

S. HRG. 118-582

NOMINATIONS OF THE 118th CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION, PART I

HEARINGS

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS UNITED STATES SENATE

ONE HUNDRED EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

January 3, 2023 to January 3, 2024

Part I

Printed for the use of the Committee on Foreign Relations



Available via the World Wide Web:
<http://www.govinfo.gov>

**NOMINATIONS OF THE 118th CONGRESS,
FIRST SESSION, PART I**

NOMINATIONS OF THE 118th CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION, PART I

HEARINGS

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS UNITED STATES SENATE

ONE HUNDRED EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

January 3, 2023 to January 3, 2024

Part I

Printed for the use of the Committee on Foreign Relations



Available via the World Wide Web: <http://www.govinfo.gov>

U.S. GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING OFFICE

58-988 PDF

WASHINGTON : 2025

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

118TH CONGRESS, 1ST SESSION

January 3, 2023 to September 23, 2023

ROBERT MENENDEZ, New Jersey, *Chairman*

BENJAMIN L. CARDIN, Maryland	JAMES E. RISCH, Idaho
JEANNE SHAHEEN, New Hampshire	MARCO RUBIO, Florida
CHRISTOPHER A. COONS, Delaware	MITT ROMNEY, Utah
CHRISTOPHER MURPHY, Connecticut	PETE RICKETTS, Nebraska
TIM KAINE, Virginia	RAND PAUL, Kentucky
JEFF MERKLEY, Oregon	TODD YOUNG, Indiana
CORY A. BOOKER, New Jersey	JOHN BARRASSO, Wyoming
BRIAN SCHATZ, Hawaii	TED CRUZ, Texas
CHRIS VAN HOLLEN, Maryland	BILL HAGERTY, Tennessee
TAMMY DUCKWORTH, Illinois	TIM SCOTT, South Carolina

DAMIAN MURPHY, *Staff Director*

CHRISTOPHER M. SOCHA, *Republican Staff Director*

JOHN DUTTON, *Chief Clerk*

September 23, 2023 to January 3, 2024

BENJAMIN L. CARDIN, Maryland, *Chairman*

ROBERT MENENDEZ, New Jersey	JAMES E. RISCH, Idaho
JEANNE SHAHEEN, New Hampshire	MARCO RUBIO, Florida
CHRISTOPHER A. COONS, Delaware	MITT ROMNEY, Utah
CHRISTOPHER MURPHY, Connecticut	PETE RICKETTS, Nebraska
TIM KAINE, Virginia	RAND PAUL, Kentucky
JEFF MERKLEY, Oregon	TODD YOUNG, Indiana
CORY A. BOOKER, New Jersey	JOHN BARRASSO, Wyoming
BRIAN SCHATZ, Hawaii	TED CRUZ, Texas
CHRIS VAN HOLLEN, Maryland	BILL HAGERTY, Tennessee
TAMMY DUCKWORTH, Illinois	TIM SCOTT, South Carolina

DAMIAN MURPHY, *Staff Director*

CHRISTOPHER M. SOCHA, *Republican Staff Director*

JOHN DUTTON, *Chief Clerk*

–

CONTENTS

Responses to additional questions from members of the committee and any other material submitted for the record are located at the end of each hearing transcript.

PART I

February 16, 2023	1
Verma, Hon. Richard R., of Maryland, nominated to be Deputy Secretary of State for Management and Resources	6
<i>Additional Material Submitted for The Record</i>	27
March 1, 2023	47
Murthy, Dr. Vivek Hallagere, of Florida, nominated to be Representative of the U.S. on the Executive Board of the World Health Organization ...	53
FitzGibbon, Kathleen A., of New York, nominated to be Ambassador to the Republic of Niger	56
Kneedler, Eric W., of Pennsylvania, nominated to be Ambassador to the Republic of Rwanda	60
Tremont, Pamela M., Tremont, of Virginia, nominated to be Ambassador to the Republic of Zimbabwe	62
Mills, Hon. Richard, Jr., of Georgia, nominated to be Ambassador to the Federal Republic of Nigeria	65
<i>Additional Material Submitted for The Record</i>	90
March 15, 2023	189
Yon, Hugo Yue-Ho, of California, nominated to be Ambassador to the Republic of Maldives	195
Allen, Elizabeth, of New York, nominated to be Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy	198
Strong, Martina Anna Tkadlec, of Texas, nominated to be Ambassador to the United Arab Emirates	201
Rood, Elizabeth, of Pennsylvania, nominated to be Ambassador to Turkmenistan	204
Sasahara, Karen, of Massachusetts, nominated to be Ambassador to the State of Kuwait	207
<i>Additional Material Submitted for The Record</i>	224

IV

	Page
March 30, 2023	249
Theriot, Nicole D., of Louisiana, nominated to be Ambassador to the Co-Operative Republic of Guyana	251
Yastishock, Ann Marie, of Pennsylvania, nominated to be Ambassador to the Independent State of Papua New Guinea, and to serve concur- rently and without additional compensation as Ambassador to the Sol- omon Islands and Ambassador to the Republic of Vanuatu	253
Dunnigan, Robin, of California, nominated to be Ambassador to Georgia ..	256
David J. Kostelancik, of Illinois, nominated to be Ambassador to the Republic of Albania	258
<i>Additional Material Submitted for The Record</i>	272
May 4, 2023	287
Nyhus, Roger F., nominated to be Ambassador to Barbados, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Antigua, and Barbuda, the Commonwealth of Dominica, Grenada, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	292
Lempert, Yael, nominated to be Ambassador to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan	294
Brown Arthur, W., to be Ambassador to the Republic of Ecuador	297
Syptak-Ramnath, Stephanie, to be Ambassador to the Republic of Peru ...	299
<i>Additional Material Submitted for The Record</i>	321
May 16, 2023	367
Escrogima, Ana A., of New York, nominated to be Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman	369
Johnson, Lisa A., of Virginia, nominated to be Ambassador to the Leba- nese Republic	372
Massinga, Ervin Jose, of Washington, nominated to be Ambassador to the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia	374
Hunt, Bryan David, of Virginia, nominated to be Ambassador to the Republic of Sierra Leone	377
Popp, William W., of Missouri, nominated to be Ambassador to the Re- public of Uganda	380
<i>Additional Material Submitted for The Record</i>	399
May 17, 2023	469
Adams, Dr. Jennifer M., of Virginia, nominated to be Ambassador to the Republic of Cabo Verde	471
Variava, Heather Roach, of Iowa, nominated to be Ambassador to the Lao People's Democratic Republic	473
Turner, Julie, of Maryland, nominated to be Special Envoy On North Korean Human Rights Issues, with the rank of Ambassador	476
Murray, Matthew D., of Maryland, nominated to be the United States Senior Official for Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) with the rank of Ambassador during his tenure of service	479
Johnson, Jennifer L., of New York, nominated to be Ambassador to the Federated States of Micronesia	481
<i>Additional Material Submitted for The Record</i>	494

V

	Page
June 13, 2023	519
Kierscht, Hon. Cynthia, of Minnesota, nominated to be Ambassador to the Republic of Djibouti	523
Ehrendreich, Joel, of New York, nominated to be Ambassador to the Republic of Palau	526
Libby, Mark W., of Massachusetts, nominated to be Ambassador to the Republic of Azerbaijan	528
Kagan, Edgard D., of Virginia, nominated to be Ambassador to Malaysia .	532
Biswal, Hon. Nisha Desai, of Virginia, nominated to be Deputy Chief Executive officer of The United States International Development Finance Corporation	534
<i>Additional Material Submitted for The Record</i>	552

PART II

June 21, 2023	577
McDonald, Kara C., of Virginia, nominated to be Ambassador to the Republic of Lithuania	579
Shea, Hon. Dorothy Camille, of North Carolina, nominated to be the Deputy Representative to the United Nations and the Deputy Representative of The United States in the Security Council of the United Nations	582
Markell, Hon. Jack A., of Delaware, nominated to be Ambassador to the Italian Republic, And to Serve Concurrently And Without Additional Compensation As Ambassador to the Republic of San Marino	586
FitzPatrick, Vernelle Trim, of Virginia, nominated to be Ambassador to the Gabonese Republic	589
Peterson, Hon. Lisa, of Virginia, nominated to be Ambassador to the Republic of Burundi	592
<i>Additional Material Submitted for The Record</i>	600
July 26, 2023	641
Hankins, Hon. Dennis B., of Minnesota, nominated to be Ambassador to the Republic of Haiti	646
O'Brien, Hon. James C., of Nebraska, nominated to be An Assistant Secretary of State (European And Eurasian Affairs)	649
Rayes, Nathalie, of Massachusetts, nominated to be Ambassador to the Republic of Croatia	651
Bradley, Tobin John, of California, nominated to be Ambassador to the Republic of Guatemala	654
<i>Additional Material Submitted for The Record</i>	672
October 18, 2023	721
Lew, Hon. Jacob J., of New York, nominated to be Ambassador to the State of Israel	725
<i>Additional Material Submitted for The Record</i>	771

VI

	Page
October 19, 2023	887
Riley, Richard H. IV, of California, nominated to be Ambassador to the Federal Republic of Somalia	889
Toner, Mark, of Pennsylvania, nominated to be Ambassador to the Republic of Liberia	892
White, David E. Jr., of New York, nominated to be Deputy Director of The Peace Corps	895
Garg, Herro Mustafa, of California, nominated to be Ambassador to the Arab Republic of Egypt	897
Martin, Hon. Paul K., of Maryland, nominated to be Inspector General, United States Agency for International Development (USAID)	900
<i>Additional Material Submitted for The Record</i>	927
November 16, 2023	973
Prescott, Jeffrey, of the District of Columbia, nominated to be U.S. Representative to the United Nations Agencies for Food and Agriculture, with the rank of Ambassador	977
Maloney, Hon. Sean Patrick, of New York, nominated to be Representative of The United States of America to the Organization for Economic Cooperation And Development, with the rank of Ambassador	980
Crist, Hon. Charlie, of Florida, nominated to be Representative of The United States of America on the Council of The International Civil Aviation Organization, with the rank of Ambassador	983
Richardson, Cardell Kenneth, Sr., of Virginia, nominated to be Inspector General, Department of State	1000
Shampaine, Nicole, of California, nominated to be United States Representative to the Organization for The Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, with the rank of Ambassador during her tenure of service	1003
Lockard, Joann M., of Virginia, nominated to be Ambassador to Burkina Faso	1005
<i>Additional Material Submitted for The Record</i>	1013
December 7, 2023	1057
Campbell, Hon. Kurt, nominated to be Deputy Secretary of State	1063
<i>Additional Material Submitted for The Record</i>	1091

NOMINATIONS

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 2023

U.S. SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS,
Washington, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:31 a.m., in Room SD-419, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Robert Menendez presiding.

Present: Senators Menendez [presiding], Cardin, Shaheen, Coons, Kaine, Schatz, Van Hollen, Duckworth, Risch, Hagerty, and Ricketts.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. ROBERT MENENDEZ, U.S. SENATOR FROM NEW JERSEY

The CHAIRMAN. This hearing of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee will come to order.

Today, we are considering one of the most critical positions of the Department of State.

Ambassador Verma, welcome. Thank you. You have served with great distinction. We appreciate your willingness to return to public service.

I understand that Senator Cardin wants the privilege of introducing you to the committee and so we will recognize him for that purpose.

STATEMENT OF HON. BENJAMIN L. CARDIN, U.S. SENATOR FROM MARYLAND

Senator CARDIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to introduce Ambassador Verma to our committee. I welcome you and thank you for your willingness to continue in public service.

You have a very distinguished career in serving, and I also want to thank your family because we recognize you cannot do this without an understanding family. It is really a family commitment. So thank you for your willingness to serve our country.

Ambassador Verma spent 30 years working in law, foreign policy, and national security. He is a veteran of the U.S. Air Force. He worked here in the Senate for many years as Senator Harry Reid's national security adviser.

He is a former Assistant Secretary of State, a distinguished U.S. Ambassador to India, and now he is general counsel of one of America's most well known and reputable companies, MasterCard.

I cannot think of a more qualified nominee to take over the Deputy Secretary position for Management and Resources.

And by the way, Mr. Chairman, he is also a Marylander.

[Laughter.]

Senator CARDIN. Ambassador Verma's father, Professor Verma, who joins us today, provides us a classic American immigrant success story. He arrived in the United States in 1963 with \$14 and a bus ticket and nothing else. No family, no support system.

Yet, he went on to become a professor at the University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown where he taught for 43 years as a scholar in English and South Asian literature.

Another connection—I am also a graduate of the University of Pittsburgh. So good choices.

Both of Ambassador Verma's parents became educators. His mom worked many years as a special needs teacher. They would raise five children, Rich being the youngest. Ambassador Verma launched his career with the help of the U.S. Air Force, securing a full Air Force ROTC scholarship to Lehigh University.

At this early age he knew he wanted to serve his country and that has not changed. We are so grateful for his service back then and here again today.

Ambassador Verma's spouse Pinky's family also overcame so much to be here today, her grandparents surviving the great atrocities in the last century committed against the Armenian people. They settled in New York in the early 1920s.

Like Ambassador Verma, Pinky's father was also a veteran and he also worked right here as chief counsel for the Senate Judiciary Committee. Another impressive family member of service.

So both Ambassador Verma and his wife have raised three wonderful children. The State Department is a great institution but it has a lot of needs. It needs bold, forward-thinking leaders who have a wide range of experiences to help us modernize and have even a greater impact globally.

This committee moved forward and the Congress did as well with several pieces of legislation that Senator Hagerty and I sponsored in the previous Congress that came out of our subcommittee on the State Department.

I look forward to working with Ambassador Verma in his new position to implement those provisions in law. Ambassador Verma is the kind of leader the department and the country needs at this time.

In addition to all the things I have already mentioned, he serves on several important boards, including the President's Intelligence Advisory Board, the Ford Foundation, Lehigh University, the National Endowment for Democracy, and a Maryland company, T. Rowe Price.

Ambassador Verma is the right person at the right time to take on this position and I am proud to introduce him to our committee.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Cardin, for that glowing introduction. He normally gives Marylanders a pretty significant introduction but this is beyond the pale, I just want you to know.

[Laughter.]

The CHAIRMAN. The Deputy Secretary of State for Management and Resources is key to a functioning department and effective U.S. diplomacy worldwide, and there are no shortage of challenges.

In recent years, State personnel have encountered a series of mounting and complex challenges, from rebuilding morale after years of decimation over the last four years to navigating COVID at home and abroad to responding to urgent crises around the world.

And yet, day in and day out our diplomatic corps works tirelessly, often around the clock, to protect Americans overseas, to advance U.S. interests, and meet the challenges of the 21st century.

We owe them the support, the resources, and the leadership they need to succeed because when our diplomacy succeeds the United States succeeds. That is why for the last two years this committee has worked diligently to reestablish the once common practice of enacting State Department authorization bills.

I am proud that this has been a robust bipartisan effort and I appreciate the partnership and contributions of the ranking member. It speaks volumes about the value that this committee places on the department, its personnel, and the importance of U.S. diplomacy. I hope that message is heard loud and clear.

I look forward to working with Senator Risch and members of this committee to keep up that progress by passing State authorizations again this year and regularly, going forward.

Ambassador Verma, if confirmed, I look forward for you to partner with us in that effort because we need to make good on the promise of modernizing our premier American foreign policy institution.

That means recruiting from across America, from the cities and coasts of New Jersey to the foothills in Idaho. It means cultivating and retaining a diverse and expert workforce to harness our nation's technological advances and keep pace with other countries.

It means making a career where you move your family from country to country work for spouses, partners, and children.

It means making sure our overseas footprint reflects the reality of the global challenges facing us today and in the years to come, not 50 years ago, and it means focusing on how we promote and retain personnel so we do not lose talented individuals after years of investment.

Ambassador Verma is a former ambassador, Assistant Secretary of State, Senate staffer. You, certainly, have the experience to be successful in this position. I know that you are up to the task. We need you to be.

More than a year ago Secretary Blinken laid out his vision for what needs to happen to make sure that the State Department is equipped and agile enough to address the global challenges facing us, and while there has been progress I have yet to see the bold action that is needed—the hard decisions, the reorienting of resources to make sure that we are competing with China, the efforts needed to push back on malign actors in backyards around the world, the strategic focus on diplomacy to strengthen relationships where we need them most for the next 10, 20, and 50 years.

I look forward to hearing your plans for how we meet this moment, how to make good on the promise of truly modernizing the department, and support our personnel from D.C. to South Carolina to Abuja to Beijing.

Given the challenges we are facing from climate change to China to the war in Ukraine to food insecurity and global migration, we need to get this right. The future of our foreign policy and national security depends on it.

With that, let me turn to my friend, the ranking member, for his remarks.

Senator Risch?

**STATEMENT OF HON. JAMES E. RISCH,
U.S. SENATOR FROM IDAHO**

Senator RISCH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ambassador Verma, we see a lot of people here with impressive resumes but this one, as the Chairman has said, is stunning, really. How they pulled you out of the private sector to do this is beyond me. But thank you for doing that.

The Chairman and I share an abiding conviction in our oversight role to see that the State Department does what it is supposed to do and does it in a way that moves us as a country forward and we do not step on our toes as we are trying to move forward.

And this position is absolutely critical, as the chairman indicated, in that regard, and as Deputy Secretary of State for Management and Resources you have an important task ensuring the department is organized and resourced to address the multitude of foreign policy issues facing the United States.

Strategic competition remains the overriding challenge demonstrated by China flying spy balloons over the middle of America and Russia continuing to pursue its unlawful war of aggression in Ukraine.

In order to properly respond, the American people need a State Department firing on all cylinders and effectively and efficiently using its budget. For years the department's cautious security approach made it difficult for American diplomats to get outside embassies and consulates to meet with locals.

Thankfully, my Secure Embassy Construction and Counterterrorism Act and the Diplomatic Support and Security Act were signed into law last year.

If confirmed, you will be responsible for implementing these efforts to move the department away from past policies of absolute total risk avoidance and instead get our diplomats back to advancing American interests abroad.

I expect the department to use these authorities in this law and I know you will help pursue that. This is particularly important in Ukraine where we need to rapidly increase staffing at the embassy and allow our diplomats to get outside the capital city to conduct oversight on the billions of dollars in assistance rightfully flowing to Ukraine.

More personnel are also needed to conduct oversight over the economic, military, and humanitarian assistance that are critical to helping the Ukraine people defend themselves and retake territory from the Putin regime.

The White House also needs to stop micromanaging Ambassador Brink's authority as Chief of Mission to get the job done. In June, I visited the embassy in Kyiv and I was really impressed with the facility there. Unfortunately, there were only a half a dozen people

that were there, for obvious reasons. The war was heated up at that time.

Ambassador Brink had just been appointed at that time. She was here when I was over there. We met before I left and I was impressed with the things she wanted to do there and I know you will continue that forward.

Along these lines, reopening an embassy in the Solomon Islands is an important step in elevating historic ties and building stronger partnerships with Pacific allies. China's corrupting political influence and its increased presence in critical maritime areas and its construction of certain undersea cables pose severe challenges to us and our partners.

I strongly support a rapid and fully resourced approach to standing up new diplomatic posts in the Pacific Islands, the Maldives, and other critical locations. Opening these diplomatic facilities is vital. We are moving too slow and not thinking creatively to get that done.

If confirmed, you will be charged with coordinating the implementation of this legislation. The department must be organized and resourced to lead health diplomacy including the execution of a coherent pandemic security strategy overseas.

On the personnel front, I continue to be deeply concerned by the appalling treatment endured by U.S. diplomats in China in the name of complying with Chinese COVID protocols.

No U.S. diplomats should have ever been detained in fever camps separated from their children, subjected to invasive medical testing and monitoring procedures, or silenced when they tried to raise concerns.

But what is worse is that the department legally permitted this treatment by partially waiving diplomatic immunity not once but twice, most recently in April of 2022.

We are determined to ensure accountability for U.S. personnel responsible for enabling this unacceptable treatment. I want to work together to accomplish this.

One thing the Administration could do immediately would be to commit to not nominate or renominate anyone significantly involved in developing or enabling those policies.

This committee must also do our part to make sure we do not reward poor judgment, incompetence, and undue deference to foreign government demands with promotions and prestigious appointments.

Thank you for your willingness to serve. With that, I yield back. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Risch.

Ambassador Verma, we will turn the floor to you. Your full statement will be included in the record without objection.

Please—if you wish, please introduce your family members. We understand this as a family affair. Everybody sacrifices along the way so we appreciate their willingness to have you serve as well.

And with that, the floor is yours.

**STATEMENT OF THE HON. RICHARD R. VERMA, OF MARYLAND,
NOMINATED TO BE DEPUTY SECRETARY OF STATE FOR
MANAGEMENT AND RESOURCES**

Mr. VERMA. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Risch, thank you very much to members of the committee.

Senator Cardin, thank you for a really gracious introduction and I am honored to appear before you today as the President's nominee to be the Deputy Secretary of State for Management and Resources.

I want to express my appreciation to President Biden and Secretary Blinken for their trust in nominating me for this position and the opportunity to serve our country again.

This is my third time appearing before this committee and this has been made possible through the support, patience, and understanding of my loving family, who are with me today.

My wife, Pinky, my children, Zoey, Lucy, and Dillan, my dad, my sisters, my sister-in-law, my brothers-in-law, and all of my family who are here today and who have always been by my side.

The CHAIRMAN. You could run for office in Maryland.

[Laughter.]

Mr. VERMA. I know I sit here today because of the sacrifice of those who came before me. As Senator Cardin mentioned, Pinky's grandparents escaped the carnage of the Armenian genocide and her father served this country in World War II.

My parents fought for Indian independence, helped build a post-colonial India, and bravely set out for the United States 60 years ago seeking a better life for their children and arriving here with virtually nothing.

Their story is the story of the American dream and my appearance before you today is a testament to the profound promise and power of that dream.

I am here because of their hard work and courage in addition to those of my teachers, coaches, neighbors, friends, mentors like Congressman Murtha, Senator Reid, Secretary Clinton, who stood by me. To all of them I say thank you.

Across a career spanning three decades I have been privileged to serve here in this esteemed institution as well as in the State Department, the military, and the private sector and, if confirmed, I will seek to bring this constellation of experiences to this role.

I have a strong appreciation for this committee's important work from my time as a Senate staffer and as Assistant Secretary for Legislative Affairs. In fact, when I served in the Leader's office working for Senator Reid, the staff director of this committee was one Tony Blinken.

If confirmed, I look forward to working closely and collaboratively again to advance shared bipartisan priorities. I know the Secretary is fiercely committed to this as well.

I was honored to have served as the U.S. Ambassador to India from 2014 to 2017 where we advanced critical priorities in the bilateral relationship.

In India, I was able to work closely with extraordinary career professionals from across the State Department and every agency of the U.S. Government to create a lasting impact.

If confirmed in this role I commit to serve the department's workforce here in Washington and around the world. Our people are our greatest asset.

We must train and invest in their professional development and support and retain this talent over time, dismantling any structural barriers that keep too many people from joining or advancing in the department's ranks.

I will support our entire workforce from our locally employed staff, our contractors, our eligible family members, civil and foreign services and to our interns.

Secretary Blinken has also made clear that advancing diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility is everyone's responsibility and I look forward to championing this effort.

I will be steadfast in the management and oversight of taxpayer dollars. I will advance a strategic vision that aligns our resources with our national security priorities and that will be delivered operationally through our workforce, through updated information technology and modern facilities as well as through impactful foreign assistance programs at the department and USAID.

And I will prioritize and advance Secretary Blinken's agenda to modernize American diplomacy. I am encouraged by the efforts already underway to enhance the department's capacity and expertise to address critical missions, to modernize training and professional development, to institutionalize an agile and hybrid workforce, to attract and retain talent, to modernize technology and the use of data and to shift toward decisive leadership, innovation, and agility.

Today's world suffers from no shortage of challenges, from the war in Ukraine to renewed great power competition to evolving transnational threats. One could easily become discouraged.

But there is reason for hope and I am truly optimistic about America's ability to lead on the global stage and to meet this critical moment in time. The America that welcomed my family here six decades ago did so on the promise of opportunity, of freedom and democracy, values we see threatened around the world today.

The U.S. State Department is more important than ever to advance these values and, if confirmed, it will be an honor to return to the department and support Secretary Blinken in his mission to equip and empower the department and its workforce to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

Thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you today and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Verma follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. RICHARD VERMA

Chairman Menendez, Ranking Member Risch, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today as the President's nominee to serve as the Deputy Secretary of State for Management and Resources.

I want to also express my gratitude to President Biden and Secretary Blinken for their trust in nominating me for this position and for the opportunity to serve our country again.

This is my third time appearing before this committee. This has been made possible through the support, patience and understanding of my loving family, who are with me today. My wife Pinky, and my children, Zoe, Lucy and Dylan. And to my dad, sisters, and all my family who are here today as well, you have always been by my side.

I know I sit here today because of the sacrifice of those who have come before me. Pinky's grandparents escaped the carnage of the Armenian genocide, and her father served in World War II. My parents fought for Indian independence, helped build a post-Colonial India, and bravely set out for the United States 60 years ago, seeking a better life for their children, arriving here with virtually nothing. Their story is the story of the American dream—and my appearance before you today is a testament to the profound promise and power of that dream.

I am here because of their hard work and courage, in addition to those of my teachers, coaches, neighbors and friends who stood by me. To all of them: thank you.

Across a career spanning three decades, I have been privileged to serve in this esteemed institution, as well as in the Department of State, the military, and the private sector. If confirmed, I will seek to bring this constellation of experiences to this role.

I have a strong appreciation for this committee's important work from my time as a Senate staffer and as Assistant Secretary of State for Legislative Affairs.

In fact, when I served in the Leader's office working for Senator Reid, the staff director of this committee was one, Tony Blinken. If confirmed, I look forward to working closely and collaboratively with this Committee again to advance shared, bipartisan priorities. I know the Secretary is fiercely committed to this as well.

I was honored to have served as U.S. Ambassador to India from 2014 to 2017, where we advanced critical priorities in the bilateral relationship. In India, I was able to work closely with extraordinary career professionals from across the State Department and U.S. Government to create a lasting impact.

If confirmed in this role, I commit to serve the Department's workforce here in Washington and around the world. Our people are our greatest asset. We must train and invest in their professional development and support and retain this talent over time, dismantling the structural barriers that keep too many people from joining or advancing in the Department's ranks.

I will support our entire workforce—from our locally employed staff, contractors, eligible family members, Civil and Foreign Services, to our interns.

Secretary Blinken has also made clear that advancing diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility is everyone's responsibility. I look forward to championing this effort.

I will be steadfast in the management and oversight of taxpayer dollars. I will advance a strategic vision that aligns our resources with our national security priorities, operationally through our workforce, information technology, and facilities, as well as through foreign assistance programs at the Department and USAID.

I will also prioritize and advance Secretary Blinken's agenda to modernize American diplomacy. I am encouraged to learn of the efforts already underway to enhance the Department's capacity and expertise to address critical missions; to modernize training and professional development; institutionalize an agile and hybrid workforce; attract and retain talent; modernize technology and the use of data; and shift toward decisive leadership, innovation, and agility.

Today's world suffers from no dearth of challenges. From the war in Ukraine, to renewed great power competition, to evolving transnational threats. One could easily become discouraged. But there is reason for hope. I am truly optimistic about America's ability to lead on the global stage and meet this critical moment in time.

The America that welcomed my family here six decades ago, did so on the promise of opportunity, freedom, and democracy—values we see threatened around the world today. The U.S. State Department is more important than ever to advance these values. If confirmed, it will be an honor to return to the Department and support Secretary Blinken in his mission to equip and empower the Department and its workforce to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

Thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you today. I look forward to your questions.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Ambassador, for your statement.

Let me first start off with a series of questions that we ask of all of the nominees on behalf of the committee as a whole. They go to the responsiveness of nominees to the committee and to Congress.

First, I would like to ask you just simply provide a yes or no answer. Do you agree to appear before this committee and make officials from your office available to the committee and designated staff when invited?

Mr. VERMA. Yes.

The CHAIRMAN. Do you commit to keeping the committee fully and currently informed about the activities under your purview?

Mr. VERMA. Yes.

The CHAIRMAN. Do you commit to engaging in meaningful consultation while policies are being developed, not just providing notification after the fact?

Mr. VERMA. Yes.

The CHAIRMAN. And do you commit to promptly responding to requests for briefings and information requested by the committee and its designated staff?

Mr. VERMA. Yes.

The CHAIRMAN. Okay. The nominee having answered yes to all those questions on behalf of the committee so we will start a series of five-minute rounds.

What do you see, and understanding you are not there now but you have been there and have also been able to see the department from the various vantage points of your career, as the most pressing and difficult questions facing the department and how would you go about trying to tackle them?

Mr. VERMA. Senator, thank you. I have thought a lot about this question and, obviously, having the experience of three years in India and seeing the department at work I am just extraordinarily proud of the department.

But as this committee has pointed out, the world is changing rapidly—the challenges that are emerging from technology to renewed great power competition to climate change to transnational threats—and I think at the core of it we have to have a department that is ready to meet the challenges of today and not yesterday.

And so that is what the Secretary's modernization agenda is about. That is what is working with all of you to make sure we have the budget and resources we have to meet that need, make sure we get our risk tolerance right so we are actually out engaging with people around the world.

But, fundamentally, to answer your question, it is making sure we have the tools, the resources, and the training to meet the quintessential and current strategic challenges—the war in Ukraine, the competition with China. I could go on. But that is how I see this job and that is how I see the challenge.

The CHAIRMAN. In that regard the Secretary has created what he calls China House. We all, I think, on a bipartisan basis agree that China is the biggest geostrategic challenge for the United States now and in the future.

How do we equip and resource to compete with China? We just put out a report—the majority report—that shows our challenges in the Indo-Pacific as part of that—meeting that challenge.

How do you plan to approach reorienting State Department personnel and resources to better set U.S. diplomacy up for strategic competition with China and as well—this is a multi-dimensional challenge—to address inroads China has made, for example, in Africa and Latin America?

Mr. VERMA. Right. Senator, again, having spent three years in the region kind of watch the competition play out in front of me and there is no more important challenge facing the country, and the President and Secretary have laid out, I think, a very com-

prehensive strategy—invest here at home, align with our partners, and compete and compete vigorously and responsibly to prevail.

So what does that mean from the department's perspective? That means, again, being present. Opening embassies in the Pacific Islands, for example, is a great step and this committee has been a leader in pushing the department in that regard.

But it is not just in the Asia Pacific. It is also in Africa. It is in Latin America. It is showing up. It is having the resources, again. It is also competing against ideas that are challenging the post-war rules-based order and I think we have to be out there getting our message out, U.S. values out, and I do think the department is well positioned.

When I look at our tradecraft it is still the best in the world. We just have a competitor that is now trying to compete with us not just in Asia Pacific but around the world, and I really believe if we invest in our people adequately and as the committee has done, we will compete again responsibly and we will win this competition. It is essential for the—for this century's peace and stability.

The CHAIRMAN. Towards that goal, as I mentioned earlier, for two years in a row the committee has successfully passed the State Department authorization bill. Last year's bill advances recruitment/retention efforts, updates embassy security processes, codifies the new Cyber Bureau, among other provisions.

Will you commit to the committee to ensuring that the department is fully implementing these laws?

Mr. VERMA. Yes.

The CHAIRMAN. Do you commit to ensuring that the department will be ready to fully implement the amendments to the CASE Act as soon as they take effect in September of this year?

Mr. VERMA. Yes.

The CHAIRMAN. As you know, I have been a longstanding champion of diversity, equity, and inclusion in international affairs, calling for a government wide DEI strategic plan in legislation in 2020, holding the committee's first ever DEI hearing last year, ensuring our State authorization bills advance the department's efforts. If you could just give me a yes or no to these questions.

If confirmed, do you commit to ensuring DEI and equity efforts are a properly staffed resource, that there is transparency and accountability around implementing those plans?

Mr. VERMA. Yes.

The CHAIRMAN. Do you commit to continuing diverse recruitment pipelines Congress has supported including paid internships, the Charles Rangel-Thomas Pickering Fellowship programs, the Colin Powell Leadership Foreign Affairs IT, and William D. Clarke Diplomatic Security fellowships?

Mr. VERMA. Yes.

The CHAIRMAN. And do you commit to advancing partnerships nationwide with the Hispanic Association of Colleges and University, historically Black colleges, and other institutions that draw diverse talent and innovative approaches to the department from different groups and geographic regions?

Mr. VERMA. Yes, absolutely.

The CHAIRMAN. Okay. Let me turn to Senator Risch for his questions.

Senator RISCH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I wonder, understanding you are new to this, are you familiar with the situation we had regarding the waivers of diplomatic immunity during the COVID situation?

Mr. VERMA. I have been briefed on it, Senator, and I know your concern about what took place. But I was not personally involved on this.

Senator RISCH. No, I get that. I understand that. Do you have some thoughts you could share with us on this? This was stunning. When we get—

Mr. VERMA. Sure.

Senator RISCH. I mean, our diplomats have certain immunities that they absolutely have to have and when they get waived it makes you sit up and take notice.

Mr. VERMA. Sure.

Senator RISCH. Have you got thoughts on this?

Mr. VERMA. Sure. I mean, let me also just credit Ambassador Burns for the fact that upon his first day in country he made it clear to the PRC that U.S. diplomatic personnel would not be appearing in their fever hospitals or in any of their quarantine situations, and I appreciate what the department did to actually set up medevac for the personnel.

As I go back, and I know you are interested in how it happened, but to suggest COVID was unprecedented it was truly unprecedented—

Senator RISCH. Fair point.

Mr. VERMA [continuing]. And China was not the only place, Senator, where we had to comply with local laws in order for our personnel to be there, and as I understand it the difficult decision that is made is do you show up for the job in a difficult location or do you not, and I think this is what was presented to us, not only in China but in dozens of jurisdictions around the world.

And I know that is not probably an adequate answer but those are the real-time tough decisions and I think the calculation, and I am happy to go back and look at this, was that it was better to be present than not be present.

Senator RISCH. That is a realistic answer and, certainly, it requires a balancing answering the question you just proposed, and that is do you comply or do you leave? That is really what it comes down to.

I think in the case of what happened in China the things they were asking were just—I guess I would have come down the other way on it if I had to make that decision because to put one of our diplomats through what some of them went through under those circumstances was more than I would want to expect from our diplomats.

Mr. VERMA. Yes, Senator, I agree. The hardship that was experienced by a number of personnel and their families was intolerable and we want to see that that sort of thing does not happen again.

Senator RISCH. Speaking of the pandemic, my Global Health Pandemic Prevention, Preparedness, and Response Act, which was passed with the help and the collaboration of the chairman, is something that we have in—we put in place to try to answer when

this happens again, and I do not think you can find anybody that would think that this is not going to happen again.

We are going to face this kind of a challenge again. Maybe not as bad, maybe worse. We do not know. But in any event, we were very much unprepared for this. You can argue fault if you want. But, again, it was unprecedented and it is understandable that people responded in a way they did in some instances.

What we tried to do is put together a response that that states U.S. policy in this regard and thus the bill, and that, of course, includes the department—a new global health bureau to advance these issues. But what—have you had a chance to review that yet and what are your thoughts on that if you have?

Mr. VERMA. I have not had a chance to look at the legislation specifically. But I know that the global health is the top—one of the top issues for the department and the new bureau will be essential working with you and your staff on these sets of issues because I concur with you, Senator.

We are going to face these kinds of transnational threats again in the future and we have to be ready and so the new bureau, along with the authorities that have come from this committee I think are going to be critically important.

Senator RISCH. I appreciate that, and I think once—the pandemic is kind of behind us now and we are focused on other things, which we have to be, of course.

But in the meantime, I think we really need to keep this on our minds because it comes out of nowhere. I mean, it is like other tragedies that happens in life. They just show up and, hopefully, this legislation that we have passed is going to put us in a better position next time, as we go forward.

We know how small the globe has become and these things happen quickly in another place and all of a sudden they are right here on our shore and what we have done, what you have done, the department has done, certainly, will make a difference in the future for better or for worse and, hopefully, this legislation will get us to where we want to be.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Senator Schatz?

Senator SCHATZ. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you for being here. Thank you to your family. I want to ask you about climate.

U.S. diplomatic posts and activities are not immune from severe weather risks, flooding, interfering with the safety and accessibility of our facilities—severe storms, droughts, wildfires—and increasing demand for U.S. disaster relief resources.

How are you thinking about more frequent and more severe weather events in the context of foreign policy?

Mr. VERMA. Yes, Senator. It is an incredibly important issue. We see the impacts of climate change across the world. We see climate migration taking place. You see instability, civil unrest, can bring down governments in unstable parts of the world.

And so this is one of the President's top priorities and it is one of the department's top priorities, and it is so, obviously, recognizing the threat but also then how is the department going to re-

spond to it and will we actually have members of the team trained up to be able to go out and work on climate-related issues.

And, again, I appreciate your leadership on this issue. I think we are moving aggressively in that direction.

Senator SCHATZ. Yeah. I just think it is important to kind of—to break up the kind of lines of effort as it relates to climate.

Obviously, we are trying to encourage other countries to take climate action. But it seems to me where the rubber hits the road in terms of our embassies and our presence abroad is actually helping our friends and allies to adjust to severe weather, to prepare for it, to respond to it, and to recover from it.

And so I am just—I want to encourage you to flesh out what they are doing at the embassy level and the consular level, and also to make sure that—everyone says whole-of-government but there are datasets from NOAA and the National Weather Service and others, even the Department of Defense, that can inform our foreign policy thinking in a particular country and I want to make sure that it is not just that we list as one of our bullets we hope you comply with your nationally declared climate goals. That is great. That is important.

But also I think to the extent that we are projecting power abroad we want people to know we are here to help you with this new problem.

Mr. VERMA. Right. Senator, I should mention that for the first time ever we have a designated kind of discipline as a climate officer. The first cohort of climate officers are going through the Foreign Service Institute right now.

Secondly, the Foreign Service Institute has incorporated the entire set of climate issues into its training. That includes management officers who have to run the large facilities that we have around the world and understand our carbon footprint, what we can do better, how we work with host governments, but also our political officers and our economic officers who are in country doing negotiations, interacting with their colleagues on this set of issues.

Senator SCHATZ. Thank you.

In April of last year, Secretary Blinken established the Bureau of Cyberspace and Digital Policy, which includes a unit on digital freedom. How are you going to ensure that CDP thrives, given the importance of cyberspace and digital policy and human rights issues?

Again, it is sort of a—it is the same question as I asked on climate. I understand we are going to prioritize digital freedom. How are we going to do that?

Mr. VERMA. Well, this new bureau is actually very cutting edge and going to be super important because how we use technology and talk about technology around the world requires U.S. leadership.

But your point about internet freedom and digital freedom is even more important because as there is more people around the world, over 5 billion on the internet, it is both a tool for development and liberation and information and it can also be a tool for oppression and censorship and misinformation.

And so we—part of our Democracy Bureau, part of the new bureau, part of a new senior official responsible for digital freedom

and internet freedom, working with all of them will continue to be even more important and we see this play out in front of us in real time all over the world.

Senator SCHATZ. Ambassador, in the interest of time I will leave you with a question for the record. You mentioned increasing our diplomatic presence everywhere but in particular that there were some pretty encouraging announcements in the Pacific.

I am a little worried, having met with Pacific Island leaders multiple times. First of all, I think this is a good step. It is better than what we were doing, which was, essentially, ignoring them and taking them for granted and looking at a relationship that with them as sort of a place to park our military assets. So I think we made a bunch of progress.

What worries me the most is this sense that they have that now we have made an announcement, we have checked the box called we are doing the Pacific now, and we will move on from that and go back to whatever it is that we always worry about institutionally.

I would just like for you to do some thinking and get back to the committee on what is the next tranche of executive actions that can be taken in the Asia Pacific region to strengthen our relationships with our friends, allies, and partners.

Thank you.

Mr. VERMA. Will definitely do that. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Senator Ricketts?

Senator RICKETTS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Ambassador Verma, for your service to our country and for your interest in continuing to serve our great nation, and I also want to thank your family because I know they serve and sacrifice alongside you when you do that.

So you are going to be the deputy of—Deputy Secretary of Management and Resources, and some of your responsibilities will include overseeing the department's personnel, facilities, managing foreign contracts, grants, foreign aid, and the acquisition and upkeep of technology.

Roughly, do you have an idea of how many people you would be responsible for?

Mr. VERMA. Well, it is a great question. The department has well over 70,000 people if you include locally employed staff and contractors. So it is a big, big group of folks. But we also have a pretty extensive and highly qualified team. So, thankfully, I am not the only person responsible for that.

Senator RICKETTS. Right. So talk to me a little bit about some of your past experience in managing large teams like that and also maybe touch upon some of your past experience with some of the things we have talked about like with grants, facilities, technology, that sort of thing.

Mr. VERMA. Sure. I mean, obviously, I have never managed 77,000 people before but, again, that is why we have the secretary, the head of management. In India we probably had a team of 4,100 people, which was a large, complicated organization. We had every agency of the U.S. Government. We had four consulates. We had a budget of a half a billion dollars.

Senator, I cannot say that that is exactly what this job will entail. But it gave me a flavor for how the department operates and how we can have impact, and I think we did a pretty decent job of it.

With regard to grants and the administration of grants, I also worked at the National Democratic Institute as a grantee. I was a field representative in Eastern Europe. I have sat on the board of NDI. I am on the board of the National Endowment for Democracy. I am on the board of the Ford Foundation.

I have a pretty good feel for the grant process and how to have an impact and what I think we owe to the American people when we put money out the door.

Senator RICKETTS. All right. Very good.

Talk to me a little bit about when Secretary Blinken was talking about his modernization agenda what does that say to you? What are you thinking about when you hear that?

Mr. VERMA. Yeah. So I hear first and foremost that we have to have the capability set for the challenges of today. So a new Cyber Bureau, a new Health Bureau, ready on climate change, for example.

Secondly, have an agile hybrid mission-focused workforce.

Third, having the kinds of technology that is required to meet the challenges of today and the proper cybersecurity protocols, having a diverse and inclusive workforce, having the proper resources to do the mission. Those are some of the things that I think about when it comes to modernization.

Senator RICKETTS. Have you had any experience working with any sort of process improvement methodologies? And the reason I ask this question is as governor one of the things I brought to the state of Nebraska was Lean Six Sigma and that is one of the methodologies but there is a number of them out there that really works with your frontline people and teams to be able to figure out how we can do a better job providing services and also lets you keep control of your costs as well.

Do you have any experience with any of those kind of methodologies? I know you were in the private sector at MasterCard but did your job involve that at all?

Mr. VERMA. I do not know if it is credible to say I have an industrial engineering degree as well from about 35, 40 years ago.

But no, I think, look, this is why we have teams of experts to go out and make sure that when we procure services we are doing them with the—having the greatest impact and the greatest efficiency, that we use data to make decision making.

And, again, Senator I would not presume to know what our teams of people know. It is even more complicated for the department because we are in places that are not often permissive, that do not often want us there, and so the security situation becomes quite difficult. So there is a lot of factors that go in to State Department procurement that are incredibly complicated.

I would also say it has been a department that was under resourced for far too long. Now, that has started to change but I think we are in a far better place than where we were. But I take the thrust of your question, which is make sure you are doing it right when you are spending the money.

Senator RICKETTS. Yeah, absolutely. It is about leveraging better technology and better processes, reducing the number of steps, for example, to take—to do the kind of average things that you do on an operational basis.

In the state of Nebraska we created a center of operational excellence to train all of our teammates on how to do that and it is one of the things that I did not see in Secretary Blinken's talk about the modernization agenda is about being able to be effective and efficient in controlling costs.

I would ask you to really think about that as you are—presuming you get confirmed here about how you can help drive that, especially with your background, to be able to make sure that the dollars that we are responsible for are being employed in the most effective and efficient way.

Thank you.

Mr. VERMA. It is a great point. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Senator Coons?

Senator COONS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and, Mr. Chairman, thank you for your focus on driving a State authorization bill every year.

I think you and the ranking member and the members of this committee have a real opportunity here and, in particular, in close consultation with Ambassador Verma, should he be confirmed—and I look forward to supporting your nomination—to focus on some of the operational issues that Senator Ricketts was just raising, issues around workforce, recruitment, retention, diversity, whether or not the embassies we have around the world are striking the right balance between security and engagement, whether or not we are finding the right people for the right roles and whether given some of the very demanding environments in which our diplomats operate whether or not we are making it an attractive work environment and a successful and productive career environment.

If I could, from the modernization initiative, Mr. Ambassador, modernizing training and professional development and shifting the State Department's culture toward decisive leadership and agility.

I, as a county executive, had a responsibility over the arc of 10 years in county government for a workforce that was very bureaucratic, very heavily controlled by a series of civil service protections.

Hiring was very difficult. Knowledge transfer was difficult. There was not a lot of, I would say, decisive agility, and the training and professional development and the ability to deliver customer services well was something I also focused a lot on.

We did end up with some greenbelts from Six Sigma training in partnership with DuPont. I think I succeeded mostly in confusing the county employees who I encouraged to participate in this. I came out of a manufacturing background.

There are disciplines and there are experts in how to motivate and engage and mobilize and sustain global workforces from diverse backgrounds. I would be interested in where you think we might make the greatest contributions to sustaining a high-quality and effective workforce but making progress in these two areas, in

training and professional development and in shifting culture towards leadership and agility. Both of these interest me a great deal.

Mr. VERMA. Senator, on the second one, on shifting the culture on more kind of decisive leadership and leading in the face of risk and not being risk averse, again, I will tell you from my experience in New Delhi I saw a very engaged and active State Department that wanted to be everywhere.

In fact, we went to every Indian state, the first time a mission had done that. We landed on three aircraft carriers. We flew over the Himalayas. We were on the border—contested border with China.

Now, that was what the department wanted to do and I think that is the culture of the department. They do not want to be behind big walls. They do not want to be away from city centers, and over time the pendulum swung back to kind of the kind of risk aversion as opposed to leading in the face of risk and I think the department's heart and gut is really about being out and being engaged.

I am actually quite confident on that if we do it right and, again, taking the safety and security of our families and the workforce top of mind, there is a way to do this and I think it fits well with the culture.

On the training and professional development, I think good progress has been made, actually. There is now for the first time ever 1,100 members of the Foreign Service in a training float for four to six months where they will actually get professional training.

We have new mid-level training for folks and this is actually important not only to give people the skills, it also is a retention factor as well. So I could not agree with you more. There is a lot we can do in this area.

I continue to believe this is the best diplomatic corps in the world. But they want and deserve these kinds of up-to-date training modules, which I think we can deliver.

Senator COONS. Thank you. As the chairman of the Appropriations Subcommittee that funds the State Department I look forward to working more closely with you.

I think there has been a lot of discussion about risk tolerance in some of the more challenging posts in Chad, in Mali, in other countries I visited in recent years.

We had built in some cases around the continent of Africa new fortresses well removed from the downtown, better protected against potential attack. But I met with career professionals who were deeply frustrated at the inability to go out and engage and have an impact, and we face a strategic competitor in China that is flooding the zone with agile and engaged diplomats and development professionals and we need to meet that challenge in a way that strikes the right risk tolerance.

I think the department may have over learned some lessons from recent years and I think we have a role to play in providing resources, staffing, and direction on how to strike that risk tolerance balance.

Mr. VERMA. Senator, I agree with you and I do think it is changing. I understand last year alone 95 percent of all requests made to diplomatic security to move around were approved. So that is a good indicator.

Senator COONS. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Senator Hagerty?

Senator HAGERTY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ambassador Verma, welcome. It is good to see you again.

Mr. VERMA. Good to see you.

Senator HAGERTY. If confirmed, Ambassador Verma, like so many other members of this committee I am looking forward to working with you on the modernization of the State Department.

But before we get into that topic, I just want to make certain that we are on the same page on an issue that I discussed with the former holder of this office back in October of 2021 and that issue is a controversial plan by the Biden administration to reopen a U.S. consulate for the Palestinians in Jerusalem.

And I would like to say this, that such a move is strongly opposed by the Israeli Government. It would basically establish a second competing U.S. mission in the capital city—Israel's eternal capital city.

I would like to go back to the question that I asked then Deputy Secretary of State Brian McKeon and repeat what I asked him.

Is it your understanding that under U.S. and international law the Government of Israel would have to provide its affirmative consent before the United States could reopen the U.S. consulate to the Palestinians in Jerusalem? Or does the Biden administration believe they can move forward to establish a second U.S. mission in the Israel capital city of Jerusalem without the consent of the Government of Israel?

At the time, Deputy Secretary McKeon answered, and I quote, "Yes, that is my understanding, that we need the consent of the host Government to open a diplomatic facility." That is the end of the quote.

Ambassador Verma, I just simply want to ask you whether you agree with then Deputy Secretary McKeon's answer.

Mr. VERMA. That is my understanding as well, Senator.

Senator HAGERTY. Okay. Good. I just wanted to make certain that we had that understanding.

To make certain that the Biden administration does not subvert the law I am going to plan to reintroduce my Upholding the 1995 Jerusalem Embassy Law Act this Congress and ensure that there is only one U.S. mission—U.S. embassy to Israel that is resident in Israel's eternal and indivisible capital.

To turn to State Department modernization, Ambassador, Senator Cardin and I worked very hard in this committee to include the Commission on Reform and Modernization of the Department of State in last year's State reauthorization law, and I want to thank Chairman Menendez and Ranking Member Risch for their support.

The commission is authorized to conduct a comprehensive review and offer legislative proposals to modernize the State Department. For the commission to be successful it is going to require close co-

operation from the State Department, and I appreciate your and Secretary Tony Blinken's commitment to prioritizing modernization of American diplomacy in your opening statement.

Now, Ambassador Verma, I just want to make certain that you support the objectives of this commission and to get your commitment to working with the commission and all the matters that are related to the law that created it.

Mr. VERMA. Absolutely, Senator—

Senator HAGERTY. Excellent.

Mr. VERMA [continuing]. And will work closely with the commission and look forward to that.

Senator HAGERTY. Certainly. And one other related question to that. If you are confirmed will you support the inclusion of the commission in the President's fiscal year 2024 budget?

Mr. VERMA. I would presume—yes. In order for the commission to do its work I assume it needs to be funded. But I will also say I am not close enough to what was actually in the budget this year in terms of what was requested.

Senator HAGERTY. I understand. I think your presumption, though, is a very logical one. It absolutely needs to be included if it is going to be operative and I think that shows me your instincts are like mine. You want to see something get done and have the resources to do it.

I would say that—Senator Cardin, I believe, joins me in this—we are very enthusiastic about the potential here. We look forward to working with a great team of people like you. I believe that our State Department and our diplomats are the best in the world and we want to see them properly resourced as agile, as Senator Coons said, and effective as they possibly can be. I am looking forward to working with you and spending a lot more time in the details on this.

Thank you very much. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. VERMA. Appreciate it.

Senator COONS [presiding]. Thank you, sir.

Senator Duckworth? Yes.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I know you and the Chairman have talked about the importance of resourcing our missions in the Indo-Pacific and I think that was a very important conversation.

I just want to emphasize the importance of that particularly with regards to the ASEAN mission itself. I hope your commitment there also extends to Southeast Asia. I believe strongly in the importance of the role that ASEAN plays in regional stability and believe we should be strengthening our partnerships with ASEAN.

That is why I am going to be traveling to Jakarta this coming week and it is also why when I am there I am going to be specifically visiting the mission—the ASEAN mission itself—and to also meet with ASEAN member country leadership.

I will be discussing supply chain transparency, economic cooperation, trade facilitation, labor practices, and defense of maritime security. I look forward to bringing these discussions back to inform my work on this issue.

I just want to emphasize the importance of ASEAN.

Mr. VERMA. Senator, I could not agree more with you and I think it is an incredibly important part of the world, getting even more important. ASEAN and our ASEAN friends and partners are—again, are critically important and I look forward to hearing about your trip and some of the learnings when you come back.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you.

I am going to shift gears a little bit, and it is unfortunate that Senator Hagerty has left because I was going to give him some kudos.

One issue that has come up repeatedly in my discussion with our various missions around the world is the problem of accessibility at overseas missions and residences. While the State Department has made considerable efforts to incorporate accessibility features into new design and construction, it has devoted far fewer resources to upgrading existing facilities.

I remember on a trip to Japan when Ambassador Hagerty was there—where my colleague was the Ambassador to Japan and one of the staff members there, when I said there are no accessible bathrooms that I can get to, the response was, oh, we are in Japan. This is not the ADA. It does not apply to Japan. And I said this is American soil. This is the U.S. Embassy.

And under then Ambassador Hagerty's leadership they actually went through and fixed everything. So it was quite wonderful.

But I just found out again since his tenure there the bathroom in the ambassador's residence is still not accessible. They have put grab bars and all the stuff in there but the door is still not within ADA—is not in compliance with the ADA.

The lack of accessibility at so many of our facilities is a serious obstacle to the full participation of people with disabilities who want to serve their nation and advance U.S. policy overseas.

It also makes it extremely difficult for nondisabled individuals with family members who are disabled to be able to serve our government overseas. Because it is difficult to find accessible facilities in homes abroad our nation's diplomats often have to make very tough choices and we must make sure that the best, most qualified people are posted to each of our missions. But they cannot do that and they cannot go to the countries where we need them to if such barriers are getting in their way.

If confirmed, what steps will you take to make sure that our overseas missions and residences are fully accessible in compliance with the ADA—it has been 32 years since ADA passed—to all U.S. governmental employees and their families, and will you commit to working with me to make concrete progress towards achieving full accessibility?

Mr. VERMA. Yes, Senator, absolutely, a hundred percent and I—it is an incredibly important issue.

As you probably know, our facilities are not as up-to-date as they should be and this is from a variety of perspectives, and so we need to make sure that our people are not limited in any way by the facilities where they serve.

I look forward to working with you closely on it and I will say even more than that. I think accessibility, as you have pointed out many times, is only part of the answer. There is also making sure that we are promoting and retaining and recognizing and advancing

ing people with disabilities throughout the State Department. I look forward to working with you on that as well.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you.

I would also like to ask you about accessibility and the prioritization of disability rights within the State Department here at home.

As you know, it is one of the things to be in compliance with the law but it is another to encourage and cultivate a culture that welcomes values and empowers people with disabilities.

What actions will you take, if confirmed, to foster such a culture at the State Department here at home?

Mr. VERMA. Yeah. Again, I will just restate this is important to me personally and I will make sure that this is a priority on my team and I already know it is a priority for Secretary Blinken.

I have seen the DEIA strategic plan. I have seen the detailed benchmarks that they are putting in place, some 200 measurable performance measurements on this scale. So accessibility but, again, the whole suite of kind of issues that go with it are going to be very, very important, if confirmed.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you. I yield back, Chairman.

Senator COONS. Thank you, Senator Duckworth.

I will tell you I met with a U.S. Ambassador yesterday who raised this exact issue about making reasonable investments to ensure that there is accessibility in our facilities.

Senator Shaheen?

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you. Congratulations—Mr. Verma: Thank you.

Senator SHAHEEN.—Ambassador Verma, and thank you for your willingness to continue to serve this country.

I would actually like to begin with an issue that we discussed when we met last week. I know it is not directly within your portfolio but as the former ambassador to India can you talk about why this Senate needs to act to confirm an ambassador to the country of India, the largest democracy in the world?

Mr. VERMA. I will just say, Senator, I continue to believe this is the defining partnership for this century. The relationship is so consequential in so many ways and having a senior official on the ground that represents the President makes a big difference.

And so I think everyone, hopefully, appreciates the urgency with the need to put someone there as soon as possible. It is also, I would say, a morale issue for the team but, more importantly, just delivering on the President's priorities.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you. Hopefully, we will see some action soon.

Another area where, sadly, the Senate has been lacking in its responsibility is in confirming an ambassador to head the Office of Global Women's Issues. That office has been without an ambassador for five of the last six years.

Without that ambassador, it is—the office is inhibited in its ability to ensure that a gender lens policy is done throughout our Department of State and in terms of our foreign policy, and I wonder if you could comment first on why having that gender lens on our foreign policy is important and, secondly, how you would see working with Secretary Blinken and a future ambassador of global

women's issues to engage in having that gender lens on all aspects of our foreign policy.

Mr. VERMA. Senator, it is so important, and from the President early on through his leadership and the Secretary has made gender equality and fighting gender discrimination around the world a foreign policy priority, and when women and girls cannot reach their full potential those countries are not as successful. They are not as impactful. They are generally not as democratic, and so it is a key component of our foreign policy.

The position that that you mentioned, the global coordinator for women's issues, is so essential to make sure that we continue to have it at the forefront.

I know it is a super high priority for the Secretary. It will be for me. It was when I was in India and we were carrying out the agenda there. And so this has been a high commitment for me and it will continue to be.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you very much and, hopefully, we can see some movement on that appointment as well.

We have had a law around women, peace, and security since 2017, recognizing that having women at the table as we are looking at conflict areas and looking at how we address peace and stability throughout the world it is very important to have women as part of that.

I understand that a number of your questions have been around diversity and equity and inclusion at the State Department. How do you see the women, peace, and security initiative being integrated into those efforts to address diversity and equity?

Mr. VERMA. It is absolutely essential and it goes along with the—again, the national strategy on gender equality. It goes along with our own department's strategy on women and girls, as I said.

But, again, having women at the table on the key issues of the day in senior leadership positions, I think the Secretary has demonstrated that with his appointments, frankly, within the department and that will continue.

But we also have work to do to make sure in the senior and mid-level components of the department that there is greater parity—gender parity—and, again, still a journey. We are not where we need to be and we have to do a better job.

I just want to thank you for everything you have done to call out this issue and all I can say is I look forward to working with you as we give the department even more of a focus on this.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you very much.

I am almost out of time but I just want to raise another issue that we discussed when we met and that is around the Afghan SIV process.

Since the U.S. left Afghanistan in August of 2021 there have been 200 to 300 reports of credible—Taliban murdering Afghans who worked with the United States Government and our allies in Afghanistan.

This comes when, according to State's reporting, only 2,646 SIV applications were issued in fiscal year 2022 and that compares to 3,626 visas in 2016 and 4,120 in 2017.

We are not doing what we need to do in this area. We talked about that when we met. I know you understand that. But we have got to do better.

It is just not acceptable that we are doing worse now in terms of those SIV applications, given all of the attention that has happened on Afghanistan in the last few years.

So I would just say to you I hope you will take that as a directive from Congress to address that.

Mr. VERMA. I absolutely will, Senator. I know how important this is and I know how many people are now charged with making sure we are living up to that commitment to our Afghan partners and friends and there is a lot of resources being put at this. There is a new unit in Doha, as you know. There are thousands of people in the process.

I know it is difficult. There is also a security element to this that we cannot underlook as well. But I take your directive quite seriously.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Senator KAINE [presiding]. Senator Van Hollen?

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and Ambassador Verma, it is great to see you. Great to have a fellow Marylander at least now here. Thanks for your service on the Hill and your previous service as Ambassador to India, among other posts.

And I do want to second what Senator Shaheen and maybe others have said about the importance of us confirming an ambassador right away to represent the United States in New Delhi, as you did so ably.

I want to raise a couple issues with you in my time. One has to do with the passage of the Foreign Service Families Act. I co-chair along with Senator Sullivan the bipartisan Foreign Service Caucus and we are very focused on trying to make sure we have strong morale in the Foreign Service and the State Department overall.

We passed something called the Foreign Service Families Act as part of the last State Department authorization bill that was included in the NDAA and I look forward to working with you and your team to implement it.

My staff has asked for a report on the implementation and so I just look forward to working with your team on that process. The idea is to extend some of the same benefits to Foreign Service families that military families enjoy. That is one aspect of it.

I just look for your commitment to make sure that we fully implement that act.

Mr. VERMA. Hundred percent. Absolutely.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Appreciate that.

Let me turn now to consular services. Look, we went through a COVID pandemic. Understand that there were delays on both issuing U.S. citizens passports and also issuing foreigners, including a lot of family members with loved ones who are U.S. citizens.

I understand the delays, but the delays have been continuing and this is no hit on the people who are working every day very hard to try to process the passports and nonimmigrant and immigrant visas.

They are just under resourced and it really ends up, I think, hurting the United States when people are able to travel to other countries—they want to come to the United States but they are able—other countries but just cannot get a nonimmigrant visa. And then, of course, there are people who would like to come, for example, from India to see their relatives in Maryland for a wedding or for a funeral.

Do you have any idea what the current wait time is for a non-immigrant visa in New Delhi?

Mr. VERMA. It is too long, Senator.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. It is 612 days. I mean, I do not know how many people plan weddings, you know, two weeks ahead. Certainly, people do not plan their funerals.

It is just really—it is really hurting us, in my view. It is, certainly, hurting constituents here in Maryland and around the country, and on U.S. passports the delay is now 12 to 18 weeks still.

I mean, that is—it is unacceptably long and, again, the people doing this work they are doing it well. They just need to be better resourced.

Do I have your commitment to work on this issue?

Mr. VERMA. Yes, but maybe I could just add a couple observations here because I have stood in the visa line myself out in our consulates. I know how important this is to folks.

I will say our biggest challenge is not in every category. It is in the tourist visa—the first time applicants for tourist visas—and it is not globally. It is in a few select countries and, in fact, we have exceeded our wait times and made good progress in the other categories.

But you are right. In these high population countries with the surge in travel—India, Mexico, and some others—we have to get those numbers down. I think there is a plan to get those numbers down. I will also say on passport services, as I understand it, we are back to kind of the standard routine processing time of six to nine weeks.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. I know you are working to that. I have 12 to 18. Let us compare notes afterwards. But it has improved, obviously, since the pandemic period but I do think we have a long way to go.

I do want to follow up with you after this on two things. One are security clearances, where there have been significant improvements. Ninety percent of State Department security clearances now come in below the government standard. There is still 10 percent that are agonizingly long and, again, hurt the State Department's ability to do its work, mostly in other federal agencies. So I want to work with you on that.

Mr. VERMA. Agree.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Visa waiver program—the visa waiver program obviously provides great convenience and is also designed to provide security with that convenience. It is a good program where it works.

But, as you know, I think the key part of the visa waiver program includes reciprocity, equal treatment of American citizens of all faiths and backgrounds traveling overseas. You know that, right?

Mr. VERMA. Absolutely.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. We do not have any measure of that right now in our current visa waiver program. We have no way to measure whether or not Americans of one faith or another, one ethnicity or another, are being treated differently than other Americans when they are traveling abroad under the visa waiver program.

Will you work with me to make sure that we have a standard to measure that?

Mr. VERMA. Absolutely.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. I look forward to that because blue is blue and we want to make sure all Americans are treated equally when they are traveling under the visa waiver program. Anywhere we want that but the visa waiver program is something we set up. It is within our control. So I look forward to working with you on that.

Mr. VERMA. It is a great point.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you.

Senator KAINE. Thank you, Senator Van Hollen, and Ambassador Verma, great to see you again.

There is a vote ongoing. I will ask questions and then I do not believe Senator Risch has any follow-up so we will likely then conclude unless another member comes in.

I want to ask you about Havana syndrome. We had a hearing in May around State Department reauthorization and the then Deputy Secretary Brian McKeon testified a bit about this.

He reported that the DNI-commissioned reporting showed a number of cases and that they were explained by environmental health factors but many still did not have an explanation and the U.S. Government was still unable to attribute incidents to a particular actor.

If confirmed, do you commit to ensuring that the department fully supports the provision of all appropriate health care and reasonable accommodations to State Department employees who are suffering from Havana syndrome symptoms incurred while serving the country?

Mr. VERMA. Absolutely. Yes, sir.

Senator KAINE. Great. Thank you, Ambassador Verma.

I want to ask you a question about the workforce. A sizeable percentage of the State Department workforce live in Virginia. They are constituents of mine.

The GA—I am sorry, the OPM does an annual employment survey. It is the FEVS—Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey—and for many, many years the State Department, of the 17 large agencies that tend to be surveyed, again and again ranked near the top in terms of job satisfaction. But in recent years—and the most recent FEVS we have is from 2021—the job satisfaction in the department has dramatically declined.

What would you do in your role, if confirmed, to try to really work on these internal morale issues and return the State Department to the place that it has traditionally been?

Mr. VERMA. It is really important, Senator, and I think trying to get at the root—what is driving that attitude, what is happening that people feel that way—and there has been a number of sur-

veys. There has been some early feedback and the Secretary, I think, has set out really in a focused way.

I mean, the modernization agenda is really about taking care of the workforce and making sure they have what they need. So do they also have—are benefits competitive? Do we have the right childcare subsidy? Do we have the right kind of agility in our workforce compared to other federal agencies?

These are all things that we are looking at. I still think the mission of the department attracts the best people from around the country but we got to make sure we are actually living up to our commitment to them to make sure they are getting the best of what they need.

I really—again, my experience overseas helped me see what people need and how they live and how it works in practice day to day and I think we do an exceptionally good job of taking care of people around the world.

But we have got to do better. We want to be at the top part of that survey and not lagging behind.

Senator KAINE. Just to share an insight with you, when I travel abroad I usually try to have a meeting with first or second tour FSO State Department folks at embassies without the ambassador there, without any supervisor there, and I ask them this question.

You obtained a very difficult job. To get—I mean, to get to be a Foreign Service officer incredibly difficult to get there. What will be the determinant about whether you make this a career or make this a shorter term job, and I hardly have to say another word and then I just listen for about 90 minutes, and I will say a lot of the discussion tends to revolve around we are not given enough latitude to make decisions.

Somebody once said to me, I had to pass a security vetting that was super intense but if I want to requisition five pencils they treat me like I am going to steal one of them and I have got to account for all five and what I am going to do with them.

You have been there. You have been an ambassador but you have also worked your way up. You understand the sacrifices and the frustrations. I think you would be uniquely situated to deal with this.

But I would just encourage you to and, kind of additionally, the surveys tend to show that you are doing—the State Department's efforts around recruiting are okay but maybe you are falling short on the retention side.

Mr. VERMA. Right.

Senator KAINE. So I would urge you to focus on that.

Last thing. I know—as far as I know, Congress has not yet been provided the 2022 FEVS results. Do you have any idea about when we might see those?

Mr. VERMA. I do not but I will definitely find out and come back to you as quickly as possible.

Senator KAINE. If you could that would be great.

Mr. VERMA. Senator, your point on retention is really important and there is a retention working group that is focused on this coming out with a number of recommendations and already taken some steps.

But training is a big part of it, making sure people have a pathway to promotion. There is a lot that will go into retention. But it is not just recruiting great people. It is making sure they stay.

Senator KAINE. I think you are uniquely qualified to help us get better at this.

Mr. VERMA. Thank you.

Senator KAINE. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I am going to go vote.

The CHAIRMAN [presiding]. Okay.

Ambassador, for a position of this consequence this type of hearing is unremarkable so that is a good thing, testament to you.

This record will remain open—let me see until when—will remain open until the close of business tomorrow. There may be questions for the record. I would urge you to answer them expeditiously and as fully as you can so that we can consider your nomination at a business markup.

With the thanks of the committee for your appearance here today, his hearing is adjourned.

Additional Material Submitted for the Record

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED
TO HON. RICHARD R. VERMAN BY SENATOR ROBERT MENENDEZ

Question. Congress enacted the Lateral Entry into the Foreign Service Pilot Program in December 2016. Fast forward six years later, and the program has yet to take off the ground. One of the purposes of the pilot program was to provide State additional avenues for targeting and recruiting “mid-career individuals from the civil service and private sector who have skills and experience that would be extremely valuable to the Foreign Service.” Individuals with skillsets in the areas of critical and emerging technologies such as information and communications technology, cybersecurity, and artificial intelligence have been and will continue to be extremely valuable for the Foreign Service given the Department’s new international cyber and digital policy mission. This is particularly true with the recent establishment of the Bureau for Cyber and Digital Policy and the Office of the Special Envoy for Critical and Emerging Technologies. Will the Department commit to utilizing the Foreign Service lateral entry pilot program provided by Congress beginning in FY 2023?

Answer. Despite delays due to lack of funding, hiring freezes and, most recently, COVID, the Department is committed to and actively developing the lateral entry pilot program. The program will target critical skills gaps and allow the Department to fill positions to support the Secretary’s modernization agenda, including in emerging technologies and critical missions. If confirmed, I commit to prioritize and implement this program in 2023.

Question. How does the Department intend to use the flexible-hiring mechanism provided by the pilot program?

Answer. The 3-year lateral entry pilot program will enable the Department to hire qualified mid-career professionals from the Civil Service and private sector into the Foreign Service to fill identified gaps in talent needed to support the Secretary’s modernization agenda in the following six critical areas: cyberspace and emerging technologies; climate, environment, and energy; global health security and diplomacy; strategic competition with the People’s Republic of China (PRC); economic statecraft; and multilateral diplomacy. If confirmed, I am committed to implementing this pilot program.

Question. In October 2021, the Department released its first ever Enterprise Data Strategy, which seeks to promote data-informed diplomacy by bolstering the Department’s data analytics and management and building a “data-savvy” workforce. As your predecessor once said, “the Department of State must leverage data as a critical instrument of diplomacy.” How do you intend to continue the Department’s efforts to data-informed diplomacy?

Answer. Data-Informed Diplomacy is a core element of the Secretary's agenda for modernizing American diplomacy. If confirmed, I will continue my predecessor's approach of implementing the Enterprise Data Strategy through campaigns that surge data and analytics resources on priority issues such as Strategic Competition; Multilateralism; and Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA). I also intend to accelerate the use of the Department's enterprise analytics platform, Data-State, and champion data science hiring and training initiatives that strengthen data skills within our workforce.

Question. Which areas of the modernization agenda could use further congressional support?

Answer. If confirmed, I am committed to advancing the Secretary's Modernization Agenda to ensure the Department is ready to meet the tests of the 21st century. I look forward to working with Congress to ensure the Department has the necessary resources and authorities to meet these challenges. This includes flexible hiring authorities tailored to the Department's national security mission to ensure our workforce is positioned to address mission critical areas, including China, climate, global health security, cyberspace, economic statecraft, and multilateral diplomacy.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED
TO HON. RICHARD R. VERMA BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

Question. During his confirmation process, this committee asked Secretary Blinken: "Under your leadership as Secretary of State, what actions will you pursue to ensure that hard-to-fill posts in Sub-Saharan Africa are sufficiently and consistently staffed?" On January 19, he replied in writing: "If confirmed, I will work with the White House and relevant State Department bureaus and offices to ensure that all posts in Sub-Saharan Africa are sufficiently and consistently staffed with the appropriate personnel." During his confirmation process, I similarly asked your predecessor, if confirmed, as Deputy Secretary of State for Management and Resources, Brian McKeon, what he "viewed as the most pressing management and staffing challenges facing the Department's Bureau of African Affairs," to which he replied, in part, "The Bureau of African Affairs has been chronically understaffed both domestically and overseas, impeding the Department's ability to achieve the Administration's goals, as well as to seize opportunities when they appear. If confirmed I will explore enhancing incentives to serve at hardship posts, including those in Africa, and will look for other ways to ensure that our vacancies are filled." What is your understanding of actions taken to date by the State Department under the Biden Administration to address acute challenges to fully staffing the Africa Bureau?

Answer. I understand the Department continues to use increased incentives for service in historically difficult to staff posts around the world, including service needs differential as an incentive for extended service, along with hardship differentials, and early handshakes, among others. Additionally, several initiatives are underway to address these gaps, including development of regional support models and use of a new assignments process based on medical resident matching. If confirmed, I commit to overseeing a holistic look at recruitment incentives to fill hard-to-fill posts around the world, especially in Africa.

Question. When was the last time an Africa Bureau-specific culture survey was conducted?

Answer. I understand from the Department that an Africa Bureau Domestic Workplace Climate Survey was conducted in August and September of 2022.

Question. What was the response rate in the last Africa Bureau-specific culture survey?

Answer. I understand from the Department that 51 percent of domestic employees in the Bureau of African Affairs responded to the Workplace Climate Survey.

Question. What were the findings of the last Africa Bureau-specific culture survey?

Answer. I understand that staff indicated in the AF climate survey that they truly enjoy their work, appreciating it makes an impact in Africa and advances U.S. foreign policy interests. They expressed strong frustration with low staffing levels and feeling overworked, however, underscoring the importance of domestic hybrid workplace flexibilities, expressing concern these arrangements might change in the fu-

ture. Civil Service staff communicated a strong desire for more opportunities to do long-term TDYs and to spend time in the field.

Question. When were the results of the last Africa Bureau-specific culture survey shared with the Africa Bureau workforce and by whom?

Answer. I understand that, on behalf of the Africa Bureau's Diversity and Inclusion Council and Assistant Secretary Phee, Deputy Assistant Secretary Lord shared the results of the Africa Bureau workplace climate survey with domestic staff on November 29, 2022.

Question. Do you feel that sufficient and timely action is being taken to address the acute and disproportionate staffing challenges that are faced by the Africa Bureau?

Answer. The challenge of filling positions in historically difficult to staff posts, of which those in Africa comprise more than half, is one that the Department is deeply committed to resolving. Insufficient infrastructure, inadequate schools, health care challenges, and the remote nature of many postings in Africa are inherent impediments to getting those posts to full staffing. I believe the Department is working to address these challenges, and if confirmed, I commit to maintaining a focus on finding solutions.

Question. Please provide a breakdown of Africa Bureau civil service staffing by office, including GS level? Please provide comparative information for other regional bureaus.

Answer. With 46 embassies supporting bilateral relations with 49 countries and the African Union, I understand from the Department that the Africa Bureau employs 120 Civil Service employees across ten domestic offices, of which 11 are GS-15, 23 are GS-14, 44 are GS-13, 15 are GS-12, 14 are GS-11, 8 are GS-9 and 5 are GS-8. In comparison, the Bureau of East Asia and Pacific Affairs employs 70, the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs employs 142, the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs employs 158, the Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs employs 62, and the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs employs 100.

Question. How many civil servants have left the Africa Bureau since the start of the Biden Administration? Please detail vacated positions, and the length of time to fill the vacated position (from date of announcement to date of onboarding).

Answer. I understand from the Department that 22 civil service employees left their positions in the Bureau of African Affairs since the beginning of the Biden Administration. As rank is in position, not person, for the civil service, promotions necessitate leaving a position. On average, it takes 90 calendar days to fill a position from date of announcement to date of onboarding.

Question. What will you do to address the length of time it takes to hire civil servants for the Africa Bureau?

Answer. The Africa Bureau has a similar timeline for hiring civil service (CS) employees as compared to other bureaus. I understand from the Department that the GTM's Shared Services center hires about 50 percent of the Department's civil service, including AF, and has worked with Diplomatic Security to reduce the time it takes for security clearances by 120 days, installed new technologies such as a case management system, and implemented an onboarding system to streamline CS hiring.

Question. What specific actions will you prioritize in your role to ensure that the Africa Bureau's staffing efforts focus on building regional expertise, diversity, and preparedness so the Department can sufficiently and consistently staff hard-to-fill posts in Africa?

Answer. With more than half of all historically difficult to staff posts located in Africa, this is an important issue. If confirmed, I commit to overseeing a holistic look at recruitment incentives to fill hard-to-fill posts around the world, including in Africa.

Question. Similarly, 27 of the last 43 career Foreign Service nominees for ambassadorial posts in the Africa Bureau were to serve as first time ambassadors. While every ambassador has a first post somewhere, first time ambassadors have been nominated for positions in highly complex political and conflict environments that are stated national security priorities for the United States in Africa, including Ethiopia, Sudan, South Sudan, Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso. If confirmed, will you commit to work with Secretary Blinken to ensure that first-time career ambassadorial nominees will not be the first choice when identifying nominees for high-profile and strategic U.S. missions in Sub-Saharan Africa?

Answer. The Department has a robust process for choosing Chiefs of Mission candidates to recommend to the President for nomination. If confirmed, I am committed to working with the Secretary and Department leadership to ensure the Department continues to identify officers with demonstrated relevant experience and a track record of successful leadership in challenging posts. As evidenced by the outcome of the above selection process, sometimes the best qualified officer has not yet been an ambassador.

Question. What specific challenges does the Africa Bureau face in recruiting experienced ambassadors to posts in the region?

Answer. The same challenges the Africa Bureau faces in recruiting staff to fill all positions impact the Department's ability to recruit ambassadors to serve in the region. Inadequate infrastructure, health challenges, lack of adequate schools, and remoteness are just some of the factors that influence an employee's assignment process.

Question. What steps will you take, if confirmed, to encourage experienced ambassadors to bid on priority ambassadorial posts in the Africa Bureau?

Answer. The Department has a robust process for choosing Chiefs of Mission candidates to recommend to the President for nomination. If confirmed, I am committed to working with the Secretary and Department leadership to ensure that the Department continues to identify officers with a demonstrated relevant experience and a track record of successful leadership in challenging posts.

Question. What Chief of Mission positions in the Africa Bureau does the Administration believe will soon require nominations for their replacements?

Answer. I understand from the Department that roughly one-third of the 46 Chief of Mission positions in sub-Saharan Africa rotate in any given year. There currently are eight Chief of Mission nominations pending confirmation in the Senate: U.S. Mission to the African Union, Cabo Verde, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, and Zimbabwe.

Question. Section 5105 of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2022 conditions the appointment of any Special Envoy (or similar position) exercising "significant authority" at the Department on obtaining the advice and consent of the Senate. This section also states that, in order for the President to appoint a Special Envoy not exercising significant authority pursuant to the laws of the United States, the President or Secretary must submit a timely notification to Congress which includes the following: "(A) A certification that the position does not require the exercise of significant authority pursuant to the laws of the United States. "(B) A description of the duties and purpose of the position. "(C) The rationale for giving the specific title and function to the position." Section 5105 of the FY22 NDAA took legal effect on January 3, 2023. If confirmed, do you commit to upholding the requirements of this statute in a timely manner and to making your staff available to routinely brief SFRC on implementation of the law?

Answer. Yes.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to immediately reviewing the waivers of diplomatic immunity for our mission personnel in China, and revoke them?

Answer. If confirmed, I will review all aspects of the status of our mission personnel in China in consultation with Department experts and take appropriate action to ensure protection of our mission personnel.

Because I have been outside the Department since before the COVID-19 pandemic began, I was not part of the deliberations on limited waivers of personal inviolability. My understanding from news reporting is that the lifting of the PRC's Zero-COVID policies has significantly eased the strain on all living in China, including U.S. diplomats.

I also understand that upon arriving at post, Ambassador Burns committed to the Embassy community and subsequently communicated to the PRC that he would not permit any American Mission personnel to be forced into a fever clinic or COVID hospital.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to review similar waivers the U.S. agreed to in more than 50 other countries?

Answer. My hope is that the declining emergency of the COVID-19 pandemic in most of the world has made such waivers no longer relevant. If confirmed, I would review all such waivers in consultation with Department experts and take appropriate action to ensure protection of our mission personnel.

Question. Would you agree to waivers of diplomatic immunity for embassy personnel in an adversarial country like China?

Answer. I was not part of the deliberations on waivers of personal inviolability in China with respect to COVID-19. If confirmed and presented with a decision on any waiver of diplomatic immunity for our personnel in any country, I would weigh the merits of the decision while considering all aspects of the situation, including the impact on the U.S.'s national security interests and personnel.

Question. Do you commit to consultation with Congress before taking any steps to waive diplomatic immunity for embassy personnel in an adversarial country like China?

Answer. If confirmed and presented with a similar decision on waivers of diplomatic immunity for Embassy personnel in an adversarial country during a pandemic or other global health crisis, I would weigh the merits of the decision while considering all aspects of the situation, including the impact on the U.S.'s national security interests and personnel, and keep Congress informed on such matters.

Question. Does the Department commit not to nominate or re-nominate to a Senate-confirmed position any officials who were involved in developing or approving the policy to comply with the PRC's COVID protocols, including detention in fever clinics, invasive, non-transparent testing procedures, and arbitrary movement restrictions and lockdowns, family separation, and the limited waivers of inviolability (in 2020 and 2022) that allowed these practices to happen?

Answer. Decisions with respect to nominating or re-nominating officials to Senate-confirmed positions are made by the President. The Department has a robust process for choosing Chiefs of Mission candidates to recommend to the President for nomination. If confirmed, I am committed to working with the Secretary and Department leadership to ensure the Department continues to identify officers with demonstrated relevant experience and a track record of successful leadership in challenging posts.

Question. In briefings to SFRC staff and in formal front-channel communications, the Department confirmed that 30 Americans had been detained in Chinese fever clinics. Following press reports on the situation at Mission China, this number was revised to 16. What accounts for the change in the number of Americans the Department says were detained in Chinese fever clinics? During which period of time and under what definitions of "American," and "detained," were these figures determined?

Answer. If confirmed, I will have no higher priority than the safety of our personnel, family members, and facilities overseas. I was not serving in government during this time period. But I do understand that upon arriving at post, Ambassador Burns committed to the Embassy community and subsequently communicated to the PRC that he would not permit any American Mission personnel to be forced into a fever clinic or COVID hospital.

Question. When the United States re-imposed COVID testing requirements for Chinese citizens traveling to the United States, did the PRC Embassy submit an LWOI or equivalent in order for its diplomats to comply when entering the United States?

Answer. The United States did not impose testing on PRC diplomats in the United States. My understanding is that pre-flight testing of PRC diplomats in China does not implicate their immunity.

Question. Please explain why it takes so long to build an embassy and why it is so expensive?

Answer. I understand the Department plans, designs, and executes worldwide construction projects in dangerous and unpredictable environments facing rapidly changing security risks, unrest, evolving climate threats, and malign influencers. These factors, combined with the cost of building increasingly complex facilities to stringent U.S. design and life safety building codes, legislated procurement and contracting regulations, host country permits and labor laws, and SECCA 1999 security standards, resulted in increased costs for site acquisition and construction and extended project timelines.

Question. If confirmed, what structural changes would you make to streamline this process to promote efficiencies and save taxpayer dollars?

Answer. I understand SECCA 2022 empowered the Department to develop solutions that balance mission location, footprint, setback, and colocation and will provide increased flexibility for site selection, design, and construction. If confirmed, I

am committed to promoting further efficiencies such as using the design-build contracting methodology (as mandated by the FY 2022 State Authorization Act) and exploring ways to increase the number of contractors bidding on these complex construction projects.

Question. Do you commit, if confirmed, to implementing as quickly as possible the Secure Embassy Construction and Counterterrorism Act of 2022 (SECCA)?

Answer. Yes. I understand the Department formed a high-level coordination group and is working to develop a full implementation plan. If confirmed, I am committed to implementing SECCA 2022 and enhancing diplomatic presence agility; managing risk in the planning, design, and construction of the Department's facilities to respond to evolving national security priorities; and ensuring responsible stewardship of taxpayer dollars.

Question. Do you commit, if confirmed, to implementing as quickly as possible the Diplomatic Support and Security Act (DSSA)?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to timely implementation of the Diplomatic Support and Security Act. I appreciate Congressional attention to reforming the Accountability Review Board process and providing the Department with greater flexibility to advance U.S. national security priorities and foreign policy.

Question. Do you commit, if confirmed, to briefing my staff on the Department's implementation of SECCA and DSSA within your first 90 days?

Answer. As noted in my confirmation testimony, I have a strong appreciation for the work of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. If confirmed, I look forward to working closely and collaboratively with the committee and its staff to advance shared, bipartisan priorities, to include regular briefings on the Department's progress toward implementation of SECCA and DSSA Reforms.

Question. Do you believe that there are posts where U.S. diplomats struggle to get outside of embassy or consulate on a regular basis?

Answer. Engaging with foreign government partners and members of society abroad is critical to advancing U.S. national security interests. While the vast majority of U.S. Government personnel worldwide interact outside embassy walls unencumbered, there remain a select few locations where factors can occasionally limit or preclude certain engagements. I am heartened by the fact that, even at our high threat/high risk diplomatic missions, roughly 95 percent of engagement requests are approved. As Secretary Blinken said, "we have to accept risk, and manage it smartly." I commit to doing so if confirmed.

Question. Do Chinese, Russian, or Iranian diplomats have trouble accessing local populations in countries in which they operate?

Answer. Foreign diplomats have traditionally been targeted less than American diplomatic personnel. However, based on open-source reporting, Chinese and Russian diplomats may be engaging more frequently in certain high threat locations, but they have done so at great cost. In the last six months alone, Russian diplomats in Kabul, for example, have been killed in front of their own embassy. A Chinese delegation was present during an attack at the Afghanistan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, while visiting members of the Taliban in their offices. These foreign diplomats were killed while operating with a lower risk threshold than that which the Department insists on to safeguard our personnel.

Question. How to you intend to improve the access of U.S. diplomats to local populations at our posts abroad, especially in high-threat posts where embassy rules make getting off the compound difficult or nearly impossible?

Answer. Department leadership acknowledges that the U.S. foreign policy mission entails diverse types of risk and remain committed to managing it smartly and appropriately, such as the Department's efforts to re-open Embassy Kyiv. If confirmed, I will ensure the implementation of recent legislation enabling the Department to quickly establish new facilities and continue to expand diplomatic outreach. I look forward to supporting Department initiatives and I will have no higher priority than the safety of U.S. personnel, family members, and facilities overseas.

Question. If confirmed, you do you commit to increasing the number of Diplomatic Security officers to better staff priorities and avoid DS personnel burnout?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to reviewing Diplomatic Security staffing levels and if appropriate, to reviewing existing security requirements and newly implemented NDAA changes and increasing staffing levels as permissible within budgetary limits. In the interim, DS will continue to align its personnel to meet the De-

partment's most critical mission requirements, ensuring the Department is addressing world-wide security incidents and concerns.

Question. If confirmed, how do you intend to implement the Global Health Security and International Pandemic Prevention and Preparedness Act?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to following and implementing all laws, including the Global Health Security and International Pandemic Prevention and Preparedness Act. I commend Congress for the attention it has brought to strengthening capacities and resources to prevent, detect, and respond to infectious disease threats, including the newly established Pandemic Fund, and I commit to working to ensure the Act's successful implementation at the Department, including in alignment with the Department's proposed Bureau for Global Health Security and Diplomacy.

Question. What concrete steps would you take to effectively organize and resource the Department's new Global Health Bureau to advance the global health security and diplomacy objectives of the United States overseas?

Answer. A unified bureau will streamline internal coordination between the Department's global health security foreign policy efforts and assistance programs, including PEPFAR, by placing these functions under one organizational umbrella within the Department. At the country-level, Chiefs of Mission will continue to direct, supervise, and coordinate all U.S. Government executive branch employees in the country or area of responsibility.

Question. The Department has been late in providing requests or feedback to our committee on State Department authorization, making it difficult or at points impossible to include some Department asks. If confirmed, do you commit to working in a positive manner with our committee on State Department authorization bills?

Answer. Yes.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to provide the Department's authorization requests by March 17, 2023?

Answer. I recognize and appreciate that working together to develop flexible authorization legislation for the Department is an important process premised on close and transparent communication. If confirmed, I am committed to working within the Department and with interagency partners throughout my tenure to identify and propose to Congress in a timely manner authorities for Department operations that will help the Department advance U.S. foreign policy objectives and take care of our employees both domestically and abroad.

Question. The Department recently agreed to limit severely the definition of worldwide availability and has not been responsive to my requests for a briefing on the situation. What do the words, "worldwide availability" mean to you?

Answer. I understand the Department is considering whether to continue with the specific term "worldwide availability." The proposed medical standard for pre-employment clearance of career Foreign Service applicants is that they meet the minimum medical qualifications to serve at all MEDEVAC posts (currently Bangkok, London, Pretoria, and Singapore) and a unique standard would apply to applicants for medical specialist categories. Assignments will not be limited to those four posts, and employees—including those with a disability—will be expected to bid competitively and serve at a wide variety of posts in consultation with the Bureau of Medical Services.

Question. In your opinion, has the Department effectively eliminated "worldwide availability" by reducing it to just a handful of posts?

Answer. I understand that while the proposed pre-employment medical eligibility standard requires that applicants meet the minimum medical qualifications to serve at MEDEVAC posts, assignments will not be limited to those posts, and employees—including those with a disability—will be expected to serve at a wide variety of posts, in consultation with the Bureau of Medical Services. There are several dozen posts, in every geographical region, with medical capabilities equivalent to those at MEDEVAC posts. I understand this eligibility standard moves the Department towards more diversity, equity, and inclusion throughout the Foreign Service.

Question. I frequently hear from the Department and its personnel that the Foreign Service is akin to the U.S. armed forces. Does the change in definition of "worldwide" availability diminish the similarities between the Foreign Service and our armed forces? If yes, does that demand a reevaluation of employee benefits for the Foreign Service?

Answer. I understand career Foreign Service candidates will still be expected to serve at a wide variety of posts around the world, and the revised standard pro-

posed is not expected to have a material operational effect on the Department's ability to meet its foreign policy and national security mission at posts throughout the globe. I understand the proposed policy will provide more career opportunities in the Foreign Service for persons with a disability as the Department seeks to welcome a broader array of qualified individuals into the ranks of the Foreign Service.

Question. I was troubled to learn last year that the Department has been medically clearing terminally ill Foreign Service Officers for duty abroad, so long as they can receive medical care similar to what they would receive in the United States. What is the purpose of a medical clearance if it does not indicate whether someone is fit for service?

Answer. If confirmed, I will ensure the Department continues to issue medical clearances for assignments in a manner consistent with law and Department policy. Federal privacy laws prevent the Department from commenting on specific cases, and as a nominee I am not privy to this type of information.

Question. In your opinion, should the Department be assigning personnel abroad who are terminally ill?

Answer. If confirmed, I will ensure the Department continues to issue medical clearances in a manner that is consistent with Federal law and Department policy. As things stand, the Department issues a Class 1 clearance to those with no significant medical condition or a Class 2 clearance for those persons for whom the availability of adequate medical care may depend on the post to which they could be assigned. Employees suffering from unstable terminal illnesses are issued a Class 5 clearance. Individuals issued Class 5 clearances are limited to service within the United States.

Question. Does the Department believe a Foreign Service Officer has a right to die while serving abroad?

Answer. I understand the Department works diligently to ensure our employees and their family members are assigned to posts where they can obtain the medical care needed to support medical conditions. In the event an individual's condition deteriorates to the point where local resources cannot provide adequate care, the Department, pursuant to 22 U.S.C. 4081, will evacuate the employee and/or their family either back to the United States or to a regional medical evacuation center where they can obtain the care they need.

Question. Given the small number of posts who can handle Class II cases, does the Department risk overwhelming the capacity of those embassy medical units?

Answer. I understand many, if not most, of the Department's posts support the medical needs of employees with Class 2 clearances, better known as post-specific clearance. In the event post health units are unable to manage the specific medical condition of an employee, I understand health units will work to arrange for the employee to obtain appropriate care in the country of assignment, and in the event the medical needs of the employee cannot be supported abroad, MED will provide evacuation services as consistent with 22 U.S.C 4081.

Question. What is the ideal time for the State Department to process the average visa and what is the current average time? What accounts for this discrepancy?

Answer. The long wait times for first-time B1/B2 visitor visas in some countries are the result of pent-up visa demand outpacing consular staffing levels when pandemic-related travel restrictions ended. Nonimmigrant visa (NIV) interview wait times are coming down faster than projected due to policy changes, innovations, and staffing surge efforts. For a visitor visa, the median interview wait time is less than two months, half what it was in June 2022. Wait times for all other NIV categories, including students and temporary workers, are at or below pre-pandemic levels.

Question. What steps is the State Department taking to speed up the visa approval process and are there viable alternatives to in person interviews?

Answer. The State Department is pursuing multiple strategies to streamline visa processing and to dedicate more resources to reducing wait times consistent with national security. This includes surging staff overseas, working with DHS to pursue expanded interview waiver authorities for additional categories of low-risk visa applicants, and expanding the development and use of technological solutions to remotely adjudicate applications that do not require interviews. The Department also will soon pilot domestic revalidation of certain petition-based nonimmigrant visas.

Question. Due to the wide variation in wait times for visa appointments, is the State Department focusing on consulates with longer than average wait times? If

so, what is the Department doing to support consulates with a longer than average wait time?

Answer. In FY 2022, the Department exceeded pre-pandemic levels of non-immigrant visa issuances in several categories critical to economic and bilateral interests, including for seasonal workers, students, and crewmembers. The Department is surging resources where wait times for B1/B2 visa interviews, needed by would-be first-time visitors, remain high, such as India and Mexico. Consular officers in some locations are remotely adjudicating tens of thousands of interview-waiver visas each week. Visa renewal wait times, crucial to the economy, are low.

Question. Do you have the funding and other resources necessary to reduce wait times for appointments? If not, what do you need in order to reduce the backlog?

Answer. Over the last year and a half, the Department reduced gaps in consular staffing overseas caused by the drop in fee revenue due to the pandemic's near-shutdown of international travel. With the resurgence of travel, the Bureau of Consular Affairs' financial situation has improved. If confirmed, I will strive to ensure that as many adjudicators as possible are assigned to overseas positions, to reach world-wide pre-pandemic staffing by the end of this year. Maintaining expanded spending authorities and additional fee flexibilities would help allow for continued innovation and additional hiring.

Question. When will the State Department return to pre-pandemic processing times?

Answer. In many places, visa wait times have returned to pre-pandemic processing times. Except for first time B1/B2 visitors in certain countries, wait times for all other nonimmigrant categories, including students and temporary workers, are at or below pre-pandemic levels. The Department updates nonimmigrant visa (NIV) wait time information on its public website weekly. Wait times vary depending on the visa category, appointment availability, and demand. The Department issued 13 percent more NIVs in the first quarter of FY 2023 than the same period in FY 2019.

Question. What is the ideal time for the State Department to process the average passport renewal and what is the current average time?

Answer. Processing times vary throughout the year and are dependent upon workload, which increases with seasonal spring and summer travel. I understand from the Department that processing time for passport applications was at pre-pandemic levels until February 6, when it increased with the normal cyclical demand. Processing times are now 8 to 11 weeks for routine service and 5 to 7 weeks for expedited service. The goal is to ensure the average application is processed within service commitments. Most applicants receive their passports weeks earlier than advertised.

Question. What steps is the State Department taking to speed up the passport approval process?

Answer. Processing time for passport applications was at pre-pandemic levels until February 6 when it increased with the normal cyclical demand. I understand from the Department that the Department's Bureau of Consular Affairs (CA) instituted an "all hands on deck" posture requiring Passport Services headquarters employees to adjudicate; authorized 30,000 hours of monthly overtime; and recruited volunteers, including re-employed annuitants, to work in the Washington, DC, Satellite Office (akin to a medium-sized agency). Since January 2022, CA hired more than 100 new staff, with more than 200 additional employees in the recruitment pipeline.

Question. From your perspective, what are the differences in roles and responsibilities between the Deputy Secretary of State for Management and Resources and the Undersecretary of State for Management?

Answer. The Deputy Secretary of State for Management and Resources and the Under Secretary of State for Management play critical, complementary roles in support of the resilience of our workforce and effective functioning of the Department. If confirmed, I look forward to working closely with the Under Secretary for Management and would focus my efforts on addressing enterprise-wide challenges and opportunities domestically and overseas at the intersection of policy, management, and resources.

Question. If confirmed, how would you work with the Undersecretary of State for Management to ensure there are no gaps or overlap in responsibilities? Please describe your understanding of the anticipated work relationship with the Undersecretary for Management.

Answer. If confirmed, I would work with the Department to approach issues and resource needs that are cross-cutting and interdisciplinary, in coordination with OMB, Congress, and other departments and agencies. The Under Secretary of State for Management has a mix of operational responsibilities in support of the Department's ongoing mission and a focus on implementation and planning to ensure proposed improvements to workforce policies, management practices, and the Department's facilities and associated services are sustainable and effective in a wide range of operating environments, both domestically and overseas.

Question. The Office of the Inspector General found that during the pandemic, the Department encouraged maximum telework for both domestic and overseas staff. COVID-19 cases have drastically declined in the United States and around the world. The Biden administration declared its intent to end the national emergency and public health emergency declarations related to the COVID-19 pandemic on May 11, 2023. If confirmed, would you advocate for the full return to work for all State Department employees, especially when the emergency public health declarations are over?

Answer. Most domestic positions and all overseas positions are on-site routinely to meet mission critical goals. Given its global purview, the Department has always had an asynchronous and distributed workforce. If confirmed, I will ensure the Department continues to improve its agility in the face of 21st century challenges—most notably, the need to support global coverage and to recruit and retain top talent, particularly in competitive fields like information technology.

Question. The Office of the Inspector General found that during the pandemic, the Department encouraged maximum telework for both domestic and overseas staff. COVID-19 cases have drastically declined in the United States and around the world. The Biden administration declared its intent to end the national emergency and public health emergency declarations related to the COVID-19 pandemic on May 11, 2023. How can employees who regularly handle classified information consistently work from home?

Answer. If confirmed, I will support the Department's mission-first priorities. Employees who need classified access will continue to work on-site, with extremely limited exceptions due to security considerations. A very small number of secure communications kits, which allow access to classified information from approved alternate work locations—a home office, for example—are made available to approved personnel to facilitate 24/7 access.

Question. Diversity is now included as a promotion precept at the Department of State. How will the diversity precept be measured or evaluated for promotion?

Answer. I understand the Department issued a document defining the new Core Precept of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) for the global workforce and for the Foreign Service Selection Boards (FSSB). I understand the bureau of Global Talent Management is creating a "Procedural Precepts" document to define for FSSB members the relevant criteria and processes for promotion, including how to use the Core Precepts document to measure performance. I understand that before implementing these guidelines, the Department will negotiate them with AFSA.

Question. What types of activities will reflect positively for promotion in terms of diversity?

Answer. I understand Department employees should promote and demonstrate DEIA principles in interactions with colleagues and interlocutors. Some examples of this would include collaborating with others to achieve Department goals through inclusive teamwork; developing accessible communications for events, engagements, and interactions with the full complement of employees, interlocutors, and the public; actively recruiting and retaining diverse teams and improving methods of attracting diverse candidates for positions; and supporting equity in staff opportunities, roles, and recognition.

Question. What role does the Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer play in the selection process for Deputy Chiefs of Mission and other senior foreign service positions?

Answer. Beginning in 2021, Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer (CDIO) Abercrombie-Winstanley joined the Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM) Committee, which has oversight of the selection process for DCM, Principal Officer, Deputy Principal Officer, and senior foreign policy advisor (POLAD) positions. The CDIO also joined the D Committee, chaired by the Deputy Secretary, which makes all Chief of Mission recommendations to the Secretary of State, and approves selection of Principal

Deputy Assistant Secretaries and Deputy Assistant Secretaries. The CDIO, along with all committee members, encourages applicants from a variety of diverse backgrounds to compete for these positions, but selection is based on merit.

Question. The State Department has prioritized recruitment efforts in densely populated geographic locations and coastal cities over rural areas. This contributes to overrepresentation by Foreign Service officers from cities and those who can afford to travel great distances in order to take the oral exam required for entry into the Service. If confirmed, how would you work to reduce the costs and other obstacles placed on applicants?

Answer. I understand that the Department has successfully assessed specialist candidates using a virtual platform and is currently working to do the same for Foreign Service generalist candidates, making the hiring process more accessible to all individuals. If confirmed, I will work to continue efforts to reduce obstacles and ensure that oral assessments for FS generalists are also transitioned to a virtual platform.

Question. Our veterans sacrificed much to protect our nation and freedom. Their service, perspective, and experience is immensely valuable, and should be better harnessed by our State Department to advance diplomacy. If confirmed, how would you work to increase veterans' preference in the Foreign Service?

Answer. Upon application, and after passing the Foreign Service Oral Assessment, veterans receive additional points, allowing them to move higher on the rank-ordered Foreign Service specialist and generalist registers. Additionally, veterans may also receive an age waiver to enter the Foreign Service, allowing them to bypass the mandatory age requirements of the Foreign Service. If confirmed, I will work with veterans' groups and Department leadership to determine if additional benefits can be provided within the Federal hiring rules.

Question. A transparent promotion process has the potential to improve the quality of the workforce while also increasing diversity. What actions should the Department take to increase transparency in the promotion process? Should the Department consider changes to the promotion process? If yes, at what levels?

Answer. I understand the Department is developing a scoring tool for Foreign Service Selection Board (FSSB) members to use when evaluating candidates at all levels, as well as a new annual Employee Evaluation Report form that will measure employees at all levels using the same assessment as the FSSB, increasing transparency. With the implementation of the scoring tool, all promotion candidates will now see their average score on each Core Precept, as well as their total score across all Core Precepts, compared with the average total score of those against whom they competed and those who were promoted from their FSSB.

Question. The Department has notified Congress of its desire to create an Office of Anti-Harassment and Bullying Intervention. How is bullying defined? If confirmed, what safeguards would you put in place to avoid the weaponization of anti-bullying efforts through the filing of false claims?

Answer. I understand the Department defines bullying as a single, significant incident and/or pattern of unwelcome behavior that for a reasonable person creates an intimidating, hostile, threatening, or offensive work environment and/or interferes with an individual's work performance. Behavior that to a reasonable person has a demonstrable impact on others may constitute bullying, even if the recipient or target of the bullying behavior indicates they are not offended and/or affected. If confirmed, I will support a standardized and transparent approach to investigate allegations of bullying.

Question. The Inspector General's statement on the Department of State's major management and performance challenges for Fiscal Year 2022 highlighted that Department information systems are subject to serious threats that can lead to exploited weaknesses and compromised sensitive information. An audit of the information security program identified weaknesses in eight of nine information security domains. If confirmed, what steps would you recommend the Department take to ensure that the information systems are authorized to operate and effective monitoring programs are in place?

Answer. If confirmed, I will work with the Department of State to continue addressing the findings identified in the FY2022 OIG FISMA Audit. I will also work with the Department to continue implementing a Zero Trust architecture set forth by Executive Order 14028 and the Federal Chief Information Officer. Finally, if confirmed, I will partner with the CISA, the NSA, and other partners to implement cy-

bersecurity best practices, remediate vulnerabilities, and monitor new and existing threats.

Question. The Inspector General's statement on the Department of State's major management and performance challenges for Fiscal Year 2022 found that public members serving on the Department's Foreign Service Selection Boards did not fully meet Department qualifications and that family members and personal friends of Department employees had been selected for these roles. Please describe your view on the importance of transparency in the Foreign Service Selection Board's process. If confirmed, how would you improve management oversight of the public member selection process?

Answer. It is imperative that the State Department ensure the work of the Foreign Service Selection Boards is conducted in a manner that is fair, transparent, and objective. If confirmed, I will hold the team accountable for abiding strictly by the newly issued written policy regarding public member referrals and recusals. I will work closely, if confirmed, with the Director General to oversee the process in which all resumes submitted are collected and tracked centrally, and all public member candidates are interviewed by a panel and ranked on a score sheet that documents their qualifications to serve on a board as established in the Foreign Affairs Manual.

Question. The Inspector General's statement on the Department of State's major management and performance challenges for Fiscal Year 2022 found that Department entities did not consistently and adequately monitor and document contractor and grantee performance. Please describe the importance of conducting oversight of contracts, grants, and foreign assistance domestically and abroad, and explain how you would improve oversight efforts if confirmed.

Answer. I understand the Department will realize better acquisition outcomes by more closely monitoring and frequently assessing contractor and grantee performance. Investing in a quality assurance program and enabling executive decision-making by bolstering access to, and use of, actionable data to monitor cost, schedule, and performance baselines is a must. If confirmed, I would ensure the Department's quality assurance program is improved and augment it with data informed, executive-level governance to drive planning and performance oversight of major business investments.

RESPONSES TO FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

Thank you for the request to expand on my responses to several questions. I appreciate the Senator's engagement and leadership on these issues, and if confirmed, I look forward to working with the Senator and his staff to address any remaining concerns.

If confirmed, the safety and security of the Department's personnel, family members, and facilities will be my first and foremost priority. As I said during my nominations hearing, COVID-19 presented an unprecedented challenge. This is true not only for the Department, but for organizations around the world.

As I understand it, the Department was faced with balancing compliance with certain local regulations on COVID-19 testing that would permit our personnel to remain in China and 50 other missions around the world, and asserting diplomatic immunity to object to such testing which would have prevented them from entering China or would have led to their departure. The balance the Department struck is one that allowed U.S. personnel to enter and remain in the country. The alternative was to exit China and over 50 other missions around the world, thus, severely impacting our diplomatic footprint at a time where direct engagement and international cooperation and coordination were critical.

Staying or getting into a country, in some cases, meant that the U.S. Government had to authorize limited waivers of personal inviolability for U.S. personnel, who enjoyed personal inviolability based on their particular accreditation status in order to allow them to be tested on arrival and in some circumstances quarantined. As a nominee who was not at the Department during the relevant period, I am not familiar with the specific cases, but I do commit to go back and review the situation at the Mission in China if confirmed, and to draw any lessons learned and process improvements that could be made for the future. I would intend to work closely with the committee on this set of issues.

I was not surprised to hear, and am encouraged, that upon arriving at post, Ambassador Burns committed to the Embassy community, and subse-

quently communicated to the PRC, that he would not permit any American Mission personnel to be forced into a Chinese “fever hospital” or COVID isolation hospital. I strongly support that decision, and if confirmed, I will work to ensure that protocol continues.

Original Question. If confirmed, do you commit to immediately reviewing the waivers of diplomatic immunity for our mission personnel in China, and revoke them?

If confirmed, do you commit to review similar waivers the U.S. agreed to in more than 50 other countries?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed, I commit to review the limited waivers of personal inviolability of our mission personnel in China, as well as similar diplomatic waivers across more than 50 other countries. I will conduct this review in consultation with Department experts and take appropriate action, as needed, to ensure protection of our mission personnel and the maintenance of an effective diplomatic footprint. I will certainly confer closely with the committee on this.

My understanding from the Department is that these waivers were not “blanket” in nature, but rather individual. That is to say, waivers were specifically issued for each traveler or group of travelers that came to post that applied to a specific testing requirement. Therefore, there are generally not ongoing waivers to revoke or rescind with the host nations.

Question. Would you agree to waivers of diplomatic immunity for embassy personnel in an adversarial country like China?

Answer. As noted in my QFR’s, if confirmed and presented with a similar situation of waiving diplomatic immunity in an adversarial or other country, I would weigh the hardship placed on the Mission’s personnel by the particular local requirement at issue, the consequences to our diplomatic presence of asserting immunity and not complying with the requirement, and the national security interest of remaining in country. It’s hard to predict where I would come out in a hypothetical without knowing the full set of facts applicable to each case, but I can assure you, if confirmed, the safety and security of the Department’s personnel, family members, and facilities will be my first and foremost priority with respect to any decision that comes before my desk. If and when these situations arise in the future, we would certainly keep you and the committee fully informed and apprised.

Original Question. Do you commit to consultation with Congress before taking any steps to waive diplomatic immunity for embassy personnel in an adversarial country like China?

Answer. If confirmed and presented with a similar decision on waivers of diplomatic immunity for Embassy personnel in an adversarial country during unusual circumstances, such as those seen during the COVID-19 pandemic, I commit to keeping Congress regularly informed on our policy and approach with respect to such matters. This includes, but is not limited to, abiding by the statutory notification requirements recently enacted under the NDAA.

Original Question. Does the Department commit not to nominate or re-nominate to a Senate-confirmed position any officials who were involved in developing or approving the policy to comply with the PRC’s COVID protocols, including detention in fever clinics, invasive, non-transparent testing procedures, and arbitrary movement restrictions and lockdowns, family separation, and the limited waivers of inviolability (in 2020 and 2022) that allowed these practices to happen?

Answer. As noted in my initial responses, decisions with respect to nominating or re-nominating officials to Senate-confirmed positions is solely the prerogative of the President, not the Department. Even if I were in a position to make such a commitment, I could not do so as a nominee without knowing all of the facts and circumstances that went into those decisions.

If confirmed, I will serve on the committee that recommends career Chief-of-Mission candidates. I will take that responsibility seriously and I am committed to working with the Secretary and the Department leadership to ensure the Department identifies officers that exercise sound judgment and leadership in challenging posts, including reviewing decision-making in the wake of COVID-19.

Original Question. In briefings to SFRC staff and in formal front-channel communications, the Department confirmed that 30 Americans had been detained in Chinese fever clinics. Following press reports on the situation at Mission China, this number was revised to 16. What accounts for the change in the number of Americans the Department says were detained in Chinese fever clinics? During which period of time and under what definitions of “American,” and “detained,” were these figures determined?

Answer. My understanding from the Department is that a total of 30 individuals (including U.S. Government employees or family members) tested positive for COVID-19 upon arrival in China and entered PRC COVID protocols. Of these 30, 16 spent some time in a fever hospital. The remaining 14 were able to clear COVID protocols by PRC health authorities short of fever hospital admittance.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED
TO HON. RICHARD R. VERMA BY SENATOR CHRIS VAN HOLLEN

Question. I understand that State has made significant improvements to the security clearance process in the last three years, and that 90 percent of cases are now processed well under the government-wide standard. However, 10 percent of cases take considerably longer, often due to delays within the U.S. Government, as other agencies do not respond in a timely manner. This leaves jobs unfilled and employees frustrated by the opaque process. If confirmed, how will you engage with other government agencies to ensure that the U.S. Government is not responsible for egregious delays in processing security clearances?

Answer. The Department continues to foster relationships with interagency partners to coordinate the expedient processing of security clearances and ensuring a trusted workforce. By bridging the communications gap, the Department has already seen a decrease in response times and faster timelines.

If confirmed, I commit to aiding Diplomatic Security to further modernize the security clearance process in line with the Secretary of State’s modernization agenda and to ensuring that 10 percent of cases that may take longer than the average processing time are being addressed appropriately.

Question. Foreign national employees are the backbone of our foreign policy operations abroad. As U.S. Ambassador to India, you have firsthand knowledge of the critical role that our local experts play, from knowing the roads and traffic patterns in order to safely transport employees, to providing critical political insight on local issues. Since 1952, the U.S. has had a program to reward our most loyal employees abroad by allowing them to seek an immigrant visa after 15 years of exceptional service. However, I understand that this program is now in jeopardy due to increased demand for other visas in this category and resultant wait times. Can you explain how this program has ended up with such a concerning backlog, after operating without issue for nearly 70 years? Can you provide estimated numbers of the backlog?

Answer. The EB-4 immigrant visa category covers multiple categories of “special immigrants,” including our locally employed (LE) staff overseas, “special immigrant juveniles” (SIJs)—certain unaccompanied minors who arrive at the southwest border—and other important groups. Congress sets an annual cap on the number of EB-4 visas available. Increased demand and a lower EB-4 limit for FY 1A2023 means LE staff and others now face an unusually long waiting period before visas are available. If confirmed, I look forward to working with Congress and our interagency partners on how to reduce this backlog.

Question. Can you describe the importance of the special immigrant visa program for U.S. Government employees abroad, and the impact that any disruption in this program will have on morale and retention?

Answer. The services provided by our locally employed U.S. Government colleagues overseas are indispensable, and the sacrifices they make on behalf of the United States are deeply valued. Due to recent increased demand for immigrant visas in the employment based fourth-preference category, local staff approved for special immigrant visa status now face a multi-year wait for a visa, as the demand exceeds the limited number of EB-4 visas available under the annual statutory cap. This wait and uncertainty harms local staff morale, recruitment, and retention. If confirmed, I look forward to working with Congress and our interagency partners on how to reduce this backlog.

Question. What steps is State taking to address the increased demand for this visa category? What additional legislative authority is needed to remedy this issue?

Answer. Demand for the EB-4 immigrant visa category derives from geopolitical and migration realities outside of the immediate control of the Department.

The Department of State cannot meet demand under the numerical limitations of the statute. Amending the INA could help to ensure certain groups covered under the EB-4 visa category are able to obtain immigrant visas upon completion of their qualifying service.

