy Feenstra (R-IA), Lizzie Fletcher (D-TX), Scott Franklin (R-FL), Tony Gonzales (R-TX), Jim Himes (D-CT), Ashley Hinson (R-IA), Erin Houchin (R-IN), Dusty Johnson (R-SD), Robin Kelly (D-IL), Raja Krishnamoorthi (D-IL), Darin LaHood (R-IL), Rick Larsen (D-WA), Laurel Lee (R-FL), John Moolenaar (R-MI), Blake Moore (R-UT), Greg Murphy (R-NC), Dan Newhouse (R-WA), Jay Obernolte (R-CA), Jimmy Panetta (D-CA), August Pfluger (R-TX), Linda T. Sánchez (D-CA), Terri Sewell (D-AL), Jason Smith (R-MO), Pete Stauber (R-MN), Tom Suozzi (D-NY), and Rudy Yakym (R-IN). Also participating was former Representative Dave Camp (R-MI), who serves as Chair of the Franklin Center.

The Congressional delegation participated in a number of high-level meetings and briefings including a bilateral meeting with Chancellor Karl Nehammer, the Federal Chancellor of the Republic of Austria. Occurring on Monday at the Chancellery, also participating in the meeting was Mr.



Chancellor Nehammer greets Rep. Pfluger and Rep. Panetta

Peter Lausky-Tieffenthal, who serves as the Special Envoy of the Federal Chancellor, and State Secretary Claudia Plakolm, who serves as Austria’s State Secretary for Digitalization, Youth, and Civilian Service.

Two U.S. Embassies led briefings during the conference. The U.S. Embassy Vienna led by Ambassador Victoria Reggie Kennedy and Ms. Kami Witmer, the Embassy’s Deputy Chief of Mission held two panel briefings on U.S.-Austrian relations on Friday. Speaking on the panels were Mr. Baron Lobstein who is the Political-Economic Counselor, Ms. Elizabeth Martin-Shukrun, who is the Public Diplomacy Officer, Col. Jonathan Drake, who is the Embassy’s Defense Attaché, Mr. Kenneth Walsh, who is the Senior Commercial Officer, and Mr. Kevin Daniels, the Assistant Regional Director for the Drug Enforcement Administration based at the Vienna mission.

The U.S. Mission to the International Agencies in Vienna (UNVIE) led a briefing on the synthetic drug crisis which briefed on the efforts of U.S. diplomats to engage the UN Office on Drugs and Crimes (UNODC) and other pertinent international agencies to thwart the fentanyl and synthetic drug crisis plaguing America. Additionally, the UNVIE leaders informed the Members of Congress about other aspects of their engagement with the UN Office at Vienna (UNOV), including the challenges and opportunities facing the U.S. with the IAEA and the other UN offices and agencies based in

Vienna. Ambassador Laura S. H. Holgate, Representative of the U.S.A. to the International Atomic Energy Agency; Representative of the U.S.A. to the Vienna Office of the United Nations led the briefing with Ms. Lucy Chang who is the Counselor for Nuclear Affairs at UNVIE, and Mr. Barry Fullerton, who is its Counselor for UN Affairs.

Over three lunches, leaders with international focuses addressed the conference. On Saturday, Ms. Aarti Holla-Maini, the Director of the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs, spoke about the mission and future of her office.

On Sunday, two leaders of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Mr. John Brandolino, Director for Treaty Affairs, and Mr. Bo Mathiasen,

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Officer-in-Charge for the Division for Operations, discussed the challenges and opportunities facing their organization as it fights international crime and illicit drugs.

On Monday, Austria's Federal Minister for European and International Affairs, Minister Alexander Schallenberg, spoke about transatlantic relations and defending the rules-based order in times of systemic rivalry.

Throughout the conference was also ten bipartisan panel sessions on issues of importance to the United States and Austria.

On Saturday, the conference gathered at Gartenpalais Lichtenstein for three panels. The first panel, "U.S.-EU Trade," was a panel discussion which focused on the trade priorities of the U.S., Austria, and the EU, and the ways our countries can increase mutually beneficial free trade. The panel discussed how the results of the 2024 elections in both the U.S. and Austria will shape the trajectory of their respective nation's global engagement and trade agendas. The ways in which governments can strengthen supply chains for consumer goods and raw materials was also explored. It featured a bipartisan group of legislators, Rep. Sewell, Rep. Smith, Rep. LaHood, Rep. Panetta, Rep. Yakym, and Minister Martin Kocher, who is Austria's Federal Minister for Labour and Economy. Chairman Camp moderated this discussion.

