Todd Young: ‘Shocked’ if 60 senators not for Russian energy sanctions

By ALEXANDER WARD and QUINT FORGEY | 03/02/2022 04:18 PM EST

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Sen. TODD YOUNG (R-Ind.) thinks there’s a filibuster-proof majority of senators willing to back crushing sanctions on Russia’s energy sector — a step President JOE BIDEN and his European counterparts have so far refused to take.

“I’d be shocked if there weren’t 51 United States senators” in favor, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee member told NatSec Daily in an interview today. “Frankly, I’d be surprised if there weren’t 60 senators that didn’t think some sort of sanctioning of Russia’s energy sector made sense.”

The Biden administration has been reluctant to impose costs on Russia’s most lucrative industry, namely because it could increase costs for Americans and enrich Russian President VLADIMIR PUTIN.
"Given high oil and gas prices, cutting off Russian oil and gas will drive prices up to Putin’s benefit. And as we have said repeatedly on the record, on background [and] off the record, our sanctions are designed to harm Russia’s economy, not ours,” a senior administration official told us just last week.

Biden, however, reiterated his stance today that “no option is off the table” when it comes to sanctioning Russia. The only option he refuses to consider is putting U.S. troops directly into the fight, though he’s shown no reticence about flowing weaponry and other aid to Ukrainian forces.

But it seems members from both parties in the Senate might now place pressure on Biden to hit Russia where it most hurts. Sens. JOE MANCHIN (D-W.Va.) and LISA MURKOWSKI (R-Alaska) will introduce a bill to ban Russian oil and fuel from entering the U.S. Sen. Dan Sullivan (R-Alaska) has already indicated he would back the measure.

Separately, Young is calling on SFRC Chair BOB MENENDEZ (D-N.J.) to hold hearings on the viability of Russian-energy sanctions.

“This, of course, is something important enough that we ought to be holding some extensive hearings to identify the specific implications this will have on our own markets and on rank-and-file Americans,” the former Marine told us. “But, look, I think most Americans understand that we can’t be funding regimes that are hostile to our own national security and that don’t exhibit our values.”

It’s unclear, though, if Senate Majority Leader CHUCK SCHUMER would put any measure on the floor for a vote without most Democrats and the White House behind it. One lobbyist familiar with Manchin’s plans said "Schumer wants to move something on this very quickly,” and Schumer himself did say that he was expecting a copy of the Manchin-Murkowski bill.

Young suggested there’s more the U.S. could do to strengthen its hand during this crisis. Among his suggestions: increase the domestic production of oil and gas; spend more on defense and advanced technologies like artificial intelligence and quantum computing; harden the public and private sector’s cyber defenses; and shore up America’s alliances, though he said the administration has done well on this specific front.

How the U.S. and its partners around the world respond to this crisis matters, he said, because China still looms large and continues to threaten Taiwan.