Question. Both the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the U.S. Department of State are charged with the protection of U.S. citizens abroad. However, it appears that we have allowed 40 countries to enter the Visa Waiver Program without a clear way to measure or assess reciprocal treatment of U.S. citizens, despite reciprocity being a key feature of the Visa Waiver Program. This program has existed since 1986, but there has been no effort to confirm that U.S. citizens are being treated fairly regardless of race, national origin, ethnicity, or religious background. If confirmed, how will you work to protect U.S. citizens abroad, and assess reciprocal treatment in all visa waiver and visa waiver-aspirant countries?

Answer. A key statutory requirement is that all Visa Waiver Program (VWP) countries extend privileges to U.S. citizens and nationals reciprocal to those that the U.S. extends to the citizens of VWP countries. This important principle includes that all U.S. citizens and nationals are treated equally without regard to race, religion, ethnicity, or national origin. The Department of Homeland Security in consultation with the Department of State is statutorily required to review at least every two years the effects of each VWP country's program designation on U.S. national security, law enforcement, and immigration interests.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO HON. RICHARD R. VERMA BY SENATOR MARCO RUBIO

Question. In May 2022, Secretary Blinken said that the People's Republic of China is the "only country with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do it." The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) clearly holds all the reins of power in the People's Republic of China and has used this power to violate the sovereignty of the United States by flying spy balloons over our country, committing an ongoing genocide in Xinjiang, flood our communities with fentanyl, and emit by far the largest quantity of greenhouse gases. With their absolute control of Chinese society and industry, the CCP could stop all of these destructive actions tomorrow if they so choose. Is the Chinese Communist Party a threat to the United States?

Answer. The President has made it clear the United States views the People's Republic of China (PRC) as a strategic competitor that challenges the existing rules-based international order. Under President Xi, the Chinese Communist Party has become more repressive at home and more assertive abroad. We will defend and strengthen U.S. national security, prosperity, and values; defend international law and agreements and the other principles and institutions that maintain peace and security; protect the rights of individuals and sovereign nations; and make it possible for all countries to coexist and cooperate.

Question. Does the Chinese Communist Party undertake any activities that are beneficial to U.S. interests?

Answer. The United States will work with the PRC where our interests are aligned. We cannot let the disagreements that divide us stop us from moving forward on transnational issues that demand that we work together, for the good of the American people and for the good of the world.

Question. I note that you worked at Albright-Stonebridge Group, a consulting firm that does a significant amount of business in China. This is rather concerning. Do you have any remaining business interests in China or with Chinese companies?

Answer. No.

Question. Are there any areas in which the Chinese Communist Party could constructively work with the United States in good faith? If so, what are they?

Answer. The United States will work with the PRC where our interests are aligned. This includes exploring possible cooperation on transnational challenges such as counter-narcotics, global health, and food security. We cannot let disagree-

ments that divide us stop us from making progress on the priorities that demand we work together, for the good of the American people and for the good of the world.

Question. Are you confident that our facilities and personnel in the People's Republic of China are safe from Chinese Communist Party directed interference and harassment?

Answer. If confirmed, I will have no higher priority than the safety of U.S. Government personnel, family members, and facilities overseas. All U.S. Government facilities, to include the U.S. Mission in China, operate consistent with applicable security programs and in consultation with Mission China leadership standards. Protecting personnel and facilities through the pandemic took extraordinary efforts by the Department's team and this focus will continue to be required as the operating environment changes.

Question. If confirmed, what policies would you put in place to ensure the safety and security of American diplomats posted to China?

Answer. The Department continues to evaluate and adjust the security posture as needed to ensure the safety of U.S. Government personnel, and family member, and facilities in the People's Republic of China. If confirmed, I will have no greater priority.

Question. Last month, the Administration stated it will terminate the COVID-19 public health emergency in May 2023. During the pandemic, the State Department significantly expanded telework eligibility for Civil Service and Foreign Service employees domestically, as well as overseas. It is time to bring back these employees into their respective offices, embassies, and consulates to properly provide services for the American people and conduct in-person diplomacy. U.S. Passport adjudication backlogs cannot be completed from an employee's dining room table and diplomacy to counter CCP influence around the world should not be conducted via a video conference on a boat in the Caribbean.

Answer. Overseas, all U.S. direct hire employees are in the office. As of April%, 2022, the Department adopted an All-Functions posture domestically, enabling full onsite engagement for all tasks requiring in-person presence. If confirmed, I will continue to support the Secretary's Modernization Agenda, under which the Department's Future of Work Plan employs a "Mission First" core guiding principle. This principle ensures that flexibilities augment our ability to deliver on our mission.

Question. Are you aware of the current backlog of U.S. Passports applications?

Answer. In FY2022, Consular Affairs adjudicated the highest number of passport products in history. I understand from the Department that processing time for passport applications was at pre-pandemic levels until February 6 when it increased with the normal cyclical demand. New application volumes are higher than volumes seen at the same time of year pre-pandemic. The Department increased capacity by hiring new staff, recruiting internal volunteers, requiring Passport Services headquarters employees to adjudicate, and authorizing 30,000 hours of monthly overtime.

Question. Should all Consular Affairs employees be back in the office to clear this backlog?

Question. In FY2022, Consular Affairs (CA) adjudicated the highest number of passport products in history. I understand from the Department that processing time was at pre-pandemic levels until February 6 when it increased with the normal cyclical demand. As of late August 2021, all adjudicators returned to work in the office. CA instituted an "all hands on deck" posture, requiring Passport Services headquarters employees to adjudicate; authorized 30,000 hours of monthly overtime; and recruited volunteers, including re-employed annuitants, to work in Washington D.C.'s Satellite Office (akin to a medium-sized agency).

Question. Should employees assigned to overseas posts be authorized telework from another country or domestically?

Answer. I understand in certain circumstances employees assigned to our overseas posts may be granted permission to telework while on medical travel or emergency visitation travel in the United States. This policy both helps posts accomplish their missions and take care of people. I understand employees assigned overseas are not permitted to telework from another overseas location or in other circumstances from the United States and "Third country" telework is not permitted.

Question. If telework remains authorized for our diplomatic missions overseas, why should the U.S. have a physical presence in our embassies and consulates if the work can be done remotely from the United States?

Answer. I understand Department policies do not allow for regularly scheduled or core telework for U.S. direct hire employees assigned abroad. Department telework policy permits situational telework only for U.S. direct hire employees assigned overseas. This means that supervisors have discretion to permit their employees to telework in certain circumstances including security situations, traffic disruptions, quarantine due to COVID-19, and other situations when the supervisor deems telework the best option for the employee to meet the needs of the mission.

Question. Should the U.S. taxpayer cover the costs of housing and other benefits for diplomats assigned overseas, but choose to work from the United States?

Answer. Housing and benefits are based on the location of assignment, which is the physical location where the officer is stationed. Foreign Service Officers and specialists assigned overseas, work overseas. Only in exceptional, temporary circumstances would they work from the United States. The Department provides housing for diplomats stationed overseas to ensure that employees at our over 260 U.S. diplomatic missions around the world have secure and functional residences to carry out U.S. foreign policy objectives consistent with their assignment abroad.

Question. It is critically important that we have a Foreign Service that is designed to meet the needs of this century. The talent we have recruited to the Foreign Service is impressive, but there are ways to further strengthen how we identify new talent and train the workforce that we have. During the Cold War of the last century, the State Department recognized the need to deal with the global threat of the Soviet Union, by hiring Russian speakers and experts on communist ideology. To meet the challenges of this century, our Foreign Service must be structured to counter the malign influence of the Chinese Communist Party, which is now our main geopolitical threat. If confirmed, what would you do to shift the focus of the Foreign Service toward developing regional expertise and advanced language skills, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region?

Answer. The State Department is focused on ensuring its foreign affairs professionals have the regional expertise and language skills necessary to responsibly manage engagement with the PRC, the United States' most complicated bilateral relationship. If confirmed, I would support the Department's recent launch of a Global China training course to deepen officers' understanding of how China exercises influence around the world and how the U.S. can counter that influence. If confirmed, I would also support the Department's plan to train additional critical officers in Chinese and to maintain advanced Chinese language skills.

Question. If the generalist model is to be retained, are you prepared to carve out a separate track for political and economic officers who specialize in one region and/or critical language?

Answer. While I am open to exploring changes, if confirmed, I understand that the current system ensures the Department has a well-rounded, skilled diplomatic corps. Foreign Service Generalist Officers are our key interlocutors with foreign governments, engage with foreign citizens, work to ensure the safety and security of U.S. citizens, and advance U.S. interests abroad. Many gain expertise in a language or region over their career. Given the global scale on which we compete, it is important that our officers be able to succeed in a variety of circumstances and conditions.

Question. If confirmed, will you commit to an evaluation of the personnel numbers in each region and adjust accordingly?

Answer. Yes. I understand the Department is currently in the process of reviewing positions, both domestically and overseas, for potential realignment to better support policy priorities.

Question. Since the start of the Biden Administration, the State Department has been in the business of exporting the same "woke" policies that divide our nation to our allies and partners. From sponsoring drag theater performances in South America to criticizing partners in the Indo-Pacific for same-sex marriage laws, State has placed divisive social objectives over our stated national security priorities. You are currently a member of the board of trustees with the Ford Foundation, correct?

Answer. Yes.

Question. I assume you are aware of the Ford Foundation's stated position to promote abortion access overseas in the name of democracy?

Answer. I am aware of the Ford Foundation's position on women's rights, including reproductive health services. Members of the board of trustees do not approve individual grants.

Question. If confirmed, will you support policies that put the American taxpayer on the hook for providing abortions for State Department employees, even if those employees are stationed in a nation where abortion is illegal?

Answer. I recognize and respect there are restrictions under U.S. federal law on using government funds for abortion services. If confirmed, I will execute the duties of my office and execute the functions of the Department consistent with federal law and Department policy both domestically and overseas.

Question. After the tragic East Africa bombings of the 1990s, the State Department's Accountability Review Board recognized the need for Diplomatic Security Special Agents, called Regional Security Officers (RSO) when overseas, to have direct lines of communication to convey accurate and timely threat information and provide security advice to senior State department leadership. Those recommendations resulted in the RSO no longer reporting to Management officers overseas and directly to the Ambassador. Unfortunately, those recommendations were only implemented overseas and as the events unfolded in Benghazi, Libya, the Assistant Secretary of Diplomatic Security in State Department headquarters did not have the ability to directly brief or provide advice to the Secretary of State, or Deputy Secretaries, here in Washington, without going through multiple layers of bureaucracy. In an increasingly dangerous world, where authoritarian regimes are waging war on sovereign states and operating undercover overseas police outposts, this inability to report unvarnished, accurate, and timely threat information regarding our overseas operations to our chief decision makers in the department puts our diplomats at risk.

- Why does the Assistant Secretary for Diplomatic Security still report to the Undersecretary for Management, instead of directly to the Secretary in Washington, given the need to provide direct and timely security advice and while this reporting chain was eliminated at our overseas missions?

Answer. Direct engagement with foreign partners outside embassy walls is at the heart of diplomacy. From my time as Chief of Mission in India, I recognize the importance of direct and frank threat security assessments from Diplomatic Security (DS) advisors to guide how the U.S. Government balances foreign policy imperatives and risks to U.S. Government personnel. By law, the DS Assistant Secretary reports directly to the Secretary as threats and circumstances require. If confirmed, I am committed to ensuring the Department respects Congress's intent of direct access to the Secretary.

Question. Would you agree that the passage of timely threat information and advice needs to be received in a timely manner directly to the Secretary and Deputy Secretaries, while not being pre-screened by a non-security professional?

Answer. I agree accurate and timely threat information reporting and security advice is critical to smartly balancing risk and our foreign policy objectives. By law, the Assistant Secretary for Diplomatic Security has direct access to the Secretary as threats and circumstances require. If confirmed, I am committed to ensuring the Department respects Congress's intent of direct access to the Secretary by the Assistant Secretary for Diplomatic Security, so that the Secretary has a comprehensive view of the risks inherent in diplomacy.

Question. The Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Antisemitism (SEAS) is responsible for developing and implementing policies to combat antisemitism overseas and plays a critical role in urging and advising foreign governments to take measures to ensure the safety and security of their respective Jewish communities. Vital to its mission is adequate staffing levels and continuity between Administrations. How many positions (full time, part-time, and temporary) currently exist within the SEAS Office as well as the title, hiring mechanisms, and funding sources for such positions.

Answer. I understand from the Department that the staffing of J/SEAS currently consists of five FTEs, three of which are career (two Civil Service, one Foreign Service), one presidential appointment, and one schedule C, all funded via the American Salaries operating account within the Diplomatic Programs appropriation. FTEs include a Special Envoy, a Deputy Special Envoy, one Political Officer, and two Foreign Affairs Officers.

Question. Are there plans to provide the SEAS Office with additional positions or adjust staffing in the coming year?

Answer. I understand there are no current plans to provide additional positions to the SEAS Office or to adjust staffing at this time.

Question. What is the State Department's plan to ensure continuity within the SEAS Office between administrations and before a Special Envoy is confirmed?

Answer. Antisemitism is rising rapidly around the world. I know both the Department and Congress takes countering global antisemitism seriously. The SEAS Act, which elevated the rank of the U.S. Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Antisemitism to the rank of Ambassador, was signed into law in January 2021. It is my understanding the Department is still formulating a comprehensive plan to ensure continuity between administrations and special envoys. If confirmed, I will ensure the SEAS office receives the resources it needs and a continuity plan is in place so the important work of the office can continue without disruption.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO HON. RICHARD R. VERMA BY SENATOR TODD YOUNG

Question. The President has issued the PMA (or the President's Management Agenda) for initiatives designed to make government more citizen-centered, effective, and efficient. Using the passport processing crisis as an example—current passport processing times are not at pre-pandemic levels and the expediting program called “Hand-Carry” which supports urgent passport processing for Americans is not back to full operation. If confirmed, what would be your plan to return all remote workers to on-sight work and how should the Department leverage or utilize existing technologies in the private sector that improve the efficiency and effectiveness of those workers?

Answer. In FY 2022, Consular Affairs adjudicated the highest number of passport products in history. Processing time for passport applications was at pre-pandemic levels until February 6, when it increased with the normal cyclical demand. As of late August 2021, all adjudicators returned to work in the office. Counter and courier services are at or above pre-COVID levels. The Department is evaluating strategies and leveraging existing technologies to alleviate backlogs and manage the demands of our workload effectively, including by piloting remote processing via On-line Passport Renewal.

NOMINATIONS

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 1, 2023

U.S. SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS,
Washington, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:33 p.m., in Room SD-419, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Cory A. Booker presiding.

Present: Senators Booker [presiding], Cardin, Coons, Kaine, Van Hollen, Risch, Young, Barrasso, Hagerty, and Ricketts.

Also Present: Senator Casey, Jr.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. CORY A. BOOKER, U.S. SENATOR FROM NEW JERSEY

Senator BOOKER. I am now going to officially gavel the hearing in. This hearing of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee will now come to order.

We are here today to consider five truly important positions of great service to our nation. The first is Vivek Murthy to be the U.S. Representative on the Executive Board of the World Health Organization. The next is Ms. Kathleen FitzGibbon to be the Ambassador to the Republic of Niger.

Next is Eric Kneedler to be the Ambassador to the Republic of Rwanda. Next is Ms. Pamela Tremont to be Ambassador to the Republic of Zimbabwe, and finally, Mr. Richard Mills to be the Ambassador to the Republic of Nigeria.

As chair of this committee's Africa and Global Health Policy Subcommittee this Congress, I am eager to hear from each of you on how you intend to pursue the United States' interests in the countries and organizations you will respectively be serving in should you be confirmed by the United States Senate.

But it is also important for us to see how these interests fit in with deepening and expanding our relationships and shared opportunities with countries across Africa.

We know that too many people paint Africa, this massive continent, with broad strokes, ignoring the incredible diversity and dynamism across the continent.

I am hopeful that in the aftermath of December's U.S.-Africa Leadership Summit, the United States will chart an emboldened path forward to strengthen U.S.-Africa relations defined by shared visions and with an eye towards prosperity and sustained engagement as partners.

In particular, I would like to highlight the significance of the President's \$55 billion commitment to advance Africa's economic

and human capital development priorities, and the appointment of the Special Representative to ensure implementation of this and other summit deliverables is really a welcome sign.

I am looking forward to working with the administration and all of you to secure support for this financial commitment and ensure accountability from African leaders to deliver for their citizens.

Now it is an absolute pleasure for me, it truly is, to introduce the nominees before us, who are dedicated Americans in their service—already shown and demonstrated service.

The first is someone I have known for quite a long time, Vivek Murthy. It is my honor to introduce him as the President's nominee to become the Representative—the next Representative of the United States on the Executive Board of the World Health Organization, also known as the WHO.

Dr. Murthy is the current U.S. Surgeon General—he does not just dress that way for his fun and enjoyment—and has served our country through one of the worst public health crises in modern history.

Thanks to his effective and steady leadership and at the direction of the President of the United States, he was able to vaccinate millions in record time.

Dr. Murthy also served as U.S. Surgeon General under President Obama where he oversaw the United States response to the Ebola and Zika viruses, underscoring his ability to spearhead government wide responses to public health threats.

He has ample experience interacting with global health leaders, including the WHO director general and foreign health ministers from around the world.

I will spare the committee the rest of his incredible resume. But I will say it is a quite extensive and impressive resume. It is truly a testimony to his qualifications for his role and how he is one great American dedicated to the health of our country.

We have learned from this pandemic. We have learned about infectious diseases and we know that such diseases have no borders nor ideology. They affect human populations regardless. It is imperative that we have strong representation at the WHO.

Dr. Murthy, I look forward to hearing from you and how and why U.S. leadership and engagement at the World Health Organization is critical to fostering sustainable, resilient, and innovative developments in public health around the world.

Ms. Kathleen FitzGibbon, you have been nominated to be the U.S. Ambassador to Niger. It is—you are a career member of the Foreign Service, of which this committee is grateful.

You have served as deputy chief of mission in Nigeria. Your track record across Africa spans more than two decades—you started when you were 12—and includes tours in Sierra Leone, Gabon, Uganda, and Chad.

You are the recipient of multiple performance awards including one for leadership during the West Africa Ebola crisis. You have served under multiple presidents and dedicated yourself to this country's mission.

Your assignments here in D.C. are also highly relevant having worked in the State Department's Office to Combat and Monitor

Trafficking in Persons and later in the Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research as the Office of Africa analyst director.

As a native of New York, known for its greatness in its proximity to New Jersey, Ms. FitzGibbon attended Hartwick College and earned a master's degree from UC Davis, which is considered the Rutgers of the West.

Ms. Pamela Tremont—Ms. Tremont is nominated to be the U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Zimbabwe, is also a career member of the senior Foreign Service, and you have again demonstrated patriotism, service, and leadership over the course of your career.

Your most recent posting to the U.S. Embassy in Stockholm included an 18-month stint as the Charge d'Affaires. Ms. Tremont has wide-ranging experience across multiple regions in substantive areas.

She was assigned to the U.S. Embassy in Ukraine and served as Deputy Chief of Mission of the U.S. Embassy in Cyprus. She has not—she has also held positions in Washington related to NATO policy as well as overseas at the U.S. Embassy in Zambia. Ms. Tremont earned degrees from Baylor and the National Defense University.

Mr. Richard Mills—Mr. Richard Mills' 30-year career in the Foreign Service includes tours in challenging security environments, work in sub-Saharan Africa, and experience leading large inter-agency teams.

You are the acting head of mission to Canada and previously served as the U.S. Ambassador to Armenia. Your incredible service of patriotism to your country also includes overseas postings in Lebanon, Malta, Iraq, and the United Kingdom.

Prior to joining the Foreign Service, Mills was an attorney and received a law degree from the University of Texas. Mr. Mills currently serves as U.S. Deputy Representative to the United Nations, where he has a front row seat to witnessing Nigeria's diplomatic clout and its role—and role on the world stage.

As the President's nominee to the U.S. Ambassador to Nigeria, many of us are eager to hear your thoughts on Nigeria's recent elections and how you would work with the new government to advance U.S. interests.

And the final intro, last but definitely not least, Mr. Eric Kneedler nominated to be U.S. Ambassador to Rwanda. You have the fortunate distinction amongst this group of five of not being introduced by me. Congratulations.

Instead, we have up on this screen—I am going to try to do this looking like I am controlling this like an orchestra conductor—we are going to hear from Senator Bob Casey of Pennsylvania.

Roll the tape.

**STATEMENT OF HON. ROBERT P. CASEY, JR.,
U.S. SENATOR FROM PENNSYLVANIA**

Senator CASEY. Chairman Menendez, Ranking Member Risch, and members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of the nomination of a fellow Pennsylvanian and devoted civil servant, Eric Kneedler.

Eric, thank you for your willingness to serve. I would also like to thank Mr. Kneedler's family, his wife Kristin, and two children,

Toren and Ella. No one enters public service alone. The commitments of such a role mean public servants' families make sacrifices as well.

The role of ambassador to Rwanda is a critical diplomatic position for the U.S. Government. As both Rwanda and the United States form more perfect representative and inclusive unions our continued partnership is vital.

The United States is the largest bilateral supporter of Rwanda and the ambassador plays an important role in ensuring that those U.S. dollars do the most good they can for the Rwandan people.

As Rwanda is one of the Feed the Future program's target countries, Mr. Kneedler will be implementing the Global Food Security Act on the frontlines, fighting the root causes of hunger, poverty, and malnutrition while lifting up communities through agricultural development.

Mr. Kneedler's quarter century of diplomatic experience makes him well equipped to strengthen the U.S.' relationship with Rwanda.

Most recently he served as political counselor, Chief of Mission, and Chargé d'Affaires in nearby Kenya for five years. While serving as charge last October, Mr. Kneedler gave an important speech that made reference to people with disabilities.

At the inclusive Africa Conference, Mr. Kneedler talked about the need to build on the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Convention of Rights of Persons with Disabilities to, quote, "unlock the hidden potential of every person to contribute to a brighter future for Africa," unquote.

Every community from here to Rwanda is better off when people with disabilities are able to fully participate in their communities. Mr. Kneedler's service, his qualifications, and experience have prepared him well to honorably represent U.S. interests abroad and prioritize the human rights of all people, including those with disabilities.

And while his career has required Eric to leave Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania has never left him. Once a week during football season you can find him awake in the middle of the night watching the Steelers.

I strongly support Eric's nomination to be the next U.S. Ambassador to Rwanda and thank you again for the opportunity to speak on his behalf.

Senator BOOKER. I am sorry that he mentioned that you were a Steelers fan. I think you just lost four votes up here.

[Laughter.]

Senator BOOKER. I have to say that Mr.—Senator Hagerty is relieved he is no longer the acting ranking member of this committee hearing. He and I as junior senators now turn it to the far more experienced, the far more senior, the wise sagacious soul that is sitting to my left.

I now bring you the ranking member, former chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, Senator Risch.

**STATEMENT OF HON. JAMES E. RISCH,
U.S. SENATOR FROM IDAHO**

Senator RISCH. Mr. Chairman, flattery will get you everything. Thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I appreciate the merriment we are having here at the beginning with some good interaction. But this is really serious. I mean, this panel is made up of people who are going to very difficult places and I have a few things I want to say on the record before we start and I am going to begin with the nomination of Dr. Murthy to be U.S. Representative to the World Health Organization.

The WHO is a flawed organization and I say that from experience. I dealt with them deeply as the COVID matter started, and the pandemic was difficult, as we all know, at the best and I just simply was not getting out of WHO what I wanted and I think most people saw what was happening there.

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed critical weaknesses in the organization's structure and leadership. It failed to act quickly in response to the COVID-19 outbreak and it yielded—this was the thing that really troubled me—it yielded to the Chinese pressure in stalling the investigation.

I remember I was shocked when I talked to the head of the WHO and asked him how they went about this right at the beginning, and they went to China but they were stuck in a hotel for two weeks before the Chinese would let them get out of their hotel to go look at what was going on and they—WHO has failed to hold China accountable for its lack of transparency.

These failures contributed to the deaths of millions of people around the world. It put politics ahead of human health. The WHO has also been plagued by allegations, as we all know, of sexual exploitation and abuse including in response to the Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

These unconscionable acts cannot be swept under the carpet. The WHO employees responsible for these crimes must be fired, banned from future service in the U.N. system, and held personally and criminally liable.

There are apparently discussions going on between the White House regarding some kind of an agreement on the pandemic—on any future pandemic with the WHO.

I am disappointed that the White House has not included me—I do not know if they have included the Democrat members—in these discussions, but our side has not been included in this.

This is incredibly important that Congress be read in on this. We certainly should be asked to approve any agreement that is entered into since it will be a treaty. I introduced a resolution this week that would ensure the Senate gets an appropriate opportunity to consider any such agreement.

The administration should also refrain from increasing U.S. contributions to the WHO without targeted verifiable reforms that ensure the WHO is properly tasked and fully accountable.

If confirmed, you will be responsible to hold the line on these principles.

On the nomination of U.S. Ambassador to Zimbabwe I am appalled by the continued abuses of power, excessive corruption, and

horrific human rights record by the country's leadership. These not only inhibit the U.S.-Zimbabwe relationship but also deprive the region of benefiting from a prosperous Zimbabwe.

With elections expected this summer we already see the Zimbabwean regime taking the country down a dark and familiar path of electoral violence, repression, and impunity.

Our ambassador must hold firm in the support for the people of Zimbabwe while committing to uphold U.S. values on human rights and democracy and engaging the Zimbabwean Government.

I look forward to hearing how Ms. Tremont plans to—Ms. Tremont plans to do this.

On the nomination of U.S. Ambassador to Rwanda, this is always an important job on the continent but even more so now that the U.S. has critical priorities where Rwanda can either be a constructive partner or an unhelpful constraint.

Important issues include the regional conflict in eastern Congo and the reengagement of M-23 and other rebel groups, the Rwandan Government's detention of U.S. permanent resident and recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom, and also Rwanda's role in helping to stabilize northern Mozambique and Central African Republic.

I am keen to hear from Mr. Kneedler about how he will confront the challenges while shaping a U.S. policy in Rwanda that requires greater clarity and direction.

Moving on to the nomination of U.S. Ambassador to Niger, Ms. FitzGibbon's most recent experience as chief deputy—or excuse me, as deputy chief of mission in Nigeria is probably the best preparation one could get for this role.

Both countries battle significant insurgent threats, are essential U.S. security partners, and face severe challenges to democracy, which can be overcome with commitment and support.

The situation in the Sahel has deteriorated dramatically in the last few years, particularly with the coup in Mali and Burkina Faso and the entry of Russian-backed Wagner Group into Mali.

I look forward to hearing how Ms. FitzGibbon will support the U.S.-Niger security relationship while being a visible proponent for developing resilient democratic institutions in Niger.

Finally, the nomination of U.S. Ambassador to Nigeria—this country is undergoing a rapid transformation. We must commit to working with Nigeria to capitalize on opportunities to build its economy and democracy while confronting significant challenges like insecurity.

Elections in Nigeria always serve as a vital test for Nigeria's democracy and have a lasting impact on the region. While the result of last Saturday's presidential election was announced today, it is clear that many of the technical and institutional challenges that have previously plagued Nigerian elections continued into this process.

It is critical that Nigeria finds a path forward that serves the will of the Nigerian people.

Mr. Mills, if confirmed, will need to lead U.S. efforts in Nigeria to support the development of strong democratic institutions including political parties.

Lastly, the human rights record of Nigeria's military gives us pause about how we provide the country with much needed security assistance. Nigeria's partnership with the U.S. must include lasting solutions to seemingly unending human rights abuses. I look forward to hearing how Mr. Mills plans to approach these issues.

So, again, I come back, Mr. Chairman, to the fact that this is a panel made up of very qualified people to take these issues on. I am keen to hear from them how they are going to do that.

We do not often see a panel with as many challenges collectively as all of you have. But we hope you are up to the task. Thank you for taking this on.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator BOOKER. No, Mr. Ranking Member, thank you for your opening remarks and for your insights into these challenges as well as your affirmation of the qualities of the people before me.

We are now going to open for opening testimonies. We are going to start with Dr. Murthy. Then we are going to go to Ms. FitzGibbon, then Mr. Kneedler, then Ms. Tremont, and then the mighty Mr. Mills.

I am going to have to run to the floor to vote. Should we get done with the opening testimony before I return—I doubt that will happen—you are very fortunate because the acting Chairman of this committee will be the former Chairman of the entire Foreign Relations Committee, a dear friend who also I am stuck between, unlike the Rutgers University between Harvard and Princeton here. So——

Senator RISCH. Who is Harvard and who is Princeton?

Senator BOOKER. Sir, you are whoever you want to be.

[Laughter.]

Senator BOOKER. But I will direct Dr. Murthy to please begin with your opening statement, sir, and to please take no disrespect from me turning my back on you and walking out.

Dr. MURTHY. It is all good. I appreciate that.

Senator BOOKER. All right.

STATEMENT OF DR. VIVEK HALLAGERE MURTHY, OF FLORIDA, NOMINATED TO BE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE UNITED STATES ON THE EXECUTIVE BOARD OF THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

Dr. MURTHY. Chairman Booker, Ranking Member Risch, and distinguished members of the committee, I am deeply honored for the opportunity to appear before you today as the President's nominee to serve as the Representative of the United States to the Executive Board of the WHO.

I would not be here today if it were not for the love and support of my wife and best friend, Alice Chen, my children, Teyjas and Shanthi, my sister and brother-in-law, Rashmi and Amit, my grandmother, Sarojini, and especially my parents, Hallegere and Myetraie Murthy.

It was my father and mother who inspired me to become a doctor and to enter public service. I spent afternoons after school and on weekends in the small clinic that they ran in Miami, Florida. I was greeting patients and watching my parents at work.

Over time I came to see that healing was about more than diagnoses made and medicines prescribed. It was also about building relationships and empowering people with the tools necessary to keep themselves and their families healthy.

Through their words and actions my parents taught me that health is the most important investment that we can make. It is the foundation for prosperity and happiness, and I came to see that this was true not only for individuals but also for communities, nations, and for the world.

This lesson became the foundation of my career in medicine and in public health. Nearly 30 years ago, it inspired me to launch VISIONS, an organization focused on HIV/AIDS prevention, that organized youth-led workshops and trained students to be educators and community leaders.

It is a lesson that guided me when launching the Swasthya Community Health Partnership in rural India, which trained local young women to be community health workers and community leaders.

It has informed the way I have cared for patients and their families over the years, and the lesson from my parents has also guided my work as Surgeon General. Over two terms I have had countless conversations with fellow Americans to learn about their health concerns and needs. I have worked to advance solutions to opioid addiction, tobacco-related disease, mental illness, and other public health challenges.

I have had the privilege of working with community organizations, government leaders of all levels and from both parties, and countless Americans to address global health threats that have impacted the United States from Ebola and Zika to COVID-19.

My experiences dealing with domestic and global health matters have made it clear to me that the health of Americans requires effective partnership and coordination with the rest of the world to ensure the early detection, rapid response, and containment of public health threats.

This is a place where the World Health Organization has a vital role to play and the United States must ensure that the WHO plays this role effectively. That is why my top priorities for this position, if confirmed, are strong governance at the WHO and making sure we are better prepared for the next pandemic.

Now, given this significant longstanding investment in the WHO by the United States we have both the ability and the responsibility to demand clarity, transparency, and accountability in all WHO operations.

That includes ensuring that the WHO uses its position to help build stronger and more resilient health systems around the world, that its approach to public health threats is rapid and robust, that resources are used responsibly and that decision making is transparent.

It also means demanding that the WHO workforce be held to the highest ethical standards and that there is a zero tolerance policy for abuse and exploitation that is enforced.

Ensuring we are better prepared for the next pandemic will ensure the WHO—will require the WHO to see that the lessons of COVID-19 and prior infectious disease threats are in fact reflected

in a clear strategy for addressing future pandemics including effective surveillance and detection, rapid response, and sustained efforts to support recovery.

It will also require successful engagement on negotiations currently underway to strengthen the international health regulations and develop a new pandemic accord to address broader gaps in pandemic preparedness.

An effective WHO can help the world address not only future pandemics but also ongoing public health challenges from maternal mortality, HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria, to noncommunicable diseases and mental illness, which are robbing more and more people of their health, productivity, and fulfillment.

Mental health is an area that I have focused on during my tenure as surgeon general. It has become a global crisis and I believe the United States is uniquely positioned to provide the empathetic, thoughtful, and urgent leadership that this issue demands.

If I had the privilege of serving as U.S. Representative to the WHO Executive Board, it is my intention to strengthen America's voice and leadership on mental health on the world stage.

I recognize this is a time of great challenge for America and the world when it comes to health. But I also believe we have a window of opportunity to strengthen our institutions and processes so we are more prepared than before COVID-19 and that is my guiding principle.

I hope to have the opportunity to do so as U.S. Representative to the WHO Executive Board, working hand in hand with partners in Congress and across the administration.

I thank you for your consideration of my nomination and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Dr. Murthy follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF DR. VIVEK HALLAGERE MURTHY

Chairman Booker, Ranking Member Risch, distinguished members of the committee—I'm deeply honored by the opportunity to appear before you today as President Biden's nominee to serve as Representative of the United States on the Executive Board of the World Health Organization.

I would not be here today were it not for the love and support of my wife and my best friend, Dr. Alice Chen; my children, Teyjas and Shanthi; my sister, Rashmi and brother-in-law Amit; my grandmother Sarojini; and especially my parents, Hallegere and Myetraie Murthy.

It was my father and mother who inspired me to become a doctor and to enter public service. I spent afternoons after school and on weekends in the small clinic they ran in Miami, greeting patients and watching my parents at work. Over time, I came to see that healing was about more than diagnoses made and medicines prescribed; it was also about building relationships and empowering people with the tools necessary to keep themselves, and their families, healthy.

Through their words and actions, my parents taught me that health is the most important investment we can make—it is the foundation for prosperity and happiness. I came to see that this was true not only for individuals, but for communities, for nations, and for the world.

This lesson became the foundation of my career in medicine and public health. Nearly 30 years ago, it inspired me to launch VISIONS, an organization focused on HIV/AIDS prevention that organized youth-led education workshops and trained students to be educators and community leaders. It's the lesson that guided me when launching the Swasthya Community Health Partnership in rural India, which trained local young women to be community health workers and community leaders. It informed the way I have cared for patients and their families over the years.

And the lesson from my parents has guided my work as Surgeon General. Over two terms, I've had countless conversations our fellow Americans to learn about

their health concerns and needs. I've worked to advance solutions to opioid addiction, tobacco-related disease, mental illness, and other public health challenges. And I've worked with community organizations, government leaders at all levels and from both parties, and countless Americans to address global health threats that have impacted the United States, from Ebola and Zika to COVID-19.

My experiences dealing with domestic and global health matters have made clear to me that the health of Americans requires effective partnership and coordination with the rest of the world, to ensure early detection, rapid response, and containment of public health threats. This is a place where the World Health Organization has a vital role to play. And the United States must ensure that the WHO plays this role effectively.

That's why my top priorities for the position, if confirmed, are strong governance at the WHO and making sure we're better prepared for the next pandemic. Given the significant, decades-long investment in the WHO by the United States, we have the ability and the responsibility to demand clarity, transparency, and accountability in all WHO operations. That includes ensuring that the WHO uses its position to help build stronger and more resilient health systems around the world, that its approach to public health threats is rapid and robust, that resources are used responsibly, and that decision-making is transparent. It also means demanding that the WHO workforce be held to the highest ethical standards, and that there is zero tolerance for abuse and exploitation.

Ensuring we are better prepared for the next pandemic will require the WHO to see that the lessons of COVID-19 and prior infectious disease threats are reflected in a clear strategy for addressing future pandemics, including effective surveillance and detection, rapid response, and sustained efforts to support recovery. It also will require successful engagement on negotiations currently underway to strengthen the International Health Regulations and develop a new pandemic accord to address broader gaps in pandemic preparedness.

An effective WHO can help the world address not only future pandemics, but also ongoing public health challenges, from maternal mortality, HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria to noncommunicable diseases and mental illness, which are robbing more and more people of their health, productivity, and fulfillment. Mental health is an area I have focused on during my tenure as Surgeon General. It has now become a global crisis. I believe the United States is uniquely positioned to provide the empathetic, thoughtful, and urgent leadership that this issue demands.

If I have the privilege of serving as U.S. Representative to the WHO Executive Board, it is my intention to strengthen America's voice and leadership on mental health on the world stage.

I recognize that this is a time of great challenge for America and the world when it comes to health. But I also believe that we have a window of opportunity to strengthen our institutions and processes so we are more prepared than before COVID-19. That is my guiding principle. I hope to have the opportunity to do so as U.S. Representative to the WHO Executive Board, working hand-in-hand with partners in Congress and across the Administration.

Thank you for your consideration of my nomination. I look forward to your questions.

Senator CARDIN [presiding]. We are going to have a roving chairmanship here until our Chairman gets back.

Ms. FitzGibbon?

STATEMENT OF KATHLEEN A. FITZGIBBON, OF NEW YORK, A CAREER MEMBER OF THE SENIOR FOREIGN SERVICE, CLASS OF MINISTER-COUNSELOR, NOMINATED TO BE AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY, OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE REPUBLIC OF NIGER

Ms. FITZGIBBON. Thank you.

Mr. Acting Chairman, Ranking Member, and distinguished members of the committee, I am honored to appear before you today as President Biden's nominee to be the next ambassador to the Republic of Niger.

I deeply appreciate the confidence and trust that the President and the Secretary of State have shown in nominating me for this position and I thank you for your consideration.

If confirmed, I look forward to working with Congress to advance our interests in Niger.

My family members could not be here with me today but because of their support I am sitting before this committee. My father, sisters and brothers, aunts and uncles and cousins, are all watching from Bills country in western New York, Virginia, and family outposts in North Carolina and Washington State, and my colleagues in Africa are, watching represented here by Katie Donohoe from Team Nigeria, and then I also have behind me my desk officer from Team Niger. So I am going to be traded from one team to the other, if confirmed.

My mother and sister are no longer here with us but they were important players in my story. My commitment to sub-Saharan Africa began as a Hartwick College intern at INTERACTION where I worked with nongovernmental organizations and the Select Committee on Hunger, mustering support for the Ethiopian famine in 1984.

This motivated my academic focus on African politics and development at the University of California at Davis and teaching African politics at Mary Washington College in Fredericksburg, Virginia.

These experiences enabled me to springboard into diplomatic service, which was a lifelong dream which seemed far out of reach from my small working-class town of Caledonia, New York.

I started my State Department career as a civil service officer and then converted into the Foreign Service thanks to a program initiated by Secretary Powell to make our diplomatic face abroad look more like America.

My dream job has allowed me to be a participant in historic junctures in Nigeria, Chad, Uganda, Sierra Leone, Gabon, and Sao Tome and Principe. These assignments built my experience in security and counterterrorism, conflict resolution, refugee and migration affairs, trafficking in persons, human rights, democratic reforms, and commercial advocacy, as well as humanitarian and health diplomacy.

I led interagency teams that managed U.S. Government resources as deputy chief of mission in Gabon, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, and as charge d'affaires for a year in Sierra Leone during the West Africa Ebola crisis.

In these positions I mentored our next generation of diplomats so they too could have the skills they need to succeed.

I also take very seriously my responsibility to protect American citizens overseas. Serving in Africa, I coordinated military and law enforcement activities during numerous situations of political unrest, terrorist threats, and kidnapping for ransom. In 2020, I secured Nigerian permission for a successful cross border rescue of an American hostage.

If confirmed, I will make use of these rich experiences to reinforce the strong partnership between Niger and the United States. Niger faces major terrorist threats on multiple borders and is a critical partner in our efforts to combat violent extremism and in

strengthening democratic governance and adherence to international humanitarian law in West Africa.

It is a linchpin of our rebalance stabilization strategy for the Sahel that seeks governance solutions to the security problems plaguing Niger and its neighbors. Our objective is to address Niger's many development deficits while strengthening its military capacity to restore the security necessary to defeat the terrorists on and within its borders.

If confirmed, I will lead our interagency team's efforts to enhance the Government's delivery of critical services in health, education, agriculture, food security, and the rule of law. Through these efforts I will seek to deepen Niger's democracy, provide economic opportunity, and deny violent extremist organizations the ability to recruit neglected youth.

Fundamental to our assistant strategy is the promotion and respect for human rights and humanitarian principles for which I will be a relentless advocate.

Early in my career female activists told then Secretary Albright that in Africa poverty has a woman's face. These words resonate as a sobering reality in Niger. I look forward to working with President Bazoum, who is prioritizing the betterment of women and girls as a major pillar of the country's economic development plan.

Our USAID mission, which opened up after a 22-year absence, is a critical player in our whole-of-government approach to investing in Nigerian people, especially women and girls.

This long-term investment will require buy in from Niger's political class, a challenge that I will gladly take up, although I also understand local absorptive capacity could limit the pace of our progress.

Finally, I will support inclusive democratic processes and transparency to strengthen the foundation of governance necessary to meet the aspirations of Niger's youthful population.

Senators, the United States has an important role and stake in helping Niger succeed in its uphill battle. If confirmed, I look forward to leading U.S. Government efforts to consolidate Niger's democratic gains and create a secure environment in which Nigeriens can prosper.

Close coordination and consultation with Congress will be essential to achieving these goals.

Mr. Acting Chairman and Mr. Ranking Member, thank you for the opportunity to be here before you today and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Ms. FitzGibbon follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF KATHLEEN A. FITZGIBBON

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and distinguished members of the committee, I am honored to appear before you as President Biden's nominee for United States Ambassador to the Republic of Niger. I deeply appreciate the confidence and trust the President and Secretary of State have shown in nominating me for this position. Thank you for your consideration and if confirmed, I look forward to working with Congress to advance our interests in Niger. My family members could not be here today, but because of their support, I am sitting before this committee. My father, sisters and brothers, aunts, uncles, and cousins are watching from Bills country in Western New York and our family outposts in North Carolina and Washington State. My mother and sister are no longer with us, but they also were important players in my story.

My commitment to sub-Saharan Africa began as a Hartwick College intern at INTERACTION, where I worked with non-governmental organizations and the Select Committee on Hunger mustering support during the Ethiopian famine in 1984. This motivated my academic focus on African politics and development at the University of California at Davis and teaching African politics at Mary Washington College. These experiences enabled me to springboard into diplomatic service, which was a lifelong dream that seemed out of reach from my small, working-class town of Caledonia, New York. I started my State Department career as a civil service officer and then converted into the Foreign Service, thanks to a program initiated by Secretary Powell to make our diplomatic face abroad look more like America.

My dream job has allowed me to be a participant at historic junctures in Nigeria, Chad, Uganda, Sierra Leone, Gabon, and Sao Tome and Principe. These assignments built my expertise on security and counterterrorism, conflict resolution, refugee and migration affairs, trafficking in persons, human rights, democratic reforms, commercial advocacy, as well as humanitarian and health diplomacy. I led interagency teams and managed U.S. Government resources as Deputy Chief of Mission in Gabon, Sierra Leone, and Nigeria and as the Charge d'Affaires for a year in Sierra Leone during the West African Ebola crisis. In these positions, I mentored our next generation of diplomats so they could have the skills they need to succeed.

I also take very seriously my responsibility to protect U.S. citizens overseas. Serving in Africa, I coordinated military and law enforcement activities during numerous situations of political unrest, terrorist threats, and kidnapping-for-ransom cases. In 2020, I secured Nigerian permission for a successful cross-border rescue of an American hostage.

If confirmed, I will make use of these rich experiences to reinforce the strong partnership between Niger and the United States of America. Niger faces major terrorist threats on multiple borders and is a critical partner in our efforts to combat violent extremism and in strengthening democratic governance and adherence to international humanitarian law across West Africa. It is a linchpin in our re-balanced stabilization strategy for the Sahel that seeks governance solutions to the security problems plaguing Niger and its neighbors. Our objective is to address Niger's many development deficits while strengthening its military capacity to restore the security necessary to defeat terrorists on and within its borders. If confirmed, I will lead our interagency team's efforts to enhance the Government's delivery of critical services in education, health, agriculture, food security, and the rule of law. Through these efforts, I will seek to deepen Niger's democracy, provide economic opportunity, and deny violent extremist organizations the ability to recruit neglected youths. Fundamental to our assistance strategy is the promotion of respect for human rights and humanitarian principles, for which I will be a relentless advocate.

Early in my career, female activists told then-Secretary Albright that "in Africa, poverty has a woman's face." These words resonate as a sobering reality in Niger. I am looking forward to working with President Bazoum, who is prioritizing the betterment of women and girls as a major pillar of the country's economic development plan. Our USAID mission, which reopened after a 22-year absence, is a critical player in our whole-of-government approach to investing in the Nigerien people, especially women and girls. This long-term investment will require buy-in from Niger's political class, a challenge that I will gladly take up though I also understand that local absorptive capacity may limit the pace of our progress. Finally, I will support inclusive democratic processes and transparency to strengthen the foundation of governance necessary to meet the aspirations of Niger's youthful population.

The United States has an important role and stake in helping Niger succeed in its uphill battle. If confirmed, I look forward to leading U.S. Government efforts to consolidate Niger's democratic gains and create a secure environment in which Nigeriens can prosper. Close coordination and consultation with Congress will be essential to achieving these goals.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I look forward to your questions.

Senator KAINE [presiding]. Thank you very much.
Mr. Kneeder?

STATEMENT OF ERIC W. KNEEDLER, OF PENNSYLVANIA, A CAREER MEMBER OF THE SENIOR FOREIGN SERVICE, CLASS OF MINISTER-COUNSELOR, NOMINATED TO BE AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE REPUBLIC OF RWANDA

Mr. KNEEDLER. Acting Chairman, Ranking Member, distinguished members of the committee—and a special thank you to Senator Casey for the very kind introduction—it is a tremendous honor and privilege to appear before you today as President Biden’s nominee to be the U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Rwanda.

I am grateful to President Biden and Secretary Blinken for their confidence and trust and, if confirmed, I look forward to working with the committee and other members of Congress to strengthen the bilateral relationship for the benefit of both of our countries.

Before I begin I would like to take a moment to thank my wife, Kristin, who is also a U.S. diplomat and is with me here today along with her sister, Kelly, for her unwavering support and partnership throughout our Foreign Service journey.

It has been a true team effort from the beginning, and I would also like to thank our son, Toren, and daughter, Ella, for weathering the many moves and disruptions to their lives, mostly with good humor and a sense of adventure.

I also want to thank my parents, Dick and Suzette, who are tuning in from Florida and taught me the importance of hard work and public service. I would like to thank my sister, Rebecca, as well who is watching in Arkansas, in addition to my Aunt Rebecca.

I am also grateful for the support of friends across the country and around the globe and to the many State Department colleagues with whom I have had the pleasure of serving, particularly our locally employed staff, friends, who keep our missions running. Thank you.

As this committee is well aware, this is an important moment in our relationship with Rwanda. There are significant ways in which U.S. and Rwandan policy views diverge.

As Secretary Blinken noted during his visit to Kigali earlier this year, or last year, the United States has concerns about the human rights climate in Rwanda and believes citizens in every country should be able to express their views without fear of intimidation, imprisonment, violence, or any other forms of repression.

I would like to underscore that support for democracy, respect for human rights, and the rule of law remain cornerstones of U.S. policy in Rwanda. If confirmed, I will work tirelessly to promote freedom of expression, democratic governance, and access to justice, just as I have done at every stop of my 24-year career, including most recently as the charge d’affaires at our embassy in Nairobi.

Since November of 2021 the violence in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo has caused significant human suffering. We appreciate Rwanda’s engagement in the Nairobi and Rwanda processes, and urge Rwanda and all signatories to abide by the commitments in the November 23 Luanda communique.

Given the legacy of the Rwandan genocide, we strongly condemn anti-Rwandaphone hate speech and any collaboration with armed groups which espouse genocide ideology. As we have noted publicly

in various fora, however, there is evidence Rwanda has provided support to the U.N.- and U.S.-sanctioned M-23 armed group responsible for much of the recent violence, and consistent with the Luanda communique we call for an end to that support.

If confirmed, I will use every tool at my disposal to help deescalate tensions, promote respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, and assist ongoing African-led mediation efforts.

At the same time, the United States and Rwanda share many global, regional, and local priorities and we have a broad partnership with the people of Rwanda. If confirmed, I would work to advance our cooperation with the Government and people of Rwanda in many of these areas, including global health security, the economic and commercial relationship, environmental and climate issues, and peacekeeping.

We are also now seeing the benefits of our decades of assistance helping Rwanda to strengthen its public health system. For example, Rwanda rapidly achieved one of the world's highest COVID-19 vaccination rates, in part due to this longstanding assistance and the U.S. donation of over 7 million vaccine doses in partnership with COVAX.

In addition, the United States and Rwanda have worked together to combat malaria and HIV/AIDS. If confirmed, I look forward to building on these successes and advancing our shared health priorities.

U.S. business interests in Rwanda are also expanding, with private U.S. investment increasing in key sectors including energy, water treatment, and telecommunications. Informal university partnerships also continue to grow between our two countries, and the only American research university with a full time faculty and operations in Africa plans to expand opportunities at its Kigali campus.

Meanwhile, over 1,200 Rwandans studied in the United States during the last academic year and 2,500 Rwandans are alumni of U.S. Government-sponsored exchange programs. If confirmed, I will look for ways to advance U.S. values and promote our shared interests.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today and I look forward to your questions.

PREPARED STATEMENT OF ERIC W. KNEEDLER

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and distinguished members of the committee: It is a tremendous honor and privilege to appear before you today as President Biden's nominee to be the U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Rwanda. I am grateful to President Biden and Secretary Blinken for their confidence and trust, and if confirmed, I look forward to working with the committee and other Members of Congress to strengthen the bilateral relationship for the benefit of both of our countries.

Before I begin, I would like to take a moment to thank my wife Kristin, who is also a U.S. diplomat, for her unwavering support and partnership throughout our Foreign Service journey. It has been a true team effort from the beginning. I would also like to thank our son Toren and daughter Ella for weathering the many moves and disruptions to their lives mostly with good humor and a sense of adventure. I also want to thank my parents Dick and Suzette, who are tuning in from Florida, and taught me the importance of hard work and public service. I'd like to thank my sister Rebecca as well, who is watching in Arkansas, in addition to my Aunt Rebecca. I am also grateful for the support of friends across the country and around the globe. And to the many State Department colleagues with whom I have had the

pleasure of serving, particularly locally employed staff friends who keep our missions running—thank you.

As this committee is well-aware, this is an important moment in our relationship with Rwanda. There are significant ways in which U.S. and Rwandan policy views diverge. As Secretary Blinken noted during his visit to Kigali last year, the United States has concerns about the human rights climate in Rwanda and believes citizens in every country should be able to express their views without fear of intimidation, imprisonment, violence, or any other forms of repression. I would like to underscore that support for democracy, respect for human rights, and the rule of law remain cornerstones of U.S. policy in Rwanda. If confirmed, I will work tirelessly to promote freedom of expression, democratic governance, and access to justice, just as I have done at every stop of my 24-year career, including most recently as the Chargé d’Affaires, a.i. at our Embassy in Nairobi.

Since November 2021, the violence in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo has caused significant human suffering. We appreciate Rwanda’s engagement in the Nairobi and Luanda processes and urge Rwanda and all signatories to abide by the commitments in the November 23 Luanda communiqué. Given the legacy of the Rwandan genocide, we strongly condemn anti-Rwandaphone hate speech and any collaboration with armed groups which espouse genocide ideology. As we have noted publicly in various fora, however, there is evidence Rwanda has provided support to the U.N.- and U.S.-sanctioned M23 armed group responsible for much of the recent violence, and, consistent with the Luanda communiqué, we call for an end to that support. If confirmed, I will use every tool at my disposal to help deescalate tensions, promote respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, and assist ongoing African-led mediation efforts.

At the same time, the United States and Rwanda share many global, regional and local priorities and we have a broad partnership with the people of Rwanda. If confirmed, I would work to advance our cooperation with the Government and people of Rwanda in many of these areas, including global health security; the economic and commercial relationship; environmental and climate issues; and peacekeeping.

We are also now seeing the benefits of our decades of assistance helping Rwanda to strengthen its public health system. For example, Rwanda rapidly achieved one of the world’s highest COVID-19 vaccination rates in part due to this longstanding assistance and the U.S. donation of over seven million vaccine doses in partnership with COVAX. In addition, the United States and Rwanda have worked together to combat malaria and HIV/AIDS. If confirmed, I look forward to building on these successes and advancing our shared health priorities.

U.S. business interests in Rwanda are also expanding, with private U.S. investment increasing in key sectors including energy, water treatment, and telecommunications. Informal university partnerships also continue to grow between our two countries, and the only American research university with a full-time faculty and operations in Africa plans to expand opportunities at its Kigali campus. Meanwhile, over 1,200 Rwandans studied in the United States during the last academic year, and 2,500 Rwandans are alumni of U.S. Government sponsored exchange programs. If confirmed, I will look for ways to advance U.S. values and promote our shared interests.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I look forward to your questions.

Senator BOOKER [presiding]. Thank you very much for that opening statement.

We will now move on to Ms. Tremont.

STATEMENT OF PAMELA M. TREMONT, OF VIRGINIA, A CAREER MEMBER OF THE SENIOR FOREIGN SERVICE, CLASS OF MINISTER-COUNSELOR, NOMINATED TO BE AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE REPUBLIC OF ZIMBABWE

Ms. TREMONT. Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, distinguished members of this committee, it is the greatest honor of my 30-year diplomatic career to appear before you today as President Biden’s nominee to be the next U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Zimbabwe.

I am profoundly grateful to the President and Secretary Blinken for entrusting me with this tremendous responsibility.

This nomination is a culmination of my family's public service to the American people. My parents, Linn and Jan Danielski, who are just behind me, instilled in me a spirit of public service through my father's 28-year Army career.

They and my sister Stacey encouraged my dreams when at the age of 16 I announced my future was in the U.S. Foreign Service. But I am particularly indebted to my best friend and husband of 31 years—to this side—Eric Tremont, who has always prioritized me and our family above himself. I would not be here today without him and our 17-year-old son, Peyton, who has served alongside us in five countries and who was one of the last Eagle Scouts out of Troop 980 in Kyiv, Ukraine. He is undoubtedly watching from the ski slopes in Europe, although he should be studying physics.

[Laughter.]

Ms. TREMONT. My family's values and the support of many dear friends have been crucial along this journey and they inspire me every day to seek diplomatic solutions to global challenges.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, along that journey I have been privileged to represent the United States in eight countries across three continents, including seven years working on Southern African affairs.

The common thread among people everywhere is a desire for representative governance that respects their human rights and offers them economic opportunity free from corruption and supported by rule of law. In a word, they want dignity, and I firmly believe the Zimbabwean people want and deserve that, too.

Throughout my career I have promoted these foundational values by supporting electoral assistance in countries such as Comoros, Zambia, and Ukraine, where I headed electoral assistance to the 2019 presidential election just months after Russia attacked Ukrainian ships, which ushered in a period of martial law.

Our assistance gave Ukrainians confidence in the electoral system to elect the leader of their choice. This year Zimbabweans will go to the polls for the second time in the post-Mugabe period. Zimbabwe's constitution guarantees its citizens the right to choose their leaders through free and fair elections, to participate in political parties and organizations, and to campaign freely and peacefully.

But too often Zimbabweans have been denied these rights and I share the committee's concerns over the increasing instances of political violence, intimidation, and lawlessness.

The Government of Zimbabwe has an opportunity to uphold its own constitution and deliver on President Mnangagwa's yet to be realized commitment of peaceful democratic electoral processes.

If confirmed, I will actively work to support the democratic aspirations of the Zimbabwean people and I will seek partnership with those in Zimbabwe who are doing the same.

The U.S. commitment to the Zimbabwean people is clear. Since we recognized the new state of Zimbabwe immediately after independence in 1980 the U.S. Government has invested more than \$4.5 billion in humanitarian aid and development assistance to the Zimbabwean people.

Millions of Zimbabweans are alive today because of the PEPFAR program. Yet, the potential of the Zimbabwean people is stymied by corruption, economic mismanagement, and a lack of investment in human capital that have undermined this former breadbasket of Africa, the home of Great Zimbabwe.

If confirmed, I will work with this committee to promote economic reform, rule of law, transparency, and women's empowerment to unleash Zimbabwe's economic potential and offer opportunities to U.S. business. Together we can address poverty and food insecurity in Zimbabwe and the entire region.

My highest priority will be the safety and security of Americans in Zimbabwe including the Embassy staff and our local staff who have come under increasing pressure as a result of their employment with us.

My leadership touchstone has always been that diverse teams properly resourced in a secure environment can do anything and I have always confronted harassment and discrimination head on.

If confirmed, I will carefully steward U.S. resources, hold my team to the highest possible standard, protect them at all costs, and empower them to work with Zimbabweans who share our goal of peaceful democratic nations working together to overcome global challenges.

Thank you for your consideration and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Tremont follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF PAMELA M. TREMONT

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, distinguished members of the committee, it is the greatest honor of my 30-year diplomatic career to appear before you today as President Biden's nominee to be the next U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Zimbabwe. I am profoundly grateful to the President and Secretary Blinken for entrusting me with this tremendous responsibility.

This nomination is a culmination of my family's service to the American people. My parents, Linn and Jan Danielski, instilled in me a spirit of public service through my father's 26-year Army career. They and my sister Stacey encouraged my dreams when, at 16, I announced my future was in the U.S. Foreign Service. But I am particularly indebted to my best friend and husband of 31 years, Eric Tremont, who has always prioritized me and our family over himself. I would not be here today without him and our 17-year-old son Peyton, who has served alongside us in five countries and was one of the last Eagle Scouts out of Troop 980 in Kyiv. He is undoubtedly watching from Europe, where he goes to school. My family's values and the support of many dear friends have been crucial in this journey, and they inspire me every day to seek diplomatic solutions to global challenges.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, along that journey I have been privileged to represent the United States in eight countries across three continents, including seven years working on southern African issues. The common thread among people everywhere is a desire for representative governance that respects their human rights and offers economic opportunity free from corruption and supported by rule of law. In a word, they want dignity. I firmly believe the Zimbabwean people want and deserve this too. Throughout my career, I have promoted these foundational values, including through U.S. electoral assistance programs in the Comoros, Zambia, and Ukraine, where I coordinated U.S. assistance for the 2019 Ukrainian presidential election just months after Russia's attack on Ukrainian ships ushered in a period of martial law. Our assistance gave Ukrainians confidence in the process to elect the leader of their choice.

This year, Zimbabweans will go to the polls for the second time in the post-Mugabe period. Zimbabwe's constitution guarantees its citizens the right to choose their leaders through free and fair elections, to participate in political parties or organizations, and to campaign freely and peacefully. Too often Zimbabweans have been denied these rights, and I share the Committee's concerns over the increasing

instances of political violence, lawlessness, and intimidation. The Government of Zimbabwe has the opportunity to uphold its own constitution and deliver on President Mnangagwa's yet-to-be-realized commitment to a peaceful, democratic electoral process. If confirmed, I will actively work to support the democratic aspirations of those advocating for Zimbabwean's constitutional rights, and I will seek partnership with all those in Zimbabwe who are doing the same.

The U.S. commitment to the Zimbabwean people is clear. Since we recognized the new state of Zimbabwe immediately after independence in 1980, the U.S. Government has invested more than \$4.5 billion dollars in humanitarian and development assistance for Zimbabweans. Millions of Zimbabweans are alive today because of the PEPFAR program. Yet the potential of the Zimbabwean people is stymied by corruption, economic mismanagement, and a lack of investment in human capital that have undermined this former breadbasket of Africa, home of Great Zimbabwe. If confirmed, I will work with this committee to promote economic reform, rule of law, transparency, and women's empowerment to unleash Zimbabwe's economic recovery and offer opportunities for U.S. business. Together we can address poverty and food insecurity in Zimbabwe and the region.

My highest priority will be the safety and security of American citizens and the very talented Embassy staff, including our local staff who have performed admirably under pressure stemming from their employment with us. My leadership touchstone has always been that diverse teams can do anything when properly resourced in a secure and respectful environment, and I have always confronted harassment and discrimination head-on. If confirmed, I will carefully steward U.S. resources, hold my team to a high standard, protect them at all costs, and empower them to work with partners in Zimbabwe who share our vision of peaceful, democratic nations working together to overcome global challenges.

Thank you for your consideration, and I look forward to your questions.

Senator BOOKER. Thank you for that very strong opening statement.

I would like to now turn to the mighty Mr. Mills.

**STATEMENT OF THE HON. RICHARD MILLS, JR., OF GEORGIA,
A CAREER MEMBER OF THE SENIOR FOREIGN SERVICE,
CLASS OF MINISTER-COUNSELOR, NOMINATED TO BE AM-
BASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY OF
THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE FEDERAL REPUB-
LIC OF NIGERIA**

Mr. MILLS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Ranking Member Risch and other members of the committee. It is an honor to appear before this committee once again as a nominee to represent the United States as one of her ambassadors.

I am joined today by my better half, my wife, Leigh, who knows well the challenges and the satisfactions of diplomatic service, having served herself for three decades as a Foreign Service officer. I am very thankful that if I am confirmed she will be with me in Abuja.

Senator BOOKER. And forgive me for the unorthodox interruption, but where is your wife from, for the record?

Mr. MILLS. Good question. New Jersey, I believe.

[Laughter.]

Mr. MILLS. I would also like to recognize my parents who are not from New Jersey but whose influence definitely inspired me to join the Foreign Service. They are not here with me today but they are with me in spirit.

Like others on this panel I am very grateful to President Biden and Secretary Blinken for the trust and the confidence they have shown in nominating me for this position.

If confirmed for this challenging job I will draw upon the experiences and skills gained from my 35-year career in the Foreign

Service, experience which Senator Booker has shared with the committee.

Committee members, Mr. Chairman, this is a unique moment for U.S.-Nigerian relations and for Nigeria as a whole. President Buhari is stepping down after his constitutionally limited two terms.

As Senator Booker has already referenced, overnight Bola Tinubu was declared the winner of the election. I and the U.S. Government congratulate the people of Nigeria, President-elect Tinubu, and all political leaders on this competitive election.

While I understand that many Nigerians and some of the parties have expressed frustration about certain aspects of how the process was conducted, there are well established mechanisms in place to adjudicate electoral disputes and the U.S. Government and I certainly encourage anyone seeking to challenge the outcome to use those mechanisms.

We call on all parties, candidates, and supporters to continue to avoid any inflammatory rhetoric during this period.

Going forward, this new government will be faced with many challenges, some of which Senator Risch has identified—how to beat back the threat from ISIS, Boko Haram, and other criminal elements in Nigeria, how to reduce intracommunal strife in the country that has claimed the lives of far too many Nigerian Christians and Muslims, and how to harness Nigeria's vast oil wealth to improve the lives of its citizens.

If confirmed, I am committed to leveraging all elements of American diplomacy and foreign assistance to help Nigeria and its new government tackle these goals.

A top U.S. priority and one for me will be combating the insecurity that plagues the Nigerian people with nearly all the country's 36 states experiencing some level of violence. From terrorism in the northeast and elsewhere to criminal attacks in the Niger Delta to piracy off the coast, crime and insecurity are nationwide problems.

If confirmed, I will continue our efforts to work with the Nigerian Government to help professionalize its security services in order to create a professional Nigerian military and police force that respects human rights, can protect civilians, and hold those who do commit abuses to account.

Finally, Nigeria is an important economic partner for the United States with over \$10 billion in two-way trade between our nations, and the Nigerian economy itself, while still primarily reliant on oil, is increasingly diversified and as the largest in Africa offers real opportunities for mutually beneficial trade.

I look forward to leveraging the ingenuity of the American private sector as well as our own Nigerian diaspora community here in the United States to continue to improve the economic relationship between our two countries.

Let me end by saying for all this wealth from resources and trade I know too little of it makes its way down to the average Nigerian. Illegal oil bunkering and criminality in the Niger Delta limits the ability of Nigeria to benefit from its natural resources, and endemic corruption throughout the country further limits the ability of all Nigerians to profit from their nation's wealth.

If confirmed, I will continue to press the Nigerian Government to tackle corruption and improve the rule of law.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, members of the committee, when I appeared before this committee eight years ago to be confirmed as the U.S. Ambassador to Armenia I committed to working transparently with committee members to advance American interests in Armenia and overseas. I renew that commitment to you and your staffs today and I look forward to your questions.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Mills follows:]

STATEMENT OF HON. RICHARD MILLS, JR.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and distinguished members of the committee: It is an honor to appear before this committee once again as a nominee to represent the United States as one of her ambassadors. I am joined today by my wife, Leigh, who knows well the challenges of diplomatic service having served for three decades as a foreign service officer herself. I am grateful that, if I am confirmed, she will be with me in Abuja. I would also like to recognize my parents, whose influence inspired me to join the Foreign Service. Although they cannot be here with me today, they are with me in spirit.

I am grateful to President Biden and Secretary Blinken for the trust and confidence they have shown in nominating me for this position. If confirmed, I will draw upon the experiences of my 35-year career in the foreign service.

As Chargé at Mission Canada, I sharpened my skill at coordinating policy and consistent public messaging among the many U.S. Government agencies in Canada, almost as many as operate on the ground in Nigeria. As U.S. Ambassador to Armenia, I learned how to effectively raise difficult issues—such as fighting corruption and ensuring human rights are respected—with a government that has otherwise strong ties to the United States. And in my current assignment as the Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations, I see first-hand Nigeria's diplomatic heft and leading role on the world stage so I recognize the importance of ensuring Nigerians understand and support key global U.S. foreign policy objectives.

Mr. Chairman, this is a unique moment for U.S.-Nigerian relations and for Nigeria as a whole. President Buhari is stepping down after his constitutionally limited two terms and we are looking forward to the announcement of the outcome of this past weekend's elections. As Nigeria is Africa's largest democracy, we know that these elections will be watched across the continent. I am pleased that, based on preliminary reports and assessments by election monitoring groups on the ground, despite some incidents of violence and delays at certain polling stations, the voting on election day generally unfolded peacefully.

However, after this election, whichever candidate is chosen, the new government will be faced with many challenges: how to beat back the threat from ISIS, Boko Haram, and other criminal elements in Nigeria; how to reduce intra-communal strife in the country that has claimed the lives of far too many Nigerian Muslims and Christians; and how to harness Nigeria's vast oil wealth to improve the lives of its citizens. If confirmed, I am committed to leveraging all elements of American diplomacy and foreign assistance to help Nigeria in tackling these goals.

A top U.S. priority is combatting the insecurity that plagues the Nigerian people, with nearly all the country's 36 states experiencing some level of violence. From terrorism in the northeast and elsewhere, to criminal attacks in the Niger Delta and Southeast, to piracy off the coast, crime and insecurity are nation-wide problems. If confirmed, I will continue our efforts to work with the Nigerian Government to help professionalize its security services in order to create a professional Nigerian military and police force that respect human rights, protects civilians, and holds those who commit abuses to account.

Finally, Nigeria is an important economic partner for the United States with over ten billion dollars in two-way trade between our nations. And the Nigerian economy itself—while still primarily reliant on oil—is increasingly diversified and, as the largest in Africa, offers real opportunities for mutually beneficial trade.

And yet, for all this wealth from resources and trade, too little of it makes its way down to the average Nigerian. Illegal oil bunkering and criminality in the Niger Delta region limits the ability of Nigeria to benefit from its natural resources. And endemic corruption throughout the country further limits the ability of all Nigerians to profit from their nation's wealth. If confirmed, I will continue to press the Nige-

rian Government to tackle corruption and improve the rule of law. Additionally, I look forward to leveraging the ingenuity of the American private sector, as well as our Nigerian diaspora community in the United States, to continue to improve the economic relationship between our two countries.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, members of the committee, when I appeared before this committee eight years ago to be confirmed as the U.S. Ambassador to Armenia, I committed to working with Committee members to advance American interests overseas. I renew that commitment today to you and your staffs.

Thank you and I welcome your questions.

Senator BOOKER. I think the thanks is ours. The ranking member and I have known each other for about 10 years now and there are things we disagree on but one thing we both agreed on, as you all were speaking, we have a lot of humility, as we sit before career diplomats who have dedicated themselves to what you do, and as a result, your whole family has made this extraordinary dedication.

This is how we are going to roll now, if you all do not mind. I am going to ask some perfunctory questions or, should I say, some technical questions. Then I am going to hold my policy questions and let Mr. Risch, out of respect, start the questioning.

If no Democrats show up, I am going to let Mr. Ricketts go second, actually, and then I will save my policy questions for the end.

But as far as the procedural questions, I would like to ask, each of you should just answer yes or no and directly we can just go down the line, starting with Dr. Murthy, or General Murthy or however you would like to be recalled, my friend. Dr. General, Mr. Murthy?

Dr. MURTHY. Vivek is fine. I am informal.

[Laughter.]

Senator BOOKER. We will start with you and we will just go down.

Do you agree to appear before this committee and make officials from your office available to the committee and designated staff when invited?

[All witnesses answer in the affirmative.]

Senator BOOKER. Do you commit to keep this committee fully and currently informed about the activities under your purview?

[All witnesses answer in the affirmative.]

Senator BOOKER. Do you commit to engaging in meaningful consultation while policies are being developed, not just providing notification after the fact?

[All witnesses answer in the affirmative.]

Senator BOOKER. Do you commit to promptly responding to the requests for briefings and information requested by this committee and its designated staff?

[All witnesses answer in the affirmative.]

Senator BOOKER. All right. I say thank you for that. And, again, I will reserve my questioning for the end. I want to be—give deference to my colleagues.

And with that, I ask Ranking Member Risch for his questions.

Senator RISCH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I join in your humble appreciation for the cast that we are looking at today. Your resume—your collective resume—is indeed impressive.

Dr. Murthy, I want to talk to you a little bit about the WHO. You heard me in my opening statement talk about how staggered I was as at their incompetence when admittedly I had never worked with

them before on anything, and when COVID raised its ugly head we needed help and we needed help badly and the place we turned to was the WHO, and I was just blown away at the incompetence that I ran into there.

It needs reform. It needs lots of different stuff. What are your thoughts on how you are going to approach that?

Dr. MURTHY. Thank you, Senator, and I must say your statements at the opening about your concerns about the WHO, about the need for it to be effective and competent in what it does, I think I understand those and I share a deep concern for the status quo being continued.

I think we have got to make things better. Here is how I think about it, sir. I think one of the things that we have got to focus on is accountability at the WHO. We are the biggest investor in the WHO and the real question is are we delivering the value for the American people that those dollars should get.

I do not think we are there yet. I think we need to know that the WHO has transparency when it comes to how funds are being used, that we have clarity about goals, what those goals are, what the timeline is and which are being accomplished.

I think we also need transparency in decision making, which has not always been there, and, finally, we need workforce accountability. The allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse, these are horrifying. There should be no tolerance for that kind of behavior from any organization, much less one entrusted with the safety and the health and well being of people around the world.

But I also think, sir, when it comes to pandemic preparedness the world needs to be able to rely on the WHO to function and function well both during a pandemic but also beforehand to help prevent the next one and ensure we are prepared and that means setting up the kind of surveillance and rapid alert systems and transparent data sharing that we need but do not quite have yet.

It means having a robust rapid response, ensuring that we have the ability to manufacture and distribute countermeasures around the world so that everyone can benefit from the discoveries and scientific advances that ultimately help us get through pandemics.

So these are some of the areas where I believe we need to focus. That is why my priority, if I have the privilege of serving, sir, would be to focus specifically on these two areas of pandemic preparedness and better governance and transparency of the WHO.

And I would look to do that both in my voice at Executive Board meetings working in consultation and partnership with you and other members of this committee and with partners in the State Department, USAID, and our Department of Health and Human Services.

Senator RISCH. I think you got that exactly right. I think both of those areas of focus are incredibly important, particularly the preparation for the next one.

After we have been through this as a world we know the heartache and issues that this causes and there is no reason we should not be prepared—much more prepared for the next one, also getting accurate information.

One of the things I get most from constituents is they really do not believe they got accurate information from the very beginning.

They still do not think they are getting accurate information and that is it—and sometimes you just do not know and it is better to say that than to try to give information that misleads people.

Anyway, thank you for that. I think you got that right. My time is short. But I do want to—I do want to ask—because of the pool of talent we have here I do want to ask—I get reports regarding the Sahel. I am also senior Republican on the Intelligence Committee so I get it here and I get it there, and it has been one of the most disheartening things for me is to watch how the Sahel has deteriorated in recent years.

Part of it, of course, is because of our success in the Middle East. We drove a lot of the terrorists out of there. Where did they go? They went to the next weakest link in the chain and that was the Sahel.

And it looks to me—I could be wrong on this but it looks to me like it is going to be even tougher in the Sahel because of the weakness of the governments there and the corruption and everything else that is there.

It is going to be even more difficult there to take on the terrorism issue that we have had to deal with in the Middle East.

Somebody help me out here. Give me some optimistic view and, if not, how we are going to do that. You all have—you all have tremendous resumes. Who wants to take a shot at this?

Ms. FITZGIBBON. My team is throwing me under the bus.

[Laughter.]

Senator RISCH. There you go. Been there.

Ms. FITZGIBBON. It is very interesting. We do need to make a more concerted effort not to just focus on security assistance, which is very important and vital. We need to keep our security assistance to countries like Niger.

But, more importantly, is we need to help reinforce state legitimacy with their people. We have got to make sure that governments are making those connections and that service delivery is happening and fighting corruption is very important in that.

But even more important is people need to feel that their government is protecting them and their government is providing for them, and if that is not happening these youngsters in Niger, in particular, 70 percent of the population is youth and they are very, very easily led astray by violent extremist organizations.

So without—we have to have that total whole-of-government—we call it the 3 Ds, you know, defense, democracy, diplomacy, and development—package to make sure that we are trying to alleviate the conditions that are creating the recruitment or the recruits for those organizations.

But we still do need to undergird that with security assistance. I know that Niger is—right now, and Nigeria, the two countries still standing as democracies in the region, and we need to work more closely together between those countries and ECOWAS to strengthen the institutions, the security apparatus, to fight terrorism, but also to fight terrorism and make sure that the next elections in Niger, which are coming in a few years, that we are working towards that now. We cannot just wait till an election comes and then have a crisis and a military coup happen.

Senator RISCH. With the increase that we have had in terrorist activity in the Sahel do you think that countries are getting any better in dealing with that on a positive basis or are they are they just accepting it? What is your view of that?

Ms. FITZGIBBON. My experience has been Nigeria is getting better at it. Part of it is some of the foreign military sales that we have made to Nigeria that is making them more attuned to being precise in their attacks and also more collaboration with the neighbors in information sharing.

In Niger's case I think our partner capacity that we have been building is doing a good job for them. The most recently trained—U.S.-trained unit just went to the border with Benin so they are actually positioning those troops where they should be, not keeping them back in Niamey. They are putting them out on the front line.

So in Niger I think we are making progress. In the other countries and the Sahel with the military takeovers that we have had I would argue that we are not.

The other thing in Niger is that they are very much against the incursion of Russian organizations like Wagner. They are very attuned to what is happening in Benin and Burkina Faso.

So bolstering their resolve and bolstering their capacity to protect their borders and be able to be a beacon in the region for what democracy can bring to their people is the way we have to go.

Senator RISCH. Thank you. I appreciate your thoughts on that and my time is way past up. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator BOOKER. We have a light attendance today so you should feel comfortable doing that.

I am going to turn to Senator Van Hollen.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank all of you for your service. Congratulations on your nominations to these ambassadorial positions.

And just—Ms. FitzGibbon, I just returned from a trip along with some of my colleagues from this committee—Senator Menendez, Senator Coons, Senator Graham from another committee—and one of our stops was Niger. They may have already discussed it in this hearing.

But I just want to underscore your statement. I do think that we need to be doing more to support Niger. While we were there our country team and folks on the ground indicated that there were requests for certain additional helicopters and things like that, and given what has happened in Mali, Burkina Faso, I just think that that is a priority, as you know.

Ambassador Miller, thank you for your earlier service in Armenia, among other posts. I know you have discussed the election that just took place in Nigeria and I know you also mentioned in your testimony here the issue of endemic corruption in Nigeria, which is really holding the country back in many, many ways when it comes to any kind of confidence of investors in the economy.

Can you just talk about what your plan would be to address that issue?

Mr. MILLS. Thank you, Senator. Yes. I think in my experience the number-one question I hear from U.S. business and investors is what is the corruption situation in Nigeria—what is being done to address it.

The mission in Nigeria has a full range of programs designed to promote anti-corruption activities. We also address it at the highest levels and it certainly, as I said in my statement, will be a priority for me.

The mission supports the Department of Justice efforts to claw back a lot of the illegally-obtained resources that are overseas in the United States, including those that came during the presidency of President Abacha, and a lot of those clawed-back resources when they come back are put directly into programs and infrastructure to benefit the Nigerian people themselves.

In my experience dealing with the issue of corruption, which is pervasive and in many places that I have served and can happen anywhere, is that it is important to identify local voices, people in the country that will speak out against corruption.

You often hear—I heard it in several of the places I have served—this is our system. This is our culture. Do not imply—sort of impose your values on how we do business here.

So I find it most valuable to identify and amplify those voices in the culture that say no, corruption is not part of our culture. This is not how we do business. So I think that will be a real emphasis for me in Nigeria.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Well, no, I appreciate that and I think—look, the election results are in. I know some people are asking questions.

But we know that there is a history of corruption among many of the players who were involved in the election. So I wish you the best and look forward to staying in touch with you on that.

Mr. Kneedler, congratulations to you as well. Lots of issues to cover in Rwanda. I look forward to continuing our conversation on the M-23 threat in the eastern part of Congo and Rwanda's role in that.

But I wanted to ask you about the decision that was made in May by the State Department when they categorized the Rwandan Government's arrest and imprisonment of Paul Rusesabagina, who, of course, is known to many Americans through the portrayal in "Hotel Rwanda," a legal permanent resident of the United States as a wrongful detention.

So how would we—how do you propose to address that issue? Because I think many of us—former Senator Leahy, myself, and others—have been following this case closely.

Mr. KNEEDLER. Sure. Thank you very much, Senator, for the question. I have been following Mr. Rusesabagina's case very closely.

As you noted, the State Department determined that he was wrongfully detained last year. The State Department has also outlined concerns about the lack of free trial guarantees observed during the course of his trial and conviction—conviction, rather, and also underscored the importance of ensuring that he is afforded every legal protection, going forward.

Senator, if confirmed, I would look forward to working with members and staff from this committee, with his family, with our special envoy for hostage affairs, who has the lead on this case, to do everything possible to resolve this case as quickly as possible.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. I appreciate that. As you know, there are also a lot of concerns about the Rwandan Government's tactics of harassing and even reports of sometimes killing dissidents abroad. So I think we have got a lot of work to do in this particular area.

I look forward to working with you and I thank all of you for your service and I look forward to supporting all of your confirmations.

Senator BOOKER. Thank you very much, Senator Van Hollen. I apologize to Senator Ricketts. I thought you were going to be second in questioning. You now have been bumped back to fifth, man, and——

Senator RICKETTS. I am the new guy. I get it.

Senator BOOKER. I appreciate that. But I respect you deeply, not just because you are my fellow colleague but because you have got the best haircut on this entire panel.

[Laughter.]

Senator BOOKER. So I would like to go to Mr. Hagerty, please.

Senator HAGERTY. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and my apologies, Senator Ricketts. But I appreciate the opportunity to discuss a topic that is very disturbing to me and, I think, perhaps to all of us here.

I would like to start with you, Dr. Murthy. I want to ask you if you believe that China should be held accountable for any of its malfeasance during the COVID pandemic, including their stonewalling, the lying, misleading the world about the pandemic's origin and its spread.

I would just appreciate a simple yes or no answer.

Dr. MURTHY. Yes, Senator. I think it is important for all countries to be held accountable when—especially for lack of transparency.

Senator HAGERTY. I would say the country that—where the origin started is the one I am focused on right now. Next question, do you believe that the World Health Organization should be held accountable for initially covering up the possibility that COVID came from a Chinese lab leak?

And, again, I would appreciate a yes or no answer here.

Dr. MURTHY. Senator, yes, I do believe accountability is important with the WHO as well when it comes to COVID origins.

Senator HAGERTY. I absolutely agree. Their performance in this regard was absolutely pathetic. They were late to the game and they were very quick to dismiss the possibility that this leak came from the Wuhan lab.

Specifically, in February of 2021, more than a year after COVID emerged, a WHO investigation team finally gets there and then they almost immediately determined that it was, quote, "extremely unlikely" that COVID came from the Wuhan lab and they recommended against further investigation.

Yet, according to news reports the Department of Energy's Office of Intelligence and Counterintelligence just recently joined the FBI in assessing that COVID likely originated from a lab leak in China.

I would also note that the Energy Department's intelligence arm employs actual biologists, virologists, and other scientists in this regard. Moreover, just yesterday FBI Director Wray publicly reiterated that COVID most likely came from the Wuhan lab.

So, Dr. Murthy, do you think it is extremely unlikely that COVID came from a lab leak in China?

Dr. MURTHY. Senator, thank you for raising this issue. I think there is currently a range of opinions, as I understand it, in the intelligence community about the origins of COVID-19. The lab leak theory is one of those possibilities and I do not think it is proper to discount a theory until it has been properly investigated.

Senator HAGERTY. I could not agree with you more.

Dr. MURTHY. My big concern, though, is the lack of transparency that we have had from China when it comes to gathering the information needed to actually get to the bottom of that story and to do a complete investigation that has integrity.

Senator HAGERTY. We share that concern. Yet, the WHO was more than willing to write this off and let the CCP get away without revealing base data and to quickly dismiss this.

Given the recent DOE and FBI reports do you believe that the WHO report was actually wrong to conclude that the lab leak was extremely unlikely and to recommend against any further investigation?

Dr. MURTHY. I think it is clear that further investigation is needed and that is something that President Biden has been clear on—that is, when he directed the intelligence community to double down.

Senator HAGERTY. I think, clearly, the report was wrong. Clearly, it was premature to shut down further investigations into the lab leak theory.

The WHO is alarmingly close to the CCP and the previous administration rightly withdrew from that organization. Despite all of this, President Biden unconditionally rejoined the WHO immediately after taking office. The United States is now, again, the WHO's largest donor. We are paying them more than \$400 million dollars per year.

Dr. Murthy, do you trust China to be a good partner to the United States the next time we have a pandemic?

Dr. MURTHY. I think we have got to ensure that there is accountability that comes through assistance. It means that the money we give, Senator, the money you referenced should not be a blank check to the WHO.

It should come with assurances that the reforms that we are seeking are actually happening. And look, in this—one of the things we learned from COVID-19 that—

Senator HAGERTY. We did not get any assurances when we agreed to come back into the WHO organization. Have you got new information for me that we got assurances from the WHO when we agreed to come back in?

Dr. MURTHY. I do think being a part of the WHO and engaging with them is the best way to change them and to—

Senator HAGERTY. So we stepped back up to be the largest donor, yet we have got, as far as I know, no guarantees that they are going to reform. Certainly, their performance does not support this.

I think it is something that is deeply, deeply concerning. There is another area, though, that I am deeply concerned about and this has to do with our sovereignty.

So I want to ask you this question as well. Should the United States ever under any circumstance cede its sovereign policy-making authority, for example, to the CCP during a pandemic?

Dr. MURTHY. No, Senator. We should retain——

Senator HAGERTY. I agree with you. I did not think—I think that is correct. Next question, though, which is closely related to this, then should the United States ever under any circumstance cede its sovereign policymaking authority to the WHO under these circumstances?

Dr. MURTHY [continuing]. We should retain our sovereignty when it comes to making decisions for the American people's health and well being.

Senator HAGERTY. I very much appreciate that answer. I am also very concerned. As you know, the Biden administration is actively negotiating with other countries right now on a new agreement on a global pandemic response that will give the WHO greater influence and control. This is a draft of the agreement.

Dr. Murthy, if concern—if confirmed, I just would like to know if you will commit to me and to this committee that you will not participate in any effort to enter into any international agreement that would give the WHO greater control over future American pandemic responses.

And, again, I would appreciate a yes or no answer.

Dr. MURTHY. Yes, Senator, I can assure you that one of my guiding principles will be maintaining American sovereignty in our decision making. We know our people the best. We know what our people need here in America and we have got to have and retain always the ability to make decisions for America.

Senator HAGERTY. So I can take that as a commitment that you will not cede greater control to the WHO over pandemic response here in America through the course of this agreement or any other?

Dr. MURTHY. I will always seek to retain our sovereignty when it comes to our health.

Senator HAGERTY. Is that a yes or no answer?

Dr. MURTHY. It is what I said, Senator. I will strive to retain our sovereignty and that is important. I do not want to cede that to anyone.

Senator HAGERTY. I certainly would hate to see our sovereignty be given away in this agreement.

Mr. Chairman, I would just like to enter this document into the record.

Senator BOOKER. Without objection.

[The information referred to is located at the end of this hearing's transcript.]

Senator HAGERTY. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Dr. Murthy.

Dr. MURTHY. Thank you.

Senator BOOKER. I turn now to Senator Coons. I am the chairman of the Africa Subcommittee but this is the, in many ways, expert on issues regarding Africa. So, sir, would you please take us to a higher level?

Senator COONS. I wish I could. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Actually, the experts are the people in front of us, folks who have served and both serve for long periods of time in the field and many who are with you. I appreciate the compliment but I am undeserving. I am confident of that.

Having just returned alongside Senator Van Hollen and a bipartisan group from a visit to a number of countries—I think this has already been brought up—I just want to start by expressing my deep gratitude to each of you, to your families, for your willingness to continue to serve our country in a number of contexts that are very challenging. So let me get to it and try to be brief, if I can.

Dr. Murthy, it is great to see you again. I know it is somewhat unprecedented for there to be a requirement for a separate hearing for WHO representation but you have just heard some of the reasons why there are heightened concerns. I greatly appreciated your coming to Delaware and to visit some of our young people, our healthcare professionals, and to talk about how we move forward here domestically.

Your previous experience in this role and in other roles in the U.S. Public Health Service Commission Corps, I think, makes you abundantly qualified for this position. I hope you are promptly confirmed.

If you would like to just take one more minute and talk about how you would promote U.S. interests at the WHO, if confirmed, I would appreciate that.

Dr. MURTHY. Thank you so much, Senator Coons, and thank you again for the invitation to come to Delaware, and I really enjoyed and learned a lot from my visit there.

In my view, Senator, as you know well, our health and well being in the United States does depend on what happens elsewhere in the world. We saw that with COVID. We have seen that with other infectious disease threats.

In order—my privilege as the surgeon general has meant to look out for the health and well being of Americans and that, to me, involves, in some ways, a natural extension into this role if I am privileged to have the opportunity to serve in it, which is to work on the global stage to also safeguard the health and well being of Americans.

How we do that means that we have got to ensure that we have better collaboration, coordination, and transparency with other governments and that includes in the areas of data surveillance and data sharing. It means we need early detection systems but we also need rapid response operations, again, a place where the WHO needs to have an effective role.

But it also means that when it comes to the production of countermeasures, Senator, we know, again, that all of us are better off when the entire world is better off and when the entire world has access to countermeasures like vaccines and therapeutics.

And so part of the work, I believe, that we need to push and engage the WHO on is the work of ensuring that we have adequate production distribution capacity when it comes to manufacturing and distributing these countermeasures.

To me, these are all parts of what we need to do to ensure we are prepared for the next pandemic.

But finally, I will say this, Senator. We need an effective WHO not just for pandemic preparedness but for many of the other health threats that we are facing and for the WHO to be effective there it has to be credible, which means it needs to be able to deliver on promises.

It needs to be transparent in decision making, and its workforce also has to adhere to the highest ethical standards and those are the issues, again, that I hope to focus on if I have the opportunity to serve.

Senator COONS. Terrific. Thank you very much.

Part of our trip was celebrating the accomplishments of 20 years of PEPFAR launched by President Bush, the single largest public health intervention in world history, which has saved more than 25 million lives.

Its path forward will in no small part come through this committee and we got to see, for example, in the country of Zambia how significant investment of the United States has saved huge numbers of lives. In South Africa the same.

I hope to work with you both on pandemic prevention but also in celebrating some of the ways in which our investments in public health infrastructure on the continent of Africa and elsewhere in the developing world have made us safer and have helped avoid preventable deaths.

If I could, two more questions.

Ms. FitzGibbon, just interested in what you think of the stability of the Bazoum Government. Our time in Niger was disconcerting and they are, I would say, an island of stability in a region beset by chaos.

I am very concerned about Russia's presence and the way in which Wagner has taken a more and more aggressive posture to the east and west of Niger.

I would be interested in how you think we could successfully counter Russian disinformation, which has had an impact in all of the countries to which you are nominated to serve, and how we might more successfully engage the people of Niger and the Sahel region in a way that would promote stability.

Ms. FITZGIBBON. Thank you for that question. We have answered the Government's request for help on disinformation, whether it is Russian disinformation or Chinese disinformation. Our senior bureau official for public affairs went out to Niger in November.

We have brought down experts to help strengthen the journalistic infrastructure, so to say, so that—to help the journalists understand better how journalistic integrity is very important to putting word out to whatever information they are putting out.

And then we have helped point out to them when we see disinformation and to all that, and China has put on a big PR blitz in Niger but its actual popularity ratings are going down despite how much money it is putting into there.

So something is working there. Part of it, I would like to say, is our U.S. Embassy's public affairs program and reaching out to people. Our people-to-people relations are working.

And with Wagner—we have a strong ally in President Bazoum on Wagner. The smallest of our Ds as we were talking about a little bit earlier is our democracy funding.

But one of the things we can make up for that with is diplomatic engagement and I intend to work very hard—and I have done this in every country I have served in—with the political elite to make them understand that there are a lot of political tradeoffs that need to be made for the long-term stability of the country, and the economic and social investments that need to be made in Niger need to be made now.

Senator COONS. Agree.

Ms. FITZGIBBON. And that means the opposition and members of the ruling party and aspirants to be the next president of Niger need to have that buy in because the country's stability is at risk and the time is now.

The attention from the United States and the attention from other donors is now, too. So this is the time that the country can benefit most and I believe that President Bazoum has that commitment and we will make sure that we are talking frankly to him when we see things that might be done better.

Senator COONS. Thank you.

Ms. FITZGIBBON. So I am hoping to have a good relationship there.

Senator COONS. I look forward to hearing from you.

Could I beg the indulgence of one more question, Mr. Chairman? He is distracted.

So if I could, Ambassador Mills, I am interested in each of your countries. I apologize, but I am already out of time.

You will represent us in Abuja in one of the most populous countries in the world, a real linchpin for West Africa and its stability, and where the outcome of the election, I think, is leading to some widespread disappointment amongst those who had hoped for change and the possibility for real continuity.

What do you expect out of the Tinubu Government? What do you think his previous service as governor of Lagos State, if I am not mistaken, is going to lead to and how do we build a more stable, sustainable relationship between the United States and Nigeria, given some of our issues in terms of the conduct of the Nigerian Armed Forces, internal division, and the very strong and robust diaspora community here in the United States?

Mr. MILLS. Good question. Sorry. And in a way, that is the answer. It is a holistic approach. It is—if we are going to deepen the relationship, which is actually quite strong—we have quite an engaged relationship with Nigeria across the board economically, diplomatically, culturally—we have to use all the tools, as I mentioned in my statement.

In terms of the election, I would point out that there was some good news from the election. Candidates—the top three candidates each won over 12 states in the election, which is new, and I think that reflects the diversity of the political system there and a lot of new voices taking part in this election. That is very encouraging.

I think if President-elect Tinubu is listening, he knows that there was a great demand for change. The campaign that in many ways supported the candidacy of Peter Obi, a lot of young people came out and I think he will be aware of that. We certainly will remind him of the need to be responsive to that, moving forward.

In terms of our priorities, we have long for a long time our work in Nigeria, guided by the administration's Africa policy, Africa strategy, and the mission's own strategy, has focused on really four key areas that we are engaged on: improving security—Nigeria is a counterterrorism partner.

We have to improve their ability to fight the terrorism threat that they are facing; working to develop the economy through mutually beneficial trade; human rights—huge, huge issue that we need to promote and we need to increase accountability; and the transnational issues that the doctor mentioned. Nigeria is a partner in transitional—transnational health issues and crime issues. So those are our priorities, I think.

You mentioned security in particular, and to get to Senator Risch's question about the Sahel, I think in some ways there is a success story in Nigeria. The last couple of years, as Kathleen knows well, we have sold to the Nigerians at their request some important military precision munitions and aircraft.

Those aircraft in the last two years have made a difference in their ability to fight the terrorism threat, especially in the northeast. It has reduced—those precision munitions—civilian casualties, and I think more importantly, and this is the secret, we sold these weapons and nested inside the Sahel were important human rights components, important new steps we said if we are going to share these weapons—sell these weapons to you you need to take these actions, everything from new air to ground integration teams that have really reduced civilian casualties wherever the air force is working in Nigeria, but we have put in a military justice advisor.

We have put in a new advisor into how to work with the civilian communities and I think that is a real model for moving forward and that will be a priority, moving forward, to continue monitoring that and building on that.

Senator COONS. Thank you. It is a complex issue. I appreciate your answer. I have been to Borno state. I have been to Nigeria several times. I look forward to staying in touch with you, and I apologize for running over.

Please, Mr. Kneeder, Ms. Tremont, give my regards to President Kagame and President Mnangagwa and thank you to all of you and your families for your willingness to serve.

Senator BOOKER. Senator Coons' 12 minutes of questioning represents the grandeur of his mastery of these issues. But I am now happy to turn to Senator Young.

Senator YOUNG. I will try and keep mine a concise 10 minutes or so.

[Laughter.]

Senator COONS. Thank you.

Senator YOUNG. All right. I welcome all our panelists. Congratulate each of you for your nominations and we will look forward to serving with most or all of you here in the future on behalf of our country.

Dr. Murthy, as you know, the United States lost more than a million lives due to COVID. Equally as concerning are the effects of the pandemic on untold millions of children from education to socialization to mental health.

It is clear, Doctor, that the United States has a vested interest in the renegotiation of the World Health Organization's pandemic response policies to mandate transparency and cooperation during the next pandemic, which undoubtedly will occur.

If confirmed, sir, you will have a central role in ensuring that our country and our children are protected from malfeasance during future health emergencies.

Dr. Murthy, do you support the proposed draft agreement as currently written and, if confirmed, what specific changes to the regulations will you propose to mitigate the damage during the next public health crisis?

Dr. MURTHY. Thank you, Senator, for that question.

And let me just say at the start that I really appreciate you bringing up the impact this pandemic has had on our children and on mental health, more broadly, because the impact has been profound.

I have seen that in my own family and I have certainly seen that in my community and it is one of the reasons why I feel very strongly that I want to do everything I can to ensure we are better prepared for the next pandemic because there is a lot at stake, most importantly our children.

A few things that I think would be important that I would look to focus on when it came to pandemic preparedness, as you noted, one is to ensure that we have the early detection capabilities and early data sharing. That is so vital to understanding when a threat is emerging. If we had had that in place effectively this past time around with COVID I daresay we may have been in a better place.

But the second thing that we need is to be able to mobilize a rapid—

Senator YOUNG. And, sir, can I just interject—

Dr. MURTHY. Of course.

Senator YOUNG [continuing]. Because it is an important point. Is it accurate to say that we would have had a lot more lead time or we gave up some valuable lead time to prepare, to harden ourselves, by producing or sourcing PPE, by protecting people against the virus, which presumably if you had the data would have had a better chance of identifying the nature of the virus, it would have saved countless lives?

Dr. MURTHY. The short answer is yes, Senator. Yeah, it is—the benefits of longer lead time are both in preparation from a materials perspective but also scientifically that gives scientists a head start on trying to understand and collaborate on understanding what the actual pathogen is and then starting the process of developing countermeasures. So that is absolutely right.

So that early detection, that surveillance, that data sharing is really critical. What we also need to do, though, is ensure that we have the ability to respond in terms of countermeasures. That is both in the development of countermeasures but also in the production and distribution of those countermeasures.

This is the challenge we had during COVID-19. How do we—it is one thing to develop a vaccine. It is another to manufacture and distribute it at scale to everyone who needs it and that is a place also where we have to work hard because as we saw with COVID-19, COVID is not immutable.

It changes. It mutates, and the more uncontrolled spread there is the more mutations there are, the more dangerous variants can develop and that can come back to hurt us, as has happened several times during this pandemic.

Finally, I will just say, Senator, again, to come back to something you raised in the beginning about mental health, I think as we think about our own country and our response to this, this is part of the longer tail, the deeper consequence of COVID-19 that we have to grapple with and one of the reasons that I have been so focused on mental health and well being in my work as surgeon general, one of the reasons why I also want to make mental health part of our focus on the global stage is because we are not alone in those struggles.

A lot of countries are struggling with the mental health impact of COVID-19. That is part of how we have to respond to this pandemic and be prepared for the next.

Senator YOUNG. Thank you, Doctor. Everything you said makes great sense. You mentioned relationship building as a key factor in negotiations and in cooperation from member states during the next global health crisis.

It was something that you underscored in your written testimony. Two-part question. Do you believe that relationship building will be sufficient? It may be necessary but will it be sufficient to tackle the next global pandemic?

It seems to me, and this is the second part of the question, that we should be supporting some sort of regulations that establish punitive consequences from governments that do not comply with or cooperate with other countries during such emergent circumstances.

Dr. MURTHY. Yes, Senator, I am glad you raised this.

I would say relationships are necessary but insufficient on their own to generate the results that we want. The relationships build familiarity and trust. They make it easier to work together more quickly. So that is essential.

But we also need our agreements with teeth. There needs to be accountability in this process. We cannot have another instance where there is not transparency and data sharing that helps us get to the bottom of COVID origins, for example, that helps us understand when a threat has emerged so we can leap to action together as a global community to address it with maximal lead time.

So all of that, I believe, is important in the components we need to assemble for an effective pandemic response.

Senator YOUNG. Lastly, I am going to ask you about Taiwan. For the last two years the Biden administration's pledge to bring Taiwan back into the World Health Assembly as an observer and for two years straight China has blocked that from happening.

Is the fact that the administration, despite its best efforts, has been unable to win this status for Taiwan—does this constitute some evidence that the organization is deferring to the Chinese Communist Party and its wishes or is it something else?

Dr. MURTHY. It is a good question, Senator. This is one of the areas that I would be happy to get into if I had the opportunity to serve. Once I have the opportunity to start in the position, my hope would be to approach this with a clear set of priorities but

also with an intent to understand how decisions have been made. It has been—we have been clear about Taiwan, how—what role we think Taiwan can and should have in terms of conversations related to global health and that is an area where I am certainly prepared to weigh in as well if I have the chance to serve on the Executive Board.

Senator YOUNG. Thank you, Doctor.

Dr. MURTHY. Thank you.

Senator BOOKER. Thank you very much. The prodigiously patient patriot, Mr. Ricketts.

Senator RICKETTS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and you have got a heck of a barber, too.

Well, I want to thank—again, add my thanks to all the panelists for your service to our great nation and I also want to thank your families as well because I know they serve alongside you as you are serving our country, and especially to our members of the Foreign Service, thank you.

As governor of Nebraska I had the opportunity to lead about two trade missions a year around the world and I got to tell you, every time I was in an embassy I was very impressed with the quality of people who are representing our country overseas. So thank you very much for your service. In particular, I had direct experience with that.

Dr. Murthy, so I share also some of my colleagues' disappointment with the WHO and specifically around the COVID pandemic. Again, as I mentioned, I was governor and so I had kind of a front row seat to the failures of the WHO as we went through that pandemic on a number of different levels.

But what I want to focus on is kind of something that Senator Hagerty mentioned about before. If you are confirmed will you ensure that the WHO conducts a true and thorough investigation into the origins of the COVID pandemic, the actions of the Chinese Communist Party?

There has been a lot of folks that the WHO claim to be committed to getting real answers about the pandemic and claim to be tough on China.

But as soon as the Chinese Communist Party pushes back, for example, denies entrance to a lab or refuses to allow a doctor or scientist have access for us, they all kind of back down and do nothing and, certainly, I think that a lot of the information early on especially it seemed like the WHO was really being deferential to the CCP, which I think all of us would agree does not share our values here in the United States.

I think the U.S. Representative at the WHO needs to have a specific plan to—when you arrive on how are you going to get these answers.

So do you have a specific plan on how to ensure the WHO conducts a thorough investigation and gets—the best that we can get the origins of the COVID pandemic and the Chinese Communist Party's role in that?

Dr. MURTHY. Yeah, thank you, Senator.

I continue to believe this is a very important issue for us to get to the bottom of. We cannot afford to cast it off and just move on

for two critical reasons. One is understanding the origins of this pandemic will help us be better prepared for the future.

But there is also to me a more important—an equally important principle at play here, which is that if we are truly in the era of global health we need to be a global community.

That means we all have to be transparent, open, and cooperative, and it cannot be allowed for one nation to not be transparent, to not allow a thorough investigation with integrity to take place.

That just—that does not only put at threat our ability to understand COVID but it puts a threat, I believe, our ability to be effective and demand transparency from all countries in future responses.

So if I have the opportunity to serve this is an issue that I would press as an Executive Board member. I would work together with our other colleagues in the administration who also feel strongly that we need to get to the origins and the bottom of the story about COVID origins and this is something I would look to engage directly with the director of the WHO on.

Senator RICKETTS. So you do not have a plan quite yet. You are going to—if you are confirmed then you will work on a game plan together about how we tackle this problem of getting to the origins of COVID? Is that what I hear you saying?

Dr. MURTHY. This would certainly be an issue that my colleagues who are currently engaging with the WHO have been engaged with the leadership there on and what I would look to do if I started in this position, as I have done in prior positions, is, first, understand those conversations, understand where we are not making progress, and then lean in to those areas so that we can ensure that we have a robust engagement with the WHO and we are pushing this agenda on a full investigation.

Senator RICKETTS. What is your thoughts on how we get the CCP to be responsive and be transparent? Because, obviously, if, indeed, it was from a lab in Wuhan they are the ones that have the data. How do we actually get them? Any thoughts on how we can get them to cooperate?

Dr. MURTHY. Senator, I think that is the delicate work that we have got to do when it comes to both our diplomacy but also thinking about the sort of measures that we take in putting these global agreements together to ensure that they have teeth.

I think there are, certainly, measures that have been discussed over the last couple of years. We are learning from this experience where we have to, again, ensure that there are consequences for lack of cooperation, lack of transparency, and again, this is part of what I would look to to engage on and to work with my colleagues in the U.S. Government on because again, as I said, this—to me, this is not a backburner issue.

This is not something we can afford to put aside. This is front and center of one of my core priorities that I mentioned earlier on, which is pandemic preparedness and that means that we have got to get to the bottoms of COVID origins.

Senator RICKETTS. As you know, doing an after action report or a post mortem, whatever we would call it, afterwards is going to be important. I think that getting the Chinese Communist Party to cooperate with that somehow is going to be important.

I am out of time, but I would note, Ms. Tremont, you are the one person who has not been asked a question here today. I feel bad. I do not even have a question for you. But thought I would recognize you here since everybody else got to talk on the panel. You showed up, got dressed up for nothing.

Ms. TREMONT. Thank you, Senator. Zimbabwe is feeling a little bit neglected.

[Laughter.]

Senator BOOKER. Senator Ricketts, you are the only one that abided by the time limits of five minutes. So I appreciate your discipline in that measure. I am going to ask some questions, if I may, now. I am grateful that we had such a great turnout from my colleagues and you can see the seriousness with which they take the important roles each of you will play.

I will go to Zimbabwe, if I may. I remember flying there with this incredible bipartisan delegation that ranged from Chris Coons to then Senator Jeff Flake and we were coming there right after Mnangagwa got elected and we had some—a good sanctions regime, and we were looking forward to talking to them, hopeful that the democratic norms that we wanted to see and that we could find some way to leverage the economic pressures we had.

As we were landing, interestingly enough, we were reading in the newspaper that representatives from Mnangagwa's team were landing from China, and China did not have concerns about their democratic norms and principles.

And so I guess I have a couple questions. One, it has been disappointing to me to see the challenges for democracy in Zimbabwe, and I am wondering what do you think the commitment of Mnangagwa is to key reforms that we would clearly like to see as we continue and maintain the sanctions regime?

And then I am curious about the influence of China, perhaps in many of the countries in Africa, but I am curious what your perspective might be in terms of informing what is the area of bipartisan concern as China is growing influence on the continent?

Ms. TREMONT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for that question. The U.S. Government warmly welcomed the improved tone of President Mnangagwa after his inauguration in 2018. But it is true to say there is a lot of work remaining before we see the sustained governance and economic reforms that he promised.

Zimbabwe is still not meeting the requirements of its own constitution nor its commitments to the African Union and the Southern African Development Community.

There we have recently seen over the recent months increased political violence against people expressing legal political activity, biased implementation of laws and rights.

The U.S. Government has been very concerned about this and has not hesitated to call out violence when we see it. If confirmed, I look forward to having frank and respectful conversations with the Zimbabwean Government about what sort of governance and democratic reforms would make the elections more credible and provide the Zimbabwean people their constitutional right to express their political will in a peaceful environment.

Regarding China, that is a big question. As you know, China has been investing in the extractive industries all over the world and

Zimbabwe with its rich mineral resources is no exception. In fact, the PRC and Russia comprise about 90 percent of the foreign direct investment in Zimbabwe's mineral sector.

Unfortunately, there is very little transparency regarding the terms of those contracts. So while I would always support private sector-led growth in Zimbabwe or any country, I certainly hope the Zimbabwean Government is ensuring that the Zimbabwean people are getting fair compensation for the minerals taken from their country.

In addition, I hope that they are looking at the environmental impact of these countries' investments and observing local labor laws to protect the workers who work for the Chinese companies.

If confirmed, I would ensure that U.S. businesses also have a fair and level playing field to invest in the many investment opportunities in Zimbabwe.

Senator BOOKER. Thank you very much. I see Senator Barrasso has come. I am going to suspend my questioning. He is a far more senior senator than I am with a lot more demands on his time, and I am going to allow him now to commence his questioning before I finish mine.

Senator BARRASSO. Thanks so much, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate it.

Dr. Murthy, good to see you again. Like you, I am a physician. You and I have been on programs together at various locations.

One of my biggest concerns is this loss of credibility by public health agencies, especially the World Health Organization. Time and again the American people see public health bureaucrats putting politics ahead of sound science. I think this needs to stop.

As an example, the Department of Energy now and the Federal Bureau of Investigation have concluded that the COVID pandemic likely stemmed from a leak from a Chinese lab, something Republicans have been saying for a long time.

I know Chairman McCaul of the House Foreign Relations Committee, former Senator Richard Burr of the HELP Committee, each released separate reports with the same conclusion.

So do you agree with the Department of Energy and with the FBI that the pandemic likely originated from a Chinese lab leak?

Dr. MURTHY. Thank you, Senator Barrasso, and it is good to see you again as well.

While I have not looked at the data that the Intelligence Committee has looked at and that is not my primary area of expertise, I did note what both of them—both departments have said publicly and I also understand that there is a diverse set of views in the intelligence community about the origins.

I do think what is essential here is that we pursue aggressively the investigation here to understand what the true origins are, recognizing that there are multiple possibilities here.

But I also think that one of the obstacles we have had, Senator, is having transparency with regard to China and we have not been able to get some of the information we need to do a full and thorough investigation and that needs to happen.

Senator BARRASSO. If confirmed, what actions would you support in terms of the World Health Organization in terms of taking to hold China accountable?

Dr. MURTHY. Well, Senator, my feeling is that as we embark in this new phase of learning from this pandemic and better prepare for the next one we have to have guidelines, rules, that we all abide by, rules that have teeth.

Otherwise, it does not serve us well. I also worry that if we allow an instance where one country does not end up engaging in a transparent way it creates more opportunities and almost license for others to do the same later in future pandemics.

My approach, if I have the privilege of serving, Senator, would be, number one, to go in there and to engage and understand the conversations that our colleagues across USG have had with the WHO specifically about them being—conducting an investigation with integrity, second, to assess where the gaps are, and third, to then press WHO leadership to close those gaps and in that process, Senator, I would welcome the opportunity to work with you and others in this committee.

Senator BARRASSO. Thanks.

Ms. Tremont, if I could, in 2022 Zimbabwe's president praised their, quote, "excellent relations with China." That followed the gift of a \$200 million parliament building funded by and constructed by China.

In 2021, Zimbabwe opened their national data center which China helped to build. The NetOne, Zimbabwe's state-owned telecoms network, has received about \$239 million from China since 2013. The purpose of the center is to gather information from the Government and private firms. That includes banks.

So how can we do a better job in countering this Chinese influence in Africa?

Ms. TREMONT. Senator, thank you for that question.

Obviously, I can only speak for Zimbabwe. But yes, Zimbabwe and China have a longstanding relationship that goes all the way back to Zimbabwe's war for independence.

I think the difference between Chinese investments in Zimbabwe and, perhaps, other places in Africa is the U.S. investments of \$4.5 billion that we have invested in Zimbabwe in people—have been for the people—to promote their health, to defend the democratic space, to improve the electoral systems, to increase food security. Seven hundred thousand Zimbabweans benefited from our food security and agricultural programs last year. It was tremendously important in light of the food shortages brought on by Russia's unprovoked war against Ukraine.

Whereas the Chinese investments are much more for the Government of Zimbabwe. The parliament building does not necessarily benefit the Zimbabwean people the way U.S. investment does.

And I do believe also that we hold our U.S. companies to a much higher standard when they invest in the private sector around the world than other countries do.

Senator BARRASSO. If confirmed, how will you help shed light on some of the terrible practices and atrocities committed by China to Africa?

Ms. TREMONT. Senator, I think that our fantastic embassy in Harare has excellent outreach and public relations with the entire country and I think our image among the Zimbabwean people is

much different than what you will sometimes see in the press or from official mouthpieces in Zimbabwe.

And so, if confirmed, I would continue that outreach and underscore to the Zimbabwean people our commitment to them and to their well being and to defending their democratic rights which are enshrined in their constitution.

Senator BARRASSO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator BOOKER. Thank you very much, Senator.

I just want to continue with that line of questioning. Again, there is a real concern—bipartisan concern—about China's growing influence there.

I think the senator said it right, the sort of corrupt practices that they use and engage in, how that often results in their influence, how they vote in different world organizations. It is a growing concern.

At the recent summit of Africa Leaders, I heard at least a lot of discussion about how they prefer us as partners but feel often we are not stepping up to compete and fill the gap, how when China comes in and does major projects, for example, they are not using local labor. They are not really helping to build.

I am just wondering if you have insights for us, because I think there is a lot of work we could do as a committee to try to better empower American interests and, frankly, that align with the interests of different African nations.

Do you have any insights that you might want to add to the senator's concerns and mine?

Ms. TREMONT. Thank you for that question, Senator.

I believe that U.S. business and their investments overseas represent U.S. values in a way that Chinese investments do not. We require that our companies do not pay bribes.

We have anti-corruption legislation that we enforce from back here at home. We highlight and press our own companies to enforce local labor laws and abide by local laws. Other regimes who do not share our values do not hold their companies to those same values.

So I think our investments and our companies will always have a slightly tougher road to hoe as a result but I do not think that we can compromise on those in order to compete in a race to the bottom for investment in Africa and influence there.

I have not been confirmed yet. I do not—I have not been to Zimbabwe in a very long time. But my sense is that the Zimbabwean people are keenly aware that they are not benefiting from Chinese investment in Zimbabwe and I think that is an important point to make.

Senator BOOKER. It is, and it touches on everything from national security issues for us, economic opportunity and, again, critical minerals—I could go through the things that are challenging for us—as well as helping countries have democracy because our values—our democratic values are very different than those of China..

I am grateful for your thoughtfulness on this question, and I look forward to continuing, should you be confirmed, this dialogue.