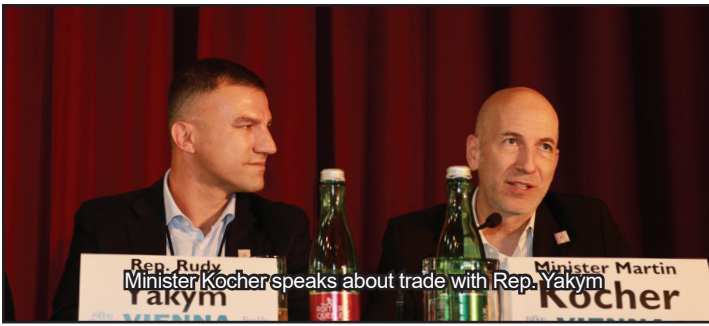
The second panel, "Workforce and immigration," was a panel session that analyzed the immigration policies of the U.S., Austria, and the EU, and discussed ways policymakers can enact common sense solutions to this politically sensitive issue. The panelists weighed whether such solutions should also be used to address workforce challenges and labor shortages. Finally, refugee reforms and proposals, like Austria's ideas to handle asylum claims in neutral third countries, was discussed. The discussion was moderated by Rep. Johnson and appearing on it were Rep. Sánchez, Rep. Newhouse, Rep. Suozzi, and Minister Susanne Raab, who serves as Austria's Federal Minister for Women, Family, Integration and Media.

The final panel of the day, "The role of the EU and NATO in ensuring security in Europe," was a panel discussion about the roles the U.S. and Austria play within multilateral alliances like NATO and the EU and how those pacts safeguard Europe. Against the backdrop of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and other worrisome conflicts around the world, the conversation spoke to how each country may enhance their own militaries in addition to increasing their commitment and participation in such alliances. Finally, the panel explored possible further expansion of NATO in the wake of the ascension of Sweden and Finland. Participating in this panel discussion were Rep. Himes, Rep. Bacon, Rep. Franklin, Rep. Gonzales, and Dr. Arnold Kammel, who is the Secretary General and Director General for Defense Policy for Austria's Federal Ministry of Defense. Rep. Feenstra served as the moderator.

On Sunday, the conference met at Palais Ferstel for four additional panels. The morning's first session was "Important issues for future consideration," which reflected upon the results of the 2024 elections and how they will impact the agenda of the 119th Congress. Specifically, the panelists examined the looming fiscal challenges awaiting Congress in 2025 including raising the debt ceiling, funding the government, the partial expiration of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, and our nation's growing debt and deficit. Appearing on the panel were three Democrats and three Republicans: Rep. Sewell, Rep. Bacon, Rep. Panetta, Rep. Suozzi, Rep. Gonzales, and Rep. Hinson, while Chairman Camp served as the moderator.

The second session that day, "Financial services and the economy," was a panel discussion concerning the challenges and opportunities being faced by banking, insurance, and other financial service industries around the world. The panel also debated the role governments should play in steering their economies and combating inflation. The panelists were Rep. Himes, Rep. Barr, Rep. Beatty, Rep. Houchin, and Dr. Robert Holzmann, the Governor of the Oesterreichische Nationalbank (Austrian National Bank). Rep. Bice moderated





Minister Rudy Kocher speaks about trade with Rep. Yakym



Rep. Houchin listens to Governor Holzmann discuss global financial services and banking policy

this panel discussion.

The third session, “Meeting the China challenge,” was a discussion about the future of U.S., Austrian, and EU engagement with China and the challenges and opportunities which lie ahead. Among other items, the conversation addressed the efforts of major corporations to potentially decouple or “de-risk” themselves from China, as well as the controversy of Chinese companies operating and investing in countries. Finally, the panel explored future multilateral efforts to address the threats posed by China. Appearing on the panel during this session were Rep. Larsen, Rep. Moolenaar, Rep. Krishnamoorthi, Rep. Johnson, Rep. Hinson, and Ambassador Gregor W. Kössler, who serves as the Director General for Political Affairs in Austria’s Ministry of European and Foreign Affairs. Rep. LaHood served as the moderator.