Maybe I will switch right to Mr. Kneeder. There is a real problem in Rwanda around critical minerals and I would say we see al-

leged smuggling of resources from the DRC conflict zone that are contributing to the destabilization of the country, the exploitation of people, and, again, often working against America's interests as we globally compete for these critical minerals and rare earth metals.

I am wondering if you have an assessment of Rwanda's involvement in mineral smuggling and not only its impact—if you can give me your thoughts if you agree with me about the severity of the crisis—but some thoughts on how we stop it.

Mr. KNEEDLER. Mr. Chairman, thank you very much for the question. This is, indeed, a very serious concern, the issue of the illicit flow of resources across borders throughout the region, throughout the Great Lakes region.

There are a number of regional initiatives established to deal with precisely this problem. Rwanda participates in a number of these initiatives. Rwanda has also taken some steps to legitimize its mineral trade, has implemented some traceability measures.

But it is true there is still work to be done in that regard. If confirmed, Senator, I would look forward to working with Rwanda to plug those remaining gaps. But it is an issue of concern.

Senator BOOKER. I appreciate that. And my last question, Doctor General—my mother would be more proud of you—Murthy, you heard from my Republican colleagues, which I think are all legitimate concerns, about U.S. sovereignty, about transparency.

I think my colleagues—Republican colleagues—put rightfully, trying to get facts and truth out. I wonder if I could ask some of their—maybe the inverse of their questions because I see China trying to influence a lot of world organizations, not just the United Nations.

They are trying to out influence us in creating the rules of the world order, and I guess I would like to hear from you, keeping in mind the legitimate concerns that my colleagues have brought up, what is the opportunity lost should we not be leaning into an organization like the WHO, if we do not exercise Americans' leadership and, as I often hear from our peer countries, the indispensable nature of America's leadership in defining the world order?

Dr. MURTHY. Thank you, Senator Booker, for that question.

I think there is a lot to be lost if we do not have American leadership at the WHO. I think we are the nation that can most effectively press for the transparency and accountability that is needed to make the WHO into the even more effective and impactful organization that it needs to be for the future.

But I also think what matters are our values. When we lead the approach we take to global health is one that supports human rights, that brings people to the table, that looks to care for and support the most underserved communities that are traditionally left out.

These are important values that we cannot take for granted and I am not confident that without American leadership that those values would be advanced with the same vigor and effectiveness.

So I think it is vital that we are on the world stage engaging with the WHO and bringing member nations together to push for the effective organization in the WHO that we need and to ensure, again, that agreements that we put together, amendments that we

make to the international health regulations, are ones that not only make sense but have teeth so we can move together with strong relationships but also with accountability.

That, in my mind, Senator, is how we create a safer world for tomorrow. That is how we ensure that there are risks to our children of enduring another pandemic and one that has impacts both on their physical and mental health is diminished in probability and that is why I feel that this is urgent work because we cannot wait another five or 10 years to engage and ensure that the WHO is the effective organization it needs to be. We need to do that work right now.

Senator BOOKER. You are—unlike the other four on the panel, you and I have known each other for 10 years. I consider you a friend. I could whisper this to you privately but I want to say to you publicly, I think that my—a lot of my Republican colleagues are such good faith actors that it would behoove you, should you get confirmed, to pull some of them close in in this important role that you have.

I see you and Senator Barrasso are both doctors. I, too, have a science degree in political science but there is a lot of expertise here on this subcommittee and I think it could really work well to have us take our role in organizations like the WHO to another level of leadership that also gives the American public the confidence that these organizations are not being used to undermine public safety or to obscure truth and fact but, indeed, to help make for a safer world.

I want to also say for the record, not that I am picking on you, Doctor General, who my mom would be more proud of, I want to just say to you that your work in the area of mental health—it is a global crisis coming out of a pandemic and I think that that you have unique insights and expertise that could really help not just at home in your role as Attorney General but in a larger planet that is seeing a lot more stressors on a lot of nations, and I am looking forward to learning a lot more from you.

I want to say to the group as we—as I bring this to a close, Ms. FitzGibbon, you talked about development, democracy, and diplomacy. I want to use different D-words for you. Every one of you is doing a job and, should you be confirmed, will have to do a job, and especially the folks who have been career diplomats before have done this with the Ds of doing things that are difficult, doing things that are demanding, and doing things that are very, very dangerous.

We are a nation that has seen the challenges our diplomats have faced from physical attacks to dealing with environments that are amid severe conflict.

We also know that the work that you do, which many of us who travel as members of the Foreign Relations Committee have seen with our own eyes, you all are doing work that ultimately secures democracy, saves lives, and expands access to human rights.

The work that you all do is extraordinary and the work that you—and the support you get from your family—I am so happy that many of you had family members here—that should be noted. I did not just say that in a perfunctory manner about your patriotism because there are a lot of symbols of patriotism.

But you all in many ways, as we travel around the world, are showing the substance of what I think are lives dedicated to making this nation and the world a better place.

I love our history and I love the role that some of our first ambassadors held, people like Ben Franklin and Thomas Jefferson. They showed the way of what it means to be the light of this nation abroad and helping to not only secure American interests but make for better alliances and more hope and democracy globally.

And so I just want to say as we bring this hearing to a conclusion that I am grateful, I am hopeful, and while this might not have—I just came from an earlier hearing today with the Attorney General, which was a packed room—You may not see the celebrity of this moment but you all are people who are more concerned with significance than celebrity and purpose than simple popularity.

And so with that, I am going to adjourn the hearing. I would like to thank you all for your participation. I want to thank your family members for coming as well.

You all know this but this hearing record will remain open until the close of business on Thursday, March 2nd. I guess that is tomorrow. Okay.

It is going to stay open until the end of business tomorrow, March 2nd. I would encourage you that if there are questions for the record—many of my colleagues who are pulled in different directions on the days we are in session, they may submit to you questions for the record.

I suggest you take them very seriously, as I know that you do, answer them diligently so that we can have a smooth vote here in the Senate, which I hope—in this committee, which I hope then—we will send you to the Senate floor for a full vote.

But I am very honored to be sitting before you all and I really do hope that I get a chance to serve with you in the positions to which you have been nominated.

With that, this hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 4:27 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

Additional Material Submitted for the Record

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO
DR. VIVEK HALLAGERE MURTHY BY SENATOR ROBERT MENENDEZ

Question. 2023 is set to be a significant year for the World Health Organization. Member states are expected to consider amendments to the International Health Regulations at the next World Health Assembly in May. And negotiations are under way for an international pandemic accord. I understand the Biden administration put forward several amendments to the IHRs to improve information sharing and the process of issuing alerts related to public health incidents. If confirmed, what actions will you take to ensure the WHO can meaningfully support collective efforts to prevent, detect and respond to pandemic threats?

Answer. COVID-19 reminded us that infectious diseases do not stop at our borders and that global engagement and coordination is required to protect Americans against current and future health threats. One of my top priorities for the position, if confirmed, is to make sure we are better prepared for the next pandemic. We must all internalize, better understand, and ensure that the lessons of COVID-19 and prior infectious disease threats are reflected in a clear strategy for addressing future pandemics, including effective surveillance and detection, rapid response, and sustained efforts to support recovery. The World Health Organization (WHO or Or-

ganization) can play a key role in this effort by working to strengthen its and its Member States' capacities. It also will require successful engagement on negotiations currently underway to strengthen the International Health Regulations and develop a new pandemic accord to address broader gaps in pandemic preparedness.

Question. WHO does critical work helping countries respond to health emergencies around the world, often in places where people are extremely vulnerable to abuse. WHO's response to allegations of widespread sexual abuse and exploitation by its staff and partners during the 2018–2020 Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of the Congo drew significant concern from Member States, prompting the WHO to undertake a set of reforms.

- Do you think the reforms are adequate?
- If confirmed, what steps will you take to ensure WHO's mechanisms related to prevention of and accountability for sexual abuse and exploitation are both adequate, and consistently applied?

Answer. There must be zero tolerance for sexual exploitation and abuse at the WHO. It is my understanding that the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the Department of State (State), and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) have been working closely with the WHO as they respond to sexual exploitation and abuse allegations and work to build stronger systems to prevent and address sexual exploitation and abuse in the future. The WHO has made improvements and laid out a Management Response Plan with next steps to continue progress, but our pressure on these issues must continue to be a top priority, especially making sure that the survivors of sexual exploitation and abuse receive the necessary support, perpetrators are brought to justice, and future incidents of sexual exploitation and abuse are prevented.

Question. What reforms need to be implemented in order to achieve sustainable financing for the World Health Organization? Do you support increasing assessed contributions to the World Health Organization?

Answer. I strongly support the ongoing efforts to strengthen the WHO and make it more agile, transparent, and efficient, which include more sustainable financing of the Organization. When Member States agreed in principle to increase the WHO's assessed contributions last May at World Health Assembly (WHA) 75, that was not a blank check, but rather, a commitment to step up as Member States to sustainably finance the Organization, and for the WHO Secretariat to step up in significantly changing the way the WHO's budget and finances are governed. If confirmed, I look forward to working to help ensure the WHO has delivered on those commitments and to working with State and HHS to continue to provide Congress with regular updates.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO
DR. VIVEK HALLAGERE MURTHY BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

Global Health

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to ensuring that the WHO holds all staff who engage in sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) personally and professionally liable for their crimes?

Answer. There must be zero tolerance for sexual exploitation and abuse at the WHO. It is my understanding that HHS, State, and USAID have been working closely with the WHO as they respond to sexual exploitation and abuse allegations and work to build stronger systems to prevent and address sexual exploitation and abuse in the future. The WHO has made improvements and laid out a Management Response Plan with next steps to continue progress, but our pressure on these issues must continue to be a top priority, especially making sure that the survivors of sexual exploitation and abuse receive the necessary support, perpetrators are brought to justice, and future incidents of sexual exploitation and abuse are prevented.

Question. We are at a critical point in negotiating an international pandemics agreement and, according to Ambassador Hamamoto's team, things are not going well. Do you commit to ensuring that any agreement that creates new or expanded legal obligations upon the United States be submitted in the form of a treaty, and thus subject to Senate advice and consent?

Answer. The timeline for developing the Pandemic Accord is very ambitious, and therefore the International Negotiating Body and WHO Member States are on an

aggressive schedule. But, we all recognize that we must be ambitious in order to protect ourselves and the world from future pandemic threats. The Pandemic Accord is an opportunity to strengthen the global health security architecture for future pandemic threats by applying the lessons learned from COVID-19 and other outbreak responses. This is the first time we are undertaking this type of pandemic preparedness exercise on a global scale, and we must ensure the outcome is as strong as possible. Ambassador Hamamoto and her team are leveraging the strengths and expertise from across the federal government to make this happen. I agree that transparency and accountability are an important facet of all the work we are undertaking as we learn from the pandemic, and it is my understanding that experts are examining the legal questions around exactly what format the final agreement will take. Regardless, I believe that congressional engagement in the process is extremely important, and if confirmed, I look forward to working with you.

FOLLOW-UP QUESTION

Question. We are at a critical point in negotiating an international pandemics agreement and, according to Ambassador Hamamoto's team, things are not going well. Do you commit to ensuring that any agreement that creates new or expanded legal obligations upon the United States be submitted in the form of a treaty, and thus subject to Senate advice and consent? *Please answer yes or no, and explain your response.*

Answer. I am committed to continuing to consult with Congress throughout these negotiations and appreciate the input the negotiating team has already received through initial consultations. The United States is still at an early stage in this negotiating process, and it is my understanding that as this process continues, we will get a better sense of what the agreement will ultimately look like, including the scope of its content and the extent to which it will contain binding legal commitments. I will continue to seek consultation with Congress in the coming months and will urge my colleagues to do the same.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO DR. VIVEK HALLAGERE MURTHY BY SENATOR MARCO RUBIO

Question. In May, Secretary Blinken said that the People's Republic of China is the "only country with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do it." The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) clearly holds all the reins of power in the People's Republic of China and has used this power to commit genocide in Xinjiang, flood our communities with fentanyl, and emit by far the largest quantity of greenhouse gases. As we speak, the Party is cracking down on unprecedented student protests across the country. With their absolute control of Chinese society and industry, the CCP could stop all of these destructive actions tomorrow if they so choose. Is the Chinese Communist Party a threat to the United States?

- Does the Chinese Communist Party undertake any activities that are beneficial to U.S. interests?
- Do you believe that there are any areas within which the Chinese Communist Party would constructively work with the United States in good faith?
- If confirmed, will you approve any joint activity with organizations or representatives from the People's Republic of China in the countries, or organizations in which you will work?

Answer. I understand the United States engages with China where it is in our best interests. In relationship to my role as the U.S. Representative to the WHO Executive Board, if confirmed, I believe the best way for us to combat China's influence in global institutions is to robustly engage and lead in these institutions. When the United States takes a leadership role in the WHO, it leaves less room for China to exert its influence. The United States values cooperation, transparency, accountability, and human rights. We must remain committed to strengthening the WHO, so it can do its work better and without fear of any unwarranted interference. The United States is an effective leader at the WHO, working to build consensus and collegiality among Member States to prevent, prepare for, and respond to health emergencies. When we disengage it allows for other Member States to exert influence and push the organization in ways that may not be in the best interest of glob-

al public health including the health of Americans. If confirmed, I would work with my U.S. Government partners to ensure that the WHO focuses on its mandate of promoting health for all and helping everyone achieve the highest attainable level of health.

Question. If confirmed, you would assume responsibilities on the WHO Executive Board which determines the agenda for the WHO's World Health Assembly (WHA). Part of the WHO's responsibilities is the prevention of pandemics, like COVID-19. In order to prevent future pandemics, we need to have a crystal clear understanding of what caused previous pandemics. For COVID-19, because of Chinese Communist Party obstruction, we unfortunately do not yet have that understanding. The WHO and the Office of the Director of National Intelligence have assessed that natural transmission was the likely source of the COVID-19, while the FBI and, this week, the U.S. Department of Energy, believe it is a lab leak. My colleagues on the Senate committee responsible for Health also believe a lab origin is likely. Do you believe that there is the possibility that COVID-19 originated through a lab leak at the Wuhan Institute of Virology and, if so, should that possibility be thoroughly investigated?

Answer. There are a variety of views in the intelligence community about the origins of COVID-19. Some elements of the intelligence community have reached conclusions on one side, some on the other, and a number of them have said they do not have enough information to reach a conclusion. It's important to note that a significant reason why we have not had sufficient information is the lack of transparency from the Chinese Government. Getting to the bottom of the origins of COVID-19 continues to be a priority for the United States, and I will advocate strongly to this effect if I am confirmed.

Question. Do you believe China notified the WHO regarding the COVID outbreak in Wuhan in a timely and responsible fashion in 2019?

- In February the WHO abandoned its investigation into whether COVID-19 originated, or leaked, from a lab in Wuhan because of "politics across the world." To what extent do you believe opposition from the Chinese Communist Party drove the WHO's decision to end its investigation?

Answer. For more than two years now, China has been blocking international investigators and members of the global public health community from accessing information. We must continue to work with partners around the world to press China to fully share information and to cooperate with the WHO.

Question. If confirmed, will you work to reverse the WHO decision to stop investigating the source of COVID?

Answer. Getting to the bottom of the origins of COVID-19 must be a priority, and I would strongly support efforts to investigate this important issue. Doing so will help provide additional information that can be used to better prepare for and hopefully prevent the next pandemic, be that more effective biosafety and biosecurity practices or reducing opportunities for spillover of viruses to humans.

Question. This week, the U.S. Ambassador to China, Nick Burns, stated that China needed to "be more honest about what happened three years ago in Wuhan with the origin of the COVID-19 crisis." According to a Wall Street Journal article, a classified intelligence report provided to the Biden administration, and members of Congress, concluded the COVID pandemic most likely arose from a lab leak. Do you agree with the Department of Energy and Federal Bureau of Investigation's conclusion that COVID most likely originated from a Chinese lab?

Answer. There are a variety of views in the intelligence community about the origins of COVID-19. Some elements of the intelligence community have reached conclusions on one side, some on the other, and a number of them have said they do not have enough information to reach a conclusion. Getting to the bottom of the origins of COVID-19 should continue to be a priority, and I will advocate strongly to this effect if I am confirmed.

Question. Like the U.N. Human Rights Council, the WHO continues to unfairly single out Israel on health rights. According to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, this kind of double standard applied to Israel is an example of antisemitism. Should the U.S. support any organization that engages in antisemitism?

Answer. I agree that anti-Israel bias in international organizations remains a persistent challenge and believe that the United Nations (U.N.) must take steps to address it wherever it occurs. If confirmed, I will be keenly attuned to this challenge and look forward to consulting closely with Israeli diplomatic colleagues and other

likeminded Member States to ensure that such bias is brought to light and countered vigorously and with unity of purpose.

Question. How will you use U.S. assistance and your position with the WHO to stop unjustly targeting Israel?

Answer. The United States is best able to influence the direction and performance of organizations such as the WHO when we are robustly engaged, and if confirmed, I would add my voice, energy, and experience to that effort, including in an instance in which Israel is unfairly targeted or subject to other forms of bias.

Question. Last year, the Biden administration submitted to the World Health Assembly draft text to amend the International Health Regulations, (IHR), which govern how the WHO responds to international pandemics. Americans across the country have raised concerns that this proposal for a so-called “Pandemic Preparedness Treaty” would override American sovereignty by opening the door for the WHO to authorize sanctions against the United States or to assume control of healthcare regulations determined by American states. What is your assessment of the impact of the administration’s proposals to reform the IHR?

Answer. The United States will not support any proposal that will compromise our sovereignty or security. COVID-19 reminded us that infectious diseases do not stop at our borders and that global engagement and coordination is required to protect Americans against current and future health threats. One of my top priorities for the position, if confirmed, is to make sure we are better prepared for the next pandemic. The WHO can play a key role in strengthening its and its Member States’ capacities. The United States proposed substantive amendments to the International Health Regulations (IHR) containing measures that would strengthen the WHO’s ability to use available information to determine whether a Public Health Emergency of International Concern may be occurring, and based upon that information, inform all nations of the threat in a timely manner and provide valuable recommendations on how to safely and effectively respond.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to voting against any reform to the IHR or other WHO regulation that would violate the United States’ sovereignty?

Answer. The United States will not support any provisions that compromise our sovereignty or security. We will not support any provisions that would compromise Americans’ control over their own health care decisions.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO
DR. VIVEK HALLAGERE MURTHY BY SENATOR BILL HAGERTY

WHO-China Ties

Question. World Health Organization Director-General Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus—who had hailed China’s Health Silk Road as an alternative to Western-led institutions in 2017—was lavish in his public and explicit praise for CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping’s cooperation as “very impressive and beyond words” early in the pandemic. Yet, at the same time, the WHO privately complained that China was not sharing enough data.

- Do you believe Dr. Tedros is too close to the CCP? Please begin your answer with a yes or no.
- Do you believe Dr. Tedros has the confidence of the international community to continue to lead the WHO? If so, why?
- If confirmed, will you advocate for major leadership changes at the WHO? Please begin your answer with a yes or no.

Answer. The best way for us to combat China’s influence in global institutions is to robustly engage in these institutions as the United States. When the United States takes a leadership role in the WHO, it leaves less room for China to exert its influence. The United States values cooperation, transparency, accountability, and human rights. We must remain committed to strengthening the WHO, so it can do its work better and without fear of any unwarranted interference. The United States is an effective leader at the WHO, working to build consensus and collegiality among Member States to prevent, prepare for, and respond to health emergencies. When we disengage, it allows other Member States to exert influence and push the organization in ways that may not be in the best interest of global public health, including the health of Americans. If confirmed, I would work with my U.S. Govern-

ment partners to ensure that the WHO focuses on its mandate of promoting health for all and helping everyone achieve the highest attainable standard of health.

WHO Accountability

Question. During your SFRC confirmation hearing, you said that you supported holding the WHO accountable and that the United States should “not provide a blank check” to the WHO, adding that U.S. funding to the WHO “should come with assurances that the reforms we are seeking are happening.”

- What specific reforms must be made the WHO so that we are not providing a blank check?
- If the WHO fails to make these reforms, will you, if confirmed, advocate for the United States to suspend funding to the WHO?
- How has the Biden administration held the WHO accountable for its poor performance during the pandemic?
- What conditions, if any, did the Biden administration place on rejoining the WHO?
- What assurances has the Biden administration sought from the WHO on reform?

Answer. The WHO is an essential organization; they are the only international organization with the mandate and convening power to bring together Ministries of Health and health experts across 194 countries. Thus, I strongly support the ongoing efforts to strengthen the WHO and make it more agile, transparent, and efficient, which include more sustainable financing of the Organization. When Member States agreed in principle to increase the WHO’s assessed contributions last May at WHA 75, that was not a blank check, but rather, a commitment to step up as Member States in sustainably financing the Organization, and for the WHO Secretariat to step up in significantly changing the way the WHO’s budget and finances are governed. It is my understanding that the U.S. worked with WHO to lay out a clear reform agenda and track progress against that agenda, as well as launched a new Strategic Dialogue between the U.S. and WHO to ensure WHO is delivering on the priorities for the United States. If confirmed, I look forward to working to help make this happen and working with State and HHS to continue to provide Congress with regular updates.

The WHO Intergovernmental Negotiating Body Pandemic Treaty “Zero Draft”

Question. During your SFRC confirmation hearing, you said that you would “strive to protect American sovereignty.”

- If confirmed, what specific actions will you take to protect U.S. sovereignty with respect to global public health?
- Do you believe countries have the sovereign right to determine and manage their approach to public health-including pandemic prevention, preparedness, and response-pursuant solely to their own policies and legislation?
- Do you believe that the WHO-despite its abysmal track record during the COVID pandemic-should be given greater authority under international agreement as a coordinating and implementing entity during the next pandemic?
- Do you support preemptively committing the United States via international agreement to waive intellectual property rights-including on vaccines, therapeutics, and diagnostics-during the next pandemic?
- Do you support the principle of “common but differentiated responsibility” in global pandemic response?
- Do you support allowing the WHO under international agreement to determine fair and equitable allocation of pandemic-related products and resources based on public health risks and needs?
- Do you support expanded WHO authorities under international agreement for coordinating global supply chains for the production of pandemic-related products?
- Do you support allowing the WHO under international agreement to coordinate the creation of strategic stockpiles of pandemic-related products?
- Do you support obligating the United States under international agreement to contribute not lower than five-percent of its current health expenditure for pandemic prevention, preparedness, and response?

Answer. The Pandemic Accord is an opportunity to strengthen the global health security architecture for future pandemic threats by applying the lessons learned from COVID-19 and other outbreak responses. The Accord is also an opportunity

to promote and strengthen national, regional, and global approaches to transparency, accountability, improved coordination, and rapid action. While the substantive negotiations, led by Ambassador Hamamoto, are ongoing with respect to the different items you mention, the United States will not support any provisions in the Accord that compromise the sovereignty or security of the United States. We will not support any provisions that would compromise Americans' control over their own health care decisions. I believe that congressional engagement in the process is extremely important and, if confirmed, I look forward to hearing from you as conversations continue on this important endeavor.

FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

Question. On March 3, the lead U.S. Negotiator for the Pandemic Accord, Ambassador Pamela K. Hamamoto, called for the WHO pandemic agreement to include an obligation to provide “sexual and reproductive health services” as essential health care services during pandemics in the U.S. opening statement of negotiations this week.¹ Do you support obligating the United States via international agreement to provide reproductive health services, including abortion, as essential health care during a pandemic?

Answer. If confirmed, I will comply with all legislative restrictions on foreign assistance related to abortion, including restrictions against advocating for or against abortion in multilateral fora.

Question. Ambassador Hamamoto also appeared to agree with China that negotiations and future versions of the draft treaty should be discussed in closed session, noting: “I think at this stage I have some concerns about sharing the draft to all stakeholders given where we are in the process.”² If confirmed, do you commit to advocate that the pandemic agreement negotiations and draft text of the document be made public in the interests of transparency? Please begin your answer with a yes or no.

Answer. If confirmed, I agree that a transparent process is critical to the overall success of the pandemic agreement. I will commit to advocating with the U.S. Pandemic Negotiator, Ambassador Pamela Hamamoto, for a transparent and open review process that includes Congress and the American public.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to advocate that any pandemic agreement giving rise to new or expanded legal obligations be submitted by the President to the Senate in the form of a treaty and subject to advice and consent under clause 2 of section 2 of article II of the U.S. Constitution? Please begin your answer with a yes or no.

Answer. The timeline for developing the Pandemic Accord is very ambitious, and therefore the International Negotiating Body and WHO Member States are on an aggressive schedule. But, we all recognize that we must be ambitious in order to protect ourselves and the world from future pandemic threats. The Pandemic Accord is an opportunity to strengthen the global health security architecture for future pandemic threats by applying the lessons learned from COVID-19 and other outbreak responses. This is the first time we are undertaking this type of pandemic preparedness exercise on a global scale, and we must ensure the outcome is as strong as possible. Ambassador Hamamoto and her team are leveraging the strengths and expertise from across the Federal Government to make this happen. I agree that transparency and accountability are an important facet of all the work we are undertaking as we learn from the pandemic, and it is my understanding that experts are examining the legal questions around exactly what format the final agreement will take. Regardless, I believe that congressional engagement in the process is extremely important, and if confirmed, I look forward to working with you.

¹ <https://apps.who.int/gb/inb/e—inb-4.html>

² <https://apps.who.int/gb/inb/e—inb-4.html>

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
 SUBMITTED TO KATHLEEN A. FITZGIBBON BY SENATOR ROBERT MENENDEZ

Conditions in the Sahel continue to deteriorate. According to the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, "more civilian fatalities have been reported in the Central Sahel this year than in all of 2021, with more than 2,300 killed." Successive administrations have invested significant resources in the security sector, but it's clear we need a more holistic approach. With military juntas now in power in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Chad, achieving an appropriate balance in Niger—so as to ensure that Niger remains a bulwark against authoritarianism and terrorism—is more important now than ever.

Question. What is your assessment with regards to whether we have achieved the correct balance between our investments in defense and our investments in diplomacy and development?

Answer. Our pivot to creating a better balance among our defense, development, democracy, and diplomatic investments is ongoing. Over the past few years, the U.S. Government has significantly augmented our development assistance and increased diplomatic efforts in Niger, while leveraging small funds and exchanges to bolster our engagements to strengthen democracy. As the leader of our interagency team, if confirmed, I will be cognizant of the need to balance our resources appropriately in line with our U.S. Sahel Strategy and coordinate with other donors to meet the country's economic, political, and security challenges. If confirmed, I will increase our communications to the Nigerien Government and people on the results of our partnership.

I understand in recent years there has been a significant increase in economic investments (USAID/MCC) aimed at improving service delivery, expanding agricultural outputs, supporting education initiatives, and promoting livelihoods, aimed at strengthening confidence in government capacity. Diplomatic engagement that is more focused on inclusive governance, increasing participation, and encouraging political competition is our focus. If confirmed, I will use my position to create opportunities to strengthen the connection between political elites and Nigeriens and foster a shared vision for Niger's future. I will leverage smaller programs, including Department of Justice and Conflict Stabilization programs to strengthen rule of law and promote anti-corruption activities. Steady and consistent commitment to building partner capacity and human rights accountability will focus on building professionalism, adherence to international humanitarian principles, and the rule of law.

Question. What changes have we made to better balance our approach since the passage of the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership Program Act last March?

Answer. The U.S. Sahel Strategy is based on the assessment that instability in the Sahel is a security problem with a governance solution. In Niger, the United States is working to create a better balance between our security and development assistance and diplomatic efforts. If confirmed, I will be cognizant of the need to balance our resources appropriately. Along with our USAID Mission Director, I will coordinate with other donors to support the country's economic, political, and security challenges.

Question. What is the status of staffing at Embassy Niger? Have any posts been vacant longer than 6 months? Are the incentives currently in place sufficient for attracting foreign service officers? If not, how should they be adjusted?

Answer. Progress has been made in filling vacancies in Niamey. The Mission is now down to an overall vacancy rate of 22 percent, and the vacancy rate is projected to drop below 10 percent by the end of the summer transfer season. Fourteen positions have been vacant for more than 6 months. At least nine of these positions will be filled in the coming months. If I am confirmed and am able to fill the Ambassador's Office Management Specialist position quickly, this will fill two more of the fourteen longstanding vacancies. The Bureau of African Affairs and Global Talent Management are working on other incentives to attract bidders.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to briefing the Committee on the status of implementation of the Sahel strategy in Niger?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed, I will brief the Committee on the status of the implementation of the Sahel Strategy in Niger.

The Government of Niger recently approved new rules related to NGO operations that as drafted, threaten the independence of operations of international and local NGOs working on development, good governance, and human rights. These changes could hamper our ability to provide aid to Niger through such organizations. Niger has also jailed a human rights defender—Abdoulaye Seydou—first for “undermining public order” and then for alleged arson.

Question. What is the status of the new NGO regulations? Have the Embassy and USAID engaged directly with Parliament and the Presidency on these concerns? If confirmed, what steps will you take to convince the Government to ensure international NGOs can operate independently?

Answer. Senior U.S. Mission Niamey officers and USAID Administrator Power have engaged directly with President Bazoum and his administration on our concerns about the NGO decree (an executive order) and the Nigerien Government’s commitment to revise the NGO legal framework and uphold civil liberties. In November, the Government of Niger hosted a national conference with multiple government ministries, NGOs, and civil society leadership to review the NGO legal framework. Final conference recommendations included revising the NGO decree and decades-old NGO and association laws into a single updated law as well as modernizing the management of NGOs and associations. The Nigerien Government announced it would establish a drafting committee for the NGO legal framework. If confirmed, I will engage to ensure forward momentum on the drafting and implementation of the NGO legal framework. Furthermore, I will seek opportunities to technically support and facilitate dialogue through public and diplomatic engagements, underscoring international best practices for civic freedoms.

Question. Tolerance for dissenting voices and views is a hallmark of a functional democracy, and muzzling these voices often backfires. Is there enough space in Niger for people to criticize their Government without fear of arrest or intimidation? Has Abdoulaye Seydou been freed? If confirmed, what steps will you take to strengthen respect for democratic rights in Niger?

Answer. Abdoulaye Seydou, the founder and national coordinator of the Government opposition group Movement 62 (M62), who was arrested on January 23, has not yet been freed. The Embassy in Niamey is closely following Seydou’s arrest and detention and has repeatedly stressed to the Government of Niger the importance the United States places on freedom of expression for civil society leaders and opposition figures. The Embassy is also deeply engaged on this issue with civil society leaders. If confirmed, I will raise Seydou’s arrest, advocate for his release with top government officials, and remind them of President Bazoum’s statements that the lack of respect for state authority is at the core of instability in neighboring countries. I will speak publicly about the importance of political space and dialogue for citizens to engage the Government on political and economic issues of national importance. I will emphasize that marginalization of dissenting voices feeds dissatisfaction and plays into the hands of violent extremist organizations. I will promote discussions about the importance of protecting democratic and human rights as a core strategy to counter terrorist recruitment messaging.

Question. What are the most important actions you have taken in your career to date to support democracy and human rights? What has been the impact of your actions?

Answer. I have promoted respect for human rights and democracy throughout my career. Specifically, my work to protect human trafficking victims, empower women and girls, and promote the human rights of members of the LGBTQI+ community have been aimed at establishing legal frameworks to respect and protect human rights. I have worked with several African governments to pass or strengthen anti-trafficking legislation, increase prosecutions, and provide stronger protection for victims. In Uganda, I led an effort by female parliamentarians to draft and pass the country’s first anti-trafficking legislation in 2009 and, in Sierra Leone, I participated on the Government’s anti-trafficking committee, advising on strengthening its legislation, no-cost actions to raise awareness of trafficking, and on the importance of interagency collaboration. I was a U.S. negotiator at the Darfur Peace Talks, oversaw our support for 250,000 Darfur refugees in Chad, and supported our research team that uncovered facts that supported the determination that genocide was being committed by the Government of Sudan. In Sierra Leone, I prioritized empowering women as a primary mission goal, which led then-Secretary Kerry to name Embassy Freetown “Gender Champions.” I also advocated for free and fair elections in Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Gabon, and Sao Tome and Principe. In Nigeria, I engaged diplomatically to assist a Christian girl fleeing religious persecution after

receiving humanitarian parole to depart Nigeria. I worked with national human rights councils in Sierra Leone and Nigeria to ensure the human rights of members of the LGBTQI+ community are protected. The National Human Rights Commission in Nigeria is taking on cases of arrests and working to challenge the law. Through our PEPFAR program, I led engagement with governors to stand up against discrimination against those with HIV/AIDS to counter stigmatization, which enabled us to enroll 500,000 new patients on HIV treatment, propelling Nigeria toward achieving epidemic control in 2023.

Question. What issues are the most pressing challenges to democracy or democratic development in Niger? These challenges might include obstacles to participatory and accountable governance and institutions, rule of law, authentic political competition, civil society, human rights and press freedom. Please be as specific as possible.

Answer. High levels of illiteracy, poverty, insecurity, and alarming demographic trends are fundamental obstacles to deepening public participation in Niger's democracy. Our development assistance aims at strengthening the Government's ability to deliver services in health, education, agriculture, and livelihoods, and is critical to increasing respect for state authority and improving these trends. Our democracy programs are developing the capacity of youth and women to more fully participate in political discourse, strengthening journalistic integrity, bolstering rule of law, and supporting livelihoods.

Question. What steps will you take—if confirmed—to support democracy in Niger? What do you hope to accomplish through these actions? What are the potential impediments to addressing the specific obstacles you have identified?

Answer. At the strategic level, I will, if confirmed, engage Niger's political elite, across all parties, and key civil society leaders to gain elite buy-in to secure political tradeoffs to tackle the deep challenges threatening consolidation of democracy. I will point out when short-term interests are undermining democratic consolidation. It also is essential to secure long-term commitments that can bolster democracy, such as reforming the education sector, committing to educating girls, and investing in infrastructure. These commitments transcend administrations because they have support across the political spectrum. Tactically, this means frequent engagement with key players, including civil society, traditional leaders, and marginalized groups, to share information about our investments in bolstering democracy, and to seek their ideas and support. If confirmed, I will leverage our key reports—human rights, trafficking in persons, and religious freedom—to engage the Government on improving these areas of concern. I will combine public and private engagement to keep human rights and democracy issues at the forefront of our shared priorities.

Question. How will you utilize U.S. Government assistance resources at your disposal, including the Democracy Commission Small Grants program and other sources of State Department and USAID funding, to support democracy and governance, and what will you prioritize in processes to administer such assistance?

Answer. If confirmed, I will continue to prioritize the human rights of women in Niger in our diplomatic, development and operation activities, including focusing on efforts to promote women's economic and political participation and strategic initiatives related to gender-based violence and women, peace and security. Embassy Niamey will promote gender balance in the selection of U.S. Government professional and education exchanges.

The U.S. Government is committed to contribute to the President's priorities through USAID's investments increasing girls' access to education, particularly where child marriage rates are the highest. Also, USAID works with imams, community leaders, parents, and caregivers to support girls' education and better understand the positive effects of girls staying in school. USAID will begin working with UNICEF to address the loss of learning resulting from conflict and school closures by focusing on distance education for children and youth ages 7-15.

Advancing women in the labor force is good for companies' bottom lines, good for countries' economic growth, and good for global security, prosperity, and stability. As such, Mission Niger promotes Nigerien women's participation in the International Visitor Leadership Program, Washington Mandela Fellows Program, and in other exchanges such as Fulbright and the Global Undergrad Program. Mission Niger also provides implementation oversight to USAID and Department of State-funded women, peace, and security programs and initiatives that have increased women's leadership and participation in community security networks and peacebuilding platforms in Diffa, Maradi, and Tillabéri regions. USAID is also supporting improved maternal and child health, voluntary family planning, and efforts

to prevent of child early and forced marriage and improved access to quality, safe basic education opportunities.

Embassy Niamey has a long history of supporting female entrepreneurs in Niger. Through a PD Section small grant more than five years ago, a central women's entrepreneurship association emerged in Niamey, which now has affiliate groups in every region. Embassy Niamey has sponsored shark tanks and trainings for women entrepreneurs as well as invested in programs to teach women vocational trades. Embassy Niamey also sponsors a school for women entrepreneurs in Maradi, and the Millenium Challenge Corporation supports functional literacy classes for rural Nigeriens with a focus on women.

In addition, the Embassy is credited with training Niger's first female pilot, sending its first female attendee to the United States Military Academy, West Point and two successful nominations of the Department of State Women of Courage candidates, resulting in the elevation of women's status in the field of security, defense, and human rights. The Embassy's ongoing Ambassador Fund for Cultural Preservation Grant seeks to train and empower women potters from Boubon, Niger on how to keep their tradition alive while also making it a viable economic living.

Girls' empowerment through sports programing is a central effort to promoting girls' education and schooling. The Embassy uses social media as a key platform to showcase our commitment to the advancement of women and girls as noted by the annual participation of the Young African Leaders Initiative social media campaign #Africa4Her encouraging Africans to pledge to support women's and girls' access to opportunity; and workshops encouraging political and civic participation among women before, during, and after elections.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to meet with civil society members, human rights and other non-governmental organizations in the U.S. and with local human rights NGOs, and other members of civil society in Niger? What steps will you take to pro-actively address efforts to restrict or penalize NGOs and civil society via legal or regulatory measures?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed, I commit to meeting with a wide range of civil society members, human rights groups, and non-governmental organizations in Niger. This engagement is fundamental to our agenda to strengthen democracy. I will seek ways to bring these groups together with government officials to build trust and interaction. I will continue our mission's proactive approach to addressing efforts to restrict NGOs and civil society. I also will meet with our implementing partners and the USAID director to get feedback on the law's revisions and any other similar regulations that limit or penalize civil society or NGOs. Finally, it will be important to coordinate with likeminded diplomatic missions to amplify our positions.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to meet with democratically oriented political opposition figures and parties? What steps will you take to encourage genuine political competition? Will you advocate for access and inclusivity for women, minorities and youth within political parties?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed, I will meet with democratically oriented political opposition figures and parties. I will encourage genuine political competition and defend the importance of a level and inclusive playing field for all political actors. I will make interventions when needed to encourage positive behaviors and make use of all the available tools necessary. It will be important to start talking to key players now about preparations for the elections in 2025. Access and inclusivity for women, minorities, and youth within political parties is a central tenet of our programs and diplomatic engagement to strengthen governance in Niger. I consider these critical constituencies and will nurture their political participation.

Reversing severe gender inequality will remain a priority. This includes focusing on efforts to promote women's economic and political participation and strategic initiatives related to gender-based violence and women, peace and security. To the extent possible, Embassy Niamey ensures gender balance is applied in the selection of U.S. Government professional and education exchanges, and I will continue this policy.

Question. Will you and your embassy team actively engage with Niger on freedom of the press and address any government efforts designed to control or undermine press freedom through legal, regulatory or other measures? Will you commit to meeting regularly with independent, local press in Niger?

Answer. If confirmed, I will lead our embassy team in engaging on press freedom. Our efforts will include voicing our concerns when we see limits or regulations designed to undermine press freedom or efforts to intimidate journalists. The Embassy's public diplomacy team has excellent relationships among independent journalists in

Niger and I look forward, if confirmed, to further strengthening their capacity to effectively serve as a watchdog and report accurately on national events.

Question. Will you and your embassy team actively engage with civil society and government counterparts on countering disinformation and propaganda disseminated by foreign state or non-state actors in the country?

Answer. If confirmed, I will continue to lead our mission's efforts to counter the increasing spread of disinformation, which is a threat to stability in Niger. Those carrying out disinformation campaigns often target specific populations by capitalizing on and/or exploiting the grievances, vulnerabilities, incentives, and/or suspicions that make each group susceptible to manipulation. Nigeriens are vulnerable to disinformation when actors (including state and non-state actors, and foreign governments) are willing to prey on these weaknesses by targeting populations with false and misleading information.

The United States coordinates closely with Nigerien officials on regional security issues, including to address the inherent risk of instability in the Sahel region posed by disinformation and armed groups operating along Niger's borders. The United States will continue to monitor emerging disinformation narratives on an ongoing basis and support civil society and independent media voices advocating on behalf of democratic principles and processes.

The Government has asked for assistance with disinformation. The Senior Bureau Official for Public Affairs highlighted our commitment to counter disinformation when she visited Niger in late 2022. The Embassy's Public Diplomacy Section secured an expert in media to train journalists, government officials, and civil society on how to properly run press operations, how to manage the media ecosystem, and understanding why it is important. USAID also has conducted eight programs to date and is training journalists on public accountability; promoting civic action to monitor and counter hate speech and violence; and to study, correct, and mitigate disinformation.

Question. Will you and your embassy teams actively engage with Niger on the right of labor groups to organize, including for independent trade unions?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed, I will ensure the Embassy team will actively engage with labor groups to understand any limitations on the right to organize. I also will engage relevant government officials on issues as they arise.

Question. Will you commit to using your position, if confirmed, to defend the human rights and dignity of all people in Niger, no matter their sexual orientation or gender identity?

Answer. Yes. If confirmed, I will advocate for and defend the human rights and dignity of all people in Niger, no matter their sexual orientation or gender identity. I will work with the national human rights organization to mainstream the rights of LGBTQI individuals. It is important to strengthen the capacity of domestic institutions to defend the human rights of all Nigeriens.

Question. What challenges do the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) people face in Niger?

Answer. As noted in the 2021 Human Rights Report, there is a strong societal stigma against same-sex sexual conduct, but there are no laws criminalizing adult consensual same-sex sexual conduct. Gay men and lesbians experienced societal discrimination and social resentment. LGBTQI+ associations reportedly conducted their activities secretly, in part because they were not officially registered. There were no reports of violence against individuals based on their sexual orientation or gender identity. There were no documented cases of discrimination in employment, occupation, housing, statelessness, or access to education or health care based on sexual orientation. Observers, however, believed stigma or intimidation impeded individuals from reporting such abuse.

Question. What specifically will you commit to do to help LGBTQ people in Niger?

Answer. If confirmed, I will support LGBTQI+ persons in Niger through outreach and inclusion in mission activities, and by speaking out on the importance of protecting the human rights of members of the LGBTQI+ community. I will facilitate linkages between LGBTQI+ groups with other civil society groups and with government entities, to include the national human rights commission to mainstream their issues for protection like those of members of other groups. I will seek opportunities to demonstrate our support for LGBTQI+ issues publicly. In our activities, I will be guided by what the LGBTQI+ organizations themselves request and the principle of "do no harm".

Question. Will you commit, if confirmed, to ensuring that you fully brief Members of Congress and/or their staff each time you are in Washington for visits or consultations during your tenure as Ambassador to Niger?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed, I will keep Members of Congress and/or their staff apprised, as appropriate, in coordination with the Bureau of Legislative Affairs.

Question. How do you anticipate fostering diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility at Embassy Niamey?

Answer. If confirmed, I will communicate my commitment to a workplace where diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility are core to our mission's work. The Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM) and I will participate in Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) activities to underscore the value we place on professional growth, promoting diversity, equity, inclusion, accessibility, and a workplace free from harassment and bullying. I will establish a monthly professional day during which all mission employees will participate in skills development, security awareness, mentoring sessions, and DEIA activities. The DCM and I will also ensure that our DEIA Council has the support it needs and that we promote forums for open discussions of difficult issues, such as the ongoing NEC Talk series. Finally, I take my responsibility for creating an environment free of harassment and bullying seriously and will address conduct and discipline problems appropriately as they arise. Taken together, these actions are aimed at empowering both our U.S. and Locally Employed Staff to make good decisions and promote an inclusive, positive work environment. This, in turn, strengthens our ability to carry out our foreign policy agenda.

Question. What specifically will you do to prioritize and promote diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility, while also combating racism, discrimination, and inequality among locally employed staff in Niger?

Answer. Locally employed staff will be part of our ongoing Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility activities. Cross-cultural sharing between American and Nigerien staff will be a central tenant of our workplace environment. If confirmed, I will meet regularly with the Locally Employed (LE) Staff Association and do frequent walk-arounds to better understand how our LE Staff work with each other. It also will be important to teach our U.S. Direct Hire staff to look beneath the surface when situations arise to better understand if there is any systemic or situational discrimination underlying behavior. I will ensure that our employees receive the training they need to spot discrimination or harassment and report immediately.

Question. In addition to focusing on diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility in our workforce, will you commit to engaging more equitably in operations and programming, particularly with potential partners and communities that traditionally have been marginalized, excluded, or underrepresented in ours and others' donor and partnership efforts?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to continuing to ensure equity in our programs. I will use the Integrated Country Strategy process and annual reviews of USAID Operational Plans to monitor our efforts to include marginalized and underrepresented communities in our programs and operations. Our economic development programs are targeted at reducing multi-dimensional poverty, which means focusing on women and children, as the most marginalized groups. Our education and health programs are designed to be inclusive to enhance access in different regions and to ensure handicapped individuals can get health care and participate in the political system. Education programs are aimed at removing cultural and security barriers to female participation. I will ensure that our representational events and public diplomacy programs include marginalized and underrepresented groups. Our security assistance has increased the participation of women in security organizations, especially the military where female recruits have increased by 300 percent and boasts the first female pilot and first cadet at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. Operationally, our human resources team will use diverse panels in hiring processes to ensure applicants are not being disadvantaged.

Question. How do you anticipate utilizing local expertise, knowledge, and capacity to meet our foreign policy goals?

Answer. If confirmed, I will integrate our Locally Employed Staff into our strategic planning and ensure they fully understand our foreign policy goals. I will work with our Locally Employed Staff to expand our outreach efforts to build into our contact networks experts from every region and multiple groups. We will leverage the various languages spoken within our mission to assist our U.S. officers in making connections beyond the capital. I will encourage out-of-capital travel, security

permitting, or alternatively using the technology at our American corners and spaces to do virtual outreach.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO KATHLEEN A. FITZGIBBON BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

Question. Given the deterioration of the situation in Mali, and the emergence of Niger as the U.S.' preferred partner in the Sahel, what will your priorities be as U.S. Ambassador, if confirmed, in supporting Niger within the context of the threat from violent extremist groups in the Sahel?

Answer. If confirmed, I will ensure that our interagency effort takes a multi-pronged approach by increasing our investments in development, democracy, and diplomacy to mirror our long-standing commitment to counter terrorism. Coordination is critical to sequence and recalibrate our efforts as needed to manage our governance and security priorities simultaneously. I will monitor our security cooperation efforts at partner capacity-building to ensure that there is an emphasis on professionalization and respect for human rights. I will support our growing development programs, which are aimed at the underlying causes of multi-dimensional poverty facing most Nigeriens. This includes our USAID programs in health, education, agriculture, and livelihoods. I will work to ensure that our USAID efforts are compatible with and leveraging our Millennium Challenge Corporation's compacts. The Niger Compact (\$442.6 million) is increasing arable land and agriculture output, livestock health, and road infrastructure, and the recently signed concurrent regional transport Compacts with Niger and Benin (\$302 million for Niger and \$202 million for Benin) will rehabilitate and strengthen the transport corridor between Niamey, Niger and the port of Cotonou in Benin.

Question. Niger has made positive democratic gains in recent years, but democratic institutions remain weak and under threat (as evidenced by coups in neighboring Mali and Burkina Faso). As U.S. Ambassador to Niger, how will you balance U.S. counter-terrorism interests with the need to support the development of strong and resilient democratic institutions in Niger?

Answer. Our counter-terrorism interests and efforts to strengthen democratic institutions are inextricably linked. Niger needs the capacity to fight terrorist organizations in order to create the security conditions necessary to promote economic development and consolidate democratic gains. As we seek to strengthen governance as a key to resolving security issues, if confirmed, I will lead our interagency team to keep Washington headquarters elements informed about key resource needs. I will bolster our support for democratic consolidation by using diplomatic engagement, our available USAID funds, and our public diplomacy resources to strengthen and amplify civil society voices and empower women and youth participation in national dialogue and political processes. If confirmed, I will use my position to boost the inclusion of these voices in decision-making and work with political elites to make trade-offs that will have to be made now to achieve long-term gains for the country's stability.

Question. How do these goals reinforce each other and how are they in conflict?

Answer. Increased security creates the conditions necessary to promote economic development and consolidate democratic gains. More economic opportunity and a more responsive government addresses many of the motivators that drive people to join violent extremist groups. I will seek to find the right balance within our assistance portfolio to create a more stable Niger. The key to achieving balance is to ensure that we are including all segments of Nigerien society, addressing issues most important to Nigeriens, and creating self-sustaining efforts that Nigeriens can carry forward once our programs end. If pursuing a security-only focused agenda, there is the danger of neglecting democracy and human rights. If confirmed, I will ensure our security programs have a strong human rights component and we advocate publicly on human rights issues.

Question. Looking at how Nigeria's ongoing electoral process is playing out, what could the United States have done differently ahead of and during the electoral process, including but not limited to foreign assistance?

Answer. Prior to my departure from Nigeria in July 2022, the U.S. mission played an important role in supporting and pressing for the passage of the Electoral Act that included provisions for the electronic transmission of votes. The mission also pushed for additional elections support. The Department's facilitation of Washington

visits for leading presidential candidates enabled the United States to communicate U.S. expectations surrounding the elections. The mission encouraged youth leaders to be more involved and they registered in high numbers. At the time, the viability of a third-party candidate had not yet gained traction. The mission had concerns about how the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System would work but at the time of my departure, did not foresee significant issues with the separate system for uploading of results. The slow upload is a source of criticism that is contributing to the undermining of public confidence in the election results.

Question. What lessons will you take with you to Niger from your experience as Deputy Chief of Mission in Nigeria?

Answer. From Nigeria, a critical lesson learned is the importance of working with Congress on key issues, such as arms sales. The mission's engagement with Congressional staff on the proposed helicopter sale was useful to support our requests for a human rights advisor and political section position to follow security force accountability. Both of these positions have increased the mission's ability to discuss human rights and accountability issues with the military. There is still a long way to go, but the tone and substance of our interactions improved. It also will be important to maintain contact with Congress to better understand concerns in order to tackle them. If confirmed, I will build on this experience by prioritizing respect for human rights and accountability with the Nigerien Government in order to maintain our ability to support the security partnership. Another important takeaway from Nigeria is the importance of countering disinformation and communicating publicly about our values even as we are engaged in behind-the-scenes dialogue.

Question. As Chief of Mission in Niger, how will you support the recently reopened USAID mission in Niger to contribute to the achievement of U.S. foreign policy objectives in Niger?

Answer. If confirmed, I will be a strong advocate for USAID programming, personnel, and resources because the country's needs are so great. Our binding constraint is Niger's absorptive capacity and the limited capability locally to implement programs. To be effective, it is important to have a consistent, predictable budget over time and higher staffing levels within the mission to advance our foreign assistance objectives and coordinate with other donors. Currently, USAID is lacking 60 percent of the staff necessary to implement foreign assistance programming. If confirmed, I will create a positive interagency work environment, advocate for additional incentives, and highlight the critical nature of our mission to attract additional bidders. I will support additional appropriate resource requests and work closely with the USAID Mission Director on a strategy to fill positions.

Question. In your hearing, you committed to supporting Niger in strengthening its democracy. What specific types of democracy assistance do you think are needed in Niger?

Answer. Traditional democracy assistance, such as providing technical support to the electoral commission, voter education, and assistance to civil society, including political party development, is needed now to enhance political participation ahead of the elections in 2025. If confirmed, I will step up our diplomatic engagement across the political spectrum, make our expectations clear with the Government about the importance of a level playing field, and create opportunities for civil society and youth to channel demands into political action. I will engage political players to stress the importance of making the necessary trade-offs for long-term stability over short-term political considerations. I will ensure that our development assistance remains focused on long-term investments to bolster democracy, such as education sector reform, improving girls' education, and investing in infrastructure.

Question. In the State Department's 2022 Trafficking in Persons Report Niger remained on Tier 2 for not fully meeting the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking but making significant efforts to do so.

Answer. In 2019, Niger's increased efforts to combat Trafficking in Persons (TIP) resulted in an upgrade from Tier 2 Watch List to Tier 2. Since 2019, Niger has successfully maintained a Tier 2 ranking, which requires Niger to demonstrate overall increasing efforts year-on-year to bring themselves into compliance with the relevant standards. Over the past year, the Government of Niger has proposed new legislation to criminalize hereditary slavery and established an inter-ministerial committee to combat forced begging. These efforts are in addition to its increasing law enforcement efforts to investigate, prosecute, and convict traffickers and to identify and protect survivors of the crime.

Question. If confirmed, what concrete steps could you take to help Niger operationalize the prioritized recommendations contained in the TIP report?

Answer. In confirmed, I will draw on my past experience working with several African Governments to pass or strengthen anti-trafficking legislation, increase prosecutions, and provide stronger protection for victims. I will use my position to raise public awareness on trafficking in persons and work with neighboring U.S. missions and other diplomatic missions in Niamey on cross-border trafficking, particularly as it relates to migrants. I will host government officials and civil society groups on a regular basis to measure anti-trafficking progress.

Question. What is your assessment of religious freedom in Niger and if confirmed, how will you work with the Ambassador At Large for International Religious Freedom to bolster religious freedom in-country?

Answer. The constitution prohibits religious discrimination and provides for freedom of religion and worship consistent with public order, social peace, and national unity. There is no restriction on private, peaceful proselytization or conversion of an individual's personal religious beliefs from one religious faith to another. The Government prohibits open-air, public proselytization events for all religious groups, purportedly due to safety concerns. If confirmed, I will continue the Embassy's longstanding advocacy for religious tolerance and freedom, and engagement with members of all faiths in Niger. I will welcome engagement from the Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom, who met with Nigerien officials in December 2022, so our approach in Niger to promoting religious freedom is informed by the most recent guidance and best practices.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to personally engaging with civil society on promoting religious freedom?

Answer. If confirmed, I will personally engage with civil society on promoting religious freedom. Promotion of religious freedom is vital to peaceful and tolerant society and is a defense against the spread of extremism that has been so devastating to the people of Niger.

Question. If confirmed, what concrete steps can you take to help Niger increase their societal and governmental respect for religious freedom?

Answer. If confirmed, I will use my position to host religious leaders for round-table discussion and I will meet with religious leaders during in-country trips to emphasize the important role they can play to prevent and mitigate conflict. I will leverage our Public Diplomacy programming and exchanges to find opportunities to expose young leaders to religious freedom issues. I also seek opportunities for U.S.-based Muslim scholars to visit Niger and interact with various audiences in and out of the capital.

Question. The State Department's 2021 Human Rights Report describes significant human rights issues in Niger including unlawful or arbitrary killings by the Government, serious restrictions on free expression and media. How will you direct your Embassy to work with civil society organizations to improve the human rights situation on the ground? How will you approach addressing these serious human rights issues with the Nigerien Government?

Answer. Working with civil society organizations is critical to our understanding of the human rights situation in Niger as they are on the frontline of addressing challenges facing their communities. If confirmed, I will encourage my team to continue to work closely with civil society so that the United States has an accurate picture of human rights concerns so that we can address them with the Government and design programming to improve the human rights situation in the country. I understand the Embassy discusses human rights issues with the Government at the highest level and I will continue to do this, if confirmed. Government officials are responsive to requests for information, and cabinet members and their staff readily meet with us to discuss various issues. Promotion of respect for human rights is an important cross-cutting priority for all mission activities. U.S. military assistance includes training the Nigerien Ministry of National Defense legal advisors on our own Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) systems; this kind of training is a critical step in improving prosecutions of such cases. Lastly, the Embassy has advocated for the training of all Nigerien soldiers on respect for human rights.

Question. According to the Conduct in U.N. Field Missions online portal, there are 11 open allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse by the country's peacekeepers deployed to U.N. peacekeeping missions, in cases from 2022, 2018, 2016, and 2015. The Nigerien Government has not explained what actions if any have been taken to address these allegations, including substantiated allegations where the perpetra-

tors have been repatriated to Niger. How will you engage with the Niger Government to ensure that perpetrators of sexual exploitation and abuse from U.N. peacekeeping missions are held accountable?

Answer. The United States will continue urging our Nigerien interlocutors to meet peacekeeper conduct, discipline, and accountability standards, including those spelled out in U.N. Security Council Resolution 2272 (2016), championed by the United States. We will continue support to the U.N. to rigorously apply its ClearCheck vetting system, which prevents individuals subject to sexual exploitation and abuse allegations from later redeploying to peacekeeping operations. The Government has kept the mission informed about investigations into two incidents, one in 2017 and another in 2021, one of which is now with the Attorney General. If confirmed, I will advocate that the findings of these investigations be made public.

Question. How do you intend to work with senior leadership at the State Department to address acute staffing challenges at Mission Niamey?

Answer. If confirmed, I will work with the Bureau of African Affairs and Global Talent Management to identify existing gaps and future needs to ensure that Mission Niamey has the right mix of positions to achieve our goals, through the annual Mission Resource Request, and also on an ongoing basis. We will focus ahead of bidding season and proactively recruit officers. The Bureau of African Affairs and Global Talent Management are exploring increased incentive packages for Niger. Already, an additional Rest and Recuperation has been added and several civil service officers have been assigned to fill vacant foreign service positions. Niamey's vacancy rate stood at 40 percent in December 2022 and is now 26 percent with the arrival of new officers. I will keep Washington apprised of staffing needs and take advantage of different programs, such as hard-to-fill opportunities, Pickering and Rangel Fellows, and Eligible Family Member positions. Finally, I will negotiate deadlines with Washington, and the DCM and section chiefs will be empowered to triage workloads when needed to protect our employees from burnout.

Question. Many U.S. missions have been under enormous stress over the last several years, in large part due to COVID. What is your understanding of morale throughout Mission Niamey?

Answer. My understanding is that morale is good at Mission Niamey despite the challenging environment and the lingering impact of stress from COVID-19. Personnel in Niamey have a strong sense of purpose and mission. They see the results of their work and see the rewards, including through promotions. Nonetheless, the removal of COVID-19 travel restrictions has resulted in a heavy visitor workload for post, setting the scene for potential burnout as employees balance visitor support with required reporting and other taskings.

Question. How do you intend to improve morale at Mission Niamey?

Answer. My six tours in Africa taught me the importance of being attentive to each employee's professional development and ensuring that they know how their work fits into the Embassy's mission and achievement of Department goals. It also is important to take care of the needs of Eligible Family Members through employment and activities that bring the community together. Creating and maintaining an environment free of harassment and bullying is a hallmark of my leadership style and essential for employees to flourish. If confirmed, I will advocate for additional incentives for officers serving in Niamey to attract more bidders to fill vacancies and reinforce our stretched-thin workforce. Leadership at hardship posts also showed me the importance of frequent and clear communication with our employees and being inclusive in our decision-making. I will model the importance of work-life balance and ensure our managers know how to set priorities and negotiate deadlines to avoid employee burnout and promote resilience.

Question. How do you intend to create a unified mission and vision at Mission Niamey?

Answer. If confirmed, I will be leading a U.S. Government team comprised of seven agencies at post. This means ensuring all agencies understand the mission and activities of others and discussing the tradeoffs that often need to be made on foreign policy goals or Embassy operations together. I have found that a structured approach should include weekly Country Team meetings and the dissemination of minutes throughout the mission, weekly meetings with agency leaders that include the DCM to discuss programs and events, mission-wide participation in the Integrated Country Strategy and Mission Resource Request planning requests. Internal clearances on cables and memos will include relevant sections and agencies at post to ensure all perspectives and equities are included. Mission-wide off-sites and pro-

professional development days will be used to review our progress and develop our workforce skillsets and build a sense of community and mission. Finally, if confirmed, under my leadership, Mission Niamey will review our goals and achievements as we update our Integrated Country Strategy. This is an effective tool to keep all agency activity in-line with our mission goals.

Question. How do you intend to improve morale at Mission Niamey?

Answer. My six tours in Africa taught me the importance of being attentive to each employee's professional development and ensuring that they know how their work fits into the Embassy's mission and achievement of Department goals. It also is important to take care of the needs of Eligible Family Members through employment and activities that bring the community together. Creating and maintaining an environment free of harassment and bullying is a hallmark of my leadership style and essential for employees to flourish. If confirmed, I will advocate for additional incentives for officers serving in Niamey to attract more bidders to fill vacancies and reinforce our stretched-thin workforce. Leadership at hardship posts also showed me the importance for frequent and clear communication with our employees and being inclusive in our decision-making. I will model the importance of work-life balance and ensure our managers know how to set priorities and negotiate deadlines to avoid employee burn out and promote resilience.

Question. Management is a key responsibility for chiefs of Mission. How would you describe your management style?

Answer. My management style is open and empowering. A lifelong athlete, I benefited from excellent coaching and know-how to strike the balance between correcting behavior and keeping employees motivated. This means jointly identifying employee weaknesses and agreeing on how to bolster the skills necessary to strengthen them. I strive to maintain a workplace atmosphere where mistakes are turned into learning opportunities. I will coach our employees through decision-making processes to develop their leadership skills and provide regular mentoring and support. I am decisive, but inclusive of a wide range of views and will communicate the "why" of a decision to make sure those who were involved and those not involved understand what the Executive Office will be doing and the rationale for it. If confirmed, the Deputy Chief of Mission and I will be attentive to workplace issues and create a harassment and bullying free environment.

Question. Do you believe it is ever acceptable or constructive to berate subordinates, either in public or in private?

Answer. It is never acceptable or constructive to berate subordinates. Performance and conduct management needs to be a regular and ongoing process. Mistakes are learning opportunities and correcting them can be an inclusive, constructive process that is done in private.

Question. How do you envision your relationship with the Deputy Chief of Mission?

Answer. I have worked previously with the current Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM) in Niger. As a three-time DCM and long-term Charge d'Affaires myself, I understand what it takes to establish and nurture a strong, collaborative relationship between the Ambassador and DCM. If confirmed, I will listen and learn from the experience of the current DCM who has served as CDA for the last 15 months and respect the relationships she has established with Nigerien officials and within the mission. I view the DCM role as a force multiplier and as someone who must be ready to step in during my absence so she will be involved in key internal and external meetings. I will expect her to deliver her honest, frank opinion so that together we can make the best decisions possible. I will create an environment in which she can feel free to disagree with me when we consider options or suggest course corrections, but that we present a united front to the mission once a decision is made. Leadership at the top must be proactive, consistent, and fair. If confirmed, I am confident the DCM and I will be able to create a positive work experience for our team in Niamey.

Question. If confirmed, what leadership responsibilities do you intend to entrust to your Deputy Chief of Mission?

Answer. The Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM) is arguably the most difficult position at post. If confirmed, I will leverage my experience as a three-time DCM to establish a strong and symbiotic relationship to oversee mission operations and conduct our foreign policy. As I lead the mission, I will need to be able to work through the DCM to ensure that we are protecting U.S. Government resources across agencies, running an efficient Interagency Cooperative Services platform, and supporting

our personnel needs. The DCM will play the role of chief operating officer of the mission, but also be involved in our foreign policy agenda. I will include her in meetings with government officials and in communications with Washington. She will ensure that performance management, budget oversight, and human resources platforms are performing effectively and our operations soundly steward U.S. Government resources. I expect her to develop her managerial skills across all aspects of mission life and will coach her as needed. I also will ensure that the DCM and our other employees share in our representational activities to expand our outreach activities. I will expect the DCM to oversee our leadership, mentoring, and Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility programs.

Question. In order to create and continue employee excellence at the Department, accurate and direct employee evaluation reports (EERs) for Foreign Service Officers are imperative, though often lacking.

Answer. I believe that a strong performance management culture is essential backbone to professional development and to achieving mission goals. I also teach both employees and their supervisors on how best to capture an employee's achievements and use counseling discussions to improve performance. I look closely at how section heads supervise their employees and oversee U.S. Government resources and include these in their own work requirements. I teach employees that what you do is important, but how you do it is critical to achieving success in what one does. Another important component is to ensure that our Locally Employed Staff supervisors are trained formally and mentored on their supervisory responsibilities. This is important because culturally, some Locally Employed Staff are conflict-adverse and need coaching on how to correct behavior or improve performance of those they supervise.

Question. Do you believe that it is important to provide employees with accurate, constructive feedback on their performance in order to encourage improvement and reward those who most succeed in their roles?

Answer. Yes. I believe that establishing open communications between employees and their supervisors is at the core of effective performance management. Throughout my career, I have mentored supervisors on how to provide feedback, write employees performance reviews and counseling documents. If confirmed, I will continue to pay close attention to developing the performance management skills of our supervisors and the employee's understanding of how the system benefits their professional development.

Question. If confirmed, would you support and encourage clear, accurate, and direct feedback to employees in order to improve performance and reward high achievers?

Answer. Yes, providing clear, accurate, and direct feedback has been a hallmark of my leadership and supervisory style. A good coach helps employees develop their skills, work on their weaknesses, and prepare them for their next assignment. I will ensure that post's mentoring programs for entry and mid-level officers are integrated into monthly professional development days. Open communications in no-fault discussions are important to making sure that both the employee and the supervisor agree and that perceptions do not diverge over expectations. I will also seek to reward high performers and ensure that the mission's award program clearly identifies benchmarks that merit recognition so that awards are meaningful. Weekly recognition of mission achievements is a way to reward performance and on-the-spot awards can be used regularly to encourage employees throughout the year. When I see exceptional performance, I also will stop by to see or send an e-mail to an employee so that they know I valued their contribution to an assignment. When I see mistakes, I send an e-mail called "Coaching Corner" to put in writing the implications of the mistake and offer suggestions on better ways to handle future situations.

Question. It is imperative that U.S. diplomats get outside of posts abroad to meet with local actors, including host government officials, non-government organizations, and local citizens.

Answer. It is imperative for diplomats to develop a wide range of contacts that include government, diplomatic community members, civil society, law enforcement, security officials, private sector businesspersons, religious and traditional leaders, regional officials, women, and youth. My analytic background drives my need to tap into diverse sources of information to better evaluate facts in order to make policy recommendations.

Question. In your experience, do U.S. diplomats get outside of our Embassy walls enough to fully accomplish their missions?

Answer. In my career, security concerns have changed the way diplomats travel in-country or get “beyond the wire.” I have directed our employees to get out of the mission to meet and cultivate a wide range of contacts in and outside the capital and major cities. To enable these efforts, I have sought and received the resources necessary to support their in-country travel. In my previous assignment in Nigeria, security concerns were real across the country as they will be in Niger, but we had an obligation to monitor our robust assistance portfolio. I worked with the Regional Security Officer and Diplomatic Security to make sure we had enough armored vehicles and security assets to get our employees on the road while also ensuring their personal security. Our program was tightly controlled, but we were able to have over 360 trips outside the capital to allow our diplomats, health experts, and development officers to travel to all corners of Nigeria without incident. If confirmed, I will seek to do the same in Niger.

Question. How do you intend to improve the ability of U.S. diplomats to better access all local populations?

Answer. If confirmed, I will encourage and support in-country travel with adequate security resources and also mentor employees on thinking-outside-the-box on how to reach local populations. As a soccer player, I myself meet and interact with local population through sports and if confirmed, I will support an active sports diplomacy agenda. On a regular basis, I will ensure that our employees are maintaining contacts with regional leaders at all levels and meeting with them in their areas and when they come to the capital. It also means ensuring that employees are using representational events and funds to cultivate contacts and promote mission goals. Our Embassy in Niger already has a goal that guest lists for events include 50 percent female invitees. I will tap into the expertise of our Locally Employed Staff and our implementing partners to find ways to connect our officers with the grass-roots levels of society. I will continue public diplomacy programs that target women and youth and to leverage the extensive alumni network, which includes participants across all U.S. Government agencies to reach their home areas. In addition, I will seek ways to expand our recruitment efforts for various programs and training, such as the Ambassador’s Self-Help Fund, International Military Education and Training, African Women’s Entrepreneurial Program, Mandela Washington Fellows, beyond traditional contact networks. I will support cross-cultural learning from our Locally Employed Staff and U.S. employees as well as learning of local languages. I will encourage our mission employees to participate in our English language programs to meet and support Nigerien youth.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO KATHLEEN A. FITZGIBBON BY SENATOR MARCO RUBIO

Question. In May, Secretary Blinken said that the People’s Republic of China is the “only country with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do it.” The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) clearly holds all the reins of power in the People’s Republic of China and has used this power to commit genocide in Xinjiang, flood our communities with fentanyl, and emit by far the largest quantity of greenhouse gases. As we speak, the Party is cracking down on unprecedented student protests across the country. With their absolute control of Chinese society and industry, the CCP could stop all of these destructive actions tomorrow if they so choose. Is the Chinese Communist Party a threat to the United States?

Answer. Yes, the activities of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and Chinese Communist Party (CCP) represent a significant challenge to U.S. economic, political, and security interests globally and in the Africa region. Under President Xi, the PRC has become more repressive at home and more assertive abroad. We will defend and strengthen U.S. national security, prosperity, and values; defend international law and agreements and the other principles and institutions that maintain peace and security; and protect the rights of individuals and sovereign nations. As Deputy Chief of Mission in Nigeria, I had numerous discussions with government officials, including legislators, on the PRC’s use of its influence in the U.N. and abroad in ways that undermine the rule of law, democratic principles, and the broader rules-based international order. Our engagement on these issues resonated with the Government. As Secretary Blinken said, we will invest, align, and compete with the PRC to defend our interests and build our vision for the future. If con-

firmed, I will invest in our partnership with Niger; highlight the risks associated with PRC engagement that could impact Niger's security, democratic principles, sovereignty, and U.S. interests; and ensure that our vision of regional security and prosperity provides the basis of a positive U.S.-Niger partnership that competes successfully with the PRC.

Question. Does the Chinese Communist Party undertake any activities that are beneficial to U.S. interests?

Answer. We are committed to working with Beijing only if it secures American jobs, American values, and our way of life for future generations. Issues like food security, global health, climate change, the global drug trade, and COVID-19 are the very issues that directly threaten our prosperity and security and that of Niger. PRC contributions should be scrutinized, however, to ensure they are not a springboard for narrow PRC economic interests.

If confirmed, I will also work with the Department of State's new Office of China Coordination, to advance U.S. objectives and counter harmful behavior by the PRC and other actors in the Nigerien context. This new office, inaugurated immediately following the U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit, brings together a group of China experts from throughout the Department and beyond to work more effectively with colleagues from every regional bureau and experts in international security, economics, technology, multilateral diplomacy, and strategic communications. In addition, I will direct the members of post's PRC working group to work closely with the Regional China Officer based in Abidjan.

Question. Do you believe that there are any areas within which the Chinese Communist Party would constructively work with the United States in good faith?

Answer. The United States will engage constructively with the PRC when it is in our interest to do so in Niger. For example, issues like food security, global health, climate change, the global drug trade, and COVID-19 are the very issues that directly threaten our prosperity and security, and that of Niger, which is one of the countries most affected by climate change and is a major crossroads for smuggling routes between the continent and Europe. If confirmed, on climate change issues, I will be a staunch advocate for U.S. companies over PRC firms as the Government seeks renewable energy solutions to ameliorate the impact of climate change in Niger.

Question. If confirmed, will you approve any joint activity with organizations or representatives from the People's Republic of China in the countries, or organizations in which you will work?

Answer. If confirmed, I will consult Department guidance on engagements with PRC organizations or representatives to work together when it is in U.S. interests to do so.

Question. The State Department has framed U.S.-Niger relations as "close and friendly." Externally, Niger is surrounded by instability, conflict and crises on its borders and is among the world poorest and least developed countries in the world. Over the past decade, as regional stability has eroded, the U.S. and Niger have increased cooperation militarily, with health aid, food security programs, and agricultural development. Niger hosts approximately 1,000 U.S. military personnel and USAID bilateral aid totaled more than \$78 million in FY2021. Niger faces external and internal terrorist and insurgent threats, ranging from Al Qaeda, Boko Haram, and IS-offshoots. As such, Niger is a top recipient on the African continent for U.S. Department of Defense (DoD)-administered Counterterrorism assistance. Given the fragile state of Niger's economy and democracy, how vulnerable is Niger to terrorist groups flourishing in their country?

Answer. President Bazoum acknowledges Niger's vulnerability to violent extremist organizations and is pursuing a multi-pronged strategy to strengthen the country's security architecture and to tackle complex issues such as education, agriculture, livelihoods, and the climate crisis. He has stated that the solution to insecurity is good governance. U.S. Government assistance is aimed at bolstering the Government's ability to deliver services in these critical areas to consolidate public support for democracy and reverse negative demographic trends. Over 70 percent of Nigeriens are youth and 70 percent of Niger's children are out of school. Most girls only get 1.4 years of education and 76 percent of them are married by 18 and have on average seven children. President Bazoum views reversing these demographics as the key to depriving violent extremist organizations of recruits and to consolidating the country's democratic gains. Our non-military bilateral investments target these demographics and are aimed at improving livelihoods. In addition to FY2021 funding, we plan to allocate over \$90 million in FY2022 bilateral development as-

sistance for Niger, subject to availability of funds and congressional notification, and the Millennium Challenge Corporation has two compacts with Niger totaling \$700 million to increase agricultural outputs, increase arable land through irrigation, and strength rural road networks as well as the road to the Port of Cotonou, Benin. Our investments support Bazoum's economic priorities and he is being inclusive and attempting to balance resources across the country's region.

Niger is punching above its weight regionally and internationally as it seeks to leverage partnerships to further bolster its defenses. This includes a troop commitment to MINUSMA, G-5 Sahel, and the Multinational Joint Task Force in the Lake Chad Basin as it coordinates counter-terrorist activities with other countries in the region. It is a reliable counter-terrorism partner for the United States and active member of the D-ISIS Coalition, just recently hosting a meeting in Niamey. President Bazoum understands that defeating terrorism requires a multi-pronged approach, which includes non-military interventions in education, health, food security, and livelihoods. He views partnerships with the U.S. and other likeminded countries as critical to succeeding against violent extremists.

Question. If confirmed, how will you leverage your position to ensure Islamist insurgents do not make progress in Niger, like we have seen them make in Mali and Burkina Faso?

Answer. If confirmed, I will continue fostering our strong bilateral ties through our defense, development, democracy, and diplomatic engagements to build Niger's capacity to defend its borders and deliver services to its population to counter violent extremist groups. Our new strategy for the Sahel emphasizes governance solutions to security problems. I will leverage our assistance to support improved public service delivery to boost public confidence in democracy.

I also will reach out across Niger's elite political class to foster a consensus on achieving the country's national goals. This means promoting dialogue among the political class on the trade-offs that must be made in the short term to achieve stability over the long-term for all Nigeriens. My long experience in Africa will help me identify the interests of key political players and find common ground across politicians, civil society, and security officials. With likeminded donors, I will amplify our expectations of democratic consolidation, respect for human rights, and political inclusion. I will travel throughout Niger—security permitting—to meet with Nigeriens and promote our people-to-people relationships. I will work closely with AFRICOM and Special Operations Command Africa to support our continued security cooperation assistance, which includes training and equipping the Nigerien armed forces and sharing information.

Question. Unfortunately, we have seen China take advantage of poor and developing countries in Africa by exploiting cheap labor and offering debt trap loans for projects or mines. Does the CCP play any role in Niger's economy, including the mining and energy sectors?

Answer. The PRC is less active in Niger relative to other African countries and has a diplomatic, but not a military presence in Niger. It is focused on oil production and infrastructure, including an oil pipeline and a hydroelectric dam. It is now adding vaccine cooperation and some economic recovery projects. The PRC has also dropped in public opinion despite its vigorous public relations campaign. Niger is skeptical of PRC investment because it uses PRC labor and delays infrastructure projects. If confirmed, I will continue the United States' robust relationship across the board with Niger, making us its partner of choice. Our development, defense, humanitarian, and democracy programs are aimed at removing constraints on economic growth, improve livelihoods and lives, enhance governance, and enhance security. We have answered the Government's request on how to counter disinformation with USAID and Public Diplomacy programs to train journalists, strengthen the foundations of journalistic integrity, and how to identify disinformation. As a result, the United States is viewed as being a supportive player in achieving Niger's overall development goals in contrast to the PRC.

Question. What steps will you take to identify projects, with Niger officials and the Development Finance Corporation, regarding opportunities for U.S. companies to compete with CCP funded projects?

Answer. If confirmed, I will ensure that post has an active interagency "Deal Team" and a China Working Group, designed to seek opportunities for U.S. businesses and to monitor PRC activities. I will establish contacts across the U.S. business community in Niger, the Corporate Council on Africa and BCIU, and lead Direct Line calls with U.S. companies on opportunities in various sectors. U.S. companies are interested in investments in the renewable energy sectors and the Government is supporting them. I will ensure that our economic officers leverage our sub-

stantial economic toolkit, which includes Power Africa and the Development Finance Corporation. I will meet with U.S. companies during visits to Niger and during consultations in Washington. Our USAID and MCC programs are deepening our contact networks and understanding of private sector investment opportunities, which can be leveraged to help U.S. companies interested in energy, agriculture, and the digital economy. Finally, I will use our diplomatic engagement to show government officials and the public that the United States is a better partner than the PRC in terms of sustainable investments aimed at bettering the lives of Nigeriens.

Question. Mali, Burkina Faso and the Central African Republic have invited the Wagner Group, a Russian private military company responsible for gross violations of human rights abuses around the world, to assist in their counter-terrorism efforts and have subsequently ended the presence of French and Western troops. In your assessment, has the participation of the Wagner Group in counter-terrorism operations led to operational gains against Boko Haram and the Islamic State?

Answer. We do not assess that the Wagner Group operations have led to operational gains. The Armed Conflict Location and Event Dataset indicates that violent extremist organization attacks are rising. The reported human rights abuses committed by Wagner and its partner armed forces will likely only serve to swell the ranks of violent extremist organizations. Niger is highly critical of the presence of the Wagner Group in neighboring Mali and Burkina Faso, particularly its reported human rights abuses and contracts for minerals and resources. President Bazoum is staunchly opposed to Wagner's activities and reported human rights abuses in both countries. Niger maintains troops in MINUSMA in Mali and have deployed troops on its borders with both Mali and Burkina Faso to defend against terrorist incursions. Russia does not have an embassy in Niger and the ambassador travels to Niamey from Bamako, Mali. Niger does have Russian helicopters and is looking to buy U.S. helicopters to bolster its mobility against terrorist groups. Niger also asked for our assistance in countering disinformation. Our public diplomacy and USAID programs have provided experts and training to Nigerien journalists on the importance of information integrity, how to identify disinformation, and how to counter it. The Department's Senior Bureau Official for Public Affairs traveled to Niger late last year to discuss disinformation with Niger.

Question. If confirmed, what will you do to ensure that Niger also does not invite the Wagner Group into their country?

Answer. If confirmed, I will keep President Bazoum abreast of Wagner's activities in the region and share information as appropriate. He views Wagner as a destabilizing force in the region and is firmly against its expansion into Niger. I will use interagency working groups within the mission to gather information and formulate responses. This will include our public diplomacy officers who are monitoring the press for disinformation promulgated by Wagner. I have found that thematic working groups are an effective tool in countering malign influence. Fortunately, we already have an ally in the Government of Niger, which understands the danger Wagner presents to the country's stability and long-term prosperity.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO KATHLEEN A. FITZGIBBON BY SENATOR BILL HAGERTY

As you know, on February 18, 2023, an Israeli diplomat who was an accredited observer with an entry tag was expelled from the opening ceremony of the African Union summit. In the following days, the African Union Commission Chief stated that Israel's observer status that the bloc has been suspended. These actions are part of a larger effort to delegitimize Israel by states driven by hatred. Just as biased targeting of Israel at the United Nations is a grave concern, anti-Israel actions and rhetoric in other international forums also cannot be ignored. Indeed, what happened to Israel at the AU Summit is reprehensible and unacceptable.

Question. If confirmed, what would you do to address this problem?

Answer. AU Commission Chairperson Moussa Faki Mahamat accepted the Israeli Ambassador's credentials in 2021. However, this decision was challenged by some AU member states, as permitted by the AU Constitutive Act. The AU established a Heads of State Committee, comprised of six member states, to consult on the accreditation issue with plans to report back at the 2023 AU Summit. Faki's acceptance of Israel and its observer status have been held pending his receipt of the Committee's recommendation. According to the AU, AU Chairperson Faki's staff had

convened the Israeli delegation in advance of the AU Summit to ask that the delegation not attend the event, as the Committee had not yet made a final decision. I understand that with that information, Sharon Bar-li, Israeli Deputy Director General of the Africa Division of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs still decided to attend the opening ceremony on February 18 and was subsequently escorted out by AU security.

If confirmed, I would continue to advocate that Israel's role in the African Union be quickly clarified and confirmed as an observer. As Deputy Chief of Mission in Nigeria, I worked with Israel's Embassy in Abuja to convey to Nigerian Government officials the value Israeli observer status would bring to the AU. I would advocate with Nigerian officials that multilateral institutions are strongest when differing voices and perspectives are engaged to enact change that impacts global populations. Israel's impact on Africa is significant, from its contributions to technology and resources to bolstering food security efforts via substantive trade—it is an important partner to the continent and can share vital perspectives for the AU's work.

Question. What would you do to engage with foreign governments and ensure that Israel is not unfairly targeted, but rather included in future African Union summits and other regional and international forums?

Answer. If confirmed, I plan to work closely with the U.S. Mission to the African Union to continue advancing Israel's relationship with the AU. By harnessing the strong relationships that we have with member states across Africa, we can and should elevate Israel as an important partner to the African Union. I will be able to leverage my experience in the African Union-led negotiations on Darfur, where external partners were able to play a positive role at crucial points in the discussions and in committing to support AU peace agreements.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to doing everything within your power to further regional security and prosperity by encouraging Niger to re-normalize its relations with Israel?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to advocating for and facilitating Israel's efforts to normalize its relationship with Niger. Such efforts could include emphasizing Israel's expertise in agriculture, technology, and security, which could benefit Niger achieve its development and defense goals. I have strong working relationships with Israeli diplomats in the region that have furthered our shared interests with host governments and will leverage those. Niger is punching above its weight in regional and international fora because it has a broad perspective on the importance of international cooperation.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO ERIC W. KNEEDLER BY SENATOR ROBERT MENENDEZ

According to the U.N. Group of Experts (GoE) for the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), there is overwhelming proof that Rwanda is once again supporting U.N.-sanctioned M23 rebels in eastern DRC. The Rwandan-backed M23 is now responsible for killing more than 100 Congolese civilians and displacing hundreds of thousands more, downing a U.N. helicopter and murdering several U.N. peacekeepers, numerous acts of sexual violence, and the recruitment of child soldiers.

Question. Do you agree with the U.N. Group of Experts findings that Rwanda is supporting M23 and that Rwandan troops are fighting alongside M23 in eastern DRC?

Answer. Yes, the Department of State finds the evidence presented in the report to be credible.

Question. Does documented Rwandan support for M23 mean that Rwanda is in violation of the Child Soldiers Prevention Act and section 7042(a) of FY2023 Consolidated Appropriations Act P.L. 117–328) regarding destabilizing activities in a neighboring country, including aiding and abetting armed groups?

Answer. I understand the State Department is currently going through the process of developing 2023 Child Soldiers Prevention Act (CSPA) list recommendations for the Secretary's review. The CSPA will be published in the annual Trafficking in Persons Report, which is due to Congress no later than June 30 each year. I cannot speculate on the outcome of that review.

Since 2017, Rwanda has been subject to Section 7042(a) of FY2023 Appropriations Act, which restricts certain types of International Military Education and Training (IMET) assistance.

Question. What steps can the U.S. take to hold accountable senior Rwandan Government and military officials who are responsible for fomenting instability, violence, and gross violations of human rights in eastern DRC?

Answer. The U.S. Government has a range of possible policy tools, including targeted financial sanctions and visa restrictions, that can be utilized to promote accountability. If confirmed, I will consider every tool at my disposal to resolve this crisis.

Rwandan President Kagame's efforts to target, kidnap, and kill dissidents both in Rwanda and abroad are well documented. U.S. permanent resident Paul Rusesabagina and his family are among those targeted by Rwanda while living in the United States. Rusesabagina, who is now illegally detained by Rwanda, was lured onto a charter flight and flown to Rwanda without his knowledge as part of an operation Rwandan President Kagame later described to the New York Times as "flawless." According to the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP), in 2015 the FBI told the State Department's Bureau of African Affairs that the Rwandan Government interfered in the U.S. asylum process and "almost certainly" compromised an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) investigation into a Rwandan national who resided in the U.S. and had applied for U.S. asylum. ICE deported the applicant to Rwanda in 2016 and he is now serving a 14-year jail sentence in Rwanda for comments he made about the Rwandan regime while living in the United States. In January 2023, meanwhile, Rwandan journalist John Williams Ntwali—who was one of the only remaining journalists in Rwanda reporting on allegations of torture, disappearances, and land evictions by the Rwandan Government—was killed under mysterious circumstances.

Question. If confirmed, will you commit to meeting with the families of Paul Rusesabagina, Rwandan journalist John Williams Ntwali, and other recent victims of Rwandan Government oppression and abuse?

Answer. I am deeply concerned about the Rwandan Government's repression of dissidents, both domestically and abroad. If confirmed, I will coordinate closely with the Department and other interlocutors to ensure meeting with families and victims would be helpful or advantageous to these or other cases. If so, I will gladly meet with them.

Question. Will you commit to reviewing this FBI report before starting your assignment in Rwanda? Does the State Department agree that the Rwandan Government likely compromised an ICE investigation which resulted in an individual's deportation and subsequent imprisonment in Rwanda?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed, I will work with the FBI to review the report. While I am not in a position to speculate on the ICE investigation, if confirmed, I commit to working to counter transnational repression wherever and whenever possible.

The State Department's Travel Advisory for Rwanda is currently at the lowest level, "Level 1: Exercise Normal Precautions." This is lower than the State Department's Travel Advisory for the United Kingdom which is at "Level 2: Exercise Increased Caution."

Question. Given Kagame's well-documented practice of kidnapping, jailing, and assassinating critics, are Americans or American residents who publicly criticize the Rwandan Government safe in Rwanda?

Answer. Travel Advisories communicate to U.S. citizens the risks of travel to a particular country. The State Department does not believe U.S. citizens who criticize the Rwandan Government are in danger of kidnapping, jailing, or assassination in Rwanda.

Question. Should the State Department raise the Travel Advisory for Rwanda and add a "D" indicator to this Travel Advisory to warn Americans of the risk of wrongful detention by the Rwandan Government?

Answer. The State Department updates Travel Advisories on a regular basis. The Wrongful Detention indicator is used when there is a policy determination that U.S. citizens face the risk of wrongful detention. The State Department does not believe U.S. citizens are in danger of wrongful detention in Rwanda.

Question. Prior to Secretary Blinken's visit to Rwanda in August 2022, the State Department described Rwanda as a "strategic partner." Given Kagame's longstanding disregard for basic democratic and human rights norms, his decision to once again foment violence and instability in neighboring DRC, the illegal detention of Rusesabagina, and Kagame's continued efforts to silence critical voices and views both in Rwanda and abroad to include inside the United States, do you view President Kagame as a credible partner or someone who shares U.S. values and interests?

Answer. The United States and Rwanda share a broad and longstanding bilateral partnership. We cooperate in many areas of mutual interest, including on public health, education, the environment, and economic growth issues. Rwanda is one of the most effective implementers of U.S. assistance on the continent. However, as previously noted, U.S. and Rwandan policy views diverge in significant ways and those differences have become more pronounced in the past year. The United States is deeply concerned about Rwanda's involvement in eastern DRC and its approach to human rights, including transnational repression and the wrongful detention of Paul Rusesabagina. The United States does not see eye-to-eye with President Kagame on the best way to govern. If confirmed, I will actively engage the Government of Rwanda to resolve or reduce areas of concern and disagreement.

Question. Given the Rwandan military's support for M23, implication in the recruitment of child soldiers, and Rwanda's well-documented use of cyber tools to target dissidents in the U.S. and around the world, was it appropriate for the United States to invite members of the Rwandan military to participate in the "Justified Accord" exercise in Kenya in February 2023 and provide Rwandan security forces with training on cyber techniques?

Answer. All engagements with Rwanda are evaluated through the lens of whether the activity supports U.S. interests and is consistent with our policy to stabilize the region. If confirmed, I commit to you that I will ensure all engagements align with U.S. policy towards Rwanda and advance broader U.S. goals and objectives.

In addition to fighting alongside M23 in eastern DRC, Rwandan troops are operating in the Central African Republic and Mozambique. There are reports that the Rwandan Government is using the presence of Rwandan troops in these countries to target dissidents and secure access to natural resources. According to media, several Rwandan businesses owned by Rwanda's ruling party have recently started operating the mining, private security, and construction sectors in Cabo Delgado in Mozambique.

Question. To what extent are Rwandan military personnel coordinating with the Wagner Group in the Central African Republic (CAR)?

Answer. I am not aware of coordination between Rwandan Defense Forces and the Wagner Group in CAR.

Question. Are Rwandan troops in CAR or Mozambique facilitating Rwandan Government or business access to natural resources, minerals, government contracts, or mining sites?

Answer. Rwanda has entered into bilateral agreements with the Central African Republic (CAR) and Mozambique. Rwanda's 2021 bilateral agreement with CAR covers security, transportation, mining, and economic planning. Kigali continues to play a constructive role in CAR as the leading troop and police contributor to the U.N. Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in CAR. In addition, Rwanda's efforts to encourage progress on the CAR peace process have been constructive. If confirmed, I would be glad to work with State Department experts to provide you with a classified briefing to discuss this topic in greater detail.

On July 20, 2022, I wrote to Secretary Blinken to express concern about the Rwandan Government's continued disregard for basic democratic and human rights norms and the need for U.S. policy to adjust accordingly. In the letter, I encouraged the Department to undertake a review of our policy toward Rwanda, clarify whether the Department can sanction Rwandan officials implicated in the kidnapping of Paul Rusesabagina, protect Americans and American residents in Rwanda by raising the Department's Travel Advisory for Rwanda from "Level 1: Exercise Normal Precautions" to "Level 3: Reconsider Travel," and consider restrictions on U.S. security assistance to Rwanda.

Question. Please provide an update on the status of my request to conduct a policy review.

Answer. I understand the interagency is currently reviewing U.S. policy towards Rwanda. If confirmed, I look forward to participating in that process or helping to implement its decisions. Again, if confirmed, I will work to ensure U.S. policy to

wards Rwanda aligns with U.S. national interests and objectives, and will remain in close contact with members and staff from the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Question. Are Rwandan Government officials responsible for transnational repression subject to sanction under the “Khashoggi Ban” or Executive Order 14078 and the Robert Levinson Hostage Recovery and Hostage-Taking Accountability Act?

Answer. I understand the United States continues to review incidents of serious, extraterritorial counter-dissident activity following Secretary Blinken’s announcement of the Khashoggi Ban in February 2021. While I am aware of concerns related to reports of transnational repression by the Government of Rwanda, I cannot speculate as to how or whether the Khashoggi Ban or Executive Order 14078 could be applied in any particular case.

Question. What are the most important actions you have taken in your career to date to support democracy and human rights? What has been the impact of your actions?

Answer. As a Political-coned officer, I have had the honor and pleasure of working closely on human rights issues at virtually every stop of my professional career. I have worked closely with human rights advocates in Mauritius, Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines, and Kenya, supporting them in any way possible and championing their work. I have also either drafted or helped manage and supervise the process of drafting the Human Rights Report in every one of these countries. This human rights advocacy has helped civil society groups advance their critical work and sent a clear message to every host government that the United States stands shoulder to shoulder with democracy and human rights advocates.

Question. What issues are the most pressing challenges to democracy or democratic development in Rwanda? These challenges might include obstacles to participatory and accountable governance and institutions, rule of law, authentic political competition, civil society, human rights and press freedom. Please be as specific as possible.

Answer. The United States considers Rwanda to be a constitutional republic dominated by a strong presidency. The Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) has ruled Rwanda since 1994. President Kagame has been in power since 2000 and faced elections in 2003, 2010, and 2017, each time winning more than 90 percent of the vote. The Government represses its political opponents, both in Rwanda and abroad, and members of opposition parties face the threat of disappearance, arbitrary arrest and detention, and assassination. Kagame has already indicated he plans to run in the 2024 presidential election. As the election approaches, it is likely Rwanda’s political space will become even more restrictive, as Kagame seeks to intimidate, disappear, and threaten opponents. If confirmed, I will strongly support and promote the benefits of democracy—not just in practice but in substance—to Rwandans. I will encourage the Government of Rwanda to ensure and respect the rights of its citizens to exercise their rights to freedoms of expression, conscience, and peaceful assembly, including through the electoral process, and underscore that meaningful progress on democratic performance will contribute to Rwanda’s long-term peace and stability and bolster its capacity to achieve Rwanda’s ambitious development and economic growth goals.

Question. What steps will you take—if confirmed—to support democracy in Rwanda? What do you hope to accomplish through these actions? What are the potential impediments to addressing the specific obstacles you have identified?

Answer. As promoting democracy within the Government of Rwanda is a difficult task, Mission Kigali’s approach to diplomacy and assistance recognizes the indispensable role of civil society in Rwanda. Democracy, human rights, and governance programming supports civil society organizations engaging with their communities and with government officials on citizen involvement in government processes. Promoting greater government accountability is an integral part of this. The Embassy also regularly meets with members of civil society to be sure their input is included in our approach to the U.S.-Rwanda bilateral relationship. If confirmed, I will strongly support the ongoing efforts to promote democracy in Rwanda and encourage my team to seek out creative engagement and new programming ideas. As stated above, there are significant challenges to promoting democracy in Rwanda. However, it is important to further accelerate these critical efforts.

Question. How will you utilize U.S. Government assistance resources at your disposal, including the Democracy Commission Small Grants program and other

sources of State Department and USAID funding, to support democracy and governance, and what will you prioritize in processes to administer such assistance?

Answer. If confirmed, I will leverage U.S. Government assistance resources to support democracy, respect for human rights, and good governance as vigorously as possible. I will consult with USAID, the State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Rights and Labor, other agencies and offices, civil society, and non-governmental organizations to determine whether we should pursue new programming approaches that might help unlock additional progress. I will ensure all assistance programs administered by Mission Kigali are as effective and impactful as possible.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to meet with civil society members, human rights and other non-governmental organizations in the U.S. and with local human rights NGOs, and other members of civil society in Rwanda? What steps will you take to pro-actively address efforts to restrict or penalize NGOs and civil society via legal or regulatory measures?

Answer. If confirmed, I will gladly meet with civil society members, local and international human rights and other NGOs, as well as other members of civil society in Rwanda. I believe meeting with these organizations sends a clear message to the Government of Rwanda and these organizations that the United States supports their work, leading to incremental progress in the democracy, rights, and governance arena. I will work with partners on the ground and the Government to stop efforts to restrict or penalize NGOs and civil society.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to meet with democratically oriented political opposition figures and parties? What steps will you take to encourage genuine political competition? Will you advocate for access and inclusivity for women, minorities and youth within political parties?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to meeting with democratically oriented political opposition figures and parties in Rwanda and will welcome their recommendations about what additional steps Mission Kigali could take to encourage genuine political competition. Rwanda is a global leader in gender equality, but I will advocate for greater access and inclusivity for women, as well as minorities and youth within political parties.

Question. Will you and your embassy team actively engage with Rwanda on freedom of the press and address any government efforts designed to control or undermine press freedom through legal, regulatory or other measures? Will you commit to meeting regularly with independent, local press in Rwanda?

Answer. Yes. Mission Kigali regularly meets with independent, local press in Rwanda and, if confirmed, I will welcome the opportunity to participate in those engagements. Mission Kigali will continue to identify opportunities to discuss and promote press freedom with the Government of Rwanda.

Question. Will you and your embassy team actively engage with civil society and government counterparts on countering disinformation and propaganda disseminated by foreign state or non-state actors in the country?

Answer. Yes. The People's Republic of China (PRC), in particular, actively messages in Rwanda. Mission Kigali's public messaging promotes U.S. values and explains the value of U.S.-Rwanda bilateral cooperation to the people of Rwanda. The United States has a good story to tell in Rwanda, a story that can effectively counter disinformation. If confirmed, I look forward to telling it wherever and whenever possible.

Question. Will you and your embassy teams actively engage with Rwanda on the right of labor groups to organize, including for independent trade unions?

Answer. If confirmed, I plan to meet regularly with labor unions and workers to hear their concerns and ideas. Engaging with the Government of Rwanda, businesses, and trade unions to promote worker rights is critical to building a strong middle class and achieving sustainable, long-term, inclusive economic growth.

Question. Will you commit to using your position, if confirmed, to defend the human rights and dignity of all people in Rwanda, no matter their sexual orientation or gender identity?

Answer. Yes. All people deserve to have their human rights and dignity respected and defended, regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or sex characteristics.

Question. What challenges do the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) people face in Rwanda?

Answer. Although Rwanda does not criminalize LGBTQI+ conduct or identity, Rwandan society stigmatizes LGBTQI+ persons. Rwandan law does not protect LGBTQI+ persons from discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or sex characteristics. Embassy Kigali reports that LGBTQI+ community members believe that hate speech and harassment, especially of transgender persons, is increasing. Rwandan law does not provide for marriage equality—but neither is marriage equality criminalized. LGBTQI+ persons in Rwanda experience societal discrimination, stigmatization, and abuse. LGBTQI+ civil society and community members report that government officials do not adequately respond to reports of abuse and crimes committed against LGBTQI+ persons, especially at the local government levels, and thus LGBTQI+ persons often do not report crimes committed against them for fear authorities would be indifferent or complicit. LGBTQI+ persons have difficulty registering non-governmental organizations.

Question. What specifically will you commit to do to help LGBTQ people in Rwanda?

Answer. Embassy Kigali assesses there are many opportunities to engage the Government of Rwanda, civil society, and the media to advance the human rights of LGBTQI+ persons. If confirmed, I look forward to exploring these opportunities and supporting LGBTQI+ persons in any way I can.

Question. Will you commit, if confirmed, to ensuring that you fully brief Members of Congress and/or their staff each time you are in Washington for visits or consultations during your tenure as Ambassador to Rwanda?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed, I will be glad to brief relevant Members of Congress and/or their staff, as appropriate, in coordination with the Bureau of Legislative Affairs.

Question. How do you anticipate fostering diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility at the U.S. Embassy in Rwanda?

Answer. If confirmed, one of my top priorities would be to advance the goals and objectives of Mission Kigali's Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility (DEIA) Committee. I would emphasize in Town Halls, Country Team, and Senior Staff discussions from the outset that the DEIA's work is of paramount importance and will require the focus, attention, and input of the entire community. In addition, I will apply lessons learned from my time leading Mission Nairobi's DEIA team, while also underscoring the importance of active and inclusive mentoring.

Question. What specifically will you do to prioritize and promote diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility, while also combating racism, discrimination, and inequality among locally employed staff in Rwanda?

Answer. If confirmed, I will underscore from the outset in Town Halls and discussions with Locally Employed (LE) staff my expectation that the entire Mission will be actively engaged in promoting diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility. I will also make it very clear that under my leadership, Mission Kigali will not tolerate racism, discrimination, or inequality in any form.

Question. In addition to focusing on diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility in our workforce, will you commit to engaging more equitably in operations and programming, particularly with potential partners and communities that traditionally have been marginalized, excluded, or underrepresented in ours and others' donor and partnership efforts? How do you anticipate utilizing local expertise, knowledge, and capacity to meet our foreign policy goals?

Answer. If confirmed, I will commit to engaging more equitably in operations and programming, particularly with potential partners and communities that traditionally have been marginalized, excluded, or underrepresented in ours and others' donor and partnership efforts.

If confirmed, I will ensure Mission staff prioritize travel throughout the country, regular engagement and exchanges with host country nationals, and the critical contact work that fuels effective diplomacy overseas. I would work to remove any impediments standing in the way of allowing this to happen so that the Mission team can best advance our foreign policy goals.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED
TO ERIC W. KNEEDLER BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

Question. As U.S. Ambassador to Rwanda, if confirmed, do you commit to regularly engaging with the Rwandan Government over its continued unlawful detention of U.S. permanent resident and recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom Paul Rusesabagina?

Answer. Yes. I have been following Mr. Rusesabagina's case very closely. If confirmed, resolving this case will be one of my top priorities, and I will maintain high-level engagement with the Government of Rwanda and pursue any and all avenues that might help resolve this matter as expeditiously as possible.

Question. As U.S. Ambassador, if confirmed, how will you view the continued unlawful detention of Mr. Rusesabagina in the context of the broader U.S./Rwanda relationship?

Answer. The wrongful detention of Paul Rusesabagina is a significant bilateral irritant, and the Department of State has made this very clear to the Government of Rwanda on multiple occasions. This case is one of a number of issues that has negatively impacted the bilateral relationship and is preventing the United States and Rwanda from expanding cooperation and collaboration.

Question. As U.S. Ambassador, if confirmed, do you commit to ensuring that, in coordination with the Belgian Embassy, Paul Rusesabagina receives a consular visit on a monthly basis?

Answer. Yes.

Question. On January 19, 2023, Rwandan authorities reported that leading investigative journalist John Williams Ntwali, who reported on human rights abuses in Rwanda, died in a vehicle accident a day prior. The lack of a credible independent and transparent investigation further raises suspicions about the circumstances around his death. As U.S. Ambassador to Rwanda, if confirmed, how will you engage the Rwandan Government on this issue?

Answer. The Department of State is concerned about the death of John Williams Ntwali and has monitored the case closely from the first report. I understand the Government of Rwanda has been forthcoming with Embassy Kigali about the case. However, I agree that the rapid investigation and closed trial do raise questions. If confirmed, I will raise this case and similar cases with Rwandan Government counterparts. I will strongly advocate for freedom of expression and media freedom as part of the U.S. Government's broader commitment to supporting and promoting respect for human rights.

Question. What is your view of the crisis in Eastern Congo—particularly since the reengagement of M23—and Rwanda's role in it?

Answer. I am alarmed by the situation in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), where escalating violence is exacerbating immense human suffering, leading to hundreds of deaths and the internal displacement of over 600,000 people. I am deeply concerned with Rwanda's troop presence in the DRC, which violates the DRC's territorial integrity, and their support for the M23 armed group, which is public knowledge due to the U.N. Group of Experts midterm report released in December. The United States supports the mediation efforts led by Angola and the East African Community to resolve the longstanding crisis and has been urging the Rwandan and DRC Governments at the highest levels for more than a year to de-escalate tensions and commit to peace. Rwanda's concerns about armed groups espousing genocidal ideologies are understandable but must be addressed through consultations with the Government of the DRC and cannot justify support for other armed groups or incursions by the Rwandan military. I believe Rwanda and the DRC have much to gain from cooperative relations with neighbors and a more stable region.

Question. How will you engage the Rwandans on the crisis in Eastern Congo as U.S. Ambassador, if confirmed?

Answer. If confirmed, I will reinforce the messages that Secretary Blinken and other senior U.S. officials have delivered: that Rwanda, and all countries in the region, must respect the DRC's territorial integrity and that Rwandan military incursions into the DRC are not acceptable. I will pursue creative solutions to the crisis and work with any and all helpful partners. I will explain how Rwanda's actions damage our bilateral relationship.

Rwanda has been, and remains, an important partner to the United States, particularly related to security on the continent. Rwanda is proving critical to stabi-

lizing the situation in Northern Mozambique and potentially in the Central African Republic.

Question. As U.S. Ambassador, if confirmed, how will you balance the U.S. security relationship with Rwanda with our concerns over Rwanda's democratic record, particularly as it relates to repression of dissenting voices within and outside Rwanda?

Answer. The U.S.-Rwanda bilateral relationship is complex. Though we cooperate in many areas, there are significant ways in which our policy views diverge. As I understand it, the United States has paused all new obligations of bilateral security assistance programming to Rwanda. If confirmed, I commit to you that I will evaluate all engagements with Rwanda with a focus on whether the activity supports U.S. interests and is consistent with our policy to stabilize the region.

Question. As U.S. Ambassador, if confirmed, how will you view the continued unlawful detention of Mr. Rusesabagina in the context of the broader U.S./Rwanda relationship?

Answer. The wrongful detention of Paul Rusesabagina is a significant bilateral irritant, and the Department of State has made this very clear to the Government of Rwanda on multiple occasions. This case is one of a number of issues that has negatively impacted the bilateral relationship and is preventing the United States and Rwanda from expanding cooperation and collaboration.

In the State Department's 2022 Trafficking in Persons Report, Rwanda remained on Tier 2 for not fully meeting the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking but is making significant efforts to do so.

Question. If confirmed, what concrete steps could you take to help Rwanda operationalize the prioritized recommendations contained in the TIP report?

Answer. If confirmed, I will encourage the Government of Rwanda to work on the prioritized recommendations listed in the annual Trafficking in Persons report. In particular, I will urge them to ensure traffickers are held accountable for their actions by increasing effective investigations and prosecutions. I will also encourage them to develop a mechanism for screening for potential trafficking victims among vulnerable populations in order to refer them to protective services.

In the State Department's 2021 International Religious Freedom report, Rwanda was noted to have a strict faith-based organization law and the need for transparency in working with religious groups on the law's implementation and requirements.

Question. What is your assessment of religious freedom in Rwanda and if confirmed, how will you work with the Ambassador At Large for International Religious Freedom to bolster religious freedom in-country?

Answer. Religious freedom is a U.S. foreign policy priority. The Department continues to closely monitor the religious freedom situation in Rwanda and the region. While Rwandan law prohibits religious discrimination, the law on faith-based organizations led to strict regulations that some civil society and religious groups have noted make it prohibitively expensive or burdensome for religious groups to operate in Rwanda. If confirmed, I will support the Embassy's ongoing efforts, in close coordination with the Office of International Religious Freedom and Ambassador at Large Hussain, to engage with the Rwandan Government on these issues and promote protections for religious freedom.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to personally engaging with civil society on this issue?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed, I commit to engaging with civil society on this important issue.

Question. If confirmed, what concrete steps can you take to help Rwanda increase their societal and governmental respect for religious freedom?

Answer. If confirmed, I will support Embassy Kigali's ongoing efforts to engage with the Government on this issue. I will urge the Government to protect religious freedom for people of all beliefs, as well as promote greater transparency and equity with the implementation of registration and regulation of religious groups and other relevant laws.

In the State Department's 2021 Human Rights Report, Rwanda was identified to have significant human rights issues including unlawful or arbitrary killings by the Government, politically motivated reprisals, and restrictions on internet freedom.

Question. If confirmed, how will you direct your Embassy to work with the Government to improve the human rights situation on the ground?

Answer. Though Rwanda is a challenging environment for human rights, the Government of Rwanda has demonstrated some willingness to engage in dialogue, and there are areas of possible collaboration and some potential for progress. If confirmed, I will ensure the Government of Rwanda knows democracy and human rights issues are at the forefront of U.S. foreign policy and will be on the agenda at every meeting. I will direct my team to identify and engage areas of opportunity. If confirmed, one of my top priorities would be to take a fresh look at human rights-related programming and seek to expand the scope and impact of the United States' work on human rights issues.

Question. How will you direct your Embassy to work with civil society organizations to improve the human rights situation on the ground?

Answer. Embassy Kigali enjoys close collaboration with a range of civil society organizations that are able to operate in Rwanda. If confirmed, I will encourage the Mission to continue the strong work they are already doing to support civil society and promote democracy, respect for human rights, and good governance. I will also work to identify creative new opportunities to advance these critical efforts.

Question. What is your understanding of morale throughout Mission Kigali?

Answer. My understanding from the most recent Mission Kigali morale survey is that, by and large, morale is quite high within the Embassy.

Question. How do you intend to improve morale at Mission Kigali?

Answer. If confirmed, I would work to ensure that Mission morale remains high and do everything possible to reinforce to the community that I have no higher priority than the safety, security, health, and welfare of our Mission personnel. In addition, I would make it clear that I will do everything in my power to ensure they have all the resources and support they need, both personally and professionally.

Question. How do you intend to create a unified mission and vision at Mission Kigali?

Answer. If confirmed, I would work to ensure every member of the Mission Kigali community has a clear understanding of our Embassy goals, their role in advancing them, and how our collective work directly advances U.S. national security interests.

Question. How do you intend to improve morale at Mission Kigali?

Answer. If confirmed, I would work to ensure that Mission morale remains high and do everything possible to reinforce to the community that I have no higher priority than the safety, security, health, and welfare of our Mission personnel. In addition, I would make it clear that I will do everything in my power to ensure they have all the resources and support they need, both personally and professionally.

Question. How would you describe your management style?

Answer. I would describe my management style as calm, accessible and characterized by self-awareness and humility with a particular emphasis on inclusiveness. I never have and never will tolerate any form of bullying, harassment, or discrimination.

Question. Do you believe it is ever acceptable or constructive to berate subordinates, either in public or in private?

Answer. It is unacceptable to berate subordinates under any circumstances.

Question. How do you envision your relationship with the deputy chief of mission?

Answer. If confirmed, one of my top priorities would be to quickly forge a strong and productive working relationship with the Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM), who has a wealth of experience in Rwanda from her extensive time as Chargé d'Affaires. It is essential for the Ambassador and DCM to be fully aligned in advancing the work of the Mission team, and I would ensure that is the case in Kigali.

Question. If confirmed, what leadership responsibilities do you intend to entrust to your deputy chief of mission?

Answer. If confirmed, I would work to ensure the entire Mission community knows not only that the DCM has my full confidence and trust, but also that the DCM always speaks authoritatively on my behalf. My goal would be to quickly establish that there is no daylight between the two of us on any Mission-related issues.

In order to create and continue employee excellence at the Department, accurate and direct employee evaluation reports (EERs) for Foreign Service Officers are imperative, though often lacking

Question. Do you believe that it is important to provide employees with accurate, constructive feedback on their performance in order to encourage improvement and reward those who most succeed in their roles?

Answer. Yes, it is critical to provide employees with accurate, constructive feedback on their performance in order to encourage improvement and reward those who most succeed in their roles.

Question. If confirmed, would you support and encourage clear, accurate, and direct feedback to employees in order to improve performance and reward high achievers?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed, I would support and encourage clear, accurate, and direct feedback to employees in order to improve performance and reward high achievers.

Question. In your experience, do U.S. diplomats get outside of our Embassy walls enough to fully accomplish their missions?

Answer. Yes, during every one of my previous assignments I believe U.S. diplomats have been able to get outside of the Embassy's walls enough to fully accomplish our respective missions. If confirmed, I would ensure Mission staff place a real emphasis on doing so in consultation with the Regional Security Officer.

Question. How do you intend to improve the ability of U.S. diplomats to better access all local populations?

Answer. If confirmed, I will ensure Mission staff prioritize travel throughout the country, regular engagement and exchanges with host country nationals, and the critical contact work that fuels effective diplomacy overseas. I would work to remove any unnecessary impediments standing in the way of allowing this to happen.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED
TO ERIC W. KNEEDLER BY SENATOR MARCO RUBIO

Question. In May, Secretary Blinken said that the People's Republic of China is the "only country with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do it." The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) clearly holds all the reins of power in the People's Republic of China and has used this power to commit genocide in Xinjiang, flood our communities with fentanyl, and emit by far the largest quantity of greenhouse gases. As we speak, the Party is cracking down on unprecedented student protests across the country. With their absolute control of Chinese society and industry, the CCP could stop all of these destructive actions tomorrow if they so choose. Is the Chinese Communist Party a threat to the United States?

Answer. Yes, the activities of the People's Republic of China (PRC) and Chinese Communist Party (CCP) represent a significant challenge to U.S. economic, political, and security interests globally and in the Africa region. Under President Xi, the Chinese Communist Party has become more repressive at home and more assertive abroad. We will defend and strengthen U.S. national security, prosperity, and values; defend international law and agreements and the other principles and institutions that maintain peace and security; and protect the rights of individuals and sovereign nations.

As Chargé d'Affaires, a.i. at our Embassy in Nairobi in my last assignment, I saw first-hand how the PRC uses its influence abroad to undermine the rule of law, democratic principles, and the broader rules-based international order. On May 26, Secretary Blinken said we will invest in our domestic strength and align with our allies and partners so that we can compete effectively with the PRC to defend our interests. If confirmed, I will promote U.S. investments in Rwanda and seek to highlight the risks associated with the kinds of PRC engagement that could impact Rwanda's security, economy, and sovereignty.

I will also continue to deepen our partnership with Rwanda and engage with the Rwandans to deliver the message that as Rwanda's largest humanitarian and development partner, the United States is committed to Rwanda's future, in contrast to the PRC's transactional approach to engaging with other countries.

In addition, I will ensure that our vision of regional security and prosperity remains the core of a strong U.S.-Rwanda partnership that offers an attractive alternative to the type of relationship offered by the PRC. If confirmed, I will also work with the Bureau of African Affairs and other Department stakeholders, including

Department of State's new Office of China Coordination, to advance U.S. objectives and counter harmful behavior by the PRC and other actors in Rwanda.

Question. Does the Chinese Communist Party undertake any activities that are beneficial to U.S. interests?

Answer. We are committed to working with Beijing only if it secures American jobs, American values, and our way of life for future generations. Issues like climate change, the global drug trade, and COVID-19 are the very issues that directly threaten our prosperity and security. PRC contributions should be scrutinized, however, to ensure they are not a springboard for narrow PRC economic interests.

If confirmed, I will also work with the Department of State's new Office of China Coordination, to advance U.S. objectives and counter harmful behavior by the PRC and other actors in the Rwandan context. This new office, inaugurated immediately following the U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit, brings together a group of China experts from throughout the Department and beyond to work more effectively with colleagues from every regional bureau and experts in international security, economics, technology, multilateral diplomacy, and strategic communications. In addition, I will direct the members of post's PRC working group to work closely with the Regional China Officer based in Abidjan.

Question. Do you believe that there are any areas within which the Chinese Communist Party would constructively work with the United States in good faith?

Answer. The United States broadly, and Mission Kigali specifically, should work with the PRC where our interests clearly coincide. Areas of potential cooperation include food security, global climate change, counter-narcotics, or disaster relief. If confirmed, the Mission would be ready to take advantage of such opportunities if they clearly advanced U.S. interests and policy goals.

Question. If confirmed, will you approve any joint activity with organizations or representatives from the People's Republic of China in the countries, or organizations in which you will work?

Answer. If confirmed, I will consult Department guidance on engagement with PRC organizations or representatives to work together when it is in U.S. interests to do so.

Question. During an August 2022 visit to Rwanda, Secretary Blinken informed President Kagame that U.S. officials would "continue to engage" on the questionable detainment of Paul Rusesabagina, who is most well-known for sheltering refugees of the Rwandan genocide. Do you believe there is any evidence that substantiates the Rwandan Government's charges against Rusesabagina?

Answer. I understand the United States has not taken a position on the substance or merits of the charges against Mr. Rusesabagina. The Department of State determined he was wrongfully detained, and if confirmed, I will fully support that determination and work for his release.

Question. If confirmed, how will you engage to obtain Rusesabagina's release?

Answer. I have been following Mr. Rusesabagina's case very closely. If confirmed, resolving this case will be one of my top priorities, and I will maintain high-level engagement with the Government of Rwanda and pursue any and all avenues that might help resolve this matter as expeditiously as possible.

Question. Have you spoken, or met, with Mr. Rusesabagina's family to discuss his detainment?

Answer. No. As the nominee, it is not appropriate for me to speak with or meet Mr. Rusesabagina's family at this time.

Question. Has Africa Bureau Assistant Secretary Molly Phee met or spoken with Rusesabagina's family members? If not, why not?

Answer. As far as I know, Assistant Secretary Phee has not met with Mr. Rusesabagina's family members, although others in the Department, including the Special Presidential Envoy for Hostage Affairs, are in regular contact.

Question. Rwanda has partnered with the CCP's Belt and Road Initiative and has welcomed infrastructure, China-based technology such as Huawei, and military training. What steps will you take to identify projects with Rwandan officials and the Development Finance Corporation regarding opportunities for U.S. companies to compete with CCP funded projects?

Answer. If confirmed, I would work with Embassy Kigali's Deal Team—an Embassy interagency working group promoting U.S. trade and investment in Rwanda—to offer alternatives to the PRC's investments wherever and whenever possible. The

Deal Team can help spur additional U.S. investments in the health, banking, housing, hospitality, and water treatment sectors, as well as other areas. If confirmed, I would also work with the American Chamber of Commerce to explore new investment opportunities. The Chamber continues to grow by adding new members and engages frequently with the Government of Rwanda to improve the investment climate and ensure a level playing field for U.S. firms. The Development Finance Corporation (DFC), the U.S. Trade and Development Agency (USTDA), the Department of Commerce, and others in the U.S. interagency also continue to maintain portfolios in Rwanda that I would work to fully leverage. Meanwhile, I would work with Embassy Kigali's public affairs team to explain the value of U.S.-Rwanda bilateral cooperation to the people of Rwanda.

At every stop in my diplomatic career, promoting U.S. interests and values has been a top priority. For example, I was a member of the negotiating team that secured the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) agreement between the United States and the Philippines. During my last assignment in Kenya, I helped establish Mission Nairobi's Deal Team, which aligns the Embassy's entire Country Team behind a unified effort to secure economic and commercial opportunities for U.S. firms, creating jobs for the American people and reinforcing our status as the preferred partner of choice in Kenya.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED
TO ERIC W. KNEEDLER BY SENATOR BILL HAGERTY

Combating Anti-Israel Bias in the African Union and Other International Forums

As you know, on February 18, 2023, an Israeli diplomat who was an accredited observer with an entry tag was expelled from the opening ceremony of the African Union summit. In the following days, the African Union Commission Chief stated that Israel's observer status that the bloc has been suspended. These actions are part of a larger effort to delegitimize Israel by states driven by hatred. Just as biased targeting of Israel at the United Nations is a grave concern, anti-Israel actions and rhetoric in other international forums also cannot be ignored. Indeed, what happened to Israel at the AU Summit is reprehensible and unacceptable.

Question. If confirmed, what would you do to address this problem?

Answer. AU Commission Chairperson Moussa Faki Mahamat accepted the Israeli Ambassador's credentials in 2021. However, this decision was challenged by some AU member states, as permitted by the AU Constitutive Act. The AU then established a Heads of State Committee to consult on the accreditation issue with plans to report back at the 2023 AU Summit. The Committee is composed of six member states, with three opposing (Algeria, South Africa, Nigeria) and three supporting (Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda). Faki's acceptance of Israel and its observer status are on hold pending his receipt of the Committee's recommendation.

If confirmed, I would work with the Rwandan Government to press the AU take immediate steps to confirm Israel as an observer. Multilateral institutions are strongest when differing voices and perspectives come together to effect changes that impact global populations. Israel's impact on Africa is significant, from its contributions to technology and resources to bolstering food security efforts via substantive trade. Israel is an important partner to the continent. The United States and Rwanda are fully aligned on this issue. Rwanda is a strong supporter of Israel.

Question. What would you do to engage with foreign governments and ensure that Israel is not unfairly targeted, but rather included in future African Union summits and other regional and international forums?

Answer. If confirmed, I will work closely with the U.S. Mission to the African Union to continue to strengthen Israel's relationship with the AU. By harnessing the strong relationships, we have with member states across Africa, we can and should elevate Israel's status as an important partner to the African Union.

Chinese Influence in Rwanda

China's influence in Rwanda has been growing over the past decade, with the Chinese Government and Chinese companies playing an increasingly prominent role in the country's economy and infrastructure development.

Question. Are you concerned about China having outsized influence in Rwanda?

Answer. Countering the PRC's significant influence and role in Rwanda will be a priority for me, if confirmed. Although the People's Republic of China (PRC) has not made inroads as substantial in Rwanda as in many other parts of Africa, the PRC does have significant investments in the transportation, energy, and real estate sectors. If confirmed, I will follow the Administration's policy of competing and contesting the PRC's engagement in Rwanda as appropriate and advancing our national interests.

Question. If confirmed, what steps would you take to counter China's influence?

Answer. If confirmed, I would work with Embassy Kigali's Deal Team—an embassy interagency working group promoting U.S. trade and investment in Rwanda—to counter the People's Republic of China's (PRC) investments wherever and whenever possible. The Deal Team can help spur additional U.S. investments in the health, banking, housing, hospitality, and water treatment sectors, as well as other areas. If confirmed, I would also work with the American Chamber of Commerce to explore new investment opportunities. The Chamber continues to grow by adding new members and engages frequently with the Government of Rwanda to improve the investment climate and ensure a level playing field for U.S. firms. The Development Finance Corporation (DFC), the U.S. Trade and Development Agency (USTDA), the Department of Commerce, and others in the U.S. interagency also continue to maintain portfolios in Rwanda that I would work to fully leverage. Meanwhile, I would work with Embassy Kigali's public affairs team to explain the value of U.S.-Rwanda bilateral cooperation to the people of Rwanda.

At every stop in my diplomatic career, competing with the PRC has been a top priority. For example, I was a member of the negotiating team that secured the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) agreement between the United States and the Philippines, an agreement that allows the United States to rotate troops into the Philippines, as well as operate facilities on Philippine bases for both American and Philippine forces. During my last assignment in Kenya, I helped establish Mission Nairobi's Deal Team, which aligns the Embassy's entire Country Team behind a unified effort to secure economic and commercial opportunities for U.S. firms, creating jobs for the American people and reinforcing our status as the preferred partner of choice in Kenya.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED
TO PAMELA M. TREMONT BY SENATOR ROBERT MENENDEZ

Question. ZANU-PF has captured the country's parliament, judiciary, and security services in order to ensure political control of the country. There is little chance that this year's election will be free, fair, transparent, or even non-violent. In such an oppressive environment, what opportunities are there to support democratic voices and make tangible progress towards accountable, democratic governance?

Answer. The USG and Embassy Harare continually seek opportunities to support media, human rights defenders, and civil society organizations—each of which play a key role in the monitoring and analysis of democratic trends, advocacy, and training for individuals and vulnerable groups. U.S. support enables these groups to speak out against oppression and sheds light on the Government's anti-democratic and corrupt activities. In addition, U.S. programs support voter registration and voter education to encourage Zimbabweans to express their political will and hold their elected leaders accountable. As civic and political space close in the lead-up to and after this year's elections, it will be critical to continue U.S. support for human rights advocacy and legal support for individuals and organizations that promote democratic governance, especially those targeted for suppression and violence.

Question. If confirmed, what specific actions will you take to support civil society, media and others working to increase democratic space?

Answer. If confirmed, I will work with the Country Team to understand the full scope of U.S. programming and assistance to increase democratic space. I will engage in frank and respectful dialogue with government and political actors to urge respect for fundamental rights. Where and when appropriate, I will publicly promote the efforts of civil society organizations, free and independent media, and other key actors working in this space. I will make myself and members of the Embassy available to civil society for consultation and guidance and engage with journalists to convey messages of U.S. values and support for democratic processes and institutions.

Question. The enactment of the PVO Amendment Act would have a severe impact on the capability and safety of non-governmental organizations in Zimbabwe, including U.S.-funded organizations. What specific actions will you take in response to the enactment of the PVO Amendment Act, and to the implementation of its provisions against NGOs?

Answer. If confirmed, I am committed to working with Mission Harare colleagues to identify, assess, and manage risks associated with the potential enactment of the PVO Amendment bill, using USAID's risk management framework. If President Mnangagwa signs the PVO Amendment bill into law, I will direct embassy messaging to publicly rebuke it (in coordination with like-minded embassies). Privately, I will engage diplomatically with the Government of Zimbabwe, calling on decision makers to exercise restraint in its implementation. I will work with the Mission Harare Country Team and colleagues in Washington to determine appropriate responses if a U.S.-funded NGO is targeted, drawing from the experiences of other embassies in countries where similar legislation has been enacted.

Question. What actions will you take to support affected NGOs, particularly USAID partner organizations?

Answer. If confirmed, I will begin my tenure with outreach, acknowledgement, and support for the work of USAID implementing partners. Civil society actors in Zimbabwe have borne the brunt of harassment and scrutiny in recent years and face the prospect of increased government interference if the PVO Amendment bill is enacted. When appropriate, I will meet publicly with USAID partner organizations and conduct site visits to U.S.-funded programs to demonstrate U.S. support for these initiatives. I will also ensure all U.S. programs are selected in accordance with the Brownback amendment.

Question. What steps will you take to counter false narratives related to U.S. sanctions in Zimbabwe?

Answer. If confirmed, I will engage publicly and privately with interlocutors about U.S. sanctions to dispel myths and set the record straight for the people of Zimbabwe. As Ambassador, I will use my voice and office to reinforce the message that U.S. sanctions are targeted against human rights abusers and corrupt individuals and entities to prevent them from utilizing U.S. banks and institutions for their ill-gotten gains. I will highlight updates to our sanctions list, including the removal of individuals and entities from the list so that the public can see the sanctions can and are lifted when malign activity ceases. I would also highlight corruption and failed economic policies as the root causes of Zimbabwe's economic problems.

Question. Despite the authoritarian nature of ZANU-PF, other countries in Southern Africa—many of them strong democracies—have been reticent to criticize the regime. The Southern African Development Community has not taken any action with regards to pressing the regime to open political space. Are there actions the United States could undertake to convince countries in Southern Africa to advocate for democratic reform in Zimbabwe?

Answer. If confirmed, I look forward to constructive engagement with the U.S. interagency and my colleagues and counterparts in Southern Africa to persuade regional actors such as the Southern African Development Community (SADC) to advocate for democratic reforms in Zimbabwe, including by emphasizing the destabilizing nature of Zimbabwe's current posture and by addressing their concerns about the impact of U.S. sanctions. I believe SADC is best suited to impress upon the Government of Zimbabwe the need for democratic reform, non-violent elections, and productive engagement with the U.S. and others.

Question. If confirmed, how will you work with U.S. Ambassadors in Southern Africa to press governments in the subregion to take meaningful bilateral action, and actions through SADC?

Answer. If confirmed, I will engage my colleagues and counterparts in key Southern Africa Development Community member states to coordinate messaging and outreach regarding collective pressure and advocacy on Zimbabwe. U.S. Ambassadors in Southern Africa are well-placed to understand their host country equities, share information, and raise security and stability concerns posed by Zimbabwe for the wider region and to identify Southern African individuals who may be effective interlocutors with Zimbabwean leaders.

Question. What are the most important actions you have taken in your career to date to support democracy and human rights? What has been the impact of your actions?

Answer. Throughout my career, I have promoted and supported democracy and respect for human rights, including through U.S. electoral assistance programs in Comoros and Zambia. In the Comoros, I organized a U.S.-sponsored election observer mission of Mauritian observers, thereby increasing the regional observer capacity. In Zambia I oversaw the Embassy election observation team for the 2008 presidential elections. In Kyiv, I coordinated U.S. assistance for the 2019 Ukrainian presidential election just months after Russia's attack on Ukrainian ships ushered in a period of martial law. Our assistance gave Ukrainians confidence in the electoral process to elect Presidential Zelensky.

Question. What issues are the most pressing challenges to democracy or democratic development in Zimbabwe? These challenges might include obstacles to participatory and accountable governance and institutions, rule of law, authentic political competition, civil society, human rights and press freedom. Please be as specific as possible.

Answer. Zimbabwe suffers from numerous challenges to its democracy, including endemic corruption, weak rule of law, allegations of human rights violations and abuses, shrinking democratic and civic space, a captured judiciary, political intolerance, and political polarization that pits citizens and critics of the Government against each other. At the center of these challenges, the Government of Zimbabwe utilizes lawfare to target its rivals. The ruling ZANU-PF party has benefited from state capture and has allowed party elites to determine who has access to government positions, services, resources, the economy, and even justice.

Question. What steps will you take—if confirmed—to support democracy in Zimbabwe? What do you hope to accomplish through these actions? What are the potential impediments to addressing the specific obstacles you have identified?

Answer. Zimbabwe's 2013 constitution guarantees human rights and fundamental freedoms to all, including the rights to freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly. The Government of Zimbabwe, however, has enacted laws and captured institutions which allows for their selective application, frequently against the ruling ZANU-PF's perceived opponents in and out of government. If confirmed, I will use my voice and office to urge government accountability and respect for human rights. I will urge the election commission to accelerate voter registration, remediate the delimitation report, and publish the voter roll free of charge. I will encourage greater U.S. support for organizations and initiatives that aim to expand respect for democratic principles, including an independent press and the right to freedom of peaceful assembly. I will actively work to support the democratic aspirations of those advocating for Zimbabweans' constitutional rights and the transparency of electoral processes, and I will seek partnership with all those in Zimbabwe who are doing the same. These hopes and plans come with associated risks—particularly for Zimbabwean activists—from a government eager to close political and civic space. In addition, Zimbabwe's autocratic allies will impede these efforts and amplify anti-sanctions and anti-democratic propaganda.

Question. How will you utilize U.S. Government assistance resources at your disposal, including the Democracy Commission Small Grants program and other sources of State Department and USAID funding, to support democracy and governance, and what will you prioritize in processes to administer such assistance?

Answer. If confirmed, I will utilize all tools at the Embassy's disposal to support democracy and governance initiatives in the lead-up to, and following, the 2023 elections in Zimbabwe. I will encourage colleagues throughout the Embassy to think creatively and to identify and promote organizations engaged in innovative programming to give voice and agency to the Zimbabwean people. I will seek to increase public diplomacy exchanges and bolster NGO efforts with U.S. programming assistance through any available and legal funding authorities.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to meet with civil society members, human rights and other non-governmental organizations in the U.S. and with local human rights NGOs, and other members of civil society in Zimbabwe? What steps will you take to pro-actively address efforts to restrict or penalize NGOs and civil society via legal or regulatory measures?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed, I commit to meet with civil society members, human rights defenders, and non-governmental organizations in the U.S. and with local human rights NGOs and other members of civil society in Zimbabwe. I am committed to working with Mission Harare colleagues and NGOs to identify, assess, and manage risks posed to NGOs and civil society organizations by legal and regulatory measures. I will direct the U.S. Embassy to engage directly with potentially affected organizations to identify creative solutions to ensure their operations continue unin-

interrupted. I will also meet with political parties across the spectrum to underscore U.S. commitments to human rights, democratic principles, and non-violence. And I will urge the Zimbabwean Government, bilaterally and with likeminded partners, to uphold Zimbabwe's constitution and the fundamental freedoms enshrined in it.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to meet with democratically oriented political opposition figures and parties? What steps will you take to encourage genuine political competition? Will you advocate for access and inclusivity for women, minorities and youth within political parties?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed, I commit to meet with democratically oriented political figures and parties, and I will advocate for access and inclusivity for women, members of minority groups, and youth within political parties. I will encourage political actors to engage in political competition and consensus-building efforts. I will promote USAID's ongoing democracy programming, which strengthens civil society and other advocacy groups to have equal access to compete and advocate for good governance, protects human rights defenders, and promotes democratic principles including political competition. I will also ensure programming promotes inclusion, protection, and empowerment of women, minorities, LGBTQI+, and youth as active contributors to the Zimbabwean society.

Question. Will you and your Embassy team actively engage with Zimbabwe on freedom of the press and address any government efforts designed to control or undermine press freedom through legal, regulatory or other measures? Will you commit to meeting regularly with independent, local press in Zimbabwe?

Answer. Yes and yes.

Question. Will you and your Embassy team actively engage with civil society and government counterparts on countering disinformation and propaganda disseminated by foreign state or non-state actors in the country?

Answer. Yes.

Question. Will you and your Embassy teams actively engage with Zimbabwe on the right of labor groups to organize, including for independent trade unions?

Answer. Yes.

Question. Will you commit to using your position, if confirmed, to defend the human rights and dignity of all people in Zimbabwe, no matter their sexual orientation or gender identity?

Answer. Yes.

Question. What challenges do the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) people face in Zimbabwe?

Answer. Zimbabwe's strict anti-LGBTQI+ laws continue to create a hostile environment that disrespects the human rights of members of the LGBTQI+ community and restricts their ability to engage in political activism or collective action. Same-sex marriage is illegal, and members of the LGBTQI+ community are not provided with legal protections from discrimination, violence, or targeted harassment. The lack of state protection increases the likelihood of community-led violence against members of the LGBTQI+ community.

Question. What specifically will you commit to do to help LGBTQ people in Zimbabwe?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to be an advocate for LGBTQI+ persons in Zimbabwe and identify opportunities for the U.S. Mission to support and promote their rights. I look forward to celebrating their diversity and humanity in the safety of USG sponsored events, including them in exchange programs that will build their capacity for advocacy, and urging the Government to decriminalize homosexuality, as some of Zimbabwe's regional neighbors have done.

Question. Will you commit, if confirmed, to ensuring that you fully brief Members of Congress and/or their staff each time you are in Washington for visits or consultations during your tenure as Ambassador to Zimbabwe?

Answer. Yes. I will keep the relevant Congressional committees apprised, as appropriate, in coordination with the Bureau of Legislative Affairs.

Question. How do you anticipate fostering diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility at Embassy Harare?

Answer. Diversity and inclusion are priorities for the Secretary of State and the Department. As a Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM), I worked actively to recruit, hire, and mentor a diverse group of people, both U.S. Direct Hire employees and Locally

Engaged Staff. At all three posts where I was DCM, I ensured there was greater diversity in the staff more broadly, but also at the country team level. I am proud to have led efforts to include gender and diversity goals as a component of the Integrated Country Strategies in Kyiv and Stockholm. In Nicosia and Stockholm, I led efforts to hire more diverse local staff and recruit from the Turkish-speaking Cypriot community and the Sami community respectively. As a mid-level officer, I served as our post Equal Employment Opportunity officer and offered anti-sexual harassment training to over 400 employees in two languages. I consider it a duty and a privilege to recruit and mentor a broad range of officers. I look forward to mentoring all officers and local staff in Harare to give everyone opportunities for professional development and advancement. I would also continue to encourage every employee to report all discrimination, harassment, or toxic behavior to the EEO Counselors, DCM or, failing that, directly to me. I would also encourage employees to use the DEIA tools offered by the Department.

Question. What specifically will you do to prioritize and promote diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility, while also combating racism, discrimination, and inequality among locally employed staff in Zimbabwe?

Answer. As called for in the Department's precepts, I will cultivate an environment that values diversity and respect for EEO and merit principles. I will model those behaviors and insist that all those under my direction hold themselves to the highest standard in accordance with Department regulations and the law. I have found that cultural shifts, including towards greater tolerance and diversity, require repetition of these values, and I would seek to incorporate those themes in my engagements with team members.

Question. In addition to focusing on diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility in our workforce, will you commit to engaging more equitably in operations and programming, particularly with potential partners and communities that traditionally have been marginalized, excluded, or underrepresented in ours and others' donor and partnership efforts? How do you anticipate utilizing local expertise, knowledge, and capacity to meet our foreign policy goals?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed, I commit to engaging equitably in operations and programming, particularly with potential partners and communities that traditionally have been marginalized, excluded, or underrepresented in ours and others' donor and partnership efforts. Like I have in all my previous posts, I will leverage the expertise, knowledge, and guidance of our Locally Employed Staff to help navigate my understanding of dynamics and trends in Zimbabwe.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED
TO PAMELA M. TREMONT BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

Question. As you are aware, the U.S. relationship with Zimbabwe is guided and constrained by conditions set forth in the Zimbabwe Democracy and Economic Recovery Act (ZDERA). What is your understanding of how the U.S. can engage with Zimbabwe under ZDERA given that conditions for a stronger U.S./Zimbabwe bilateral relationship have not been met?

Answer. I understand that ZDERA guides the U.S. bilateral relationship with Zimbabwe. U.S. diplomats regularly cite ZDERA criteria—including restoration of the rule of law; free and fair elections as determined by independent international monitors; commitment to equitable, legal, and transparent land reform; and subordination of the military and police to civilian government—when engaging with Government of Zimbabwe interlocutors on the topic of improving bilateral relations. Given the Government of Zimbabwe's failure to make meaningful improvements on these criteria, the U.S. maintains its ceiling on bilateral engagement and limits its support for Zimbabwe, including through International Financial Institutions. I look forward to having frank conversations with the Government regarding the criteria for improved relations.

Question. Do you commit to respecting ZDERA in your relationship with the Government of Zimbabwe as U.S. Ambassador, if confirmed?

Answer. Yes.

Question. As U.S. Ambassador, if confirmed, how will you counter anti-sanctions rhetoric from the Government of Zimbabwe and other actors?

Answer. If confirmed, I will engage publicly and privately with interlocutors about U.S. sanctions to dispel myths and set the record straight for the people of Zimbabwe. As ambassador, I will use my voice and office to reinforce the message that U.S. sanctions are targeted against human rights abusers and corrupt individuals and entities to prevent them from utilizing U.S. banks and institutions for their ill-gotten gains. We will highlight updates to our sanctions list, including the removal of individuals and entities from the list so that the public can see the sanctions can be and are lifted when malign activity ceases. I would also highlight corruption and failed economic policies as the root causes of Zimbabwe's economic problems.

Question. We are already seeing Zimbabwe's leadership take the country down a dark, and unfortunately familiar road ahead of elections expected this summer. As U.S. Ambassador, if confirmed, what do you see your role being ahead of and following elections in pushing for accountability, respect for human rights, and long-term democratic reforms in Zimbabwe?

Answer. Zimbabwe's 2013 constitution guarantees human rights and fundamental freedoms to all, including the rights to freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly. The Government of Zimbabwe, however, has enacted laws and captured institutions which allows for their selective application, frequently against the ruling ZANU-PF's perceived opponents in and out of government. If confirmed, I will use my voice and office to urge government accountability and respect for human rights. I will actively work to support the democratic aspirations of those advocating for Zimbabweans' constitutional rights and transparency of electoral processes, and I will seek partnership with all those in Zimbabwe and the region who are doing the same.

Question. Do you think it is possible to Zimbabwe to conduct a credible and democratic electoral process this year? Why?

Answer. While it is theoretically possible for the Government to hold free and fair elections in 2023, based on several worrying trends it is unlikely. The Government of Zimbabwe has tilted the playing field in the ruling ZANU-PF's favor using violence, intimidation, coercion, patronage, and lawfare tactics. If confirmed, I intend to work tirelessly to defend every Zimbabweans' right to express their will peacefully.

Question. How do you intend to ensure that U.S. foreign assistance to Zimbabwe, including humanitarian assistance, is not used as a tool by the Government of Zimbabwe to buy votes or intimidate voters ahead of elections this year?

Answer. If confirmed, I will direct my staff to ensure all U.S. assistance, program activities, and recipient organizations are properly vetted to ensure that no U.S. resources are used by, or directly benefit, the Government of Zimbabwe to buy votes or intimidate voters ahead of elections. All U.S. programming to Zimbabwe undergoes thorough vetting and monitoring. I am committed to ensuring that our assistance is directed at the people of Zimbabwe, not the Government.

Question. As U.S. Ambassador, if confirmed, how will you engage in public diplomacy efforts to continue messaging of U.S. support to the Zimbabwean people, demonstrated largely through the U.S.' significant contribution of humanitarian and development assistance to Zimbabwe?

Answer. If confirmed, I will work with Country Team members to ensure that officers highlight U.S. humanitarian and development assistance contributions while on site visits and travel outside of Harare. The U.S. Mission's communications strategy engages print, radio, and social media to reach a diverse audience. Targeted messaging will continue to highlight the U.S. contribution to development and health outcomes in Zimbabwe. This targeted messaging is both time-responsive and authentic to U.S. policy and values.

Question. As U.S. Ambassador, if confirmed, what will your approach be to supporting the USAID Mission, USAID staff, and USAID implementing partners across sectors, to conduct their work in support of the Zimbabwean people, particularly as conditions for such work may deteriorate in the lead-up and aftermath of Zimbabwe's elections later this year.

Answer. If confirmed, I will begin my tenure with outreach, acknowledgement, and support for the work of my USAID colleagues and implementing partners. Civil society actors in Zimbabwe have borne the brunt of harassment and scrutiny in recent years and face the prospect of increased government interference with pending legislation. I will support the USAID Mission in their efforts to serve at-risk groups and communities. In addition, I remain committed to actively working to support

the democratic aspirations of those advocating for Zimbabweans' constitutional rights and the transparency of electoral processes, and I will seek partnership with all those in Zimbabwe who are doing the same.

Question. As U.S. Ambassador, if confirmed, how will you ensure that the Embassy, USAID and other U.S. efforts related to Zimbabwe's upcoming elections, including those funded by the National Endowment for Democracy, are in sync and contributing to a unified effort from the United States?

Answer. If confirmed, I will work to align all U.S. election-related programming and outreach and to coordinate with like-minded partners. To execute this effort, I will ensure Front Office participation at Elections Working Group meetings. Regular updates from the Working Group, particularly around challenges faced by program implementers, will inform Embassy diplomatic engagement with the Government of Zimbabwe. As the elections near, we will integrate lessons learned from implementers in the Working Group and coordinate the Embassy's election observation mission with implementers and like-minded partners.

Question. Do you commit to keeping Congress apprised of harassment experienced by U.S. citizens, and U.S. organizations and implementing partners in Zimbabwe by Zimbabwean officials, political parties, security services or other entities ahead of and following elections expected later this year?

Answer. Yes. I will keep the relevant Congressional Committees apprised, as appropriate, in coordination with the Bureau of Legislative Affairs.

Question. In the State Department's 2022 Trafficking in Persons Report, Zimbabwe remained on the Tier 2 Watch List for the second consecutive year for not fully meeting the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking but is making significant efforts to do so. If confirmed, what concrete steps could you take to help Zimbabwe operationalize the prioritized recommendations contained in the TIP report?

Answer. If confirmed, I will vigorously engage the Government of Zimbabwe to make significant efforts to meet the Minimum Standards for the Elimination of Trafficking and encourage partnership with civil society to address this crime. In particular, I will offer the Embassy's guidance and regularly highlight the recommendations of the 2022 TIP Report, including formally launching and implementing the 2022–2026 National Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons with dedicated resources, amending Zimbabwe's anti-trafficking law to criminalize all forms of trafficking in persons, and expediting the prosecution of trafficking to address significant court backlogs. I commit to coordinating closely with the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons and report accurate information on human trafficking for the annual TIP Report.

Question. In the State Department's 2022 International Religious Freedom report indicated that Zimbabwe had curtailed some freedom of religion and assembly. What is your assessment of this religious freedom in Zimbabwe and if confirmed, how will you work with the Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom to bolster religious freedom in-country?

Answer. Zimbabwe's constitution prohibits discrimination based on religious belief and provides for freedom of religion, including the freedom to practice, propagate, and give expression to one's religion, in public or in private, alone or with others. Embassy Harare enjoys strong partnerships with key Christian, Jewish, and Muslim organizations and leaders. If confirmed, I commit to working closely with the Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom to engage faith communities and the Government of Zimbabwe on issues of religious freedom, religious tolerance, and the role of faith communities in supporting political reconciliation and national healing.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to personally engaging with civil society on this issue?

Answer. Yes.

Question. If confirmed, what concrete steps can you take to help Zimbabwe increase their societal and governmental respect for religious freedom?

Answer. If confirmed, I will publicly and privately engage with actors of all faiths, including the Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations and the Zimbabwe Interreligious Council, which is now an official body that seeks to promote peace, reconciliation, good governance, and holistic human development through interfaith action and collaboration. I will seek to support effective interfaith work underway in Zimbabwe and amplify the voices of faith leaders calling for tolerance, religious

freedom, human rights, and social cohesion. I intend to build on the work of the Embassy team who have engaged and partnered with diverse religious leaders working to end child marriage and gender-based violence, who have modeled and promoted vaccination in the face of Covid-19 and measles outbreaks, and who have promoted constitutionalism and democratic engagement among their communities.

Question. The State Department's 2021 Human Rights Report indicated that Zimbabwe continues to have significant human rights abuses including unlawful or arbitrary detention by security forces, political prisoners, restrictions on freedom of movement and widespread corruption and impunity. How will you direct your Embassy to work with civil society organizations to improve the human rights situation on the ground?

Answer. If confirmed, I will encourage Embassy sections to seek out additional programmatic assistance from Washington offices to bolster the respect for human rights, and for independent media and other civil society groups to engage in monitoring, reporting, training, human rights support, and advocacy. My team and I will meet regularly with human rights defenders and civil society organizations to understand the latest trends. Where available, I will support efforts to continue U.S. programming for human rights advocacy and legal support, particularly as civic and political space continues to close.

Question. If confirmed, how will you direct your Embassy to work with the Government to improve the human rights situation on the ground?

Answer. If confirmed, I will direct the Embassy to engage key interlocutors in the Government of Zimbabwe in urging respect for human rights, and I will raise our concerns in my bilateral meetings, reminding them that the protection of human rights around the world is central to U.S. foreign policy. I will direct the Embassy team to identify and seek ways to engage with government actors who may be more supportive of reforms and oriented toward inclusive development and for ways to hold those responsible for human rights violations and abuses accountable. I will also encourage Washington offices to publicly call out instances of human rights abuses,

Question. Many U.S. Missions have been under enormous stress over the last several years, in large part due to COVID. What is your understanding of morale throughout Mission Harare?

Answer. I understand that Mission Harare enjoys broadly positive morale, where staff members understand their roles and contributions, see the effects of their work, and feel appreciated. This is a testament to a dedicated team and the strong and collaborative leadership exhibited by the current Chargé d'Affaires and her predecessors. I am a strong believer in high morale as a force multiplier, and, if confirmed, I look forward to doing what I can to boost morale in Harare.

Question. How do you intend to improve morale at Mission Harare?

Answer. If confirmed, I intend to build on Mission Harare's existing systems and successes. I will show through my words and actions that every employee—regardless of nationality, role, or employment mechanism—is valued and vital to our Mission's success. I manage through discussion, engagement, and visiting my teams' spaces. I intend to set a clear vision for the Mission, and to empower our teams to help define our collective strategies and objectives to ensure awareness, buy-in, and ownership. I also intend to understand the Mission's performance on meeting internal support service standards and press for improvements to support our staff and families. Finally, I plan to ensure all employees have access to mentoring and professional development and will continue the practice of using personal resources to host employees at my residence to celebrate special events and build comradery.

Question. How do you intend to create a unified mission and vision at Mission Harare?

Answer. If confirmed, I will lay out to Mission Harare a vision that emphasizes the opportunity and the vital role of each Mission element and staff-member. I will apply the Integrated Country Strategy (ICS) produced collaboratively by the Mission and engage each Section and Agency to emphasize our shared objectives. In so doing, I will listen to and learn about their existing and envisioned contributions to the ICS, and I will challenge them to share information proactively and seek synergies with other mission elements to advance shared objectives. I will challenge the Embassy team to develop action plans for sections and agencies to work complementarily toward achieving ambitious-yet-achievable tangible results.

Question. How do you intend to improve morale at Mission Harare?

Answer. If confirmed, I intend to build on Mission Harare's existing systems and successes. I will show through my words and actions that every employee—regardless of nationality, role, or employment mechanism—is valued and vital to our Mission's success. I manage through discussion, engagement, and visiting my teams' spaces. I intend to set a clear vision for the Mission, and to empower our teams to help define our collective strategies and objectives to ensure awareness, buy-in, and ownership. I also intend to understand the Mission's performance on meeting internal support service standards and press for improvements where they are missed to support our staff and families. Finally, I plan to ensure all employees have access to mentoring and professional development and will continue the practice of using personal resources to host employees at my residence to celebrate special events and build comradery.

Question. Management is a key responsibility for Chiefs of Mission. How would you describe your management style?

Answer. Over the course of my career, I have relied heavily on the components of consultative and servant leadership, and I believe this approach to be the most beneficial in delivering a positive work environment and tangible achievements for the Mission team, for USG policy priorities, and for the American people. I believe leaders carry the mantle of outlining a vision, based on consultation, and in the creation of a management environment that values and rewards innovation, bold thinking, and achievement. I believe strongly that accessibility, approachability, and active listening are the key components of success. I also believe in rigorous management of U.S. Government resources and fair application of rules and regulations.

Question. Do you believe it is ever acceptable or constructive to berate subordinates, either in public or in private?

Answer. No.

Question. How do you envision your relationship with the Deputy Chief of Mission?

Answer. Leadership is a true team effort, and the relationship between a Chief of Mission and Deputy Chief of Mission depends heavily on trust, open communication, and a shared approach and vision. As a three-time DCM, I know that collaborative and consultative leadership requires the DCM to speak openly and honestly on issues facing the Mission, both in policy and operational terms. I will invest my support and trust to my DCM and ensure that our Mission team understands we speak with one voice on issues facing the community and our policy priorities. Essential for the success of that approach is a professional relationship where honest and open dialogue forms the foundation.

Question. If confirmed, what leadership responsibilities do you intend to entrust to your Deputy Chief of Mission?

Answer. Though the ultimate responsibility for defining leadership rests on the shoulders of the Chief of Mission, sharing of responsibilities is vital as we look to develop the next generation of Foreign Service Officers. I intend to partner fully with my DCM to define and deliver the type of collaborative leadership that creates a professional environment most conducive to professional growth and achievement. Leadership at its core is a team sport, and effective communication is vital. I plan to entrust to her entirely the role of Chief Operating Officer.

Question. In order to create and continue employee excellence at the Department, accurate and direct employee evaluation reports (EERs) for Foreign Service Officers are imperative, though often lacking. Do you believe that it is important to provide employees with accurate, constructive feedback on their performance in order to encourage improvement and reward those who most succeed in their roles?

Answer. I believe constructive feedback is critical to achieve our common Mission goals and to shape and prepare the next generation of Foreign Service professionals to lead and succeed. Over my years of service, I have used constructive and clear feedback and discussion with employees at all levels to improve performance, establish new targets for achievement, and create opportunity. A vital component of constructive feedback is also the ability to identify, cite, and recognize achievement through awards, promotions, and recognition.

Question. If confirmed, would you support and encourage clear, accurate, and direct feedback to employees in order to improve performance and reward high achievers?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit fully to supporting and encouraging clear, accurate and direct feedback. I have found this to be a critical skill as I have assumed

roles of greater responsibility throughout my nearly 31-year career with the State Department.

Question. It is imperative that U.S. diplomats get outside of posts abroad to meet with local actors, including host government officials, non-government organizations, and local citizens. In your experience, do U.S. diplomats get outside of our Embassy walls enough to fully accomplish their missions?

Answer. I believe that the key imperative for our diplomats posted overseas is to get to know the country of assignment as thoroughly as possible, and that cannot be done adequately by remaining in the office. Engagement, relationship-building, and understanding is only possible through personal contact and experience. Diplomacy is a full-contact sport. If confirmed, I will make this approach a priority for myself and my team, because when we know and understand our environment, we can most faithfully execute on our goals.

Question. How do you intend to improve the ability of U.S. diplomats to better access all local populations?

Answer. If confirmed, I will work closely with the Regional Security Officer and team at Post to ensure that the staff at Embassy Harare have the means and resources to safely travel and access all local populations to further U.S. priorities. I will always seek to balance the importance of person-to-person engagements with the safety of my staff.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO PAMELA M. TREMONT BY SENATOR MARCO RUBIO

Question. In May, Secretary Blinken said that the People's Republic of China is the "only country with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do it." The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) clearly holds all the reins of power in the People's Republic of China and has used this power to commit genocide in Xinjiang, flood our communities with fentanyl, and emit by far the largest quantity of greenhouse gases. As we speak, the Party is cracking down on unprecedented student protests across the country. With their absolute control of Chinese society and industry, the CCP could stop all of these destructive actions tomorrow if they so choose. Is the Chinese Communist Party a threat to the United States?

Answer. Yes, the activities of the People's Republic of China (PRC) and Chinese Communist Party (CCP) represent a significant challenge to U.S. economic, political, and security interests globally and in the Africa region. Under President Xi, the PRC has become more repressive at home and more assertive abroad. We will defend and strengthen U.S. national security, prosperity, and values; defend international law and agreements and the other principles and institutions that maintain peace and security; and protect the rights of individuals and sovereign nations.

Question. Does the Chinese Communist Party undertake any activities that are beneficial to U.S. interests?

Answer. We are committed to working with Beijing only if it secures American jobs, American values, and our way of life for future generations. Issues like climate change, the global drug trade, and COVID-19 are the very issues that directly threaten our prosperity and security. PRC contributions should be scrutinized, however, to ensure they are not a springboard for narrow PRC economic interests.

If confirmed, I will also work with the Department of State's new Office of China Coordination to advance U.S. objectives and counter harmful behavior by the PRC and other actors in the Zimbabwe context. This new office, inaugurated immediately following the U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit, brings together a group of China experts from throughout the Department and beyond to work more effectively with colleagues from every regional bureau and experts in international security, economics, technology, multilateral diplomacy, and strategic communications. In addition, I will direct the members of post's PRC working group to work closely with the Regional China Officer based in Abidjan.

Question. Do you believe that there are any areas within which the Chinese Communist Party would constructively work with the United States in good faith?

Answer. The United States will engage constructively with the PRC when it is in our interest to do so in Zimbabwe. For example, issues like food security, global health, climate change, the global drug trade, and COVID-19 are the very issues that directly threaten our prosperity and security, and that of Zimbabwe. If con-

firmed, on climate change issues, I will be a staunch advocate for U.S. companies over PRC firms as the Government seeks renewable energy solutions to ameliorate the impact of climate change in Zimbabwe.

Question. If confirmed, will you approve any joint activity with organizations or representatives from the People's Republic of China in the countries, or organizations in which you will work?

Answer. If confirmed, I will consult Department guidance on engagement with PRC organizations or representatives to work together when it is in U.S. interests to do so.

Question. Over the last several decades, diplomatic relations between the U.S. and Zimbabwe have been strained due to serious concerns over patterns of undemocratic governance, political repression, human rights violations, and corruption by Zimbabwe's dominant political party, ZANU-PF. The U.S. has imposed targeted sanctions against Zimbabwean officials for continued politically motivated violence, public corruption, and breakdown of the rule of law. The next Ambassador will be tasked to confront the longstanding challenge of engaging with an authoritarian government that has not reformed, despite international and domestic pressure, and relations with the U.S. and Western governments do not appear unlikely to improve over the horizon. Given the challenging relationship with Zimbabwe, what would be your top policy goal with Zimbabwe, if confirmed?

Answer. If confirmed, my top policy goals in Zimbabwe will align with the Embassy's Integrated Country Strategy, which calls for promoting improved accountable, democratic governance that serves an engaged citizenry and respects fundamental human rights; a market-oriented economy that provides broad-based economic growth and an opportunity for all Zimbabweans to prosper; and improved health and well-being of Zimbabwean citizens.

Question. How would you counter claims by the CCP that U.S. sanctions unfairly target the Zimbabwean people?

Answer. If confirmed, I will engage publicly and privately with interlocutors about U.S. sanctions to dispel myths and set the record straight for the people of Zimbabwe. As Ambassador, I will use my voice and office to reinforce the message that U.S. sanctions are targeted against human rights abusers and corrupt individuals and entities to prevent them from utilizing U.S. banks and institutions for their ill-gotten gains. I will highlight updates to our sanctions list, including the removal of individuals and entities from the list so that the public can see the sanctions can and are lifted when malign activity ceases. I would also highlight corruption and failed economic policies as the root causes of Zimbabwe's economic problems.

Question. The CCP recently gifted Zimbabwe a parliament building and exported advanced surveillance equipment to the country. How will you counter the CCP's influence in Zimbabwe, if confirmed?

Answer. If confirmed, I will draw on the long history of U.S. support for the people of Zimbabwe. Since 1980, the United States has provided more than \$4.5 billion in assistance to Zimbabwe, with the bulk of it directed to life-saving health and food support, as well as education and defense of democracy. In the last 20 years, U.S. assistance has helped extend the life expectancy of Zimbabweans by 17 years, from 44 years to 61 years, and I believe the Zimbabwean people recognize that PRC influence in Zimbabwe does not benefit them. I hope to travel frequently and meet as many Zimbabweans as possible to model our values and provide contrast to those of Beijing, and I will amplify the steadfast support the United States has provided to the people of Zimbabwe.

I will draw from experiences in countering the PRC's influence in previous assignments. For example, as Deputy Chief of Mission and Chargé in Stockholm, my team worked closely with the Swedish Government to develop investment screening legislation based on the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States. Our work highlighting the PRC's human rights abuses contributed to Swedes having the strongest disapproval rates of the PRC of any country in the world, except for Japan, according to a Pew poll. As Deputy Chief of Mission in Kyiv, our Mission worked with Washington and the private sector to discourage the sale of a Ukrainian defense parastatal to a PRC company. If confirmed, I will likewise highlight the risks associated with PRC influence and investment in Zimbabwe.

Question. What steps will you take to identify projects with Zimbabwean officials and the Development Finance Corporation regarding opportunities for U.S. companies to compete with CCP funded projects?

Answer. It is my understanding that since 2021, the Development Finance Corporation agreed to not conduct programming in Zimbabwe directly with the Government of Zimbabwe or in a way that will indirectly benefit the regime. If confirmed, I look forward to exploring opportunities for U.S. companies to invest in Zimbabwe in ways that do not benefit the Government of Zimbabwe or the regime and remain consistent with U.S. sanctions.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO PAMELA M. TREMONT BY SENATOR BILL HAGERTY

Combating Anti-Israel bias in the African Union and Other International Forums

As you know, on February 18, 2023, an Israeli diplomat who was an accredited observer with an entry tag was expelled from the opening ceremony of the African Union summit. In the following days, the African Union Commission Chief stated that Israel's observer status that the bloc has been suspended. These actions are part of a larger effort to delegitimize Israel by states driven by hatred. Just as biased targeting of Israel at the United Nations is a grave concern, anti-Israel actions and rhetoric in other international forums also cannot be ignored. Indeed, what happened to Israel at the AU Summit is reprehensible and unacceptable.

Question. If confirmed, what would you do to address this problem?

Answer. AU Commission Chairperson Moussa Faki Mahamat accepted credentials of the Israeli Ambassador in 2021. However, this decision was challenged by some AU member states, as permitted by the AU Constitutive Act. The AU then established a Heads of State Committee to consult on the accreditation issue with plans to report back at the 2023 AU Summit. Faki's acceptance of Israel and its observer status are on hold pending his receipt of the committee's recommendation.

According to the AU, AU Chairperson Faki's staff convened the Israeli delegation in advance of the AU Summit to ask that the delegation not attend the event, because the committee had not yet made a final decision. Israeli Deputy Director General (DDG) of the Africa Division of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA,) Sharon Bar-li, decided to attend the AU Assembly opening ceremony on February 18 and was subsequently escorted out by AU security.

A/S Phee raised the issue with both Chairperson Faki and Bar-li at the AU Summit in Addis. We are working with Israel and the AU to determine the best way to continue advancing Israel's relationship with the AU after this setback.

Question. What would you do to engage with foreign governments and ensure that Israel is not unfairly targeted, but rather included in future African Union summits and other regional and international forums?

Answer. If confirmed, I plan to advocate for the important role Israel plays on the continent with Zimbabwean counterparts and work closely with the U.S. Mission to the African Union to continue advancing Israel's relationship with the AU. By harnessing our strong relationships with member states across Africa, we can and should elevate Israel as an important partner to the African Union.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED
TO HON. RICHARD MILLS, JR. BY SENATOR ROBERT MENENDEZ

In your confirmation hearing you congratulated "president-elect" Bola Tinubu; however preliminary statements from elections missions including Yiaga Africa, the Joint National Democratic Institute/International Republican Institute Joint International Observer Mission, and the European Union Election Observation Mission pointed to serious irregularities and shortcomings in the administration of elections.

Question. How would you assess the overall performance of the Independent National Electoral Commissions administration of elections?

Answer. Nigeria's Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) undertook extensive preparations in advance of Nigeria's February 25 elections, which included updating and expanding the roll of registered voters and organizing elections at 176,846 polling units across Nigeria. It did so amid significant insecurity and nation-wide shortages of naira currency and fuel. Voting generally took place in an orderly manner and although a Parallel Vote Tabulation (PVT) showed inconsistencies

in two states, nation-wide results of the PVT closely tracked nation-wide official results—as did the state-level results in all 35 of the other 37 states. However, INEC experienced significant challenges during the electoral process and struggled to meet citizens' expectations on Election Day. These included significant logistics issues—exacerbated by naira currency and fuel shortages—and technical shortcomings of a results viewing platform which served as a secondary means for transmitting results; the official results of Nigerian elections are still transmitted on paper. The United States has joined other observers in urging the electoral commission to increase transparency and improve in the areas needing most attention ahead of Nigeria's March 11 state elections. The United States has also urged restraint on the part of political parties and their supporters in reacting to the results and for the parties to rely on the courts to settle any disputes about the outcome of the election. The Mission anticipates that political parties will take their grievances to the Court of Appeal—the relevant legal forum for challenges in presidential elections—in the coming days. Bola Tinubu, who received a certificate of return from Nigeria's Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) declaring him the president-elect, endorsed his competitors' recourse to the legal process regarding challenges.

Question. Are the preliminary findings of various election observation missions credible?

Answer. The United States finds the preliminary findings of international and Nigerian election observers to be credible and generally consistent with U.S. observations of the February 25 election. Observers noted that voting generally occurred in an orderly manner and without interference by security forces. Common Election Day challenges identified by observers included reports of widespread delayed poll openings, long lines, and overcrowding, which in some cases impeded the secrecy of the ballot, and delays in the uploading of scanned tally sheets into a public results viewing portal. Various observer groups noted that naira currency and fuel shortages contributed to logistics challenges. Some observers noted challenges in the lead up to the elections, including with voter registration and voter card distribution, and a broader environment marked by insecurity, disinformation, and allegations of vote buying. We noted with concern reports that numerous members of the media were attacked during the course of the election, and we urged the Government, security forces, political actors, and all citizens to respect the media's critical role by refraining from any damaging acts against them and ensuring accountability for such acts when they do occur. Apart from the technologies newly used in nation-wide elections, the challenges identified by observers were largely consistent with challenges observed during previous Nigerian election cycles.

Question. What information do you have that the irregularities reported by observers did not affect the elections outcome?

Answer. The results of a Parallel Vote Tabulation (PVT) conducted by Yiaga Africa, a civil society organization which deployed 3,014 citizen observers to randomly selected polling units across all 36 of Nigeria's states and the Federal Capital Territory, found inconsistencies in two of Nigeria's states. While these inconsistencies are of concern, they were not sufficient to affect overall nation-wide results. Nation-wide official presidential results closely tracked the results of this PVT, as they showed that Bola Tinubu won 36.6 percent of nation-wide votes, while Atiku Abubakar received 29.1 percent, and Peter Obi received 25.4 percent. Yiaga Africa's PVT similarly showed that Tinubu would receive between 33.4 percent and 37.4 percent of the vote; that Atiku would receive between 28.3 percent and 31.1 percent of the vote; and Obi would receive between 24.2 percent and 28.4 percent of the vote.

By all indications, Nigeria's elections were highly competitive. Each of the top three presidential candidates was the leading vote-getter in twelve states, a remarkable first in Nigeria's modern political era, reflecting the diversity of views that characterized the campaign and the wishes of Nigeria's voters. Opposition presidential candidates collectively won 64% of the vote and also won the vote in twelve states where the ruling party holds the governorship. In the National Assembly elections conducted simultaneously, even with many results still being tabulated, opposition parties that had previously had little or no representation have already won numerous seats.

Insecurity impacts Nigerians living in various part of the country. While banditry, political violence and terrorism are persistent and growing problems for Nigerians in more than one region, perhaps most well-known are continuing threats from Boko Haram and ISIS West Africa Province in the northeastern region. Successive U.S. administrations have supported military sales of a variety of air platforms as one way to help Nigeria defeat

Boko Haram, though it's unclear whether air power alone will defeat the organizations. And the human rights track record of the Nigerian military is questionable. In December, Reuters ran a series of articles that alleged numerous abuses by the military including a decade plus secret mass abortion program, in its war against Boko Haram.

Question. What are the major constraints to military effectiveness in northeastern Nigeria?

Answer. The security situation in Northeast Nigeria is highly complex, with a decade-long conflict against Boko Haram and ISIS-WA. The Nigerian military leadership understands the limits of military action generally and air power specifically to end permanently the root causes of the conflict. ISIS-WA and Boko Haram will only be permanently displaced by a combination of good governance, provision of services, and the rule of law. Military forces must provide the Nigerian Government the space to do that. The military itself faces capacity and human resource limits, particularly in terms of intelligence, targeting, holding territory, and civil military relations. U.S. programs address these issues through training and capacity building. We also support the holistic response, which both the Nigerian Government and the United States is required, through support from USAID to strengthen civil society institutions, not only in the Northeast but throughout the country.

Question. Upon what analysis is your answer based? Has the interagency discussed these constraints and is there consensus among the interagency as to these constraints?

Answer. Our Embassy in Nigeria has regular contact with the Nigerian military. All assistance includes monitoring, evaluation, and after-action reviews of the military's operations, all of which informs the U.S. Government assessment of the Nigerian military's effectiveness. We also rely on the vibrant Nigerian civil society and research community, as well as international organizations and think tanks for information and assessments on Nigerian military effectiveness. The interagency discusses these constraints frequently through both formal and informal mechanisms, through working groups in Embassy Abuja, and in various fora with like-minded partners. There is consensus that the response in Northeast Nigeria requires a holistic approach and that the military can only provide the secure space to allow for improvements in governance, the provision of services, and respect for human rights and the rule of law.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit requesting a sense of the community related to the major constraints to military effectiveness in northeast Nigeria?

Answer. We rely on the community to continually inform our view of the military effectiveness in northeastern Nigeria and constraints to the military's capabilities. Mission Nigeria regularly conveys information to the community that it gathers through our many partners and engagements with civil society. If confirmed, I commit to continuing to use this information, requesting updates from the community as needed, and engaging new partners as available.

Question. Should the United States be contemplating arms sales to Nigeria given the current allegations?

Answer. For now, future arms sales should be considered in the light of the current allegations and the eventual results of Nigerian Human Rights Commission's investigation into the deeply concerning allegations in the Reuters articles.

Arms sales, however, are only one component, albeit an important one, of how we help the Nigerians improve their security forces, and human rights considerations are part of every arms transfer decision. All arms sales are made on a case-by-case basis, but U.S. Foreign Military Sales employ a complete package approach that includes training, maintenance, and—in the case of Nigeria—capacity building designed to improve the military's commitment to the rules of war, respect for human rights, and abilities to prevent civilian casualties. This capacity building has brought meaningful improvements. The Nigerian Air Force has taken several steps in recent years to reduce the potential for civilian harm as a result of air operations. It has done so by applying lessons learned, implementing new policies and doctrine, and undertaking new programs, equipment, and training. An "Air-to-Ground Integration" (AGI) program provides training and equipment to establish specialist teams linking air and ground units to improve tactics, techniques and procedures for close air support, improve target selection and identification, and mitigate civilian harm. It includes training on the Law of Armed Conflict and civilian harm mitigation. Also noteworthy is the recent arrival of a military justice advisor to be embedded within the Nigerian defense ministry, an outcome of the access, trust, and

relationships built through ongoing U.S. training, equipment, and capacity building programs.

Question. If confirmed, what steps will you take to support accountability for human rights abuses by the Nigerian military?

Answer. I know that consistent engagement at the highest levels of the Nigerian Government is a vital tool to ensure accountability. Regarding the allegations made in the Reuters reports, U.S. officials in both Washington and Abuja have engaged at the highest levels of the Nigerian Government to encourage them to conduct a thorough, transparent investigation and hold accountable any who are responsible for human rights violations and abuses. The United States has also encouraged them to engage impartial international voices in their effort. This engagement has seen results as the Nigerian Government has committed to supporting the investigation by the Nigeria National Human Rights Commission. The Chief of Defense Staff publicly pledged to support the investigation and make any military personnel available that the Commission requests. If confirmed, I would continue to engage with the highest levels of the Nigerian Government while, at the same time, supporting my team's efforts to engage with local interlocutors in the northeast. If the National Human Rights Commission does find evidence substantiating these allegations, I would press the Nigerian Government to use its full authorities to ensure human rights violators face prosecution to the fullest extent of the law and would explore pursuing possible visa restrictions or financial sanctions against those committing gross violations of human rights.

According to Transparency International's 2022 Corruption Perceptions Index. The Index also found that 43% of respondents thought corruption had increased in the previous 12 months, and 44% of public service users who responded had paid a bribe.

Question. How much does corruption cost the Nigerian economy every year?

Answer. Corruption costs the Nigerian economy billions of dollars each year. Yiaga Africa released a report in 2021 stating that Nigeria has lost at least \$582 billion since the country's independence in 1960, due to endemic corruption. Lax regulatory oversight and ad hoc implementation of rules and regulations have created conditions for criminal actors to operate with impunity in many instances. Case in point is the oil and gas sector where poor oversight has led to hundreds of thousands of barrels per day of oil lost to crude oil theft, decreasing the country's key source of foreign exchange. Corruption is a serious blight on the nation's development and one of the main impediments to lifting the majority of Nigerians out of poverty. The Nigerian economy also loses an untold sum due to the perception of corruption that keeps international investors from entering the Nigerian market.

Question. What programs and activities is the U.S. currently supporting to combat corruption?

Answer. U.S. interagency efforts support the return of millions of dollars stolen by corrupt Nigerian officials and ensure those funds are used for health, infrastructure, and other projects that benefit the Nigerian people. We work to strengthen civil society efforts to hold the Government accountable for public resources. The U.S. partners with select Nigerian states which have demonstrated political commitment to improve transparency and accountability in public financial management. And we are working to help address petty corruption by the police—the most common corruption Nigerians face in their daily lives.

Question. If confirmed, what steps will you take to help combat corruption in Nigeria?

Answer. If confirmed, I will place anti-corruption efforts at the heart of my conversations with Nigerian businesspeople, government officials, and civil society organizations. My experience as Ambassador to Armenia highlighted the resonance of the U.S. Government amplifying the voices of Armenians working to stop corruption, rather than allowing the issue to be viewed as a “demand” from outside the country itself. Additionally, I will direct Mission personnel to help advocate for an investment environment in Nigeria that is sound for U.S. businesses and corporations. Nigeria represents a huge potential market for U.S. investment, and it would be tragic to continue to lose ground in this space to adversaries such as China who are known to be apt to take advantage of economic and societal vulnerabilities in countries with weaker safeguards.

Nigeria is beginning a new oil and gas project for the first time in Northern Nigeria. The Nigerian Government has urged its energy sector and inter-

national oil companies to adopt voluntary principles on security and human rights within the sector.

Question. As a multi-stakeholder initiative aimed at protecting the human rights of those impacted by oil prospecting, how will the U.S. work to reinforce human rights within Nigeria's energy sector and avoid the environmental degradation we have seen in places like the Niger Delta?

Answer. Nigeria's Petroleum Industry Act (PIA) signed in 2021 heavily relied on USG technical assistance for its completion. If confirmed, I will direct my team to continue to engage with the new regulatory entities the PIA created, on various facets of its implementation. We will work with these entities together with other international partners to explore opportunities for technical and other forms of assistance to address environmental degradation and other ecological threats as well as protecting communities within the oil producing regions. I understand that scientists from the EPA also have previously worked with Nigeria's Federal Ministry of Environment and the National Oil Spill Detection and Response Agency (NOSDRA) to provide training on best practices on oil spill prevention, response, and remediation, and I would hope to continue those efforts.

Question. In your view, what non-military investments should the U.S. pursue to address insecurity and banditry in Nigeria. How will your Embassy utilize peacebuilding efforts to enhance safety and reduce violence in Nigeria?

Answer. The United States is bringing a full range of interagency tools to the security challenges in Nigeria to strengthen local governance and services and support community conflict mitigation, issues that are the underlying root causes of the insecurity in the country. We are working to improve law enforcement and access to justice, border control, counterterrorism efforts as well as anti-money laundering and combatting the funding of terrorists, aviation security and the collection of biometrics.

USAID will continue to train respected local leaders to better mediate conflicts and build peace, efforts that have already successfully reduced violent conflict in parts of Nigeria. USAID and other USG colleagues continue to engage with Nigerian interlocutors on opportunities for investment in areas severely affected by insecurity and banditry. These engagements have uncovered the need for support to boost literacy and education rates and enhance agriculture activity to secure the livelihoods of those living in the affected communities. The Nigerian Government has also touted ranching as a means of lessening potentially deadly confrontations between sedentary farmers and herders seeking food sources for their cattle. If confirmed, I will continue to use the full range of engagements with Nigerian Government counterparts, communities, civil society, and private citizens to identify areas where we can get the most out of USG investment.

Democracy & Human Rights

Question. What are the most important actions you have taken in your career to date to support democracy and human rights? What has been the impact of your actions?

Answer. Work in support of human rights and democracy building has been a significant part of my career. As the human rights officer at U.S. Consulate St. Petersburg on my second tour, I helped build relationships between U.S. human rights groups and Russian counterparts newly formed in the aftermath of communism's collapse, as well as monitored the effectiveness of U.S. financial and technical support to local human rights groups. At U.S. Embassy Baghdad, I served as the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor's (DRL) Senior Democracy Advisor, managing DRL's programs to build democratic infrastructure and institutions in Iraq, as well as directing DRL's support to the Iraqi national election in 2009.

My work leading U.S. Embassy Yerevan's efforts to counter corruption and strengthen civil society in Armenia had the most significant impact of my work thus far. Early in my tenure in Yerevan, the Embassy made bolstering Armenian voices and civil society groups campaigning against corruption a top priority. Drawing on the expertise of our Department of Justice office, as well as USAID and public affairs teams, the Embassy worked with local Armenian groups to create a list of needed anti-corruption legislation and reforms, developed a program of technical support for anti-corruption groups to amplify their messaging, and adopted an aggressive Embassy public messaging campaign to call out specific cases of corruption and identify corruption's cost in lost foreign investment. Within two years, Armenia's Velvet Revolution took place, largely driven by public outrage over corruption, which brought in a new government committed to rooting out corruption and strengthening democracy. Among the new government's first actions was to propose

anti-corruption reforms that had been the centerpiece of civil society's requests. Many of the members of the new government were alumni and beneficiaries of the Embassy's anti-corruption and human rights programs. The Velvet Revolution was a "bottom up" result of the Armenian people's demand for change and democracy, but I do assess the efforts of Embassy Yerevan, over many years including my time there, played a significant part in marshalling the local leaders and ability to message to the public that allowed the Revolution to succeed.

Question. What issues are the most pressing challenges to democracy or democratic development in Nigeria? These challenges might include obstacles to participatory and accountable governance and institutions, rule of law, authentic political competition, civil society, human rights and press freedom. Please be as specific as possible.

Answer. Nigeria's democracy faces numerous challenges. Nigeria struggles to ensure the consistent application of the rule of law, which encourages impunity and creates openings for the rise of violent groups and criminal gangs to gain traction in many parts of Nigeria, threatening civilian populations. Security forces face allegations of human rights violations and abuses and those responsible are often not held to account in transparent and accessible proceedings. This lack of accountability for those responsible for human rights violations and abuses undercuts public trust in the Government. Weak rule of law also contributes to corruption, which undermines public trust in government institutions and public officials. Protectionist economic policies and a weak tax base stifle economic growth and impair the Government's ability to deliver essential services to citizens. Despite all of these and other challenges however, Nigeria's democracy also has many strengths, including a flourishing civil society and thriving independent media, and dynamism in some sectors of Nigeria's highly diversified economy.

Question. What steps will you take—if confirmed—to support democracy in Nigeria? What do you hope to accomplish through these actions? What are the potential impediments to addressing the specific obstacles you have identified?

Answer. The U.S.-Nigeria partnership is built on advancing shared democratic values to our countries' mutual benefit. If confirmed, strengthening necessary democratic institutions in Africa's largest democracy through our diplomatic and programmatic engagements, including through U.S. support to strengthen Nigeria's electoral system, will be a priority for me. Weak rule of law, corruption, and protectionist economic policies are likely to continue to remain obstacles but a focus on institution building along with a range of diplomatic tools can advance Nigeria's democratic path.

Question. How will you utilize U.S. Government assistance resources at your disposal, including the Democracy Commission Small Grants program and other sources of State Department and USAID funding, to support democracy and governance, and what will you prioritize in processes to administer such assistance?

Answer. If confirmed, I will utilize all available U.S. foreign assistance programs and tools to strengthen democracy and good governance in Nigeria. State Department and USAID resources are critical to achieving our policy goals and advancing our values in Nigeria. USAID works in close consultation with the Nigerian Government, civil society, local leaders, and citizens to prioritize its development goals for a peaceful and prosperous Nigeria. This multi-stakeholder approach fosters greater accountability and transparency in U.S. foreign assistance programs.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to meet with civil society members, human rights and other non-governmental organizations in the U.S. and with local human rights NGOs, and other members of civil society in Nigeria? What steps will you take to pro-actively address efforts to restrict or penalize NGOs and civil society via legal or regulatory measures?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to meeting with civil society members, human rights and other non-governmental organizations in the United States, and with local human rights NGOs and other members of civil society in Nigeria. Nigeria has a robust civil society and I understand the Embassy conducts such engagements regularly. I plan to build on their good work. I will advocate for unimpeded operation by NGOs and civil society, who do much to promote good governance and respect for human rights in Nigeria. I will advocate on their behalf privately and publicly should it be deemed helpful.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to meet with democratically oriented political opposition figures and parties? What steps will you take to encourage genuine

political competition? Will you advocate for access and inclusivity for women, minorities and youth within political parties?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to meet with democratically oriented political opposition figures and parties, not just in Abuja but across Nigeria. I will encourage political figures and parties to consider the equities of all Nigerians, represent the diversity of Nigeria's geographic, religious, and ethnic groups, and to run on platforms built on substance, not personality. As more political parties are elected to key offices in Nigeria's state and federal bodies, I commit to engaging with officials from all parties. I will advocate for access and inclusivity for women, people with disabilities, members of minority groups, and youth within political parties.

Question. Will you and your Embassy team actively engage with Nigeria on freedom of the press and address any government efforts designed to control or undermine press freedom through legal, regulatory or other measures? Will you commit to meeting regularly with independent, local press in Nigeria?

Answer. Nigeria has a vibrant and diverse press, and if confirmed, I commit to meeting and engaging regularly with independent, local press. A well-informed citizenry is required for a functioning democracy, so I support the continuation of current embassy and Department programs to educate and train journalists, and the expansion of such programs where appropriate and where resources are available. If confirmed, I will actively engage with the Nigerian Government to promote a free, independent press and I will advocate against any measures designed to control or undermine press freedom.

Question. Will you and your Embassy team actively engage with civil society and government counterparts on countering disinformation and propaganda disseminated by foreign state or non-state actors in the country?

Answer. I understand that Mission Nigeria works intensively and innovatively with civil society to educate editors, journalists, and the public on understanding, recognizing, and countering disinformation and propaganda. If confirmed, I will bring my own experience and learned lessons on countering state-sponsored disinformation in the UN system to help inform Mission Nigeria continuing activities. I would also engage government counterparts on these issues as appropriate.

Question. Will you and your Embassy teams actively engage with Nigeria on the right of labor groups to organize, including for independent trade unions?

Answer. Nigeria has a robust community of over 40 labor unions which actively organize to support the rights of their workers. I understand that Embassy staff engage the Nigerian Government on issues involving labor groups and their rights, and the Mission routinely engages with the top umbrella labor groups. If confirmed, I commit to engaging with Nigerian officials on the right of labor groups to organize.

Question. Will you commit to using your position, if confirmed, to defend the human rights and dignity of all people in Nigeria, no matter their sexual orientation or gender identity?

Answer. The U.S. is a leader in promoting the human rights of members of all marginalized communities, including members of the LGBTQI+ community. If confirmed, I will use my position to promote respect for the human rights and dignity of all Nigerians, no matter their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Question. What challenges do the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) people face in Nigeria?

Answer. The Same Sex Marriage Prohibition Act of 2015 criminalizes the LGBTQI+ community in Nigeria. On top of this, in the 12 states in northern Nigeria that adhere to sharia penal code, homosexuality is a crime with severe penalties. LGBTQI+ persons in Nigeria face harassment, threats, discrimination, and incidents of violence against them, many times from members of their own community, including close family. According to local NGOs, some 10 percent of abuses reported by LGBTQI+ persons in Nigeria involve state actors. Invasion of privacy, arbitrary arrest, and unlawful detention were the most common abuses perpetrated by state actors. Blackmail, extortion, assault, and battery were the most common abuses perpetrated by nonstate actors. LGBTQI+ persons also face stigma, discrimination, and barriers to accessing basic health care.

Question. What specifically will you commit to do to help LGBTQ people in Nigeria?

Answer. As Secretary Blinken has said, promoting and advancing respect for the human rights of LGBTQI+ persons is a foreign policy priority for this Administration. If confirmed, I will advocate for the human rights and dignity of all people in

Nigeria, including LGBTQI+ persons. I commit to meet with LGBTQI+ civil society members, to seek their guidance on how the U.S. Embassy can best support them, and to use our voice and resources to promote their rights and wellbeing.

Congressional Consultations

Question. Will you commit, if confirmed, to ensuring that you fully brief Members of Congress and/or their staff each time you are in Washington for visits or consultations during your tenure as Ambassador to Nigeria?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit, in coordination with the State Department's Bureau of Legislative Affairs, to promptly accommodate requests for briefings and for information by members of Congress, as appropriate.

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility

Question. How do you anticipate fostering diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility at the U.S. Embassy and Consulate in Nigeria?

Answer. If confirmed, I will ensure that our Mission creates the spaces for discussion and information-sharing about DEIA, both within the Embassy and with external interlocutors. With input from across our Embassy community, I will ensure that representatives from historically marginalized groups are included in Embassy events and as appropriate, when U.S. Government delegations visit. I will also encourage our managers to participate in DEIA initiatives to help enhance their leadership skills around fostering an open and inclusive environment for both our U.S. direct hire and Locally Employed Staff.

Question. What specifically will you do to prioritize and promote diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility, while also combating racism, discrimination, and inequality among locally employed staff in Nigeria?

Answer. Nigeria is home to 371 ethnic groups and that ethnic diversity can be found among our Locally Employed Staff as well. Coming from various cultures and backgrounds, our Locally Employed Staff provide a wealth of knowledge and diversity of ideas that has sustained the excellent operations of our Mission in a tough security and economic environment. If confirmed, I will make sure that we recruit and hire from the broadest and most diverse pool of candidates, that I empower our leaders across the mission to take reports of inequality and discrimination very seriously, and that our Locally Employed Staff are provided the environment in which they can be comfortable in raising these issues with their leaders, including me.

Question. In addition to focusing on diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility in our workforce, will you commit to engaging more equitably in operations and programming, particularly with potential partners and communities that traditionally have been marginalized, excluded, or underrepresented in ours and others' donor and partnership efforts? How do you anticipate utilizing local expertise, knowledge, and capacity to meet our foreign policy goals?

Answer. Our Mission is already doing excellent work in ensuring the State Department meets its DEIA goals in Nigeria. If confirmed, I will continue to build on that strong foundation by canvassing the perspectives of employees around the Mission to assess where we can improve on our DEIA commitments in our operations. Outside of the Mission, I will seek to learn from our Nigerian interlocutors about their needs and, with my team, assess how to best marry those needs with our policy goals to ensure the bilateral relationship goes from strength to strength.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED
TO HON. RICHARD MILLS, JR. BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

Question. What is your assessment of Nigeria's ongoing electoral process so far?

Answer. On February 25, Nigeria held general elections for the presidency and National Assembly. Each of the top three presidential candidates was the leading vote-getter in twelve states, a remarkable first in Nigeria's modern political era, reflecting the diversity of views that characterized the campaign and the wishes of Nigeria's voters. Opposition candidates collectively won 64% of the national vote and won the vote in twelve states where the ruling party holds the governorship. The results of a Parallel Vote Tabulation (PVT) conducted by Yiaga Africa, a civil society organization which deployed 3,014 citizen observers to randomly selected polling units across all 36 of Nigeria's states and the Federal Capital Territory, found inconsistencies in two of Nigeria's states but found that the overall official results—

as well as the state-level results in all 35 of the other states—closely tracked the results of their PVT. In the National Assembly elections conducted simultaneously, even with many results still unknown, opposition parties that had little or no representation have already won numerous seats.

International and Nigerian observers noted that voters experienced serious challenges during the electoral process. These included significant logistics issues—exacerbated by naira currency and fuel shortages—and technical shortcomings of a results viewing platform which was serving as a secondary means for transmitting results with the intention of increasing transparency; the official results of Nigerian elections are still transmitted on paper. The United States has joined other observers in urging the electoral commission to increase transparency and improve in the areas needing most attention ahead of Nigeria's March 11 state elections. The United States has also urged restraint on the part of political parties and their supporters in reacting to the results, and for the parties to rely on the courts to settle any disputes about the outcome of the election. The Mission anticipates that political parties will take their grievances to the Court of Appeal—the relevant legal forum for challenges in presidential elections—in the coming days. Bola Tinubu, who received a certificate of return from Nigeria's Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) declaring him the president-elect, endorsed his competitors' recourse to the legal process regarding challenges.

Question. What are some areas where the U.S. needs to engage our Nigerian partners following the announcement of the presidential result on March 1, 2021 and ahead of the state-level vote on March 11?

Answer. The United States is urging INEC to take additional steps to address widespread delayed poll openings and other logistics challenges experienced during the February 25 elections as well as the technology issues that led to delays in the uploading and electronic transmission of scanned tally sheets to the electoral commission's results viewing portal, a mechanism designed to promote public transparency to complement the official, hard-copy results. Finally, the United States is calling on INEC to proactively communicate with the public about the problems experienced during the February 25 polls and how it is working to address them ahead of the March 11 state elections. U.S. officials are also engaging the candidates and their party leadership, alongside diplomatic partners, to welcome and reinforce their mutual calls to eschew violence and pursue challenges through legal means, as well as encouraging senior Nigerian Government officials to continue their roles in calming the security environment in the runup to state-level elections for governor scheduled for March 11.

Question. Do you think it was premature to congratulate president-elect Bola Tinubu and the Nigerian people on the conduct and outcome of the February 25 election?

Answer. The United States recognizes Bola Tinubu as President-elect, in line with the official announcement of Nigeria's Independent National Electoral Commission made on March 1. This decision was also informed by the observations of international and domestic election observer missions, including the results of a Parallel Vote Tabulation process showing similar and statistically significant vote spreads consistent with nation-wide official results. Should candidates or parties choose to challenge the election outcome, which is their right under Nigerian law, we have urged them to do so through appropriate legal mechanisms. It is up to the Nigerian legal system to resolve any legal challenges in accordance with Nigerian constitution and law.

Question. In December, Reuters published a deeply troubling investigative piece on forced abortions and child killings by Nigeria's military. The Nigerian National Human Rights Commission has begun its investigation into the accusations, which the Nigerian Government has denied. As U.S. Ambassador, if confirmed, how will you engage the Nigerian Government and others on this process?

Answer. Since the deeply troubling Reuters pieces were published in December 2022, U.S. officials in Nigeria have contacted dozens of interlocutors who work in, or are familiar with, the Northeast part of the country where these allegations are alleged to have occurred. At the same time, officials in both Washington and Abuja have engaged at the highest levels of the Nigerian Government to encourage them to conduct a thorough, transparent investigation and hold accountable any who are responsible for human rights violations and abuses. They have also encouraged Nigerian authorities to engage impartial international voices as part of their effort to address the allegations. This U.S. engagement has seen results as the Nigerian Government has publicly committed to supporting an investigation by the Nigeria National Human Rights Commission. The Chief of Defense Staff publicly pledged to

support the investigation and make any military personnel available that the Commission requests. If confirmed, I would continue to engage with the highest levels of the Nigerian Government to press for a transparent, full investigation while, at the same time, supporting my team's efforts to engage with local interlocutors in the northeast. If the National Human Rights Commission does find evidence substantiating these allegations, I will press the Nigerian Government to use its full authorities to ensure human rights violators face prosecution to the fullest extent of the law and would explore pursuing possible visa restrictions or financial sanctions against those committing gross violations of human rights.

Question. Do you feel that the Nigerian National Human Rights Commission has the capacity, independence and political space to conduct a sufficiently thorough investigation of the claims made in the Reuters piece, particularly given the short timeline the Nigerian Government has discussed for completion of the investigation (late March/early April)?

Answer. My understanding is that the Nigerian National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has a mandate expected to last up to six months, with a final report due sometime this summer, although I understand we expect interim reports to be issued before then. Additionally, the NHRC has identified a series of individuals with reputable backgrounds and relevant experience to serve on this panel. The NHRC is considered a reputable, independent organization, and I understand U.S. officials have strongly advocated with the Nigerian Government to provide it with the necessary resources and support to conduct the investigation that these allegations warrant. The mission has also encouraged them to engage impartial international voices in their effort. Finally, as we encourage Nigeria to address allegations of human rights violations and abuses, it is important that we support the Nigerian Government and people in developing their own institutions with the capacity and credibility to respond as an effective Nigerian-led investigation, conducted by respected experts in relevant fields, as it will have greater credibility and its findings will have more acceptability with the Nigerian public than an "outside" investigation. If confirmed, I look forward to assisting, where appropriate, the investigations of the NHRC.

Question. I have been engaged in discussions with the Department over security assistance to Nigeria, considering both the acute security challenges Nigeria faces and the concerning human rights record of the Nigerian military. As U.S. Ambassador to Nigeria, if confirmed, how will you balance these considerations as you engage the Nigerian Government on security assistance and in combatting the insurgent threat posed by Boko Haram and other groups in the North East, and other security challenges across Nigeria?

Answer. I believe security assistance and human rights are inextricably linked as we help Nigeria face its security challenges throughout the country. We know that reported human rights violations and abuses, especially if the perpetrators are not held to account in transparent and accessible proceedings, erodes the trust the Nigerian Government needs to ultimately end security threats in the country. As ambassador, if confirmed, I will engage with the highest levels of the Nigerian Government to urge them to investigate credible accusations of human rights violations and abuses and hold those responsible to account. At the same time, security assistance is critical to help the Nigerian Government create a safe and secure environment for its citizens. Consistent with the Leahy Law, we will not provide security assistance to units if there is credible information indicating the unit or its members have committed a gross violation of human rights. I would continue to support assistance where appropriate, such as where we could help the Nigerians improve their technical capabilities and ability to mitigate civilian casualties while, at the same time, increase the professionalism of the Nigerian Armed Forces.

Question. In the State Department's 2022 Trafficking in Persons Report, Nigeria remained on Tier 2 for not fully meeting the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking but is making significant efforts to do so. If confirmed, what concrete steps could you take to help Nigeria operationalize the prioritized recommendations contained in the TIP report?

Answer. The Nigerian Government has demonstrated significant and increasing efforts and political will to combat human trafficking in recent years. In 2022, the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) made several updates to their Protocols, Strategic Framework, and National Plan to account for lapses found during the COVID pandemic and for the needs of more vulnerable populations. Other efforts include recent finalization of a protocol agreement with UNICEF to refer children identified in armed conflict to civilian authorities. Nigeria also enhanced training and screening for trafficking across the travel industry and

with social services agencies to identify and provide appropriate care for all those identified as victims. While there is political will, sustained U.S. and Mission Nigeria engagement on this issue will be critical to ensure successful implementation, as corruption and official complicity in trafficking crimes remain serious concerns. The Mission will continue to support NAPTIP's efforts through training and continued engagement. If confirmed, I will also encourage robust U.S. engagement with the National Police Force, a close NAPTIP partner, to prioritize key trafficking issues and to strengthen its coordination with NAPTIP.

Question. In the State Department's 2021 International Religious Freedom report, Nigeria was noted to have large scale religious-affiliated violence between Christian and Muslim communities. What is your assessment of religious freedom in Nigeria and if confirmed, how will you work with the Ambassador At Large for International Religious Freedom to bolster religious freedom in-country?

Answer. Religious freedom is enshrined in Nigeria's constitution and plays a key role in Nigerian society and its institutions. Because religion plays such an important role in Nigeria's social fabric, communal conflicts in Nigeria, often over resources or perceived grievances, can sometimes take on religious overtones. If confirmed, I will ensure that Mission Nigeria's work prioritizes outreach and dialogue with religious leaders and faith-based communities, who play a critical role in Nigeria's social fabric and who are important voices for promoting religious tolerance. I will engage the Government of Nigeria on specific cases and areas of concern. I will also seek opportunities to strengthen religious freedom protections in Nigerian law. Finally, I would continue to support State Department and USAID programmatic activities that promote religious tolerance, interfaith dialogue, and conflict resolutions programs. I look forward to the opportunity, if confirmed, to work with the Ambassador at Large for Religious Freedom to find innovative programs to reduce communal violence and increase trust across Nigeria's many religious communities.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to personally engaging with civil society on this issue?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to personally engaging with civil society to promote religious tolerance, advance interfaith dialogue, and encourage civil society's essential role in conflict prevention and community peacebuilding efforts, including by working with faith leaders. I would also support programs, including USAID activities, that work with civil society to train respected local leaders from a variety of religious faiths and ethnic backgrounds to better mediate conflicts and build peace, efforts that have already successfully reduced violent conflict in parts of Nigeria.

Question. If confirmed, what concrete steps can you take to help Nigerians increase their societal and governmental respect for religious freedom?

Answer. If confirmed, in addition to promoting respect for all religions and ethnicities by advancing interfaith dialogue with religious and community leaders, I would work with the Nigerian Government to address the root causes of conflict through better governance, rule of law, and accountability for those responsible for human rights violations and abuses. I would seek to engage leaders at the sub-national level to discuss the laws against blasphemy and insulting religion. I would also support programs, including USAID activities, that work with civil society to train respected local leaders from a variety of religious faiths and ethnic backgrounds to better mediate conflicts and build peace—efforts that have already successfully reduced violent conflict in parts of Nigeria.

Question. In the State Department's 2021 Human Rights Report, Nigeria was identified to have significant human rights issues including unlawful or arbitrary killings by the government, politically motivated reprisals, and restrictions on internet freedom. If confirmed, how will you direct your embassy to work with the government to improve the human rights situation on the ground?

Answer. Strengthening respect for human rights is fundamental to U.S. engagement in Nigeria and around the world. A Nigerian Government that demonstrates transparency, seeks and achieves transparent accountability for abuses committed by government actors, and that fully respects the human rights of its people is a government that will help the country thrive. If confirmed, I will seek to advance and further institutionalize respect for human rights and accountability for those responsible for violations and abuses in our diplomatic and programmatic engagements, including through requiring human rights capacity building and training in our security cooperation. These programmatic engagements would be through a whole-of-government approach. For example, with regard to military cooperation,

our sale of A-29 aircraft includes training on civilian harm mitigation and the Law of Armed conflict. For civil society, USAID works with civil society on training and capacity building for wide-ranging topics like democratic governance, countering trafficking in persons, and greater inclusion of persons with disabilities. Our International Narcotic and Law Enforcement office programming to strengthen the capacity of Nigerian law enforcement includes robust human rights training.

Question. If confirmed, how will you direct your embassy to work with civil society organizations to improve the human rights situation on the ground?

Answer. Nigeria has robust civil society organizations, able to operate freely, that are working to promote respect for human rights, and with which the U.S. Mission engages on a continuing basis. U.S. engagement with and support for them helps to inform U.S. policy, provides opportunities to engage with the Nigerian public, including with youth, and ensures that we have strong partners for U.S. programming. USAID, for example, is supporting CSOs advocating for an end to child forced marriage and for greater rights and accessibility for people with disabilities. If confirmed, continuing this engagement with Nigeria's civil society will be a priority for me.

Question. According to the Conduct in U.N. Field Missions online portal, there are 17 open allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse by the country's peacekeepers deployed to U.N. peacekeeping missions, in cases from 2017 and 2018. How will you engage with the Nigerian Government to ensure that perpetrators of sexual exploitation and abuse from U.N. peacekeeping missions are held accountable?

Answer. If confirmed, I would engage with the Nigerian Government to ensure any allegations of sexual misconduct are dealt with in a transparent and timely manner and those responsible held accountable. I will also draw upon my work as U.S. Deputy Representative to the U.N. addressing issues of peacekeeper accountability with the U.N. Secretariat and specific U.N. Missions to advise Nigerian authorities on their responsibilities to address allegations of sexual abuse and the mechanisms to do so. In this latter regard, Nigeria recently passed the Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Act in part to combat the prevalence of gender-based violence. The U.S. Mission continues to work with interlocutors, CSOs, and multilateral organizations to ensure the full implementation of the act. If confirmed, I would engage with the Nigerian Government on any serious and credible allegations of sexual exploitation by Nigeria's U.N. peacekeepers brought to my attention, and direct Mission personnel to continue to engage at the working level with Nigerian counterparts to ensure accountability for those responsible and support for victims of sexual violence.

Question. Many U.S. missions have been under enormous stress over the last several years, in large part due to COVID. What is your understanding of morale throughout Mission Nigeria?

Answer. The COVID pandemic and necessary mitigation strategies placed stress and challenges to work operations on Mission Nigeria staff, as the pandemic did on U.S. missions worldwide. Mission Nigeria leadership's transparent, pragmatic approach to addressing the stress on staff and work challenges was centered on ensuring the health and safety of all Mission staff, which strengthened Mission morale during a difficult time. If confirmed, I intend to maintain that approach as Chief of Mission.

Question. How do you intend to improve morale at Mission Nigeria?

Answer. If confirmed, I will be leading a Mission team with strong morale despite the real challenges—from a changing security environment to the aftermath of the COVID pandemic—that impact all the Mission team whether direct hires, locally-employed staff, or family members. A key to maintaining and strengthening the Mission's morale, in my view, will be regular communication with all staff on Mission operations, security issues, and U.S. policies.

I will continue practices I have successfully used in past assignments, including regular "town hall" meetings with staff, a regular "open door" by the Deputy Chief of Mission and myself for staff and family members to discuss concerns and ideas, and ensuring I create an environment in which all members of the country team, regardless of their host agency, are comfortable raising questions and new approaches on Mission policies and operations.

Demonstrating through my own actions, and those of the Mission's senior leadership, the Department's principles of diversity and inclusion is also a key to maintaining morale. Mission Nigeria has a strong track record of building a diverse, inclusive work force, whether in the diversity of the team's American direct hires or

a locally employed work force that represents Nigeria's own diverse communities. I look forward to building on that record.

Question. How do you intend to create a unified mission and vision at Mission Nigeria?

Answer. If confirmed, maintaining a unified vision, messaging, and priorities among the fifteen different agencies at Mission Nigeria will be a top goal.

My experience managing other large U.S. missions, such as Mission Canada, taught me a key to achieving this goal is making sure the Mission's Integrated Country Strategy is a "whole of Mission" product which I would make clear that all staff should use in setting objectives and priorities for their work.

Consistent messaging, clear priorities, and communication with Mission section and agency heads is vital, as are regular consultations with agency headquarters and the interagency to hammer out differences early. Regular coordination among the various public affairs offices of each agency at the Mission is also critical to ensure consistency and alignment in our outreach and messaging to the Nigerian public.

As Chief of Mission, I have also learned the value of being clear at Mission country team and staff meetings about my planned schedule of meetings and public engagements, spelling out what my messages and goals will be, and expecting Mission staff to all mirror that messaging and goals as well. Making sure that key policy and messaging points are routinely shared to all sections and agencies across the Mission, even when not specifically pertinent to a section or agency's own work, is the most effective way to ensure a consistent vision and message across even the largest U.S. Mission teams.

Question. How do you intend to improve morale at Mission Nigeria?

Answer. If confirmed, I will be leading a Mission team with strong morale despite the real challenges—from a changing security environment to the aftermath of the COVID pandemic—that impact all the Mission team whether direct hires, locally-employed staff, or family members. A key to maintaining and strengthening the Mission's morale, in my view, will be regular communication on Mission operations, security issues, and U.S. policies with all staff.

I will continue practices I have successfully used in past assignments, including regular "town hall" meetings with all staff, a regular "open door" by the Deputy Chief of Mission and myself for staff and family members to discuss concerns and ideas, and ensuring I create an environment in which all members of the country team, regardless of their host agency, are comfortable raising questions and new approaches on Mission policies and operations.

Demonstrating in my own actions, and those of the Mission's senior leadership, to the Department's principles of diversity and inclusion is also a key to maintaining morale. Mission Nigeria has a strong track record of building a diverse, inclusive work force, whether in the diversity of the team's American direct hires or a locally employed work force that represents Nigeria's own diverse communities. If confirmed, I look forward to building on that record.

Question. Management is a key responsibility for chiefs of Mission. How would you describe your management style?

Answer. My management approach is to put an emphasis on building "one team," preventing silos of information among embassy sections and agencies and seeking out the staff's frank views as part of my own decision-making process.

I view the Country Team as my primary resource for creative strategies on implementing Mission goals and raising policy issues that need resolution, while being clear that I expect Country Team members and section heads to empower their own staffs to be comfortable offering ideas and tactics to achieve Mission objectives, whether operational or related to U.S. policies. After appropriate discussion and consideration, when a decision is taken, I expect staff, in turn, to professionally carry out the decision to their best of their abilities. I assess their performance and potential only in that regard.

Question. Do you believe it is ever acceptable or constructive to berate subordinates, either in public or in private?

Answer. I do not.

Question. How do you envision your relationship with the Deputy Chief of Mission?

Answer. My Deputy Chief of Mission will be my fully empowered partner at Mission Nigeria. If confirmed, I look forward to my Deputy's substantive engagement in all aspects of the Mission's operations and significant policy decisions, so that he

is ready and prepared to fill in for me whenever required and whatever the time frame. I want my Deputy to provide frank advice to me, whether in larger group settings or behind closed doors as the situation may require. I especially look to my Deputy to be a direct and frank conduit to me on insights into the staff's operational concerns, issues related to family members, and overall morale.

Question. If confirmed, what leadership responsibilities do you intend to entrust to your Deputy Chief of Mission?

Answer. If confirmed, I plan for my Deputy to substantively engage in all aspects of the Mission's operations and significant policy decisions.

With regard to specific leadership responsibilities, I envision entrusting him with leadership responsibility for maintaining a mentoring and professional-skills building program for direct hires and locally employed staff; monitoring Mission employment and hiring decisions to ensure we meet our diversity and inclusion goals; monitoring the Mission's security environment to alert me and other Mission leadership when security decision points are reached; and working with Mission supervisors to ensure they are providing constructive and accurate evaluations of performance to staff, whether those staff are meeting performance requirements or failing to succeed.

Question. In order to create and continue employee excellence at the Department, accurate and direct employee evaluation reports (EERs) for Foreign Service Officers are imperative, though often lacking. Do you believe that it is important to provide employees with accurate, constructive feedback on their performance in order to encourage improvement and reward those who most succeed in their roles?

Answer. If confirmed, it will be among my highest priorities to ensure that Mission Foreign Service staff, across agencies, are provided meaningful, accurate, and constructive feedback on their performance in regular counseling sessions, as well as in their annual written evaluations.

Question. If confirmed, would you support and encourage clear, accurate, and direct feedback to employees in order to improve performance and reward high achievers?

Answer. If confirmed, I pledge to provide clear, accurate, direct feedback to my direct ratees and to convey I expect all supervisors, across all agencies, to provide the same constructive and direct feedback to their staff as well.

Question. It is imperative that U.S. diplomats get outside of posts abroad to meet with local actors, including host government officials, non-government organizations, and local citizens. In your experience, do U.S. diplomats get outside of our embassy walls enough to fully accomplish their missions?

Answer. Engagement with local actors—whether from civil society, the private business sector, or sub-national governments—has been central to the work of each U.S. Embassy at which I have served or had the honor of leading as Chief of Mission.

Although security situations can limit access and the ability to travel in-country for some colleagues, my overall experience is that U.S. diplomats are eager to get beyond Embassy walls to effectively engage with a range of local actors and are able to do so to carry out their work.

If confirmed, I will continue to make such engagement with local actors a priority for myself and Mission Nigeria staff at all levels, consistent with the prevailing security environment.

Question. How do you intend to improve the ability of U.S. diplomats to better access all local populations?

Answer. Mission Nigeria leadership has successfully worked to balance the goal of ensuring U.S. diplomats are engaged with key local actors—from civil society to religious leaders—with the requirement of ensuring the safety of Mission staff.

If confirmed, I am committed that among my first goals will be to work with Mission Nigeria staff to identify the operational challenges—whether logistical, financial, or security—to strengthening their access to key local interlocutors. I am committed to taking actions that staff identify to expand our access to local populations in line with the prevailing security conditions in Nigeria at the time.

FOLLOW-UP QUESTION

Question. Do you think it was premature for you to congratulate president-elect Bola Tinubu and the Nigerian people on the conduct and outcome of the February 25 election on March 1? Please respond yes or no.

Answer. No, it was not premature to congratulate President-Elect Bola Tinubu, the Nigerian people, and political leaders on a competitive election on February 25. My decision to offer congratulations on the election's competitiveness during my March 1 confirmation hearing was made after serious reflection, taking into consideration the Department's public statement shortly before my hearing, although that statement was not determinative in my own decision-making.

My statement, as well as the Department's, was made after careful evaluation of available information and the announcement of official results by Nigeria's Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). It was informed by the results of a credible Parallel Vote Tabulation which closely tracked nation-wide results. The election, despite the logistical problems and instances of serious violence at some polling stations, was highly competitive. Each of the top three presidential candidates won twelve states. In more than half of Nigeria's states—twenty—the winning presidential candidate represented a different party than that of the incumbent governor.

Neither the Department's statement nor my comments diminished U.S. concerns about the logistical and technical issues surrounding Nigeria's electoral process that clearly failed to meet Nigerians' expectations and our own as a friend of Nigeria. The United States has been very clear in its public statements that INEC must address such issues ahead of Nigeria's upcoming state-level elections.

I was also clear that Nigerian parties who have concerns about the electoral process and the announced outcome should use legally established mechanisms for resolving such concerns. The United States supports the right of all parties to fully pursue those mechanisms under Nigerian law, even though I understand those processes may be lengthy. We must allow this process to proceed. If confirmed, I will monitor the legal processes underway and not hesitate to speak out about any failures to accord all parties due process under Nigerian law.

Looking ahead, I will ensure that Mission Nigeria continues to press INEC to further strengthen the electoral process beyond this election cycle.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED
TO HON. RICHARD MILLS, JR. BY SENATOR MARCO RUBIO

Question. In May, Secretary Blinken said that the People's Republic of China is the "only country with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do it." The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) clearly holds all the reins of power in the People's Republic of China and has used this power to commit genocide in Xinjiang, flood our communities with fentanyl, and emit by far the largest quantity of greenhouse gases. As we speak, the Party is cracking down on unprecedented student protests across the country. With their absolute control of Chinese society and industry, the CCP could stop all of these destructive actions tomorrow if they so choose. Is the Chinese Communist Party a threat to the United States?

Answer. Yes, activities by the People's Republic of China (PRC) and CCP represent significant challenges to U.S. economic, political, and security interests globally and in the Africa region. Under President Xi, the PRC has become more repressive at home and more assertive abroad. We will defend and strengthen U.S. national security, prosperity, and values; defend international law and agreements and the other principles and institutions that maintain peace and security; and protect the rights of individuals and sovereign nations. As U.S. Deputy Representative to the UN, I have seen first-hand how the PRC uses its influence in the U.N. and abroad in ways that undermine the rule of law, democratic principles, and the broader rules-based international order. In line with Secretary Blinken's speech on May 26, in which the Secretary said we will invest in our domestic strength and align with our allies and partners so that we can compete effectively with the PRC to defend our interests, if confirmed, I will continue to deepen our partnership with Nigeria, address our shared concerns, and engage with Nigerians to deliver the message that as one of Nigeria's largest humanitarian and development partners, the United States is committed to Nigeria's future, in contrast to the PRC's transactional approach. I will seek to highlight the risks associated with PRC engagement that could impact Nigeria's economy, security, democratic principles, sovereignty, and U.S. interests. Following on from my predecessor, I will also continue

to ensure that our vision of regional security and prosperity remains the bulwark of a strong U.S.-Nigeria partnership that competes successfully with the type of relationship offered by the PRC. If confirmed, I will also work with the Department of State's new Office of China Coordination, to advance U.S. objectives and counter harmful behavior by the PRC and other actors in the Nigerian context. This new office, inaugurated immediately following the U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit, brings together a group of China experts from throughout the Department and beyond to work more effectively with colleagues from every regional bureau and experts in international security, economics, technology, multilateral diplomacy, and strategic communications.

Question. Does the Chinese Communist Party undertake any activities that are beneficial to U.S. interests?

Answer. We are committed to working with Beijing only if it secures American jobs, American values, and our way of life for future generations. Issues like food security, global health, climate change, the global drug trade, and COVID-19 are the very issues that directly threaten our prosperity and security and that of Nigeria. PRC contributions should be scrutinized, however, to ensure they are not a springboard for narrow PRC economic interests.

If confirmed, I will also work with the Department of State's new Office of China Coordination, to advance U.S. objectives and counter harmful behavior by the PRC and other actors in the Nigerian context. This new office, inaugurated immediately following the U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit, brings together a group of China experts from throughout the Department and beyond to work more effectively with colleagues from every regional bureau and experts in international security, economics, technology, multilateral diplomacy, and strategic communications. In addition, I will direct the members of post's PRC working group to work closely with the Regional China Officer based in Abidjan.

Question. Do you believe that there are any areas within which the Chinese Communist Party would constructively work with the United States in good faith?

Answer. The United States broadly, and Mission Nigeria specifically, should only work with the PRC where our interests clearly coincide. Limited areas potentially may emerge—perhaps food security, counter-narcotics, or disaster relief—where U.S. and PRC interests could converge in Nigeria. If confirmed, when appropriate, the mission would be ready to consider taking advantage of such opportunities if they were clearly beneficial to the Nigerian people as well as aligned with U.S. interests and policy goals.

Question. If confirmed, will you approve any joint activity with organizations or representatives from the People's Republic of China in the countries, or organizations in which you will work?

Answer. If confirmed, I will consult Department guidance on engagement with PRC organizations or representatives to work together when it is in U.S. interests to do so.

Question. The CCP is Nigeria's largest bilateral lender of top export destination. CCP construction firms have a number of public infrastructure projects in the country to include railways, highways, new airport terminals, a deep-water port, and hydroelectric power project. What have been the impacts of CCP infrastructure investments for Nigeria, and for U.S. interests?

Answer. The CCP continues to find opportunities to increase their influence in Nigeria through these very visible projects, but the Nigerian private and public sectors have both indicated that the United States remains their partner of choice. China remains a major development, trade, and investment partner for Nigeria, and the largest source of official finance for Nigeria with \$10 billion from 2010 to 2017, but several key projects have fallen into disrepair or have proven to be inappropriate projects for Nigeria. In many cases, the selection of PRC firms and financing in these projects is simply due to a dearth of available or affordable alternatives. And outstanding PRC lending to Nigeria remains relatively limited at only \$3.1 billion, or 4% of Nigeria's total public debt.

CCP influence continues to expand, but the trend is being met with resistance by a skeptical population and politicians are increasingly critical. Chinese commercial entities face challenges operating in Nigeria and the public is wary of their interventions. If confirmed, I will make messaging the failure of Chinese investment and trade, in contrast to the values and benefits that U.S. investment brings to Nigeria's economy, a priority in my private and public engagements. We will continue to work with our likeminded partners to provide Nigeria the alternative opportunities pro-

vided by our government and private sector to ensure we remain Nigeria's partner of choice.

Question. What steps will you take to identify projects with Nigerian officials and the Development Finance Corporation regarding opportunities for U.S. companies to compete with CCP funded projects?

Answer. We have robust engagement with Nigeria on project identification and financing. We have a DFC representative in-country to support possible U.S. investment in local projects, and the Mission saw a visit by DFC CEO Nathan Scott in July of 2022. If confirmed, I will direct our Deal team, which includes the DFC, the Department of Commerce, and USTDA-which all maintain an in-country presence-to enhance our efforts to link U.S. firms with opportunities in Nigeria, whether through the International Trade Administration's (ITA) Express Leads system, reverse trade missions, or other commercial diplomacy tools at our disposal.

Question. In December 2022, Reuters reported that the Nigerian military ran a secret mass abortion program in its war against Boko Haram, resulting in at least 10,000 non-consensual abortions. Both State and DoD provide assistance and aid to Nigeria for counterterrorism purposes. If the claims are found to be credible, what should be the consequences for U.S.-Nigeria relations and security cooperation?

Answer. I was shocked to read about the allegations contained in the Reuters reports in December 2022. I know that U.S. officials, both in Washington D.C. and Abuja, have worked tirelessly to look into these claims as well as to press the Nigerian Government to conduct and support a thorough, transparent investigation and to hold accountable any individual responsible for human rights violations and abuses.

As per the Leahy laws, the Department does not provide assistance to any security force unit if there is credible information that the unit has committed a gross violation of human rights. All U.S. security assistance is evaluated on a case-by-case basis, and we take credible allegations into consideration as we plan security assistance. Looking ahead, we expect the Nigerian National Human Rights Commission to complete its investigation this summer and, if confirmed, I will continue to press the Nigerian Government to see the investigation to its conclusion and act on its findings. If these troubling allegations are substantiated, I would press the Nigerian Government to fully prosecute any individuals implicated, while at the same time exploring visa restrictions or financial sanctions against those committing gross violations of human rights.

Question. The Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 and annual appropriations legislation prohibit the use of taxpayer money to pay for abortions or advocacy to change the legal status of abortions in foreign countries. If confirmed, what will you do to verify that U.S. taxpayer money was not used in any Nigerian Government program conducting non-consensual abortions?

Answer. We are awaiting the conclusion of the Nigeria National Human Rights Commission's investigation into the allegations in the Reuters reports of December 2022. I do not wish to pre-judge their investigation. If confirmed, I pledge to press the Nigerian Government to act on any findings of wrongdoing in the report, to include taking appropriate actions and ensuring accountability for those responsible for human rights abuses and violations. The U.S. Government extensively monitors its activities in Nigeria to ensure compliance with all relevant U.S. legislation, including the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, and the USAID Mission in Nigeria does not fund any services associated with abortion. That monitoring will be applied to the information that is reported as a result of the Human Rights Commission's investigation.

Question. The status of religious freedom in Nigeria is appalling. Nigeria's legal and criminal codes enshrine blasphemy laws informed by Shari'a law that are disproportionately wielded against Christians and members of minority religious groups. Cases of violence against religious Nigerians frequently go un-investigated and un-prosecuted by Nigeria's law enforcement agencies. For these reasons, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom recommended last year that Nigeria be designated as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998. However, the State Department did not designate Nigeria as a CPC. Do you agree with the State Department that the actions of Nigeria's Government are not sufficient for it to be designated as a CPC?

Answer. Although I was not involved in the decision, I understand that State Department assessed Nigeria did not meet the legal criteria to be designated a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) in 2022. The U.S. Mission in Nigeria and the De-

partment of State writ large closely monitor religious freedom dynamics in Nigeria, including threats to religious freedom and the efforts of the Nigerian Government to promote religious freedom and tolerance. The Embassy engages religious institutions and advocacy groups of all faiths in Nigeria, as well as civil society and human rights and religious freedom advocates to make sure we have the most accurate picture possible, which the Mission regularly conveys to Washington. I am committed to ensuring the Mission's reporting and views are part of the inter-agency assessment on religious freedom in Nigeria and its CPC status. We also regularly engage the Government of Nigeria on religious freedom issues of concern and advocate strongly for both specific cases of concern and on broader issues. If confirmed, I would continue to do the same.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to advocating for Nigeria's designation as a CPC?

Answer. I do not wish to prejudge the Department's annual review process on religious freedom designations in 2023, which will be based on developments in this calendar year. But I commit to ensuring that religious freedom issues will remain a priority for U.S. policy and Mission Nigeria if I am confirmed.

Question. If confirmed, what will you do to promote religious freedom in Nigeria?

Answer. If confirmed, I will ensure that our diplomacy prioritizes outreach and dialogue with religious leaders and faith-based communities, who play a critical role in Nigeria's social fabric and who are important voices for promoting religious tolerance. I will engage the Government of Nigeria on cases and areas of concern. I will also seek opportunities to strengthen religious freedom protections. Finally, I would continue to support State Department and USAID programmatic activities that promote religious tolerance, interfaith dialogue, and conflict resolution programs.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED
TO HON. RICHARD MILLS, JR. BY SENATOR BILL HAGERTY

Combating Anti-Israel Bias in the African Union and Other International Forums

As you know, on February 18, 2023, an Israeli diplomat who was an accredited observer with an entry tag was expelled from the opening ceremony of the African Union summit. In the following days, the African Union Commission Chief stated that Israel's observer status that the bloc has been suspended. These actions are part of a larger effort to delegitimize Israel by states driven by hatred. Just as biased targeting of Israel at the United Nations is a grave concern, anti-Israel actions and rhetoric in other international forums also cannot be ignored. Indeed, what happened to Israel at the AU Summit is reprehensible and unacceptable.

Question. If confirmed, what would you do to address this problem?

Answer. AU Commission Chairperson Moussa Faki Mahamat accepted credentials of the Israeli Ambassador in 2021. However, this decision was challenged by some AU member states, as permitted by the AU Constitutive Act. The AU then established a Heads of State Committee to consult on the accreditation issue with plans to report back at the 2023 AU Summit. The Committee is composed of six member states, with three opposing (Algeria, South Africa, Nigeria) and three supporting (Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda). Faki's acceptance of Israel and its observer status are on hold pending his receipt of the Committee's recommendation.

As Deputy Representative to the U.N., I worked with the Israeli Mission in New York to convey to African Missions the value Israeli observer status would bring to the AU. If confirmed, I would continue to advocate with Nigerian officials that Israel's role in the African Union be finalized and confirmed as an observer. Multilateral institutions are strongest when differing voices and perspectives are united to enact change that impacts global populations. Israel's impact on Africa is significant, from its contributions to technology and resources to bolstering food security efforts via substantive trade—it is an important partner to the continent, so will be an equally important voice in the AU's work.

Question. What would you do to engage with foreign governments and ensure that Israel is not unfairly targeted, but rather included in future African Union summits and other regional and international forums?

Answer. Israel's outreach to African nations is something to be lauded. If confirmed, as Ambassador I would engage the Nigerian authorities, in close coordination with my Israeli colleagues, on the targeting of Israel in international fora, and would encourage the Nigerians to oppose unfair and unbalanced resolutions in all

venues. It is worth noting that Nigeria and Israel have enjoyed full diplomatic relations for decades and then-President Goodluck Jonathan made the first visit by a Nigerian head of state to Israel in 2013.

Chinese Influence in Nigeria

Nigeria and China have a significant economic relationship, with China being Nigeria's largest trading partner. China has invested heavily in Nigeria's infrastructure development, including roads, railways, and ports.

Question. Are you concerned about China having outsized influence in Nigeria?

Answer. Countering the PRC's significant influence and role in Nigeria will be a priority for me, if confirmed. While the PRC remains a major development, trade, and investment partner for Nigeria, and the largest source of official finance for Nigeria with \$10 billion from 2010 to 2017, the Nigerian private and public sectors see the United States as their partner of choice. Nigerians overwhelmingly prefer U.S. goods, services, and expertise. As is the case globally, PRC influence within Nigeria is being met with some resistance by a skeptical population, and politicians are increasingly critical. It is noteworthy that Taipei has a Trade Office in Nigeria, continuing cultural and economic ties with Taiwan despite PRC pressure. All of this does not deflect from the fact that the PRC will continue to seek opportunities to advance its interests and undermine the rules-based international order. We will continue to work with our likeminded partners to provide Nigeria alternatives to the PRC's model of authoritarian development, mobilize financing mechanisms, and support American businesses to compete within this market.

Question. Do you think China's growing influence has the potential to negatively impact U.S. economic and security interests in Nigeria?

Answer. The PRC's growing influence has the potential to negatively impact U.S. economic and security interests in Nigeria. If confirmed, I will highlight and model the contrast between our values and trade benefits and those of Beijing, building on growing Nigerian public skepticism about the PRC's role in the country.

The PRC's inroads around Africa have come with many reports of threats if local governments question or disapprove of the Chinese Communist Party's policies, but in Nigeria the PRC does not act with impunity. While the PRC has invested in Nigerian infrastructure, such as rail, satellites, ports, and airports, PRC-affiliated companies have been cited for corrupt practices and have abandoned some projects entirely. Similarly, in their fight against violent extremists and other security challenges, Nigeria has learned that PRC-made equipment is unreliable and ineffective—another reason why Nigeria views the United States as its security partner of choice. It is also important to note that outstanding PRC lending to Nigeria remains relatively limited at only \$3.1 billion, or 4 percent of total public debt.

If confirmed, I will work to strengthen our relationships with Nigerian interlocutors and make sure they receive the necessary technical assistance to adequately assess development and financing initiatives that benefit all Nigerians. We will continue to push opportunities for U.S. businesses, build upon recent visits from the heads of the Development Finance Corporation and the U.S. Trade and Development Agency—for whom Nigeria is a key market—and build on the momentum of December's African Leaders Summit. In the face of numerous, varied, and prolonged security challenges, we will also continue our active engagement with the Nigerian military to create a modern, professional, well-equipped fighting force capable of protecting the population while respecting human rights.

Question. If confirmed, what steps would you take to counter China's influence?

Answer. If confirmed, I will continue to lead Mission Nigeria's use of our full range of commercial promotion, foreign assistance, public diplomacy, and political and military partnerships to counter the PRC's influence. I plan to travel frequently, along with Mission Nigeria staff, to engage Nigerians to deliver the message that as one of Nigeria's largest humanitarian and development partners, the United States is committed to Nigeria's future, in contrast to the PRC's transactional approach. The Mission will use the tools and support provided by the Biden Administration's Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII) to enhance the Mission's Deal Team process that promotes U.S. firms as the preferred choice for Nigerian partners, underscoring the quality and transparency that other competitors lack. Our cultural and educational programming will continue to amplify U.S. soft power. Nigeria's commitment to mitigating the effects of climate change also presents an opportunity for even greater collaboration. Nigeria views the United States as the leader in climate mitigation and adaptation activities and I will continue to utilize engagement in this area to forge even closer ties and provide

a credible alternative to PRC interests. And I will emphasize the values we share with Nigerians, such as our democratic systems and respect for individual freedoms.

The Nigeria Election

Bola Tinubu of the ruling All Progressive Congress was declared winner of the 2023 presidential election on March 1, but the opposition has demanded a recount citing major fraud.

Question. Do you believe the Nigerian presidential election was credible and transparent?

Answer. The results of the election suggest the outcome credibly reflects the will of Nigerian voters, despite notable concerns and problems with the voting process on election day. Nigeria's Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) had technical and logistical challenges during the 2023 election, including late-opening polling stations and locations with insufficient voting materials. Delays in the electronic transmission of polling unit results sheets-intended to serve as a backup to Nigeria's official transmission of voting tallies on paper-led to considerable frustration on the part of many voters and observers. While the numerous international and domestic observation missions also noted these problems, none of them questioned the overall legitimacy of the results. In the presidential race, opposition parties collectively won 64 percent of the vote; many states voted with the opposition-including 12 where the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) party holds the governorship-and a USAID-funded parallel vote tabulation validated the national result and the presidential results in 35 out of 37 states. In the National Assembly elections, even with many results still unknown, opposition parties that had little or no representation have already won numerous seats. We have encouraged candidates with concerns about the integrity of the election to use appropriate legal mechanisms to contest the results and have joined other observers in urging INEC to increase transparency of electoral processes and improve in the areas needing most attention ahead of Nigeria's March 11 state elections.

Question. What are the prospects for mass protests and violence following the election?

Answer. Since INEC announced the results, all four major parties have called on supporters to remain calm and peaceful even as the opposition parties have vowed to contest the results of the election through established legal means. In the days since the election and announcement of results, to my knowledge there have not been mass protests or widespread violence.