The final session of Sunday was, “Improving health care and pharmaceutical costs and delivery,” which was a panel discussion focusing on what the U.S. and Austrian governments can do to encourage better patient care and health care outcomes while maintaining or lowering costs for consumers. The conversation also explored solutions to the high cost of pharmaceuticals while ensuring substantial private sector investment in innovation. Appearing on the panel were Rep. Bucshon, Rep. Kelly, Rep. Murphy, Rep. Moore, and Dr. Katharina Reich, who serves as the Head of Section VII Public Health & Health System and Chief Medical Officer for Austria’s Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection. The moderator of the panel was Rep. Sewell.

On the last day of the conference, Monday, the conference held three panel discussions at Aula der Wissenschaften. The day opened with, “Nuclear power, energy security, and climate change,” which was a panel discussion about the future of nuclear energy and the role the Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) plays in encouraging its safe use and deployment. The panel also discussed how Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has affected energy security in Europe, in particular Austria’s energy sourcing and mix. Finally, the panel examined climate change concerns, and discussed whether continued technological innovation and cleaner energy sources like, renewables and

nuclear, are sufficient to address these problems, or if further intervention by governments will be necessary. Appearing during the panel discussion were Rep. Carter, Rep. Fletcher, Rep. Stauber, Rep. Bice, Rep. Pfluger, and Dr. Andrea Borio Di Tigliole, who serves as the Program Coordinator for the Department of Nuclear Energy at the International Atomic Energy Agency. Rep. Krishnamoorthi moderated the discussion.

The next session was, “Corporate and digital services taxation,” which was a panel discussion regarding the OECD’s Pillar I, digital services taxation, and Pillar II, a global minimum tax, proposals and it examined how they will affect the tax systems and economies of U.S. and Austria. The panel also discussed how Congress may act in 2025 to address the impending expiration of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act. The panelists were Rep. Smith, Rep. Sánchez, Rep. Estes, Rep. Feenstra, Rep. Carey, and Professor Gunter Mayr, who is the Director General for Tax Policy and Tax Law for Austria’s Federal Ministry of Finance. The moderator of the tax discussion was Chairman Camp.

The final panel conversation of the conference was “AI and Technology.” That panel examined the promise of artificial intelligence and other emerging technologies, and the role governments play in both encouraging and regulating it. The recent enactment of the EU’s Artificial Intelligence Act and the options facing the U.S. Congress as they decide whether to pursue such a law was also discussed. Appearing as panelists were Rep. Bera, Rep. Cammack, Rep. Obernolte, Rep. Lee, and Mr. Wolfgang Ebner, who is the Director General for Digitalization and EGovernment in the Federal Chancellery of Austria. The moderator of the discussion was Rep. Bucshon.

Additionally, to showcase the role of U.S. and UN leadership in preserving global traditions, culture, and the arts, the conference visited the Spanish Riding School for a discussion about the history of and a demonstration of the Lipizzaner stallions. Addressing the group were the Managing Director of the Spanish Riding School, Dr. Alfred Hudler, one of their riders, Mr. Marius Schreiner, and Ms. Julie Dold, who served as a moderator of the discussion and demonstration.



Rep. Himes poses for a picture with the UNVE team led by Amb. Holgate, Ms. Chang, and Mr. Fullerton



Dr. Borio Di Tigliole speaks about the IAEA with Rep. Pfluger



Amb. Kössler discusses Austrian relations with China during the “Meeting the China Challenge” panel



Chairman Camp moderates the Issues for Future Consideration Panel



Reps. Franklin and Gonzales listen to Dr. Kammel discuss defense issues



Mr. Mayr makes a point to Rep. Carey and Rep. Feenstra on the tax panel



Mr. Bo Mathiasen and Mr. John Brandolino brief about the UNODC



State Secretary Plakolm and Mr. Launsky-Tieffenthal



Rep. Bacon thanks Ms. Holla-Maini for her remarks



Rep. Sánchez and Rep. Estes discuss tax issues



The health care panel discuss increasing accessibility while lowering costs



The AI and technology panel



Rep. Fletcher and Rep. Carter discuss nuclear energy and climate change



The Congressional delegation, Amb. Kennedy, and Amb. Schneebauer with Chancellor Nehammer and State Secretary Plakolm