Question. Nigeria's two leading presidential parties have each departed from long-standing conventions that aim to preserve balance in this very diverse country-the APC by putting forth a Muslim-Muslim ticket, and the PDP by nominating a northerner for the presidency after eight years of rule by another northerner. How do you think this will affect the election and broader north-south dynamics?

Answer. It is too early to predict how this dynamic will play out in Nigeria's politics longer term, but the departure from such conventions may in fact represent a positive development and a subtle shift away from identity politics. The major candidates sought to appeal to supporters outside their religion, and while religion was a factor, religious identity appears to have played a less defining role in the February 25 presidential election as compared with other recent Nigerian elections.

Christian Persecution in Nigeria

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom finds it "inexplicable that the U.S. Department of State did not include Nigeria or India in its latest designations of 'Countries of Particular Concern' under the International Religious Freedom Act."

Religious violence and intolerance directed toward Nigerian Christians has worsened in recent years and Nigeria remains the deadliest country for Christians. Persecution of Nigerian Christians has been carried out by both the Nigerian Government, most notoriously through arrests and convictions under blasphemy laws, as well as non-state actors, including jihadist groups: Islamic State West Africa Province and Boko Haram.

Question. Do you agree with the Biden Administration's decision not to designate Nigeria a "Country of Particular Concern" under the International Religious Freedom Act? Please explain.

Answer. Although I was not involved in the decision, I understand that the State Department assessed Nigeria did not meet the legal criteria to be designated a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) in 2022. Religious freedom is a U.S. foreign

policy priority. The U.S. Mission in Nigeria and the Department of State writ large closely monitor religious freedom dynamics in Nigeria, including threats to religious freedom and the efforts of the Nigerian Government to promote religious freedom and tolerance. The Embassy engages religious institutions and advocacy groups of all faiths in Nigeria, as well as civil society and human rights and religious freedom advocates to make sure we have the most accurate picture possible, which the Mission regularly conveys to Washington. The Mission also regularly engages the Government of Nigeria on religious freedom issues of concern and advocates strongly on both specific cases of concern and on broader issues. If confirmed, I would continue to do the same.

Question. Do you believe Christian persecution in Nigeria is increasing? If no, what is causing the decrease and what can we learn from it? If yes, what do you assess to be the principal drivers for the increase?

Answer. The overall security situation in Nigeria is of grave concern and is impacting Nigerian Christians, and Nigerians of all beliefs. While insecurity has worsened in recent years, the drivers of conflict are numerous and overlapping and are not necessarily indicative of increasing religious persecution. Experts have cited the proliferation of small arms, increasing competition over dwindling land and water resources, allegations of human rights violations and abuses by security forces, lack of accountability and access to justice, as well as politics, ethnicity, and religion among contributing factors. Ineffective state security responses, poor governance and service delivery, endemic corruption, and a lack of economic opportunity also create conditions that can increase risks for conflict and unchecked criminality.

Question. If confirmed, what would be your strategy to encourage the Nigerian Government to change anti-Christian blasphemy laws, prosecute those responsible for persecuting Christians, and hold security forces accountable for failing to protect Christian communities?

Answer. If confirmed, I will ensure that Mission Nigeria's work prioritizes outreach and dialogue with religious leaders and faith-based communities, who play a critical role in Nigeria's society and who are important voices for promoting religious tolerance and influencing societal attitudes around blasphemy. I will seek opportunities to strengthen religious freedom protections in Nigerian law. I will engage the Government of Nigeria on specific cases and areas of concern. I will press for accountability for abuses and for improved civilian security delivery by security forces to ensure individuals and religious communities are not victims to violence in the first place. Finally, I would continue to support State Department and USAID programmatic activities that promote religious tolerance, interfaith dialogue, and community-driven conflict resolution mechanisms. I look forward to the opportunity, if confirmed, to work with the Ambassador at Large for Religious Freedom to find innovative programs to reduce communal violence and increase trust across Nigeria's many religious communities.

WHO INTERGOVERNMENTAL NEGOTIATING BODY
PANDEMIC AGREEMENT "ZERO DRAFT"



FOURTH MEETING OF THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL
NEGOTIATING BODY TO DRAFT AND NEGOTIATE
A WHO CONVENTION, AGREEMENT OR OTHER
INTERNATIONAL INSTRUMENT ON PANDEMIC
PREVENTION, PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE
Provisional agenda item 3

A/INB/4/3
1 February 2023

**Zero draft of the WHO CA+
for the consideration of the Intergovernmental
Negotiating Body at its fourth meeting**

**WHO convention, agreement or other international instrument on
pandemic prevention, preparedness and response ("WHO CA+")**

BACKGROUND, METHODOLOGY AND APPROACH

1. In recognition of the catastrophic failure of the international community in showing solidarity and equity in response to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the World Health Assembly convened a second special session in December 2021, where it established an Intergovernmental Negotiating Body (INB) open to all Member States and Associate Members (and regional economic integration organizations as appropriate) to draft and negotiate a WHO convention, agreement or other international instrument on pandemic prevention, preparedness and response, with a view to its adoption under Article 19, or under other provisions of the WHO Constitution as may be deemed appropriate by the INB.
2. In furtherance of the above mandate, the INB established a process and systematic approach for its work and agreed, at its second meeting, that the instrument should be legally binding and contain both legally binding as well as non-legally binding elements. In that regard, the INB identified Article 19 of the WHO Constitution as the comprehensive provision under which the instrument should be adopted, without prejudice to also considering, as work progressed, the suitability of Article 21, and requested the Bureau to develop and present to the INB a conceptual zero draft of the instrument (referred to herein as the "WHO CA+") for discussion.
3. At its third meeting, the INB agreed that the Bureau, with support from the WHO Secretariat, would prepare the zero draft of the WHO CA+, based on the conceptual zero draft and input received during the third meeting of the INB, with legal provisions. The INB further agreed that the zero draft would be considered at its fourth meeting as a basis for commencing negotiations at that meeting, it being understood that the zero draft will be without prejudice to the position of any delegation and following the principle that "nothing is agreed until everything is agreed".
4. Accordingly, the Bureau has prepared this zero draft of the WHO CA+ for consideration by the INB at its fourth meeting.

Contents

The world together equitably	8
Chapter I. Introduction	9
Article 1. Definitions and use of terms	9
Article 2. Relationship with other international agreements and instruments	9
Chapter II. Objective, guiding principles and scope	10
Article 3. Objective	10
Article 4. Guiding principles and rights	10
Article 5. Scope	13
Chapter III. Achieving equity in, for and through pandemic prevention, preparedness, response and recovery of health systems	13
Article 6. Predictable global supply chain and logistics network	13
Article 7. Access to technology: promoting sustainable and equitably distributed production and transfer of technology and know-how	14
Article 8. Regulatory strengthening	15
Article 9. Increasing research and development capacities	15
Article 10. WHO Pathogen Access and Benefit-Sharing System	17
Chapter IV. Strengthening and sustaining capacities for pandemic prevention, preparedness, response and recovery of health systems	19
Article 11. Strengthening and sustaining preparedness and health systems' resilience	19
Article 12. Strengthening and sustaining a skilled and competent health and care workforce	20
Article 13. Preparedness monitoring, simulation exercises and universal peer review	20
Article 14. Protection of human rights	21
Chapter V. Coordination, collaboration and cooperation for pandemic prevention, preparedness, response and health system recovery	22
Article 15. Global coordination, collaboration and cooperation	22
Article 16. Whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches at the national level	22
Article 17. Strengthening pandemic and public health literacy	23
Article 18. One Health	24
Chapter VI. Financing for pandemic prevention, preparedness, response and recovery of health systems	25
Article 19. Sustainable and predictable financing	25
Chapter VII. Institutional arrangements	26
Article 20. Governing Body for the WHO CA+	26
Article 21. Consultative Body for the WHO CA+	27
Article 22. Oversight mechanisms for the WHO CA+	27
Article 23. Assessment and review	28
Article 24. Secretariat	28

Chapter VIII.	Final provisions.....	28
Article 25.	Reservations.....	28
Article 26.	Confidentiality and data protection.....	28
Article 27.	Withdrawal	29
Article 28.	Right to vote	29
Article 29.	Amendments to the WHO CA+.....	29
Article 30.	Adoption and amendment of annexes to the WHO CA+.....	29
Article 31.	Protocols to the WHO CA+.....	30
Article 32.	Signature.....	30
Article 33.	Ratification, acceptance, approval, formal confirmation or accession.....	30
Article 34.	Entry into force	31
Article 35.	Provisional application by the Parties, and actions to give effect to the provisions of the WHO CA+ by the World Health Assembly.....	31
Article 36.	Settlement of disputes.....	31
Article 37.	Depositary.....	32
Article 38.	Authentic texts	32

**ZERO DRAFT, FOR THE CONSIDERATION OF THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL
NEGOTIATING BODY AT ITS FOURTH MEETING**

The Parties to this WHO CA+,¹

1. *Reaffirming* the principle of sovereignty of States Parties in addressing public health matters, notably pandemic prevention, preparedness, response and health systems recovery,
2. *Recognizing* the critical role of international cooperation and obligations for States to act in accordance with international law, including to respect, protect and promote human rights,
3. *Recognizing* that all lives have equal value, and that therefore equity should be a principle, an indicator and an outcome of pandemic prevention, preparedness and response,
4. *Recalling* the preamble to the Constitution of the World Health Organization, which states that the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being without distinction of race, religion, political belief, economic or social condition, and that unequal development in different countries in the promotion of health and control of disease, especially communicable disease, is a common danger,
5. *Recognizing* the central role of WHO, as the directing and coordinating authority on international health work, in pandemic prevention, preparedness, response and recovery of health systems, and in convening and generating scientific evidence, and, more generally, fostering multilateral cooperation in global health governance,
6. *Noting* that a pandemic situation is extraordinary in nature, requiring States Parties to prioritize effective and enhanced cooperation with development partners and other relevant stakeholders to address extraordinary challenges,
7. *Recognizing* that the international spread of disease is a global threat with serious consequences for public health, human lives, livelihoods, societies and economies that calls for the widest possible international cooperation and participation of all countries and relevant stakeholders in an effective, coordinated, appropriate and comprehensive international response,
8. *Recalling* the International Health Regulations of the World Health Organization and the role of States Parties and other stakeholders in preventing, protecting against, controlling and providing a public health response to the international spread of disease in ways that are commensurate with, and restricted to, public health risks, and which avoid unnecessary interference with international traffic and trade,
9. *Recognizing* that national action plans for pandemic prevention, preparedness, response and recovery of health systems should take into account all people, including communities and persons in vulnerable situations, places and ecosystems,
10. *Recognizing* that the threat of pandemics is a reality and that pandemics have catastrophic health, social, economic and political consequences, especially for persons in vulnerable situations, pandemic prevention, preparedness, response and recovery of health systems must be systemically integrated into

¹ The Bureau proposes, consistent with Member State submissions, that the preambular section be discussed at the appropriate point in the negotiations.

whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches, to ensure adequate political commitment, resourcing and attention across sectors, and thereby break the cycle of "panic and neglect",

11. *Reflecting* on the lessons learned from coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and other outbreaks with global and regional impact, including, inter alia, HIV, Ebola virus disease, Zika virus disease, Middle East respiratory syndrome and monkeypox/mpox, and with a view to addressing and closing gaps and improving future response,

12. *Recognizing* that urban settings are especially vulnerable to infectious diseases and epidemics, and the important role that communities have in preventing, preparing for and responding to health emergencies,

13. *Noting* with concern that the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed serious shortcomings in preparedness – especially at city and urban levels – for timely and effective prevention and detection of, as well as response to, potential health emergencies, indicating the need to better prepare for future health emergencies,

14. *Noting* that in 2021 women comprised more than 70% of the global health and care workforce and an even higher proportion of the informal health workforce, and during the COVID-19 response were disproportionately impacted by the burden of the pandemic, notably on health workers,

15. *Reaffirming* the importance of diverse, gender-balanced and equitable representation and expertise in pandemic prevention, preparedness, response and health system recovery decision-making, as well as in the design and implementation of activities,

16. *Expressing* concern that those affected by conflict and insecurity are particularly at risk of being left behind during pandemics,

17. *Recognizing* the synergies between multisectoral collaboration – through whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches at the country and community level – and international, regional and cross-regional collaboration, coordination and global solidarity, and their importance to achieving sustainable improvements in pandemic prevention, preparedness and effective response,

18. *Acknowledging* that the repercussions of pandemics, beyond health and mortality, on socioeconomic impacts in a broad array of sectors, including economic growth, employment, trade, transport, gender inequality, food insecurity, education, environment and culture, require a multisectoral whole-of-society approach to pandemic prevention, preparedness, response and recovery of health systems,

19. *Acknowledging* the impacts of determinants of health across different sectors and communities on the vulnerability of communities, especially persons in vulnerable situations, to the spread of pathogens and the evolution of an outbreak,

20. *Underscoring* that multilateral and regional cooperation and good governance are essential to prevent, prepare for, respond to, and recovery of health systems from, pandemics that, by definition, know no borders and require collective action and solidarity,

21. *Emphasizing* that policies and interventions on pandemic prevention, preparedness, response and recovery of health systems should be supported by the best available scientific evidence and adapted to take into account resources and capacities at subnational and national levels,

22. *Reaffirming* the importance of access to timely information, as well as efficient risk communication that manages to counteract pandemics,
23. *Understanding* that most emerging infectious diseases originate in animals, including wildlife and domesticated animals, then spill over to people,
24. *Recognizing* the importance of working synergistically with other relevant areas, under a One Health approach, as well as the importance and public health impact of growing possible drivers of pandemics, which need to be addressed as a means of preventing future pandemics and protecting public health,
25. *Noting* that antimicrobial resistance is often described as a silent pandemic and that it could be an aggravating factor during a pandemic,
26. *Reaffirming* the importance of a One Health approach and the need for synergies between multisectoral and cross-sectoral collaboration at national, regional and international levels to safeguard human health, detect and prevent health threats at the animal and human interface, in particular zoonotic spill-over and mutations, and to sustainably balance and optimize the health of people, animals and ecosystems,
27. *Acknowledging* the creation of the Quadripartite (WHO, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the World Organisation for Animal Health and the United Nations Environment Programme) to better address any One Health-related issue,
28. *Reiterating* the need to work towards building and strengthening resilient health systems to advance universal health coverage, as an essential foundation for effective pandemic prevention, preparedness, response and recovery of health systems, and to adopt an equitable approach to prevention, preparedness, response and recovery activities, including to mitigate the risk that pandemics exacerbate existing inequities in access to services,
29. *Recognizing* that health is a precondition for, and an outcome and indicator of, the social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,
30. *Recognizing* that pandemics have a disproportionately heavy impact on frontline workers, notably health workers, the poor and persons in vulnerable situations, with repercussions on health and development gains, in particular in developing countries, thus hampering the achievement of universal health coverage and the Sustainable Development Goals, with their shared commitment to leave no one behind,
31. *Recognizing* the need to enhance global solidarity and effective global coordination, as well as accountability and transparency, to avoid serious negative impacts of public health threats with pandemic potential, especially on countries with limited capacities and resources,
32. *Acknowledging* that there are significant differences in countries' capacities to prevent, prepare for, respond to and recover from pandemics,
33. *Deeply concerned* by the gross inequities that hindered timely access to medical and other COVID-19 pandemic-related products, notably vaccines, oxygen supplies, personal protective equipment, diagnostics and therapeutics,

34. *Reiterating* the determination to achieve health equity through resolute action on social, environmental, cultural, political and economic determinants of health, such as eradicating hunger and poverty, ensuring access to health and proper food, safe drinking water and sanitation, employment and decent work and social protection in a comprehensive intersectoral approach,
35. *Emphasizing* that, in order to make health for all a reality, individuals and communities need: equitable access to high quality health services without financial hardship; well-trained, skilled health workers providing quality, people-centred care; and committed policy-makers with adequate investment in health to achieve universal health coverage,
36. *Emphasizing* that improving pandemic prevention, preparedness, response and recovery of health systems relies on a commitment to mutual accountability, transparency and common but differentiated responsibility by all States Parties and relevant stakeholders,
37. *Recalling* the Doha Declaration on the TRIPS Agreement and Public Health of 2001 and reiterating that the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS Agreement) does not and should not prevent Members of the World Trade Organization from taking measures to protect public health,
38. *Reaffirming* that the TRIPS Agreement can and should be interpreted and implemented in a manner supportive of the right of Members of the World Trade Organization to protect public health and, in particular, to promote access to medicines for all,
39. *Reaffirming* that Members of the World Trade Organization have the right to use, to the full, the TRIPS Agreement and the Doha Declaration on the TRIPS Agreement and Public Health of 2001, which provide flexibility to protect public health including in future pandemics,
40. *Recognizing* that protection of intellectual property rights is important for the development of new medical products, but also recognizing concerns about its effects on prices, as well as noting discussions/deliberations in relevant international organizations on, for instance, innovative options to enhance the global effort towards the production of, timely and equitable access to, and distribution of health technologies and know-how, by means that include local production,
41. *Recognizing* that protection of intellectual property rights is important for the development of new medicines, and also recognizing concerns about the negative effect on prices and on the production of, timely and equitable access to, and distribution of vaccines, treatments, diagnostics and health technologies and know-how,
42. *Recognizing* that intellectual property protection is important for the development of new medicines, and also recognizing concerns about its effect on prices, as well as noting discussions on enhancing global efforts towards the production of, timely and equitable access to, and distribution of health technologies and products,
43. *Recognizing* the concerns that intellectual property on life-saving medical technologies continues to pose threats and barriers to the full realization of the right to health and to scientific progress for all, particularly the effect on prices, which limits access options and impedes independent local production and supplies, as well as noting structural flaws in the institutional and operational arrangements in the global response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the need to establish a future pandemic prevention, preparedness and response mechanism that is not based on a charity model,

44. *Reaffirming* the flexibilities and safeguards contained in the TRIPS Agreement and their importance for removing barriers to production of, and access to, pandemic-related products, as well as sustainable supply chains for their equitable distribution, while also recognizing the need for sustainable mechanisms to support transfer of technology and know-how to support the same,

45. *Reaffirming* the flexibilities and safeguards contained in the TRIPS Agreement and their importance for ensuring access to technologies, knowledge and full transfer of technology and know-how for production and supply of pandemic-related products, as well as their equitable distribution,

46. *Recalling* resolution WHA61.21 (2008) on the global strategy and plan of action on public health, innovation and intellectual property, which lays out a road map for a global research and development system supportive of access to appropriate and affordable medical countermeasures, including those needed in a pandemic,

47. *Recognizing* that publicly funded research and development plays an important role in the development of pandemic-related products and, as such, requires conditionalities,

48. *Underscoring* the importance of promoting early, safe, transparent and rapid sharing of samples and genetic sequence data of pathogens, as well as the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising therefrom, taking into account relevant national and international laws, regulations, obligations and frameworks, including the International Health Regulations, the Convention on Biological Diversity and its Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from their Utilization, and the Pandemic Influenza Preparedness Framework, and also mindful of the work being undertaken in other relevant areas and by other United Nations and multilateral organizations or agencies,

49. *Acknowledging* that pandemic prevention, preparedness, response and recovery of health systems at all levels and in all sectors, particularly in developing countries, require predictable, sustainable and sufficient financial, human, logistical and technical resources,

Have agreed as follows:

The world together equitably

Vision: The WHO CA⁺¹ aims for a world where pandemics are effectively controlled to protect present and future generations from pandemics and their devastating consequences, and to advance the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health for all peoples, on the basis of equity, human rights and solidarity, with a view to achieving universal health coverage, while recognizing the sovereign rights of countries, acknowledging the differences in levels of development among countries, respecting their national context and recognizing existing relevant international instruments. The WHO CA⁺ aims to achieve greater equity and effectiveness for pandemic prevention, preparedness and response through the fullest national and international cooperation.

¹ At its second meeting in July 2022, the INB identified that Article 19 of the WHO Constitution is the comprehensive provision under which the WHO CA⁺ should be adopted, without prejudice to also considering, as work progressed, the suitability of Article 21.

Chapter I. Introduction

Article 1. Definitions and use of terms

1. For the purposes of this WHO CA+:

- (a) "genomic sequences" means the order of nucleotides identified in a molecule of DNA or RNA. They contain the full genetic information that determines the biological characteristics of an organism or a virus;
- (b) "pandemic" means the global spread of a pathogen or variant that infects human populations with limited or no immunity through sustained and high transmissibility from person to person, overwhelming health systems with severe morbidity and high mortality, and causing social and economic disruptions, all of which require effective national and global collaboration and coordination for its control;¹
- (c) "pandemic-related products" means products that may be needed for pandemic prevention, preparedness, response and/or recovery, and which may include, without limitation, diagnostics, therapeutics, medicines, vaccines, personal protective equipment, syringes and oxygen;
- (d) "persons in vulnerable situations" includes indigenous peoples, persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities, refugees, migrants, asylum seekers, stateless persons, persons in humanitarian settings and fragile contexts, marginalized communities, older people, persons with disabilities, persons with health conditions, pregnant women, infants, children and adolescents, and those living in fragile areas, such as Small Island Developing States;
- (e) "pathogen with pandemic potential" means...;
- (f) "One Health approach" means...;
- (g) "One Health surveillance" means...;
- (h) "infodemic" means...;
- (i) "inter-pandemic" means...;
- (j) "current health expenditure" means...;
- (k) "universal health coverage" means...; and
- (l) "recovery" means...

Article 2. Relationship with other international agreements and instruments

1. The implementation of the WHO CA+ shall be guided by the Charter of the United Nations and the Constitution of the World Health Organization. The WHO CA+ and other relevant international instruments, including the International Health Regulations, should be interpreted so as to be

¹ The INB is encouraged to conduct discussions on the matter of the declaration of a "pandemic" by the WHO Director-General under the WHO CA+ and the modalities and terms for such a declaration, including interactions with the International Health Regulations and other relevant mechanisms and instruments. In this connection see Article 15.2 hereof.

complementary, compatible and synergistic, and the WHO CA+ should be interpreted in a manner that promotes and supports the implementation and operationalization of the International Health Regulations and other relevant international instruments.¹ In the event that any part of the WHO CA+ addresses areas or activities that may bear on the field of competence of other organizations or treaty bodies, appropriate steps will be taken to avoid duplication and promote synergies, compatibility and coherence, with a common goal of strengthened pandemic preparedness, prevention, response and health system recovery.

2. The provisions of the WHO CA+ shall not affect the rights and obligations of any Party under other existing international instruments and shall respect the competencies of other organizations and treaty bodies.

3. The provisions of the WHO CA+ shall in no way affect the right of Parties to enter into bilateral or multilateral instruments, including regional or subregional instruments, on issues relevant or additional to the WHO CA+, provided that such instruments are compatible with their obligations under the WHO CA+. The Parties concerned shall communicate such instruments to the Governing Body for the WHO CA+ through the Secretariat.

Chapter II. Objective, guiding principles and scope

Article 3. Objective

The objective of the WHO CA+, guided by equity, the vision, principles and rights set out herein, is to prevent pandemics, save lives, reduce disease burden and protect livelihoods, through strengthening, proactively, the world's capacities for preventing, preparing for and responding to, and recovery of health systems from, pandemics. The WHO CA+ aims to comprehensively and effectively address systemic gaps and challenges that exist in these areas, at national, regional and international levels, through substantially reducing the risk of pandemics, increasing pandemic preparedness and response capacities, progressive realization of universal health coverage and ensuring coordinated, collaborative and evidence-based pandemic response and resilient recovery of health systems at community, national, regional and global levels.

Article 4. Guiding principles and rights

To achieve the objective of the WHO CA+ and to implement its provisions, the Parties will be guided, *inter alia*, by the principles and rights set out below:

1. **Respect for human rights** – The implementation of the WHO CA+ shall be with full respect for the dignity, human rights and fundamental freedoms of persons, and each Party shall protect and promote such freedoms.
2. **The right to health** – The enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health, defined as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, is one of the fundamental rights of every human being without distinction of age, race, religion, political belief, economic or social condition.
3. **Sovereignty** – States have, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and the principles of international law, the sovereign right to determine and manage their approach to public

¹ The INB is encouraged to conduct discussions on the matter of making explicit the synergies and concrete complementarity of the WHO CA+ with the International Health Regulations and other relevant mechanisms and instruments.

health, notably pandemic prevention, preparedness, response and recovery of health systems, pursuant to their own policies and legislation, provided that activities within their jurisdiction or control do not cause damage to their peoples and other countries. Sovereignty also covers the rights of States over their biological resources.

4. **Equity** – The absence of unfair, avoidable or remediable differences, including in their capacities, among and within countries, including between groups of people, whether those groups are defined socially, economically, demographically, geographically or by other dimensions of inequality, is central to equity. Effective pandemic prevention, preparedness, response and recovery cannot be achieved without political will and commitments in addressing the structural challenges in inequitable access to fair, equitable and timely access to affordable, safe and efficacious pandemic-related products and services, essential health services, information and social support, as well as tackling the inequities in terms of technology, health workforce, infrastructure and financing, among other aspects.

5. **Solidarity** – The effective prevention of, preparedness for and response to pandemics requires national, international, multilateral, bilateral and multisectoral collaboration, coordination and cooperation, through global unity, to achieve the common interest of a fairer, more equitable and better prepared world.

6. **Transparency** – The effective prevention of, preparedness for and response to pandemics depends on transparent, open and timely sharing, access to and disclosure of accurate information, data and other relevant elements that may come to light (including biological samples, genomic sequence data and clinical trial results), for risk assessment and control measures, and development of pandemic-related products and services, notably through a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach, based on, and guided by, the best-available scientific evidence, consistent with national, regional and international privacy and data protection rules, regulations and laws.

7. **Accountability** – States are accountable for strengthening and sustaining their health systems' capacities and public health functions to provide adequate health and social measures by adopting and implementing legislative, executive, administrative and other measures for fair, equitable, effective and timely pandemic prevention, preparedness, response and recovery of health systems. All Parties shall cooperate with other States and relevant international organizations, in order to collectively strengthen, support and sustain capacities for global prevention, preparedness, response and recovery of health systems.

8. **Common but differentiated responsibilities and capabilities in pandemic prevention, preparedness, response and recovery of health systems** – All States are responsible for the health of their people, including pandemic prevention, preparedness, response and recovery, and previous pandemics have demonstrated that no one is safe until everyone is safe. Given that the health of all peoples is dependent on the fullest cooperation of individuals and States, all Parties are bound by the obligations of the WHO CA+. States that hold more resources relevant to pandemics, including pandemic-related products and manufacturing capacity, should bear, where appropriate, a commensurate degree of differentiated responsibility with regard to global pandemic prevention, preparedness, response and recovery. With the aim of supporting every Party to achieve the highest level of proven and sustained capacity, full consideration and prioritization are required of the specific needs and special circumstances of developing country Parties, especially those that (i) are particularly vulnerable to adverse effects of pandemics; (ii) do not have adequate capacities to respond to pandemics; and (iii) potentially bear a disproportionately high burden.

9. **Inclusiveness** – The active engagement with, and participation of, all relevant stakeholders and partners across all levels, consistent with relevant and applicable international and national guidelines,

rules and regulations (including those relating to conflicts of interest), is fundamental for mobilizing resources and capacities to support pandemic prevention, preparedness, response and health systems recovery.

10. **Community engagement** – Full engagement of communities in prevention, preparedness, response and recovery of health systems is essential to mobilize social capital, resources, adherence to public health and social measures, and to gain trust in government.

11. **Gender equality** – Pandemic prevention, preparedness, response and recovery of health systems will be guided by and benefit from the goal of equal participation and leadership of men and women in decision-making with a particular focus on gender equality, taking into account the specific needs of all women and girls, using a country-driven, gender responsive/transformative, participatory and fully transparent approach.

12. **Non-discrimination and respect for diversity** – All individuals should have fair, equitable and timely access to pandemic-related products, health services and support, without fear of discrimination or distinction based on race, religion, political belief, economic or social condition.

13. **Rights of individuals and groups at higher risk and in vulnerable situations** – Nationally determined and prioritized actions, including support, will take into account communities and persons in vulnerable situations, places and ecosystems. Indigenous peoples, persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities, refugees, migrants, asylum seekers, stateless persons, persons in humanitarian settings and fragile contexts, marginalized communities, older people, persons with disabilities, persons with health conditions, pregnant women, infants, children and adolescents, for example, are disproportionately affected by pandemics, owing to social and economic inequities, as well as legal and regulatory barriers, that may prevent them from accessing health services.

14. **One Health** – Multisectoral and transdisciplinary actions should recognize the interconnection between people, animals, plants and their shared environment, for which a coherent, integrated and unifying approach should be strengthened and applied with an aim to sustainably balance and optimize the health of people, animals and ecosystems, including through, but not limited to, attention to the prevention of epidemics due to pathogens resistant to antimicrobial agents and zoonotic diseases.

15. **Universal health coverage** – The WHO CA+ will be guided by the aim of achieving universal health coverage, for which strong and resilient health systems are of key importance, as a fundamental aspect of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals through promoting health and well-being for all at all ages.

16. **Science and evidence-informed decisions** – Science, evidence and findable, accessible, interoperable and reusable data should inform all public health decisions and the development and implementation of guidance for pandemic prevention, preparedness, response and recovery of health systems.

17. **Central role of WHO** – As the directing and coordinating authority on global health, and the leader of multilateral cooperation in global health governance, WHO is fundamental to strengthening pandemic prevention, preparedness, response and recovery of health systems.

18. **Proportionality** – Due consideration should be given, including through regular monitoring and policy evaluation, to ensuring that the impacts of measures aimed at preventing, preparing for and

responding to pandemics are proportionate to their intended objectives and that the benefits arising therefrom outweigh costs.

Article 5. Scope

The WHO CA+ applies to pandemic prevention, preparedness, response and health systems recovery at national, regional and international levels.

Chapter III. Achieving equity in, for and through pandemic prevention, preparedness, response and recovery of health systems

Article 6. Predictable global supply chain and logistics network

1. The Parties, recognizing the shortcomings of the preparedness for and response to the COVID-19 pandemic, agree on the need for an adequate, equitable, transparent, robust, agile, effective and diverse global supply chain and logistics network for pandemic prevention, preparedness, response and recovery.
2. The WHO Global Pandemic Supply Chain and Logistics Network (the "Network") is hereby established.
3. The Parties shall support the Network's development and operationalization, and participate in the Network, within the framework of WHO, including through sustaining it in inter-pandemic times as well as appropriate scale-up in the event of a pandemic. In that regard, the Parties shall:
 - (a) determine the types and size of products needed for robust pandemic prevention, preparedness and response, including costs and logistics for establishing and maintaining strategic stockpiles of such products, by working with relevant stakeholders and experts, guided by scientific evidence and regular epidemiological risk assessments;
 - (b) assess anticipated demand for, and map sources of, manufacturers and suppliers, including raw materials and other necessary inputs, for sustainable production of pandemic-related products (especially active pharmaceutical ingredients), including manufacturing capacities, and identify the most efficient multilateral and regional purchasing mechanisms, including pooled mechanisms and in-kind contributions, as well as promoting transparency in cost and pricing of all elements along the supply chain;
 - (c) develop a mechanism to ensure the fair and equitable allocation of pandemic-related products based on public health risks and needs;
 - (d) map existing delivery and distribution options, and establish or operationalize, as appropriate, international consolidation hubs, as well as regional staging areas, to ensure that transport of supplies is streamlined and uses the most appropriate means for the products concerned; and
 - (e) develop a dashboard for pandemic-related product supply capacity and availability, with regular reporting, and conduct regular tabletop exercises to test the functioning of the Network.
4. The Parties commit not to impose regulations that unduly interfere with the trade in, or of, pharmaceutical raw materials and ingredients, mindful of the need for unhindered access to pandemic-related products.

5. The Parties commit to safeguard the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence, and to facilitate the unimpeded access of humanitarian staff and cargo. The commitment to facilitate such access is understood to be legally binding and to apply in all circumstances, consistent with humanitarian principles.

6. The Parties, working through the Governing Body for the WHO CA+, shall take all appropriate measures to establish and start functioning of the Network no later than XX. It is understood that giving effect to this Article immediately upon adoption of the WHO CA+ shall be considered pursuant to, and within the meaning of, Article 35 of the WHO CA+.

Article 7. Access to technology: promoting sustainable and equitably distributed production and transfer of technology and know-how

1. The Parties recognize that inequitable access to pandemic-related products (including but not limited to vaccines, therapeutics and diagnostics) should be addressed by increased manufacturing capacity that is more equitably, geographically and strategically distributed.

2. The Parties, working through the Governing Body for the WHO CA+, shall strengthen existing and develop innovative multilateral mechanisms that promote and incentivize relevant transfer of technology and know-how for production of pandemic-related products, on mutually agreed terms, to capable manufacturers, particularly in developing countries.

3. During inter-pandemic times, all Parties commit to establish these mechanisms and shall:

(a) coordinate, collaborate, facilitate and incentivize manufacturers of pandemic-related products to transfer relevant technology and know-how to capable manufacturer(s) (as defined below) on mutually agreed terms, including through technology transfer hubs and product development partnerships, and to address the needs to develop new pandemic-related products in a short time frame;

(b) strengthen coordination, with relevant international organizations, including United Nations agencies, on issues related to public health, intellectual property and trade, including timely matching of supply to demand and mapping manufacturing capacities and demand;

(c) encourage entities, including manufacturers within their respective jurisdictions, that conduct research and development of pre-pandemic and pandemic-related products, in particular those that receive significant public financing for that purpose, to grant, on mutually agreed terms, licences to capable manufacturers, notably from developing countries, to use their intellectual property and other protected substances, products, technology, know-how, information and knowledge used in the process of pandemic response product research, development and production, in particular for pre-pandemic and pandemic-related products; and

(d) collaborate to ensure equitable and affordable access to health technologies that promote the strengthening of national health systems and mitigate social inequalities.

4. In the event of a pandemic, the Parties:

(a) will take appropriate measures to support time-bound waivers of intellectual property rights that can accelerate or scale up manufacturing of pandemic-related products during a pandemic, to the extent necessary to increase the availability and adequacy of affordable pandemic-related products;

(b) will apply the full use of the flexibilities provided in the TRIPS Agreement, including those recognized in the Doha Declaration on the TRIPS Agreement and Public Health of 2001 and in Articles 27, 30 (including the research exception and “Bolar” provision), 31 and 31bis of the TRIPS Agreement;

(c) shall encourage all holders of patents related to the production of pandemic-related products to waive, or manage as appropriate, payment of royalties by developing country manufacturers on the use, during the pandemic, of their technology for production of pandemic-related products, and shall require, as appropriate, those that have received public financing for the development of pandemic-related products to do so; and

(d) shall encourage all research and development institutes, including manufacturers, in particular those receiving significant public financing, to waive, or manage as appropriate, royalties on the continued use of their technology for production of pandemic-related products.

5. For purposes of this Article, “capable manufacturer” refers to an entity that operates in a manner that is consistent with national and international guidelines and regulations, including biosafety and biosecurity standards.

Article 8. Regulatory strengthening

1. The Parties shall strengthen the capacity and performance of national regulatory authorities and increase the harmonization of regulatory requirements at the international and regional level, including, as applicable, through mutual recognition agreements.

2. Each Party shall build and strengthen its country regulatory capacities and performance for timely approval of pandemic-related products and, in the event of a pandemic, accelerate the process of approving and licensing pandemic-related products for emergency use in a timely manner, including the sharing of regulatory dossiers with other institutions.

3. The Parties shall, as appropriate, monitor and regulate against substandard and falsified pandemic-related products, through existing Member State mechanisms on substandard and falsified medical products.

Article 9. Increasing research and development capacities

1. The Parties recognize the need to build and strengthen capacities and institutions for innovative research and development for pandemic-related products, particularly in developing countries, and the need for information sharing through open science approaches for rapid sharing of scientific findings and research results.

2. With a view to promoting greater sharing of knowledge and transparency, each Party, when providing public funding for research and development for pandemic prevention, preparedness, response and recovery of health systems, shall, taking into account the extent of the public funding received:

(a) promote the free, public dissemination of the results of publicly and government-funded research for the development of pandemic-related products;

(b) endeavour to include terms and conditions on prices of products, allocation, data sharing and transfer of technology, as appropriate, and publication of contract terms;

A/INB/4/3

- (c) ensure that promoters of research for pandemic-related products assume an appropriate level of the associated risk;
 - (d) promote and incentivize technology co-creation and joint venture initiatives; and
 - (e) establish appropriate conditions for publicly funded research and development, including on distributed manufacturing, licensing, technology transfer and pricing policies.
3. Parties shall increase the transparency of information about funding for research and development for pandemic-related products by:
- (a) disclosing information on public funding for research and development of potential pandemic-related products and provisions to enhance the availability and accessibility of the resulting work, including freely available and publicly accessible publications and public reporting of the relevant patents;
 - (b) making it compulsory for manufacturers that receive public funding for the production of pandemic-related products to disclose prices and contractual terms for public procurement in times of pandemics, taking into account the extent of the public funding received; and
 - (c) encouraging manufacturers that receive other funds, external to the manufacturer, for the production of pandemic-related products to disclose prices and contractual terms for public procurement in times of pandemics.
4. Each Party should encourage non-State actors to participate in and accelerate innovative research and development for addressing novel pathogens, pathogens resistant to antimicrobial agents and emerging and re-emerging diseases with pandemic potential.
5. The Parties shall establish, no later than XX, with reference to existing models, a global compensation mechanism for injuries resulting from pandemic vaccines.
6. Pending establishment of such global compensation mechanism, each Party shall, in contracts for the supply or purchase of pandemic-related products, endeavour to exclude buyer/recipient indemnity clauses of indefinite or excessive duration.
7. In the conclusion of contracts for the supply or purchase of pandemic-related products, each Party shall endeavour to exclude confidentiality provisions that serve to limit disclosure of terms and conditions.
8. Each Party shall, as applicable, implement and apply international standards for, oversight of and reporting on laboratories and research facilities that carry out work to genetically alter organisms to increase their pathogenicity and transmissibility, in order to prevent accidental release of these pathogens, while ensuring that these measures do not create any unnecessary administrative hurdles for research.
9. The Parties are encouraged to promote and strengthen knowledge translation and evidence-based communication tools and strategies relating to pandemic prevention, preparedness, response and recovery, at local, national, regional and international levels.

10. The Parties acknowledge the need to take steps, individually and collectively, to develop strong, resilient national, regional and international clinical research ecosystems. In that regard, the Parties, as appropriate, commit to:

- (a) fostering and coordinating clinical research and clinical trials, including, as appropriate, through existing coordination mechanisms;
- (b) ensuring equitable access to resources (funding or in-kind), clinical research and clinical trials, so that resources are deployed optimally and efficiently;
- (c) supporting transparent and rapid reporting of clinical research and clinical trial results, to ensure evidence is available in a timely manner to inform national, regional and international decision-making; and
- (d) disclosing disaggregated information, for instance by gender and age, to the extent possible and as appropriate, on the results of clinical research and clinical trials relating to pandemic prevention, preparedness, response and recovery.

Article 10. WHO Pathogen Access and Benefit-Sharing System

1. The need for a multilateral, fair, equitable and timely system for sharing of, on an equal footing, pathogens with pandemic potential and genomic sequences, and benefits arising therefrom, that applies and operates in both inter-pandemic and pandemic times, is hereby recognized. In pursuit thereof, it is agreed to establish the WHO Pathogen Access and Benefit-Sharing System (the "PABS System") under this WHO CA+. The Parties are mindful that the PABS System, or parts thereof, could be adopted under Article 21 of the WHO Constitution, should such an approach be agreed. The terms of the PABS System shall be developed no later than XX with a view to their provisional application consistent with Article 35 hereof.

2. The PABS System shall cover all pathogens with pandemic potential, including their genomic sequences, as well as access to benefits arising therefrom, and ensure that it operates synergistically with other relevant access and benefit-sharing instruments.

3. The PABS System shall include the following elements and shall be regulated as follows:

Access to pathogens with pandemic potential

(a) Each Party, through its relevant and authorized laboratories, shall, in a rapid, systematic and timely manner: (i) provide pathogens with pandemic potential from early infections due to pathogens with pandemic potential or subsequent variants to a laboratory recognized or designated as part of an established WHO coordinated laboratory network; and (ii) upload the genomic sequence of such pathogens with pandemic potential to one or more publicly accessible databases of its choice. For purposes hereof, "rapid" shall be understood to mean within XX hours from the time of identification of a pathogen with pandemic potential;

(b) The PABS System will be consistent with international legal frameworks, notably those for collection of patient specimens, material and data, and will promote effective, standardized, real-time global and regional platforms that promote findable, accessible, interoperable and reusable data available to all Parties;

(c) Access shall be accorded expeditiously by the laboratory recognized or designated as part of an established WHO coordinated laboratory network, subject to conclusion of a Standard Material Transfer Agreement, developed for the purposes of the PABS System, with the recipient in accordance with subsection (i) below. Any such access shall be subject to applicable biosafety and biosecurity rules and standards, and free of charge, or, when a fee is charged, it shall not exceed the minimal cost involved;

(d) Recipients of materials shall not claim any intellectual property or other rights that limit the facilitated access to pathogens with pandemic potential, or their genomic sequences or components, in the form received; and

(e) Access to pathogens with pandemic potential protected by intellectual and other property rights shall be consistent with relevant international agreements and with relevant national laws.

Fair and equitable benefit-sharing

(f) The Parties agree that benefits arising from facilitating access to pathogens with pandemic potential shall be shared fairly and equitably in accordance with the provisions of the PABS System. Accordingly, it is understood that production of pandemic vaccines or other pandemic-related products, irrespective of the technology, information or material used, implies use of pathogens with pandemic potential, including the genomic sequence;

(g) Facilitated access shall be provided pursuant to a Standard Material Transfer Agreement, the form of which shall be set out in the PABS System and that shall contain the benefit-sharing options available to entities accessing pathogens with pandemic potential; and

(h) Such options shall include, but not be limited to: (i) real-time access by WHO to 20% of the production of safe, efficacious and effective pandemic-related products, including diagnostics, vaccines, personal protective equipment and therapeutics, to enable equitable distribution, in particular to developing countries, according to public health risk and need and national plans that identify priority populations. The pandemic-related products shall be provided to WHO on the following basis: 10% as a donation and 10% at affordable prices to WHO; (ii) commitments by the countries where manufacturing facilities are located that they will facilitate the shipment to WHO of these pandemic-related products by the manufacturers within their jurisdiction, according to schedules to be agreed between WHO and manufacturers.

Recognition of the PABS System as a specialized international instrument

(i) The PABS System, adopted under the WHO Constitution, is established with a view to its recognition as a specialized international access and benefit-sharing instrument within the meaning of the Nagoya Protocol;

(j) Upon adoption, each Party shall, in accordance with its national law, adopt and implement effective legislative, executive, administrative or other measures to give effect to such recognition at the domestic level and/or with respect to its relations with all other States and regional economic integration organizations, as appropriate; and

(k) The Parties shall support the further development and operationalization of the PABS System, including appropriate governance mechanisms, and participate in its operation, including

through sustaining it in inter-pandemic times as well as appropriate scale-up in the event of a pandemic.

4. The Parties, working through the Governing Body for the WHO CA+, shall develop and finalize additional elements and tools necessary to fully implement, operationalize and sustain the PABS System, no later than XX.

Chapter IV. Strengthening and sustaining capacities for pandemic prevention, preparedness, response and recovery of health systems

Article 11. Strengthening and sustaining preparedness and health systems' resilience

1. The Parties recognize the need for resilient health systems, rooted in universal health coverage, to mitigate the shocks caused by pandemics and to ensure continuity of health services, thus preventing health systems from becoming overwhelmed.
2. The Parties are encouraged to enhance financial, technical and technological support, assistance and cooperation, in particular to developing countries, to strengthen health emergency prevention and preparedness consistent with the goal of universal health coverage. The Parties shall strive to accelerate the achievement of universal health coverage.
3. The Parties are encouraged to establish global, regional and national collaborative genomics networks that are dedicated to epidemiological genomic surveillance and the global sharing of emerging pathogens with pandemic potential.
4. Each Party shall, in accordance with national law, adopt policies and strategies, supported by implementation plans, across the public and private sectors and relevant agencies, consistent with relevant tools, including, but not limited to, the International Health Regulations, and strengthen and reinforce public health functions for:
 - (a) continued provision of quality routine and essential health services during pandemics, including clinical and mental health care and immunization, with a focus on primary health care and community-level interventions, and management of the backlog of and waiting lists for the diagnosis and treatment of, and interventions for, other illnesses, including care for patients with long-term effects from the pandemic disease;
 - (b) strengthening human resource capacities during inter-pandemic times and during pandemics;
 - (c) surveillance (including using a One Health approach), outbreak investigation and control, through interoperable early warning and alert systems;
 - (d) sustained laboratory capacity for genomic sequencing, as well as for analysing and sharing such information;
 - (e) prevention of epidemic-prone diseases, and emerging, growing or evolving public health threats with pandemic potential, notably at the human-animal-environment interface;
 - (f) post-emergency health system recovery strategies;

(g) strengthening public health laboratory and diagnostic capacities, and national, regional and global networks, including standards and protocols for infection prevention and control, and public health laboratory biosafety and biosecurity; and

(h) creating and maintaining up-to-date, universal platforms and technologies for forecasting and timely information sharing, through appropriate capacities, including building digital health and data science capacities.

Article 12. Strengthening and sustaining a skilled and competent health and care workforce

1. Each Party shall take the necessary steps to safeguard, protect, invest in and sustain a skilled, trained, competent and committed health and care workforce, at all levels, in a gender-responsive manner, with due protection of its employment, civil and human rights and well-being, consistent with international obligations and relevant codes of practice, with the aim of increasing and sustaining capacities for pandemic prevention, preparedness and response, while maintaining essential health services. This includes, subject to national law:

(a) strengthening in- and post-service training, deployment, remuneration, distribution and retention of the health and care workforce, including community health workers and volunteers; and

(b) addressing gender disparities and inequalities within the health and care workforce, to ensure meaningful representation, engagement, participation and empowerment of all health and care workers, while addressing discrimination, stigma and inequality and eliminating bias, including unequal remuneration, and noting that women still often face significant barriers to taking leadership and decision-making roles.

2. The Parties are encouraged to enhance financial and technical support, assistance and cooperation, in particular to developing countries, to strengthen and sustain a skilled and competent health and care workforce at the national level.

3. The Parties shall invest in establishing, sustaining, coordinating and mobilizing an available, skilled and trained global public health emergency workforce that is deployable to support Parties upon request, based on public health need, in order to contain outbreaks and prevent an escalation of small-scale spread to global proportions.

4. The Parties will support the development of a network of training institutions, national and regional facilities and centres of expertise in order to establish common guidance to enable more predictable, standardized, timely and systematic response missions and deployment of the aforementioned public health emergency workforce.

Article 13. Preparedness monitoring, simulation exercises and universal peer review

1. Each Party shall undertake regular and systematic capacity assessments in order to identify capacity gaps and develop and implement comprehensive, inclusive, multisectoral national plans and strategies for pandemic prevention, preparedness and response, based on relevant tools developed by WHO.

2. Each Party shall periodically assess the functioning, readiness and gaps of its preparedness and multisectoral response, logistics and supply chain management, through appropriate simulation or

tabletop exercises, that include risk and vulnerability mapping. Such exercises may consist of after-action reviews of actual public health emergencies that can support identifying gaps, share lessons learned and improve national pandemic prevention, preparedness and response.

3. The Parties will convene multi-country or regional tabletop exercises every two years, with technical support from the WHO Secretariat, with an aim to identify gaps in multi-country response capacity.

4. Each Party shall provide annual (or biennial) reporting, building on existing relevant reporting where possible, on its pandemic prevention, preparedness, response and health systems recovery capacities.

5. The Parties shall develop and implement a transparent, effective and efficient pandemic prevention, preparedness and response monitoring and evaluation system, which includes targets and national and global standardized indicators, with necessary funding for developing countries for this purpose.

6. The Parties should establish, regularly update and broaden implementation of a universal peer review mechanism to assess national, regional and global preparedness capacities and gaps, by bringing nations together to support a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach to strengthen national capacities for pandemic prevention, preparedness, response and health systems recovery, through technical and financial cooperation, mindful of the need to integrate available data and to engage national leadership at the highest level.

7. The Parties shall endeavour to implement the recommendations generated from review mechanisms, including prioritization of activities for immediate action.

Article 14. Protection of human rights

1. The Parties shall, in accordance with their national laws, incorporate non-discriminatory measures to protect human rights as part of their pandemic prevention, preparedness, response and recovery, with a particular emphasis on the rights of persons in vulnerable situations.

2. Towards this end, each Party shall:

(a) incorporate into its laws and policies human rights protections during public health emergencies, including, but not limited to, requirements that any limitations on human rights are aligned with international law, including by ensuring that: (i) any restrictions are non-discriminatory, necessary to achieve the public health goal and the least restrictive necessary to protect the health of people; (ii) all protections of rights, including but not limited to, provision of health services and social protection programmes, are non-discriminatory and take into account the needs of people at high risk and persons in vulnerable situations; and (iii) people living under any restrictions on the freedom of movement, such as quarantines and isolations, have sufficient access to medication, health services and other necessities and rights; and

(b) endeavour to develop an independent and inclusive advisory committee to advise the government on human rights protections during public health emergencies, including on the development and implementation of its legal and policy framework, and any other measures that may be needed to protect human rights.

Chapter V. Coordination, collaboration and cooperation for pandemic prevention, preparedness, response and health system recovery

Article 15. Global coordination, collaboration and cooperation

1. The Parties recognize the need to coordinate, collaborate and cooperate, in the spirit of international solidarity, with competent international and regional intergovernmental organizations and other bodies in the formulation of cost-effective measures, procedures and guidelines for pandemic prevention, preparedness, response and recovery of health systems, and to this end shall:

- (a) promote global, regional and national political commitment, coordination and leadership for pandemic prevention, preparedness, response and recovery by means that include establishing appropriate governance arrangements;
- (b) support mechanisms that ensure global, regional and national policy decisions are science and evidence-based;
- (c) develop, as necessary, and implement global policies that recognize the specific needs, and ensure the protection of, persons in vulnerable situations, indigenous peoples, and those living in fragile environments or areas, such as Small Island Developing States, who face multiple threats simultaneously, by gathering and analysing data, including data disaggregated by gender, to show the impact of policies on different groups;
- (d) promote equitable gender, geographical and socioeconomic status, representation and participation, as well as the participation of youth and women, in global and regional decision-making processes, global networks and technical advisory groups;
- (e) ensure solidarity with, and prevent stigmatization of, countries that report public health emergencies, as an incentive to facilitate transparency and timely reporting and sharing of information; and
- (f) facilitate WHO with rapid access to outbreak areas within the Party's jurisdiction or control, including through the deployment of rapid response and expert teams, to assess and support the response to emerging outbreaks.

2. Recognizing the central role of WHO as the directing and coordinating authority on international health work, and mindful of the need for coordination with regional organizations, entities in the United Nations system and other intergovernmental organizations, the WHO Director-General shall, in accordance with terms set out herein, declare pandemics.¹

Article 16. Whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches at the national level

1. The Parties recognize that pandemics begin and end in communities and are encouraged to adopt a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach, including to empower and ensure communities' ownership of, and contribution to, community readiness and resilience for pandemic prevention, preparedness, response and recovery of health systems.

¹ Reference is made to footnote 3 (Article 1), which invites the INB to propose and consider the development of modalities and terms for this provision.

2. Each Party shall establish, implement and adequately finance an effective national coordinating multisectoral mechanism with meaningful representation, engagement and participation of communities.
3. Each Party should promote effective and meaningful engagement of communities, civil society and non-State actors, including the private sector, as part of a whole-of-society response in decision-making, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, as well as effective feedback mechanisms.
4. Each Party shall develop, in accordance with its national context, comprehensive national pandemic prevention, preparedness, response and recovery plans pre-, post- and inter-pandemic that, inter alia: (i) identify and prioritize populations for access to pandemic-related products and health services; (ii) support timely and scalable mobilization of multidisciplinary surge capacity of human and financial resources, and facilitate timely allocation of resources to the frontline pandemic response; (iii) review the status of stockpiles and surge capacity of essential public health and clinical resources, and surge capacity in production of pandemic-related products; (iv) facilitate rapid and equitable restoration of public health capacities following a pandemic; and (v) promote collaboration with non-State actors, the private sector and civil society.
5. Each Party will take steps to address the social, environmental and economic determinants of health, and vulnerability conditions that contribute to the emergence and spread of pandemics, and prevent or mitigate the socioeconomic impacts of pandemics, including but not limited to, those affecting economic growth, the environment, employment, trade, transport, gender equality, education, social assistance, housing, food insecurity, nutrition and culture, and especially for persons in vulnerable situations.
6. Each Party should strengthen its national public health and social policies to facilitate a rapid, resilient response, especially for persons in vulnerable situations, including mobilizing social capital in communities for mutual support.

Article 17. Strengthening pandemic and public health literacy

1. The Parties commit to increase science, public health and pandemic literacy in the population, as well as access to information on pandemics and their effects, and tackle false, misleading, misinformation or disinformation, including through promotion of international cooperation. In that regard, each Party is encouraged to:
 - (a) promote and facilitate, at all appropriate levels, in accordance with national laws and regulations, development and implementation of educational and public awareness programmes on pandemics and their effects, by informing the public, communicating risk and managing infodemics through effective channels, including social media;
 - (b) conduct regular social listening and analysis to identify the prevalence and profiles of misinformation, which contribute to design communications and messaging strategies for the public to counteract misinformation, disinformation and false news, thereby strengthening public trust; and
 - (c) promote communications on scientific, engineering and technological advances that are relevant to the development and implementation of international rules and guidelines for pandemic prevention, preparedness, response and recovery of health systems, based on science and evidence.

2. The Parties will contribute to research and inform policies on factors that hinder adherence to public health and social measures, confidence and uptake of vaccines, use of appropriate therapeutics and trust in science and government institutions.

3. The Parties shall promote science and evidence-informed effective and timely risk assessment, including the uncertainty of data and evidence, when communicating such risk to the public.

Article 18. One Health

1. The Parties, recognizing that the majority of emerging infectious diseases and pandemics are caused by zoonotic pathogens, commit, in the context of pandemic prevention, preparedness, response and recovery of health systems, to promote and implement a One Health approach that is coherent, integrated, coordinated and collaborative among all relevant actors, with the application of existing instruments and initiatives.

2. The Parties, with an aim of safeguarding human health and detecting and preventing health threats, shall promote and enhance synergies between multisectoral and transdisciplinary collaboration at the national level and cooperation at the international level, in order to identify, conduct risk assessment of and share pathogens with pandemic potential at the interface between human, animal and environment ecosystems, while recognizing their interdependence.

3. The Parties will identify and integrate into relevant pandemic prevention and preparedness plans interventions that address the drivers of the emergence and re-emergence of disease at the human-animal-environment interface, including but not limited to climate change, land use change, wildlife trade, desertification and antimicrobial resistance.

4. The Parties commit to regularly assess One Health capacities, insofar as they relate to pandemic prevention, preparedness, response and recovery of health systems, and to identify gaps, policies and the funding needed to strengthen those capacities.

5. The Parties commit to strengthen synergies with other existing relevant instruments that address the drivers of pandemics, such as climate change, biodiversity loss, ecosystem degradation and increased risks at the human-animal-environment interface due to human activities.

6. The Parties commit to strengthen multisectoral, coordinated, interoperable and integrated One Health surveillance systems and strengthen laboratory capacity to identify and assess the risks and emergence of pathogens and variants with pandemic potential, in order to minimize spill-over events, mutations and the risks associated with zoonotic neglected tropical and vector-borne diseases, with a view to preventing small-scale outbreaks in wildlife or domesticated animals from becoming a pandemic.

7. Each Party shall:

(a) implement actions to prevent pandemics from pathogens resistant to antimicrobial agents, taking into account relevant tools and guidelines, through a One Health approach, and collaborate with relevant partners, including the Quadripartite;

(b) foster actions at national and community levels that encompass whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches to control zoonotic outbreaks (in wildlife and domesticated animals), including engagement of communities in surveillance that identifies zoonotic outbreaks and antimicrobial resistance at source;

- (c) develop and implement a national One Health action plan on antimicrobial resistance that strengthens antimicrobial stewardship in the human and animal sectors, optimizes antimicrobial consumption, increases investment in, and promotes equitable and affordable access to, new medicines, diagnostic tools, vaccines and other interventions, strengthens infection prevention and control in health care settings and sanitation and biosecurity in livestock farms, and provides technical support to developing countries;
- (d) enhance surveillance to identify and report on pathogens resistant to antimicrobial agents in humans, livestock and aquaculture that have pandemic potential, building on the existing global reporting systems; and
- (e) take the One Health approach into account at national, subnational and facility levels in order to produce science-based evidence, and support, facilitate and/or oversee the correct, evidence-based and risk-informed implementation of infection prevention and control.

Chapter VI. Financing for pandemic prevention, preparedness, response and recovery of health systems

Article 19. Sustainable and predictable financing

1. The Parties recognize the important role that financial resources play in achieving the objective of the WHO CA+ and the primary financial responsibility of national governments in protecting and promoting the health of their populations. In that regard, each Party shall:
 - (a) cooperate with other Parties, within the means and resources at its disposal, to raise financial resources for effective implementation of the WHO CA+ through bilateral and multilateral funding mechanisms;
 - (b) plan and provide adequate financial support in line with its national fiscal capacities for: (i) strengthening pandemic prevention, preparedness, response and recovery of health systems; (ii) implementing its national plans, programmes and priorities; and (iii) strengthening health systems and progressive realization of universal health coverage;
 - (c) commit to prioritize and increase or maintain, including through greater collaboration between the health, finance and private sectors, as appropriate, domestic funding by allocating in its annual budgets not lower than 5% of its current health expenditure to pandemic prevention, preparedness, response and health systems recovery, notably for improving and sustaining relevant capacities and working to achieve universal health coverage; and
 - (d) commit to allocate, in accordance with its respective capacities, XX% of its gross domestic product for international cooperation and assistance on pandemic prevention, preparedness, response and health systems recovery, particularly for developing countries, including through international organizations and existing and new mechanisms.
2. The Parties shall ensure, through innovative existing and/or new mechanisms, sustainable and predictable financing of global, regional and national systems, capacities, tools and global public goods, while avoiding duplication, promoting synergies and enhancing transparent and accountable governance of these mechanisms, to support strengthening pandemic prevention, preparedness, response and recovery of health systems, based on public health risk and need, particularly in developing countries.

3. The Parties shall promote, as appropriate, the use of bilateral, regional, subregional and other appropriate and relevant channels to provide funding for the development and strengthening of pandemic prevention, preparedness, response and health system recovery programmes of developing country Parties.

4. The Parties will facilitate rapid and effective mobilization of adequate financial resources, including from international financing facilities, to affected countries, based on public health need, to maintain and restore routine public health functions during and in the aftermath of a pandemic response.

5. The Parties represented in relevant regional and international intergovernmental organizations and financial and development institutions shall encourage these entities to provide financial assistance for developing country Parties to support them in meeting their obligations under the WHO CA+, without limiting their participation in or membership of these organizations.

Chapter VII. Institutional arrangements

Article 20. Governing Body for the WHO CA+

1. A governing body for the WHO CA+ is established to promote the effective implementation of the WHO CA+ (hereinafter, the "Governing Body").

2. The Governing Body shall be composed of:

- (a) the Conference of the Parties (COP), which shall be the supreme organ of the Governing Body, composed of the Parties and constituting the sole decision-making organ; and
- (b) the Officers of the Parties, which shall be the administrative organ of the Governing Body.

3. The COP, as the supreme policy setting organ of the WHO CA+, shall keep under regular review every three years the implementation and outcome of the WHO CA+ and any related legal instruments that the COP may adopt, and shall make the decisions necessary to promote the effective implementation of the WHO CA+. The COP shall:

- (a) be composed of delegates representing Parties;
- (b) convene regular sessions of the Governing Body; the first of which shall take place not later than one year after the date of entry into force of the Convention, at a time and place to be determined by the WHO Secretariat, with the time and place of subsequent ordinary sessions to be determined by the COP upon a proposal of the Officers of the Parties;
- (c) convene special sessions of the Governing Body at such other times as may be deemed necessary by the COP, or at the written request of any Party, provided that, within 30 days of such a request being communicated to the Party/Parties by the Secretariat, it is supported by at least one third of the Parties; and
- (d) adopt its rules of procedure, as well as those of the other bodies of the Governing Body, which shall include decision-making procedures. Such procedures may include specified majorities required for the adoption of particular decisions.

4. The Officers of the Parties, as the administrative organ of the Governing Body, shall:
 - (a) be composed of two Presidents, four Vice-Presidents and two rapporteurs, serving in their individual capacity and elected by the COP for XX years; and
 - (b) endeavour to make decisions by consensus; however, if efforts to reach consensus are deemed by the Presidents to be unavailing, decisions may be taken by voting by the President and Vice-Presidents.
5. The Governing Body may further develop proposals for consideration by the WHO Executive Board, including to promote coordination and synergies between its Standing Committee on Health Emergency Prevention, Preparedness and Response and the Governing Body for the WHO CA+.

Article 21. Consultative Body for the WHO CA+

1. A consultative body for the WHO CA+ (the "Consultative Body") is established to provide advice and technical inputs for the decision-making processes of the COP, without participating in any decision-making.
2. The Consultative Body will provide opportunity for broad, fair and equitable input to the COP for the decision-making processes of the COP. Further, the Consultative Body will provide opportunity for facilitation of implementation of COP decisions through modalities to be established by the COP. For the avoidance of doubt, it is understood that the Consultative Body will not participate in any decision-making, whether by consensus, voting or otherwise, of the COP.
3. The Consultative Body shall be composed of (i) delegates representing Parties; and (ii) representatives of the United Nations and its specialized and related agencies, as well as any State Member thereof or observers thereto not Party to the WHO CA+. Further, representatives of any body or organization, whether national or international, governmental or nongovernmental, private sector or public sector, which is qualified in matters covered by the WHO CA+, may be admitted upon formal application, in accordance with terms and conditions to be adopted by the COP, renewable every three years, unless at least one third of the Parties object.
4. The Consultative Body shall be subject to the oversight of the COP, including rules of procedure adopted by the COP.

Article 22. Oversight mechanisms for the WHO CA+

1. The Governing Body, at its first meeting, shall consider and approve cooperative procedures and institutional mechanisms to promote compliance with the provisions of the WHO CA+ and also address cases of non-compliance.
2. These measures, procedures and mechanisms shall include monitoring provisions and accountability measures to systematically address the achievement and gaps of capacities for prevention, preparedness, response and recovery of health systems, and the impact of pandemics, by means that include submission of periodic reports, reviews, remedies and actions, and to offer advice or assistance, where appropriate. These measures shall be separate from, and without prejudice to, the dispute settlement procedures and mechanisms under the WHO CA+.

Article 23. Assessment and review

The Governing Body shall establish a mechanism to undertake, three years after the entry into force of the WHO CA+, and thereafter every three years and upon modalities determined by the Governing Body, an evaluation of the relevance and effectiveness of the WHO CA+, and recommend corrective measures, including, if deemed appropriate, amendments to the text of the WHO CA+.

Article 24. Secretariat

1. A Secretariat for the WHO CA+ shall be provided by the Director-General of the World Health Organization. Secretariat functions shall be:

- (a) to make arrangements for sessions of the Governing Body and any subsidiary bodies and to provide them with services as required;
- (b) to transmit reports received by it pursuant to the WHO CA+;
- (c) to provide support to the Parties, on request, in the compilation and communication of information required in accordance with the provisions of the WHO CA+;
- (d) to prepare reports on its activities under the WHO CA+ under the guidance of the Governing Body, and submit them to the Governing Body;
- (e) to ensure, under the guidance of the Governing Body, the necessary coordination with the competent international and regional intergovernmental organizations and other bodies;
- (f) to enter, under the guidance of the Governing Body, into such administrative or contractual arrangements as may be required for the effective discharge of its functions; and
- (g) to perform other secretariat functions specified by the WHO CA+ and such other functions as may be determined by the Governing Body.

Chapter VIII. Final provisions**Article 25. Reservations**

- 1. No reservations or exceptions may be made to this WHO CA+ unless expressly permitted by other articles of this WHO CA+.
- 2. A reservation incompatible with the object and purpose of the WHO CA+ shall not be permitted.
- 3. Reservations that are receivable in accordance with the above, once made, may be withdrawn at any time by notification to this effect addressed to the Depositary, who shall then inform all Parties thereof. Such notification shall take effect on the date on which it is received.

Article 26. Confidentiality and data protection

Any exchange of data or information by the Parties pursuant to the WHO CA+ shall respect the right to privacy, including as such right is established under international law, and will be consistent with each Party's national law, as applicable, regarding confidentiality and privacy.

Article 27. Withdrawal

1. At any time after two years from the date on which the WHO CA+ has entered into force for a Party that Party may withdraw from the WHO CA+ by giving written notification to the Depositary.
2. Any such withdrawal shall take effect upon expiry of one year from the date of receipt by the Depositary of the notification of withdrawal, or on such later date as may be specified in the notification of withdrawal.
3. Any Party that withdraws from the WHO CA+ shall not be considered as having also withdrawn from any protocol to which it is a Party, or from any related instrument, unless such a Party formally withdraws from such other instruments, and does so in accordance with the relevant terms, if any, thereof.

Article 28. Right to vote

1. Each Party to the WHO CA+ shall have one vote in the COP, except as provided for in paragraph 2 of this Article.
2. Regional economic integration organizations, in matters within their competence, shall exercise their right to vote with a number of votes equal to the number of their Member States that are Parties to the WHO CA+. Such an organization shall not exercise its right to vote if any of its Member States exercises its right, and vice versa.

Article 29. Amendments to the WHO CA+

1. Any Party may propose amendments to the WHO CA+. Such amendments will be considered by the COP, which may invite views of the Consultative Body.
2. Amendments to the WHO CA+ shall be adopted by the COP. The text of any proposed amendment to the WHO CA+ shall be communicated to the Parties by the Secretariat at least three months before the session at which it is proposed for adoption. The Secretariat shall also communicate proposed amendments to the signatories of the WHO CA+ and, for information, to the Depositary.
3. The Parties shall make every effort to reach agreement by consensus on any proposed amendment to the WHO CA+. If all efforts at consensus have been exhausted, and no agreement reached, the amendment shall as a last resort be adopted by a two-thirds majority vote of the Parties present and voting at the session. For purposes of this Article, Parties present and voting means Parties present and casting an affirmative or negative vote. Any adopted amendments shall be communicated by the Secretariat to the Depositary, who shall circulate it to all Parties for acceptance.
4. An amendment adopted in accordance with paragraph 3 of this Article shall enter into force, for those Parties having accepted it, on the ninetieth day after the date of receipt by the Depositary of an instrument of acceptance by at least two-thirds of the Parties.
5. The amendment shall enter into force for any other Party on the ninetieth day after the date on which that Party deposits with the Depositary its instrument of acceptance of the said amendment.

Article 30. Adoption and amendment of annexes to the WHO CA+

1. The COP may adopt annexes to the WHO CA+ and amendments thereto.

2. Annexes to the WHO CA+ shall form an integral part thereof and, unless otherwise expressly provided, a reference to the WHO CA+ constitutes at the same time a reference to any annexes thereto.

3. Annexes shall be restricted to lists, forms and any other descriptive material relating to procedural, scientific, technical or administrative matters, and shall not be substantive in nature.

Article 31. Protocols to the WHO CA+

1. Any Party may propose protocols to the WHO CA+. Such proposals will be considered by the COP, which may invite the views of the Consultative Body.

2. The COP may adopt protocols to the WHO CA+. In adopting these protocols every effort shall be made to reach consensus. If all efforts at consensus have been exhausted and no agreement reached, the protocol shall as a last resort be adopted by a two-thirds majority vote of the Parties present and voting at the session. For the purposes of this Article, Parties present and voting means Parties present and casting an affirmative or negative vote.

3. The text of any proposed protocol shall be communicated to the Parties by the Secretariat at least three months before the session at which it is proposed for adoption.

4. States that are not Parties to the WHO CA+ may be Parties to a protocol thereof, provided the protocol so provides.

5. Any protocol to the WHO CA+ shall be binding only on the Parties to the protocol in question. Only Parties to a protocol may take decisions on matters exclusively relating to the protocol in question.

6. The requirements for entry into force of any protocol shall be established by that instrument.

Article 32. Signature

The WHO CA+ shall be open for signature by all Members of the World Health Organization, any States that are not Members of the World Health Organization but are members of the United Nations, and by regional economic integration organizations, at the World Health Organization headquarters in Geneva, immediately following its adoption by the World Health Assembly at the Seventy-seventh World Health Assembly, from XX May 2024 to XX July 2024, and thereafter at United Nations Headquarters in New York, from XX August 2024 to XX November 2024.

Article 33. Ratification, acceptance, approval, formal confirmation or accession

1. The WHO CA+ shall be subject to ratification, acceptance, approval or accession by States, and to formal confirmation or accession by regional economic integration organizations. It shall be open for accession from the day after the date on which the WHO CA+ is closed for signature. Instruments of ratification, acceptance, approval, formal confirmation or accession shall be deposited with the Depositary.

2. Any regional economic integration organization that becomes a Party to the WHO CA+ without any of its Member States being a Party shall be bound by all the obligations under the WHO CA+. In the case of those organizations, where one or more of its Member States is a Party to the WHO CA+, the organization and its Member States shall decide on their respective responsibilities for the performance of their obligations under the WHO CA+. In such cases, the organization and the Member States shall not be entitled to exercise rights under the WHO CA+ concurrently.

3. Regional economic integration organizations shall, in their instruments relating to formal confirmation or in their instruments of accession, declare the extent of their competence with respect to the matters governed by the WHO CA+. These organizations shall also inform the Depositary, who shall in turn inform the Parties, of any substantial modification in the extent of their competence.

Article 34. Entry into force

1. The WHO CA+ shall enter into force on the thirtieth day following the date of deposit of the thirtieth instrument of ratification, acceptance, approval, formal confirmation or accession with the Depositary.

2. For each State that ratifies, accepts or approves the WHO CA+ or accedes thereto after the conditions set out in paragraph 1 of this Article for entry into force have been fulfilled, the WHO CA+ shall enter into force on the thirtieth day following the date of deposit of its instrument of ratification, acceptance, approval or accession.

3. For each regional economic integration organization depositing an instrument of formal confirmation or an instrument of accession after the conditions set out in paragraph 1 of this Article for entry into force have been fulfilled, the WHO CA+ shall enter into force on the thirtieth day following the date of its depositing of the instrument of formal confirmation or of accession.

4. For the purposes of this Article, any instrument deposited by a regional economic integration organization shall not be counted as additional to those deposited by Member States of the Organization.

Article 35. Provisional application by the Parties, and actions to give effect to the provisions of the WHO CA+ by the World Health Assembly

1. The WHO CA+ may be applied provisionally, in whole or in part, by a signatory and/or Party that consents to its provisional application by so notifying the Depositary in writing at the time of signature of the instrument, or signature or deposit of its instrument of ratification, acceptance, approval, formal confirmation or accession. Such provisional application shall become effective from the date of receipt of the notification by the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

2. Provisional application by a signatory and/or Party shall terminate upon the entry into force of the WHO CA+ for that Party or upon notification by that signatory and/or Party to the Depositary in writing of its intention to terminate its provisional application.

3. Provisions of the WHO CA+ may be given effect as recommendations for all Member States of the World Health Organization under Article 23 of the WHO Constitution, and given effect as policies of the World Health Organization, understood as authoritative with respect to the Director-General, under Articles 18(a), 28(a) and 31 of the WHO Constitution.

Article 36. Settlement of disputes

1. In the event of a dispute between two or more Parties concerning the interpretation or application of the WHO CA+, the Parties concerned shall seek through diplomatic channels a settlement of the dispute through negotiation or any other peaceful means of their own choice, including good offices, mediation or conciliation. Failure to reach agreement by good offices, mediation or conciliation shall not absolve Parties to the dispute from the responsibility of continuing to seek to resolve it.

A/INB/4/3

2. When ratifying, accepting, approving, formally confirming or acceding to the WHO CA+, or at any time thereafter, a Party may declare in writing to the Depositary that, for a dispute not resolved in accordance with paragraph 1 of this Article, it accepts, as compulsory *ipso facto* and without special agreement, in relation to any Party accepting the same obligation: (i) submission of the dispute to the International Court of Justice; and/or (ii) ad hoc arbitration in accordance with procedures to be adopted by consensus by the Governing Body.

3. The provisions of this Article shall apply with respect to any protocol as between the Parties to the protocol, unless otherwise provided therein.

Article 37. Depositary

The Secretary-General of the United Nations shall be the Depositary of the WHO CA+ and amendments thereto and of protocols and annexes adopted in accordance with the terms of the WHO CA+.

Article 38. Authentic texts

The original of the WHO CA+, of which the Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish texts are equally authentic, shall be deposited with the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

— — —

NOMINATIONS

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 15, 2023

U.S. SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS,
Washington, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:41 p.m., in Room SD-419, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Christopher Murphy presiding.

Present: Senators Murphy [presiding], Menendez, Shaheen, Kaine, Van Hollen, Hagerty, and Ricketts.

Also Present: Senators Casey and Sullivan.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. CHRISTOPHER MURPHY, U.S. SENATOR FROM CONNECTICUT

Senator MURPHY.—the subcommittee to order and we are glad to welcome to the committee nominees to be Ambassador to Kuwait, Ambassador to Turkmenistan, Ambassador to the UAE, Ambassador to the Maldives, and Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy.

We are gifted by the presence of several of our colleagues who are going to provide introductions. We will start with Senator Casey, who will introduce Elizabeth Rood, Senator Sullivan, who will introduce Martina Strong, and then Senator Shaheen, who will introduce Elizabeth Allen.

I will introduce the remaining guests. Senator Hagerty and I will say a few opening words and then we will get to the testimony of our very capable nominees.

Again, thank you to both Senator Casey and Senator Sullivan for joining us here today and I am going to defer to Senator Casey and Senator Sullivan to open us up.

STATEMENT OF HON. ROBERT P. CASEY, JR., U.S. SENATOR FROM PENNSYLVANIA

Senator CASEY. Chairman Murphy, thank you and Ranking Member Hagerty and members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of the nomination of a fellow Pennsylvanian and devoted civil servant, Elizabeth Rood, to be the next U.S. Ambassador to Turkmenistan.

Elizabeth, thank you for your willingness to serve as well as your years of service at the Army War College in Carlisle.

I would also like to thank Elizabeth's three children—Margaret, Alice, and Andrew—and her grandchildren. No one enters public service alone. The commitments of such a role mean that public

servants' families make—must make sacrifices as well as the person who is elected or appointed to a position.

Elizabeth has already shown herself to be a tough diplomat committed to standing up for U.S. interests and U.S. values. The role of Ambassador to Turkmenistan is a critical diplomatic position for the United States Government and it will require someone with Elizabeth's experience and determination.

Turkmenistan occupies an important geographic region bordering Afghanistan, Iran, and the Caspian Sea. Rich in fossil fuels, Turkmenistan's reliance on Chinese natural gas purchases puts the country at the heart of great power competition.

The Government of Turkmenistan's authoritarian rule, centralized economy, corruption, and human rights record present challenges for our future ambassador.

Elizabeth's 35-plus years of public service, including almost three decades as a diplomat and six years as a public school teacher, make her well equipped to promote U.S. interests in Turkmenistan.

Most recently, she served as deputy chief of mission and charge d'affaires at U.S. Embassy Moscow. I personally know of her commitment to the nation through her efforts to fight for the release of a fellow Pennsylvanian and a fellow student of the Russian language, international educator Marc Fogel, who languishes still in a Russian jail on trumped up charges and who requires our continued attention.

Filling in as an acting Ambassador, Elizabeth led the U.S. mission in Moscow for almost five months during the most tumultuous time for U.S.-Russia relations since the Cuban Missile Crisis due to Russia's unlawful invasion of Ukraine.

But this is just the latest example of her taking on a tough challenge. Throughout her career she has jumped at opportunities to do all she can for our country, including multiple years-long tours in Afghanistan leading the State Department's Critical Export Control Cooperation Office or strengthening democracy in the country of Georgia less than 30 miles from Russian-occupied territory.

Her exemplary service, qualifications, and eagerness to take on difficult assignments make me confident that she will honorably represent U.S. interests in Turkmenistan.

I strongly support her nomination to be the next U.S. Ambassador and thank you for the opportunity to speak on her behalf.

Senator MURPHY. Thank you, Senator Casey.

Senator Sullivan?

**STATEMENT OF HON. DAN SULLIVAN,
U.S. SENATOR FROM ALASKA**

Senator SULLIVAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and to my fellow colleagues in the U.S. Senate it is a great pleasure to be here today to introduce to you Martina Strong, the President's nominee to be ambassador to the United Arab Emirates.

I have known Martina since 2003 when we worked together on the National Security Council staff during the Bush administration. In fact, we had adjoining offices, long hours there.

I want to tell you that Martina literally embodies the American dream. She came to the U.S. from communist Czechoslovakia as a

political refugee at the age of 14 and has gone on to enjoy a remarkable exceptional career in the service of the American people.

Her husband, John, who is right behind us, has also served our nation very well, retiring as a colonel in the U.S. Army after 30 years of service.

A career member of the Senior Foreign Service and rank of minister-counselor, Martina served most recently as charge d'affaires at the U.S. Embassy in Saudi Arabia.

In fact, although that was supposed to be a temporary assignment Martina has been charge in Riyadh for three years after nearly two additional years as deputy chief of mission there.

She was the DCM to our former outstanding ambassador to Saudi Arabia, General John Abizaid, who called Martina, quote, "a gifted leader and diplomat second to none."

Mr. Chairman, it is not an easy time to lead any mission in the Gulf, whether Riyadh or elsewhere but Martina's record in this crucial region has been exceptional.

First and foremost, she has been a champion for our fellow Americans and their security. She has provided key support for our efforts to end the war in Yemen and mobilize assistance for Ukraine, and she has helped deliver billions of dollars in commercial wins for American companies and American workers through relentless advocacy.

Just yesterday, Boeing, with Martina's assistance, announced a landmark \$37 billion deal with Saudi Arabia to purchase 787 Dreamliners.

There are a lot of moving pieces in the Persian Gulf. U.S. leadership is not something that we can take for granted in that region. We have to work at maintaining our strategic, security, and commercial advantages.

We need someone in Abu Dhabi who understands this and who has a proven record of doing it. I am confident that Martina Strong is that person.

Mr. Chairman, as some of you know, Senator Van Hollen and I co-founded the Senate Foreign Service Officers Caucus a number of years ago to highlight and promote the patriotic men and women who serve our great nation with integrity, skill, and professionalism, who have taken risks for our nation, who have sacrificed time away from family and loved ones for months or even years in order to promote the foreign policy interests of America.

Martina embodies that type of Foreign Service officer that Senator Van Hollen and I had in mind when we started this caucus.

Martina served in Iraq as the political minister-counselor in Baghdad during the height of the conflict with ISIS and earlier as the U.S. Army's political advisor in Basra during the Shi'a militia insurgency. These were multiyear unaccompanied tours that entailed much risk and separation from her family.

She has served in Bulgaria as DCM in the Czech Republic, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and France. And oh, by the way, in addition to English Martina speaks seven languages: Arabic, French, Russian, German, Polish, Czech, and Bosnian.

In addition to a long list of State Department recognitions and awards she is the recipient of the Meritorious Presidential Rank

Award as well as the Department of the Army's Meritorious Civilian Service and Superior Civilian Service Awards.

Martina Strong will serve our country as she always has with integrity, honor, and distinction. I urge all of my colleagues to strongly support her confirmation.

Thank you.

Senator MURPHY. Thank you very much. Thanks, Senator Sullivan. Thank you, Senator Casey.

We know you have busy days ahead of you but we appreciate you being here with us to make those introductions.

And as you depart let me recognize Senator Shaheen.

**STATEMENT OF HON. JEANNE SHAHEEN,
U.S. SENATOR FROM NEW HAMPSHIRE**

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and as a member of the committee I will stay up here since there is not a lot of room at the table.

But it is my honor to introduce Elizabeth Allen who is also known as Liz—all of her friends and colleagues call her Liz—to be Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs.

That is a position that is critical to advancing our foreign policy priorities in every corner of the world. Ms. Allen got her professional start at the State Department supporting Afghan women and combating human trafficking.

If confirmed, this would be her sixth role at the department. She is an experienced practitioner of public diplomacy and longtime communications and public affairs strategist.

Ms. Allen believes deeply in the United States' role in the world and she has seen firsthand how our positive affirmative vision can reinforce America's leadership.

Her strong commitment to public service is reflected in the eight years she served in the Obama-Biden administration, including as White House Deputy Communications Director and Deputy Assistant to President Obama and as White House Director of Message Planning and Deputy Director of Communications to then Vice President Biden.

Liz previously was a partner at FGS Global where she specialized in message and advocacy strategy, reputation and crisis management, and executive leadership communications on a range of international public policy issues.

Liz is a native of Buffalo, New York, and she graduated magna cum laude and Phi Beta Kappa with a degree in political science from the State University of New York at Geneseo.

Ms. Allen's nomination to this role could not come at a more important time. Since it was created in 1999, sadly, this role of public diplomacy has been left vacant as often as it has been filled.

In 2021 I led a letter to President Biden calling for an appointment to this position. The Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy provides the vision, the tools, and the guidance our Foreign Service, civil service, and locally-engaged staff need to effectively communicate our foreign policy and to build sustained relationships.

Among Ms. Allen's responsibilities in this role will be oversight of the Global Engagement Center, an important interagency effort that identifies and counters misinformation which harms U.S. in-

terests by undermining global public support for our foreign policy agenda.

The Global Engagement Center has had strong bipartisan support but its mission has become even more important in the last year because of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

If confirmed, I look forward to working with Liz Allen to ensure the department and its public diplomacy team are well positioned to meet this moment and I urge all of the members of the committee to support her nomination.

Senator MURPHY. Thank you very much, Senator Shaheen.

Before I make a few opening remarks let me just round out our introductions. We are very eager to hear from Ms. Karen Sasahara, who most recently served as Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs with responsibility for North Africa.

She has previously served posts in Jordan, Jerusalem, and Yemen, and comes uniquely poised to succeed as our next ambassador to Kuwait.

And we are also pleased to be joined by Mr. Hugo Yon, who is currently a senior adviser to the Under Secretary of State for Economic Growth, Energy, and the Environment. He previously served in the State Department's Bureau of International Organization Affairs, Transportation Affairs, and in several positions at the National Security Council.

Let me just say a few opening words to our panel. You are all before us to represent the United States in key posts all around the world and, of course, first and foremost, we thank you for the service you have rendered to this country and for your continued willingness to serve and to your families as well for serving alongside you.

Ms. Sasahara, the United States, of course, has had a very distinctive partnership with Kuwait since we helped liberate the country from Saddam Hussein's forces in 1991.

The country's strategic location, large oil and natural gas reserves, and its willingness to base and host U.S. troops ensures that Kuwait is going to remain very relevant to U.S. interests in the Gulf.

But, interestingly, in comparison to other monarchies in the region, particularly in the GCC, Kuwait has also made some pretty interesting progress when it comes to participatory democracy and I will be interested to hear from you about ways in which we can support Kuwait's plans to further such reform in the years ahead.

Ms. Rood, you are headed to Turkmenistan and it is a country very rich in hydrocarbons but also home to a repressive authoritarian government that has kept the country, largely, isolated from the outside world.

And so the committee is going to welcome your views on how to encourage Turkmenistan to diversify its natural gas exports away from China, take steps to open its economy and improve its human rights record.

Ms. Strong, the UAE has emerged as an influential economic and diplomatic player in the Middle East and beyond. But the UAE has not always wielded that influence in ways that support U.S. interests, most notably in Yemen and Libya, and recently in their will-

ingness to allow their country to become a hub for Russia sanctions evasion.

We are going to look forward to hearing from you on how to help us balance and right size that relationship.

Ms. Allen, you have served as Under Secretary of Public Diplomacy on an acting basis for almost a year now. You have experienced firsthand the challenges of managing our engagement with foreign publics and the media and so we really look forward to your very informed views on how to best promote U.S. policies overseas and how to counter these increasingly sophisticated disinformation campaigns.

Finally, Mr. Yon, you are nominated to be our first U.S. Ambassador with sole responsibility for the Maldives and we—it could not come at a better time as we seek to expand our diplomatic presence in the Indo-Pacific by opening a new embassy in Male.

It is a country with influences from both India and China but they have a really critical role to maintaining peace and security in the Indian Ocean and we are glad that you will signal our increased attention to that country.

I look forward to your testimony, and let me turn it over to Senator Hagerty for his opening comments.

**STATEMENT OF HON. BILL HAGERTY,
U.S. SENATOR FROM TENNESSEE**

Senator HAGERTY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I want to thank all the nominees for appearing today before us and I want to thank you for your willingness to serve our great nation.

Today, we consider nominees for five important positions and, first and foremost, I want to congratulate you but even more importantly I want to congratulate all of your families.

I appreciate the sacrifice that your families make to support you in the roles that you are hoping to take on and it makes a tremendous difference. So congratulations to all of them.

If confirmed, you are going to have the unique opportunity and responsibility to represent the most exceptional nation in the world. Please remember that every day that you wake up you are representing the most exceptional nation in the world.

I know there may be challenges and may be problems but this is America that you are planning to represent. So congratulations to you and your families.

I would like to start with the nominee to be U.S. Ambassador to the UAE. The UAE and the United States share a history of strong friendship and cooperation.

The UAE is a very important player in energy markets and in regional security and regional commerce, more broadly. I look forward to hearing from the nominee about how we can maintain a strong partnership while working to counter China's growing malign influence in the region and at the same time working to address Iranian efforts to destabilize the region.

Next, I would like to turn to the nominee to be Ambassador to Kuwait. Kuwait and the United States enjoy a long history of cooperation and Kuwait will be critical to combating the malign influence of communist China in the Middle East. I look forward to hearing from the nominee on this subject.

Next, I would like to turn to the nominee to be Ambassador to Turkmenistan. Turkmenistan's location and energy resources are critical aspects of this important relationship for the United States. I hope our next ambassador can continue to build strong diplomatic ties.

And turning now to be—turning now to the nomination to be our Ambassador to the Maldives.

Hugo, it is good to see you again. I want to congratulate you on your nomination and to underscore the fact that there is a tremendous amount of activity where you are headed and I think you are going to play a very critical role in establishing our foothold there and our influence there.

The United States and the Maldives enjoy a very friendly relationship and the nation's strategic location is absolutely critical to our diplomatic ties in that entire region.

So I look forward to hearing from you on how we will strengthen that relationship as well.

And last but, certainly, not least, I would like to focus on the nominee to be Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs.

The Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs is tasked with leading the U.S. Government's overall public diplomacy effort, increasing the impact of educational and cultural exchange, and developing and utilizing new technologies to improve the efficiency of our public diplomacy programs.

I look forward to hearing your plan on leveraging this position to advance America's interest.

And to all of our nominees, again, thank you for serving our nation and for answering the questions from the committee today. I look forward to hearing all of your testimony.

Mr. Chairman, I yield my time back to you.

Senator MURPHY. Thank you very much, Senator Hagerty.

Let me also welcome this committee's good friend, Michael Ratney, to the committee. We hope to time these confirmations perfectly for your family to get you both to the region as expeditiously as possible. Thank you for being here today.

Why do we not start with Mr. Yon and we will go down the line for opening comments? We ask you to keep your comments to five minutes or less. Anything extra you can submit for the record.

STATEMENT OF HUGO YUE-HO YON, OF CALIFORNIA, A CAREER MEMBER OF THE SENIOR FOREIGN SERVICE, CLASS OF MINISTER-COUNSELOR, NOMINATED TO BE AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE REPUBLIC OF MALDIVES

Mr. YON. Chair Murphy, Ranking Member—

Senator MURPHY. Let us just wait to make sure we have a working microphone. Do we have somebody from the committee who can—

[Pause.]

Senator MURPHY [continuing]. Look at that. That is impressive.

Mr. YON. All right. How is that?

Senator MURPHY. That is perfect.

Mr. YON. Okay. That is great.

Chair Murphy, Ranking Member Hagerty, and distinguished Members of the committee, it is a privilege to appear before you today. I thank President Biden and Secretary Blinken for their confidence in me and their support in nominating me to become the first U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Maldives.

I want to thank my spouse, Liza, without whose support and sacrifice I would not be sitting here today. I also want to recognize my children, Hudson and Hannah, who have had to endure and enjoy the itinerant life of diplomacy.

If my parents were alive today our life of public service would bring smiles to their faces. My father and his family ran from China during the tumultuous decade of the Cultural Revolution.

After immigrating to the United States he rebuilt his life, ultimately becoming a proud civilian engineer for the U.S. Navy. My parents taught me that one can pursue the American dream but also serve his or her community and help others to advance.

I have carried these life lessons into my 24 years of diplomacy. We shape global rules and norms that allow Americans to compete and prosper but also provide opportunity for other countries to join in and benefit from an open, free, prosperous, and secure world order.

If confirmed, I would help build the foundation to facilitate U.S.-Maldives ties for decades to come.

As we take this important step towards strengthening our bilateral relationship Maldives stands at a historical juncture in its own development. I would prioritize expanding and deepening our partnership with Maldives in the areas of democracy, diversification, and defense.

On democracy, Maldives is scheduled in the early fall to directly elect its president for just the fourth time. As a young democracy, Maldives has been building the institutions to support and strengthen the democratic process. The country made strong commitments at the Summit for Democracy.

If confirmed, I would continue to prioritize the work of the State Department, the USAID, and the Department of Justice in sustaining and strengthening democracy in Maldives.

On diversification, Maldives faces limited options to shape, resist, and adapt to global forces. Maldives is well known as a world-class tourism destination. That strength is also a source of vulnerability for the economy because Maldives relies so heavily on this one industry.

Even as the country endeavors through infrastructure investments to expand tourism, sustain its fisheries, develop additional sectors in jobs, and adapt to sea level rise and land erosion, it still faces vulnerabilities.

If confirmed, I would build on our work with Maldives on financial management and transparency. I would facilitate American business engagement and U.S. educational and training opportunities to help Maldives diversify their economic partner choices for its people and to meet the unique challenges that small island nations face.

Furthermore, Maldives has embraced the principle that all countries should engage peacefully for an open, free, prosperous, and se-

cure Indo-Pacific region. In the United Nations it stood firm against Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The Maldives has played a positive role in international organizations in search of solutions to global challenges including on climate change.

If confirmed, I would deepen our work together on regional and global challenges of mutual priority.

Third, on defense, the vast waters of Maldives' Exclusive Economic Zone sit upon a critical global sea lane through which a significant portion of the world's energy and goods transit.

In securing these waters, the Maldivian people face transnational threats such as trafficking, illegal and unreported fishing, violent extremism, terrorism, and communicable diseases.

Maldives also must contend with actors who seek to undermine democratic values and erode the sovereignty and security of nations.

We are addressing this broad set of challenges including through our 2020 Defense Cooperation Agreement, in military exchanges and engagement by the State Department and our partner agencies.

If confirmed, I would continue to expand our multifaceted partnership to support Maldives' efforts to maintain the security, integrity, and openness of the vast ocean territory we both work to protect.

Finally, at the top of my daily priorities list will be safeguarding our people, including the over 60,000 Americans who visit Maldives' signature tourism destinations each year.

With that, I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Yon follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF YUE-HO YON

Chair Murphy, Ranking Member Hagerty, and distinguished Members of the committee, it is a privilege to appear before you today. I thank President Biden and Secretary Blinken for their confidence in me and for their support in nominating me to become the first U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Maldives.

I want to thank my spouse, Liza, without whose support and sacrifice over nearly two decades I would not be sitting here today. I also want to recognize my children, Hudson and Hannah, who similarly have had to endure and enjoy the itinerant life of diplomacy. If my parents were alive today, our life of public service would bring smiles to their faces. My father and his family ran from China during the tumultuous decade of the cultural revolution. After immigrating to the United States, he rebuilt his life ultimately becoming a civilian engineer for the U.S. Navy. My parents taught me that one can pursue the American dream, but also serve his or her community and help others advance. I carry these life lessons into the work of diplomacy, where we shape global rules and norms that allow Americans to compete and prosper, but also provide opportunity for other countries to join in and benefit from an open, free, prosperous, and secure world order.

If confirmed, I would help build the foundation to facilitate U.S.-Maldives ties for decades to come. As we take this important step toward strengthening our bilateral relationship, Maldives stands at a historical juncture in its own development. I would prioritize expanding and deepening our partnership with Maldives in the areas of democracy, diversification, and defense.

On democracy, Maldives is scheduled in the early fall to elect its president for just the fourth time. As a young democracy, Maldives has been building the institutions to support and strengthen the democratic process. The country made strong commitments at the Summit for Democracy. If confirmed, I would continue to prioritize the work of the State Department, USAID, and the Department of Justice in sustaining and strengthening democracy in Maldives.

On diversification, Maldives faces limited options to shape, resist, and adapt to global forces, whether those forces take the form of economic, transnational, or environmental challenges. Maldives is well known as a world class tourism destination. That strength is also a source of vulnerability for the economy, because Maldives relies so heavily on this single industry. Even as the country endeavors through infrastructure investments to expand tourism, sustain its fisheries, develop additional sectors, and adapt to sea level rise and land erosion, it faces vulnerabilities. If confirmed, I would build on our work with Maldives on financial management and transparency. I also look forward to facilitating deeper American business engagement and U.S. educational and training opportunities to help Maldives diversify economic choices for its people and meet the unique challenges that small island nations face.

Furthermore, Maldives has embraced the principle that all countries should engage peacefully for an open, free, prosperous, and secure Indo-Pacific region. In the United Nations, it stood firm against Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The country has played a positive role in international organizations in search of solutions to global challenges, including on climate change. If confirmed, I would deepen our work on regional and global challenges of mutual priority.

Third, on defense, the vast waters of Maldives' exclusive economic zone sit upon a critical global sea lane through which a significant portion of the world's energy and goods transit. In securing these waters, the Maldivian people face transnational threats such as trafficking, illegal and unreported fishing, violent extremist, terrorism, and communicable diseases as well as the environment and global economic forces I mentioned earlier. Maldives also must contend with actors who seek to undermine democratic values and erode the sovereignty and security of nations. We are addressing this broad set of challenges, including through our 2020 defense cooperation agreement, robust military exchanges, and engagement by multiple State Department bureaus and partner agencies. If confirmed, I would continue to expand our multi-faceted partnership to support Maldives' efforts to maintain the security, integrity and openness of the vast ocean territory we both work to protect.

Finally, at the top of my daily priorities list will be safeguarding our people, including the over 60,000 Americans who visit Maldives' signature tourism destinations each year.

I look forward to your questions.

Senator HAGERTY [presiding]. Ms. Allen, please.

STATEMENT OF ELIZABETH ALLEN, OF NEW YORK, NOMINATED TO BE UNDER SECRETARY OF THE STATE FOR PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

Ms. ALLEN. Thank you so much, first, to Senator Shaheen for that very kind introduction. I am very grateful for your partnership.

To Chairman Murphy, to you, Ranking Member Hagerty, and members of this committee I am very humbled to be here today, and having spent the majority of my career in public service I am very humbled to be considered by the Senate for this important position.

The virtue of serving the American people runs deep in my family. I am the granddaughter of two World War II veterans. I am the daughter of parents who taught me the importance of voting and civic participation regardless of party.

I am the sister of a United States Naval Academy graduate and U.S. Marine Corps veteran. I am the sister-in-law of a civil servant at the Pentagon and I am the friend to many who have chosen to dedicate their lives to public service.

I am joined here today by some of those family and friends, including behind me, my dad, Stephen, my mom, Susan, and some of those friends and I am deeply grateful for their support.

I first joined the State Department under President George W. Bush and Secretary Condoleezza Rice, working on international

women's issues. I later returned to work on combating human smuggling and trafficking, and in between my time in the Obama-Biden White House I spent a year in the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs under Secretary Kerry, which is to say that I believe deeply in the work of the State Department and its people.

This nomination to serve as Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy is the honor of a professional lifetime and I thank President Biden for placing his faith in me as his nominee.

Over the past two years under Secretary Blinken I have had the privilege of serving as Assistant Secretary of State for Global Public Affairs and senior official for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, and those and other experiences in and out of government have reinforced my firm belief that U.S. public diplomacy is essential to shaping a more open, prosperous, and secure future.

Our audiences overseas, both online and in person, are central to every major foreign policy issue and consequence. It is relationships between people, not just relationships between government, that are driving geopolitical developments that will shape the future.

And at the same time, as has been mentioned here today, the information space is an increasingly contested theater of competition, competition for influence. The stakes have never been greater and to meet this moment we must be clear eyed about the challenges we face.

Repressive governments envision a future in which freedom of expression is criminalized and the flow of information is stymied, as we are seeing in Iran. The People's Republic of China and Russia vastly outspend us on what they call public diplomacy and their growing alignment threatens to upend global norms.

But this is our opportunity. For the United States the value proposition of our public diplomacy is different. It is about telling America's story, explaining our foreign policy, conveying our vision, creating economic opportunity, developing the leaders of tomorrow, empowering independent media, and calling out foreign propaganda, disinformation, and foreign malign influence.

In doing all of that we build trust and credibility to realize an affirmative, forward-looking dynamic vision for ourselves and our partners worldwide and, if confirmed, I am committed to harnessing the public diplomacy toolkit to address these challenges presented by our adversaries and to seize opportunities made possible by American leadership.

That is exactly what our public diplomacy team did in the face of Russia's illegal unjustified invasion of Ukraine. We identified and analyzed Putin's lies. We worked alongside the interagency to declassify intelligence, exposing his plans and intentions.

We conducted hundreds of media interviews to share the truth with the American people, the Russian people, and people all over the world. We developed and deployed new engaging digital products that highlighted stories of Ukrainian resilience and of Putin's hypocrisy.

We leveraged new platforms, technology, and content to reach Russian-speaking audiences. We worked with the Ukrainian Gov-

ernment to protect cultural heritage, helping the Ukrainians preserve their identity and their democracy.

This work was and remains fundamental to unifying our allies and laying out the facts for the world to see. It is important to note that public diplomacy benefits us here at home as well.

International students added \$32 billion to the U.S. economy last year and American exchange program participants are returning home with marketable skills that are making them more competitive for 21st century jobs. International visitors on our programs engage communities across our country and programs like the Gilman Scholarship help underserved Americans study abroad.

And, if confirmed, I want to better communicate the benefits of foreign policy to our fellow Americans who deserve to know what the United States Government is doing around the world day in and day out in their interest.

And finally, most importantly, it would be my great honor to lead the more than 5,000 dedicated Foreign Service officers, civil service officers, locally-employed staff, eligible family members and contractors who comprise our public diplomacy workforce across the world.

If confirmed, and in partnership with you, I look forward to better equipping them with the tools, resources, training, and leadership needed to meet this critical moment.

Thank you so much to the committee for inviting me here today and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Allen follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF ELIZABETH M. ALLEN

Thank you, Chairman Murphy, Ranking Member Hagerty, and Members of the committee. I am humbled to be here. And, having spent the majority of my career in public service, I am honored to be considered by the Senate for this important position.

The virtue of serving the American people runs deep in my family. I am the granddaughter of two veterans of World War II. I am the daughter of parents who taught me the importance of voting and civic participation, regardless of party. I am the sister of a United States Naval Academy graduate and U.S. Marine Corps veteran, and the sister-in-law of a civil servant at the Pentagon. I am the inspired friend of many others who've chosen to serve their country. I am joined here today by some of those family and friends—including my dad, Stephen, and my mom, Susan—and I am deeply grateful for their support.

I first joined the State Department as an intern under President George W. Bush and Secretary Condoleezza Rice, where I worked on international women's issues. I returned after college to work on combatting human smuggling and trafficking. Between my time in the Obama-Biden White House, I spent a year in the Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs under Secretary Kerry.

I believe deeply in the work of the State Department and its people.

This nomination to serve as Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy is the honor of a professional lifetime, and I thank President Biden for placing his faith in me as his nominee.

Over the past two years under Secretary Blinken, I have had the privilege of serving as Assistant Secretary of State for Global Public Affairs and as Senior Official for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs.

Those and other experiences, in and out of government, have reinforced my firm belief that U.S. public diplomacy is essential to shaping a more open, prosperous, and secure future.

Our audiences overseas—both in-person and online—are central to every major foreign policy issue and consequence. It's relationships between people—not just governments—that are shaping geopolitical developments. At the same time, the information space is an increasingly contested theater of competition for influence. The stakes have never been greater.

To meet this moment, we must be clear-eyed about the challenges we face. Repressive governments envision a future in which freedom of expression is criminalized and the flow of information is stymied, as we're seeing in Iran. The People's Republic of China and Russia vastly outspend us on what they call public diplomacy, and their growing alignment threatens to upend global norms.

But this is our opportunity. For the United States, the value proposition of our public diplomacy is different: it is about telling America's story, explaining our foreign policy, creating economic opportunity, developing the leaders of tomorrow, empowering independent media, and calling out foreign propaganda and foreign malign influence. In doing so, we build trust and credibility to realize an affirmative, forward-looking, dynamic vision for ourselves and our partners worldwide.

If confirmed, I am committed to harnessing the public diplomacy toolkit to address the challenges presented by our adversaries and seize opportunities made possible with American leadership.

This is exactly what the public diplomacy team did in the face of Russia's illegal, unjustified, full-scale invasion of Ukraine. We identified and analyzed Putin's lies. We worked alongside the interagency to declassify intelligence, exposing his plans and intentions. We conducted hundreds of media interviews to share the truth with the American people, the Russian people, and people around the world. We developed and deployed new, engaging digital products that highlighted stories of Ukrainian resilience and Putin's hypocrisy. We leveraged new platforms, technology, and content to reach Russian-speaking audiences. We worked with the Ukrainian Government to protect cultural heritage, helping Ukrainians preserve their identity and democracy. This work was—and remains—fundamental to unifying our allies and laying out the facts for the world to see.

Public diplomacy benefits us here at home as well. International students added \$32 billion to the U.S. economy last year, and American exchange program participants are returning with marketable skills that make them more competitive for 21st-century jobs. International visitors on our programs engage communities across our country, while the Gilman Scholarship helps underserved Americans study abroad. And if confirmed, I want to better communicate the benefits of foreign policy to our fellow Americans—who deserve to know what the U.S. Government is doing around the world, day in and day out, in their interest.

Finally, it would be my great honor to lead the more than 5,000 dedicated foreign service officers, civil service officers, locally employed staff, and contractors who comprise our public diplomacy workforce across the world. If confirmed—and in partnership with you—I commit to better equipping them with the tools, resources, training, and leadership needed to meet this critical moment.

Thank you for inviting me here today. I look forward to your questions.

Senator HAGERTY. Thank you.

Chargé Strong?

**STATEMENT OF MARTINA ANNA TKADLEC STRONG, OF TEXAS,
A CAREER MEMBER OF THE SENIOR FOREIGN SERVICE,
CLASS OF MINISTER-COUNSELOR, NOMINATED TO BE AM-
BASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY OF
THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE UNITED ARAB
EMIRATES**

Ms. STRONG. Thank you very much, and I would like to also begin with a word of thanks to Senator Sullivan. Even though he had to depart I really appreciate his kind introduction and the friendship throughout the years.

Chairman Murphy, Ranking Member Hagerty, distinguished Members of the committee, it is an honor to appear before you today as President Biden's nominee to serve as the next U.S. Ambassador to the United Arab Emirates.

I am grateful to the President and Secretary Blinken for the trust and confidence they have placed in me. If confirmed, it will be an honor to lead our mission as we continue to deepen our nation's strategic partnership with the United Arab Emirates.

Our relationship is critical to U.S. national security at a time when our interests in the region are being challenged by conven-

tional and asymmetric threats, complex problems like climate change, as well as aggressive competitors, particularly China.

If confirmed, I pledge to consult closely with this committee in advancing our interests and addressing our challenges.

Mr. Chairman, the safety and security of our fellow Americans and U.S. personnel will be my foremost priority, if confirmed. I will devote myself to protecting U.S. citizens and their interests and you have my commitment that I will advocate for detained Americans, their welfare, and their well being.

If confirmed, I will press Emirati authorities to respect American citizens' rights and to meet their international obligations including to provide regular consular access to our citizens.

By signing the historic Abraham Accords in 2020 the UAE became the first Arab country in generations to normalize ties with Israel. Leveraging this opportunity and expanding the growing cooperation between the UAE and Israel will buttress our shared goals of peace, prosperity, and greater integration in the Middle East.

The UAE will host COP-28 later this year, presenting another key opportunity to deepen our collaboration. If confirmed, I will work to expand our partnership in these and other areas.

Our commercial and investment ties are dynamic and drive prosperity in both our countries. The United States enjoys a healthy trade surplus with the UAE, which is the largest market for U.S. goods and services in the Middle East. Over 1,500 American firms are successfully operating in the UAE.

If confirmed, I will continue to advocate for U.S. businesses in the UAE and work to ensure that these positive trend lines continue.

Our security ties with the UAE, a capable and interoperable partner, have been central to our fight against terrorism and to countering Iran's malign activities across the region.

If confirmed, I will prioritize our efforts to bolster deterrence and regional stability, deescalate regional tensions, protect freedom of navigation, especially in critical maritime choke points, and support a political settlement to the conflict in Yemen.

If confirmed, I will also be clear with UAE leaders regarding our deep concerns pertaining to China, whose violations of international law and sovereignty of countries around the globe, including the United States, underscore that China represents our most consequential geopolitical challenge.

If confirmed, I will work closely with the administration and Congress to counter China's efforts to expand its influence in the UAE and the Gulf.

Our partnership with the UAE is built on a strong foundation of decades-long close cooperation and our mutual interest in securing a free, rules-based, and prosperous world today and for decades to come.

While we do not agree on all issues, our frank and constructive diplomatic engagement has helped us deepen and modernize this vital bilateral partnership.

If confirmed, I will work with the UAE to advance our shared values like interfaith tolerance, which is embodied in the recently opened Abrahamic House. Our ongoing and vital work to address

trafficking in persons and to strengthen human rights protections will also continue.

If confirmed, I will ensure that the work of our mission to the UAE is firmly anchored in our nation's core priorities and our team continues to deliver for the American people, companies, and workers.

In closing, please allow me to take this opportunity to thank my husband, John, and our wonderful daughter, Ellie, who are joining me here today. I am deeply grateful for their boundless love, support, and patience in the face of multiple moves and long separations during my several unaccompanied tours.

While they cannot be here today, I am forever indebted to my parents, Vojtek and Jarmila Tkadlec, whose courage and conviction helped our family escape from communist Czechoslovakia and then propelled us from a refugee camp to a successful new life in the United States.

For us, the American dream became a reality in large part thanks to the generous assistance of so many. I especially want to thank family Sevie, whose help early on launched us on the path that led me all the way to this hearing today.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Hagerty, thank you again for the privilege of appearing before you and for your consideration of my nomination. I welcome your questions.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Strong follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF MARTINA A. STRONG

Chairman Murphy, Ranking Member Hagerty, distinguished Members of the committee, it is an honor to appear before you today as President Biden's nominee to serve as the next U.S. Ambassador to the United Arab Emirates. I am grateful to the President and Secretary Blinken for the trust and confidence they have placed in me.

If confirmed, it will be an honor to lead our Mission as we continue to deepen our nation's strategic partnership with the United Arab Emirates. Our relationship is critical to U.S. national security at a time when our interests in the region are being challenged by conventional and asymmetric threats, complex problems like climate change, as well as aggressive competitors, particularly China. If confirmed, I pledge to consult closely with this Committee in advancing our interests and addressing these challenges.

Mr. Chairman, the safety and security of our fellow Americans and U.S. personnel will be my foremost priority, if confirmed. I will devote myself to protecting U.S. citizens and their interests, and you have my commitment that I will advocate for detained Americans, their welfare, and their well-being. If confirmed, I will press Emirati authorities to respect American citizens' rights and to meet their international obligations, including to provide regular consular access to our citizens.

By signing the historic Abraham Accords in 2020, the UAE became the first Arab country in generations to normalize ties with Israel. Leveraging this opportunity and expanding the growing cooperation between the UAE and Israel will buttress our shared goals of peace, prosperity, and greater integration in the Middle East. The UAE will host COP28 later this year, presenting another key opportunity to deepen our collaboration. If confirmed, I will work to expand our partnership in these and other areas.

Our commercial and investment ties are dynamic and drive prosperity in both our countries. The United States enjoys a healthy trade surplus with the UAE, which is the largest market for U.S. goods and services in the Middle East. Over 1,500 American firms are successfully operating in the UAE. If confirmed, I will continue to advocate for U.S. businesses in the UAE and work to ensure that these positive trendlines continue.

Our security ties with the UAE, a capable and interoperable partner, have been central to our fight against terrorism and to countering Iran's malign activities across the region. If confirmed, I will prioritize our efforts to bolster deterrence and regional stability; de-escalate regional tensions; protect freedom of navigation, espe-

cially in critical maritime choke points; and support a political settlement of the conflict in Yemen.

If confirmed, I will also be clear with UAE leaders regarding our deep concerns pertaining to China, whose violations of international law and sovereignty of countries around the globe, including the United States, underscore that China represents our most consequential geopolitical challenge. If confirmed, I will work closely with the Administration and Congress to counter China's efforts to expand its influence in the UAE and the Gulf.

Our partnership with the UAE is built on a strong foundation of decades-long close cooperation and our mutual interest in securing a free, rules-based, and prosperous world today and for decades to come. While we do not agree on all issues, our frank and constructive diplomatic engagement has helped us deepen and modernize this vital bilateral relationship. If confirmed, I will work with the UAE to advance our shared values like interfaith tolerance, which is embodied in the recently opened Abrahamic House. Our ongoing and vital work to address trafficking-in-persons and to strengthen human rights protections will also continue. If confirmed, I will ensure that the work of our Mission to the UAE is firmly anchored in our nation's core priorities and our team continues to deliver for the American people, companies, and workers.

In closing, please allow me to take this opportunity to thank my husband Colonel John Strong and our wonderful daughter Ellie, who are joining me here today. I am deeply grateful for their boundless love, support, and patience in the face of our multiple moves and long separations during my several unaccompanied tours. While they cannot be here today, I am forever indebted to my parents, Vojtech and Jarmila Tkadlec, whose courage and conviction helped our family escape from communist Czechoslovakia and then propelled us from a refugee camp to a successful new life in the United States. For us, the American dream became a reality in large part thanks to the generous assistance of so many. I especially want to thank family Sevieck, whose help early on launched us on the path that led me all the way to this hearing today.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Hagerty, thank you again for the privilege of appearing before you and for your consideration of my nomination. I welcome your questions.

Senator MURPHY [presiding]. Thank you very much.
Ms. Rood?

STATEMENT OF ELIZABETH ROOD, OF PENNSYLVANIA, A CAREER MEMBER OF THE SENIOR FOREIGN SERVICE, CLASS OF MINISTER-COUNSELOR, TO BE AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO TURKMENISTAN

Ms. ROOD. Good afternoon, Chairman Murphy, Ranking Member Hagerty, and honorable members of this committee. I am grateful to have the opportunity to speak with you today and thank you for considering my nomination to serve as ambassador to Turkmenistan.

I would like to start by thanking Senator Casey for the honor of his introduction, as well as the family, friends, and colleagues who have supported me. My family cannot be present today but I would like to acknowledge the presence of—I am sorry, I would especially like to acknowledge my children, Margaret, Alice, and Andrew Kimbrell, who are now grown but who have accompanied me in my Foreign Service career.

I have the honor to have as guest today two former ambassadors to Turkmenistan, Ambassador Steven Mann and Ambassador Laura Kennedy. Their mentoring and friendship have played a large role across the decades in my presence here today.

Since Turkmenistan's independence in 1991 and the establishment of diplomatic relations the following year, progress in our engagement has been slow but steady. The United States has been

steadfast in our commitment to Turkmenistan's independence, prosperity, sovereignty, and territorial integrity and our consistent diplomacy has borne fruit.

Our persistent diplomatic efforts in recent years have yielded expanded U.S. commercial ties with Turkmenistan, a broadening of security cooperation to face security threats in the region, increased engagement to fight climate change through the reduction of methane emissions, unprecedented cultural and educational exchanges, and nascent progress on human rights highlighted by the Government's pardoning in 2021 of 16 Jehovah's Witnesses incarcerated for their conscientious objection to mandatory military service.

I believe all these developments demonstrate that tenacious, principled engagement with Turkmenistan works. If confirmed, I will work to build on this progress to ensure our bilateral engagement reaches its full potential.

I want to underscore that despite our differences the United States and Turkmenistan share several important interests. We share with Turkmenistan an increasing interest in securing the country's borders, particularly its 462-mile border with Afghanistan, secure borders to help counter the threats posed by terrorism, drug trafficking, and the smuggling of other dangerous and illicit materials.

When we help Turkmenistan secure its borders we are not only promoting the sovereignty and stability of Turkmenistan and the broader Central Asia region but we are also helping to keep the American people and the world safe.

There is also tremendous potential for our two countries to achieve the key administration goal of addressing climate change. In the last few years, Turkmenistan has clearly demonstrated an awareness of the threat climate change poses and the part it can play in combating the threat.

Turkmenistan's interest in combating climate change provides a strong basis for engagement and cooperation with the United States.

As just one example, we have recently offered to share our expertise to help Turkmenistan reduce methane leaking and venting. We also share with Turkmenistan an interest in building commercial ties between our countries.

Greater commercial ties provide greater opportunities for U.S. companies to expand sales and boost the economy of the United States while creating greater incentives for the Government of Turkmenistan to reduce corruption, strengthen its legal system, and improve its business environment.

We are also investing in preserving Turkmenistan's rich cultural heritage. Some of the more notable projects include restoration of the country's oldest standing mosque, unique forms of folk music, antique carpets and manuscripts, and important Silk Road sites.

This cooperation preserves something valuable to both Turkmenistan and the world and has been a high point in our bilateral relationship for many years.

Maintaining a productive relationship with Turkmenistan is in the best interests of the United States because it allows us to engage with the Government of Turkmenistan on issues of vital importance to our national security.

For example, if confirmed, I will emphasize the importance of holding Russia to account for its aggression against Ukraine and urge cooperation on the implementation of sanctions on Russia.

I will use every opportunity to urge the Government of Turkmenistan to adhere to its international legal obligations and commitments, including as a member of the United Nations and the OSCE.

I will also continue to send a strong and clear message about the importance of human rights and fundamental freedoms, including freedom of religion or belief, freedom of expression, and civil and political rights, and I will also continue our advocacy for labor rights, women's rights, civil society, and the rule of law.

Mr. Chairman, there is tremendous potential for our bilateral relationship with Turkmenistan. If confirmed, I look forward to partnering with this committee and Congress to build on our progress so that we may achieve mutual objectives for the benefit of the people of the United States and the people of Turkmenistan.

Thank you for considering my nomination. I look forward to answering any questions you might have.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Rood follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF ELIZABETH ROOD

Good morning, Chairman Murphy, Ranking Member Hagerty, and honorable Members of this committee. I am grateful to have the opportunity to speak with you today. Thank you for considering my nomination to serve as Ambassador to Turkmenistan.

I would like to start by thanking Senator Casey for the honor of his introduction, as well as the family, friends, and colleagues who have supported me. My family cannot be present today, but I would especially like to acknowledge my children, Margaret, Alice, and Andrew Kimbrell, who are now grown but accompanied me in my Foreign Service career. I have the honor to have as guests today two former Ambassadors to Turkmenistan, Ambassador Steven Mann and Ambassador Laura Kennedy. Their mentoring and friendship across decades play a large role in my presence here today.

Since Turkmenistan's independence in 1991 and the establishment of diplomatic relations the following year, progress in our engagement has been slow but steady. The United States has been steadfast in our commitment to Turkmenistan's independence, prosperity, sovereignty, and territorial integrity, and our consistent diplomacy has borne fruit.

Our persistent diplomatic efforts in recent years have yielded expanded U.S. commercial ties with Turkmenistan, a broadening of security cooperation to face security threats in the region, increased engagement to fight climate change through the reduction of methane emissions, unprecedented cultural and educational exchanges, and nascent progress on human rights, highlighted by the Government's pardoning in 2021 of 16 Jehovah's Witnesses incarcerated for their conscientious objection to mandatory military service.

I believe all these developments demonstrate that tenacious, principled engagement with Turkmenistan works. If confirmed, I will work to build on this progress to ensure our bilateral relationship reaches its full potential.

I want to underscore that despite our differences, the United States and Turkmenistan share several important interests.

We share with Turkmenistan an interest in securing the country's borders, particularly its 462-mile border with Afghanistan. Secure borders help counter the threats posed by terrorism, drug trafficking, and the smuggling of other dangerous and illicit materials. When we help Turkmenistan secure its borders, we are not only promoting the sovereignty and stability of Turkmenistan and the broader Central Asian region, but we are also helping to keep the American people and the world safe.

There is also tremendous potential for our two countries to achieve the key administration goal of addressing climate change. In the last few years, Turkmenistan has clearly demonstrated an awareness of the threat climate change poses and the part it can play in combating that threat. Turkmenistan's interest in combating cli-

mate change provides a strong basis for engagement and cooperation with the United States. As just one example, we have recently offered to share our expertise to help Turkmenistan reduce methane leaking and venting.

We also share with Turkmenistan an interest in building commercial ties between our countries. Greater commercial ties provide greater opportunities for U.S. companies to expand sales and boost the U.S. economy while creating greater incentives for the Government of Turkmenistan to reduce corruption, strengthen its legal system, and improve its business environment.

We are also invested in preserving Turkmenistan's rich cultural heritage. Some of the more notable projects include restoration of the country's oldest standing mosque, unique forms of folk music, antique carpets and manuscripts, and important Silk Road sites. This cooperation preserves something valuable to both Turkmenistan and the world and has been a high point in our bilateral relationship for many years.

Maintaining a productive relationship with Turkmenistan is in the best interests of the United States because it allows us to engage with the Government of Turkmenistan on issues of vital importance to our national security.

For example, if confirmed, I will emphasize the importance of holding Russia to account for its aggression against Ukraine and urge cooperation on the implementation of sanctions on Russia. I will use every opportunity to urge the Government of Turkmenistan to adhere to its international legal obligations and commitments, including as a member of the UN and the OSCE.

I will also continue to send a strong and clear message about the importance of human rights and fundamental freedoms, including freedom of religion or belief, freedom of expression, and civil and political rights, and will also continue our advocacy for labor rights, women's rights, civil society, and the rule of law.

Mr. Chairman, there is tremendous potential for our bilateral relationship with Turkmenistan. If confirmed, I look forward to partnering with this Committee and Congress to build on our progress so that we may achieve mutual objectives for the benefit of the people of the United States and the people of Turkmenistan. Thank you for considering my nomination. I look forward to answering any questions you might have.

Senator MURPHY. Thank you very much.

Ms. Sasahara?

STATEMENT OF KAREN SASAHARA, OF MASSACHUSETTS, A CAREER MEMBER OF THE SENIOR FOREIGN SERVICE, CLASS OF MINISTER-COUNSELOR, NOMINATED TO BE AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE STATE OF KUWAIT

Ms. SASAHARA. Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Hagerty, distinguished members of the committee, I am honored to appear before you today as President Biden's nominee to serve as ambassador to the state of Kuwait.

I am grateful to the President and to Secretary Blinken for their confidence in me to undertake this important role.

If confirmed, I look forward to working closely with members of this committee to advance U.S. national security interests in Kuwait and to ensure that Kuwait remains a strong partner for the United States.

I would also like to express my deepest gratitude to my parents, members of that greatest generation whose devotion to their family and their sacrifices is why I am here today.

Likewise to my siblings, who have always supported me no matter what, and, of course, my husband, who has been a great source of support both personally and as a fellow Foreign Service officer.

If confirmed, I will work with our Kuwaiti partners to increase pressure on Iran to stop its destabilizing activities in the region. Through my service in Yemen, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and elsewhere

in the Middle East, I know firsthand the harm Iran and its proxies have inflicted on U.S. interests and on our allies.

Iran continues to threaten freedom of navigation in one of the world's most critical seaways, threatening regional stability and global energy markets. Its support to the Houthis in Yemen, Bashar al-Assad's regime in Syria, and Hezbollah in Lebanon destabilizes the entire region and threatens U.S. security interests. If confirmed, I will work with our Kuwaiti partners to counter this threat.

And Kuwait has developed stronger ties across its border with Iraq, including normalized trade relations and a modernized border crossing. If confirmed, I look forward to helping strengthen relationships across the region.

Kuwait is a member of the Coalition to Defeat ISIS and our relationship is vital to the stability and security in the Middle East and essential to our own national security.

In 2021, Kuwait helped the United States relocate more than 5,000 people from Afghanistan, in addition to their most recent efforts to ease the horrific situation in Ukraine.

If confirmed, I look forward to working with the Kuwaiti leadership to do even more, given Kuwait's own history with unprovoked aggression.

We cannot ignore our strong economic ties with Kuwait. Kuwait invested billions of dollars in construction in capital markets and consumer goods in the United States. There are significant opportunities for U.S. businesses in Kuwait and, if confirmed, I will advocate strongly for American companies.

Mr. Chairman, human rights are at the core of the administration's foreign policy. If confirmed, it will be among my highest priorities. This includes strengthening the rights of women, stateless residents, and Kuwait's large expatriate workforce.

Recent elections saw the return of women to the parliament, something we were very supportive of. Kuwait takes the issue of religious freedom seriously and is home to one of the largest cathedrals in the region.

Kuwait is already a leader in the region for allowing space for political expression, fostering an independent media, and encouraging participatory government. If confirmed, I look forward to supporting these important issues in any way that I can.

The United States and Kuwait share a long history that forms a strong foundation for the future. Every year thousands of Kuwaitis come to study at universities across the United States. They return to Kuwait with their experience in the U.S. and contribute to building and strengthening their country.

Mr. Chairman, I want to assure the members of this committee that my highest priority, if confirmed, will be the safety and security of all Americans in Kuwait.

Over 30,000 U.S. citizens work as military contractors, teachers, and business people, in addition to U.S. Government and military personnel. Their presence is emblematic of the strong U.S.-Kuwait partnership. Enduring congressional support and engagement is also a key element of our partnership.

I would also like to thank Chairman Menendez for his recent visit, and, if confirmed, I would welcome the members of the committee to visit as well.

I would be remiss if I did not take this opportunity to congratulate the former Kuwaiti ambassador to the United States, Sheikh Salem Al-Sabah, on his appointment to foreign minister.

Chairman Murphy, Ranking Member Hagerty, Chairman Menendez, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I look forward to answering your questions.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Sasahara follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF KAREN H. SASAHARA

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, distinguished Members of the committee, I am honored to appear before you today as President Biden's nominee to serve as Ambassador to the State of Kuwait. I am grateful to the President and to Secretary Blinken for their confidence in me to undertake this important role. If confirmed, I look forward to working closely with Members of this Committee to advance U.S. national security interests in Kuwait and to ensure that Kuwait remains a strong partner for the United States.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my parents, members of that greatest generation whose devotion to their family and their sacrifices are why I'm here today. Likewise, gratitude to my siblings, who have always supported me no matter what. And of course, my husband, who has been a great source of support, both personally and as a fellow Foreign Service Officer.

If confirmed, I will work with our Kuwaiti partners to increase pressure on Iran to stop its destabilizing activities in the region. Through my service in Yemen, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and elsewhere in the Middle East, I know first-hand the harm Iran and its proxies have inflicted on U.S. interests and on our allies. Iran continues to threaten freedom of navigation in one of the world's most critical seaways, threatening regional stability and global energy markets. Its support to the Houthis in Yemen, Bashar al Assad's regime in Syria, and Hezbollah in Lebanon, destabilizes the entire region and threatens U.S. security interests. If confirmed, I will work with our Kuwaiti partners to counter this threat. Kuwait has developed stronger ties across its border with Iraq, including normalized trade relations and a modernized border crossing. If confirmed, I look forward to helping strengthen relationships across the region.

Kuwait is a member of the Coalition to Defeat ISIS and our relationship is vital to the stability and security in the Middle East and essential to our own national security. In 2021, Kuwait helped the United States relocate more than 5,000 people from Afghanistan, in addition to their most recent efforts to ease the horrific situation in Ukraine. If confirmed, I look forward to working with Kuwaiti leadership to do even more, given Kuwait's own history with unprovoked aggression.

We can't ignore our strong economic ties with Kuwait. Kuwait invests billions of dollars in construction, capital markets, and consumer goods in the United States. There are significant opportunities for U.S. businesses in Kuwait and, if confirmed, I will advocate strongly for American companies.

Mr. Chairman, human rights are at the core of the Administration's foreign policy. If confirmed, it will be among my highest priorities. This includes strengthening the rights of women, stateless residents, and Kuwait's large expatriate workforce. Recent elections saw the return of women to the Parliament, something we were very supportive of.

Kuwait takes the issue of religious freedom seriously and is home to one of the largest cathedrals in the region. Kuwait is already a leader in the region for allowing space for political expression, fostering an independent media, and encouraging participatory government. If confirmed, I look forward to supporting these important issues in any way I can.

The United States and Kuwait share a long history that forms a strong foundation for the future. Every year, thousands of Kuwaitis come to study at universities across the United States. They return to Kuwait with their experience in the United States and contribute to building and strengthening their country.

Mr. Chairman, I want to assure the Members of this committee that my highest priority, if confirmed, will be the safety and security of all Americans in Kuwait. Over 30,000 U.S. citizens work as military contractors, teachers, and

businesspeople, in addition to U.S. Government and military personnel. Their presence is emblematic of the strong U.S.-Kuwait partnership. Enduring Congressional support and engagement is also a key element of our partnership.

I would also like to thank Chairman Menendez for his recent visit, and if confirmed, I would welcome the Members of the committee to visit as well. I would be remiss if I didn't take this opportunity to congratulate former Kuwaiti ambassador the United States, Sheikh Salem Al-Sabah, on his appointment to Foreign Minister. Chairman Murphy, Ranking Member Hagerty, Members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I look forward to answering your questions.

Senator MURPHY. Thank you to all of our witnesses for your testimony and, again, for your willingness to serve. We will begin a round of five-minute questions and I will begin.

Let me start with you, Ms. Allen. The Global Engagement Center has been a bipartisan apolitical success story, a way for the United States to counteract the growing propaganda campaigns that emanate out of Moscow, Beijing, and many nonstate actors.

But recently the GEC, as it has come to be known, has come—has been under scrutiny and criticism from right-wing voices who are promoting just basic conspiracy theories about how the GEC is engaged in government censorship or media manipulation.

I sort of cannot keep track of all the buzzwords and phrases that they use, which really belies the fact that this has been a result of consensus between both parties on the need to combat misinformation.

So let me just ask you, how are you responding to these critics and conspiracy theorists and is this not a moment when we need to strengthen the GEC's resources and authorities to make sure that we can be somewhere close to an even playing field with those that have even bigger information operations that the United States?

Ms. ALLEN. Indeed, Senator. Thank you so much for the opportunity to talk about the mission of the Global Engagement Center, which is really the critical body working to counter our adversaries that attempt to undermine us, undermine our credibility, and undermine our vision for the future and, in fact, I have talked to members of this committee and staff of this committee on a bipartisan basis about ways in which we can strengthen the Global Engagement Center.

Let me be clear. The Global Engagement Center does not engage in censorship, does not operate domestically, and does not work on U.S. citizens.

They are focused on countering misinformation, disinformation, propaganda, and foreign malign influence aimed at overseas audiences and they have four core areas of focus: countering the PRC, countering Iran, countering Russia, and countering terrorism.

They are most well known for their exposure of disinformation, for their identification and analysis of the perpetrators of disinformation and a foreign malign influence, and of exposing those that are doing so, of calling out false narratives, of calling out lies, and making sure that audiences across the world understand that they are being acted against intentionally by actors like the PRC and Russia.

But in addition to their exposure work, I would like to note here today they are doing a lot of work behind the scenes with governments, partners, and allies across the world and this, indeed, is the

area in which, if confirmed, I would like to continue to push on the Global Engagement Center to expand their work.

They are working with governments across the world on analyzing disinformation prior to their elections to make sure that elections can be conducted in a fair and free way. They are working with partners like Five Eyes, with the U.K., with the European Union, and with the G-7 on making sure that counter disinformation efforts are on our bilateral and multilateral agendas worldwide.

Senator MURPHY. Thank you. Thanks for that very cogent explanation of what the GEC does and does not do and we look forward to working with you to tell that story.

Ms. Strong, I noted in your testimony that you correctly pointed out that countering Chinese influence in the region is going to be amongst your highest priorities.

But, of course, as you know, you are going to represent the United States in a country that has deepening and very worrying ties with China. Assistant Secretary Leaf testified before this committee in August about administration concerns over Chinese inroads into UAE's tech sector.

The national threat assessment highlighted China's pursuit of a potential military base in the UAE. We understand that the sale of F-35s and MQ-9s have been halted. The discussions around those sales have been halted due to these concerns about potential deepening integration between China and the UAE.

Talk to us a little bit about how worried you understand that we should be about this growing security and economic partnership and how this will rank amongst your priorities once on the job.

Ms. STRONG. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, for that question.

The administration has been absolutely clear that China poses the most consequential geopolitical challenge for the United States and it is a challenge that every single one of our embassies, every single one of our ambassadors around the world, is focused on. It is my understanding, certainly, that our mission in the UAE has made this a top priority, as has the department here.

In terms of the specific concerns, as you noted, we have seen China's efforts to increase its influence, gain footholds not just in the Gulf but around the world.

In the Gulf and specifically in the UAE the President has been clear that we will work to strengthen our partners. But at the same time we will work to ensure that no country can seek to dominate or dominate the region militarily or through military threats or through military buildups and that, certainly, would include an establishment of a Chinese installation—military installation in the region.

We have been very clear with our partners in the region to include the UAE that there are certain categories of cooperation with China that would run up very directly and impact very directly our U.S. national security interests.

That message has been delivered and we believe that our partners in the region are very clear about our concerns, especially, as you noted, Mr. Chairman, certain areas of cooperation in high-tech, advanced technology, and that could potentially impact or threaten

the safeguarding and security of our own technology, whether commercial or especially in the defense sector.

If confirmed, Mr. Chairman, you certainly have my commitment that this will be a top priority for me. Part of the answer here, of course, is to strengthen our partnership with the UAE.

They are a capable interoperable partner, and having a very robust diplomatic discourse on this topic is going to be critical in addressing this challenge.

Senator MURPHY. Thank you for that strong clear answer.

Senator Hagerty?

Senator HAGERTY. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

In 2021, U.S. intelligence agencies reportedly learned that China was secretly building a military facility at a port near the UAE capital of Abu Dhabi.

While the UAE eventually halted construction, subsequent developments are challenging U.S.-UAE security cooperation including the continued operation of PRC-owned firms at the port, the UAE's plans to purchase Chinese aircraft, UAE cooperation with PRC-owned firms and 5G communications technology, all the above making it extraordinarily challenging.

Charge Strong, do you believe communist China's growing presence in the UAE and, more broadly, in the Middle East constitute a threat to U.S. national security interests?

Ms. STRONG. Thank you, Senator. And, certainly, as I noted, we are watching with concern China's global efforts. These are not just efforts in the Gulf to expand its influence. This is very much a focus for all of us around the world and for the administration.

In terms of the specific areas of concern that you have noted, it is very much a concern and it is a concern that I know was addressed by our intelligence colleagues last week during the annual threat assessment, a very detailed look at what China is trying to do, what level of threat it poses and, again, here in the Gulf and specifically in the UAE this requires absolutely a robust diplomatic response.

As I mentioned, it is my understanding that our mission and senior officials of the administration have been very focused on this in their engagements with the UAE and, certainly, if confirmed, this would be a top priority and I would look forward to working with our—all of our interagency colleagues and with Congress on addressing this challenge.

Senator HAGERTY. I, certainly, welcome your work—I mean, working with this committee. We see this every day and I am deeply concerned about the challenge.

Ms. Sasahara, I want to acknowledge Ambassador Ratney's presence here. Thank you both for your service. I think you are going to a very challenging neighborhood and you will see from different perspectives particularly the challenge that the CCP is posing in the region.

I was quite disturbed to see them brokering arrangements between Saudi Arabia and Iran recently. Their presence in Saudi Arabia, their aggressive posture toward obtaining new sources of energy, all of these challenges, I think, are going to be significant.

And I want to thank both of you for the sacrifice. I mentioned families before, but you will be in different countries should you be

confirmed. But I very much appreciate the sacrifice that both of you are making.

And, particularly, I would like to just ask you the same question that I asked Charge Strong. Do you believe communist China's growing presence in Kuwait and the broader Middle East constitute a serious national security threat for America?

Ms. SASAHARA. Thank you very much for the question, Senator.

I share your concern about aggressive Chinese security cooperation and commercial prospecting in the region. Our ambassador is confronted every day and if I am confirmed I will confront it as well.

We believe that we are—we remain the strategic partner of choice in Kuwait. But we cannot be complacent. We have to stay present, we have to be engaged, and we cannot cede space to China or to any other country.

Senator HAGERTY. Well put.

Charge Strong and, again, Deputy Assistant Secretary Sasahara, President Biden claimed last year that the administration will—quote, “will not walk away and leave a vacuum to be filled by China, Russia, or Iran.”

But the CCP nevertheless has definitely increased its influence in the Middle East and, I think, at America's expense over the past couple of years.

The recent CCP-brokered normalization agreement between Saudi and Iran terrorist regimes should be a wakeup call for us, I think. But during a press conference in March 13th National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said something that concerned me.

The national security adviser said that the CCP-brokered deal between Saudi Arabia and Iran, and I quote—this is from Jake Sullivan—quote, “is something that we think is a positive,” and he added, quote, “having other countries like China promote deescalation is not fundamentally averse to U.S. interest.”

Charge Strong and Deputy Assistant Secretary Sasahara, do you agree with National Security Adviser Sullivan's statement that the CCP-brokered deal between the Saudis and Iran is a positive for the U.S. and, if you are confirmed, would either of you welcome more CCP influence in the UAE or in Kuwait?

I will start with you, Charge Strong.

Ms. STRONG. Thank you, Senator. I think it is important to note about this announced agreement last week that this is very much an agreement that is focused on the relationship between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

It is a relationship that has been very tense, very fraught, and we saw it, of course, erupt in September 2019 when Iran launched a massive attack on Saudi Arabia's critical energy infrastructure and knocked out, in fact, 50 percent of that—of their production capacity.

So the fact that Saudi Arabia was looking to deescalate and depressurize their relationship with Iran certainly makes sense and when they told us about their efforts, their objective, we were certainly supportive as were other countries in the region. Iraq—and Iraq—

Senator HAGERTY. To be clear, though, you were supportive of China brokering the deal or are you supportive of—

Ms. STRONG. If I may. We were supportive of Saudi Arabia seeking a diplomatic path to deescalate their tensions in the region. It is—it, certainly, remains to be seen what happens next.

Iran, of course, has a long history of renegeing on agreements, on commitments. They have an even longer history of destabilizing activities in the region, malign activity starting first and foremost with their nuclear program, their ballistic missile program, their support for proxies, and, of course, now more concerningly proliferation of armaments to Russia.

There are many, many question marks about this agreement and what the future looks like. What is not in question and should never be in question is our partnership with Saudi Arabia and in my future, if confirmed, with the UAE we need those partnerships. They need to remain strong. We need our partners to be interoperable, capable, so that we can get on with a lot of important work we have to do.

There is no question that it is a more competitive environment for us. But we need to step up and be present and, certainly, not cede any ground to China or any other strategic or regional competitor.

Senator HAGERTY. Thank you.

Senator MURPHY. Chairman Menendez?

The Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing.

Let me thank Senator Hagerty for sitting in even though this was not his ranking spot, but we appreciate you being here so we could have the hearing of these nominees.

So it is an incredibly important part of our overall duties, even though we all came here to do policy legislation. But, nonetheless, nominations are incredibly important to execute those policies. So thank you both for doing this.

And congratulations to all the nominees. I love seeing a panel that is career service people being promoted and I think that is a great thing. So congratulations to you all and your family.

Ambassador Ratney, it is good to see you here in your new capacity confirmed. Maybe you can help your wife get through this period of time.

[Laughter.]

The Chairman: So you will both be in the region so it will be nice.

Let me turn to a few questions.

First of all, the UAE—look, the UAE is an important relationship for us. But as I have said to their ambassador here, you got to decide whose side you want to be on.

Do you want to be in a world in which China and its vision of the world is the world in which you live in or do you want to live in a world in which you get to choose how you get to thrive, protect your territorial integrity, choose who you love, who you marry, how you make your money, and a whole host of other things.

And in that regard, I hope that when you get there that you will make it very clear that that is part of your mission and part of their interests as well as ours. This is not about choose between the United States and China. It is about choose what type of world

you want to live in, and that is probably true for the—all of your assignments collectively, at the end of the day.

To your knowledge—I know you are not there yet, but to your knowledge has the UAE provided the United States with assurances that it is not going to go forward with its military base at the UAE with the Chinese?

Ms. STRONG. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and, first, absolutely, I will carry that message. It will be a priority, if confirmed.

It is my understanding that we have delivered a very clear message to all of our partners in the region but, certainly, to the Emirates on the concerns that we have, very deep and grave concerns, about certain categories of cooperation with China and that cooperation, certainly, would impact on some of our very core national security interests that you are referring to and it is a message that it is my understanding has been delivered at the senior most levels and—

The Chairman: And what has been the response, to your knowledge? Do you know if they have given us assurances they are not moving forward with a Chinese base?

Ms. STRONG. Mr. Chairman, it is my understanding that we will have administration officials briefing the committee staff tomorrow in an appropriate setting on the nature of the conversations and the status.

The Chairman: Okay. I hope my staff tells me what is happening. So we will look forward to that.

Also, in terms of Chinese penetration of the UAE telecom system and other technology sectors you are aware of that and ready to make sure you make the case why that is not a good idea for them or for us?

Ms. STRONG. Absolutely. I have seen the open source reporting on this and, clearly, the penetration of Chinese equipment in any network is concerning and, certainly, as it impacts our cooperation—our security cooperation—this would be very concerning. So very much a message that will be topmost on my agenda, if confirmed.

The Chairman: All right. Thank you.

Ms. Sasahara, I had, as you mentioned, a good visit in Kuwait. The relatively new foreign minister, former ambassador here, knows the United States well, knows the interest of his country vis-a-vis the United States well.

I am wondering whether you will be able to engage with the Kuwaitis about considering accession to the Abraham Accords. We had this conversation when we were there, and while it is clear to me that they are not ready for that, I think that working towards getting ready for that would be a good thing. Is that something that you see being engaged in?

Ms. SASAHARA. Thank you very much for the question, Mr. Chairman. It is a very important one.

I share your disappointment that Kuwait is not part of the Abraham Accords. To not even consider it is to risk being left behind in the region and possibly an outlier, which can be very risky in today's global markets and in the strategic security environment of that region.

We have already seen the benefits of the Abraham Accords, whether it is in education, tourism, business, as well as regional security.

With your permission, if I am confirmed I would like the opportunity to get on the ground and get a sense of what is possible and report back to you.

The Chairman: We appreciate the Kuwaitis being—they host—I went to the base there—they host for Thanksgiving. I went to the base. We appreciate their participation with us in so many different ways but we hope that they will be more forward leaning in embracing the possibility of normalization of relationships with Israel.

Lastly, as you know, Turkmenistan's neighbor Uzbekistan took important steps to end forced labor in its cotton industry, which opened up greater economic opportunities for the country.

Ms. Rood, what—with Uzbekistan as an example, what can be done to encourage the Government of Turkmenistan to understand that the respect for human rights is not only a moral imperative but will create an environment more conducive to economic investment and prosperity?

Ms. ROOD. Thank you for that question, Chairman Menendez.

Labor rights is among the many human rights challenges that are central to our bilateral agenda with the Government of Turkmenistan, one that we address regularly through our daily diplomacy as well as through our recurring annual bilateral consultations.

I am happy to share with you that we see some progress on the issue of forced labor and labor rights in Turkmenistan. In September and October of this year there were two visits to Turkmenistan by the International Labor Organization and another visit already just this month.

The purpose of this visit is to engage with the Government of Turkmenistan on labor issues, labor rights, particularly in the cotton industry, to provide advice, potentially, technical assistance and as well to observe and monitor practices during the cotton harvest.

I hope through this persistent and patient engagement with Turkmenistan that we will see continued progress and a resolution of the outstanding issues.

The Chairman: Thank you.

Ms. Allen, I will leave questions for the record but I do not want you to think I do not—have no affection for what you are going to do. I am concerned about what institutional changes we might use to better educate our diplomats about public diplomacy tools as well as content creation and timely delivery.

And, Mr. Yon, I think that your—that the assignment that you are being given is an incredibly important one and therefore I need to visit you.

[Laughter.]

The Chairman: To all of you.

Ms. ALLEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator MURPHY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator Ricketts?

Senator RICKETTS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

First of all, I would like to add my thanks to each of you for serving our great nation and especially those who are the career Foreign Service folks.

Thank you very much for the sacrifices you make on behalf of our country, and to the families as well because I know you sacrifice alongside your loved one when they are overseas representing our nation. So thank you all very much, and I look forward to all of you continuing to serve our great country.

Ms. Sasahara, I was actually in Kuwait when I was governor of Nebraska last year visiting some of our National Guard soldiers. So I look forward to you being able to take care of them while you are there.

And then, Ms. Strong, you and your team hosted us when we were in Saudi Arabia and you and your team did a fantastic job while we were there. So thank you very much for being great hosts while we were there and it was a very enlightening experience.

Actually, after we visited in Saudi Arabia we went to the United Arab Emirates and we had the opportunity to speak with government officials there, and one of the key things that we heard there was their great dissatisfaction with the United States response after their attack, January 17th of 2022.

Abu Dhabi was attacked by drones and missiles and there was not a response from the Biden administration. In fact, I believe Secretary Blinken had to several weeks later go back and apologize for our silence.

They equated their attack to their 9/11 and felt like we did not respond in time. In fact, I think that is one of the things that opens the door for China to have a relationship with UAE because then they question our responsiveness and whether or not we are going to be good allies in the region.

If you are confirmed what can you do to help overcome this? Like I said, it was pretty bad the way they talked to us about this. What can you do to help mend that relationship so that we can continue to have a good relationship with the UAE and make sure they are staying good allies with the United States and helping us on all the things we want to do like prevent sanctions leaking into Russia?

Ms. STRONG. Thank you, Senator, and it was a pleasure, of course, to host you in Saudi Arabia and we really appreciated the visit.

With regard to UAE, I completely agree with you that it is critical to maintain our strong partnership with the UAE. The President was very clear from the early days of his administration that our commitment to the region, to the partnerships that we have built up over decades in the region, is absolute.

When he came to the region last July he amplified that message in his conversations with the region's leaders. What I think is important here is focusing on what we are doing now and, certainly, there is a very deep security cooperation that we share with the UAE. They are, as I mentioned, a very capable, interoperable partner to us.

We have deployed together. We have countered terrorists together. The history of achievements is quite extensive. But also to have a very forward-looking agenda, which we do. When it comes to security, of course, we are working not just bilaterally but re-

gionally with the GCC to institute, for example, an integrated air and missile defense and a maritime security architecture.

Not all of our support and cooperation, of course, is in the public realm and so I am limited in what I can discuss here. But, certainly, that is very much a focus and, if confirmed, will be a focus for me.

But beyond the security there is, of course, the cooperation that we have now seen blossom under the Abraham Accords and this historic achievement should be our focus and, certainly, if confirmed, will be my focus because I think that it can underpin a lot of positive developments.

We have already, of course, seen a lot that has been achieved and I, certainly, would look forward to growing that cooperation and partnership, if confirmed.

Senator RICKETTS. Ms. Strong, I have only got about 40 seconds left and you preempted my question anyway by getting into the Abraham Accords because I do think that was a historic U.S. diplomatic achievement and glad that you are going to continue to support that.

I think that is one of the things we heard was important in the UAE we visited. You mentioned in your remarks the Abrahamic Family Center that has a mosque, a synagogue, and a Catholic Church on the site, and that we also heard there are about 600,000 Israelis have visited UAE since the Accords, which is all a very positive sign for continuing cooperation.

And I would just encourage you to also look for ways that we can expand the relationship between not only the United States and the United Arab Emirates but also with Israel in that cooperation as well.

But, again, thank you very much for being such a great host when we were over there. You and your team, again, did a great job. And just a little trivia fact. Nebraska is the state with the highest percentage of people who claim Czech ancestry. There you go.

Senator MURPHY. Senator Kaine?

Senator KAINE. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Sasahara, I want to begin with you. We are going to have a vote tomorrow that begins the process of repealing war authorizations against Iraq—two war authorizations.

Everybody knows about the 2002 authorization but we still have a live war authorization against Iraq from 1991, a war—the Gulf War that was for the purpose of driving Iraq out of Kuwait.

My understanding is that the Kuwait-Iraq relationship after 32 years, they are neighbors. They are productive. They have good diplomatic relations. May not agree on everything. You never agree on everything with a neighbor.

But is that your assessment as well, that Iraq-Kuwait relations are generally good and have been a positive force for stability in the region?

Ms. SASAHARA. Thank you for the question, Senator, and that is my understanding as well.

I think, in one sense, that was a very hard page to turn. I think most Kuwaitis over the age of 40 lived through it thirty—under-

stand that and remember that it was a brutal invasion and an even more brutal occupation. So it was a hard page to turn.

But they are neighbors and that geography is not going to change, and I think through diplomatic discussions directly they are in a better place, stronger. They are reaching a lot of agreements whether it is on maritime, whether it is on border security. I think they are in a very, very good place.

Senator KAINE. That is good. One of the things that is hardest in life to do is to beat a sword into a plowshare and, yet, you do find in life nations can do it. Germany and Japan are two of the United States' most reliable allies right now.

We were at war with Iraq to topple the Government and last week Secretary Austin was in Iraq talking about Iraq's important role as a security partner in battling against ISIS or other nonstate terrorist groups and checking Iranian aggression, trying to be a force for stability in the region.

It is a credit to the United States that we look at an adversary as a temporary adversary and have hope that in the future we might be on the same page. It is a credit to other nations that they can view us in the same way that, hey, there was tough, tough bloodshed even between our nations but we would still rather be your partner down the road than be your adversary, and one of the reasons I am excited to repeal these authorizations—there are many reasons—is I think it sends the message even to nations that are adversaries today that you could be an adversary of the United States but it is not a permanent thing.

We would want to always prefer the olive branch to the arrow and that is why the seal—the eagle on the seal of the United States looks toward the olive branch rather than to the arrow because that is our preference.

Ms. Strong, I want to ask you questions, really, just to educate me or help me gain understanding. You are leaving a very challenging position in Saudi Arabia and you are going to a really challenging and important one in the UAE.

I find Saudi Arabia often so perplexing and I am still extremely angry over the murder of Jamal Khashoggi, the Virginian Washington Post journalist. I do not think there has been accountability for that. I do not think you can allow crimes of that magnitude to go with no accountability without them proliferating.

But as a critic I do feel duty bound to also then if I am going to be a critic say something positive. Saudi Arabia recently announced aid to Ukraine. That is great. Saudi Arabia recently announced to construct a new international airline. They are purchasing aviation platforms that are made the United States.

They could have done something else and gone elsewhere. But they have done that. That is going to be good for the country. It will be good for my commonwealth.

It does appear that there is effort to hold on to a ceasefire in Yemen. So what advice would you give this committee? We often find ourselves in a tough spot where we are angry with Saudi Arabia at some things and, yet, see other areas where they are making strides that we could support.

So as you depart this position what advice would you give to the Foreign Relations Committee about the way to appropriately exercise oversight over this relationship?

Ms. STRONG. Thank you very much, Senator, and I hesitate to give you advice because you framed so aptly the complexities of the relationship that we have with Saudi Arabia.

There are, of course, many, many grave concerns, and you mentioned Jamal Khashoggi, whose murder was just a horrific act that cannot be repeated and we have made that clear to Saudi Arabia. And there are, of course, a long list of concerns related to human rights.

But, as you mentioned, there are also efforts on the part of the kingdom and the kingdom's leadership to really remake the kingdom and we do have to acknowledge the positive changes that are underway there.

It is spotty. It is far from perfect. It definitely remains a work in progress. But what I would urge members of this committee is to engage with the Saudis. They need to hear your concerns.

I think a lot of times the distance filters out a lot of the nuance and they do not fully appreciate that our concerns—your concerns—are grounded in some very core concerns that we have that impact on our national security, that may impact on our priorities—foreign policy priorities—and hearing that not just from me or from my colleagues in the Department of State or Department of Defense is very important.

And I will tell you that I am yet to go to a meeting with a senior Saudi and have them say, we are not going to talk about a specific problem, if you ask. They are very open.

As you know, President Biden, when he went to Saudi Arabia, raised all of our key issues, all of the painful issues, and he was very open in the conversation and the Saudi leadership was as well.

Senator Kaine. Thank you.

I appreciate you allowing me to go over my time. But I am really—I was really looking for advice there and I think that is good advice.

Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Senator MURPHY. Thank you, Senator Kaine.

I just have one final question and, pending arrivals, we can close the hearing out.

Ms. Strong, I guess I would not paint as rosy a picture as I think you have in your testimony and your answers to questions about the state of the U.S. relationship with UAE.

Senator Ricketts mentioned this and I do not think you responded to him so I want to talk to you about one development. One of the things you referenced in your testimony is that we share a mutual interest in securing a free, rules-based, and prosperous world with the UAE.

I do not know that I would phrase it that way. I do not think they have interest in a free world. I mean, they are a dictatorship. To the extent they support a rules-based world it is, certainly, not rules set by their citizens.

But they are also reportedly really at the hub of sanctions evasion when it comes to our ability to keep technology and weapons

out of Russia. Recent reporting suggests that the UAE, maybe more so than many of our other allies, is acting as a mechanism and means to get weapons to Russia.

There is a report that UAE exported 15 times more microchips to Russia in 2022 than in 2021. There is other reports that UAE exported 158 drones to Russia last year, as late as December of last year.

And so I want to make sure that this is high on your priority list because you are suggesting this integrated security relationship with the UAE and, yet, what we are learning is that the UAE is actually at the center of the attempt to try to support Russia against Ukraine.

I just want to make sure that this is—that you are going into this, as I know you are, with eyes wide open about this immense challenge we have with them.

Ms. STRONG. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and, absolutely, I am very much aware of the concerns that you raise. As you know, it is not just me who is concerned about this. This is the entire U.S. Government as we seek to mobilize assistance for Ukraine, as we are seeking to assist Ukraine counter this brutal aggression.

Part of our effort, of course, is to ensure that we stop the flow of the inputs that Putin is using to fuel his war machine and this is very much part of the conversations we have had with the UAE specifically on direct reexport of electronics, dual-use items, and controlled items, and our Department of Treasury—our Ambassador O'Brien, who is our sanctions coordinator—are working this issue both bilaterally and multilaterally with our EU and U.K. partners.

And this is a focus not just on the UAE although, obviously, you noted how high of an interest we have in what it is that they are doing. But also it is a global effort to ensure that we stem the flows of these items into Russia.

Senator MURPHY. I understand that it is a global effort and you have couched a lot of your answers in terms of UAE and everybody else.

But China has a particular interest in the UAE. UAE is a particular problem when it comes to sanctions evasion. So I do not want to sort of hide UAE in the global effort to counter Chinese influence or to combat sanctions evasion. There is a particular issue in the UAE that we have to confront.

Senator Van Hollen?

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank all of you for your testimony. Congratulations on your nominations.

I understand that my friend and colleague, Senator Sullivan, talked about our work together co-chairing the Foreign Service Caucus. All of you are members of the Foreign Service. Thank you for your longtime efforts.

And, Ms. Allen, thank you for your stepping up for this position, and a number of people who used to work for me sing your praises very highly.

So congratulations all, and as I came in I heard Senator Murphy asking a couple questions regarding the UAE and sanctions evasions that I had planned to take up. I appreciate your answers.

Look, as you know, we have had several envoys, one from the Treasury Department, one from the State Department, visiting the UAE recently. But conduct does not seem to have changed, at least according to most reports.

We are left with very few options. We want to work with the UAE. At the same time, we are going to have to ensure that we have the ability to enforce our sanctions.

Ms. Strong, I assume you agree with that assessment?

Ms. STRONG. Thank you, Senator, and, yes, we have been very clear that our sanctions regimes, our export controls, will be vigorously enforced.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Right. Well, we have the export control part and then we have the financial sanctions and my best assessment, based on public reporting, is UAE is violating both and so that is a challenge.

I understand you were asked about the recent agreement—at least preliminary rapprochement between Iran and Saudi Arabia brokered by China. We do not have to rehash history.

It is my belief that when the previous administration tore up the JCPOA they created openings for others. But regardless of how we got here and regardless about our concern about China's actions in the region, would you agree that lowering the temperature between Iran and Saudi Arabia would be a positive development in the region if that holds?

Ms. STRONG. Thank you, Senator. I think, first, it is worth noting that Saudi Arabia certainly believed that lowering the temperature and deescalating their relationship with Iran was important and was needed and, certainly, if the agreements and commitments are actually implemented and they do deescalate tensions in the region that could be a positive development.

Certainly, any impact—positive impact on Yemen and bringing that conflict to a more durable solution, again, would be very important, given our interest in concluding that conflict and addressing the humanitarian crisis that still exists there.

But, as I mentioned earlier, it really—it remains to be seen to what extent Iran is prepared to set aside its long history of destabilizing activities and actually live up to its commitments in this regard.

But part of the answer here has to be our cooperation and partnerships in the region and the President has made very clear that it is our partnerships in the region that are a strong asset for us and really underpin his strategy to build a Middle East that is more stable and more integrated.

And in this regard I think that we also have to take a look at our partnerships and shore them up, strengthen them, where necessary and continue to work the diplomatic piece because that is absolutely critical. It is critical in Yemen. It is yielding benefits in Yemen, and we are hopeful that we are going to be able to make some progress there.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. No, I appreciate that and, clearly, do not trust and verify. That is, I think, the maxim that we have come to adhere to and I think it is wise counsel.

I was just—I just came—I was a little late to this hearing because I came from a meeting with Director Grossi, the head of the

IAEA, giving his report on his most recent trip to Iran where he was cautiously optimistic that they would open sites to more daily inspections and verification cameras.

But as he would emphasize, as you did, as I will, you got to—only when actions are taken can we believe the commitments that were made.

If I could just close. Mr. Yon, congratulations. I think you will be the first ambassador known to the Maldives, if confirmed, and I look forward to continuing a conversation with you about our bilateral relationship as well, of course, as the issue of climate change, where we know the Maldives are probably more exposed than—if not every other country they are certainly tied for first and will be underwater at the current rate of climate change and sea level rise if we, as an international global community, do not work on that issue.

Way back in the day my father was a career Foreign Service officer. He was ambassador to Sri Lanka and the Maldives at that time. I believe he was a credit to the Maldives.

It is a beautiful country but lots of challenging issues with—especially with China's efforts to gain even more influence in that area. India, obviously, has a historic and important role to play.

But I look forward to continuing our conversation and congratulations on being the first U.S. Ambassador assigned specifically to the Maldives Islands, and I look forward to supporting all of your confirmations. Thank you.

Senator HAGERTY [presiding]. Thank you, Senator Van Hollen, and I think it is of particular import that you heard from the son of the previous ambassador to that region his congratulations. I am sure your father is smiling, Senator Van Hollen, to see the advancement of the post that he once held.

And I would like to stay with you, Hugo, if I might. You are going to the Maldives, a very strategic location. Our adversaries will have a great deal of interest in what is happening there and I think that means that you will need to have a very clear-eyed perspective on advancing America's interest along with the host nation as you serve there.

I would like to—and to that end I would like to ask you to go back in time with me to the time when you served as the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Transportation Affairs at the Department of State.

What was the best deal that you saw cut for American interests when you were in that diplomatic post?

Mr. YON. Thank you, Senator. At the risk of flattery, it was the deal we worked on. It was the deal we did in Japan.

Senator HAGERTY. Absolutely, and I just want to draw that point for the rest of the candidates here. I think you need ambassadors that wake up every day asking themselves how can I advance America's interest, how can I do that in conjunction with the host nation, how can we make our nation stronger every day.

Hugo and I worked for a long time together to get a very, very tough deal done that was very, very good for America and, frankly, it is going to be great for the region. And I just hope and pray that all of you will be finding those opportunities every day and I trust that you will.

Congratulations to all of you on your nominations. Again, congratulations to your families that are here, too. I appreciate that. QFRs will be due by the close of business on Friday. I now call this meeting adjourned. Thank you.

[Whereupon, at 4:15 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

Additional Material Submitted for the Record

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO HUGO YUE-HO YON BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

Question. In the State Department's 2021 Human Rights report, the Maldives were listed as having significant human rights abuses including a lack of independence with the judiciary, serious restrictions on freedom of speech, and corruption. How will you direct your embassy to work with civil society organizations to improve the human rights situation on the ground?

Answer. If confirmed, I will add my voice to the Department's consistent engagement with Maldivian counterparts, civil society, and the public on human rights. I will use our programming to support the participation of Maldivians in democratic processes and increase the capacity and responsiveness of local governments to the needs of their people.

Question. In the State Department's 2022 Trafficking in Persons report, the Maldives remained on Tier 2 for increasing efforts to meet the minimum standards to combat trafficking but declined in a few key areas, like investigations. How will you work with the host government and civil society actors to address these issues if you are confirmed as Ambassador?

Answer. Maldives has demonstrated progress since being upgraded to Tier 2 in the annual Trafficking in Persons Report in 2021. If confirmed, in line with the TIP Report recommendations, I will urge Maldives to increase proactive investigations of trafficking and prosecutions and convictions. I will urge Maldives to take these actions while respecting due process. I will also strengthen efforts to proactively screen vulnerable populations and increase anti-trafficking training for front-line officials.

Question. Do you commit to reporting accurate information as it pertains to the reality of the trafficking situation in the Maldives?

Answer. I do. As Secretary of State Blinken has said, "human trafficking affects us all" and "we must work together ... to effectively address this crime." If confirmed, I will ask difficult questions of the Maldives because our partnership must be rooted in our shared values, including a commitment to human dignity. I will report accurate information about human trafficking to combat this crime in Maldives.

Question. In the State Department's International Religious Freedom report, the Maldives were described as lacking societal and governmental respect for freedom of religion. What is your assessment of this particular issue, and how will you work with the Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom to bolster religious freedom in country?

Answer. I am concerned about freedom of religion or belief in Maldives. If confirmed, I will encourage senior government leaders to create space for discussing sensitive religious issues and work in country towards expanding freedom of religion or belief. I will also work closely with the Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom on engagements to advance human rights, including religious freedom.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO HUGO YUE-HO YON BY SENATOR MARCO RUBIO

Question. In May 2022, Secretary Blinken said that the People's Republic of China is the "only country with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do it." The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) clearly holds all the reins of power in the People's

Republic of China and has used this power to commit genocide in Xinjiang, flood our communities with fentanyl, and emit by far the largest quantity of greenhouse gases in the world today. With their absolute control of Chinese society and industry, the CCP could stop all of these destructive actions tomorrow if they so choose. Is the Chinese Communist Party a threat to the United States?

Answer. Under President Xi, the Chinese Communist Party has become more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad. We will defend U.S. national security and advance our values and prosperity; defend international law, agreements, principles, and institutions that maintain peace and security; protect the rights of individuals and sovereign nations; and make it possible for all countries to coexist and cooperate. If confirmed, I will continue our work with Maldives to strengthen democratic values and the commitment to a rules-based international order.

Question. Does the Chinese Communist Party undertake any activities that are beneficial to U.S. interests?

Answer. While the United States with the People's Republic of China (PRC) are strategic competitors, it may be possible for the PRC to make constructive contributions toward solving challenges we and other countries face in common. Any PRC contributions must be scrutinized, however, to ensure they are neither springboards for narrow PRC economic interests nor platforms to create more permissive conditions for its own authoritarian model.

Question. Do you believe that there are any areas within which the Chinese Communist Party would constructively work with the United States in good faith?

Answer. While the United States competes vigorously with the PRC where we differ, the United States manages this competition responsibly. This includes maintaining openness to wary cooperation with Beijing where our interests may overlap and where such an approach can advance solutions to transnational challenges, including possibly climate change, counter-narcotics, pandemic threats, non-proliferation, food security, and macroeconomics.

Question. If confirmed, will you approve any joint activity with organizations or representatives from the People's Republic of China in the countries or organizations in which you will work?

Answer. In line with the Administration's approach on competition with the People's Republic of China, I would maintain openness to U.S. involvement in shared efforts that involve PRC entities, Maldives, and third countries or international organizations in areas that lie in our collective interests. That said, I would approach such situations with skepticism and encourage third parties to scrutinize any such arrangements to ensure they follow international norms, feature transparency, and delineate steps to verify regularly that all parties are working in good faith.

Question. When will mission activities and operations for the Maldives transition from Sri Lanka to Malé?

Answer. The Department is transitioning operations to Malé in phases. A Chargé was deployed to execute diplomacy and intensify preparations to establish an initial physical presence. U.S. Mission Maldives is currently taking steps that could allow staff to move to Malé as early as summer 2023. However, the full transition of staff, equipment, and operations will take place when an Embassy facility is approved by Congress.

Question. What is keeping operations and activities from transitioning to the capital sooner?

Answer. The full transition of all mission elements requires congressional approval for the Embassy's location.

Question. Do U.S and Indian interests coincide with regard to the Maldives?

Answer. The United States and India have a shared interest in maintaining stability in the Indian Ocean region and promoting democratic values. India has a long history of robust engagement in Maldives, and U.S. Mission Maldives personnel are in regular contact with the High Commission of India on a range of issues.

Question. How much debt in the Maldives is owed to China?

Answer. Maldives accrued significant debt to PRC lenders between 2013–2018. Since then, Maldives has turned primarily to India and other lenders. PRC entities currently hold an estimated 45 percent of the country's total external debt.

Question. How much does China leverage this debt when dealing with Malé and countering Indian influence?

Answer. Infrastructure projects present potential leverage for PRC geopolitical goals, especially when countries can no longer service debt to the PRC. If confirmed, I will facilitate U.S. private sector investment and infrastructure support from sources that adhere to international standards. This will provide reliable and sustainable alternatives to reduce PRC leverage. I will continue U.S. programs that support Maldivian authorities' efforts to strengthen sound budget and financial management for the economy, including increasing transparency of the selection process concerning large infrastructure projects.

Question. Are there parallels between the CCP's efforts on influence and expansion in the Southwest Pacific and with island nations in the Indian Ocean?

Answer. The PRC offers loans, investments, and aid to many countries globally including the Southwest Pacific and the Indian Ocean Region. It is imperative that the United States has a full-time presence on the ground in Maldives to counter unfair and problematic PRC economic practices. If confirmed, I will advocate for economic and commercial alternatives that adhere to our principles of sovereignty, labor rights, and protection of the environment.

Question. What steps will you take to identify projects, with Maldives officials and the Development Finance Corporation, regarding opportunities for U.S. companies to compete with CCP funded projects?

Answer. If confirmed, I will strengthen relationships with Maldives stakeholders, government officials, community leaders, and business owners to identify projects needs and potential partnerships. I look forward to facilitating U.S. private sector engagement in such opportunities and will work closely with the U.S. Development Finance Corporation and other U.S. economic and trade agencies to deploy the full range of economic tools to grow the U.S.-Maldives economic relationship and counter PRC influence.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO ELIZABETH ALLEN BY SENATOR ROBERT MENENDEZ

In the 2022 Report to Congress on Streamlining PD Support Functions, the Department noted that a PD CTO "will create a process for inventorying IT investments to identify efficiency and effectiveness opportunities across the R Family" and identify where PD can "leverage enterprise-wide technologies and common tools."

Question. What progress has the Department made in implementing this commitment, and will you fully implement this commitment?

Answer. The Department has made progress on this commitment and plans to fully implement it by the end of this year—which I intend to support, if confirmed. The Office of the Undersecretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs (R) tasked the Chief Technology Officer's Unit (R/PPR/CTO) to manage the project. R/PPR/CTO is reviewing previous R Family IT inventory efforts for lessons learned and a draft inventory.

Over the next six to eight months, R/PPR/CTO will work with domestic public diplomacy (PD) practitioners to validate the list of common technology capabilities currently in use or planned for future use. Once that inventory is complete, R/PPR/CTO will develop recommendations for achieving efficiencies through consolidation and integration of applications and contracts and perform a gap analysis to identify where PD practitioners lack necessary technology solutions or resources to meet specific capabilities. Finally, R/PPR/CTO will analyze this approach and codify it into an SOP for keeping the inventory up-to-date and informing a strategic approach to IT acquisition for the R Family.

Question. We are unquestionably losing the information war to China and Russia. We are never going to be in a position, for a variety of reasons, where we invest as much money or state control into the information space, but with the tools you have now, what specific institutional changes will you make to better educate our diplomats and integrate public diplomacy tools into policy making?

Answer. Though we will likely never outspend the People's Republic of China dollar-for-dollar or match Russia tweet-for-tweet, we can and must outmaneuver our adversaries through a whole-of-government approach that exposes foreign sources of mis- and disinformation, deploys facts, enables the free flow of information, and builds relationships that establish trust with the next generation of global leaders. Earlier this year, the Bureau of Global Public Affairs (GPA) completed a resource-

neutral modernization effort to better integrate itself into policy making. The Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) strategically aligns its programming and exchanges with the National Security Strategy. The Department has already increased training offerings at the Foreign Service Institute focused on countering disinformation, while GPA has led Department-wide sessions related to strategic communications. The Global Engagement Center is working across the interagency, with international partners and allies, and with posts overseas to expose and combat foreign disinformation threatening our national security. If confirmed, I would ensure that the R family is structured appropriately and engaged fully to serve as a resource to the Department on these issues and would prioritize increased training on strategic communications and countering disinformation. Additionally, I would foster the enhanced connectivity needed for this whole-of-government approach through efforts to improve interagency coordination, such as by placing public diplomacy liaison officers at Combatant Commands.

I'm pleased that after literally years we finally got the report on the merger that led to the Bureau of Global Public Affairs—nothing like a confirmation hearing to make the building move One concern I hear perpetually is about the ability to deliver timely content that is tailored to specific countries and regions.

Question. Can you discuss how you plan to be responsive to posts requests for content creation and ensure that it's not just coming as a one-way street from Foggy Bottom?

Answer. The Bureau of Global Public Affairs (GPA) maintains a strong partnership with public diplomacy sections at posts, which has been critical in meeting the needs of a 24-hour news cycle. GPA has found that posts are in the best position to identify and execute on their most immediate content needs and has worked intentionally to ensure GPA staff support posts by providing guidance on the topics and tone of Department content. That said, in instances where posts requests specific content or technical assistance, GPA stands ready and willing to execute on those asks—and, in fact, are already doing so regularly. Last year, our Digital Content team launched an updated approach to provide localized content support to the field, working closely with select posts to provide digital-first content that shapes local conversations and narratives. One example includes a recent video produced earlier this year, “To the People of Russia”—highlighting shared cultural and scientific achievement and mutual respect between the people of the United States and Russia—which was produced by GPA's Digital Content team, working closely with post. The video was released from Embassy Moscow's social platforms, ultimately garnering more than a million views and more than doubling the Embassy's following on Telegram as a result.

I am a strong supporter of educational and cultural exchange programs, and as you may know, have for some time been urging better integration of our exchange programs into strategic objectives for the Department.

Question. How can we better integrate some of our programs—many of which have longstanding Congressional support and large alumni networks—into our broader policy objectives? If we treat the bureau as simply programming, we are losing a huge opportunity to directly, strategically engage foreign publics and build critical tools.

Answer. Thank you for your support for exchange programs. Exchanges further U.S. foreign policy goals by advancing democratic principles, promoting mutual understanding, and furthering our competitive edge. The Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs' (ECA) 2022 Functional Bureau Strategy articulates an additional goal: to increase the professional skills of emerging and established U.S. and foreign leaders to address global challenges such as countering disinformation and mitigating climate change.

In strategic alignment with the National Security Strategy (NSS), ECA supports embassies and consulates in integrating policy priorities with strategic public diplomacy programming—using academic, cultural, sports, and professional exchanges—in a nimble, transparent, and coordinated way to advance U.S. foreign policy goals. Recent examples of such integration include: supporting Ukraine through cultural heritage protection efforts, countering Russian disinformation, increasing Indo-Pacific engagement through the expansion of the Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative and English language programming, and launching a new Fulbright Amazonia initiative to tackle the climate crisis in the Amazon Basin.

With its global reach and proven models for exchanges, ECA is positioned to help ensure that U.S. embassies and consulates have the tools to build alliances and

maintain U.S. leadership. If confirmed, I would seek to ensure that ECA's flexible program models continue to be adaptable, scalable, and responsive to emergent foreign policy priorities.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO ELIZABETH ALLEN BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

Question. Please describe the importance of including public affairs officers in our diplomatic expansion in the Pacific Islands, and describe the steps, if confirmed, you would take to ensure that our missions abroad are adequately staffed and resourced to counter narratives of malign foreign influence.

Answer. Public diplomacy (PD) is a critical element in advancing vital U.S. interests in the Indo-Pacific region, including the Pacific Islands. Over the past five years, public diplomacy has made human and financial investments in the Pacific Islands, and the highest PD priority requests for FY2024 were for new U.S. and local staff in the Pacific Islands and Southeast Asia. The Department aims to increase our public diplomacy staffing level in the Pacific Islands by 130 percent—from six PD officer positions to 14—by the end of 2025. In addition, the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs has already established a new Regional Public Engagement Specialist position that will be based in Fiji and will expand PD engagement through American Spaces programs across the Pacific Islands. If confirmed, I look forward to working with Congress as a key, active partner in implementing our foreign policy in the Pacific Islands and ensuring our PD efforts are fully resourced and our teams have the tools, training, and leadership needed to meet this critical moment.

Question. How do you measure the value and success of the Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs' exchange programs?

Answer. With its global reach and proven models for exchanges, the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) is positioned to help ensure that U.S. embassies and consulates have the tools to build alliances and maintain U.S. leadership. ECA's exchange programs create networks—the infrastructure needed to generate trust, credibility, and space for dialogue—among current and future leaders. Exchanges provide opportunities for American citizens and communities at home and abroad, and these programs advance U.S. foreign policy goals by promoting democracy and furthering our competitive edge. In 2020, at the direction of Congress, an independent review of ECA programs found that Ambassadors and other foreign policy leaders recognized exchange program contributions to U.S. policy goals and in communicating American values.

ECA's monitoring and evaluation unit employs multiple tools and activities to help measure and show the collective impact of ECA's work. The new Monitoring Data for ECA (MODE) framework, which tracks performance for all ECA programs, has provided the following key outcomes: 94 percent of foreign participants indicated an increase in understanding of U.S. culture and values after their program, while 95 percent of participants who were a part of an ECA program with a media literacy component reported an increased ability to counter disinformation. If confirmed, I would support ECA's continuing use of data and performance metrics to assess and enhance program quality, and would seek to ensure that ECA's flexible program models continue to be adaptable, scalable, and responsive to emergent foreign policy priorities.

Question. If confirmed, how would you work to enhance the State Department's efforts to educate the American public about the role of the Department overseas?

Answer. If confirmed, among my priorities would be to better communicate the domestic equities and benefits of foreign policy to our fellow Americans. As Secretary Blinken told the U.S. Conference of Mayors in January, "Foreign and domestic policy are inextricably linked and mutually reinforcing." To that end, as Senior Official for Public Diplomacy, I encouraged and supported leaders across the Department in more than 4,300 domestic outreach engagements throughout 2022, and prioritized domestic student engagement among our senior staff. As Assistant Secretary of Global Public Affairs, I prioritized domestic media engagement as a strategic communications tactic. The American public has a right to know what their government is doing on their behalf and should have the opportunity to share their thoughts about policies that affect them. The public diplomacy community doesn't "own" domestic engagement for the Department, but its benefits to the U.S. economy as well as its connection with and impact on communities across the United

States—through colleges and universities; local media engagement; the International Visitor Leadership Program, BridgeUSA, and other exchanges; and more—are substantial. If confirmed, I would advise Department leaders on these linkages and encourage robust subnational programming by ensuring that the offices and bureaus under my purview are a bridge between foreign publics and U.S. citizens.

Question. In your opinion, how effective have public diplomacy modernization efforts been at the State Department, and what new initiatives would you recommend to continue modernizing public diplomacy efforts.

Answer. Modernized public diplomacy is policy-centered, audience-driven, and data-informed. To date, the Public Diplomacy Staffing Initiative has been implemented at all U.S. missions and has redefined Public Diplomacy Section structures and performance management to allow for modernized public diplomacy. The Initiative has also raised awareness among practitioners about the importance of strategic planning, audience research and analysis, and monitoring and evaluation. The Department would like to increase resources for learning and audience research and analysis support in response to field requests, including training, and the team continues to review and assess where more is needed—through added staff or resources, enhanced skills and expertise, or investments in emerging technology and tools. If confirmed, continuing the modernization of both public diplomacy tactics and workforce structures will be a top priority.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO ELIZABETH ALLEN BY SENATOR MARCO RUBIO

Question. In May 2022, Secretary Blinken said that the People's Republic of China is the "only country with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do it." The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) clearly holds all the reins of power in the People's Republic of China and has used this power to commit genocide in Xinjiang, flood our communities with fentanyl, and emit by far the largest quantity of greenhouse gases in the world today. With their absolute control of Chinese society and industry, the CCP could stop all of these destructive actions tomorrow if they so choose. Is the Chinese Communist Party a threat to the United States?

Answer. The President's National Security Strategy made it clear that the People's Republic of China (PRC) harbors the intention and, increasingly, the capacity to reshape the international order in favor of one that tilts the global playing field to its benefit. As Secretary Blinken has stated, we will invest at home, align our efforts with partners and allies, and compete with the PRC to defend our interests and build our vision for the future. Under President Xi, the Chinese Communist Party has become more repressive at home and more assertive abroad, and this makes the work of public diplomacy all the more important. I am clear-eyed about the threat the PRC poses—especially in the information space and their so-called public diplomacy efforts in education—and, if confirmed, I would leverage the U.S. Government's broader public diplomacy toolkit to ensure that the international system remains rooted in democratic values, not authoritarian ones.

Question. Does the Chinese Communist Party undertake any activities that are beneficial to U.S. interests?

Answer. If confirmed, I will follow the United States' approach towards the PRC, focusing on competing vigorously with the PRC where our interests and values differ and cooperating with them when it is clearly in the U.S. national interest to do so, such as on climate change, global health, food security, and macroeconomic stability.

Question. Do you believe that there are any areas within which the Chinese Communist Party would constructively work with the United States in good faith?

Answer. While competition is the defining feature of our relationship with the PRC, if confirmed, I would look to understand where there might be areas in the realm of public diplomacy where the PRC would constructively work with the United States in good faith, when doing so would be clearly in the U.S. national interest. In order to advance our interests and out-compete the PRC, the United States must have insight into the PRC, and the people of China must have opportunities to engage with Americans to gain accurate perspectives on the values and culture of the American people.

Question. If confirmed, will you approve any joint activity with organizations or representatives from the People's Republic of China in the countries or organizations in which you will work?

Answer. As the United States National Security Strategy makes clear, and as Secretary Blinken stated, the People's Republic of China (PRC) is the greatest geopolitical challenge that we face because it is the only competitor with the intent, and increasingly the capability, to remake the international order.^μ Beijing's actions suggest PRC officials have the intention to do so.^μ If confirmed, I would follow the United States' approach towards the PRC—focusing on competing where our interests and values differ and cooperating when doing so is clearly in the U.S. national interest.^μ

Question. State's public diplomacy structure, and specifically the Under Secretary position, has been described as weak and lacks authority to direct public diplomacy resources, personnel, and activities abroad. Would you agree?

Answer. I would disagree, and as Senior Official, I worked to further integrate public diplomacy and encourage cross-conal collaboration; emphasized the strategic imperative of connectivity between Washington and practitioners in the field; and advocated for public diplomacy officers to be better resourced, better trained, and better set up for advancement. If confirmed, I would continue to advocate that public diplomacy has a seat at every policy-making table and that we continue to collaborate up, down, and across the State Department.

Question. Are you aware of the tweet Chargé d'Affairs for Afghanistan, Karen Decker, published as the head of the U.S. mission requesting Beyonce and Lizzo input to Afghan women's plight and compared their situation to American racial and structural issues known as Black Girl Magic?

Answer. Yes.

Question. Are you aware, on February 12, 2023, the same Chargé d'Affairs tweeted that while it was the birthdate of President Abraham Lincoln and he "did some stuff," that it was also the date the NAACP was established, implicitly arguing that Abraham Lincoln's birth was not as important?

Answer. Yes.

Question. Both of the tweets mentioned were deleted. Is this the type of messaging the State Department envisions influencing foreign populations or Americans to advance U.S. interests and national security objectives?

Answer. Social media and digital engagement are core functions of public diplomacy and public affairs. The Department encourages its staff and principals around the world to speak authentically, and to adapt their content to their unique local audiences to effectively advance the Department's strategic goals. That often requires a healthy amount of risk tolerance and a willingness to try new things.

With over 1,200 official Department social media accounts, a small minority of messages, like these, may miss the mark. These instances offer an opportunity to be transparent about missteps and to learn and improve. The Department is already implementing further training opportunities for leadership and social media practitioners alike.

Question. How do you envision countering disinformation campaigns from malign actors, such as China, Russia, Cuba, Iran, North Korea, and Venezuela with the diffusion of public messaging platforms and authority to overseas missions if confirmed as Under Secretary?

Answer. If confirmed, I will further the Department's holistic, audience-driven approach to countering foreign disinformation and malign influence. I will harness the network of more than 5,000 public diplomacy practitioners around the world to work across the Department—including through the Global Engagement Center, Bureau of Global Public Affairs, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, and regional bureau Strategic Communications units—to identify false narratives that undermine U.S. foreign policy, develop and deploy factual messaging to key audiences overseas, and continue to build the meaningful relationships necessary to establish trust on the ground with the next generation of global leaders.

Public diplomacy also fosters open information environments and empowers independent media that allow populations to see their authoritarian regimes' actions, serves as a tool for accountability, and conveys U.S. values and policy positions to global audiences, presenting our affirmative, forward-looking, dynamic vision for ourselves and our partners worldwide as an alternative.

Question. As Under Secretary, how would you ensure misguided messages like those mentioned are not published?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to maintaining an open line of communication with Chiefs of Mission and Department leaders to advise and encourage audience-driven, data-informed, and policy-centered messaging and public diplomacy. I further commit to continuing to expand training opportunities for public diplomacy practitioners.

Question. In 2016 Congress established the Global Engagement Center (GEC) to counter foreign state and non-state propaganda and disinformation efforts. A State OIG report found the GEC could not effectively lead the USG efforts due to authority issues and competing government agency efforts, to name a few. What is your opinion of the GEC and can you point to any specific instances GEC was the lead and not supporting other interagency partner efforts?

Answer. The GEC has a critical role to play in countering America's adversaries and furthering U.S. foreign policy through its mission to lead U.S. Government efforts to recognize, understand, expose, and counter foreign malign actors' attempts to spread disinformation and propaganda outside of the United States that would undermine or influence the policies, security, or stability of the United States and our allies and partner nations.

The GEC has led numerous interagency efforts to publicly debunk Russia and PRC disinformation, inform global audiences of false narratives, and direct them to fact-based sources. For example, GEC's May 2022 public exposure report on "PRC Efforts to Amplify the Kremlin's Voice on Ukraine" illuminated Beijing's demonstrated support for Russia in attempting to influence public opinion.

The GEC concurred with the OIG's 2022 recommendations and has been working to address its concerns, including by conducting an organizational assessment, drafting a realignment plan, and enhancing risk mitigation for its analytics platform. If confirmed, I would work closely with GEC's leadership and others to ensure GEC has all policies and procedures in place to conform to the OIG recommendations and maximize its prospects for success.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED
TO MARTINA ANNA TKADLEC STRONG BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

Question. If confirmed, how will you use your role as Ambassador to strengthen economic relations among Abraham Accords/Negev Forum participants?

Answer. Building on the Abraham Accords, the UAE became the first Arab country to reach a comprehensive trade deal with Israel in 2022. Bilateral trade between them reached \$3 billion in 2022, surpassing 2021's \$1.2 billion total. If confirmed, I will build on this burgeoning economic cooperation between UAE and Israel, seek opportunities to bring U.S. firms into trilateral cooperation, and expand benefits to the broader region through multilateral initiatives like I2U2, the Negev Forum, and Project Prosperity.

Question. If confirmed, how will you use your role as Ambassador to strengthen social relations among Abraham Accords/Negev Forum participants?

Answer. If confirmed, I will work to enhance people-to-people initiatives between Israel, the UAE, and other countries in the region, leveraging ongoing work through institutions like the Negev Forum Education and Coexistence and Tourism Working Groups. I will also work with religious institutions, non-profit organizations, youth groups, and the private sector to encourage non-governmental initiatives that promote religious and cultural understanding and strengthen people-to-people ties.

Question. If confirmed, how will you use your role as Ambassador to strengthen security relations among Abraham Accords/Negev Forum participants?

Answer. Israel's integration into the region CENTCOM initiatives and its strong partnership with the UAE have created important opportunities to enhance regional security and stability. If confirmed, I will work to deepen ongoing security cooperation between Israel and its neighbors, especially UAE, through bilateral initiatives and multilateral efforts including the Negev Forum Regional Security Working Group.

Question. If confirmed, how will you use your position as Ambassador to amplify the success of the Abraham Accords?

Answer. The Administration strongly supports the historic Abraham Accords and normalization agreements between Israel and countries in the Arab and Muslim world. If confirmed, I will work to highlight the significant benefits of the Abraham Accords for the UAE and the region to encourage other countries to join the circle of Abraham Accords signatories. I will also support multilateral initiatives like the Negev Forum and I2U2.

Question. If confirmed, what areas do you see as opportunities to expand the Abraham Accords?

Answer. The Administration continues to encourage more countries to normalize relations with Israel, as well as join multilateral initiatives like the Negev Forum where they can benefit from cooperation with its members, including Israel. If confirmed, I look forward to working closely with the UAE to support these bilateral and multilateral initiatives. In addition to working closely with the UAE Government, I will seek to capitalize on opportunities to expand cooperation with Israel through private sector and people-to-people initiatives.

Question. How does the UAE play into U.S. considerations for Saudi Arabia's request for uranium enrichment capacity?

Answer. The United States has long sought to limit the spread of uranium enrichment and spent fuel reprocessing technologies globally, given their potential technical applicability to fissile material production for nuclear weapons purposes. We have encouraged states in the region to take an approach similar to the United Arab Emirates, which made a sovereign decision in 2009 to renounce the development of any domestic uranium enrichment or spent fuel reprocessing capabilities and to rely on external suppliers for nuclear fuel.

Question. How does the UAE play into U.S. considerations for Saudi Arabia's request for major non-NATO ally status?

Answer. The United States considers designation of countries as a Major Non-NATO Ally (MNNA) on a case-by-case basis. The United States shares a strong security partnership with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and remains committed to supporting the Kingdom's defensive needs.

Syria Relations

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to opposing any normalization between the UAE and the Assad regime in Syria?

Answer. The United States has been clear—both publicly and privately with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and other countries—that we continue to oppose any normalization with the Assad regime without progress on the requirements laid out in UNSCR 2254. We also continue to stress the need to hold the Assad regime accountable for the horrific atrocities it has perpetrated. If confirmed, I will continue to uphold this message.

Question. In your opinion, how has Syria's emergence as a narco-state impacted the UAE, and how will it affect your approach with UAE officials as Ambassador, if confirmed?

Answer. The Assad regime is responsible for the death and suffering of countless Syrians, the displacement of more than half of the country's pre-war population, and now the spread of illicit drugs throughout the region. Captagon trafficking by the Assad regime and its affiliates poses a significant threat to stability, public health, and rule of law in the region, including the UAE. If confirmed, I will work to enhance ongoing USG cooperation with the UAE to combat the Captagon and other illegal substance trade.

Question. What opportunities do you see for regional cooperation to address Captagon and other illegal substances from Syria?

Answer. Captagon trafficking affects multiple countries in the region, including the Gulf. Regional and international cooperation, along with a comprehensive strategy, will be vital to stem the flow of drugs into the Gulf and across the region. I understand that several U.S. Government agencies currently provide support to our partners in the region, including through information sharing and capacity building. If confirmed, I will support efforts by the Department and other agencies to strengthen regional coordination on this issue.

Iran Relations

Question. In your opinion, is normalization with Iran in the UAE's best interest?

Answer. The Emiratis are keenly aware of the threat posed by Iran and are exploring diplomatic efforts to de-escalate regional tensions, even as the United States

and UAE cooperate closely on defense and deterrence. The United States also continues to cooperate with the UAE to counter Iran's destabilizing activities in the region. If confirmed, I will work to keep our partnership with the UAE strong and focused on our shared challenges, including those posed by Iran.

Question. In your opinion, is Iran-UAE normalization in the United States' best interest?

Answer. De-escalation and diplomacy, backed by deterrence and defense ties, have been the key to the Administration's approach to the Middle East. To the extent that UAE diplomatic engagement reduces tensions, it could potentially benefit U.S. partners and their interests. However, it is far from clear whether Iran plans to live up to its commitments. The United States will also enforce vigorously all sanctions and will take action to disrupt sanctions evasion.

China Relations

The Chinese-brokered agreement between Saudi Arabia and Iran has exacerbated concerns China is replacing U.S. leadership in the region.

Question. Please describe your view of China's role in the UAE.

Answer. The Administration has clearly identified the PRC as "America's most consequential geopolitical challenge," and DNI Avril Haines testified to the threat that the PRC and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) represent to U.S. national security and leadership globally. Under President Xi, the CCP has become more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad, seeking to undercut U.S. influence and partnerships, including with the UAE. The PRC is trying to translate its commercial ties with the region into strategic gains. If confirmed, I will work to advance U.S. national security interests and push back against the PRC's efforts to expand its influence in the UAE through robust and forthright diplomatic engagements, public diplomacy programming, and commercial advocacy to bolster the foundational pillars of U.S.-UAE bilateral ties.

Question. Do you believe China's role as a mediator between Saudi Arabia and Iran is a net positive for U.S. interests?

Answer. The United States has long supported efforts to de-escalate tensions in the Middle East, including by seeking to end the war in Yemen. The March 10 agreement between Saudi Arabia and Iran was the culmination of two years of engagement, facilitated by Iraq and Oman and supported by the United States. The United States remains an indispensable partner to the UAE and other countries in the Gulf, having brokered the historic Abraham Accords and subsequent agreements on overflights of Saudi Arabia and Oman for aircraft to/from Israel, advanced peace in Yemen, and developed over decades and across U.S. administrations strong, strategic partnerships with countries in the region. If confirmed, I will work to advance U.S. leadership and ensure that we do not leave a vacuum for the PRC to fill.

Question. Do you believe a Beijing summit hosted by China and attended by Iran and Arab monarchies is a net positive for U.S. interests?

Answer. The reported plans for a Beijing summit should be viewed in the context of the PRC's track record of irresponsible disregard for international law and sovereignty of countries, as well as Iran's aggressive posture and malign actions in the region. In addition, according to the ODNI Annual Threat Analysis, the CCP is seeking to "undercut U.S. influence, drive wedges between Washington and its partners, and foster some norms that favor its authoritarian system." The United States has led the region in advancing efforts to de-escalate tensions and work with its regional partners to strengthen their deterrence and defense capabilities. If confirmed, I will continue to work to strengthen the U.S. partnership with the UAE, leveraging our longstanding ties and unmatched record of cooperation over five decades to ensure that we do not leave a vacuum for the PRC to fill. At the same time, I will continue to support the Administration's efforts to deter and disrupt Iran's destabilizing activities in the region.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to opposing further Chinese investments in strategic infrastructure, such as Khalifa Port?

Answer. There are areas of the UAE's cooperation with China that run up against U.S. interests and pose a threat to the security of sensitive weapons systems, U.S. defense and commercial technology, and information technology. At senior levels we have expressed our concerns that certain kinds of cooperation with China will make it more difficult to cooperate with the United States. If confirmed, I will address these issues forthrightly with UAE leadership to ensure our concerns are made clear.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to emphasizing the limitations the UAE's relationship with China, including Huawei, place on deepening U.S. security relations?

Answer. If confirmed, it will be a priority for me to ensure that the UAE understands and respects that there are categories of cooperation with the PRC that impact directly on U.S. national security interests, especially the security of sensitive weapons systems, U.S. defense and commercial technology, and information technology. We have been clear with leaders across the region, including in UAE, that certain kinds of cooperation with the PRC will impact our ability to work together on national security matters.

Russia Relations

U.S. officials and sanctions watchers are concerned that the UAE has become the new hot spot for Russian businesses to evade Western sanctions, including export controls.

Question. What is your understanding of Russia-UAE relations, especially in banking?

Answer. Russia and the UAE have worked to deepen their relations in recent years in multiple areas, including the banking sector. Russia is one of the main sources of tourism to Dubai, and a large expatriate Russian population lives and conducts business in the UAE. Senior U.S. officials have expressed to UAE leadership our concerns over Russian-UAE economic ties and emphasized the importance of preventing Russia from obtaining the resources and equipment it needs to prosecute its unjust war against Ukraine. Senior Administration officials have been clear about the risk to Emirati companies engaged with Russia.

The United States and our European allies are also pressing the UAE to halt all trade between UAE-based firms and Russian specially designated nationals, as well as exports of U.S. export-controlled or critical dual use goods, especially electronics, to Russia. The Administration will use all tools available to us to enforce our sanctions and stop Russia from obtaining items it needs for its brutal, unacceptable war on Ukraine.

Question. How can the U.S. incentivize transparency reforms to improve sanctions compliance?

Answer. We are deepening our work to enforce sanctions and export control measures and also to end and deter circumvention and backfill, including by expanded authorities to close down Russia's access to all inputs that can support its war machine. As part of this, we are taking new steps to target additional third-country actors across the globe to disrupt support for Russia's war from any corner of the world where it is identified.

Question. Do you believe the U.S. should threaten the UAE with sanctions if their non-compliance with Russia sanctions continues?

Answer. The United States, together with our allies in Europe, is pushing the UAE to halt all trade between UAE-based firms and Russian specially designated nationals, as well as the exports of U.S. export controlled or critical dual-use goods to Russia. We will use all the tools available to us to enforce our sanctions and stop Russia from obtaining the resources it needs for its unjust war.

If confirmed, I will build on the Administration's efforts to press senior UAE officials to work with us to address sanctions violations and sanctions evasion networks operating in the UAE. This is critical to efforts to help Ukraine defend its sovereignty from the Russian illegal invasion.

Question. The UAE's humanitarian aid to Ukraine is welcomed, but more can be done to support Ukraine's fight against Russia's invasion—especially in light of the growing Russia-Iran alignment. How will you work with the Emiratis to increase their support for Ukraine?

Answer. Given Ukraine's situation and Russia's unacceptable aggression, more can indeed be done. If confirmed, I will work with the UAE to strengthen their support for Ukraine and to reduce Russia's destabilizing influence. I will also encourage the UAE, as a non-permanent UN Security Council member, to support Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity through votes in the UN and clear statements backing these core tenets of international law.

U.S. Relations

The Chinese-brokered agreement between Saudi Arabia and Iran has exacerbated concerns China is replacing U.S. leadership in the region. The UAE, in particular, has spent the last few diversifying its partnerships to a fault.

Question. If confirmed, how will you use your role as Ambassador to bolster confidence in the U.S. partnership and increase UAE partnerships with the U.S. Government?

Answer. There should be no question that the United States remains the UAE's most important and reliable partner. If confirmed, I will work to expand and deepen our partnership with the UAE in various areas, including strengthening the U.S.-UAE security partnership, advancing U.S.-UAE commercial ties, deepening our people-to-people exchanges, and expanding the growing cooperation between the UAE and Israel under the historic Abraham Accords.

Question. If confirmed, how will you use your role as Ambassador to increase UAE partnerships with U.S. businesses?

Answer. Over 1,500 American firms are successfully operating in the UAE and the United States enjoys a healthy trade surplus with the UAE, which is the largest market for U.S. goods and services in the Middle East. If confirmed, advocating for U.S. businesses in the UAE, as well as for UAE investments into the United States, which create jobs for Americans will be at the top of my agenda. I will also engage with the UAE Government to expand trade opportunities through initiatives like I2U2, which is linking India-Israel-UAE and U.S. economies.

Question. If confirmed, how would you use your role as Ambassador to fight the narrative of U.S. disengagement from the region?

Answer. It is imperative that our partners in the region continue to view the United States as their partner of choice. If confirmed, I will work to ensure active U.S. engagement and leadership to strengthen our partnerships—and engage publics and key decisionmakers to ensure that they appreciate the valuable, ongoing leadership role of the United States in the region. The United States has led the region in unlocking historic opportunities to achieve greater stability, security, and prosperity through the Abraham Accords, the Saudi decision to open its airspace to civilian flights traveling to/from Israel, the longest period of calm in Yemen, and our close and ongoing defense cooperation. If confirmed, I will work to deepen the Emiratis' understanding of and appreciation for the benefits of the close U.S.-UAE partnership to the region's security and prosperity.

Trafficking in Persons

Question. In the State Department's 2022 Trafficking in Persons Report, the UAE remained on Tier 2 for inconsistent efforts to combat human trafficking, including failing to report any investigations into human traffickers or labor violations. How will you work with the host government and civil society actors to address these issues if you are confirmed as Ambassador?

Answer. The UAE's Tier 2 ranking indicates that the UAE has taken certain steps to improve its anti-trafficking enforcement and capacity, but much work remains. The UAE has implemented multiple labor reforms recently, including safeguards against contract switching, electronic wage payment monitoring, improved legal protections for domestic workers, and updated worker visa policies to limit vulnerabilities to exploitation. However, the UAE has only prosecuted traffickers for forced labor in limited instances. If confirmed, I will urge the UAE to continue improving TIP enforcement and protections for the victims.

Question. Do you commit to reporting accurate information as it pertains to the reality of the trafficking situation in the UAE?

Answer. Yes, this is an issue that has long been a priority for me and the U.S. Mission to the UAE. If confirmed, I will work with my colleagues in the Department to make sure the annual TIP report reflects the most accurate assessment of the trafficking situation in the UAE.

International Religious Freedom

Question. In the State Department's 2021 International Religious Freedom report, the UAE was identified as making progress towards increased societal and governmental respect for religious freedom. What is your assessment of this particular issue and if confirmed, how will you work with office of the Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom to bolster religious freedom in-country?

Answer. The UAE has initiated reforms to promote religious tolerance and is home to a diverse population of nationalities and religious groups. A number of churches and temples, including an LDS Temple in Dubai and several Evangelical churches, operate freely. The UAE also recently opened the Abrahamic Family House, a multi-faith physical manifestation of the interfaith tolerance and coexistence that the UAE has sought to promote. If confirmed, I will work closely with the

Ambassador-At-Large on areas where further progress is needed, while also highlighting important successes.

Human Rights

In the State Department's 2021 Human Rights Report, the UAE was identified as having significant human rights abuses, including arbitrary arrest, torture, restrictive laws on NGOs, and more.

Question. If confirmed, what steps will you take to address these instances with the host government?

Answer. President Biden and Secretary Blinken have been clear that human rights are central to our foreign policy and that these concerns will continue to be raised with partners as well as adversaries. The State Department frequently engages the UAE on a range of human rights concerns and will continue to do so. If confirmed, I will urge the UAE to do more to protect human rights and fundamental freedoms, with a special emphasis on the safety and wellbeing of U.S. citizens.

Question. How will you direct your embassy to work with civil society organizations to improve the human rights situation on the ground?

Answer. The President and Secretary Blinken raised human rights with regional leaders during the July visit to the region. Human rights remain at the top of the agenda for all our posts in the region. This has been a focus for me in Saudi Arabia, both to address areas of significant concern and to encourage progress underway in areas such as women's economic and societal participation. Similarly, in the UAE there are both areas of progress to build upon and areas of concern to address. If confirmed, I will work with civil society groups to seek to improve the human rights situation in the UAE.

State Department Manangement

Many U.S. missions have been under enormous stress over the last few years, in large part due to COVID.

Question. What is your understanding of morale throughout Mission Abu Dhabi?

Answer. My understanding is that morale across Mission UAE is high, despite many challenges our personnel face, including a tense regional security environment and isolation from families and friends during the pandemic. Our team is invested in their important mission and demonstrates high levels of productivity and professionalism. If confirmed, I look forward to supporting this committed team and ensuring their morale is high, they have a strong sense of purpose, and their hard work is recognized.

Question. How do you intend to improve morale at Mission Abu Dhabi?

Answer. If confirmed, I will ensure that every member of our Mission knows that I am their champion. I have always prioritized listening to my colleagues and their families, addressing their concerns, and ensuring they have the resources and support they need. Our work is often stressful, challenging, and at times dangerous. Therefore, taking care of our team and protecting our employees in every respect are among my top priorities as a leader and manager. That means protecting our Mission from security threats first and foremost. And, it also means ensuring that all of our employees are working in a place where they feel safe and free from harassment and disrespect of any kind, and where they feel valued and included. If confirmed, I will prioritize our team's morale, resilience, and well-being, which will be crucial to our success as a Mission in advancing our nation's foremost foreign and security policy goals.

Question. How do you intend to create a unified mission and vision at Mission Abu Dhabi?

Answer. In a large, complex Mission such as UAE, ensuring that the entire team is oriented around the same core objectives is key to our success. The Mission's two diplomatic posts and 13 federal agencies must have a thorough understanding of our Integrated Country Strategy goals, our plans for accomplishing them, and most importantly, the underlying reasons behind our objectives. It will also be incumbent upon me, if confirmed, to work closely with our partners throughout the U.S. Government, the U.S. Congress, as well as stakeholders in the private sector and civil society. Bringing to bear all of the United States' core sources of influence, developing innovative approaches, and forming broad coalitions have been successful strategies I have utilized in the past to strengthen our bilateral partnerships and advance top U.S. objectives.

Question. How would you describe your management style?

Answer. Throughout my career, I have approached my management responsibilities with a focus on being an inclusive and supportive leader. I have emphasized several core management principles, which I have modeled and have expected every member of the team to adhere to: serve the American people with integrity and be responsible stewards of the American taxpayers' resources; respect everyone; and empower colleagues to lead, generate solutions, and grow as professionals. As a leader, I have also prioritized my responsibility to contribute to our institutional capacity and mission readiness by mentoring my colleagues, especially those in the early stages of their careers. Over the years, building and broadening my colleagues' professional skills have helped our teams deliver many successes on behalf of the American people.

Question. Do you believe it is ever acceptable or constructive to berate subordinates, either in public or private?

Answer. It is never acceptable or constructive to berate anyone in any setting. As a leader, I make it clear to the entire Mission that respect for everyone is paramount. This means respect for everyone in our Mission, for the host government, and for the public with whom we interact. I approach my leadership role with humility and patience and expect everyone on my team to do the same. When setbacks or mistakes occur, we must coach, mentor, and course correct. We should always do so in a professional and constructive manner.

Question. How do you envision your leadership relationship with your deputy chief of mission?

Answer. To be successful, a diplomatic mission requires a close partnership, seamless collaboration, open communication, and a unity of effort between the deputy chief of mission (DCM) and the chief of mission. Having served as a DCM and acting DCM in four embassies and having supported numerous outstanding DCMs in earlier assignments, I recognize the vital importance of this position in setting the Mission's direction, supporting our colleagues and their families, and leading the team toward success.

Question. If confirmed, what leadership responsibilities do you intend to entrust to your deputy chief of mission?

Answer. As a Chief of Mission and in prior senior roles, I have prioritized empowering our employees, especially the Deputy Chief of Mission, whose role and responsibilities are critical to every diplomatic Mission's success, effectiveness, and efficiency. If confirmed, I will empower the DCM and also make clear that I have the DCM's back. As senior leader and chief of mission, I firmly believe that the proverbial buck stops with me. I am also fully committed to ensuring that everyone on my team has a professionally enhancing experience.

In order to create and continue employee excellence at the Department, accurate and direct employee evaluation reports (EERs) for Foreign Service Officers are imperative, though often lacking.

Question. Do you believe that it is important to provide employees with accurate, constructive feedback on their performances in order to encourage improvement and reward those who most succeeded in their roles?

Answer. Throughout my career, I have focused on effective and ongoing performance management as a core pillar of my approach to team leadership. When we achieved a victory—big or small—we would celebrate it. When we faced a setback or made a mistake as a team or individually, we would acknowledge it, address it, learn from it, and work on improving our performance. In this regard, constructive feedback is critical to professional development and institutional performance. I prioritize creating a safe environment to discuss how we can do better.

Question. If confirmed, would you support and encourage clear, accurate, and direct feedback to employees in order to improve performance and reward high achievers?

Answer. I take very seriously my responsibility for motivating our employees and for promoting accountability. I have always focused on ensuring the integrity of our performance management processes, to include our evaluations. Performance management is indeed a process and requires ongoing, constructive feedback to recognize achievements and address development areas. Evaluations must assess employees' performance accurately and fairly, reflect their accomplishments fully, and document clearly their impact in support of the Mission's objectives.

It is imperative that U.S. diplomats get outside of posts abroad to meet with local actors, including host government officials, non-government organizations, and fellow foreign diplomats stationed in the UAE.

Question. In your opinion, do U.S. diplomats get outside of our embassy walls enough to accomplish fully their missions?

Answer. Throughout my career, I have consistently prioritized active diplomatic engagement and public outreach. It is critical for the conduct of our foreign policy that our policymakers have access to diverse streams of information and inputs. At the same time, it is important that U.S. diplomats engage host country governments and publics frequently to advocate for and explain U.S. policies. American taxpayers make significant investments in our diplomatic platforms abroad to enable our diplomats to engage in person. It is our obligation to make the most of this investment.

Question. How do you intend to improve the ability of U.S. diplomats to better access all local populations?

Answer. If confirmed, I will work closely with my DCM, regional security officer, management officer, and public affairs team, to review our budget and the prevailing security conditions in the UAE, with the goal of maximizing the impact of our resources and managing any relevant security risks appropriately. If confirmed, I will look for opportunities to broaden our audiences, reach new segments of the society, and ensure our Mission is a role model in terms of inclusive events, to include representational events.

Question. Public Diplomacy is an important aspect of U.S. foreign policy efforts. What is the public diplomacy environment like in the UAE?

Answer. The UAE has sought U.S. partnership to build its education and culture sectors' capacity, while also engaging with numerous prominent U.S. institutions, such as Warner Bros. Inc., New York University, Berklee College of Music, and the Guggenheim Museum, to establish branches in the country to increase its touristic appeal and nurture an ecosystem for cultural creation and academic innovation. At the same time, the UAE government closely regulates and censors all media in the country, and government institutions are responsible for most education and culture activities. Our Mission in the UAE enjoys a close relationship with the relevant Emirati institutions, and, if confirmed, I will work to deepen our cooperation.

Question. What public diplomacy challenges do U.S. diplomats face there?

Answer. The ease with which public diplomacy programs can operate varies, including within different Emirates. The UAE government closely monitors U.S. public diplomacy activities. While the UAE government welcomes programming that promotes innovation and entrepreneurship, all UAE media is regulated.

Question. How do you balance the importance of Main State versus in-country mission when it comes to tailoring public diplomacy messages for foreign audiences?

Answer. The Department of State, both domestically and in the field, works to ensure clear communication of USG policies and priorities to audiences in the UAE in a manner that is persuasive and mindful of the social, cultural, and political context in the UAE.

"Anomalous health incidents," commonly referred to as "Havana Syndrome," have been debilitating and sidelining U.S. diplomats around the world for years. They have caused serious, negative consequences for U.S. diplomacy, yet many believe that the Department is not doing enough to care for, protect, and communicate to its personnel.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to taking this threat seriously?

Answer. The security and health of our personnel are among my highest priorities as a leader. If confirmed, I will continue to take this threat seriously and to provide expeditious, full, and compassionate support for our personnel, when required.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to talking as openly as you can to Mission Abu Dhabi personnel?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to speaking as openly as possible to our Mission in the UAE about all matters. I am committed to empowering our personnel and their families with information and offering them my full support when they require it.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED
TO MARTINA ANNA TKADLEC STRONG BY SENATOR MARCH RUBIO

Question. In May 2022, Secretary Blinken said that the People's Republic of China is the "only country with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do it." The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) clearly holds all the reins of power in the People's Republic of China and has used this power to commit genocide in Xinjiang, flood our communities with fentanyl, and emit by far the largest quantity of greenhouse gases in the world today. With their absolute control of Chinese society and industry, the CCP could stop all of these destructive actions tomorrow if they so choose. Is the Chinese Communist Party a threat to the United States?

Answer. The Administration has clearly identified the PRC as "America's most consequential geopolitical challenge," and DNI Avril Haines testified to the threat that the PRC and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) represent to U.S. national security and leadership globally. Under President Xi, the CCP has become more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad, seeking to undercut U.S. influence and alliances. If confirmed, I will work to advance U.S. national security interests and push back against the PRC's efforts to expand its influence in the UAE through robust and forthright diplomatic engagements, public diplomacy programming, and commercial advocacy to bolster the foundational pillars of U.S.-UAE bilateral ties.

Question. Does the Chinese Communist Party undertake any activities that are beneficial to U.S. interests?

Answer. The Administration assesses the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) activities in the context of the PRC's track record of irresponsible disregard for international law and sovereignty of countries and the CCP's increasingly aggressive posture internationally. According to the ODNI's Annual Threat Analysis, the CCP is seeking to "undercut U.S. influence, drive wedges between Washington and its partners, and foster some norms that favor its authoritarian system."

Question. Do you believe that there are any areas within which the Chinese Communist Party would constructively work with the United States in good faith?

Answer. The United States would have to determine that any potential collaboration with the CCP would—first and foremost—advance very clearly defined U.S. national security interests. The United States would have to weigh carefully all possible benefits and downsides of such cooperation and ensure that the PRC would be unable to use such cooperation to advance its own narrow and/or opportunistic objectives.

If confirmed, I will work with the Department of State's new Office of China Coordination to advance U.S. objectives and counter harmful behavior by the PRC and other actors in the Middle East.

Question. If confirmed, will you approve any joint activity with organizations or representatives from the People's Republic of China in the countries or organizations in which you will work?

Answer. If confirmed, my priority will be advancing U.S. national security interests in the UAE and countering efforts by our strategic and regional competitors to undermine those interests. The Administration has been clear that we consider the PRC to be the United States' most consequential geopolitical challenge and is committed to working to strengthen our partners in the Gulf. If confirmed, I will work closely with the Administration and Congress to counter China's efforts to expand its influence in the UAE and the Gulf.

Question. If confirmed, what will you do to re-assure the UAE of the United States' commitment to our bilateral relations?

Answer. If confirmed, I will seek to cement our bilateral relationship with the UAE by expanding and institutionalizing our partnership in key areas. These include building on the Abraham Accords and Negev Forum process and working to ensure security cooperation remains robust in order to deter and confront external threats. I will also seek to ensure that our cooperation encompasses the future energy and scientific opportunities and industries that both countries value.

Question. The UAE is China's largest non-oil trading partner in the region, estimated at more than \$50 billion. The UAE has partnered with Huawei for domestic network services, is open to using CCP technology, and considering construction of a PLA military facility at Khalifa port. Taking these into consideration, do you believe the U.S. should move forward with U.S. military sales, such as drones and F-35s to the UAE?

Answer. As the United States competes for influence with the PRC, we have made clear the importance of safeguarding U.S. advanced technology, a core national security priority that could be impacted through certain categories of cooperation with the PRC. Should the Administration move forward with these proposed defense sales, we will seek clear mutual understandings from the UAE regarding its obligations and actions before, during, and after delivery. If confirmed, protecting U.S. technology and addressing concerns concerning PRC cooperation will be priorities for me.

Question. If so, what assurances should the UAE provide to the U.S. regarding the safeguarding and security of U.S. defense technology?

Answer. The Administration continues to have robust dialogue with the UAE on the sale of U.S. defense technology to ensure there are unmistakably clear mutual understandings with respect to Emirati obligations and actions before, during, and after delivery. Congress and the Administration are focused on the same important issues. Should the proposed sales move forward, I will ensure that these issues continue to be addressed. Sensitive and advanced U.S. technology must be protected.

Question. When Arab leaders met CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping in Riyadh late last year, it was determined that China would hold a summit for Gulf Cooperation Council member states and Iran in 2023. This is in addition to the agreement that Beijing brokered between Riyadh and Tehran which was announced last Friday. What do you believe accounts for this recent win by China to supplant U.S. leadership in the Middle East?

Answer. The United States has been promoting efforts at de-escalation and a reduction in tensions across the region. The March 10 agreement was the culmination of two years of engagement, facilitated by both Iraq and Oman, which we supported. The United States remains an indispensable partner to the UAE and other countries in the Gulf, having brokered the historic Abraham Accords and subsequent agreements on overflights of Saudi Arabia and Oman for aircraft to/from Israel, advanced peace in Yemen, and developed over decades and across U.S. administrations strong, strategic partnerships with countries in the region. If confirmed, I will work to advance U.S. leadership and ensure that we do not leave a vacuum for Russia or the PRC to fill.

Question. How would you as ambassador seek to restore the United States' role as the region's main power broker?

Answer. The United States continues to lead the region in efforts to create a more secure, more stable, and more integrated Middle East. The United States helped Israel and UAE reach for peace through the Abraham Accords and continues to advance Israel's integration with the region. U.S. diplomacy facilitated the longest period of calm and de-escalation in Yemen since the start of the conflict. If confirmed, I will work to strengthen U.S.-UAE cooperation, including on regional issues. I will pursue diplomacy, backed by close defense cooperation and deterrence, to de-escalate and end conflicts and advance our objective of a more secure, stable, prosperous, and integrated region.

Question. If confirmed, how will you facilitate increased trade and ties between the UAE and the U.S.?

Answer. Our trade and investment ties are key components of our relationship. Over 1,500 U.S. firms successfully operate in the UAE and the United States enjoys a large trade surplus with the UAE, which is the largest market for U.S. goods and services in the Middle East. If confirmed, I will advocate for U.S. businesses in the UAE, as well as job-creating UAE investment in the United States. I will also partner with the UAE to expand trade opportunities through initiatives such as I2U2, which is linking governments and companies from India, Israel, the UAE, and the United States.

Question. What is your strategy to deepen and expand the UAE-Israel relationship to ensure the Abraham Accords continue to benefit both countries and long-term U.S. security interests?

Answer. The Abraham Accords are among the most important and promising developments the Middle East in many years. If confirmed, I will seize on this historic opportunity to strengthen UAE-Israel ties and deepen trilateral and regional cooperation, including through the Negev Forum and I2U2. Like the United States, the UAE cares deeply about institutionalizing these efforts. We can strengthen our bilateral ties with the UAE by championing its historic breakthrough with Israel as part of our affirmative agenda.

Question. With the withdrawal from Afghanistan, what should be changed in our security cooperation program with the UAE?

Answer. Security ties with the UAE, a capable and interoperable partner, have been central to our fight against terrorism and other defense efforts and continue to advance U.S. interests even after the withdrawal from Afghanistan. If confirmed, I will prioritize our ongoing efforts to bolster deterrence and regional stability; counter terrorism; de-escalate regional tensions; protect freedom of navigation, especially in critical maritime choke points; and support a political settlement of the conflict in Yemen, while ensuring we do not leave a vacuum for Russia or China to fill.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED
TO MARTINA ANNA TKADLEC STRONG BY SENATOR BILL HAGERTY

Combating Iranian Sanctions Evasion Efforts

The UAE last year reopened its embassy in Iran after more than six years of downgraded ties and has deepened trade relations. These business ties unfortunately have included exports of proliferation-related technology to Iran and the use of some UAE financial institutions by Iranian entities. Numerous UAE-based entities have been sanctioned by the United States for these activities in the last year. Just last week, the Biden administration sanctioned 39 entities—many based in the UAE—that form a global “shadow banking” network built by Iran to evade previous sanctions.

Question. If confirmed, how will you work to encourage our Emirati partners to crack down on companies helping Iran gain access to international financial and oil markets through sanctions evasion?

Answer. Any attempt to avoid U.S. sanctions is unacceptable. The Administration continuously raises this issue and emphasizes to the UAE that we will use all tools available to us to enforce our sanctions and to stop Iran’s destabilizing malign behavior. Iran continues to threaten the UAE’s and regional security through its nuclear and ballistic missile programs, as well as malign support for militant proxies in the region. If confirmed, I will continue the Administration’s whole of government efforts to press UAE officials to work with us to stop sanctions violations and sanctions evasion efforts by Iran and affiliated networks.

Strengthening The Abraham Accords

In 2020 the U.S. facilitated a historic agreement whereby the United Arab Emirates agreed to normalize relations with Israel. These agreements have already made tangible contributions to regional security and prosperity, furthering U.S. interests. Bilateral trade between Israel and the UAE reached \$2.59 billion in 2022, up from \$11.2 million in 2019, the year prior to the Abraham Accords. The U.S. role in facilitating these agreements cannot be overstated. They would not have happened without involvement from the United States, and their continued strengthening requires active U.S. engagement.

Question. If confirmed, how specifically do you plan to further regional security and prosperity by deepening ties between the UAE and Israel?

Answer. The historic Abraham Accords offers a generational opportunity to deepen and broaden cooperation between the UAE and Israel, as well as other countries, which is central to the Administration’s strategic objective of a more peaceful, more secure, more integrated, and more prosperous Middle East. If confirmed, I will actively develop and implement efforts—in bilateral and multilateral formats—to support the growing governmental, private sector, and people-to-people ties between the UAE and Israel. From trade and clean energy partnerships to tourism and interfaith tolerance cooperation, there are numerous opportunities to build on the progress and momentum already achieved under the Abraham Accords and related initiatives such as I2U2 and the Negev Forum. Integrating Israel further into the region can anchor the Administration’s efforts to expand the circle of peace and prosperity throughout the region.

Last month, the UAE introduced an unfairly one-sided anti-Israel Presidential Statement at the U.N. Security Council and previously intended on introducing an equally one-sided binding resolution at the Security Council. While the Biden administration should have blocked this unfair Presidential Statement, that a U.S. partner was behind these unjustified targeting of the U.S. best friend in the region is also discouraging.

Question. If confirmed, what would you do to engage with the Emirati Government to ensure that Israel is not unfairly targeted at the U.N. and at other international forums?

Answer. Unfair and biased targeting of Israel at the United Nations and other international fora is unacceptable. If confirmed, just as I have done at previous posts, I will engage with senior UAE officials to encourage the Emirati Government to take a strong stand and to use its influence with other countries against any unjustified and biased criticism of Israel.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO ELIZABETH ROOD BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

Question. In the State Department's 2022 Trafficking in Persons Report, Turkmenistan remained on Tier 3 due to the continued government policy of forced labor. How will you work with the host government and civil society actors to address these issues if you are confirmed as Ambassador?

Answer. The U.S. Government places a priority on maintaining a robust dialogue on human rights and democratic governance. If confirmed, I will lead regular human rights dialogues with the Turkmen Government. We have seen some progress on religious freedom, release of conscientious objectors, accounting for disappeared persons, and discussion of human trafficking. The International Labor Organization (ILO) recently finalized a road map, currently awaiting approval by the President of Turkmenistan, to address forced labor. If confirmed, I will work to augment this progress on these critical issues.

Question. What do you envision as possible avenues of collaboration to permanently eliminate the Government's use of forced labor in public and private sectors?

Answer. Labor needs for the annual harvest have decreased in part due to a long-running mechanization program involving U.S. industry (largely with John Deere harvesters). In part due to significant U.S. engagement, the Government of Turkmenistan allowed the ILO to visit Turkmenistan in autumn 2022 to discuss reforms to Turkmen labor laws. As a result, the Turkmen agreed to a three-stage program in which the ILO will perform a legislative review, monitoring and surveys of forced labor indicators, and capacity building and training. If confirmed, I will continue our engagement with the Government of Turkmenistan aimed at eliminating forced labor.

Question. Do you commit to reporting accurate information as it pertains to the reality of the trafficking situation in Turkmenistan?

Answer. Absolutely. Accurate and regular reporting, in addition to our engagement with the Government of Turkmenistan, civil society, and industry, are essential to combatting human trafficking and forced labor.

Question. In the State Department's 2021 International Religious Freedom report, Turkmenistan was described as lacking religious freedom and having little tolerance for religious diversity and was eventually designated as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC). What is your assessment of this issue, and if confirmed, how will you work with the office of the Ambassador-At-Large for International Religious Freedom to bolster religious freedom in country?

Answer. Turkmenistan has been designated a Country of Particular Concern since 2014. There are indications, however, that the Government is loosening its tight grip on some religious groups. The former president pardoned 16 prisoners of conscience in 2021 and has not jailed conscientious objectors since, but it has also not provided an alternative to mandatory military service compatible with conscientious objection. The Embassy coordinates closely with the Office of the Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom. If confirmed, I will continue these efforts to improve religious freedom.

Question. In the State Department's 2021 Human Rights Report, Turkmenistan was listed as having a litany of significant human rights abuses, including restrictions on internet freedom, corruption, forced labor, and more. How will you direct your embassy to work with civil society organizations to improve the human rights situation on the ground?

Answer. Through a Human Dimension Working Group, Embassy Ashgabat promotes human rights, including freedom of religion and belief, freedom of movement, labor issues, and women's empowerment, while advancing educational and cultural

programming. The embassy supports efforts to strengthen civil society through programming alumni activities and NGO capacity-building. If confirmed, I will direct and lead Embassy Ashgabat's continued efforts to engage the Government of Turkmenistan, civil society, media, and industry to improve human rights.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO ELIZABETH ROOD BY SENATOR MARCO RUBIO

Question. In May 2022, Secretary Blinken said that the People's Republic of China is the "only country with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do it." The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) clearly holds all the reins of power in the People's Republic of China and has used this power to commit genocide in Xinjiang, flood our communities with fentanyl, and emit by far the largest quantity of greenhouse gases in the world today. With their absolute control of Chinese society and industry, the CCP could stop all of these destructive actions tomorrow if they so choose. Is the Chinese Communist Party a threat to the United States?

Answer. Under President Xi, the Chinese Communist Party has become more repressive at home and more assertive abroad. We will defend and strengthen U.S. national security, prosperity, and values; defend international law and agreements and the other principles and institutions that maintain peace and security; protect the rights of individuals and sovereign nations; and make it possible for all countries to coexist and cooperate.

Question. Does the Chinese Communist Party undertake any activities that are beneficial to U.S. interests?

Answer. The United States will work with the PRC only when clearly in U.S. national interests to do so. We cannot let the disagreements that divide us stop us from moving forward on transnational issues that demand that we work together, for the good of the American people and for the good of the world.

Question. Do you believe that there are any areas within which the Chinese Communist Party would constructively work with the United States in good faith?

Answer. The United States will work with the PRC only when clearly in U.S. national interests to do so. This includes exploring possible cooperation on transnational challenges such as counter-narcotics, global health, and food security.

Question. If confirmed, will you approve any joint activity with organizations or representatives from the People's Republic of China in the countries or organizations in which you will work?

Answer. We cannot let disagreements that divide us stop us from making progress on the priorities that demand we work together, for the good of the American people and for the good of the world. However, the Administration has been clear that we consider the PRC to be the United States' most consequential geopolitical challenge. If confirmed, I will work closely with the Administration and Congress to counter China's efforts to expand its influence in Turkmenistan.

Question. Given the over \$8 billion in loans from Chinese entities to develop Turkmenistan's gas infrastructure and dependency upon China's export market, do you believe Turkmenistan is neutral when it comes to international relations and the CCP's regional aspirations?

Answer. Turkmenistan and China have strong economic ties due to the sale of Turkmen natural gas to the People's Republic of China (PRC). However, Turkmenistan reportedly has paid off all debt to the PRC for pipeline construction. Thus, unlike most other Central Asian countries, Turkmenistan is not linked to the PRC by an onerous debt burden, and the PRC's influence remains limited. Turkmenistan does not engage in security cooperation with China that we are aware of, nor is China attempting to play an outsized political role within the country. Based on our observation, Turkmenistan has consistently applied its policy of "positive neutrality" to China, as it has to Russia, Türkiye, and the United States.

Question. If confirmed, what steps will you take to promote U.S.-led and international projects to develop Turkmenistan's energy resources and infrastructure as an alternative to Chinese-backed projects?

Answer. It is important for the United States to engage with Turkmenistan to promote free trade, reduce business corruption, and expand rule of law to build commercial ties and offer Turkmenistan alternatives to PRC commercial interests. We

have engaged routinely to strengthen U.S.-Turkmenistan commercial ties, and, if confirmed, I will continue to do so. An element of this engagement has been to promote greater diversification of Turkmenistan's gas exports, reducing Turkmenistan's reliance on any one country, including the PRC. If confirmed, I will encourage European counterparts to send strong demand signals for Turkmen gas, increasing the likelihood Turkmenistan will agree to a Trans-Caspian pipeline.

Question. Is there a role for the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation in facilitating U.S. investment in Turkmenistan?

Answer. Opportunities for direct DFC involvement in Turkmenistan are limited, but I anticipate DFC's involvement in region-wide projects to benefit U.S. investment in Turkmenistan. If confirmed, I would continue to promote a whole-of-government effort—including State Department, USAID, Commerce's Commercial Law Development Program, USTR, the Export-Import Bank, and DFC—to foster economic resilience in the region, improving the workforce and business climate, and increasing interconnectivity and diversity of trade routes. I would also continue to encourage Turkmenistan's movement toward WTO membership.

Question. If confirmed, how will you leverage your position to hold the Government of Turkmenistan accountable for human rights abuse, including the use of forced labor in the cotton industry?

Answer. In our bilateral relationship with Turkmenistan, maintaining a robust dialogue on human rights and democratic governance is a top USG priority. If confirmed, I will continue to lead regular human rights dialogues, including the Human Dimension Working Group, with the Turkmen Government. We have seen some progress on human rights in the last two years with regard to forced labor, religious freedom, the release of political prisoners, and accounting for disappeared persons. Turkmenistan has shown interest in making progress on labor rights and worked recently with ILO on a roadmap to address forced labor in the cotton harvest. I understand this roadmap is currently awaiting approval by the President of Turkmenistan. If confirmed, I will work to ensure progress on these critical issues continues.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO KAREN SASAHARA BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

Question. In the State Department's 2022 Trafficking in Persons Report, Kuwait was downgraded to Tier 2 Watch List for its lack of sustained commitment to combat human trafficking, including decreased funding for protection programs and a lack of standard practices for screening potential victims. How will you address these issues with the host government and civil society actors if you are confirmed as Ambassador?

Answer. Human trafficking remains an issue of serious concern to the U.S. Government and to me personally. Kuwait was downgraded last year from Tier II to Tier II watch list due to fewer investigations, prosecutions, and convictions of traffickers than in previous years and fewer victim identifications. If confirmed, I will press Kuwait to increase its anti-trafficking actions by reforming its visa sponsorship system and improving oversight of foreign worker recruitment.

Question. Do you commit to reporting accurate information as it pertains to the reality of the trafficking situation in Kuwait?

Answer. Yes, I commit to do so.

Question. In the State Department's 2021 International Religious Freedom report, Kuwait was noted as having some antisemitic incidents and that U.S. officials in country continued engagements with religious and government leaders to press on the importance of religious tolerance. What is your assessment of this particular issue and if confirmed, how will you work with the office of the Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom to bolster religious freedom in-country?

Answer. Antisemitism in any form is unacceptable. This is a global issue whose spread and practice must be stopped. If confirmed, I will continue to support freedom of religion and expression for those of all faiths. I was pleased to hear that Director and Principal Deputy to the Ambassador-at-Large for the Office of International Religious Freedom (IRF) Dan Nadel visited Kuwait on March 1–2; I look forward to working with this office.

Question. In the State Department's 2021 Human Rights Report, Kuwait was identified as having significant human rights abuses but took attempts to punish some officials who committed them but impunity remained a problem. How will you direct your embassy to work with civil society organizations to improve the human rights situation on the ground?

Answer. President Biden and Secretary Blinken have been clear that human rights are at the heart of the Administration's foreign policy. I wholeheartedly agree. If confirmed, I will work with all relevant parties to support progress on human rights issues, including raising them at the most senior levels of the Kuwaiti government, making clear that advancement in the protection of human rights will further strengthen and deepen our relationship. Close consultation with civil society is also a key part of our human rights engagement.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO KAREN SASAHARA BY SENATOR MARCO RUBIO

Question. In May 2022, Secretary Blinken said that the People's Republic of China is the "only country with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do it." The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) clearly holds all the reins of power in the People's Republic of China and has used this power to commit genocide in Xinjiang, flood our communities with fentanyl, and emit by far the largest quantity of greenhouse gases in the world today. With their absolute control of Chinese society and industry, the CCP could stop all of these destructive actions tomorrow if they so choose. Is the Chinese Communist Party a threat to the United States?

Answer. The Administration has identified the PRC as "America's most consequential geopolitical challenge" and DNI Avril Haines testified to the threat that the PRC and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) represents to U.S. national security and leadership globally. Under President Xi, the CCP has become more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad, seeking to undercut U.S. influence and alliances. If confirmed, I will work to advance U.S. national security interests through robust and forthright diplomatic engagements, public diplomacy programming, and commercial advocacy to bolster the foundational pillars of U.S.-Kuwait bilateral ties and to push back against the PRC's efforts to expand its influence in the region and to cooperate with U.S. partners in areas that could negatively impact directly on U.S. national security interests.

Question. Does the Chinese Communist Party undertake any activities that are beneficial to U.S. interests?

Answer. The Administration assesses the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) activities in the context of the PRC's track record of blatant disregard for international law and sovereignty of countries, and the CCP's increasingly belligerent international posture. According to the ODNI's Annual Threat Analysis, the CCP is seeking to "undercut U.S. influence, drive wedges between Washington and its partners, and foster some norms that favor its authoritarian system."

Question. Do you believe that there are any areas within which the Chinese Communist Party would constructively work with the United States in good faith?

Answer. The United States would have to determine that any potential collaboration with the CCP would—first and foremost—advance very clearly defined U.S. national security interests. The United States would have to weigh carefully all possible benefits and downsides of such cooperation and ensure that the PRC would be unable to use such cooperation to advance its own narrow and/or opportunistic objectives. If confirmed, I will work with the Department of State's new Office of China Coordination to advance U.S. objectives and counter harmful behavior by the PRC in Kuwait.

Question. If confirmed, will you approve any joint activity with organizations or representatives from the People's Republic of China in the countries or organizations in which you will work?

Answer. If confirmed, my priority will be advancing U.S. national security interests in Kuwait and countering efforts by our strategic and regional competitors to undermine those interests. The Administration has been clear that we consider the PRC to be the United States' most consequential geopolitical challenge and is committed to working to strengthen our partnerships in the Gulf. If confirmed, I will

work closely with the Administration and Congress to counter any PRC effort to expand its influence at the expense of U.S. interests in Kuwait.

Question. China is a leading importer of Kuwaiti oil and CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping met with Kuwait's Crown Prince Al-Sabah in December 2022. The CCP have engaged Kuwaiti partners on projects including a port project and Kuwaiti telecom providers have partnered with Huawei to develop a 5G communications network. If confirmed, how do you plan to counter CCP initiatives in Kuwait and beyond?

Answer. Securing U.S. telecommunications networks and other sensitive technology is an Administration priority. The United States has been clear to partners there are sectors where their cooperation with the PRC precludes cooperation with us because it touches on U.S. security interests, including safeguarding our most advanced technology. If confirmed, I will engage at the highest level of Kuwaiti leadership on these issues. Ensuring the Kuwaitis remain clear-eyed about the PRC will be a top priority for me, as will advocating for U.S. businesses and ensuring Kuwait is a welcoming, secure environment for them.

Question. To date, the Kuwaitis have chosen to not recognize or engage with Israel. If confirmed, how will you work to promote Kuwait's participation in the Abraham Accords and broader normalization with Israel?

Answer. I share your concerns that Kuwait has not joined the Abraham Accords. The security and economic benefits from the Accords have been significant and will continue to grow. To not at least explore them is to risk being left behind or being an outlier, which comes with a great cost in today's global economy and regional security environment. If confirmed I will make it a priority to pursue opportunities to advance relations between Kuwait and Israel, and to make the case that this is an opportunity worth seizing.

Question. While U.S.-Kuwait security cooperation is robust and an anchor to the bilateral relationship, is the significant U.S. military presence and programs in Kuwait as critical to national security as it has been in the past, given this administration's withdrawal from Afghanistan?

Answer. Our close security partnership with Kuwait, a Major Non-NATO ally since 2004, has been and continues to be a pillar of our efforts to promote regional stability and security. The United States has a strong interest in maintaining a military presence in Kuwait, from where we are able to support Kuwaiti self-defense needs, conduct multinational exercises that improve U.S. interoperability and military capabilities, and lead the coalition campaign against ISIS in Iraq and Syria.

Question. If confirmed, how would you propose the United States adjust its security cooperation program with Kuwait to better reflect the changed dynamics in the region?

Answer. U.S. and Kuwaiti leadership meet regularly, as they have done for decades, to review security cooperation and engagements to ensure our national security needs are met. If confirmed, I will continue to consult with the Kuwaiti leadership, as well as the Departments of State and Defense and Congress, to ensure our security cooperation remains close, effective, and appropriate for security conditions in the region.

Question. When Arab leaders met CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping in Riyadh late last year, it was determined that China would hold a summit for Gulf Cooperation Council member states and Iran in 2023. This is in addition to the agreement that Beijing brokered between Riyadh and Tehran which was announced last Friday. What do you believe accounts for this recent win by China to supplant U.S. leadership in the Middle East?

Answer. U.S. leadership in the region remains robust, manifest in progress toward peace in Yemen, the ongoing Negev Forum process, and unmatched strategic ties with partners such as Kuwait. The recent agreement was the culmination of two years of engagement, facilitated by Iraq and Oman, which we supported to promote regional de-escalation. Our focus is less on where talks were held and more on their outcome. Should these talks lead Iran to actually better respect the sovereignty of its neighbors and cease interference in their affairs, that would be a benefit.

Question. How would you, as Ambassador, seek to restore the United States' role as the region's main power broker?

Answer. The United States will continue to play its decades long role as a vital partner to ensure regional and global stability. We have been and remain the stra-

tegic partner of choice for Kuwait, and, if confirmed, I will ensure we remain an engaged and present partner. Kuwait remains one of our strongest and most reliable partners in advancing regional security, and if confirmed, I will we will continue to work with Kuwait to ensure this close relationship continues.

RESPONSES TO AN ADDITIONAL QUESTION FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO KAREN SASAHARA BY SENATOR BILL HAGERTY

Question. China has also made significant investments in Kuwait as part of the CCP's Belt and Road Initiative. If you are confirmed, would you welcome more CCP influence in Kuwait?

Answer. If confirmed, I will prioritize ensuring the Kuwaitis remain clear-eyed about the People's Republic of China (PRC). We must continue to press the Kuwaitis to counter harmful PRC behavior in areas such as telecommunications, as well as false and damaging narratives about the United States proffered by the PRC in Kuwait and across the broader Middle East. For decades, we have been Kuwait's strategic partner of choice and remain so today, but we must remain engaged and not cede space to any country.

NOMINATIONS

THURSDAY, MARCH 30, 2023

U.S. SENATE
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS
Washington, D.C.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:19 a.m., in Room SD-419, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Chris Van Hollen, presiding.

Present: Senators Van Hollen [presiding], Kaine, Duckworth, and Ricketts.

Also Present: Senator Sullivan.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. CHRIS VAN HOLLEN, U.S. SENATOR FROM MARYLAND

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Good morning, everybody. The nominations hearing of the Foreign Relations Committee will come to order.

I am very pleased to be joined by the ranking member for today's hearing, Senator Ricketts, and pleased to serve with him on this committee. Congratulations to all four of you on your nominations to be our Ambassadors to different and important countries around the world. Congratulations to your family and loved ones. As someone who grew up in a Foreign Service family, I know this requires the support of other members of the family and friends. All of you have distinguished records within the career Foreign Service. I am looking forward to today's hearing. Your nominations are to countries in different parts of the world, as you know, from East Asia to South America to Europe, so we are going to try and cover a lot of territory.

In the interest of time, and we do not have a lot of time this morning, I am going to forgo any opening remarks about each of the countries to which you have been nominated to be Ambassadors. I do look forward to using that time during the question period, and, of course, I will introduce each of you fully in a moment. Let me now turn it over to Senator Ricketts for any opening comments he may have.

STATEMENT OF HON. PETE RICKETTS, U.S. SENATOR FROM NEBRASKA

Senator RICKETTS. Great. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Well, I appreciate the brevity of your opening remarks, and I will match it. [Laughter.]

Senator VAN HOLLEN. All right.

Senator RICKETTS. So I just, again, want to congratulate all the nominees on this opportunity, and thank you very much for your previous service to our country and your willingness to be able to serve this as well. And I would also like to echo the chairman's remarks with regard to your families. I know that you all have loved ones who support you, and you would not be able to do this without that, so we appreciate the sacrifices of your family as well.

As governor, I had the opportunity to do a number of trade missions around the world and visit with embassy staff, and I was always impressed by the quality of the people and the sacrifices they were willing to make for us. So I just wanted to add my thanks to that as well, and with that, Mr. Chairman, I am going to turn it back over you, and we can started.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you, Senator.

Senator RICKETTS. Yeah.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you, and, again, congratulations to all of you. So let me introduce each of our nominees to the committee, and then we will begin with the statements from each of you.

We have here today Ms. Nicole Theriot, who is the current U.S. consul general in Karachi, Pakistan. In her over 2 decades of experience representing the United States, Ms. Theriot has also served as the Deputy Chief of Mission and Chargé d'Affaires at the U.S. embassy in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, the director for immigration and visa security at the U.S. National Security Council, and U.S. consulate general in Casablanca, Morocco, among many other assignments that have earned her numerous State Department awards.

Ms. Ann Marie Yastishock serves as the USAID senior deputy assistant administrator for Asia, and before her current role, she served as USAID's mission director in Vietnam, a country to which I will be heading next week as part of an official congressional delegation. In 2021, she came home from that overseas assignment to expedite the transition of the Biden-Harris administration as chief advisor to the acting administration and chief operations officer for USAID. Ms. Yastishock's service was invaluable in jump-starting USAID's operations internationally and bringing back the United States as a force for service in the world. Congratulations to you.

Mr. David Kostelancik is—currently serves as the foreign policy advisor to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Milley. He has held posts across Eastern Europe and the Balkans, including Deputy Chief of Mission and Chargé d'Affaires at the U.S. Embassy in Budapest, Hungary, also as director of the Office of South Central European Affairs and director of the Office of Russian Affairs, both in the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs. Congratulations to you.

Finally, Ms. Robin Dunnigan is the deputy assistant secretary overseeing Central and Eastern Europe for the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs. She has also served as Chargé d'Affaires and Deputy Chief of Mission of the U.S. Embassy in Austria and Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Department of State's Bureau of Energy Resources. She first joined the State Department in 1992, and her 3 decades of experience are complemented by her master's degrees in national security strategy from the National War College

and the Foreign Service Institute at Georgetown University. Congratulations.

Congratulations again to all of you. Why do I not now turn it over? We will just go down the dais in order. I chair the East Asia Subcommittee. We will start with Ms. Theriot.

STATEMENT OF NICOLE D. THERIOT, OF LOUISIANA, A CAREER MEMBER OF THE SENIOR FOREIGN SERVICE, CLASS OF COUNSELOR, NOMINATED TO BE AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE CO-OPERATIVE REPUBLIC OF GUYANA

Ms. THERIOT. Good morning. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member Ricketts. I am honored to appear before you today as President Biden's nominee to be the next U.S. Ambassador to the Cooperative Republic of Guyana. I am grateful for the confidence the President and Secretary Blinken have placed in me and am thankful to you for considering my nomination. If confirmed, I will work closely with you and all members of Congress to advance our national interests in Guyana and the broader Caribbean.

Over the past 24 years, I have been privileged to represent the United States in 10 countries on four continents. Any success I have had is due to the support of my family, so I would like to take this opportunity to thank them—my spouse, Tom Agnew; my father, Preston Terry Theriot; my mother, Brenda Foti Theriot, who passed away in September; and my sister, Tiffany Theriot—for their steadfast support and unstinting love. And I actually learned of my nomination two days after my mom passed away, so I am quite sure she had something to do with it.

Two of my previous assignments have been in the Caribbean—Haiti and Barbados—and others have been in countries with incredible potential for economic growth, so I am familiar with both the challenges and opportunities in Guyana. I have worked on programs dealing with increasing bilateral trade and investment, strengthening security, combatting trafficking, increasing sustainable energy and climate resilience, and countering corruption, all while enhancing critical people-to-people ties that give us an important advantage over others operating in the region, including the PRC. Given my service in the Caribbean and in countries ripe for economic advancement, such as Morocco and Pakistan, I am particularly honored to be considered for this important position.

Guyana is experiencing rapid transformation and has tremendous potential, but it also faces challenges, including climate change, crime, poverty, and corruption. If confirmed, I will work with the Guyanese Government and people to address these challenges and proudly champion U.S. values in an ethnically, religiously diverse Guyana. I will work with the Government to continue responsibly leveraging the country's newfound oil revenues to expand economic opportunities, develop reliable infrastructure, and increase social services. I will work to grow trade and investment and to promote the many exciting opportunities for U.S. companies. I will support the Guyanese in building upon gains in democratic

governance and will help them continue to address humanely the influx of Venezuelan and other migrants.

A secure, democratic, and prosperous Guyana will remain an important U.S. ally in the region.

As Secretary Blinken's representative to CARICOM, I will work with regional partners, especially through the new U.S.-Caribbean Partnership to Address the Climate Crisis, or PACC 2030, as well as on regional security, human rights, and food and energy security. I sincerely thank you for this opportunity and look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Theriot follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF NICOLE D. THERIOT

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Ricketts, and distinguished Members of the Committee, I am honored to appear before you today as President Biden's nominee to serve as the next U.S. Ambassador to the Co-operative Republic of Guyana. I am grateful for the confidence the President and Secretary Blinken have placed in me and am thankful for your consideration of my nomination. If confirmed, I will work closely with you and all Members to advance our nation's interests in Guyana and the broader Caribbean.

Over the past 24 years, I have been privileged to represent the United States in 10 countries on four continents. Any success I have had was made possible by my family, so I would like to thank my spouse, Tom Agnew, my father, Preston Terry Theriot, my mother, Brenda Foti Theriot, who passed away in September, and my sister Tiffany Theriot for their unstinting love and steadfast support.

Three of my overseas assignments have been in the Western Hemisphere, including two in the Caribbean—Haiti and Barbados—and others have been in countries with incredible potential for economic growth, so I am familiar with the challenges and opportunities that exist in Guyana. I have worked on programs dealing with security and the professional development of law enforcement; on increasing bilateral trade and investment; on creating stronger military-to-military ties for regional security; on combating drug, weapons, and human trafficking; on increasing sustainable energy and bolstering climate resilience, and on combatting corruption, all while enhancing critical people-to-people ties that give us an important advantage over others operating in the region, including the People's Republic of China. Given my service in the Caribbean and in countries ripe for economic advancement such as Morocco and Pakistan, I am particularly honored to be considered for this important position in Guyana.

Guyana is experiencing rapid transformation. It has tremendous potential, with large oil reserves and mineral resources, fertile agricultural lands, virgin rainforests, a large U.S. diaspora, close ties to the United States, and significant opportunities for modernization of infrastructure, policies, and processes. It also, however, continues to face significant challenges, including climate change, crime, poverty, corruption, and trafficking of several types. If confirmed, I will work with the Guyanese Government and people to address these challenges and bolster and diversify economic growth, strengthen democracy and governance, improve respect for human rights, and promote opportunity for all Guyanese.

If confirmed, I will proudly champion U.S. values in ethnically, religiously diverse Guyana. I will work with the Government to continue responsibly leveraging the country's newfound oil revenues to expand economic opportunities, develop reliable infrastructure, and improve and expand social services. I will work diligently to increase transparent, reciprocal trade and investment and to promote the many exciting opportunities for U.S. businesses. I will support the Guyanese Government and people to build upon their gains in democratic governance and rule of law. I will help them to continue addressing humanely the influx of Venezuelan and other migrants, all while respecting Guyana's sovereignty. If confirmed, I will work to identify immediate opportunities to support Guyana's efforts to strengthen democratic institutions across every sector, including being a central partner on regional security. A secure, democratic, and prosperous Guyana will remain an important ally to the United States in the region.

Guyana is experiencing a period of unprecedented growth, with the IMF designating it one of 2022's highest growth economies. With its extensive oil reserves, Guyana must carefully guard against the "resource curse" by diversifying its economy, capitalizing on gains in good governance, and strengthening its civil society in

an equitable, inclusive manner. The Guyanese Government has recently begun to tap into its oil wealth to improve critical infrastructure, health, and education. If confirmed, I will help build upon this productive path that wisely leverages Guyana's new wealth and encourage continued partnerships with both the public and private sectors to make sure Guyana's transformation benefits all.

If confirmed, I will work closely with the Guyanese to help them reach their laudable goals of greater security, good governance, and economic prosperity, all while enhancing bilateral relations. As Secretary Blinken's representative to CARICOM, I will work to increase U.S.-Caribbean collaboration, especially through the new U.S.-Caribbean Partnership to Address the Climate Crisis (PACC 2030), and in the areas of regional stability, security, human rights, food and energy security, and climate resilience.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Ricketts, and Members of the committee, I sincerely thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you today, and I look forward to your questions.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you very much for that statement, and I apologize the confusion. You, of course, are the nominee to Guyana. I had my order mixed up here.

Ms. THERIOT. No worries.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Now to—now to East Asia and to our nominee to Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu, Ms. Yastishock. Please proceed with your testimony.

**STATEMENT OF ANN MARIE YASTISHOCK, OF PENNSYLVANIA,
A CAREER MEMBER OF THE SENIOR FOREIGN SERVICE,
CLASS OF MINISTER-COUNSELOR, NOMINATED TO BE AM-
BASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY OF
THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE INDEPENDENT
STATE OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA, AND TO SERVE CONCUR-
RENTLY AND WITHOUT ADDITIONAL COMPENSATION AS AM-
BASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY OF
THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE SOLOMON IS-
LANDS AND AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENI-
POTENTIARY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE
REPUBLIC OF VANUATU**

Ms. YASTISHOCK. Thank you, Senator. Chairman Van Hollen, Ranking Member Ricketts, good morning. I am honored to appear before you as President Biden's nominee for Ambassador to the Independent State of Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, and the Republic of Vanuatu. I am grateful for the confidence shown by the President and Senator Blinken in nominating me, and I am privileged to represent the United States. If confirmed, I look forward to working with Congress to strengthen our ties with our Pacific neighbors, advance United States' interest in a free and open, connected, prosperous, resilient, and secure Pacific region. I aim to achieve this by listening to and learning from our Pacific partners and finding a path forward together that celebrates the Pacific Way.

I want to thank the most important people in my life: my family. Joining me here are my son, Dmitri; my brother, Daniel; my sister, Betsy; and brother-in-law, John. Although my parents are not here, I know they are looking down today with pride. As the youngest of seven children from a long line of public servants, my family inspired me to love this country that has given us and me so much. If not for their love, support, and encouragement, I would not be sitting here today.

My passion for international affairs began when I served as a volunteer American Bar Association lawyer in Central Asia and continued as a Foreign Service officer with USAID. Overseeing USAID's Pacific expansion as the senior deputy assistant administrator has required a broad-based skill set, which, if confirmed, I will bring to our work in Micronesia. As a Pacific nation, the United States shares much with these proud countries, and World War II bonded us together. I will build upon this legacy.

First, I will prioritize the embassy community's well-being, including for our invaluable local staff, so that we can better support our commitment to the safety and security of U.S. citizens in these islands. Second, we will be very present, leveraging our growing footprint, including the elevated USAID presence and returning Peace Corps volunteers. In Papua New Guinea, together with local and international partners, we will advance the 10-year whole-of-government effort under the U.S. Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability. In Solomon Islands, we will address the legacy of war by shaping the future through improved natural resource stewardship.

As our Vanuatu friends know all too well, the Pacific faces increasing natural disasters and rising sea levels, and following President Biden's emphasis on the climate crisis, we will support local climate resilience adaptation and biodiversity. Success will depend on the strength, resilience, and vibrancy of our sovereign partners, which appreciate that democratic values, rule of law, and education underpin productive, inclusive, and connected societies. Together with allies and partners, if confirmed, my team and I will help these governments and civil society meet democracy's promises.

Mr. Chairman and Mr. Ranking Member, thank you again, and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Yastishock follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF ANN MARIE YASTISHOCK

Chairman Van Hollen, Ranking Member Ricketts, Members of the committee, good morning. I am honored to appear before you as President Biden's nominee for Ambassador to the Independent State of Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, and the Republic of Vanuatu.

I am grateful for the confidence shown by the President and Secretary Blinken in nominating me, and I am privileged to represent the United States. If confirmed, I look forward to working with Congress to strengthen our ties with our Pacific neighbors and advance the United States' interest in a free and open, connected, prosperous, resilient, and secure Pacific region. I aim to achieve this by listening to, and learning from, our Pacific partners and finding a path forward together that celebrates the "Pacific Way."

I want to thank the most important people in my life: my family. Joining me here are my son Dmitry, my brother Daniel, my sister Betsy and brother-in-law John. Although my parents are not here, I know they are looking down today with pride. As the youngest of seven children from a long line of public servants, my family inspired me to love this country that has given us and me so much. If not for their love, support, and encouragement, I would not be sitting here today.

My passion for international affairs began when I served as a volunteer American Bar Association lawyer in Central Asia and continued as a Foreign Service Officer with USAID. Overseeing USAID's Pacific expansion as Senior Deputy Assistant Administrator has required a broad-based skill set, which, if confirmed, I will bring to our work in Melanesia.

As a Pacific nation, the United States shares much with these proud countries, and World War II bonded us together. I will build upon this legacy,

First, I will prioritize the embassy community's well-being, including for our invaluable local staff so that we can better support our commitment to the safety and security of U.S. citizens in these islands.

Second, we will be very "present," leveraging our growing footprint, elevated USAID presence, and returning Peace Corps Volunteers. In Papua New Guinea and together with local and international partners, we will advance the 10-year, whole-of-government effort under the U.S. Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability. In Solomon Islands, we will address the legacy of war while shaping the future through improved natural resource stewardship.

As our Vanuatu friends know all too well, the Pacific faces increasing natural disasters and rising sea levels, and following President Biden's emphasis on the climate crisis, we will support local climate resilience, adaptation, and biodiversity.

Success will depend on the strength, resilience, and vibrancy of our sovereign partners, which appreciate that democratic values, rule of law, and education underpin productive, inclusive, and connected societies. Together with allies and partners, if confirmed, my team and I will help these governments and civil society meet democracy's promises.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and Members of the committee, thank you again and I look forward to your questions.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you. Thank you for your testimony. Now, as we turn to Ms. Dunnigan, I am pleased that we are joined by our friend and colleague and the co-chair with—along with myself, of the Foreign Service Caucus. Senator Sullivan, the floor is yours.

Senator SULLIVAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Ricketts. It is a great pleasure and honor to be here today to introduce you to Robin Dunnigan, the President's nominee to be Ambassador to Georgia. Robin and I have known each other for more than 30 years, going back to our days at Georgetown where we were both in the Master of Science of Foreign Service Program. In fact, at that time, I was dating a beautiful, brilliant woman named Julie. Robin was dating a great guy named Harry. We were all good friends. Julie and I ended up getting married, best thing that ever happened to me, and Robin and Harry ended up getting married, best thing that ever happened to Harry.

[Laughter.]

Senator SULLIVAN. Both Robin and Harry ended up joining the Foreign Service. Our professional careers have intersected over the years, and we have all stayed very good friends.

Robin joined the Foreign Service in 1992. She has served with Harry in the Foreign Service, and I commend the State Department for taking care of a very exceptional couple in six different countries—Austria, Vietnam, Turkey, Chile, Cuba, and El Salvador—as well as multiple tours in D.C. In Austria, Robin was Chargé d'Affaires and DCM for 3 years.

Mr. Chairman, she has served our Nation with honor, distinction, and professionalism. And as you mentioned, Mr. Chairman, just a few weeks ago before this committee, I note that the reason you and I co-founded the Senate Foreign Service Officers Caucus was to highlight and promote the integrity, skill, and professionalism of those who have worked so hard, often at significant sacrifice to their families, to promote America's foreign policy interests. Robin embodies the type of Foreign Service officer that you, Mr. Chairman, and I had in mind when we started the caucus.

Robin is currently the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Central and Eastern Europe, which includes Ukraine. Her work over the last 18 months—no surprise—has been dominated by helping

Ukraine defend itself against the brutal Russian invasion and unprovoked war. It has been a 24-and-7 effort over at the State Department. As you can imagine, she has been deeply engaged in working with our allies in Central Europe in support of that effort. Other assignments that she has had include 3 years as Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Bureau of Energy Resources from August 2014 to August 2017. There, she was way ahead of the curve, encouraging European countries to diversify away from Russian energy.

Clearly all this experience, close to the Russian account, is going to serve her and America well in Georgia. In some ways, our current problems with Russia started in Georgia back in 2008 when Russia invaded Georgia. We talk a lot about how Russia's invasion of Ukraine was unprecedented in terms of scale and duration. It has been, but the world got its first taste of what was in store for Russian sovereign neighbors back in 2008 in Georgia. Robin is also an economic officer. She has spent much of her career advocating for U.S. companies and American workers around the globe. In addition to her Georgetown degree, Robin is a distinguished graduate of the National War College where she earned her master of science in national security.

Mr. Chairman, I can tell you it is very gratifying to be able to induce—introduce Robin Dunnigan this morning. She has done so much important work for our Nation, but I am sure Robin would agree that her most important work has been raising a wonderful family with Harry. Their two children, Andrew and Anna, as well as Harry are here today.

I urge all of my colleagues to strongly support Robin's confirmation. Thank you.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you. Thank you, Senator Sullivan. Thank you for your remarks and for being here today. Ms. Dunnigan, the floor is yours.

STATEMENT OF ROBIN DUNNIGAN, OF CALIFORNIA, A CAREER MEMBER OF THE SENIOR FOREIGN SERVICE, CLASS OF MINISTER-COUNSELOR, NOMINATED TO BE AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO GEORGIA

Ms. Dunnigan. Thank you for that kind introduction, Senator Sullivan, and thank you for your tremendous service to the United States as a Senator, a Marine, and Assistant Secretary of State, and many other positions. I would also like to thank you and Senator Van Hollen for your strong support of the Foreign Service, including as co-founders of the Senate Foreign Service Caucus.

Chairman Van Hollen, Ranking Member Ricketts, distinguished members of the committee, thank you for this opportunity. I am deeply honored to be President Biden's nominee to serve as U.S. Ambassador to Georgia, and I am grateful for the confidence the President and Secretary Blinken have placed in me. If confirmed, I look forward to working closely with this committee and all members of Congress to advance the interests of the United States in Georgia. It has been a privilege to represent the United States as a career Foreign Service officer for more than 30 years. I have promoted U.S. interests across the globe, working to promote Amer-

ican—protect Americans, expand our economic prosperity, and promote and defend the democratic values at the heart of who we are as a country.

If confirmed, I will focus on four priorities. First, my highest duty will be to ensure the safety and security of the team working at the U.S. embassy and of all Americans in Georgia. Second, if confirmed, I will work with the Georgian Government and the people of Georgia to help them realize their dream of being firmly integrated with the EU, NATO, and the West. Not only will Euro-Atlantic integration benefit the citizens of Georgia, I deeply believe it is in the U.S. national interests. We want a democratic Georgia firmly integrated with the West, capable of defending its borders and able to withstand the pressure of Russian malign activities. Georgia has made remarkable progress over the last 30 years, but some concerning developments show there is more to do.

Third, I will strengthen bilateral trade and investment, including by increasing U.S. exports and opportunities for American companies in Georgia. My final priority will be to advocate for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity as Russia still occupies 20 percent of its territory. I will work with Georgia and our international partners to hold Russia to its commitments under the 2008 ceasefire agreement and the U.N. Charter.

Finally, I would like to thank and introduce my family: my husband of 30 years, Harry Kamian, who is also a Foreign Service officer, and our children, Andrew and Anna. As our careers have carried us around the world, Andrew and Anna—oh, sorry—have weathered multiple moves, adapting to new schools, new friends with remarkable humor and resilience. I am so proud of the young adults they have become. I would not be here today without the love and support of my family and my extended family. My dad, who was a small business owner, and my mom, who was a teacher, taught my siblings and me the value of integrity, honesty, hard work, and kindness—principles I try to live by every day.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, thank you, and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Dunnigan follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF ROBIN DUNNIGAN

Thank you for that kind introduction, Senator Sullivan. And thank you for your tremendous service to the United States, as a Senator, a Marine, and an Assistant Secretary of State, among other positions. I would also like to thank you and Senator Van Hollen for your strong support for the Foreign Service, including as co-founders of the bipartisan Senate Foreign Service Caucus.

Chairman Van Hollen, Ranking Member Ricketts, and distinguished members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I am deeply honored to be President Biden's nominee to serve as U.S. Ambassador to Georgia, and I am grateful for the confidence the President and Secretary Blinken have placed in me. If confirmed, I look forward to working closely with this Committee, all members of Congress, and your teams to advance the interests of the United States in Georgia.

It has been a privilege to represent the United States as a career Foreign Service Officer for more than thirty years. I have promoted U.S. interests across the globe, working to protect American citizens, expand our economic prosperity, and promote and defend the democratic values at the heart of who we are as a country.

If confirmed, I will focus on four priorities. First, my highest duty will be to ensure the safety and security of the team working at the U.S. Embassy and of all Americans in Georgia. Having worked over the last 18 months to help keep our Em-

bassy team in Kyiv safe in a very challenging environment, I know this responsibility is sacred.

Second, if confirmed, I will work with the Georgian Government and Georgian people to help them realize their desire to further integrate with the EU, NATO, and the West, and to further their democratic future. Not only will Euro-Atlantic integration benefit the citizens of Georgia, I deeply believe it is in the U.S. national interest. We want a democratic Georgia firmly integrated with the West, capable of defending its borders and able to withstand the pressure of Russian malign activities, including Russian disinformation. Georgia has made remarkable progress over the last 30 years, but some concerning developments show more remains to be done. The European Union provided Georgia with a roadmap of reforms it should complete to achieve its aim of EU candidate status this year. If confirmed, I look forward to supporting Georgia as it pursues these reforms.

Third, I will strengthen bilateral trade and investment, including by increasing opportunities for U.S. companies in Georgia and for Georgian investment in the United States. I will vigorously promote U.S. exports and encourage reforms to foster a fair and transparent business environment. I will also work with the Georgian Government to defend against potential coercive economic practices, including from Russia and the People's Republic of China.

Russia's brutal war against Ukraine violates the U.N. Charter's most fundamental principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity. Georgians know this Russian playbook all too well, because they saw it happen in their own country in 2008 and experience it every day, as Russia still occupies approximately 20 percent of Georgian territory. My final priority will be to advocate for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity. I will commit to work with Georgia and our international partners to hold Russia to its obligations and commitments under the 2008 ceasefire agreement and the U.N. Charter.

Our partnership over the past 30 years has benefitted both the people of Georgia and the United States. Georgia has been a steadfast NATO Partner for Peace since 1994 and was the largest non-NATO contributor of forces to Afghanistan, standing side-by-side with American troops. We have tremendous people-to-people ties, with thousands of exchanges over the decades. If confirmed, I hope to build on this strong legacy of partnership and cooperation.

Finally, I would like to thank and introduce my family, who are with me here today. My husband of 30 years, Harry Kamian, who is also a Foreign Service Officer, and our children Andrew and Anna. As our careers carried us around the world, Andrew and Anna weathered multiple moves, adapting to new schools and new friends with remarkable humor and resilience. I am so incredibly proud of the young adults they have become. I would not be here today without the love and support of Harry, Andrew and Anna, and my extended family. My dad, who was a small business owner, and my mom, who was a teacher, taught my siblings and me the value of integrity, honesty, hard work and kindness, principles I try to live by every day.

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Ranking Member, thank you again for this opportunity and I look forward to your questions.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you, Ms. Dunnigan, and thank you and all those who have introduced, you know, members of the family and loved ones. As you said, it is a—it is a team effort.

So, Mr. Kostelancik of Illinois, who was appointed by the President—nominated by the President to be Ambassador to the Republic of Albania, the floors is yours.

STATEMENT OF DAVID J. KOSTELANCIK, OF ILLINOIS, A CAREER MEMBER OF THE SENIOR FOREIGN SERVICE, CLASS OF MINISTER-COUNSELOR, NOMINATED TO BE AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA

Mr. Kostelancik. Thank you, Chairman. Chairman Van Hollen, Ranking Member Ricketts, it is a privilege to appear before you today. I am honored to be the nominee for U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Albania, and I thank President Biden and Secretary Blinken for their confidence in me.

I want to begin by recognizing those who have made it possible for me to be here today. First, I want to honor my wife, Trish, for her love, commitment, and support during 30 years of marriage. I want to thank our three sons—Tim, Dan, and Ben—for the sacrifices they have made growing up with frequent moves and the demands of life in the Foreign Service, and my sister, Kathi, and brother, Ken, for their steadfast support. Our parents are no longer with us, but their examples of hard work, sacrifice, and lifelong devotion to the Chicago Cubs made us what we are.

[Laughter.]

Mr. Kostelancik. I am a career Foreign Service officer with over 30 years of experience. From 1992 to 1994, I had the unique opportunity of serving as the first political economic officer assigned to the newly-reopened U.S. Embassy in Albania, whose citizens rejected decades of communist dictatorship and embraced democracy and freedom. I saw the hope that sprang from people's desire for liberty, to revive the dormant links between our countries, and transform expectations for a better future into reality. Fast forward 30 years, Albania's progress as a young democracy is astonishing. Today, Albania plays an active role in supporting U.S. global priorities as a NATO ally and rotating member of the U.N. Security Council, and in 2022, Albania opened EU accession negotiations. Still, there is a great deal more we can and must do together.

If confirmed, I will focus on the following priorities. My primary responsibility will be the welfare and safety of U.S. citizens in Albania. Second, I would continue work with Albanians to strengthen democratic and judicial institutions. President Biden identified fighting, corruption, and organized crime as part of our national security strategy, key tasks in the Western Balkans. Advancing legal and judicial reforms also will advance Albania's EU ambitions.

Third, I would build on our defense partnership. My work with the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff has reinforced for me the importance of allies. Iran's cyberattack against Albania in 2022 showed the need to develop a multifaceted approach to investing in allies' defensive infrastructure and training. Finally, I would continue strengthening the business climate. U.S. interests are served by promoting a rules-based, transparent marketplace in Albania. Albania's progress on these objectives advances our own national priorities.

If confirmed, I look forward to working with Congress to address these challenges. I would be honored to build on 30 years of hard work in and with Albania. Thank you for considering my nomination. I would be pleased to take your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Kostelancik follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT FOR DAVID J. KOSTELANCIK

Chairman Van Hollen, Ranking Member Ricketts, distinguished Members of the committee. It is a privilege to appear before you today. I am honored to be the nominee for U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Albania, and I thank President Biden and Secretary Blinken for their confidence in me. If confirmed, I look forward to working closely with Congress to advance U.S. interests in Albania.

I want to start by recognizing those who have made it possible for me to be here today. First, I want to honor my wife, Trish, for her love, commitment, and support for over 30 years of marriage. I want to thank our three sons—Tim, Dan, and Ben—for the sacrifices they have made growing up with frequent moves and the demands of life in the Foreign Service. I want to thank my sister Kathi and brother Ken for

their steadfast support every step of the way. Our parents are no longer with us, but their examples of hard work and sacrifice still inspire us.

I am a career Foreign Service Officer with over 30 years of experience. It has been my privilege to work on broadening and deepening our bilateral ties with a range of partners and allies. I have served in Albania, Turkey, Russia, Hungary, at NATO and the OSCE. Much of my career has focused on supporting close relationships between the United States and Allies and partners as well as defending and advancing respect for human rights. I have also always prioritized the welfare and safety of U.S. citizens abroad, and if confirmed I will continue to do so in Albania.

From 1992–94, I had the unique opportunity of serving in Albania as the first Political/Economic officer assigned to the newly re-opened U.S. embassy after a 52-year break in diplomatic ties. I found myself in a rapidly changing country, whose citizens rejected decades of communist dictatorship and enthusiastically embraced democracy and freedom. I traveled throughout Albania and saw the hope that sprang from people's desire for liberty—to revive the dormant links between our countries and transform expectations for a better future into reality.

Fast-forward 30 years. Albania's progress as a relatively young democracy is astonishing. Today, Albania plays an active role in supporting U.S. global priorities. Albania is a NATO Ally and contributes humanitarian and military assistance where needed. Serving as a rotating member on the United Nations Security Council, it has been a close U.S. partner and our co-pen holder on resolutions to hold Russia accountable for its war in Ukraine. In July 2022, Albania opened European Union accession negotiations, a major step toward EU membership and a reflection of Albania's progress on democratic and judicial reforms. There is still a great deal of work to do, however, and if confirmed, I will focus on the following three priorities.

First, I would continue work with Albanians to strengthen democratic and judicial institutions. President Biden identified fighting corruption and organized crime as part of our National Security Strategy, an essential endeavor in the Western Balkans. We will work with Albanians to further their efforts to make their judicial system more equitable and trusted. We need to continue providing guidance and resources for Albanians to succeed in their EU ambitions.

Second, I would build on our defense partnership bilaterally and at NATO. My work with the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff has reinforced for me the importance of allies. Iran's cyberattack against Albania in 2022 showed the need to develop a multifaceted approach to investing in our allies' defensive infrastructure and training. I am proud of our coordinated response to Iran's attack and, if confirmed, look forward to working with Congress to address critical emerging threats and to show the world the United States stands with our Allies.

Third, I would continue strengthening the business climate in Albania. Albania needs our help developing an economic ecosystem that creates jobs and opportunities in both our countries, eliminating corruption that limits quality of life. We can serve U.S. interests by promoting a rules-based and transparent marketplace in Albania.

U.S. partnership and assistance are vital to Albania as it implements domestic reforms, attracts foreign direct investment, contributes to regional stability, and remains active in global matters. Albania's progress on these objectives advances U.S. national priorities. If confirmed, I would build on 30 years of hard work in, and with, Albania.

Thank you for considering my nomination. I would be pleased to take your questions.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you very much for your testimony. Thank all of you. So we will now begin the rounds of questioning, and I am going to start with Papua New Guinea and the other Pacific Islands to which you have been nominated.

Let me—let me ask you about the Pacific partnership Strategy that was outlined by the White House in September 2022. And as you, I am confident, hope you will be confirmed, as you take on these new responsibilities, how are you going to achieve the goal of ensuring that what we see as the growing geopolitical competition in the region does not undermine the sovereignty and the security of the Pacific Islands, and, specifically, those to which you have been nominated to be our Ambassador?

Ms. YASTISHOCK. Thank you, Senator, very much for that question. I think the growing competition is probably one of our major concerns in the Pacific Islands and ensuring the sovereignty of each of the countries, particularly Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu. I think, first of all, we need to look at what we bring. It does not start with the question of the PRC but what we bring to the table, and that is, we bring the advancement of transparency, democratic values, also working with civil societies, but also, as I mentioned in my statement, listening and learning from our Pacific partners under the Pacific Way.

I think, you know, the other part about it is, is that we want to ensure that our countries are not trapped into these predatory economic opportunities, that they build the capacity and the resilience of each of the countries, not just relying on imported labor to build infrastructure but making sure that they meet the high standards that are required and what we want to see under the Indo-Pacific Strategy. So it is really working with our countries to ensure that we are building the resiliency, building the capacity, shining the light on those activities that are not in compliance with what their development goals are, as well as what their vision is for their development.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you, and I may come back to you for some further questions in a moment. But to Ms. Theriot, in Guyana, as you know, there have been relatively recent discoveries of significant oil reserves. And I know the new President is committed to try to make sure that these are developed in a responsible way, a transparent way, and where the proceeds are invested to benefit the people of his country. But we often hear that as the goal at the outset, and in many countries we have—we have not seen those different goals followed.

So what can you do as our Ambassador to try to help Guyana ensure that there is a responsible development of these reserves? And I also understand the President is committed to try to invest some of the proceeds in renewable energy. If you could just talk about that.

Ms. THERIOT. Absolutely. Thank you very much for that question. You are absolutely correct that we have seen the “resource curse” harm of other countries, and I believe that, if confirmed, my role would be to provide guidance and support to the Ali government, to the current Guyanese Government, in making sure that they do follow very sustainable, appropriate ways of developing their oil and gas sector. I think that is something that U.S. companies bring to the table.

U.S. companies provide quality, reliability, and sustainability, and the Guyanese have shown that, because of their newfound oil wealth, they no longer have to always go with the lowest bidder for important infrastructure and other projects. Instead, they can now go to the quality, reliable company, and they have shown that. In November of 2022, the largest tender ever awarded in Guyana went to a U.S. consortium, even though that consortium’s bid was higher than the other bidders, and that is because they bring what Guyana is now looking for to the table. They also bring a robust CSR package, which helps the people of Guyana.

So I do believe that with their partnership with the United States and with U.S. companies, we can ensure that the resource curse is not going to be an issue for Guyana.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you, and just in my remaining time, one of the issues, as you know, in Guyana is their neighbor, Venezuela. And the dictator in Venezuela, Nicolas Maduro, has made threatening remarks against Guyana over a territorial dispute dating back to the 19th century. Can you confirm just for the record that the Biden administration and you will stand by Guyana in this territorial dispute?

Ms. THERIOT. Absolutely, Mr. Chairman. We will continue to respect and support the current boundaries of Guyana as laid out in the 1899 arbitral award, unless or until a competent legal body, like the ICJ, decides otherwise, and we really hope for a peaceful resolution to this issue.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you. Senator Ricketts?

Senator RICKETTS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Well, Mr. Kostelancik, I am sure you know today is opening day for the Cubs. We have the Brewers at home, so hopefully we start off the season well.

On a more somber note, all of you are going to face the challenges that the Chinese Communist Party poses. President Xi has said that, essentially, he wants to be the world-dominating power by 2049, and I do not think that is in any of our interests anywhere around the world that that is going to be a good thing.

Ms. Theriot, I want to talk you a little bit about the—Guyana. You know, obviously they are a democracy and a friend, which is a welcome thing in that part of the—part of the world that is so close to us. And as mentioned, in 2015, ExxonMobil made a discovery of oil there, and I think that, on a per capita basis, that only Kuwait has more oil than Guyana now, and we certainly want to encourage that development in a responsible way. I think you said earlier that American companies provide that reliability, correct?

My understanding is Guyana Shore Base, a private company based in Georgetown, asked the Inter-American Development Bank—IDB—for help in upgrading the Guyanese infrastructure, and IDB proposed \$180 million in debt financing for the project. The Biden administration vetoed that, though, and the reasoning is they want to back oil and gas projects. And I think that is shortsighted given that China has no such restrictions and is aggressively signing contracts to build infrastructure in Guyana and around the world. And certainly, I think we would all agree that we are going to do a better job on that and, of course, contrasted with the administration then provided sanctions relief to Venezuela's authoritarian Maduro regime to boost oil production.

What are your thoughts on the Biden administration's decision to block the IDB loan?

Ms. THERIOT. Thank you very much, Mr. Ranking Member. That decision was made in March of 2022. I would say that things have changed significantly since the war on the Ukraine has dragged on, and energy security is a real concern and a significant issue. What I would do, if confirmed, is to make sure that there is a level playing field for U.S. companies in Guyana. I think that is our entree into ensuring that China does not take over this industry. I think

it is incredibly important that we remain the preferred partner in Guyana, whether it be the U.S. Government for security cooperation or U.S. companies for oil and gas development. That is something that I would work diligently to ensure.

Senator RICKETTS. So do you think blocking the IDB loan was against our strategic interests?

Ms. THERIOT. Blocking the IDB loan was in line with the current Biden administration—their priority to not contribute further to oil and gas development of fossil fuels. I think that because that vote is no longer an issue, that we can only move forward and work to ensure that U.S. companies are given a level playing field in the country.

Senator RICKETTS. So do you think given—what I hear you saying is because of the changing circumstances, you think that the—well, the world has changed since the invasion of Ukraine. Do you think if that were to come up again, that the Biden administration should allow that loan to go forward for a U.S. company to develop the resources there?

Ms. THERIOT. I would not want to speculate on that. I think we would have to see what the decision would be. Guyana's oil and gas sector is developing very well through private sector investment, and I cannot speculate on what the result of that vote would be, sir.

Senator RICKETTS. Do you know what Guyana's reaction to the decision to block the IDB loan was?

Ms. THERIOT. They were quite displeased.

Senator RICKETTS. Do you believe that Guyana views the U.S. as an unreliable partner and would turn to China because of that?

Ms. THERIOT. No, sir, I do not think that is the case, and they have shown time and time again that we are the preferred partner, both the U.S. Government and U.S. companies.

Senator RICKETTS. And maybe we will have some more time to follow up on some of the other things here as well, but I want to go to Ms. Yastishock with regard to, again, staying on the topic of the CCP and the Solomon Islands. My understanding is that China signed an agreement with the Solomon Islands with regard to the naval bases there, and this was a surprise to the Biden administration. What would you be able to do with regard to that agreement to be able to make sure that we continue to have a strong relationship with the Solomon Islands, and is there a way that we can—that's a 5-year agreement is my understanding. Is there a way that we can convince the Solomon Islands not to renew that because obviously having the Chinese navy so close to our allies in Australia and to shipping lanes is certainly a big issue?

Ms. YASTISHOCK. Thank you, Senator Ricketts, for that question. The agreement was signed, and Solomon Islands has confirmed and has stated that they are not going to be locating PRC bases in the country, but what we will be doing is providing additional security assistance through different ways. We have discussed a shiprider agreement with the Solomon Islands. We are looking at providing additional security capacity building, which we think is more sustainable and will ensure the sovereignty of the country rather than relying on foreign forces. So I think that there is a lot of discussion, and I am committed, if confirmed, to continue that discussion to

ensure the safety of the region but also ensuring that we become the partner of choice as well.

Senator RICKETTS. Thank you.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you. Senator Kaine?

Senator KAINE. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and congratulations to each of the nominees. You have very, very stellar backgrounds and are well positioned to serve in the positions for which you have been nominated. Ms. Theriot—am I my pronouncing it right—“THER-io?”

Ms. THERIOT. Sir, it is “TER-io.”

Senator KAINE. Theriot. Ms. Theriot, I want to follow up on Senator Ricketts’ points about the IDB loan because I had a chance to meet with President Ali last July, a few months after the U.S. had blocked their efforts to receive funding for energy sector improvements, and it is putting it mildly to say they were displeased. They were incredibly disappointed by this. And I have had similar discussions with other leaders in the region—Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago—who have energy resources, but they feel like the United States is standing in the way of them developing their own energy resources and stopping them from developing their own economies.

And the point that that President Ali made to me, and others have as well, is, okay, you say you are an ally. You should want us to be able to develop our economy just like you have developed yours. Yes, that is true. You say that you want to help nations wean themselves away from overreliance on petrol dictators, like Venezuela or Russia or Iran or Saudi Arabia, and have more available energy to backstop if they move away from petrol dictators. Yes, that is American policy. You are blocking us then from doing those things, developing our own economy, and creating a resource that can help people move away from reliance on petrol dictators, but you are blocking us in a foolish way because we can go to China and get these investments and without the strings attached.

I understand and share the administration’s priority in battling climate change, but as I have said at this committee before, there are sort of three goals right now that can be somewhat contradictory—battling climate change, helping our allies develop their economies, helping people wean themselves away from over-dependence on petrol dictators—and they can be in conflict. But what I have yet to hear from the administration is kind of how do we harmonize these things. Instead, it feels like there is a tug-of-war in the White House between the we got to help people wean themselves away from over-reliance on dictators versus we got to be against fossil fuel projects anywhere. And it is taking allies that are good allies and pushing them away from us.

I think there is a strategy that can be articulated by the administration that is probably a phasing strategy, that here we are during this this war and it is imposing significant challenges for nations that have relied on petrol dictators. We need to have a strategy that can, in time, move nations away. We do want to help allied nations develop their economies, be a partner in that. We do not want them to go to China to get resources when there are resources that are available that we can provide them with. I think—I think there is a phasing strategy on this.

And this is not for you, but I am just saying it because I hope somebody from the State Department or the administration is listening. You still have not come to Congress and explained these competing priorities and how you intend to manage them and phase them. But the cost so far has been to take nations that are allies of ours and make them angry with us and push them to over-reliance possibly on China, which is not a smart move long term. So I just want to put that on the record.

Let me ask you this. The Caribbean region can tend to be overlooked. We do recognize that—the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative. It is a bipartisan success. It is a regionalized cooperation that has demonstrated that the U.S. is remaining a partner of choice in the Caribbean. Senator Rubio and I have introduced the authorizing legislation for CBSI earlier this month, the companion bill on the House side by Representative Espaillat. If confirmed, how will you continue to encourage Guyana to fully implement provisions of the Inter-American Convention Against Corruption and increase resourcing for critically-important law enforcement and judicial institutions?

Ms. THERIOT. Thank you very much for that question, Senator Kaine. I am well aware of your and Senator Rubio's legislation, and I think it is very much needed. It is going to expand and enhance CBSI. I think what is important to bear in mind is that most of the security issues that Guyana faces are replicated throughout the Caribbean, whether it be the need to enhance citizen security; to counter the influx of weapons coming into the region; to counter narcotics trafficking; to bolster climate resilience, or to combat corruption as you just mentioned. Those are all problems that exist throughout the region, and a regional problem needs a regional solution. That is exactly what CBSI is. And we have been doing it for 10-plus years, so we have that expertise.

I am also very pleased to see Guyana becoming more actively engaged with some of the other multilateral and regional security organizations, like CARICOM IMPACS, including the Crime Gun Intelligence Unit, which we assist, and also RSS. They are also working more with other bilateral partners, including our European colleagues who bring other expertise to bear. So I think this is exactly the right approach to address these issues, and, if confirmed, I would work to harmonize these efforts and also to implement all aspects of the legislation that would allow for greater security in both Guyana and the greater Caribbean.

Senator KAINE. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you, Senator Kaine. So, Ms. Dunnigan, some questions on Georgia. I am sure you have been following the protests there earlier this month over the so-called foreign agents bill. And while the Georgian parliament ultimately dropped the bill after a massive public outcry, this still signals a worrying trend, not just in Georgia but other countries around the world, in terms of legislative and other crackdowns on NGOs and civil society. And I know in the eyes of the protesters in Georgia, it appeared to be an example of undue Russian influence.

If you could just talk a little bit about your perception of Russian influence in the Georgian political system today—obviously, they are a neighbor—but where that stands because we have been

watching that closely. And, of course, the EU has also been watching it closely and has expressed concerns about the state of democracy in Georgia, and it is one of the reasons they deferred EU candidate status. So if you could just talk about that set of issues.

Ms. DUNNIGAN. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, for the question. I did follow the protests in Georgia over the foreign agents law, and I think it is very—I think they were reflective of the Georgian people's desire to have their future firmly integrated with the West and the EU. We see this over and over again, the Georgian—people of Georgia's commitment to this path, and I think it is in our national interest to continue to support them in this path.

I do believe that Russia is implementing malign activities in Georgia, including disinformation, and that is having an impact on the country. It is why I think our assistance to help them implement their democratic reforms is so essential. The EU has laid out 12 reforms that Georgia needs to implement in order to obtain EU candidate status, and if confirmed, I would work closely with the Government to support them in implementing those reforms. And I share your concern, Senator, and if I were confirmed, I look forward to staying in close touch on this issue because I think it is an essential issue for the region and in Georgia.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Well, thank you. You mentioned disinformation and misinformation campaigns. One of those is the effort by a lot of Russian propagandists to suggest that the United States is trying to draw Georgia into Russia and Ukraine, which, of course, is not true. So thank you for your efforts that you are going to undertake there.

Mr. KOSTELANCIK, I was in the Munich Conference not too long ago. Senator Shaheen and I met with Prime Minister Rama. You mentioned in your opening statement the issue that he focused 75 percent of his time on, which is his really desperate need for the United States to support Albania's efforts to counter cyberattacks that have taken place against their infrastructure. I do not need to revisit the history of how we got to this point, but can you just emphasize how you will work with Albania to meet their concerns and help provide the resources necessary to protect their—their from these attacks?

Mr. KOSTELANCIK. Thank you for the question, Senator. Yes, those attacks were malicious and did a great deal of damage to Albania. I have been proud of the fact that since that time, not only the United States, but together with partners from the European Union, NATO, and other countries around the world, we have brought experts to Albania to help them to begin to mitigate, to repair the damage that was done, and to reinforce and to build a stronger, more resilient cyber system across sectors in Albania.

The United States has committed \$50 million in assistance to help Albania at this point, and our cooperation with them will continue in both the civilian and defense sectors to ensure that Albania can meet future threats and challenges that come not just potentially from Iran but from other malign activities actors in the cyber sphere.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Well, thank you because it was the issue that that he focused on during the meeting. We also talked about

the Open Balkan Initiative, and the prime minister was very positive about that as an alternative way to achieve economic development in the region as they—as they continue to press for EU membership. Finally, as you know, Albania has hosted a number of Afghan refugees, and, if confirmed, can you assure this committee that you will help provide Albania the support they need to continue in that effort?

Mr. KOSTELANCIK. Thank you, Senator. Yes, I will assure the committee, and I pledge that I will do all that I can, together with the Albanian Government, with the other parts of the U.S. inter-agency that are involved with the processing of Afghan SIVs through Albania, which has been a gracious host since the summer of 2021 to Afghans looking for a new home. We will work with the Department of Defense, Department of Homeland Security, and within the State Department to expedite the processing of those persons in Albania as quickly as possible.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you. Senator Ricketts?

Senator RICKETTS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Ms. Dunnigan, I want to go back to what we were talking about previously with the Georgian Dream and, of course, the influence of Bidzina Ivanishvili. Am I getting that name, really kind of ballpark, in the area? And I was wondering, so what—can you get more specific about what can we do to combat the influence of what is going on there with regard to the—what the Russians are trying to do to pull them, Georgia, closer to their sphere of influence?

Ms. DUNNIGAN. Thank you, Senator. It really is a critical question, and I deeply believe that our support to continue Georgia on this path to build its democratic institutions, to strengthen its independent media, to strengthen its judiciary, that these are all of the sorts of steps that help strengthen a society and make it more resilient to Russian malign activities or malign activities by the PRC.

So the work we do with Georgia in terms of security cooperation and economic cooperation, trying to integrate Georgia with the West, develop their middle corridor, through energy infrastructure and transport infrastructure, these are all of the steps that really do help cement Georgia's future with the West. And, if confirmed, I would continue to make this a priority because I think it is essential.

Senator RICKETTS. Do we need to take a harder line against some of these anti-democratic forces in Georgia?

Mr. KOSTELANCIK. Thank you. I believe it is imperative that we are frank with the Georgian Government about concerning steps that we have seen, and I would continue to be frank with the Government if confirmed. And so that is a conversation that I know we are having with the Government now and I would continue to have.

Senator RICKETTS. Okay. Thank you. And, Mr. Kostelancik, just how do you assess our cyber cooperation with Albania right now? Is there more that we need to do?

Ms. DUNNIGAN. Thank you, Senator, for the question. At the moment, we have marshaled resources from the Department of Defense, from civilian sources, and from the U.S. Government to provide as much expertise, and help, training to Albanians as they build out protections against future cyberattacks. We are working

very closely with the Albanian Government, and I am heartened as well by the help and assistance that is rendered by European partners, by others from around the world, as well as NATO through its Cyber Excellence Center. So there are a number of resources that are being applied to the challenge right now. If confirmed, I pledge to you that we will continue those efforts. They are important to securing Albania's cybersecurity, and as a NATO ally, that has great importance for us as well.

Senator RICKETTS. So do you assess that Albania is satisfied with our efforts?

Mr. KOSTELANCIK. I believe they are looking for us to continue to commit to do more. I will pledge to do all that I can, knowing that there are partners besides the United States that also have significant expertise and experience that are ready to provide that. Working all together, we hope that we can address Albania's needs.

Senator RICKETTS. Great. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you, Senator Ricketts, and, Senator Duckworth apparently is on the way, has some questions. So in the meantime, I will follow up with a few questions, and, Senator Ricketts, if you would like to as well, please feel free to do so.

I do want to mention that just today, the U.N. General Assembly adopted a resolution, led by Vanuatu, that calls upon the International Court of Justice to develop an advisory opinion clarifying the obligations of states to protect rights of future generations from adverse climate change, which does bring me, Ms. Yastishock, to a question that I did want to follow up with you on regarding the issue of the rainforests in Papua New Guinea.

Obviously, all these countries are directly threatened by rising sea levels and climate change. In the case of Papua New Guinea, they are also home to 13 percent of the world's rainforests, and I know that USAID has been working with them to try to develop plans to create alternatives to the current practice, which is cutting down a lot of the rainforests, but all of us know that that, you know, this is a race against time. So I am interested in your thoughts on how we can help the people of Papua New Guinea when it comes to making sure that their people can have a livelihood and, at the same time, make sure that we can protect the rainforests, which would, of course, be in their interest and the interest of the entire world when it comes to climate change and sea level rise.

Ms. YASTISHOCK. Thank you, Senator, for question. Yes, Papua New Guinea is rich in biodiversity, and the rainforest is—and tropical forests are one of the areas that USAID has been working on. We have entered into a bilateral agreement with Papua New Guinea on biodiversity adaptation as well as conservation efforts. Looking at where we have worked in other areas, we have adopted a number of livelihood programs that ensure the safe use and the resources of the rainforests and while also preserving the livelihoods of the people. So if confirmed, I will continue that work and build upon it so that we are preserving the natural resources of the country.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. All right. Welcome, Senator Duckworth, and the floor is yours.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you, Senator Van Hollen.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. And let me—let me also say the gavel is going to be yours because I do have to run to another meeting momentarily. I want to thank and congratulate, again, all of the witnesses for your nominations. I certainly look forward to supporting each of your nominations to be Ambassadors. Thank you for your service. Senator Ricketts, after Senator Duckworth goes, you are, of course, free to continue asking questions, but let me turn it over to Senator Duckworth.

Senator DUCKWORTH [presiding]. Wonderful. Thank you. It is opening day, by the way. All us Cubbies are super excited. Ms. Yastishock—did I pronounce that correctly—thank you for your statement today and for your lifelong dedication to public service.

Obviously, there is a significant concern about the growing PRC influence in the Pacific Islands region, particularly since the announcement of a security partnership between the PRC and the Solomon Islands. As you know, this committee has recently authorized additional diplomatic resources to be devoted to the region as a signal of our dedication and commitment, and I have been a strong supporter of those efforts. That said, my own regular travels through the Indo-Pacific have reinforced my belief that our engagement with regional partners cannot be built primarily or solely around a strategic competition with the PRC. Rather, I believe that we need to meet our partners where they are and to figure out how we work together to meet their needs as well as our own. We also need to figure out how to leverage our closest regional partners, such as Australia and New Zealand, in these efforts.

What do you see as the key challenges for the United States in our efforts to bring the Pacific Island countries into closer partnership with the United States, and, if confirmed, how would you work to address those challenges in Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu?

Ms. YASTISHOCK. Thank you, Senator. I think one that you put your finger on is that we need to be there, increasing our presence through our diplomatic efforts. We're elevating USAID's presence in Papua New Guinea to establish a country representative office, bringing back the Peace Corps to the region. Having our presence there is part of addressing that issue.

I think the other part that we need to focus on is really building the capacity of each of the countries. Our difference in the model that we bring as compared to others in the region, such as the PRC, is to really work with our partners, listening to them, learning from them, understanding what their needs are, and building their capacity. And we do that in conjunction and cooperation with our allied like-minded partners, including Australia, New Zealand, and Japan.

We can see that in some of the programs that we are already working on, for instance, in Papua New Guinea, on the electrification program, which is a joint effort between Papua New Guinea, U.S., Australia, New Zealand, and Japan. And so that is our difference. That is what we bring is to make sure that our partners have the capacity, able to make those decisions and decide their own paths forward.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you. I think there is also—you know, in addition to electrification, also healthcare opportunities there to do some joint—some joint missions as well.

My colleagues here have heard me speak time and again about my interest in elevating the U.S.-ASEAN relationship, which was bolstered last year by a special summit in May. As you know, last year, the Biden administration also hosted the first-ever U.S.-Pacific Island Country Summit here in D.C. in September. What role do you see ASEAN playing in the Pacific, especially a year like this year when Indonesia is the chair of ASEAN? Should we be doing more to encourage ASEAN or its members, particularly the major maritime states, like Indonesia and the Philippines, to engage regionally with the Pacific Island nations?

Ms. YASTISHOCK. Well, thank you again. I do agree that ASEAN could play a major role with building capacity of the Pacific Islands. They have a lot to offer as far as issues on IUU fishing, how to patrol, how to ensure and work on trafficking in persons, and also, as you mentioned, on healthcare, to be able to detect and prevent transnational threats through diseases. So I do think that there is a lot of synergy that can be between the ASEAN countries as well as the—as the Pacific Islands.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you. I am going to switch gears a little bit and look to Ukraine and Russia's invasion. You know, it has impacted every country in the world, none more so than the states that were formerly Russian—under Russian within the Soviet Union. While many of our Eastern Bloc allies are some of the fiercest advocates for Ukraine, others have hesitated to be too far off sides with Russia for various reasons.

Mr. Kostelancik and Ms. Dunnigan, for Albania and Georgia, respectively, can each of you speak to how those countries have been managing their responses to the war in Ukraine since the invasion last year, and identify some of your early priorities for engagement in this area, if confirmed?

Ms. DUNNIGAN. Thank you, Senator. The Georgian people overwhelmingly support Ukraine in this war, and the Georgians have taken important steps to support Ukraine. They have sent some critical energy equipment to help repair the energy grid that Russia has damaged when they started targeting civilian infrastructure. They welcomed thousands of Ukrainian refugees into Georgia. They have also welcomed many Russian dissidents, and activists, and journalists who fled Russia during the war. Unfortunately, Georgia knows all too well the threat that Ukraine is experiencing since Russia has occupied Georgia since 2008.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Mm-hmm.

Ms. DUNNIGAN. And if I am confirmed, I will continue to work closely with the Georgian Government and support their own sovereignty and territorial integrity, and help hold Russia accountable to its commitments under the 2008 ceasefire agreement and under the U.N. Charter, in the same way we are trying to do with Russia in relation to Ukraine.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you. Mr. Kostelancik?

Mr. KOSTELANCIK. Thank you for the question, Senator. Albania as a NATO ally has, since the beginning of the conflict—Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine—offered material, and non-lethal, and

lethal assistance to Ukraine. It has sent its forces to reinforce NATO, reinforcements in front-line states as a way of signaling to Moscow our strength as a NATO alliance that Albania is proudly part of. And quite significantly, as a rotating member of the U.N. Security Council and the co-pen holder with the United States on resolutions dealing with Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine, Albania has been enormously helpful to our diplomatic efforts there in New York and throughout the world in bringing attention to support Ukraine and to condemn Russia.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you. Senator Ricketts, did you have further questions?

Senator RICKETTS. Yeah, I just have—I just wanted to do a quick follow-up with Ms. Dunnigan. So you were just talking about Georgia's response to the invasion in Ukraine, and, of course, they initially condemned it as unacceptable and provided, as you mentioned, some of the resources there. But they have not imposed any sanctions on Russia, and there are concerns that Georgian businesses are being used to evade some of the sanctions we have put on Russia. Can you just talk a little about how do you see—again, you would think that the Georgians, as you said, were overwhelming in support of Ukraine.

You know, obviously they are very close regionally, and there are a lot of cultural ties there, but it seems like the—between Kiev and Tbilisi, there is tension. And so how do you see the Georgian Government's reaction of not being more helpful to Ukraine and less—you know, more condemning of Russia, and do you—do you think that we need to do more with regard to the sanctions, and are—you know, do you think Georgian business are helping to avoid the sanctions? I mean, just tell me how you think the Georgian Government thinks about this, and what about Georgian companies helping to evade the sanctions?

Ms. DUNNIGAN. Thank you, Senator. On the sanctions question, it is absolutely a priority of the United States to ensure sanctions compliance and implementation, or compliance if you have not—if you have not signed on to the sanctions yourself. And we are having that conversation directly with the Georgian Government, with the National Bank of Georgia, with the private sector of Georgia, and with the financial sector of Georgia. And the Georgian Government wants to comply with these sanctions. They have told us, and they have actually asked us for some more training to help them with implementation to ensure there is not evasion of sanctions with products going through Georgia.

And I absolutely agree with you. Georgia, more than—you know, Georgia absolutely should understand that we do not want to continue to fund, via sanctions evasion, Russia's war machine and its military for future aggression, so that is a conversation that we are having with Georgia. In fact, our special coordinator for sanctions and other interagency officials will be going to Georgia in the coming months to continue this important dialogue, and, if confirmed, I will certainly make this a priority.

As far as, you know, providing assistance, and what they have done, and why have they not done more, Georgia has also been very important in the international fora, as my colleague mentioned, both in the U.N. and other multilateral for a, like the

OSCE, in supporting this and supporting Ukraine, and talking—passing resolutions that really call out Russia for its aggression. And if I am confirmed, I would continue to work with the Government and help them keep doing that. Thank you.

Senator RICKETTS. Great. Thank you very much. Senator Duckworth?

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you. This hearing has now come to a close. Thank you to each of you for your service to our Nation and your continued willingness to serve on behalf of the American people. You obviously are not doing this for the glamour or the high pay, so you must do this because your heart truly is that of a servant to the people, so thank you. It is a tough job that you are each taking on, and I am so proud to have been able to make it back here to ask you questions.

For any members wishing to submit questions for the record, the hearing record will remain open until close of business tomorrow, Friday, March 31.

Senator DUCKWORTH. And the committee stands adjourned. Thank you.

[Whereupon, at 11:24 a.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

Additional Material Submitted for the Record

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO NICOLE D. THERIOT BY SENATOR MARCO RUBIO

Question. In May 2022, Secretary Blinken said that the People's Republic of China (PRC) is the "only country with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do it." The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) clearly holds the reins of power in the People's Republic of China and has used this power to commit genocide in Xinjiang, flood our communities with fentanyl, and emit, by far, the largest quantity of greenhouse gases in the world today. With their absolute control of Chinese society and industry, the CCP could stop all of these destructive actions tomorrow if they so choose. Is the Chinese Communist Party a threat to the United States?

Answer. Under President Xi, the Chinese Communist Party has become more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad. We will defend U.S. national security and advance our values and prosperity; defend international law, agreements, principles, and institutions that maintain peace and security; protect the rights of individuals and sovereign nations; and make it possible for all countries to coexist and cooperate. If confirmed, I will continue our work with Guyana to strengthen democratic values and the commitment to a rules-based international order.

Question. Does the Chinese Communist Party undertake any activities that are beneficial to U.S. interests?

Answer. While the United States and the People's Republic of China (PRC) are strategic competitors, it may be possible for the PRC to make constructive contributions toward solving challenges we and other countries face in common. Any PRC contributions must be scrutinized, however, to ensure they are neither springboards for narrow PRC economic interests nor platforms to create more permissive conditions for its own authoritarian model.

Question. Do you believe that there are any areas within which the Chinese Communist Party would constructively work with the United States in good faith?

Answer. While the United States competes vigorously with the PRC where we differ, the United States manages this competition responsibly. This includes maintaining openness to cooperation with Beijing where our interests may overlap and where our cooperation can advance solutions to transnational challenges, including possibly climate change, counter-narcotics, pandemic threats, non-proliferation, food

security, and macroeconomics. We will work with Beijing only if it secures American jobs, American values, and our way of life for future generations.

Question. If confirmed, will you approve any joint activity with organizations or representatives from the People's Republic of China in the country in which you will work?

Answer. In line with the Administration's approach on competition and cooperation with the People's Republic of China, if confirmed, I would maintain openness to U.S. involvement in cooperative efforts that involve PRC entities and third countries or international organizations in areas where it is in U.S. interests to do so. That said, I would scrutinize and encourage third parties to scrutinize any such arrangements to ensure they follow international norms, feature transparency, and delineate steps to verify regularly that all parties are working in good faith.

Question. Guyana is a founding member of the Caribbean community (CARICOM). Its current President, Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali, is working to unite Guyanese of all ethnicities, races, and religions in Guyana, which is a very much needed approach considering the history of tensions between different ethnic groups. How do you assess our current relations with Guyana?

Answer. U.S.-Guyana bilateral relations are excellent. Guyana is a steadfast partner and actively recruits U.S. investment. Visiting U.S. officials and trade delegations are received regularly by His Excellency President Ali, but also by members of the opposition, and on all sides, there is a diversity of race and religion. The Guyanese Government strongly supports U.S. Government priorities, activities, initiatives, and programs, and, if confirmed, I will search for more ways to include diverse audiences and beneficiaries so that Guyana's economic transformation includes everyone.

Question. If confirmed, what will be your main priorities as U.S. Ambassador in Guyana?

Answer. If confirmed, my priorities will be to protect U.S. citizens and U.S. interests in Guyana and to strive for a stronger bilateral partnership that supports improved governance, economic prosperity, and security in Guyana. Guiding our efforts will be diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility; ensuring climate concerns are incorporated into policy making; and emphasizing the importance of transparency and accountability at all levels of government. This path will provide opportunities for U.S. educational institutions, businesses, and citizens to partner with Guyana.

Question. How will you support deepening Guyana's relations with the United States?

Answer. If confirmed, I will work to strengthen our relationship and build on the momentum of President Ali's recent visits to Washington DC and of U.S. Government leadership to Guyana and the region. I will encourage cultural exchanges between our countries and will support frank discussion of how we can help modernize Guyana's systems and infrastructure, whether in the health care, agriculture, education, or other sectors. The United States and Guyana share a strong relationship based on the common values of openness, diversity, and democracy.

Question. In your previous role as Deputy Chief of Mission at the U.S. Embassy in Haiti, you worked through many challenges, including the increase in gang violence, lack of leadership and weak government institutions. How has your experience working in Haiti prepared you to serve as Ambassador in Guyana?

Answer. My time in Haiti was challenging, and I am grateful for that experience because it helped prepare me to weather crises. It taught me that security underpins everything. There can be no true economic growth or development without security. Guyana has weak borders and suffers from corruption and an under-resourced security sector. These deficiencies create opportunities for transnational criminal organizations. If confirmed, I will use my experience to build a stronger security sector, bringing to bear U.S. Government resources, including the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative.

Question. What is your assessment of the border dispute between Venezuela and Guyana?

Answer. Guyana's relationship with Venezuela is complicated, with Venezuela claiming nearly two thirds of Guyana's territory as its own. In the past few years, the United States and Guyana have solidified our partnership. If confirmed, I will expand this partnership and encourage a peaceful resolution of this dispute. The 1899 arbitral award determined the land boundary between Guyana and Venezuela

and should be respected unless or until otherwise determined by a competent legal body.

Question. What specific humanitarian support is the U.S. providing to support Guyana's efforts to host Venezuelan migrants?

Answer. The United States provided \$3.7 million in funding in FY 2021 to IOM, UNICEF, UNHCR, and the Pan American Development Foundation for multi-sector assistance to Venezuelan migrants. The Guyanese Government relies on international assistance to aid the Venezuelan population. If confirmed, I will strengthen Embassy efforts to support Guyana as it receives those fleeing from insecurity and economic hardship. One key opportunity is to continue supporting English language classes for migrants who want to work but struggle with the language barrier.

Question. China and Guyana have had a long history of diplomatic relations, dating to 1972. It was the first English speaking nation in the Caribbean to open relations with the PRC. The Chinese Communist Party has provided assistance and support to Marxist political parties through Guyana's history. What is your characterization of the existing relationship between Guyana and China?

Answer. Guyana is a 2018 signatory to the Belt and Road Initiative, and China National Offshore Oil Corporation has a 25 percent stake in the ExxonMobil-Hess offshore oil venture. Other PRC-linked SOEs have undertaken large infrastructure projects in the past. Prior to the influx of oil wealth, the Ali administration generally sought lowest cost bidders for large projects, but it has been vocal in the press recently about the delays and cost overruns by PRC-linked SOEs, especially on the international airport project.

Question. Are there concerns with their existing relationship? If so, by whom?

Answer. While Guyana has historic ties to the PRC through a small community of Guyanese descendants of Chinese indentured laborers, many Guyanese are concerned about the PRC's poor investment practices. In some sectors like mining infrastructure, PRC-linked companies were a partner of necessity in a country with limited revenue. However, with more oil revenues, the Guyanese Government is increasingly looking to invest in high quality goods and services offered by U.S. companies.

Question. Are you concerned with media reports indicating that Guyana's Vice President, Bharrat Jagdeo, has received bribes from Chinese companies?

Answer. Guyana recently scored 39/100 on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index. Without strong anticorruption efforts, businesses will be at a disadvantage when competing for permits and contracts in Guyana, and both Guyanese and international businesses care deeply about transparency. If confirmed, this will be one of my top priorities for cooperation with the Government of Guyana. I will work with the relevant authorities to build Guyana's capacity to identify, investigate, and prosecute corruption.

Question. The U.S. is a leading importer of Guyana's oil, with China and India following. Guyana's total oil exports earned more than \$1 billion in revenue to the Government of Guyana in 2022 and benefits both the U.S. and Guyana. Unfortunately, the Biden administration wants to stop America's use of fossil fuel energy sources such as coal, oil, and natural gas. This will hurt American's pocketbooks with increased fuel prices, but also assist's China's attempt to achieve energy dominance and will force Guyana to partner with the CCP for its economic livelihood. In your estimation, which industry or sector outside of oil exports in Guyana would result in \$1 billion a year in revenue for Guyana?

Answer. Guyana's leadership has been very clear that they will continue to develop their energy resources even as they seek to make investments in greener and renewable energy. U.S. businesses are key leaders in this effort, and we are glad they continue to be chosen to partner with Guyana in its development. Guyanese officials emphasize the need to diversify its economy. Aside from its historical strength in mining and continued exploration efforts for gold and other key minerals, it is pushing hard to develop its agriculture, eco-tourism, health care, and technology sectors.

Question. Do you support increased U.S. investment in developing Guyana's energy industry, including in fossil fuels?

Answer. Guyana's energy sector offers extensive economic opportunities for U.S. firms in both conventional and renewable energy, including in decarbonization and methane reduction. If confirmed, I will work to ensure a level playing field for American companies to compete fairly and transparently. I will work with the Guya-

nese Government to ensure U.S. firms' contracts and assets continue to be respected. Finally, I will partner with the U.S. Export Import Bank, Development Finance Corporation, and other agencies to promote the use of high-quality U.S. goods and services.

Question. Do you agree with the Biden administration's decision last year to vote against a proposal presented to the Inter-American Development Bank to build a port that would support Guyana's oil and gas industry?

Answer. The decision by the Inter-American Development Bank to not call for a vote on the port expansion project because of the U.S. policy at the time is understandable. My understanding is that the project was not voted on or vetoed by the United States, rather it was never brought to a vote. That said, energy security is a priority, particularly in the Caribbean, and we are glad that the oil and gas produced in Guyana is easier and more environmentally friendly to refine than most.

Question. Are you worried that an absence of American investment in Guyana's energy industry presents an opening for the Chinese Communist Party to increase its role in Guyana's economy?

Answer. I am encouraged by growing U.S. private sector interest in Guyana. Our Embassy is constantly hosting trade delegations, briefing U.S. businesses, and supporting Guyanese businesses looking for high-quality partners, products, or services. In the last six months, the U.S. hosted large and diverse delegations from across the United States representing small, medium, and large firms. If confirmed, my job will be to make sure we remain responsive to our private sector and to the needs of Guyana moving forward in a spirit of true partnership.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO ANN MARIE YASTISHOCK BY SENATOR ROBERT MENENDEZ

China

The security pact signed by China and the Solomon Islands last year raised concerns about Beijing infringing on the Solomon Islands' sovereignty as well as the possibility that the PRC could establish a more permanent military presence in the area.

Question. If confirmed, how will you respond to, monitor, and push back on an increased presence of the PRC?

Answer. I will work closely with the Governments of Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu as well as our Pacific Island neighbors to build greater stability, security, and economic opportunity throughout the region. U.S. security co-operation activities include the building, training, and equipping of countries' security forces, and joint maritime law enforcement initiatives. I will make use of all available tools within the U.S. Government to counter propaganda and disinformation through capacity-building training, proactive work to expose problematic PRC influence, and arrangement of provision of open media sources for the region.

Question. What changes has the framework agreement yielded so far?

Answer. The broad nature of the Solomon Islands-PRC bilateral security agreement could still leave the door open for the deployment of PRC military forces to Solomon Islands. Additionally, we have concerns over the expansion of the PRC's internal security and surveillance apparatus beyond its own borders. The signing of the agreement does not change our commitment to a strong relationship with the region and our efforts to strengthen our longstanding bonds with the people of Solomon Islands.

Question. What should the priorities be for the diplomatic team in Honiara as the Department seeks to establish a permanent diplomatic presence there?

Answer. In furtherance of U.S. policy in the Pacific, our diplomatic team has sought to build our bilateral relationship by prioritizing the needs of the people of Solomon Islands, being responsive to requests from the Government of Solomon Islands and coordinating our efforts with allies and partners. If confirmed, I will continue to promote cooperation on unexploded ordnance, the dispatch of the USNS Mercy hospital ship to address public health, the return of the Peace Corps, climate change initiatives, and strengthened people-to-people ties.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO ANNE MARIE YASTISHOCK BY SENATOR MARCO RUBIO

Question. In May 2022, Secretary Blinken said that the People's Republic of China is the "only country with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do it." The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) clearly holds the reins of power in the People's Republic of China and has used this power to commit genocide in Xinjiang, flood our communities with fentanyl, and emit, by far the largest quantity of greenhouse gases in the world today. With their absolute control of Chinese society and industry, the CCP could stop all of these destructive actions tomorrow if they so choose. Is the Chinese Communist Party a threat to the United States?

Answer. Under President Xi, the Chinese Communist Party has become more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad. We will defend U.S. national security and advance our values and prosperity; defend international law, agreements, principles, and institutions that maintain peace and security; protect the rights of individuals and sovereign nations; and make it possible for all countries to coexist and cooperate. If confirmed, I will continue our work with our Pacific Island partners to strengthen democratic values and the commitment to a rules-based international order.

Question. Does the Chinese Communist Party undertake any activities that are beneficial to U.S. interests?

Answer. While the United States and the People's Republic of China (PRC) are strategic competitors, it may be possible for the PRC to make constructive contributions toward solving challenges we and other countries face in common. Any PRC contributions must be scrutinized, however, to ensure they are neither springboards for narrow PRC economic interests nor platforms to create more permissive conditions for its own authoritarian model.

Question. Do you believe that there are any areas within which the Chinese Communist Party would constructively work with the United States in good faith?

Answer. While the United States competes vigorously with the PRC where we differ, the United States manages this competition responsibly. This includes maintaining openness to cooperation with Beijing where our interests may overlap and where our cooperation can advance solutions to transnational challenges, including possibly climate change, counter-narcotics, pandemic threats, non-proliferation, food security, and macroeconomics.

Question. If confirmed, will you approve any joint activity with organizations or representatives from the People's Republic of China in the country in which you will work?

Answer. In line with the Administration's approach on competition and cooperation with the People's Republic of China (PRC), if confirmed, I would maintain openness to U.S. involvement in cooperative efforts that involve PRC entities, our Pacific Islands partners, and third countries or international organizations in areas where our collective interests align. That said, I would scrutinize and encourage third parties to scrutinize any such arrangements to ensure they follow international norms, feature transparency, and delineate steps to verify regularly that all parties are working in good faith.

Question. In March 2022, the Solomon Islands and China signed a security agreement to address "internal threats" and included protection for Chinese-owned businesses in the country. The week before the agreement was signed, the State Department released a report attacking the Solomon Islands for their stance on same-sex marriage, alienating our Solomon Islander partners. The nation's Prime Minister declined to participate with U.S. representatives during a WWII memorial marking the Battle of Guadalcanal, as well as temporarily barring U.S. naval vessels from docking at its seaports. Is exporting an overly progressive social policy in alignment with our national security priorities?

Answer. We promote American values, such as democracy and human rights, through diplomatic activities all over the world. Likewise, we advance national security through diplomatic engagement as well as military presence, multinational training, combined exercises, and equipment exports.

I believe the report you may be referring to is the Human Rights Report (HRR), which the Secretary of State is required to submit annually to Congress. The HRR captures facts about the observance of and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. The HRR does not contain analysis, makes no judgments, and makes no statements or determinations as a matter of domestic or international

law. Promoting respect for human rights is a U.S. foreign policy priority that furthers our national interests and security. Societies that respect and defend human rights and fundamental freedoms, democratic institutions, and the rule of law are more stable and secure.

Question. As much as we hate to confront this fact, American power and influence has limits in what it can achieve. We face real tradeoffs in the objectives we need to pursue. We do not necessarily live in a world where we can both confront the growing Chinese Communist Party influence and transform traditional culture in the South Pacific to adopt the same social norms as Los Angeles. So, in the Solomon Islands, what should our priority be—containing the CCP's influence or promoting a progressive social agenda?

Answer. In Solomon Islands, we seek to build our bilateral relationship by prioritizing the needs of the people of Solomon Islands, being responsive to requests from the Government of Solomon Islands and coordinating our efforts with allies and partners. If confirmed, I will support locally owned and driven development that is sustainable and elevates gender equity and women's economic empowerment. We can showcase that supporting good governance and increasing the strength of democratic institutions delivers for people, enhancing fairness, transparency, and prosperity. If confirmed, I will work to increase American influence in this way.

Question. In your assessment, will the Solomon Islands agreement with the CCP result in a permanent military presence?

Answer. The Government of Solomon Islands stated privately and publicly that it will not allow the PRC to build a military base. The prime minister said publicly he would like to release more details if the PRC agrees. It is up to the PRC to show if it can be transparent on security matters that have raised concerns throughout the region from many Pacific Island countries. The United States encourages vigilance in the face of Beijing's strategy to increase its influence regionally through ambiguous, incremental, and escalatory tactics in furtherance of its authoritarian aims.

Question. How do you plan to counter the CCP's strategic agenda in the South Pacific as it relates to their bilateral agreements, increased presence, and overtures for military bases in the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, and PNG?

Answer. I will work closely with the Governments of Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu as well as our Pacific Island neighbors to build greater stability, security, and economic opportunity throughout the region. U.S. security cooperation activities include the building, training, and equipping of countries' security forces, and joint maritime law enforcement initiatives. The Solomon Islands Government has said both privately and publicly that it will not allow the PRC to build a military base.

Question. Should the U.S. be doing more with its allies in the region regarding shared interests? How do you envision coordinating allied efforts if confirmed?

Answer. Over the past year, the United States has demonstrated our deep and enduring partnership with the Pacific Island countries and expanded our diplomatic, development, and people-to-people efforts, including through the launch of the Partners in the Blue Pacific and the U.S.-Pacific Island Country Summit. As a continual part of our diplomatic and development activities, we regularly coordinate with allies and partners in the region as well as multilateral organizations in the advancement of shared interests. If confirmed, I will continue to engage with our allies and partners to coordinate and partner on policy, development and people-to-people initiatives in Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu.

Question. If confirmed, what steps will you take to promote U.S.-led and international projects to develop energy resources and infrastructure as an alternative to Chinese-backed projects?

Answer. The PRC's involvement in the region has grown, we have seen a range of increasingly problematic behaviors, including its assertion of unlawful maritime claims and the ongoing militarization of disputed features in the South China Sea, predatory economic activities including illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, and investments that undermine good governance and promote corruption. We must provide positive development alternatives and be visible in our programs and engagements with Pacific Island countries. For example, if confirmed I will continue efforts to work with the Government of Papua New Guinea, Australia, Japan and New Zealand to implement the Papua New Guinea Electrification Project to expand access to energy.

Question. Is there a role for the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation in facilitating U.S. investment in PNG, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu?

Answer. U.S. International Development Finance Corporation has two active projects in Papua New Guinea. Reflecting our commitment to help build a stronger Pacific region through investment in infrastructure, DFC, along with the Japan Bank for International Cooperation, each will provide \$50 million USD in credit guarantees to Export Finance Australia to support the acquisition of Digicel Pacific. If confirmed, I will work with the DFC to support negotiation of an Investment Incentive Agreement (IIA) with Vanuatu and Solomon Islands to catalyze private sector activity, spur economic growth, and advance inclusive development. Without an IIA, DFC is unable to finance projects in Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands. DFC is eager to work in both markets.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO ROBIN DUNNIGAN BY SENATOR ROBERT MENENDEZ

Georgian Democracy

The recent image of Georgian police firing a water cannon at a protestor fearlessly waving the flag of the European Union epitomizes the current moment in Georgia. Georgia's people and civil society remain committed to their European future, but the Government still must grapple with de-oligarchization and polarization to progress on their Euro Atlantic path.

Question. If confirmed, how will you work to support Georgia in the necessary reforms to move forward with EU accession, while also holding the Government accountable when they betray the will of the Georgian people and threaten civil society, as they did with their recently proposed foreign agent law?

Answer. The people of Georgia overwhelmingly support EU integration, and, if confirmed, I will prioritize helping Georgia implement the necessary reforms to achieve EU candidate status. I will engage the people and the Government of Georgia and align our assistance programming to help further Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration. Georgia has made remarkable progress, but some concerning developments show there is more to do. I will engage the Government frankly on this topic and will welcome cooperating with you and other members of Congress on these issues.

LGBTQ Rights

The 2021 attack on Tbilisi Pride, which targeted members of the LGBTQ community in Georgia, as well as journalists covering the event, was a stark reminder that the authorities in Georgia have neglected to protect vulnerable groups.

Question. How will you use your platform to stand up for Georgia's LGBTQ community if confirmed?

Answer. If confirmed, I will reiterate our solidarity with the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex (LGBTQI+) community in Georgia. I will stress that the Government of Georgia is responsible for safeguarding the right to peaceful assembly, preventing discrimination and violence, and ensuring that in Georgia, everyone's rights and safety are duly protected. I will also urge the authorities to bring all instigators, organizers, and perpetrators of the 2021 violence at Tbilisi Pride to justice.

Occupied Territory

Twenty percent of Georgian territory remains under Russian occupation. That is why I firmly believe that as we push the Georgian Government to advance the democratic will of the Georgian people, we must also support it in further developing the means to defend itself.

Question. How can the United States best support Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity as Russia's war in Ukraine sends shockwaves through the South Caucasus?

Answer. If confirmed, I will prioritize advocating for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity. I will work with Georgia and our international partners, including through the Geneva International Discussions, to hold Russia to its commitments under the 2008 ceasefire agreement and the U.N. Charter. I will continue to support programming that brings together people from across Administrative

Boundary Lines. I will also support assistance that will help Georgia defend its borders, deter Russia, and prevent Russia from expanding its influence in the region.

Question. What are the risks and opportunities created by this moment?

Answer. Russia's unprovoked war against Ukraine has shown why it is essential we help strengthen the democratic, economic, and security resilience of those facing Russian aggression and malign activities. This moment is a tremendous opportunity for the Georgian Government and the people of Georgia to realize their desire to further integrate with the EU, NATO, and the West. If confirmed, I will prioritize supporting Georgia's further Euro-Atlantic integration, which in the national interest of Georgia, as well as in the national security interest of the United States.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO ROBIN DUNNIGAN BY SENATOR MARCO RUBIO

Question. In May 2022, Secretary Blinken said that the People's Republic of China is the "only country with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do it." The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) clearly holds the reins of power in the People's Republic of China and has used this power to commit genocide in Xinjiang, flood our communities with fentanyl, and emit, by far the largest quantity of greenhouse gases in the world today. With their absolute control of Chinese society and industry, the CCP could stop all of these destructive actions tomorrow if they so choose. Is the Chinese Communist Party a threat to the United States?

Answer. Under President Xi, the Chinese Communist Party has become more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad. We will defend U.S. national security and advance our values and prosperity; defend international law, agreements, principles, and institutions that maintain peace and security; protect the rights of individuals and sovereign nations; and make it possible for all countries to coexist and cooperate. If confirmed, I will continue our work with Georgia to strengthen democratic values and the commitment to a rules-based international order.

Question. Does the Chinese Communist Party undertake any activities that are beneficial to U.S. interests?

Answer. While the United States and the People's Republic of China (PRC) are strategic competitors, it may be possible for the PRC to make constructive contributions toward solving challenges we and other countries face in common. Any PRC contributions must be scrutinized, however, to ensure they are neither springboards for narrow PRC economic interests nor platforms to create more permissive conditions for its own authoritarian model.

Question. Do you believe that there are any areas within which the Chinese Communist Party would constructively work with the United States in good faith?

Answer. While the United States competes vigorously with the PRC where we differ, the United States manages this competition responsibly. This includes maintaining openness to cooperation with Beijing where our interests may overlap and where our cooperation can advance solutions to transnational challenges, including possibly climate change, counter-narcotics, pandemic threats, non-proliferation, food security, and macroeconomics.

Question. If confirmed, will you approve any joint activity with organizations or representatives from the People's Republic of China in the country in which you will work?

Answer. In line with the Administration's approach on competition and cooperation with the People's Republic of China, if confirmed, I would maintain openness to U.S. involvement in cooperative efforts that involve PRC entities, Georgia, and third countries or international organizations in areas where our collective interests align. That said, I would scrutinize and encourage third parties to scrutinize any such arrangements to ensure they follow international norms, feature transparency, and delineate steps to verify regularly that all parties are working in good faith.

Question. Since the 1990s, Georgia's relations with Russia have been tense, resulting in Russia invading in 2008, and supporting secession movements in the regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. There have been significant concerns that Russia continues to influence Georgian affairs. Most recently, the Government's attempts to enact a "foreign agent" bill that is inspired by Russia's foreign agents law. Georgia has experience firsthand what an attack and occupation is like from Russia. In

light of Russia's aggression in Ukraine, have you noticed a change in the Georgian Government's current approach towards Russia?

Answer. The ruling party's attempt to pass a "foreign agents" bill was concerning. The people of Georgia made it clear this type of legislation is incompatible with their Georgian and Euro-Atlantic values. Georgia's citizens overwhelmingly support Ukraine and know the danger Russia poses, as it continues to occupy approximately 20 percent of Georgia's territory. The vast majority of Georgians understand it is not in Georgia's interest to move closer to Russia. If confirmed, I will prioritize advocating for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as its further Euro-Atlantic integration.

Question. What is your view regarding Georgia's prospects to conduct the reforms needed to become a candidate for EU membership, as well as prospects for NATO membership?

Answer. The people of Georgia overwhelmingly support EU integration, which will help improve the lives and security of every Georgian. If confirmed, I will prioritize helping Georgia implement the necessary reforms to achieve EU candidate status.

I support Georgia's NATO aspirations. If confirmed, I will continue to work with Georgia on strengthening its interoperability with NATO and its defensive capabilities, while also promoting the vital democratic reforms that are essential for NATO accession.

Question. Has Russian aggression against Ukraine accelerated Georgia's processes to join the EU and NATO? Why or why not?

Answer. Russia's unprovoked war against Ukraine has shown why it is essential we help strengthen the democratic, economic, and security resilience of those facing Russian aggression. At the 2022 NATO Summit, Allies endorsed additional support for Georgia as one of NATO's partners most directly affected by external threats. Also in 2022, the EU recognized that Georgia has a "European Perspective" and set out the reforms Georgia needed to implement to obtain EU candidate status.

Question. What are your views on the imprisonment of Georgia's former president Mikheil Saakashvili and journalist Nika Gvaramia?

Answer. The United States has emphasized to the Georgian Government its responsibility to provide the medical care former President Saakashvili needs and to ensure his human rights are respected, including his right to privacy. If confirmed, I will continue to follow this issue closely.

As the State Department noted in the 2022 Human Rights report, Georgia's Public Defender and human rights organizations have criticized Mr. Gvaramia's prosecution, conviction, and sentence. If confirmed, I will continue to urge the Government to respect freedom of expression and to strengthen the justice system in line with its own aspirations and goals.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO ROBIN DUNNIGAN BY SENATOR JEANNE SHAHEEN

Question. With respect to the Georgian Parliament's decision to withdraw the controversial "foreign agents" law, why did the Parliament even consider legislation that would have clearly ended their consideration for EU membership?

Answer. The ruling party's attempt to pass a "foreign agents" bill was concerning, and the people of Georgia made it clear this type of legislation is incompatible with their Georgian and Euro-Atlantic values. Georgia's citizens overwhelmingly support EU integration, which will help improve the lives and security of every Georgian. If confirmed, I will prioritize helping Georgia implement the necessary reforms to achieve EU candidate status.

Question. Do you think that our funding levels are appropriate to meet our objectives in place? Should the United States consider recalibrating their funding levels or conditioning specific funds to help encourage meaningful movement on the twelve-point plan outlined by the EU?

Answer. Georgia has made remarkable progress over the past 30 years, but there is more to do. If confirmed, I will prioritize helping Georgia implement the necessary reforms to achieve EU candidate status. I am concerned that by conditioning our assistance we could undermine our support for the people of Georgia and the democratic institutions we want to strengthen. If confirmed, I would welcome consulting with you and other members of Congress to ensure U.S. assistance is help-

ing achieve our objectives of supporting Georgia's further integration with the EU, NATO, and the West.

Question. If confirmed, how do you see this initiative supporting your efforts to advance Georgia's economic potential, strengthen its democratic institutions and increase its regional cooperation with other Black Sea partners?

Answer. The State Department is working together with the interagency on a comprehensive Black Sea Security strategy that promotes greater regional political engagement, security coordination, economic cooperation, energy security, and democratic resilience, all of which are critical for Georgia. If confirmed, I would work in the context of this broader strategy to support Georgia's efforts to develop a middle corridor, including in the transportation and energy sectors, as well as regional security cooperation.

Question. Does the United States support a long-term observer mission to ensure that next year's elections are free and fair, and reflective of the wishes of the Georgian people?

Answer. The United States supports OSCE election observation missions throughout the OSCE region. If confirmed, I will prioritize helping to ensure the 2024 parliamentary elections meet the standards of the OSCE, including by working with Georgian civil society organizations, international organizations, and partner countries. I would support an OSCE election observation mission and would encourage the Government of Georgia to welcome OSCE election observers, as they have in the past. I would also welcome engagement by you and other members of Congress on this issue.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO DAVID J. KOSTELANCIK BY SENATOR ROBERT MENENDEZ

Question. I was pleased to see the EU open accession negotiations with Albania, and USAID notify last year of its strategic re-engagement with Albania in order to support accession. The EU obviously has a large role to play in supporting Albania's accession too. How would you see your role in managing donor coordination, and what type of assistance should the United States specifically be providing to help Albania fulfill its EU aspirations?

Answer. U.S. assistance helps Albania deter threats, strengthen its democratic institutions, and push the necessary reforms to advance Albania's Euro-Atlantic integration. I support efforts to combat transnational organized crime and counter terrorism, strengthen judicial and other government institutions, bolster civil society and independent media, promote government transparency, and stiffen the fight against corruption. If not remedied, rule of law deficits and corruption in the judiciary will constrain Albania's EU membership progress, as well as its economic development and democratic consolidation.

With U.S. Government assistance, Albania established in 2016 the Special Anti-Corruption Body (SPAK), a specialized anti-corruption and organized crime entity. SPAK consists of a Special Anti-Corruption and Organized Crime Prosecutor's Office (SPO) and a National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) modeled on the FBI. SPAK has arrested former ministers, sitting members of Parliament, judges, police, prosecutors, mayors, and organized crime kingpins.

If confirmed, I will work to ensure U.S. resources accelerate Albania's EU integration through targeted investment in areas not addressed by the EU's growing assistance.

This includes, for instance, USG assistance to improve the role of women in the local decision-making process by strengthening their technical capacity to interact with local government officials and advocate effectively for improved public services; to strengthen the capacity of local civil society organizations in developing government oversight, anti-corruption efforts, human rights, gender equality, and other USG priorities; and to develop independent investigative reporting skills to expose corruption and highlight human rights issues.

Question. What do you see as the remaining obstacles in addressing good governance and judicial reforms?

Answer. The multi-year vetting process in Albania, in which all judges and prosecutors are assessed for ties to organized crime, unexplained wealth, and professional competence, is vital to restoring public trust in the rule of law, removing compromised actors, and strengthening good governance. U.S. assistance and moni-

toring efforts are supporting the vetting and selection of trusted new public officials and mitigating adjudication backlogs stemming from the vetting process.

Albania's main political parties tend to support U.S. policy and positions and advocate for Albania's EU aspirations, though political figures often are motivated by personal or partisan motives. The Albanian political class has been sluggish to enact reforms that could threaten their personal financial interests, power, and patronage networks, particularly justice reform and electoral reform. If confirmed, I will support efforts to combat corruption and focus the Government of Albania's efforts to meet EU accession goals.

Question. Iran has launched cyber-attacks on NATO member Albania for providing safe haven to the MEK at the request of the United States. What should be the response to a cyberattack on a NATO ally?

Answer. NATO is the strongest military alliance in history, as critical to ensuring the safety of the American people today as at any time since its founding more than 70 years ago. NATO is the unique, essential, and indispensable Transatlantic forum to consult, coordinate, and act on matters related to our individual and collective security. The Administration is working with NATO to strengthen our defenses in cyber space and to produce and secure the technologies of the future. NATO joined the United States and other partners making public statements of support for Albania in the wake of the attack.

If confirmed, I will continue work to strengthen the Alliance's capacity to address all threats to transatlantic security, including the malign use of emerging and disruptive technologies, malicious cyber and hybrid operations (including misinformation, disinformation, and weaponized corruption), and other challenges to the rules-based international order.

Question. While we have seen OFAC designate those responsible and we have condemned the attacks, have we done enough to support Albania in bolstering its cybersecurity and holding Tehran to account?

Answer. The Biden administration places alliances at the center of U.S. foreign policy and is actively working to ensure these alliances reflect and respond to the world we face, in order to make us stronger and safer.

Since our October 2022 Strategic Dialogue, the U.S. has worked with Albanian and U.S. experts to refine Albania's cyber needs and establish a roadmap for a strong and resilient whole-of-government cyber ecosystem. The United States has committed approximately \$50 million in cybersecurity assistance to Albania's civilian and military sectors—one of our largest cyber support contributions to any individual country to date. This is not only a response to the recent attacks, but a continuation of long-standing U.S. support for Albania's cyber capacity development goals, a commitment I intend to carry into the future.

In September 2022, the United States designated Iran's Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS) and Iran's Intelligence Minister, Esmail Khatib, for engaging in malicious cyber-enabled activities against the United States and U.S. allies, including Albania.

Question. Albania has graciously hosted a large number of Afghan evacuees. If confirmed, how will you ensure that the United States provides Albania the support that they need as they continue to do this important work?

Answer. Albania was the first European country to offer to host at-risk Afghan travelers in August 2021, and it has provided temporary protective status for almost 3,000 Afghans and their families to date.

The U.S. continues to work across the interagency to provide care and sustainment for these individuals and their families as we evaluate their applications for resettlement to the United States or other suitable locations.

Albania has been an excellent partner in assisting our Afghan allies and has expressed a willingness to continue the partnership into the future.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO DAVID J. KOSTELANCIK BY SENATOR MARCO RUBIO

Question. In May 2022, Secretary Blinken said that the People's Republic of China is the "only country with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do it." The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) clearly holds all the reins of power in the People's Republic of China and has used this power to commit genocide in Xinjiang, flood our communities with fentanyl, and emit by far the largest quantity of greenhouse

gases in the world today. With their absolute control of Chinese society and industry, the CCP could stop all of these destructive actions tomorrow if they so choose. Is the Chinese Communist Party a threat to the United States?

Answer. Under President Xi, the Chinese Communist Party has become more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad. We will defend U.S. national security and advance our values and prosperity; defend international law, agreements, principles, and institutions that maintain peace and security; protect the rights of individuals and sovereign nations; and make it possible for all countries to coexist and cooperate. If confirmed, I will continue our work with Albania to strengthen democratic values and the commitment to a rules-based international order.

Question. Does the Chinese Communist Party undertake any activities that are beneficial to U.S. interests?

Answer. While the United States and the People's Republic of China (PRC) are strategic competitors, it may be possible for the PRC to make constructive contributions toward solving challenges we and other countries face in common. Any PRC contributions must be scrutinized, however, to ensure they are neither springboards for narrow PRC economic interests nor platforms to create more permissive conditions for its own authoritarian model.

Question. Do you believe that there are any areas within which the Chinese Communist Party would constructively work with the United States in good faith?

Answer. While the United States competes vigorously with the PRC where we differ, the United States manages this competition responsibly. This includes maintaining openness to cooperation with Beijing where our interests may overlap and where our cooperation can advance solutions to transnational challenges, including possibly climate change, counter-narcotics, pandemic threats, non-proliferation, food security, and macroeconomics.

Question. If confirmed, will you approve any joint activity with organizations or representatives from the People's Republic of China in the countries or organizations in which you will work?

Answer. In line with the Administration's approach on competition and cooperation with the People's Republic of China, if confirmed, I would maintain openness to U.S. involvement in cooperative efforts that involve PRC entities, Albania, and third countries or international organizations in areas where our collective interests align. That said, I would scrutinize and encourage third parties to scrutinize any such arrangements to ensure they follow international norms, feature transparency, and delineate steps to verify regularly that all parties are working in good faith.

Question. The U.S. and Albania maintain excellent relations and the U.S. enjoys favorable views from Albanian citizens. They agreed to host Afghan evacuees from the U.S. departure from Afghanistan and is a likeminded U.S. partner regarding Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Since the early 1990s, the U.S. has provided more than \$1 billion in assistance to Albania regarding development, bolstering civil society, and security assistance. How can the U.S. further strengthen bilateral cooperation with Albania?

Answer. Advancing reform of Albania's judiciary is a key U.S. priority. Albania has undertaken a major, sweeping justice reform effort to make progress toward EU membership and the future Albanians demand and deserve. Judicial reform will create a stable, more prosperous partner with healthy, strong democratic institutions and a better place for U.S. businesses to invest and do business. If confirmed, I will do my part to help our partner reach its full potential.

The United States has recently committed approximately \$50 million in cybersecurity assistance to Albania's civilian and military sectors—one of our largest cyber support contributions to any individual country to date.

The U.S.-Albania business relationship also continues to grow. More U.S. companies are interested in doing business in Albania primarily in priority sectors—energy, tourism, and Information and Communications Technology (ICT). Our trade volume with Albania is currently small, and there are opportunities to expand in several sectors, including energy, tourism, and ICT. If confirmed, I commit to helping the Government of Albania improve transparency, rule of law, and security and political functionality to further improve the investment climate.

Question. If confirmed, how will you mitigate external authoritarian influence in concert with Albania?

Answer. This Administration supports a free and active exchange of ideas that will strengthen democracy, expand good governance, enshrine the rule of law, and

cement independence and integrity in the judicial sector in Albania. These efforts help to close vulnerabilities to malign outside actors.

A well-informed citizenry is key to strong democratic institutions. If confirmed, I will use the full range of options, including exchange programs, investigative journalist training initiatives, English language education, media literacy programs, and grants to civil society to deepen our engagement in Albania, reinforce objective and independent analysis, strengthen the fight against combat corruption, and promote information literacy.

I will also press the Albanian Government and political parties to advance electoral reforms, especially those recommended by the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights to ensure free and fair elections. U.S. assistance to Albania's new justice institutions bolsters Albania's resilience not only against corruption, but also against malign influence.

Question. If confirmed, what are your plans to counter corruption and organized crime in Albania?

Answer. U.S. assistance helps Albania deter threats, strengthen its democratic institutions, and push the necessary reforms to advance Albania's Euro-Atlantic integration. I support efforts to combat transnational organized crime and counter terrorism, strengthen judicial and other government institutions, bolster civil society and independent media, promote government transparency, and stiffen the fight against corruption. If not remedied, rule of law deficits and corruption in the judiciary will constrain Albania's EU membership progress, its economic development, and democratic consolidation.

With U.S. Government assistance, Albania established in 2016 the Special Anti-Corruption Body (SPAK), a specialized anti-corruption and organized crime entity. SPAK consists of a Special Anti-Corruption and Organized Crime Prosecutor's Office (SPO) and a National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) modeled on the FBI. SPAK has arrested former ministers, sitting members of Parliament, judges, police, prosecutors, mayors, and organized crime kingpins. If confirmed, I will continue U.S. support for the SPAK.

Question. Last year, Albania suffered a cyberattack that the U.S. Government determined to have originated in Iran. The attack was so damaging that Albania considered invoking NATO's Article 5. These attacks are believed to be retribution for Albania's decision to host members of an anti-Ayatollah group, the National Council of Resistance to Iran. If confirmed, what will you do to ensure the United States supports Albania's efforts to strengthen its cyber security?

Answer. The Biden administration places alliances at the center of U.S. foreign policy and actively works to ensure these alliances reflect and respond to the world we face, in order to make us stronger and safer.

Since our October 2022 Strategic Dialogue, the Biden administration has worked with Albanian and U.S. experts to refine Albania's cyber needs and establish a roadmap for a strong and resilient whole-of-government cyber ecosystem. The United States has committed approximately \$50 million in cybersecurity assistance to Albania's civilian and military sectors—one of our largest cyber support contributions to any individual country to date. This is not only a response to the recent attacks, but a continuation of long-standing U.S. support for Albania's cyber capacity development goals, a commitment I intend to carry into the future.

Question. How can the United States support Albania to stand up to future attempts by Iran to punish or coerce the Albanian Government?

Answer. NATO is the strongest military alliance in history, as critical to ensuring the safety of the American people today as at any time since its founding more than 70 years ago. The Administration is committed to working with NATO Allies to strengthen our defenses in cyber space and to produce and secure the technologies of the future. NATO joined the United States and other partners making public statements of support for Albania in the wake of the attack.

If confirmed, I will continue work to strengthen the NATO Alliance's capacity to address all threats to transatlantic security, including the malign use of emerging and disruptive technologies, malicious cyber and hybrid operations (including misinformation, disinformation, and weaponized corruption), and other challenges to the rules-based international order.

Question. Given this blatant attack on Albania, an American ally, do you support the Biden administration's continued attempts to negotiate a nuclear deal with Iran?

Answer. The Biden administration has made clear its commitment to never allowing Iran to acquire a nuclear weapon and believes diplomacy is the best way to

achieve that goal, which I support. The Administration's diplomatic efforts on Iran's nuclear program have gone hand in hand with pressure on the regime to curb its destabilizing activities. If confirmed, I will continue to advance strong U.S. support of our NATO Ally Albania to strengthen its defense in cyber space and guard against Iran's destabilizing behavior.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO DAVID J. KOSTELANCIK BY SENATOR JEANNE SHAHEEN

Question. If confirmed, how can the United States, through its U.S. assistance to Albania, support its EU membership aspirations? Are there particular areas where the United States can support Albania in addressing remaining reforms?

Answer. U.S. assistance helps Albania deter threats, strengthen its democratic institutions, and push the necessary reforms to advance Albania's Western integration. Our programs support combatting transnational organized crime and countering terrorism, strengthening judicial and other government institutions, and bolstering civil society (with an emphasis on youth) and independent media to promote government transparency and counter endemic corruption. Weak rule of law traditions and a corrupt judicial system are key constraints not only to EU membership, but also to economic development, democratic consolidation, and stability.

With U.S. Government assistance, Albania established in 2016 the Special Anti-Corruption Body (SPAK), a specialized anti-corruption and organized crime entity. SPAK consists of a Special Anti-Corruption and Organized Crime Prosecutor's Office (SPO) and a National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) modeled on the FBI. SPAK has arrested former ministers, sitting members of Parliament, judges, police, prosecutors, mayors, and organized crime kingpins.

U.S. resources help accelerate Albania's EU integration through targeted investment in areas left unaddressed by the EU's growing assistance, including through assistance with cyber security, COVID-19, wildfire emergencies, education, health, social support services to Afghan evacuees, and food security in the wake of the Ukraine invasion.

Question. If confirmed, how will you work with the Government of Albania, local organizations, and the individuals themselves to ensure that the remaining Afghans are able to transit safely to the United States?

Answer. Albania was the first European country to offer to host at-risk Afghan travelers in August 2021, and it has provided temporary protective status for almost 3,000 Afghans and their families to date.

I will continue our work with USG colleagues to provide care and sustainment for these individuals and their families as we evaluate their applications for resettlement to the United States or other suitable locations.

Albania has been an excellent partner in assisting our Afghan allies and has expressed a willingness to continue the partnership into the future.

Question. Can you outline how the United States has supported Albania in responding to the attacks, and if confirmed, how will you support Albania in strengthening their cyber defenses?

Answer. The Biden administration has placed alliances at the center of U.S. foreign policy and is actively working to ensure these alliances reflect and respond to the world we face, in order to make us stronger and safer.

Since our October 2022 Strategic Dialogue, the Biden administration has worked with Albanian and U.S. experts to refine Albania's cyber needs and establish a roadmap for a strong and resilient whole-of-government cyber ecosystem. The United States has committed approximately \$50 million in cybersecurity assistance to Albania's civilian and military sectors—one of our largest cyber support contributions to any individual country to date. This funding is not only in response to the recent attacks, but also a continuation of U.S. support for Albania's cyber capacity development goals, a commitment I intend to carry into the future.

Question. Can you provide an update on discussions with regard to Albania's offer of a NATO military port at Porto Romano?

Answer. Albania is a valued NATO Ally, and we appreciate its contributions to regional security. NATO's ongoing refurbishment of Albania's Kucova Air Base will directly support NATO air operations in the region. Discussions on Porto Romano as we review, along with NATO, technical specifications and designs Albania pro-

vided. Any final decision regarding the Porto Romano offer, or any other offer to NATO, will be made by NATO Allies collectively.

Question. Can you offer your assessment of the Open Balkans initiative? Does the United States continue to support the Open Balkans Initiative?

Answer. We see the future of all the Western Balkan countries in the European Union, so advancing these countries European integration remains a U.S. priority. If confirmed, I will support all economic integration efforts, including the Open Balkans initiative, that advance the region's European path and benefit all citizens of the region.

Question. How does the Open Balkan initiative fit within the domestic and foreign policy priorities for the Albanian Government?

Answer. Albanian Prime Minister Rama publicly advocates for the Open Balkan Initiative as a strong vehicle for regional integration and, eventually, Western Balkan integration into the European Union. The United States supports regional integration measures that align with EU accession priorities. Public support in Albania for EU integration remains around 90 percent, and the latest EU Commission report shows Albania progressing well on its accession process.

NOMINATIONS

THURSDAY, MAY 4, 2023

U.S. SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS,
Washington, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:17 a.m., in Room 419, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Robert Menendez, chairman of the committee, presiding.

Present: Senators Menendez [presiding], Cardin, Shaheen, Murphy, Kaine, Booker, Van Hollen, Risch, Ricketts, Young, Cruz, and Hagerty.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. ROBERT MENENDEZ, U.S. SENATOR FROM NEW JERSEY

The CHAIRMAN. This hearing of the Senate Foreign Relations committee will come to order. Let me congratulate all the nominees before us today on your nominations. Let me welcome your family members and friends who are part of the sacrifice of serving.

Whether in the Western Hemisphere or the Middle East, your service will come at a challenging time for the United States. We are facing growing instability and competition around the world.

That is why our diplomatic engagement, our cooperation with allies and partners, our efforts to counter the coercive policies of authoritarian states, these are more critical than ever for U.S. national security. Now, despite this, we see House Republicans hurtling towards debt default.

Their plan would not only undermine the United States' ability to compete with China, but by cutting funding for the State Department, USAID, and other agencies on the front lines, it would undermine our ability to protect and advance U.S. foreign policy.

I hope today's nominees will not take this lack of commitment to advancing American interests on the part of those who view that as the appropriate path as a reflection of our committee's respect for the work that you do all over the world. Indeed, the posts today's nominees must fill are critical, and I want to thank each of you, and as I have said, your families, for your willingness to serve our country.

Mr. Brown, Ecuador is experiencing a political turbulence that has implications for democracy and the Americas. President Lasso is as close a partner of the United States as you can get. President Biden receives him at the White House in December. That same week, Congress passed my U.S. Ecuador partnership to deepen cooperation between our two countries.

The United States must always stand with democratic leaders who share our values and work to improve the quality of life for their citizens. We need an ambassador that will work with President Lasso to confront organized crime and drug trafficking, to support his efforts to address climate change and protect Ecuador's environment for all of its citizens and support our governments and our private sectors to work together to promote inclusive economic growth for both nations.

And I look forward to hearing you on that. Ms. Syptak-Ramnath, is that the correct pronunciation?

Ms. SYPTAK-RAMNATH. Syptak-Ramnath.

The CHAIRMAN. Syptak, Syptak-Ramnath, okay.

Ms. SYPTAK-RAMNATH. Yes.

The CHAIRMAN. If confirmed, you will be taking over the U.S. Embassy in Lima, as the country has been rocked by protests that have left more than 50 people dead. In December, Peru raised a significant political crisis when former President Castillo resorted to unconstitutional measures in an illegal attempt to dissolve Peru's Congress.

President Castillo was legally removed from office, but the political tensions remain. I look forward to hearing from you about how the United States can best engage diplomatically in this context, and how you will work to strengthen the principles shared by our countries, as well as address the mutual concerns of our citizens.

Mr. Nyhus, the assignment to Bridgetown is incredibly important. You would not only serve as our representative to Barbados, but also as our Ambassador to Antigua, Barbuda, Dominica, Grenada, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent, and the Grenadines, but you only get one salary. I just want you to know.

[Laughter.]

The CHAIRMAN. At the time of growing geopolitical competition, it is incredibly important that we double down on our relationships with our closest democratic partners, including our neighbors in the Caribbean. We must continue to advance our relationship based on our shared values, economic ties, and the bonds between our people.

I look forward to hearing about how the United States can further strengthen our relationship with the governments of Barbados and Prime Minister Mia Mottley, who is a global leader on climate change and the environment. This is an incredibly important assignment because of the breadth and scope—each of those countries have a vote in some of our, as Senator Cantwell has pointed out to us on several times.

Ms. Lempert, I am proud and pleased to see you are the President's nominee to our Ambassador to Jordan, a longstanding strategic U.S. partner in the region. As someone who has spent her entire public service career working on issues facing the Middle East, for both Republican and Democratic Administrations, whether it was your leadership as the key U.S. negotiator, the ten year memorandum of understanding between the United States and Israel, securing the largest package of assistance in the history of our bilateral relationship, or your work to build on the historic Abraham Accords as the Administration's point person on the negative

framework, your experiences will serve you well in leading our Embassy in Amman.

I am a lifelong advocate for a strong U.S., Israel relationship, and I know you are as well, and I look forward to your leadership as we build even stronger relationships between Israel and her neighbors, including Jordan.

In closing, I must note that there is one nominee not on this panel that I hope we can get to at some point. A couple of our colleagues have consistently come up to me. And that is Ambassador Jean Manes for Columbia. She is a consummate diplomat, professional. It has been nearly a year since our former Ambassador departed Bogota. The U.S., Colombia relationship is too important not to have a confirmed Ambassador.

**STATEMENT OF HON. JAMES E. RISCH,
U.S. SENATOR FROM IDAHO**

Senator RISCH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate those remarks. And I am going to start with the nomination of Ambassador to Ecuador. Ecuador is a democratic partner facing immense pressures from political forces controlled by former President Correa, bad Chinese deals made by Correa a decade ago, and violent Mexican cartels seeking access to Europe through the Ecuadorian ports.

The United States has a national interest in a stable and prosperous Ecuador. As such, I have joined Chairman Menendez on legislative efforts to deepen our economic relations and security cooperation with Ecuador.

I look forward to hearing from Mr. Brown on how the United States can best support Ecuador as it works to successfully emerge from these crises. On the nomination of Ambassador to Peru. Peru is another democratic partner facing a decade's long political crisis worsened by President Castillo's failed self-coup attempt in December, economic and social pressures related to the regional illegal migration crisis, and growing security threats from transnational organized crime.

I hope to hear from the nominee how her experiences in other challenging places, as such as Mexico and Mali, will inform her priorities and efforts in Lima.

Turning to the nomination of Ambassador to Barbados and the long list of other countries that the nominee will represent us in.

The United States has enjoyed a strong and mutually beneficial relations with the nations of the Eastern Caribbean for a very long time. Their stable democracies are an example for the rest of the continent. We certainly hope that stays that way.

Overall, in the region, despite our shared democratic values, the region is a battleground against malign influences from China and transnational criminal organizations. I look forward to hearing from the nominee on how we can maximize our shared values and interests to keep the Caribbean an open and thriving part of the Americas.

Finally, turning to the nomination of Ambassador to Jordan, the Kingdom is an essential U.S. partner in an often turbulent region. It is clear the Middle East is rapidly changing, and strategic competition is alive and well. I think the king, who meets with us regu-

larly, both myself and the chairman, works very hard to keep our relationship strong and we want to keep it that way.

As China continues to make inroads with our long-standing partners, it is vitally important that we have diplomats who are ready to roll up their sleeves and compete in the Middle East, and I look forward to hearing your thoughts on that.

As to the Manes Columbia nomination, Mr. Chairman, thank you for your remarks.

I am subject to the same input that you are regarding the nomination from some of our members. But I am getting it both ways. And I have to say that our staff on our side has received complaints about Ms. Manes' leadership ability, interagency management style, and judgment while serving as Ambassador in charge in El Salvador.

These are serious matters that we are continuing to look into. Moreover, the state IG conducted a board of investigation into her questionable leadership and judgment. While the State IG recently closed its investigation, I am really disturbed that Manes was not forthcoming about the nature of the IG investigation on her questionnaire or in the meetings with my staff.

We all know Colombia is a critically important post. It requires the highest levels of leadership, skill, and interagency cooperation, and there are indications there that the country is not going in a good direction that we would like to see. Given the aforementioned concerns, I have more vetting work to do before putting her on a hearing, and I am not going to commit to that, to agreeing to the hearing, but you and I will discuss that some more.

I will work in good faith in that regard, but I want to underscore the concerns I have got. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Well, thank you, Senator Risch, for those remarks. Let me just say with reference to Ambassador Manes, of course, I respect your prerogative and your right to have serious vetting.

I just hope that at some point the vetting can come to a conclusion, whatever that conclusion is, and that we bring the nominee before the committee and ask her tough questions at the end of the day, and that she has her hearing. But I will look forward to working with you to get to that point.

Senator RISCH. Thank you. Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. We have the distinguished Chair of the Commerce committee with us to introduce one of our nominees, so we are going to recognize Senator Cantwell first.

Senator CANTWELL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you to you and Ranking Member Risch for holding this hearing today and for putting the nomination of Roger Nyhus before the committee.

I represent one of the most trade dependent states in the United States. To me, this committee is a very important committee in furthering the agenda of opening up markets and having good relations around the globe. I will say, as the chair of the Chips and Science Conference report, one of my big laments is that we were not able to get over the goal line, the very important work that this committee contributed, particularly in the Indo-Pacific area.

And it is my hope that we will be able to do that this year, so I look forward to working with you. I want to thank you for allow-

ing me to introduce Roger Nyhus, who I have worked with and known for many years, and wholeheartedly support his nomination to the U.S. Ambassador to seven sovereign nations of the Eastern Caribbean.

Roger has made a mark in Washington as a business and civic leader, also an advocate for the LGBT community, his Native American tribe, the Chinook Nation, and many others. As a professional communicator, his core skills as an Ambassador, I think, will be to communicate these priorities of the United States.

He earned a bachelor's degree from the famous Edward R. Murrow College of Communication at Washington State University, and he grew up in a small fishing village of Westport on Washington's Pacific Coast. That gave him a keen idea about understanding the life and economies of natural resources and tourism, like the areas that he will have to represent.

This background, combined with a proven ability to solve complex problems and manage issues that cut across the public and private sectors, which really require building trust, having diverse stakeholders come to the table, and having people who can help communicate the issues and priorities. Rodger's career has prepared him for that role.

Over three decades, he has represented clients in advancing global commerce engagement and exchange, is the founder of NCO of Nyhus Communications, a leading PR firm in the Pacific Northwest, that he grew to the eighth largest Native American owned company in Washington.

He also served as communications director for our former Governor Locke, Seattle Mayor Paul Schell, and advocacy officer for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. I think these experiences give him the critical skills as an Ambassador to this important area that you and the ranking member just articulated.

We cannot leave this to just other nations, particularly China, to advocate. We need representation and to say what the great Americas mean for all of us in the United States in that region, so I thank the committee for this opportunity.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Cantwell, for that strong introduction. And I know that you have other things to do, so feel free to excuse yourself whenever you—

Senator CANTWELL. Well, unless Senator Risch has any questions.

Senator RISCH. I was actually going to have her put under oath for the questions—

Senator CANTWELL. Yes.

[Laughter.]

Senator CANTWELL. I was going to tell the committee that we greatly support moving forward on the Columbia River Treaty. So, thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. She would be a formidable challenge, I can tell you, Senator Risch.

Senator RISCH. Oh, how well I know.

The CHAIRMAN. All right. We will turn to our nominees. I would ask you to summarize your statements in about five minutes or so, so that the committee can engage in a conversation with you. Your

full statements will be included in the record, without objection. And, Mr. Nyhus, we will start with you and just go down the line.

STATEMENT OF ROGER F. NYHUS TO BE AMBASSADOR OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO BARBADOS, SAINT KITTS AND NEVIS, SAINT LUCIA, ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA, THE COMMONWEALTH OF DOMINICA, GRENADA, AND SAINT VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES

Mr. NYHUS. Chairman Menendez, Ranking Member Risch, and distinguished members of the committee, I am grateful to appear before you as President Biden's nominee to be the U.S. Ambassador to Barbados and six other sovereign nations.

If confirmed, I would represent the United States and the American people to these seven island nations. I would like to thank my two Senators, Senator Murray, Patty Murray, and Senator Maria Cantwell, who you just heard from, for their support and friendship. I am especially grateful to Senator Cantwell for her leadership and her introduction. I am the proud product of rural America.

I grew up in West Port, Washington, a small fishing and tourist town on the Pacific Ocean. Oceans and coastal communities are in my blood. I am the son of a Native American mom and a Norwegian American fisherman dad. My family fish for salmon, tuna, Dungeness and king crab, shrimp and bottom fish, frequently miles off the Pacific coast for days and weeks at a time. My tribe, the Chinook Indian Nation, is legendary.

My ancestors greeted explorers Lewis and Clark at the mouth of the mighty Columbia River more than 200 years ago. Chinook means strong fighter, and if confirmed, I commit to being a strong fighter for the United States, the American people, our shared democratic values, our strategic interests, as well as those priorities that we work on with the Eastern Caribbean. I am from the nation's most trade dependent state.

Throughout my career, I have been a strong and effective advocate for international trade and economic development in rural, urban, and diverse communities. Over three decades, I grew my strategic communications business to represent Seattle's most successful and impactful companies, Fortune 500 companies, startups, nonprofits. I advise organizations on how to solve complex business issues, solve crises, and grow their business in the United States and abroad.

If confirmed, I am eager to put my private sector expertise and connections to use for the American people. This ambassadorship is unique in the world, representing the United States to these seven island nations, these sovereign countries, allies, right here in our own hemisphere.

The countries of the Eastern Caribbean, Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines comprise a vital political and economic region. Due to their close geographic proximity, and our shared historical and cultural ties, these countries play an outsized role in many important areas. If confirmed, my priorities are clear.

First, hundreds of thousands of American tourists visit the Eastern Caribbean each year. If confirmed, my paramount duty will be

to ensure the safety and security of these visitors, as well as the 16,000 Americans who call the region home. This includes addressing the illegal trafficking of narcotics, people, and guns in the region.

And specifically, I will work to deepen our security and law enforcement partnerships through the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative. Second, I will ensure that the United States effectively competes with the People's Republic of China and remains the partner of choice, the preferred partner in the Eastern Caribbean.

These seven countries are on the front lines of Beijing's global power projection through its ever-expanding trade, investment ties, and diplomatic presence, as well as the PRC's ongoing push to limit Taiwan international engagement. I will work to be a strong advocate for our positive U.S. agenda, and an active and visible countering force to the PRC's efforts.

Third, these small island nations are facing a unique and evolving climate and energy challenges. I am committed to working with each country on specific solutions, employing American technology and innovation.

And through the U.S. initiatives such as PACC 2030, the Partnership to Address the Climate Crisis. It is in our national interest to help these countries become more resilient to the effects of climate change and support their transition to renewable fuels, including by increasing their access to finance.

Finally, drawing on my broad private sector expertise, if confirmed, I would support U.S. business interests in the region. I would be their number one advocate and help identify new and expanded opportunities for American innovation and investment.

I look forward to leading the strong and experienced team of professionals at the mission, if I am confirmed, and collaborating closely with this committee and your staff, and together we will advance U.S. interests that benefit the American people in this very important region so close to our shores. I am happy to answer your questions. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Nyhus follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF ROGER F. NYHUS

Chairman Menendez, Ranking Member Risch, and distinguished Members of the committee. I am grateful to appear before you as President Biden's nominee to be the U.S. Ambassador to Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean. If confirmed, I would represent the United States and the American people in seven island nations.

I would like to thank the two senators from my home state of Washington—Senator Maria Cantwell and Senator Patty Murray—for their support. I am especially grateful to Sen. Cantwell for her leadership, kind introduction, and partnership over many years.

Rural America

I am the proud product of rural America. I grew up in Westport, Washington, a small fishing and tourist town on the Pacific Ocean. Oceans and coastal communities are in my blood. I am the son of a Native American Mom and a Norwegian-American fisherman Dad. My family fished for salmon, tuna, Dungeness and king crab, shrimp, and bottom fish, frequently miles off the Pacific Coast for days or weeks at a time.

Family

My tribe—the Chinook Indian Nation—is legendary. My ancestors greeted explorers Lewis and Clark at the mouth of the mighty Columbia River more than 200 years ago. Chinook means “strong fighter,” and, if confirmed, I commit to being a

strong fighter for the United States, the American people, our strategic interests and democratic values, as well as our shared priorities in the Eastern Caribbean.

Private Sector Experience

I am from the nation's most trade-dependent state. Throughout my career, I have been a strong and effective advocate for international trade and economic development in rural, urban, and diverse communities. I have represented numerous clients in advancing global commercial engagement and people-to-people exchange.

Over three decades, I grew my strategic communications business to represent Seattle's most successful and impactful Fortune 500 companies, startups, and non-profits. I advised organizations on how to navigate complex business issues, manage crises, and grow in the United States and overseas. If confirmed, I am eager to put my private sector expertise and connections to use for the American people.

Post Priorities

This U.S. ambassadorship is unique in the world—representing the United States to seven sovereign nations right here in our own hemisphere. The countries of the Eastern Caribbean—Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines—comprise a vital political and economic region. Due to their close geographic proximity and our shared historical and cultural ties, these countries play an outsized role in many important areas.

If confirmed, my priorities are clear:

First, hundreds of thousands of American tourists visit the Eastern Caribbean each year. If confirmed, my paramount duty will be to ensure the safety and security of these visitors as well as the many thousands of Americans who call the region home. This includes addressing the illegal trafficking of narcotics, people, and guns in the region. Specifically, I will work to deepen our security and law enforcement partnerships with the Eastern Caribbean through the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative.

Second, I will ensure that the United States effectively competes with the People's Republic of China and remains the partner of choice in the Eastern Caribbean. These seven countries are on the frontlines of Beijing's global power projection through ever-expanding trade, investment ties and diplomatic presence, as well as the PRC's ongoing push to limit Taiwan international engagement. I will work to be a strong advocate for our positive U.S. agenda, and an active and visible countering force to the PRC's efforts.

Third, these small island nations are facing unique and evolving climate and energy challenges. I am committed to working with each country on specific solutions employing American technology and innovation, and through U.S. initiatives such as the Partnership to Address the Climate Crisis (PACC 2030). It is in our national interest to help these nations become more resilient to the effects of climate change and support their transition to renewable fuels, including by increasing their access to finance.

Finally, drawing on my broad private sector experience, if confirmed, I would support U.S. business interests in the region and help identify new and expanded opportunities for American innovation and investment.

Conclusion

If confirmed, I look forward to leading the strong and experienced team of professionals at the mission and collaborating closely with this committee and its staff. Together, we will advance U.S. interests and benefit the American people in this important region so close to our shores. I am happy to answer your questions. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you. Ms. Lempert.

STATEMENT OF Yael Lempert to be Ambassador of the United States of America to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan

Ms. LEMPERT. Chairman Menendez, Ranking Member Risch, distinguished members of the committee, it is an honor to appear before you today as President Biden's nominee to serve as a U.S. Ambassador to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. I would like to thank the President and the Secretary of State for the confidence that they have shown in me with this nomination.

If confirmed, I look forward to working with this committee and the Congress more broadly on U.S. interests in Jordan. Since joining the Foreign Service 25 years ago, I have spent most of my career working either in or on the Middle East and North Africa, including in Iraq, Egypt, Libya, and Israel, as well as in domestic assignments at the State Department, and on the national security staff under three Presidents.

It is impossible to sufficiently express my appreciation to my family for their stalwart support throughout my career, especially to my husband, Andrea, who is here today, and our wonderful daughter Bianca, who is on her sixth-grade field trip to New York City, so is not here, who are most impacted by this itinerant lifestyle. And to my parents and siblings, who no matter how much worry I caused them, serving in a post war zone and through a revolution, always supported me in this life of serving our country.

I want to particularly recognize my late father, U.S. Air Force captain and ophthalmologist Philip Lempert, who instilled in me a devotion to public service and always believed in me and that I would reach this day. As President Biden has said, the role Jordan plays as a force for stability in the Middle East cannot be overstated.

The strategic partnership between the United States and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is key to advancing U.S. priorities throughout the region and to promoting regional security and stability.

The United States has a profound interest in supporting the political and economic reform agenda laid out by the Jordanian government to address persistent economic, environmental, and regional challenges, from unemployment, to water scarcity, to the spillover effects of the crisis in Syria. U.S. priorities in Jordan are focused on supporting economic growth, strengthening water security, and deepening our strong security cooperation.

These goals are advanced through our new seven-year assistance MOU, which supports key reforms centered on improving the lives of Jordanians, including essential public services, tackling the water crisis, and expanding economic opportunities.

Thanks to strong Congressional support, U.S. economic assistance to Jordan using Fiscal Years 2023 funds includes over \$1.2 billion aimed at bolstering Jordan's stability and strengthening our partnership.

If confirmed, I will work with Jordanian leaders, the IMF, and others to support Jordan's reform and modernization efforts, and to ensure that our assistance package is used effectively. As a major non-NATO ally and crucial member of the global coalition to defeat ISIS, Jordan has long been a key ally in the fight against terrorism, while also supporting international peacekeeping efforts and providing humanitarian assistance.

Our new MOU includes a minimum of \$400 million annually in foreign military financing for Jordan, making it among the largest recipients of FMF globally. This funding bolsters Jordan's capacity to play a stabilizing role in the Middle East.

It helps to address emerging threats and ensures continued operability—interoperability with U.S. and coalition forces. Jordan has long offered a refuge to those displaced by regional conflicts and

crises, most recently in the extraordinary generosity that the Jordanian government and its people have shown to Syrians.

The United States has contributed over \$2.2 billion in humanitarian aid to Syrian refugees in Jordan since the conflict in Syria began. If confirmed, I will continue to advocate for humanitarian assistance from our partners and the international fora to promote burden sharing and ensure that we collectively provide for those in need.

I will also promote regional integration and support Jordan's important role in contributing to regional peace and prosperity. Next year marks 30 years since Jordan signed its historic peace treaty with Israel.

Jordan's commitment to working towards peace between Israelis and Palestinians, as well as partnering with the United States and others to advance de-escalation efforts, is indispensable. The U.S. Embassy in Jordan is among the largest in the world, with a talented, dedicated, and diverse team of American and local staff that, if confirmed, I would be so proud to lead.

The safety and security of the embassy team and of U.S. citizens in Jordan, including the over 33,000 Americans residing there and the more than 150,000 American tourists who visit annually, will always be my foremost priority.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Risch, and distinguished members of the committee, if confirmed, I will work to further strengthen the vital U.S., Jordan partnership, and to ensure that it serves U.S. interests and reflects U.S. values. I thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today, and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Lempert follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF Yael LEMPERT

Chairman, Ranking Member, distinguished Members of the committee, it is an honor to appear before you today as President Biden's nominee to serve as the U.S. Ambassador to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. I would like to thank the President and the Secretary of State for the confidence they have shown in me with this nomination. If confirmed, I look forward to working with this committee, and the Congress more broadly, on U.S. interests in Jordan.

Since joining the Foreign Service 25 years ago I have spent most of my career working either in or on the Middle East and North Africa, including in Iraq, Egypt, Libya, and Israel, as well as in domestic assignments at the State Department and on the National Security Council staff under three Presidents. It is impossible to sufficiently express my appreciation to my family for their stalwart support throughout my career, especially to my husband, Andrea, and our wonderful daughter, Bianca, who are most impacted by this itinerant lifestyle, and to my parents and siblings, who—no matter how much worry I caused them, serving in a post-war zone and through a revolution—always supported me in this life of serving our country. I want to particularly recognize my late father, U.S. Air Force Captain and ophthalmologist Philip Lempert, who instilled in me a devotion to public service, and always believed in me and that I would reach this day.

As President Biden has said, "The role Jordan plays as a force for stability in the Middle East can't be overstated." The strategic partnership between the United States and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is key to advancing U.S. priorities throughout the region, and to promoting regional security and stability. The United States has a profound interest in supporting the political and economic reform agenda laid out by the Jordanian government to address persistent economic, environmental, and regional challenges—from unemployment to water scarcity to the spill-over effects of the crisis in Syria.

U.S. priorities in Jordan are focused on supporting economic growth, strengthening water security, and deepening our strong security cooperation. These goals are

advanced through our new seven-year assistance MOU, which supports key reforms centered on improving the lives of Jordanians—including essential public services, tackling the water crisis, and expanding economic opportunities. Thanks to strong Congressional support, U.S. economic assistance to Jordan using Fiscal Year 2023 funds includes over \$1.2 billion aimed at bolstering Jordan's stability and strengthening our partnership. If confirmed, I will work with Jordanian leaders, the IMF and others to support Jordan's reform and modernization efforts and to ensure that our assistance package is used effectively.

As a Major Non-NATO Ally and crucial member of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, Jordan has long been a key ally in the fight against terrorism, while also supporting international peacekeeping efforts and providing humanitarian assistance. Our new MOU includes a minimum of \$400 million annually in Foreign Military Financing for Jordan, making it among the largest recipients of Foreign Military Financing globally. This funding bolsters Jordan's capacity to play a stabilizing role in the Middle East, helps to address emerging threats and ensures continued interoperability with U.S. and Coalition forces.

Jordan has long offered a refuge to those displaced by regional conflicts and crises, most recently in the extraordinary generosity that the Jordanian government and its people have shown to Syrians. The United States has contributed over \$2.2 billion in humanitarian aid to Syrian refugees in Jordan since the conflict in Syria began. If confirmed, I will continue to advocate for humanitarian assistance from our partners and in international fora to promote burden sharing and ensure we collectively provide for those in need. I will also promote regional integration and support Jordan's important role in contributing to regional peace and prosperity. Next year marks 30 years since Jordan signed its historic peace treaty with Israel; Jordan's commitment to working towards peace between Israelis and Palestinians, as well as partnering with the United States and others to advance de-escalation efforts, is indispensable.

The U.S. Embassy in Jordan is among the largest in the world, with a talented, dedicated, and diverse team of American and local staff that, if confirmed, I would be proud to lead. The safety and security of the Embassy team and of U.S. citizens in Jordan—including the over 33,000 Americans residing there and the more than 150,000 American tourists who visit annually—will always be my foremost priority.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and distinguished Members of the committee, if confirmed, I will work to further strengthen the vital U.S.-Jordan partnership and to ensure that it serves U.S. interests and reflects U.S. values. I thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today and I look forward to your questions.

The CHAIRMAN. Well, thank you. So far, our nominees have not been affected by the State Department's inability to stay to five minutes, so thank you very much. Mr. Brown.

STATEMENT OF ARTHUR W. BROWN TO BE AMBASSADOR OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE REPUBLIC OF ECUADOR

Mr. BROWN. Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and distinguished members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear here today as President Biden's nominee to be the next U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Ecuador.

I am grateful to President Biden and Secretary Blinken for the trust and confidence they have shown in nominating me for this position. I appear before you today, accompanied by my wife, Krista.

I would like to first publicly honor you and express my deep gratitude and love for you. We began our public service journey in West Africa, where we met in 1991, serving as Peace Corps volunteers. You in Togo, I in Benin. Krista, without your sacrifices, we would not have completed over 30 years of service with the Federal Government doing the nation's work, so thank you. It has been an honor of a lifetime to serve the United States of America.

My career as a Foreign Service Officer is taking me to Southwest Asia, Central America, Africa, and the Caribbean, showing that de-

mocracy can deliver. And if confirmed, I believe my experience will serve me well in Ecuador.

If confirmed, the safety and security and welfare of U.S. citizens and mission personnel will be my top priority. Ecuador is a strategic partner for the United States in South America as we see democratic governance under pressure around the region.

If confirmed as Ambassador, I will prioritize strengthening our bilateral relationship and bolstering cooperation with Ecuador, including supporting the U.S. Ecuador Partnership Act of 2022, and the proposed Innovation and Development in Ecuador Act, the IDEA Act.

If confirmed as the next Ambassador, I will continue the excellent work of the U.S. mission in Ecuador, working with the Ecuadorian government, the private sector, civil society institutions, the Ecuadorian citizens to advance democracy, promote human rights, and the inclusion of historically marginalized communities, and support anti-corruption and crime prevention programs, and promote inclusive economic development, environmental conservation efforts.

As cartels expand their influence, local gangs align with them engaged in open warfare to control drug trafficking routes. Such robberies have provoked the worst violence in Ecuador's recent history, with increased prison deaths and a record homicide rate in 2022.

If confirmed, I will focus on our mutual security interests to combat drug trafficking and associated violence. In addition to these challenges, there are opportunities. Ecuador joined the UN Security Council in January for the fourth time as a critical—at a critical juncture in history.

If confirmed, I will further our collaboration with the Ecuadorian government, in conjunction with our mission to the UN to support Ecuador's stance for its democratic principles. Mr. Chairman, ranking member, and members of the committee, thank you for considering my nomination today. I look forward to any questions you may have.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Brown:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF ARTHUR W. BROWN

Chairman Menendez, Ranking Member Risch, and Distinguished Members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today as President Biden's nominee to be the next U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Ecuador. I am grateful to President Biden and Secretary Blinken for the trust and confidence they have shown in nominating me for this position.

I appear before you today accompanied by my wife; Krista; I would first like to publicly honor you and express my deep gratitude and love for you. We began our public service journey in West Africa, where we met in 1991 serving as Peace Corps Volunteers (you in Togo and I in Benin). Today, we are the proud parents of Arrington (19) and Ella (15) who are in school and could not be here today. Krista, without your sacrifices, we would not have completed over 30 years of service with the federal government doing the Nation's work.

It has been the honor of a lifetime to serve the United States of America. My career as a Foreign Service Officer has taken me to southwest Asia, Central America, Africa, and the Caribbean, and if confirmed, I believe my experience will serve me well in Ecuador. I have experience in expanding public health and education programs, promoting economic development and environmental activities, and strengthening governance and rule of law projects. I have dedicated decades of service to helping countries show that democracy can deliver. I look forward to leading our dynamic interagency teams at the Embassy in Quito and our consulate in Guayaquil.

U.S. Mission Ecuador is doing amazing work advancing this important bilateral relationship, and I would use my experience, if confirmed, to bolster the team's outstanding efforts.

If confirmed, the safety and security of U.S. citizens and Mission personnel will be my top priority. I will prioritize initiatives that protect and advance the interests of U.S. citizens in Ecuador.

Ecuador is a strategic partner for the United States in South America as we see democratic governance under pressure around the region. If confirmed as Ambassador, I will support the implementation of the proposed Innovation and Development in Ecuador (IDEA) Act, and the U.S.-Ecuador Partnership Act of 2022. Strengthening our bilateral relationship and continued cooperation with Ecuador through deepening trade and commercial ties, increasing cooperation on security matters, promoting mutual and inclusive economic growth, and cooperating on issues of mutual interest will be key priorities for me.

As the United States and Ecuador confront our shared challenges, if confirmed as the next ambassador, I will work with the Government of Ecuador, the private sector, civil society institutions, and Ecuadorian citizens to advance democracy, promote human rights and the inclusion of historically marginalized communities, support anticorruption and crime prevention programs, and promote inclusive economic development and environmental conservation efforts.

Ecuador faces many challenges, including increased violence perpetrated by transnational criminal organizations. As cartels expand their influence, local gangs aligned with them engage in open warfare to control drug trafficking routes. Such rivalries have provoked the worst violence in Ecuador's recent history, with increased prison deaths and a record homicide rate in 2022. The Ecuadorian Government and the Ecuadorian people have not backed down from these drug trafficking organizations. However, they need our support. U.S. Government assistance helped Ecuador interdict hundreds of metric tons of drugs in 2022. If confirmed, I will focus on our mutual security interests, continuing initiatives led by our diplomatic mission in Ecuador to bolster the Government's efforts to combat drug trafficking and associated violence.

In addition to these challenges, there are opportunities. Ecuador joined the U.N. Security Council in January for the fourth time at a critical juncture in history. If confirmed, I will further our collaboration with the Ecuadorian Government, in conjunction with our mission to the U.N., to support Ecuador as it stands for its democratic principles.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and Members of the committee, thank you for considering my nomination today. I look forward to any questions you may have.

The CHAIRMAN. Okay. Extra time. And considering how long you have been in the State Department, you haven't been infected. So, next, we will hear from Ms. Syptak-Ramnath.

STATEMENT OF STEPHANIE SYPTAK-RAMNATH TO BE AMBASSADOR OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE REPUBLIC OF PERU

Ms. SYPTAK-RAMNATH. Chairman Menendez, Ranking Member Risch, distinguished members of the committee, I am deeply honored to be here today and grateful to President Biden and Secretary Blinken for placing their confidence in me to serve as the U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Peru.

If confirmed, I commit to working with the committee and other members of Congress to advance the interests of the United States, protect the safety of our citizens, promote democracy and human rights, and strengthen a bilateral relationship that has endured for close to 200 years.

As the daughter and granddaughter of career military officers who served our country in World War II and Vietnam, it has been an honor to dedicate the past 32 years of my life to U.S. Government service, including as an officer in the Navy. My diplomatic career has allowed me to represent the United States in Africa, Asia,

Latin America, Europe, and the Arab world, and to bring American optimism, leadership, and values to diverse audiences.

My husband, Gautam, here with us today, has joined me in this adventure and in representing the diversity and opportunity that the United States represents. My daughters, Malena and Sophia, join us in this life of commitment. I am grateful to all three for their resilience, love, and support, as well as that of Gautam's mother, Subadra Ramnath, who has been an important part of our success.

I am honored to have my father, Colonel Michael Syptak, with us today, as I am eternally grateful for his example of devotion to faith, family, and country. I would also like to pay tribute to my mother, Eileen, who I know is looking down on us from heaven. She taught me to love God first and raised me with high expectations of excellence and service.

The call to service, specifically the Foreign Service, is a tremendous responsibility to both advance U.S. policy goals and represent the very best of American values in every interaction, both public and private.

And that is my commitment to you, if confirmed, in leading U.S. engagement in Peru. Peru is experiencing a transformational moment in its history. If confirmed, I will ensure the United States remains a steadfast partner for Peru's democratic institutions and the people they serve, prioritizing human rights and ensuring understanding, inclusion, and respect in all interactions.

And we will continue to support the people and government of Peru as they work to overcome the current political instability and protect the democracy, they have fought so hard to build. Peru is home to many dual Peruvian and U.S. citizens, and an important destination for American citizen travelers, researchers, and students.

It is also a key economic partner with a two-way trade that surpasses \$22 billion and a destination for strategic U.S. investment. If confirmed, I will prioritize the protection of the more than half a million Americans who visit Peru each year. I will also work with the U.S. private sector to promote inclusive and sustainable growth, and to highlight the benefits of doing business with the United States.

Our companies promote unparalleled transparency, cutting edge technology, quality engineering, and a commitment to social and environmental responsibility. With Peru, we will continue to advance our shared climate and environmental goals, including the protection of Peru's diverse ecosystems, seek regional solutions to the challenges of irregular migration, and address the scourges of illicit drug and human trafficking and other transnational organized crime.

I thank the members of Congress for your steadfast support for U.S. aid and State Department programs in Peru. If confirmed, I pledge to continue working with you to ensure that we are good stewards of the resources provided by the American people.

I look forward to leading the extraordinary interagency team in Lima, and to benefit from the wise counsel of our more than 600 locally employed staff in understanding the diversity of the country and how we can most effectively engage.

Our locally employed staff are the heart of our diplomatic missions around the world, and any success I can claim as a U.S. diplomat is due primarily to their devotion and dedicated service. Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, thank you for considering my nomination, and I look forward to your questions. Thank you. [The prepared statement of Ms. Syptak-Ramnath follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF STEPHANIE SYPTAK-RAMNATH

Chairman Menendez, Ranking Member Risch, distinguished Members of the committee, I am deeply honored to be here today and grateful to President Biden and Secretary Blinken for placing their confidence in me to serve as the U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Peru. If confirmed, I commit to working with this committee and other Members of Congress to advance the interests of the United States, protect the safety of our citizens, promote democracy and human rights, and strengthen a bilateral relationship that has endured for close to 200 years.

As the daughter and granddaughter of career military officers who served our country in World War 2 and Vietnam, it has been an honor to dedicate the past 32 years of my life to U.S. Government service, including four years as an officer in the Navy. My diplomatic career has allowed me to represent the United States in Africa, Asia, Latin America, Europe, and the Arab world; and to bring American optimism, leadership, and values to diverse audiences.

My husband, Gautam, here with us today, has joined me in this adventure and in representing the diversity and opportunity the United States represents. My daughters, Malena and Sophia, joined us in this life of commitment to the Foreign Service. I am grateful to all three for their resilience, love, and support, as well as that of Gautam's mother, Subadra Ramnath, who has been an important part of our success.

I am honored to have my father, Col. Michael Syptak, with us today as I am eternally grateful for his example of devotion to faith, family, and country. I would also like to pay tribute to my mother, Aileen, who I know is looking down on us from heaven. She taught me to love God first and raised me with high expectations for excellence and service.

The call to service, specifically the Foreign Service, is a tremendous responsibility to both advance U.S. policy goals and represent the very best of American values in every interaction, both public and private. And that is my commitment to you, if confirmed, in leading U.S. engagement in Peru.

Peru is experiencing a transformational moment in its history. If confirmed, I will ensure the United States remains a steadfast partner for Peru's democratic institutions and the people they serve, prioritizing human rights and ensuring understanding, inclusion, and respect in all interactions. And we will continue to support the people and Government of Peru as they work to overcome the current political instability and protect the democracy they have fought so hard to build.

Peru is home to many dual Peruvian and U.S. citizens, and an important destination for American citizen travelers, researchers, and students. It is also a key economic partner, with a two-way trade that surpasses \$22 billion and a destination for strategic U.S. investment. If confirmed, I will prioritize the protection of the more than half a million Americans who visit Peru each year. I will also work with the U.S. private sector to promote inclusive and sustainable growth and to highlight the benefits of doing business with the United States. Our companies

promote unparalleled transparency, cutting edge technology, quality engineering, and a commitment to social and environmental responsibility.

With Peru, we will continue to advance our shared climate and environmental goals, including the protection of Peru's diverse ecosystems; seek regional solutions to the challenges of irregular migration; and address the scourges of illicit drug and human trafficking and other transnational organized crime that rob communities of the security required for prosperity.

I thank the members of Congress for your steadfast support for USAID and State Department projects in Peru. If confirmed, I pledge to continue working with you to ensure that we are good stewards of the resources provided by the American people as we work with our municipal, state, and federal partners in Peru to create a more secure, more prosperous, and more inclusive society.

I look forward to leading the extraordinary interagency team in Lima and to benefiting from the wise counsel of our more than 600 locally employed staff in understanding the diversity of the country and how the United States can most effectively engage. Our locally employed staff are the heart of our diplomatic missions around

the world, and any success I can claim as a U.S. diplomat is due primarily to their devotion and dedicated service.

Mr. Chairman, Members of the committee, thank you for considering my nomination. I look forward to your questions. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. This is an all-star cast. Everybody has stayed under five minutes, so. Let me, before we start a series of five-minute rounds, ask some questions on behalf of the committee as a whole that we ask of nominees, speaks to the importance the committee places on responsiveness by all officials to the Executive Branch.

And I would ask each of you just to give me a verbal yes or no to each question. Do you agree to appear before this committee and make officials from your office available to the committee and designated staff when invited?

Mr. NYHUS. Yes.

Ms. LEMPert. Yes.

Mr. BROWN. Yes.

Ms. SYPTAK-RAMNATH. Yes, Senator.

The CHAIRMAN. Do you commit to keeping the committee fully and currently informed about the activities under your purview?

Mr. NYHUS. Yes, sir.

Ms. LEMPert. Yes, Senator.

Mr. BROWN. Yes, Senator.

Ms. SYPTAK-RAMNATH. Yes, Senator.

The CHAIRMAN. Do you commit to engaging in meaningful consultation while policies are being developed, not just providing notification after the fact?

Mr. NYHUS. Yes, Senator.

Ms. LEMPert. Yes, Senator.

Mr. BROWN. Yes, Senator.

Ms. SYPTAK-RAMNATH. Yes, Senator.

The CHAIRMAN. And finally, do you commit to promptly responding to requests for briefings and information requested by the committee and its designated staff?

Mr. NYHUS. Yes, Senator.

Ms. LEMPert. Yes, Senator.

Mr. BROWN. Yes, Senator.

Ms. SYPTAK-RAMNATH. Yes, Senator.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you all. For the record, each of the nominees has responded yes to all the questions, so we will go to a series of five-minute rounds. Ms. Syptak-Ramnath, in the past seven years, Peru has had six Presidents. Pretty remarkable.

The level of political instability has significantly affected not only our efforts to strengthen bilateral relations with Peru, but the ability of Peruvian democracy to deliver results for its people, including ensuring their safety and security.

I have one of the largest Peruvian Diasporas in the nation, and I hear from them all of the time. While protests against the current Boluarte government have decreased since their height in February, President Boluarte and congress remain highly unpopular, and efforts to address citizen demands, including calls for early elections, have seemingly stalled.

Meanwhile, the Peruvian people continue to face growing security, economic, and migration challenges. So, what is your assess-

ment of the stability and viability of the Boluarte government, and what steps would you take to work with Peru to strengthen its institutions and be able to meet the ability to respond to the challenges I have just discussed?

Ms. SYPTAK-RAMNATH. Thank you, Senator, for that very important question. So, President Boluarte is in power due to the democratically authorized process in the constitution, and she is our partner in working to see how the United States can support the government and the people of Peru in emerging from this moment of instability.

I think it is critically important that we continue to work with civil society and across the many sectors of the—of Peru to ensure that we understand what the issues are at play and how we as the United States can bring our resources to bear to support both the people and the government of Peru in strengthening the institutions that have, you know, come into question as to their effectiveness.

The U.S. Embassy and thanks to Congress, we have significant resources in USAID, and I know we have a very strong military relationship. Our Peace Corps volunteers just returned to Peru. So, I think we are blessed with a number of resources to really understand what the needs of the people, of the government of Peru are and how we can support them.

The CHAIRMAN. Well, one of the issues there is the question of human rights, and I would expect you to be a strong voice in standing up for human rights within the country. Is that something we can expect?

Ms. SYPTAK-RAMNATH. Yes, Senator.

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. Brown, last year, Congress passed, and President Biden signed my U.S. Ecuador Partnership Act. It is the first standalone piece of legislation dedicated to U.S. foreign policy towards Ecuador.

The U.S. Ecuador Partnership Act requires the State Department, USAID, and other relevant agencies to submit a comprehensive strategy to Congress on how to bolster our bilateral ties, including on issues regarding countering transnational crime, inclusive economic development, protecting Ecuador's environment and natural resources.

We expect these strategies to be shared with Congress in June. If confirmed, do you commit to ensuring swift and effective implementation of these strategies and to regularly meet with my office to discuss progress on implementation?

Mr. BROWN. Thank you, Senator, for the question. Yes, to answer it specifically and directly. If confirmed as Ambassador, my approach would be a whole of Government approach. The U.S. Partnership Act for it with Ecuador is a very important legislation. The U.S. relationship with Ecuador is strong and the community development work that is going on with the people of Ecuador is strong.

Strengthening different democratic institutions and promoting inclusive economic growth, supporting environmental conservation initiatives, and expanding capabilities to address corruption and crime that is going on in Ecuador will be a primary focus.

This legislation that you authored, Senator, is something that I will be focusing on as I am—if confirmed as Ambassador there, I

will be reporting back. And I pledge to work with the committee whenever possible to highlight our successes of how we are implementing the Act.

The CHAIRMAN. Well, thank you for that. Last month I traveled to Quito and met with President Lasso during my Congressional delegation of South America. This was my second trip to Ecuador in the last six months.

This is the most democratic President aligned with the United States and its values that we have in the entire hemisphere. That is a pretty big statement. But he is besieged, as the Ecuadorian people, amid rising levels of drug trafficking, violence, targeted killings of government officials, and so much more.

So, if you are confirmed, I would ask you to engage robustly in how the United States can help Ecuador meet those challenges as a partner in our collective interests. Is that something I can expect you to do?

Mr. BROWN. Certainly, Senator. We do know right now that Ecuador is a strong partner with the United States. Our engagement, a whole of Government approach from our program with USAID, INL, OSC right now is making inroads to help strengthen some of those democratic institutions. I will be reporting back, and you can count on me and my team, the U.S. mission in Quito to be able to respond to all of those elements to help strengthen the security posture in Ecuador.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you. I will take one other minute. Ms. Lempert how do—we are both—as the ranking member said, we are very strong supporters of the U.S., Jordan relationship. We think Jordan is essential.

However, I get concerned that not only Jordan but others in the region are cozying up to Assad, and it will be a horrific global statement that after the butchery that Assad has been part of, we now invite him back without consequence. How do you see dealing with that?

Ms. LEMPERT. Thank you, Senator, for this important question. I want to be clear, our views on Assad are that he has been the source of nothing but misery for Syria and for the region. The United States will not normalize with the Assad regime, and we do not support others normalizing with Damascus.

We have made this abundantly and vocally clear to our partners, and we will continue to do so. The United States believes that a political solution, as outlined in UN Security Council Resolution 2254, is the only solution to a political crisis in Syria. There is clearly an array of views across the Arab world on engagement with the Assad regime.

We remind our partners that our sanctions architecture remains in place and will be enforced in accordance with our laws, and also of the primacy and the importance of UN Security Council Resolution 2254.

In fact, the Secretary of State is speaking with the Jordanian Foreign Minister this morning to raise our concerns and discuss the meeting that occurred in Jordan on Monday. If confirmed, this will be a priority topic of discussion.

The CHAIRMAN. Some of the statements coming out of the NSC make me worry that we are diminishing 2254, and that is not something we should do. So, I look forward to your engagement.

Before I turn to Senator Risch, I know you are known to be somewhat of a shawarma aficionado and have made the point of publicly sampling shawarma during your travels to the Middle East. I know this is going to be a sensitive question, but where is the best shawarma in the Middle East?

Ms. LEMPert. Senator, it is a deeply sensitive question, and you can get me in trouble in the region, but I think it will come as no surprise, given where I have been nominated to head to that in my opinion, it is a close contest, but Jordanian shawarma is without doubt the best shawarma in the Middle East.

The CHAIRMAN. Very well done. I am going to ask Senator Kaine to preside as the chair of the Western Hemisphere subcommittee as I go to the floor. Senator Risch.

Senator RISCH. Thank you. Ms. Lempert, obviously you have as good an understanding and knowledge of the Jordanian situation as anyone, and I am impressed with that here.

I am also impressed with your strong view on normalization with the Assad regime. It is dicey, as you know, because there is the—when we talk with the Arabs, they are soft on the issue.

They think this has gone on long enough and that normalization would be good for the region and for themselves, which frankly, you can understand. Having said that, I think we are a little more neutral on it, and in looking at what Assad has done over the years is just—it is stunning. He falls in the same category as Hitler, Putin, and himself and some others that have done some pretty bad things.

Again, I hope you will continue to give that strong statement that you have. I think that you heard the chairman, he and I share the same view on that, that this is—that this is just simply not acceptable to the United States.

These countries are going to have to deal with it as they see appropriate, but it is going to cause nothing but difficulties with us if they try to cozy up to this guy, that cannot possibly be accepted into normalcy after what he has done.

One of the things that—another concern we have as far as Jordan is concerned is, I know that you played a leading role in the Negev Forum and that—which grew out of the Abraham Accords.

And we are concerned that Jordan does not have the warm embrace maybe that it should. What are your thoughts on that?

Ms. LEMPert. First of all, Senator, let me just reiterate on Syria. I am in complete agreement with you and the chairman. And as you have heard from the Secretary of State, U.S. policy on Syria and on normalization with the Assad regime will not change. With regard to your question about Jordan, Israel relations.

I would note that the peace treaty between Jordan and Israel has been a pillar of regional stability for the past 30 years. There is a strong relationship, a relationship that is not without its strengths, like all relationships, but one that, if confirmed, I will work to strengthen and advance.

And part of that would be encouraging Jordan to participate in, among other regional integration efforts, the Negev Forum, which

as you rightly point out, is building upon the historic Abraham Accords and creating an unprecedented multilateral framework of Israel and its regional partners focused on further cementing and advancing peace.

It makes all kinds of sense for Jordan to be there. Jordan is the second Arab country that signed a peace treaty with Israel, and I will continue to encourage them to do so, just as I have in my current position.

Senator RISCH. Well, I really appreciate that. The other thing, I think from a domestic standpoint in Jordan, the chairman, I think, outlined as clearly as possible the warm relationship we enjoy with the king.

Obviously because of the demographics in the country, that is not shared by everyone in the country. And I do not know if you have thoughts on how we can ratchet that up. Obviously, he is in a better position than we are to advance it. But what—do you have any thoughts on that?

Ms. LEMPert. I am sorry, Senator. Do you mean in advancing the strike that the strengthening the U.S.—

Senator RISCH. Our Jordanians view of us. I mean, you know, we do a lot for them, but I am not sure it is fully appreciated there by the masses.

Ms. LEMPert. Senator, if confirmed, I can tell you that that is going to be a top priority for me working with our embassy team, getting out and about in Jordan, explaining the role that the United States has played in supporting the Jordanian people. And I want to get the news out about that as much as possible as we work with our Jordanian partners.

Senator RISCH. I appreciate it.

Mr. Brown, you have got a heavy lift. There are things happening in Ecuador that indicate the country is headed in the wrong direction, as you probably know.

Their coca crop was at an all-time high of 500,000 acres in the last crop. This is not a good sign because obviously that the greater the drug problem, the greater the problem it is for us, for democracy in the country and everything else.

And we have we have seen some awful examples of this on the continent. What are your thoughts on this?

Mr. BROWN. Senator, thank you for the question. If you are referring to the transport of cocaine from narcotics trafficking networks through—from Colombia and through—and from Peru, the country is really being impacted, there is no doubt about that.

But with U.S. intervention over the past year, Ecuador has been able to seize more cocaine tonnage than it has ever done.

2022 had record seizure, but there is so much more that needs to be done. The instability that is being created in the communities where drug trafficking has taken over, especially in some of the coastal communities, it is a problem.

So, if I am confirmed as Ambassador, I want to use a whole of Government approach, working with—throughout the interagency, something I have done throughout my career, to sort of figure out strategically how to engage in these communities, to work with the Government and those local communities to—it is not about just seizing cocaine being transported.

And it is not just about arresting corrupt people that are involved in narcotrafficking, but it is also about dealing with some of the root problems of why young people are choosing illicit crime and committing these acts and working with the government on that.

So, you have my firm commitment to help reduce crime and violence that is going on in Ecuador at the moment.

Senator RISCH. Well said. I would say that the record seizures are probably the result of record production, so that would explain that. I think, again, your focus on that is absolutely critical because the—obviously, it is a huge problem for Ecuador itself, but every ounce of that that leaves the country is a huge problem for the U.S. of A. So, thank you for being willing to serve there and I hope you will focus on that. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator KAINE. Thank you. Senator Cardin.

Senator CARDIN. Well, let me thank all four of you for your continued or willingness to step forward to serve our nation, and I thank your families because it truly is a family commitment.

So, thank you very much for that. There is a common thread here for the four nominees to serve in our hemisphere, and that is, as we have already talked about, drug trafficking. I was recently in Ecuador, and I am convinced that President Lasso is committed to doing what he can to help in that regard, but he will tell us the challenges he has in his neighboring countries.

And we know that the political leadership in our hemisphere is changing, and their view towards drug trafficking has changed. So, the challenge is, how do we develop a coordinated strategy, including the United States, in dealing with the narcotrafficking that comes through our hemisphere?

And so I want to ask each of the three nominees for our hemisphere, how do you intend not only to work within your country that you will be assigned to, but recognizing that we have to establish a U.S. strategy for the region, that particularly, I might tell you in Ecuador, is a challenge with the policies in Colombia where they are not exactly in sync as to how to deal with drug trafficking.

How do you represent the U.S. interests to be effective in curtailing the amount of illegal trafficking of drugs? I will start with Mr. Brown, because I think Ecuador—by the way, I think we have a very close relationship with Ecuador today, and I think we can build on that. So, how do we deal with that?

Mr. BROWN. Thank you, Senator Cardin, for the question. And to state affirmatively, President Lasso is a strong partner. Ecuador is a democratic nation, and the Ecuadorian people—the U.S. and Ecuadorian people, along with the government there, are in solidarity to confront this problem.

I think what is really important is that regionally we discuss these issues and have the correct forum to be able to discuss this from country to country. You are right, there is not a consistent policy in Colombia, in Peru that impact Ecuador. I certainly pledge as Ambassador, if I am confirmed, to help sponsor any dialog that needs to be done to help at a policy level and then in an implementation level to confront this problem.

The transnational organized crime is crippling a country like Ecuador. They are being impacted and they need additional support.

As long as I am Ambassador there, if confirmed, they will get that support.

Senator CARDIN. Before I go on to the other two nominees, I just want to underscore that in Ecuador, they are a close ally and friend. They have serious corruption issues that they have to deal with.

And in all four of your countries that you are being nominated for, we need to make sure that we are laser focused on American values and anti-corruption issues, which are challenging in all four of the regions we are talking about. So, I just want to make that point. In Peru, you have got a problem of civility on the ground. It is a challenging atmosphere in which to operate. But it is also a country that has a focus on narcotrafficking. What is your strategy?

Ms. SYPTAK-RAMNATH. Thank you, Senator. What I am learning about our efforts in Peru is that the work on coca eradication is holistic, and I think that is important. So not only are we working to help eradicate the crops, but our USAID is coming in to provide licit livelihoods, opportunities for that.

Our INL is working on community policing, rule of law. So, we really have to look at this very holistically. It is not just about destroying the crops. It is about what do we bring in afterwards to make sure that people have the ability to live prosperous and secure lives? But for your question on the regional aspect of it, you are absolutely right, Senator. And we as the United States have remarkable convening power.

And fortunately, we tend to have relationships that can bring people together. And I agree that that is something that we need to be doing just as we are trying to work on a regional basis on migration as well.

The other thing I note is USAID does have a regional office based in Lima that covers many of these countries, so there is another place that we can see how we can work together.

Senator CARDIN. Eastern Caribbean, I do not want to leave that out, but first, let me just set this up. We need to be more invested. You are right about China's influence, so we see other concerns.

We do not have the support within OAS that we would like to see among the Caribbean states. So, we have to invest more in the region itself. But drug trafficking is also an issue within the East Caribbean. Your response?

Mr. NYHUS. Absolutely. Thank you, Senator. And it is even beyond narcotics. It is guns and people as well. And I would say there is a model in the Eastern Caribbean that is working. It is called the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative.

And I know that centers Kaine and Rubio recently introduced a reauthorization funding package. That program is working. Its 13 countries, so it is really Caribbean wide. And that, from what I have learned in my briefings, I think that is a program that is worth deepening and strengthening, and it is certainly something that, if confirmed, I would spend a great deal of time on.

Senator CARDIN. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator KAINE. Thank you. Senator Ricketts.

Senator RICKETTS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And congratulations on all our nominees on being nominated for these very impor-

tant positions. And I want to say thank you for your willingness to step up and serve the United States, and especially to our career Foreign Service people. I had the privilege as Governor to travel on to a number of different countries on trade missions and was always very impressed by our Foreign Service staff.

So, I know that whatever mission you end up in, you will have great teams behind you. And also, to your families as well, because I know they all will sacrifice along with you when you are overseas. Ms. Lempert, let us start talking about Jordan. One of the things that I am concerned about is the Chinese Communist Party and their expansion around the world has been discussed here today.

The CCP and the PLA have a track record tied to Huawei, and Jordan recently chose Ericsson and Nokia to do their 5G network. And this is a little courageous considering that I think both the 2G and 3G and 4G are done by Huawei.

And of course, also Jordan is a partner in China's Belt and Road Initiative, and China has a track record of penalizing people who do not do what they want. For example, when three years ago Australia asked for—had the temerity to ask for an investigation to COVID in China, China launched a trade war against them.

So, given the fact that Jordan is such a close ally and has chosen to not use Huawei, what can we do to be able to make sure that they do not face additional economic pressure from the CCP? What can we do to make sure that they do not backtrack on this decision, and how can we support them, if there is some retaliation by the PRC?

Ms. LEMPERT. Thank you, Senator, for raising this important topic. The President and the Secretary have been clear, China presents America's single most consequential geopolitical challenge. The strategic competition with the PRC will be the defining feature of U.S. diplomacy for certainly the duration of the rest of my career and likely well beyond.

And there is not a U.S. Ambassador or a U.S. embassy anywhere in the world that is not focused squarely on this. And if confirmed, that would certainly be the case for me in Jordan. You rightly point out the decision that Jordan just took.

I think what we can do is continue to double down on our partnership with Jordan. Ultimately, our ability to compete with the PRC in the Middle East rests on the continued strength of our partnerships.

And for all of the region's challenges, and they are manifold, our deep and decades long strategic cooperation with our partners across the Middle East, none more so than Jordan, remain an asset that no other country can match. So, if confirmed, I would work to remain engaged and focused on limiting China's influence in Jordan.

Actually, the largest Chinese investment in Jordan is a power plant, Attarat Power Plant, \$2.2 billion. It is a case study in the risks of engaging in major infrastructure projects with China. It is mired in international arbitration and a case of overpromising and under-delivering. And I think it is important that examples like that continue to be highlighted. We cannot be complacent about China, and if confirmed, I will not be.

Senator CARDIN. Great. Thank you very much, Ms. Lempert. Mr. Nyhus, same sort of thing with the CCP in this hemisphere where we have the CCP making investments, and Ecuador has also got issues, so is Peru. What I would like to know is just talking about, you know, going back to 1949 and Taiwan being separate from the PRC, President Xi has made it very clear he wants to reunify Taiwan by force if necessary.

And diplomatic relations have been established in many Caribbean countries. However, since President Tsai took over, I know that 10 countries around the world have switched—to the PRC, including Honduras, which cut ties with Taiwan in March, and of the only 13 countries have formal relations, and a number of them in the Caribbean, including Belize, Haiti, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

What can we do, and what can you do in particular, to make sure that we continue to have strong relationships in the Caribbean? And can we—how can we counter what the PRC is doing with regard to investment or the private, public partnerships? What can we do to make sure that we are doing our part to be able to keep those relationships, you know, focused toward the United States and not the PRC?

Mr. NYHUS. Absolutely. Thank you, Senator. Coming from the private sector, I actually have spent a couple of decades in telecom, in wireless communications. I worked with Craig McCaw, the pioneer of the US and global cellular networks.

So, in 5G in particular, I think that is an opportunity for American companies and allied companies because a lot of companies do not want to look at these small countries because they are too small to deploy a technology. And so, I think there are opportunities for us to look more regionally as opposed to at an individual company—or excuse me, country level.

I do think there is—I think the U.S. companies are the best way to compete against China in the Belt and Road Initiative and such. These countries are small, they are debt ridden, which makes them susceptible to Chinese influence.

They also, as you mentioned, there are 3 of the 13 countries that recognize Taiwan are in the 7 that I would be responsible for. And I think using the U.S., the power of the U.S., you know, our values, our companies, I think there is an opportunity to tell a story, and to deepen that story and connection with these allies.

These are democratic countries. We can do more to elevate the U.S. values and U.S. brand and U.S. companies, quite honestly. I would be a strong advocate, if confirmed, for U.S. companies in this region, and especially on the technology side. So that is really what I would do, if I am confirmed.

Senator CARDIN. Great. Thank you, Mr. Nyhus. Mr. Chairman.

Senator KAINE. Thank you to the witnesses. Congratulations on your nominations. It is a great panel. Just a few comments. And Mr. Nyhus, I have some questions for you. So, Ms. Syptak-Ramnath, what a wonderful country, Peru, but six Presidents in six years. I mean, it is very, very challenging. It is a very challenging environment.

And obviously, my colleagues have asked a number of questions. But doing what we can do to offer advice on anti-corruption efforts.

I mean, it is going to be so very critical to you, and I know you are up to the task.

Mr. Brown, I have been to Ecuador twice in the last few years, and after many, many years of a pro-Chinese orientation, the country beginning in 2021, in a fairly surprising election, both at the Presidential and the parliamentary level, really embraced a different path, wanting—having seen the downsides of being too close to China, whether it is shoddy infrastructure projects, drilling in the Amazon, illegal fishing around the Galapagos, I think they realized a different direction was necessary.

But I will say I have not been satisfied with the degree of attention that the Administration has paid to Ecuador. Ecuador's requests were fairly modest when they embraced a much more pro-U.S. orientation, and their requests included. "We are the only nation on the Pacific Coast of the Americas that does not have a trade agreement with the United States.

"We would like to do that. Could we be added to a trade agreement like the Colombia trade agreement? We do not mind high standards, we just want to not be the only nation not in the network of a trade agreement."

But the Administration has been unwilling to pursue that, and I think that is a huge, missed opportunity.

I would just encourage, and I know from your background, that you would do all you can to try to attract more attention. And Ms. Lempert, just for you, there is a Virginian—a Virginia family member, Bassem Awadallah, who is imprisoned in Jordan under murky circumstances. Our mission in Jordan does have visits with him in prison.

His family in Virginia has a weekly call with the State Department to check on him, and I would just ask, should you be confirmed that you maintain communication about the case with my Virginia constituents. Mr. Nyhus, I want to say to you, should you be confirmed, you will have the honor of having the longest title of any member of the United States Diplomatic Service.

I have been just looking at your name tag and I would clearly flunk an eye chart test even with my 2.0 reading glasses on. But it is an important part of the world, and the fact that your embassy has such a broad reach, including many different independent nations with a fairly small size, makes it a challenging task. There is staffing shortages and morale issues everywhere.

Talk about how your own experiences position you to manage so many different nations with such a small embassy staff.

Mr. NYHUS. Thank you, Senator. I think it is a great question and certainly one I have had a lot of time to think about. I will say that I am really, I am very excited and honored about this opportunity. I come from rural America, as I mentioned. I grew up in a town of 1,200 people. I know what it is like to be forgotten and kind of left out.

And I spent my career fighting for the underdog. And I think these countries are small, but they are incredibly mighty, and they are incredibly important. And I think that travel is a big challenge for this embassy. Getting from country, from country to country, there aren't interconnecting flights that are easy.

I think that is the biggest challenge for the Ambassador. I do think that there is a strong desire for more engagement from the United States, and especially the Ambassador. And if confirmed, I commit to spending more time outside of the embassy, actually in the countries, and engaging with the leadership, but also the civil society.

I do think that I do—I want to point out that there is global attention on this region, I think, thanks in large part to Prime Minister Mia Mottley of Barbados. She has—is not only a regional leader, but she is a global leader. And I would look forward to deepening that relationship in a bold and impactful way, if I am confirmed.

Senator KAINE. Thank you. Well, you mentioned the Caribbean Nation Security Initiative. We voted it out of committee yesterday with a unanimous vote. It is my hope we can take that up on the floor.

I think that has been a successful effort. The last thing I will say before calling on Senator Cruz is there is also a regional security system that is done through the State Department's international narcotics control strategy. That has also had some success. The nation of Guyana has recently completed the process to become part of that regional security system.

And I would urge you to focus on that, that there may even be some advantages in broadening that regional security system to deal with security efforts in Haiti, for example.

So, I would commend your attention to that. With that, I will call on Senator Cruz, and I will yield the chair to Senator Shaheen.

Senator CRUZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Welcome, everyone. Congratulations on your nominations, Ms. Lempert, I want to start by asking you about the case of Ahlam Tamimi. As you know, she is an FBI most wanted terrorist. She helped mastermind a horrific attack in Israel in 2001.

That attack injured over 100 people and killed 15, including seven children and a pregnant woman. The pregnant woman was an American, Judith Greenbaum. One of the murdered children was also an American, Malki Roth. Jordan has for some time been harboring to Tamimi and refused—and is refusing to extradite her to the United States. They say that our extradition treaty with them is not valid.

Three years ago, I questioned our Ambassador to Jordan, Ambassador Wooster, about the United States position on this issue, which he answered in testimony to this committee. I would now like to ask you about your understanding.

First, Ambassador Wooster testified in writing that the United States believes the government of Jordan is wrong and that our extradition treaty with them is valid. Is that also your understanding?

Ms. LEMPERT. Thank you, Senator, for raising this important question. And if I may, I would just like to begin by acknowledging what a difficult and frustrating issue this has been for the Congress, for those of us in the Executive Branch, but most of all, for the families of the American citizen victims of Ahlam Tamimi's horrific crimes, Malki Roth and Shoshana Judith Greenbaum.

If confirmed, I will do everything in my power to ensure that Ahlam Al-Tamimi faces justice in the United States for her horrific crimes. And to your precise question, Senator, yes, that is my understanding.

Senator CRUZ. Thank you. And I appreciate your strong commitment on this. I can tell you I have personally raised this issue face to face multiple times with the King of Jordan, and we need to get this resolved.

Second, Ambassador Wooster committed to me and to this committee in writing that he would explore all options, including and specifically including withholding military and economic assistance from the government of Jordan to secure Tamimi's extradition. I would like to hear if you are willing to make the same commitment today.

Ms. LEMPERT. Senator. I think our relationship with Jordan is multifaceted and extremely important. There are obviously some issues that we are not going to agree on. I think that what I can confirm to you is that I will do everything in my power to ensure that Ahlam Al-Tamimi faces justice in the United States.

As to the specifics of that, I would have to defer to my colleagues at the Department of Justice as this is a law enforcement issue, and I am willing to explore a variety of ways to continue this discussion with the Jordanians.

Senator CRUZ. Does that variety of ways include potentially withholding military and economic assistance?

Ms. LEMPERT. Senator, I think that that would need to be weighed very carefully against the range of issues and priorities that we have with the Jordanians before considering such a step, which I think would be profound. I would want to, if confirmed, get out there and try and work on this and see if we can make progress in other ways.

Senator CRUZ. Well, and let me be clear, I am not asking you to commit today to withholding that aid, but your predecessor committed in writing that that was one of the options on the table to force Jordanian cooperation.

And you said you want to consider it further and consider it with your colleagues. I am going to ask you to do that, and follow up to this hearing, I am going to ask you in writing again the same questions I asked your predecessor, and I very much hope the answer is the same. We need to use every tool we have—and I have no desire to cut off aid to Jordan.

What I have desire is to get this terrorist who murdered Americans to face justice. Let me shift to another topic briefly. In 2004, President Bush provided assurances to our Israeli allies about how the United States envisions a final peace deal between Israel and the Palestinians.

Specifically, the so-called Bush letters stated that Israel would not be expected to withdraw from all of its cities and towns in the West Bank.

And I want to read you part of that assurance. "In light of new realities on the ground, including already existing major Israeli population centers, it is unrealistic to expect that the outcome of final status negotiations will be full and complete return to the armistice lines of 1949."

Is it your understanding that these assurances are still the policy of the United States?

Ms. LEMPERT. Senator, the President has been clear that in—as we pursue the goal of a two-state solution, that it would be along 1967 lines with mutually agreed swaps. So, I believe that that speaks to exactly the question that you are raising.

Senator CRUZ. So, is your answer, yes?

Ms. LEMPERT. Yes.

Senator CRUZ. Okay. Thank you.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you. Senator Van Hollen.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And congratulations to all of you on your nominations. Ms. Lempert, if I could start with you. Congratulations. Thank you for the points you made in your opening statement regarding the fact that Jordan is a very important partner of the United States, major non-NATO ally.

Thank you also for mentioning the issues of the need to move forward on political and economic reform in Jordan. Also, Jordan's role as custodian of the Temple Mount, I-Haram al-Sharif, and the other issues that were raised, including the fact that they are right now having to absorb lots of refugees from Syria.

A very important ally at a very important time. Let me just briefly say in response to Senator Cruz, I think it has always been envisioned that any two-state solution would, as you said, involve land swaps. I would also point out that the Bush Administration was very clear about objecting to expansion of settlements.

For example, E1 specifically, Secretary Condoleezza Rice was very strongly opposed to. Yesterday was World Press Freedom Day, and the reports that came out showed that journalists are experiencing increased threats on their life. President Biden spoke eloquently the other night at the White House Correspondents Dinner about the need to protect the safety of journalists.

So, I want to ask you about a case of an American citizen perspective journalist Shireen Abu Akleh, who was killed in a shooting covering an IDF operation in Jenin on the West Bank about a little less than a year ago. At the time, the President made clear, and the Secretary of State made clear that the United States was going to insist on accountability, both because we wanted to protect journalists and because we were dealing with a U.S. citizen.

In fact, a letter that the State Department sent to me, and others said, “as the President made clear during his visit to the region, we will continue to insist on full accountability of Ms. Abu Akleh’s tragic death.” They go on to say, “in this case, just as with any wrongful death, but particularly of an American citizen, we have made clear that we expect accountability.” My question to you is, have we seen that accountability as of today?

Ms. LEMPERT. Senator, thank you for raising this question. Shireen Abu Akleh’s death almost one year ago, I think next week it will be one year, was a tragedy. Not only was Shireen an American citizen, but she was, as you pointed out, a renowned reporter who earned the respect of audiences around the world.

I was honored to be in the Secretary of State’s meeting last year with the Abu Akleh family, where we underscored our deepest condolences for their loss. I can tell you that we continue to under-

score, at the level of the Secretary of State, the importance of accountability in her killing, and we will continue to do so.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. No, I appreciate that response. And of course, your answer indicates that we have not yet seen any accountability in her shooting death. The U.S. security coordinator for Israel and the Palestinian authority recently updated his report, he submitted a summation report on the killing of Shireen Abu Akleh. You are aware of that, right?

Ms. LEMPert. I am aware of that document. I have not yet seen it myself.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. You have not yet read it. Okay. Well, we requested this document from the Administration for well over almost two weeks now, and we were told that they were going to send it back to the coordinator for, "technical changes" they say deal with classification issues, which is fine.

I just want to be really clear that we, I, and maybe other members of the committee want to see that report and we want to see that report in full without any substantive changes or edits. Can you commit to that?

Ms. LEMPert. Yes, Senator. I understand that the department has been in touch with your staff about the document in question and is working through those technical issues. Unfortunately, the document is still being reviewed for appropriate classification. The Administration is working to have it completed as soon as possible.

I want to assure you that the department has not and will not make any substantive changes to the document. The Administration is only working to address the classification issue. And again, it is my understanding that my colleagues are in touch with the committee to ensure that you are able to review the full document as soon as possible.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you. We look forward to getting it right away. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Shaheen.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am glad you are back.

The CHAIRMAN. So am I.

Senator SHAHEEN. And I want to begin by congratulating each of you on your nominations, and thanking you for your willingness to serve, for those of you who are career Foreign Service officers, for your willingness to continue to serve the country and for you, Mr. Nyhus, for your willingness to serve as well, and appreciate your family's commitment to that service.

I was in—excuse me, for the three of you who were nominated for Latin American countries, I was in Latin America last month with a group, a bipartisan delegation. Sadly, we did not visit any of the countries that you are being nominated to represent, but or just to go to.

But what we did hear there was the importance of having Ambassadors on the ground from the United States, and how important that is in the region, not only for United States interests, but as we are looking at how we offset the influence from the PRC and other actors who may be interested in subverting U.S. interests.

In this 118th Congress, we have only confirmed three Ambassadors, so I do hope we can move your nominations as quickly as

possible. One of the other things that we heard on that trip was the interest in, on the part of those countries, in doing business with the United States, and improving our trade relations and encouraging the private sector to look at Latin America as an opportunity to invest.

That sometimes has been overlooked. So can each of the three of you who are going to Latin America, if confirmed, can you speak to how you see we might better encourage those trade opportunities and other economic opportunities with Latin America. And I will start with you, Ms. Syptak-Ramnath.

Ms. SYPTAK-RAMNATH. Thank you. Well, we are fortunate to have a free trade agreement with Peru that we signed in 2009. And thanks to that, we have seen an increase in our trade from \$9 billion to \$22 billion.

And we are continuing to be the top investor in Peru. Clearly, what our private sector needs are transparent and leveled playing fields. And what, if confirmed, I would do as U.S. Ambassador to Peru is to continue to work with the private sector to make sure that we are making the case for U.S. business there.

We have competitors, and we have competitors that may have low costs now, but in the long term will have very high costs for the people of Peru. So, if confirmed, I commit to working with the private sector to make the case for private and for U.S. businesses and U.S. investment. Thank you.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you. Mr. Brown.

Mr. BROWN. Thank you, Senator. If confirmed as Ambassador, I certainly will be doing my hardest to promote U.S. enterprise. U.S. companies engaging in Ecuador, I think is very important. There is no doubt that U.S. companies efficiently and effectively produce results on the ground.

I will be working with the Ecuadorian government to understand how best we can collaborate and promote American enterprise in Ecuador. I think that there are clear examples from an infrastructure perspective where the government in the history has chosen PRC led activities.

And we know that the debt structure, the financing, and the actual infrastructure construction, I think that there are doubts about the effectiveness of PRC's results. So, all we can do is promote American companies, and if confirmed as Ambassador there, I will be a champion for those initiatives.

Senator SHAHEEN. Well, thank you. I agree. I think we heard some buyer's remorse when we were visiting. Mr. Nyhus.

Mr. NYHUS. Thank you, Senator. This question is very close to my heart. As a private sector business leader, I see business as a critical element in any ambassadorship, but especially for mine, if I am confirmed. I have worked in all the sectors that matter to this region, from technology, global health, finance, and energy.

These are areas where I will deploy my connections and my, quite honestly, my communications abilities, I think, to promote U.S. goods and services. And I think just to remember is not just products, it is services, it is banking. That is much needed in this region. So, I would certainly look forward to hosting trade delegations.

I think my friends in Seattle who are watching right now are probably already planning one, if confirmed, of course. And I would welcome Congressional delegations as well, because I think folks avoid this region because it is a beautiful place with sand and sun, and so there are perceptions of, oh, let us not go to the nice place.

But these countries are on the front lines of climate change, of the China influence. So, I think it would be welcome to have you come and visit.

Senator SHAHEEN. Well, thank you all very much for that. I think Latin America offers a tremendous opportunity in our own backyard and we need to do a better job of taking advantage of it.

I am really pleased that legislation I sponsored with Senators Durbin and Boozman was included in the Western Hemisphere Partnership Act that we passed out of this committee. It is designed to double U.S. trade to Latin America. So hopefully that will help you as you take over these responsibilities.

I have one more question, and this one also is for you, Ms. Syptak-Ramnath. Peru's government faces challenges with drug trafficking, money laundering, and transnational crime. And last December, an arbitration tribunal adjudicated a claim brought against the government of Peru for lack of payment on Peruvian agrarian reform bonds.

I assume you are familiar with this case, but the tribunal ruled that Peru must repay Gramercy Fund Management, the property—the properly updated value of the matured land bonds. And I raised this because this is an issue that affects U.S. pension funds, including in New Hampshire.

Unfortunately, Peru still has not paid the arbitration award. If confirmed, will you commit to raising this issue with the government of Peru and to keeping Congress updated on the progress to get this settlement paid? Yes, Senator, I will. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you. Two last questions. The rest I will submit for the record. Mr. Nyhus, I heard your opening statement and what—but one of the challenges we have in the Caribbean is the challenge of China and of the Caribbean nations voting in ways that are contrary to where I think they should be in terms of alignment at the OAS and other international institutions.

Over the last decade, the United States' complacent approach to the Caribbean has created a power vacuum, allowing China to assert its influence at the expense of our national interests, security, prosperity. China has become one of the largest trading partners for many Caribbean nations, allowing it to further expand its predatory economic practices.

Nevertheless, the United States continues to fail to dedicate sufficient resources and attention to the Caribbean nations, particularly those in the eastern Caribbean. So, if confirmed, what steps will you take to strengthen our ability to compete with China in the region?

How will you strengthen the visibility and impact of U.S. diplomatic efforts not just in Barbados, but across the eastern Caribbean?

Mr. NYHUS. Thank you, Chairman Menendez. This is a topic that will be one of my top priorities, if confirmed as Ambassador. I come

from Seattle. As I mentioned in my statement, we are the most trade dependent state in the nation, so we know a lot about China. We see it in action in our community.

We are engaged. I worked for a friend and mentor, Governor Gary Locke, who was the nation's first Chinese American Governor. I traveled to China with him on a trade delegation. I have had a lot of experience with China. I think, you know, a lot of these small countries see this, you know, easy Chinese money as very enticing. And I think part of the job of the Ambassador is to ensure they know what they are getting for their increased debt, and also showing some alternatives.

And I think that, you know, the U.S. private sector, I think we do not have a lot of U.S. Government money to give a round like the Chinese do, but we certainly have an incredible private sector that I would like to see us promoting more in the region.

And again, not just as a one off for a small nation but looking at it more holistically like in the 5G rollout. So, I think the power of communication is also really incredible. I hear that a lot from the post, that that having someone with my background as a professional communicator, a PR person, I actually know how to generate interest and advocate for American companies.

I have spent 30 years doing that. So, I look forward to, I think, deepening the connections with these countries in the leadership, but also introducing them to the great U.S. industries that are out there, that may not look at these countries right now because they are so small.

The CHAIRMAN. Well, I appreciate that. But one of the things I really would like to see upon your confirmation is a robust engagement, particularly at the OAS. These countries have an equal vote as anybody else in the hemisphere, but they consistently vote against our positions, and we are consistently seeking to try to help them.

So, something is a disconnect there between our desire to help them and what we do. And they are voting in adversity to our interests, so I hope that you will make that a priority.

Mr. NYHUS. Absolutely. Senator. I spoke with the Ambassador to the OAS yesterday about this very topic and would look forward to partnering with him.

The CHAIRMAN. Finally, Ms. Lempert, before I turn to Senator Hagerty, Jordan has been an important advocate for calm stability, particularly given its role with respect to the holy sites in Jerusalem.

It is hosting of the recent Aqaba meetings with senior officials from the U.S., Israel, Egypt, and Jordan. And the PA went a long way towards easing tensions. How do you evaluate the current state of relationship between Israel and Jordan, and what steps can you take as Ambassador to bring Jordan into the Negev Forum?

Ms. LEMPERT. Thank you, Senator, for the question. The peace treaty between Israel and Jordan has been a pillar of regional stability for the past 30 years. That said, there is always room for growth. And if confirmed, that would be something that I would definitely want to work together with Jordan on.

I think there is a variety of interesting avenues to pursue, Project Prosperity, the water for solar deal between the UAE, Israel, and Jordan with U.S. support is one such example of, I think, very interesting way to take advantage of increasing regional integration and move forward economic initiatives.

I do think that Jordan belongs in the Negev Forum. In my current capacity, I have made that point to Jordanian officials. If confirmed, I look forward to encouraging them to do so. I believe that as the second Arab country to make peace with Israel, it makes absolute sense.

There is an empty seat at the table of the Negev Forum where Jordan should be, and this is a very interesting, new multilateral grouping, building on the Abraham Accords that really could advance peace and regional integration, but also cooperation regionally on these transnational issues such as water, food, security, health, energy.

And I think it would really behoove Jordan to be there. I think it would benefit them. At the risk of taking too much time, I am sorry, but I also very much agree with you about the important role that Jordan had played in convening the meeting in Aqaba in February, and then there was a subsequent meeting in Sharm el-Sheikh in March, and we are looking to work with our regional partners, Jordan chief among them, to continue those meetings, because it is very, very important to help de-escalate tensions.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you. Senator Hagerty.

Senator HAGERTY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to stay on the topic of Jordan, if I could, Ms. Lempert. Is border security important?

Ms. LEMPERT. Senator, thank you for the question. More security for Jordan or—

Senator HAGERTY. Border security.

Ms. LEMPERT [continuing]. Oh, I am sorry. Thank you. Yes, Senator, border security is very important.

Senator HAGERTY. Do you support physical security measures like border walls?

Ms. LEMPERT. In Jordan, Senator?

Senator HAGERTY. Let's say on Jordan.

Ms. LEMPERT. I think I would have to defer to the Jordanians, whether they think that such measures—

Senator HAGERTY. But we are spending American taxpayer dollars for border security in Jordan. Are you familiar with the President's budget request?

Ms. LEMPERT. I am, sir. In terms of moving forward border security in Jordan, yes.

Senator HAGERTY. One hundred ten million dollars is requested in the Fiscal Years 2024 budget to include border security for Jordan. And you request that—you support that request, I just want to make this clear.

Ms. LEMPERT. I do support that request.

Senator HAGERTY. Okay. Hasn't the United States Government built a giant wall along Jordan's border?

Ms. LEMPERT. With—in the border with Jordan—

Senator HAGERTY. With United States taxpayer dollars, the U.S. Government built a wall along Jordan's border.

Ms. LEMPert [continuing]. The U.S. Government has worked with Jordan to enhance its border security in a variety of ways. Senator.

Senator HAGERTY. Let us be clear, U.S. taxpayer dollars have been deployed in this regard. Is that correct?

Ms. LEMPert. That is correct.

Senator HAGERTY. And as our nominee, you would be responsible for overseeing future funding in this regard. Is that correct?

Ms. LEMPert. That is correct, Senator, if confirmed.

Senator HAGERTY. In fact, the Omnibus, last year provides for at least \$150 million for border security in Jordan. It is a large amount of taxpayer dollars. And if you think about the purpose of this is to provide physical security, to keep people from illegally crossing into Jordan. Is not that correct?

Ms. LEMPert. It is to provide physical security, to stop drug smugglers, to deal with the threat of Jordan's neighbor, Syria. Obviously, the conflict there continues, and it is a dangerous neighborhood.

Senator HAGERTY. Well, I would think that if the funding request that has been put in place for the coming year is the size it is, there must be a belief that this sort of funding is important and that this sort of physical security is effective. Is that correct?

Ms. LEMPert. In the Jordanian context, I do believe that that is correct, Senator.

Senator HAGERTY. Well, you have been very clear to talk about this in the Jordanian context. I just think it is an important lesson for us to learn as Americans, that we are spending United States taxpayer dollars to support border security in a country that we are trying to build stronger relations with.

I think we ought to be learning a lesson ourselves because there is not a penny in the President's budget to support our own border security here. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Hagerty. I am almost enticed to follow Senator Hagerty down his road, but I am not going to. I know Senator Risch is very happy I am not going to do that. We should have a discussion about that at some point, which I would enjoy. I always appreciate my colleagues' insights.

The record for the hearing will remain open until the close of business on Friday, May the 5th. Please ensure that questions for the record are submitted no later than the close of business, Friday.

I would say to our nominees that as soon as you get, assuming you get questions, I am sure each of you will have some questions, for the record, to answer them expeditiously. Because the quicker you answer them, and the fuller that you answer them, you know, sufficient to be responsive to the question, not just to highlight it, but be responsive, otherwise there will be a reiteration of the question.

The quicker we can consider your nominations before the business committee hearing of the Senate so we can vote on your nominations and send you to the floor. With the thanks of the committee for your testimony and your service, this hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:55 a.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

Additional Material Submitted for the Record

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO ROGER F. NYHUS BY SENATOR ROBERT MENENDEZ

Environment and Climate

Barbados is one of the Caribbean's most vulnerable nations to climate change. Under the leadership of its Prime Minister, Mia Mottley, Barbados has become an international champion of the global environmental movement, campaigning and fighting against climate change, pollution, and deforestation. This includes leading efforts like the Bridgetown Initiative, which calls for reforms in development finance to better assist and equip developing nations to address the effects climate change.

Question. If confirmed, what measures will you take to strengthen U.S. support to Barbados in addressing these environmental and climate challenges?

Answer. The Caribbean is on the frontlines of the climate crisis, including sea level rise that threatens low-lying islands like Barbados and exacerbates storm surge associated with hurricanes. Strengthening energy security and building climate resilience can unlock new business opportunities and safeguard communities.

Barbados Prime Minister Mia Mottley is not only a regional leader on climate, but also a global one. Her tireless advocacy is giving voice to small island developing countries around the world. Fostering an even closer working relationship with Prime Minister Mottley will be a priority, if confirmed. There are tremendous opportunities to collaborate on many issues we share, including regional security, climate resilience, energy security, food security and water scarcity.

If confirmed, I would support the Biden Administration's efforts to promote the evolution of the Multilateral Development Banks to meet the challenges of the 21st century. If confirmed, I would advance the U.S.-Caribbean Partnership to Address the Climate Crisis (PACC 2030), the U.S. Government's flagship partnership with Caribbean countries to advance climate adaptation and resilience, and to expand clean energy programs across the region, including Barbados and the other countries of the Eastern Caribbean. With a comprehensive, adaptive, and goal-oriented approach, we will seek to support our Caribbean neighbors in addressing energy security and climate adaptation and resilience with the urgency these challenges demand.

As an example, the Administrator of the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) traveled to Barbados in April and led a workshop with the Caribbean Institute of Meteorology and Hydrology to advance regional climate services and their applications for national planning and adaptation efforts. The State Department is also providing support to Dominica as it develops a 10-megawatt geothermal power plant and transmission lines to build a more resilient and reliable grid. These types of assistance initiatives will help create the right conditions to attract new renewable energy partnerships.

If confirmed, I will support the work of PACC 2030 both in Barbados and the rest of the Eastern Caribbean to facilitate collaboration between the U.S. private sector and Caribbean companies to support renewable energy infrastructure project development. I will also bring the power of public diplomacy to bear in advancing this important initiative. The Eastern Caribbean has participated in U.S.-sponsored professional development and network-building programs for experts working on climate resilience, infrastructure transformation, and the switch to renewable energy. I will continue to use public diplomacy initiatives to support our partner countries and advance our priorities in the Eastern Caribbean. I will also use the power of U.S. messaging to highlight these building blocks of success and other stories that advance U.S. climate priorities.

China in the Caribbean

Over the last decade, the United States' complacent approach to the Caribbean has created a power vacuum allowing China to assert its influence at the expense of our national interests and the security and prosperity of populations in the region. Today, China has become one of the largest trading partners for many Caribbean nations, allowing it to further expand its predatory economic practices. Nevertheless, the United States continues to fail to dedicate sufficient resources and attention to Caribbean nations, particularly

those in the Eastern Caribbean. We must reassert our leadership and ensure the number of U.S. personnel and diplomatic posts we have are commensurate to what is needed to ensure that the United States, not China, is the primary partner of choice going forward.

Question. If confirmed, what steps will you take to strengthen our ability to compete with China in the region? How will you strengthen the visibility and impact of U.S. diplomatic efforts not just in Barbados, but across the Eastern Caribbean?

Answer. The Caribbean is the United States' third border, and I am very concerned with the PRC's efforts to project problematic influence in the region. Whether investing in Caribbean infrastructure, growing its regional diplomatic presence, or including them in its Belt and Road Initiative, the PRC has established considerable influence in the region.

If confirmed, I will work to advance U.S. national security interests and push back against problematic PRC influence in the Eastern Caribbean, through robust and forthright diplomatic engagements, public diplomacy programming, and commercial advocacy. To ensure the U.S. is the preferred partner going forward, this also means being responsive to Caribbean needs and priorities, particularly on climate, and this Administration is committed to doing so.

In particular, as a business leader with 30 years of private sector experience in a variety of key sectors, I will intensively pursue increased trade and market opportunities for U.S. businesses and innovation in the region—and the broader Caribbean. I will pay special attention to promoting and, ideally, expanding U.S. business interests, which I believe is an effective counter to PRC's Belt and Road Initiative.

Embassy Bridgetown is an important regional post. I will be a strong advocate for the resources necessary to achieve our goals, if confirmed. While interconnection among the seven countries is weak, if confirmed, I commit to prioritizing time to travel and present a strong, visible, and engaged presence in each country, and I will ask my team to do the same. I will also invite Congressional and staff delegations to the mission to learn about and witness the PRC's problematic practices and the U.S. response firsthand.

I understand that the Department of State and USAID have recently committed resources for six new U.S. direct hire positions for Embassy Bridgetown, the establishment of new USAID satellite offices in Trinidad and Tobago and Suriname, and last year increased INL program funding for the Eastern Caribbean. I also understand that Embassy Bridgetown has received additional funds to facilitate more regional travel and that the Department of State is actively considering whether to open new posts in the Eastern Caribbean. If confirmed, I will support these and other efforts to further develop relationships and areas of cooperation with host governments in the Eastern Caribbean and to counter the increasingly assertive moves of the PRC, Cuba, Venezuela, and other state and non-state actors.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO ROGER F. NYHUS BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

Chinese Influence in the Region

Question. Are there any areas of engagement by the People's Republic of China in the Eastern Caribbean that raise concerns for U.S. interests?

Answer. The People's Republic of China (PRC) makes little secret of its aspirations for recognition and influence in the Caribbean. Whether investing in Caribbean infrastructure, responding to storms and natural disasters, or including Caribbean nations in its Belt and Road Initiative, the PRC seeks to establish considerable influence in the region.

Nevertheless, the United States shares long-standing ties, democratic values, and regional security interests with all seven of these countries, and we remain their preferred partner. If confirmed, I will support U.S. companies and urge our partners to conduct rigorous due diligence on public projects involving the PRC or any other potentially problematic actor, to avoid risks to national security and sectors such as critical infrastructure.

Question. How will your experiences in China inform your work as Ambassador to Barbados and neighboring Caribbean countries?

Answer. If confirmed as Ambassador to Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean, countering problematic PRC influence in the region will be central to my ambassadorship and one of my top priorities.

I built and owned a small business—a strategic communications firm in Seattle—focused on promoting U.S. companies and their products and services across the U.S. and around the world. I have deep sector experience in energy, including fossil fuels (promoting an international export terminal for Powder River Basin coal) and biofuels; health care, global health and pharmaceuticals; aviation; technology and telecommunications; manufacturing (airplanes and glass); travel and tourism; real estate development; agriculture; seafood; and global philanthropy—all relevant to the seven independent nations I would cover, if confirmed.

I not only want the United States to be the preferred partner to these seven Eastern Caribbean democracies, but I also want the United States—and American businesses—to win and prosper. I believe the strength and innovation of the U.S. private sector is an effective counter to China's Belt and Road Initiative. Promoting U.S. businesses and creating new and expanded opportunities for them will be core to my ambassadorship, if confirmed. I have worked with hundreds of Fortune 500 companies, startups and nonprofits.

The PRC undermines U.S. interests through disinformation. As a communications professional, I will use the power of communications to ensure our partners are clear-eyed about the PRC's problematic influence and to promote the United States' positive agenda not only in the seven Eastern Caribbean countries but in the region as well. These countries may be small, but they are vitally important to U.S. interests. If confirmed, I will be a strong fighter for U.S. interests and the American people in the region. I will work to counter problematic PRC activities, promote a positive U.S. agenda and U.S. business interests, and strongly support the three nations that have diplomatic relations with Taiwan—Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines—in their efforts to resist Beijing's pressure.

Question. Nearly half of the countries covered by Embassy Barbados maintain relations with Taiwan, while the other half have relations with the PRC and joined the BRI.

Answer. Three of the seven countries covered by Embassy Barbados maintain diplomatic relations with Taiwan—St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines. This constitutes nearly half of the countries that have diplomatic ties with Taiwan in Latin America and the Caribbean. If confirmed, I would seek to buttress these important relationships with Taiwan, especially given Honduras's recent change in diplomatic ties from Taiwan to the PRC.

Question. If confirmed, how would you advance U.S. interests in reducing malign Chinese influence in the Eastern Caribbean?

Answer. The Biden administration has clearly identified the PRC as "America's most consequential geopolitical challenge," with the PRC and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) representing a threat to U.S. national security and leadership globally. Under President Xi, the CCP has become more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad, seeking to undercut U.S. influence and partnerships, including with the countries in the Eastern Caribbean.

The PRC Government also uses transnational repression by reaching outside its borders to harass, surveil, and threaten individuals into silence who are critical of the PRC Government, including in the Eastern Caribbean.

If confirmed, I will work aggressively to advance U.S. national security interests and push back against the PRC's efforts to expand its influence in the Eastern Caribbean through robust and candid diplomatic engagements, increased public diplomacy programming, and strong commercial advocacy for U.S. businesses and innovation.

Question. Do you agree it is in the interests of the United States to deepen collaboration with Taiwan in those countries with which we maintain diplomatic relations?

Answer. Yes, I strongly agree. Taiwan's relationships in the region—official and unofficial—reinforce the hemisphere's democratic values and support sustainable development. I believe we must stand together to support our democratic partner, Taiwan. If confirmed, I commit to supporting existing ties between Taiwan and the three countries in the Eastern Caribbean that maintain diplomatic relations with Taiwan and to pursuing new and creative ways to deepen that collaboration as well, including collaborating with other U.S. Ambassadors and third-country counterparts in Taiwan's diplomatic partners in the Caribbean and elsewhere.

Question. Would you support Taiwanese efforts, if any, to deepen trade and cultural ties with Caribbean countries with which they do not currently have diplomatic relations?

Answer. I would encourage partner nations in the Eastern Caribbean to deepen cooperation with and support for Taiwan. I would share with partners that our trade with Taiwan, for instance, advances U.S. interests and helps create economic opportunity in our country. Indeed, Taiwan is a global leader in advanced manufacturing, democratic governance, and public health, to name just a few areas in which the international community benefits from engagement with Taiwan.

Anti-Money Laundering

Question. If confirmed, how do you intend to engage with Barbadian authorities to address the anti-money laundering concerns flagged by the Financial Action Task Force in Barbados? Would Barbados benefit economically from addressing these pending AML concerns?

Answer. Yes, I will absolutely engage with Barbadian authorities to address the anti-money laundering concerns flagged by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) in Barbados.

FATF sets internationally recognized standards for anti-money laundering and counterterrorism financing (AML/CTF). FATF promotes international cooperation to identify, disrupt and dismantle money laundering schemes. Since February 2020, Barbados has been on FATF's list of Jurisdictions under Increased Monitoring ("gray list") of countries that are working with FATF to meet international AML/CTF standards. Appearing on this list can seriously damage the international reputation of countries that fail to meet their international commitments. Barbados has committed to resolving the deficiencies identified by FATF. If confirmed, I would encourage Barbados to continue working with FATF to address any issues identified in its action plan; ensure that accurate, up to date beneficial ownership information is available to authorities; and further pursue repatriation or sharing of confiscated assets with other countries.

Trafficking in Persons

Question. In the State Department's 2022 Trafficking in Persons Report, Barbados was upgraded to Tier 2 for its significant efforts to improve its anti-trafficking capacity but failed to secure any convictions against traffickers, among other key issues. How will you address these issues with the host government and civil society actors if you are confirmed as Ambassador?

Answer. Combating transnational organized crime will be a top priority, if confirmed. The trafficking of narcotics, guns and people are real threats to the region and the United States.

As reported in the 2022 Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report, human traffickers exploit domestic and foreign victims in Barbados, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Antigua and Barbuda. If confirmed, I will encourage and work with the countries of the Eastern Caribbean to strengthen their efforts to investigate and prosecute sex and labor traffickers and sentence convicted traffickers to significant prison terms. I will also urge these countries to proactively screen victims and provide any identified victims with trauma-informed services. I will additionally urge these countries to continue to undertake measures to prevent people from becoming victims of human trafficking. If confirmed, I also commit to supporting civil society partners working on this important issue.

Question. Do you commit to reporting accurate information as it pertains to the reality of the trafficking situation in Barbados?

Answer. Yes. If confirmed, I commit to reporting current and accurate information regarding the reality of the trafficking situation in Barbados and all other Eastern Caribbean countries.

International Religious Freedom

Question. In the State Department's 2021 International Religious Freedom report, Barbados was described as having significant societal and governmental respect for religious freedom. What is your assessment of this particular issue and if confirmed, how will you work with the office of the Ambassador At Large for international religious freedom to bolster religious freedom in-country?

Answer. As a person of faith, I strongly support religious freedom. Barbados and the other countries in the Eastern Caribbean have solid democracies and a strong commitment to and respect for human rights, including freedom of religion or belief. If confirmed, I will continue the Embassy's strong engagement on promoting religious freedom with Eastern Caribbean counterparts, civil society and the public. I will also look for ways to use our programming to support civil society and governments' work on this important issue.

Human Rights

Question. In the State Department's 2022 Human Rights Report, Barbados was identified as having few significant human rights abuses but the U.S. Mission can still support the work of civil society actors in country or regionally to better improve respect for human rights. How will you direct your Embassy to work with civil society organizations to improve the human rights situation on the ground?

Answer. Barbados and the other countries in the Eastern Caribbean, all stable democracies, have values that largely align with the United States. These countries have a tradition of respecting human rights, such as freedom of expression, and also of respecting the media. But we can do more to support the capacity of civil society organizations in the Eastern Caribbean. The Embassy currently supports civil society through exchanges and grants, including programs promoting independent journalism and supporting entrepreneurship, women's empowerment and a free press. If confirmed, I will explore ways to continue and deepen this support through more robust programming, capacity building and visibility.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO ROGER F. NYHUS BY SENATOR MARCO RUBIO

Question. In May 2022, Secretary Blinken said that the People's Republic of China is the "only country with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do it." The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) clearly holds the reins of power in the People's Republic of China and has used this power to commit genocide in Xinjiang, flood our communities with fentanyl, and emit, by far the largest quantity of greenhouse gases in the world today. With their absolute control of Chinese society and industry, the CCP could stop all of these destructive actions tomorrow if they so choose. Is the Chinese Communist Party a threat to the United States?

Answer. The Chinese Communist Party under President Xi has become more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad. If confirmed, I will work to advance U.S. national security interests and aggressively push back against the PRC's efforts to expand its problematic influence in the Eastern Caribbean, through robust and forthright diplomatic engagements, public diplomacy programming, and commercial advocacy. Importantly, three of the remaining 13 countries that maintain diplomatic ties with Taiwan are in the Eastern Caribbean—Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. If confirmed, I will continue to support Taiwan's international relationships. I will also work with all seven countries to leverage the inherent advantages of our democracies and to ensure the international system remains rooted in democratic values.

Question. Does the Chinese Communist Party undertake any activities that are beneficial to U.S. interests?

Answer. The United States and the People's Republic of China (PRC) clearly are strategic competitors. The Biden administration believes we face some common challenges that we must work together to address, including transnational crime, non-proliferation, climate change and global food security.

Question. Do you believe that there are any areas within which the Chinese Communist Party would constructively work with the United States in good faith?

Answer. The United States competes vigorously with the PRC, and, if confirmed, I will do the same in the Eastern Caribbean. The United States manages competition with the PRC responsibly and is open to cooperation with Beijing where our interests clearly overlap and where our cooperation can advance solutions to transnational challenges.

If confirmed, I will work closely with the Congress, U.S. Government officials, including other U.S. Ambassadors in the region and like-minded third-country diplomatic partners, to advance U.S. interests and counter harmful behavior by the PRC and other actors in the Eastern Caribbean.

Question. If confirmed, will you approve any joint activity with organizations or representatives from the People's Republic of China in the country in which you will work?

Answer. If confirmed, I will be a strong fighter for the United States and the American people—above all else. I will prioritize advancing U.S. national security interests in the Eastern Caribbean and countering efforts by our strategic and regional competitors who may wish to undermine them. I would encourage others, to

include the seven countries in the Eastern Caribbean, to closely scrutinize any activities that involve the PRC, to ensure they are transparent and that all parties are working in good faith.

Question. What is your understanding, and how would you assess, cooperation of Eastern Caribbean states with the U.S. on counternarcotics efforts in Florida's backyard?

Answer. I believe the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative (CBSI) is a success story, and, if confirmed, I would be a strong advocate for the program. Thank you for your leadership and strong support of this work. Since launching in 2010, CBSI has been a shining example of effective regional security cooperation. The 13 Caribbean countries engaged in this U.S. partnership are disrupting illicit trafficking and transnational crime. Simply put, CBSI is making citizens safer in the United States and in the Caribbean.

CBSI's three core pillars are to reduce illicit trafficking, increase citizen security, and prevent youth crime and violence. As of 2022, the U.S. Government has provided over \$800 million in CBSI funding, greatly benefitting Caribbean partners.

If confirmed, I commit to being a strong and outspoken advocate for CBSI and its continuing work to keep the Caribbean safe for all of us.

Question. In your opinion, is CBSI improving the Eastern Caribbean's drug interdiction capability?

Answer. Criminal organizations in the Eastern Caribbean include both local and transnational groups that traffic drugs, guns, and other illicit goods, while also laundering money and committing financial crimes to fuel their enterprises and enable corruption, threatening regional and U.S. national security.

CBSI programming has produced quantifiably positive outcomes in improving the Eastern Caribbean's drug interdiction capabilities, through its capacity-building work with CARICOM IMPACS and the Regional Security System. CBSI programs have had success in deterring and disrupting illicit drug trafficking by improving regional maritime security, port and border security, and interdiction capacity. As just one example, between 2010 and 2019, Eastern Caribbean countries achieved a 454 percent increase in cocaine seizures. Nevertheless, CBSI merits continued, concerted efforts with our partners.

Question. If confirmed, how will you improve it?

Answer. If confirmed, I will work to ensure the CBSI programs are working for the United States and our Caribbean partners. Since 2010, CBSI has greatly improved the region's capacity to combat illicit trafficking and disrupt organized crime. The reauthorization of CBSI seeks to update this 13-year-old program to ensure it can address the hardships we and the region are facing today. If confirmed, I will work to ensure CBSI and related programs work to address key challenges, including trafficking in persons, cybersecurity, and strengthening the ability of countries to prepare for and respond to natural disasters. It is important the United States Government assist our democratic allies to counter old and new threats alike, protecting our homeland in the process.

I see that you have led trade missions to Cuba as part of your job representing the Seattle Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and for Alaska Airlines. Speaking on behalf of the Cuban exile community in Miami, many of whom are barred by the regime from returning to visit their family members, it is heartbreaking to see Americans travel to Cuba and provide tourism dollars to a regime that continues to deny basic human rights to its own people.

Question. During your trips to Cuba, did you meet with any Cuban Government officials?

Answer. I did not meet with any Cuban Government officials during either of my two brief trips to Cuba. My role as a guest of the Seattle Chamber and a consultant to Alaska Airlines was to network with the U.S.-based Seattle delegations of government, business, civic, and educational leaders traveling on these trips. These two-day educational trips were highly controlled, and guests were not allowed to engage with Cuban nationals. I have no connections to or with Cuba, and I do not support Cuba's authoritarian regime. Even though I was in Havana only about 48 hours, I was able to witness firsthand the failed and crumbling policies of the current government.

Question. If so, were any subject to U.S. sanctions?

Answer. N/A

Question. If so, did you receive a license from the Office of Foreign Asset Control that provided you an exemption from sanctions to meet with these officials?

Answer. N/A

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to upholding U.S. law that prohibits providing assistance to Cuban Government entities?

Answer. If confirmed, I will uphold all U.S. laws regarding interactions with Cuba and its officials, to include the prohibition on providing assistance to Cuban Government entities.

You have a substantial record of supporting a progressive social agenda in Seattle and in private business. You will now be charged with advocating for our prosperity and national security efforts in the great power competition with China. I will note your resume shows little to no experience in living or working overseas, advancing Americas prosperity outside of the Northwest region of the U.S., nor a firm grasp of the complex national security apparatus you will be expected to helm as an Ambassador.

Question. Will you prioritize Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility considerations over the dire need to ensure our Nation can compete with the rise of the Chinese Communist Party?

Answer. Countering problematic PRC activities in the region will be one of my top priorities, if confirmed as Ambassador to Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean.

I built and owned a small business—a strategic communications firm in Seattle—focused on promoting U.S. companies and their products and services across the United States and around the world. I have deep sector experience in energy, including fossil fuels (promoting an international export terminal for Powder River Basin coal) and biofuels; health care, global health and pharmaceuticals; aviation; technology and telecommunications; manufacturing (glass and airplanes); travel and tourism; real estate development; seafood; and global philanthropy—all relevant to the seven independent nations I would cover, if confirmed.

I not only want the United States to be the preferred partner to these seven Eastern Caribbean democracies, but I also want the United States—and American businesses—to win and prosper. I believe in the strength and innovation of the U.S. private sector. Promoting U.S. businesses and creating new and expanded opportunities for them will be core to my ambassadorship, if confirmed. I have worked with hundreds of Fortune 500 companies, startups and nonprofits. My approach and private sector engagement will be nonpartisan. In my three decades in business, I can safely say that more than half of my clients and many of my senior leaders were Republicans. My business was always nonpartisan.

The PRC misuses communications to create disinformation and doubt about how the United States is the partner that consistently delivers for the people of the Eastern Caribbean. As a communications professional, I will use the power of strategic messaging to counter the PRC and promote the United States' positive agenda not only in the seven Eastern Caribbean countries but in the broader region as well.

If confirmed, I would highlight America's strong stance on religious freedom, human rights, and diversity and inclusion, juxtaposed against the record of the PRC on these issues, to make it clear that our shared values and interests give the United States a competitive advantage and make us the preferred partner for the countries of the Eastern Caribbean. And I would continue with the inclusive and engaging leadership style that brought me success in the private sector.

Question. China has increased engagement with the Eastern Caribbean region over the past 20 years and some members of CARICOM have signed onto the Chinese Communist Party's Belt and Road Initiative for infrastructure developments. What is your characterization of the existing relationship between the region and China?

Answer. The PRC has been expanding its influence in the Eastern Caribbean. In recent years, the PRC has made notable economic and political gains. Whether investing in Caribbean infrastructure, responding to storms and natural disasters or including Caribbean nations in its Belt and Road Initiative, the PRC has established considerable influence in the region.

Three of the remaining 13 countries that have diplomatic ties with Taiwan are in the Eastern Caribbean. If confirmed, I will work closely with and strongly support Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines to highlight Taiwan's positive influence in the region. In addition, the United States shares democratic values and regional security interests with all seven countries. If confirmed, I will work hard to ensure that the United States remains the preferred partner for all of these sovereign nations.

Question. Are there concerns with their existing relationship? If so, by whom?

Answer. The United States and other partners are concerned about the coercive economic pressure the PRC exerts. We echo long-standing calls from Caribbean capitals that PRC actions respect local laws and interests, including on the human rights of all persons and protections for the environment.

If confirmed, I will use my 30 years of private sector experience to better engage U.S. companies and technologies to create new and expanded opportunities to counter problematic PRC activities. I believe the U.S. private sector is the best counter to the PRC's Belt and Road Initiative. As Ambassador, if confirmed, I will lead my team in pursuing opportunities for American companies to compete for projects and contracts in these countries.

In addition, if confirmed, I will urge our country partners to conduct thorough due diligence on public projects to avoid the risks to national security, data privacy, and supply chain resiliency posed by many PRC investments, particularly in sectors such as critical infrastructure.

Question. If confirmed, what initiatives will you focus on to provide U.S. businesses fair competition regarding infrastructure projects in the region?

Answer. As I mentioned above, if confirmed, I will use my 30 years of private sector experience to better engage U.S. companies and technologies to create new and expanded opportunities to counter the PRC. Specifically, I believe the U.S. private sector is the best counter to the PRC's Belt and Road Initiative. As Ambassador, if confirmed, I will tirelessly pursue opportunities and work on initiatives that help level the playing field for American companies to compete for projects and contracts in these countries.

The PRC offers loans, investments and aid to many countries globally including in the Eastern Caribbean, but at what cost and with what strings attached? It is imperative that the United States work to counter unfair and problematic PRC economic practices. If confirmed, I will advocate for economic and commercial alternatives that adhere to our principles of respecting sovereignty, labor rights, and protection of the environment.

Specifically, if confirmed, I will engage at the highest level with the countries to which I am accredited to secure U.S. telecommunications networks, other sensitive technology, and critical infrastructure. Shining a light on problematic PRC practices in this area will be a top priority for me, as will advocating for U.S. businesses and ensuring this region is a welcoming, secure market for them.

USAID's aim in the Eastern Caribbean is focused on disaster resilience, climate change, and climate finance to name a few. However, many of the clean energy aid programs, such as solar-powered aid projects and wind turbines projects, source these products or components made in China. Besides USAID subsidizing China's industry by using solar panels and wind turbines parts for aid projects, the production of these items in China is anything but "clean" and simply provides the veneer that these USAID projects somehow reduce Co2 emission. Further, there is ample concern that components used in these projects are likely connected to forced labor in China.

Question. Are you concerned that solar panels, wind turbines, or other "clean" energy products/components made in China might be produced with slave labor?

Answer. It is well-established that the PRC uses forced labor in Xinjiang, not only in the solar industry but also in supply chains for products used across the economy. If confirmed, I will work with our partners, including the private sector, to promote accountability for the PRC Government's conduct and take joint action to ensure Eastern Caribbean supply chains are free from the use of forced labor.

Question. If confirmed, how will you verify current and future "clean" energy projects in the region are sourced from non-China suppliers?

Answer. The United States Government has several tools it can use to promote more transparent and secure supply chains. For example, the Global Magnitsky sanctions program holds individuals and entities accountable for forced labor and other human rights abuses, and the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act prohibits the importation of goods into the United States that were produced in Xinjiang, unless the importer demonstrates by clear and convincing evidence that the goods were not produced using forced labor. If confirmed, I commit to using the full range of options available to me to prevent any person or entity from benefiting from forced labor for projects in the Eastern Caribbean and to advocate for high-quality products and U.S. suppliers in the renewable energy sector.

I believe the U.S. private sector is the best counter to the PRC's Belt and Road Initiative. As Ambassador, if confirmed, I will aggressively pursue opportunities for

American companies to compete for clean energy projects and contracts in these countries, and I will advocate for economic and commercial alternatives that adhere to our principles of sovereignty, labor rights, and protection of the environment.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO Yael Lempert by Senator James E. Risch

Question. The Middle East has become ground zero for strategic competition. Our Gulf partners are quick to point to the Administration's overly restrictive arms sales policies, disastrous withdrawal from Afghanistan, endless Iran nuclear negotiations, pivot to the Indo-Pacific, and initial repudiation of the Abraham Accords as a reason to "diversify" their relationships. China is taking full advantage of this opportunity both economically and diplomatically. How do you address criticism that Biden Middle East policies have pushed our partners to China and away from the United States?

Answer. While we are clearly in a competitive global environment, it is also clear where our competitive advantages lie—American partnerships in the Middle East are unmatched, as is our ability to build alliances, partnerships, and cooperative solutions. The United States remains deeply committed to regional peace, security and prosperity as we strengthen decades-long strategic cooperation with our regional partners. We continue unrivaled defense cooperation with our partners to meet their security requirements, to include our robust military and security presence, provision of assistance, training and intelligence sharing. Our partners strongly prefer U.S. security partnerships and military equipment to those of the People's Republic of China. Our affirmative agenda of regional engagement is anchored by work to support economic development, mitigate food and water insecurity, address climate change, enhance maritime security, and cooperatively bolster air and missile defense, while also promoting regional integration through the Negev Forum and other efforts, as well as our ongoing work to deepen, strengthen, and expand the Abraham Accords.

It is imperative that our partners in the region continue to view the United States as their partner of choice. If confirmed, I will work to ensure continued active U.S. engagement and leadership to further strengthen and deepen our partnership with Jordan, engaging the public and key decisionmakers to underscore the ongoing vital role of the United States in the region, and of our unmatched cooperation with Jordan.

Question. I understand you have played a leading role in the Negev Forum, which has grown out of the historic Abraham Accords. Despite the 1994 peace treaty with Israel, Jordan has not been a full participant in the progress brought about by the Accords. Jordan's peace with Israel continues to be cold with little public support for relations with Israel, despite the significant benefits Jordan receives from its partnership with Israel. If confirmed, how will you work with Jordan to continue deepening its relationship with our ally Israel? How do we increase the understanding amongst the Jordanian public of the importance of this relationship?

Answer. If confirmed, I will continue to work with the Government of Jordan to identify areas of cooperation and mutual benefit with Israel that strengthen their diplomatic, economic, and people-to-people ties. I will encourage Jordan to participate in regional coordination efforts, such as the Negev Forum. I will also encourage further regional economic integration that strengthens Jordan's security and resilience. Project Prosperity—the water-for-solar energy deal between Jordan and Israel—is an excellent example of such regional economic integration efforts. The positive benefits to Jordan help demonstrate to the Jordanian people the value of the Jordanian-Israeli relationship and the benefits of expanding cooperation.

Question. I understand you have played a leading role in the Negev Forum, which has grown out of the historic Abraham Accords. Despite the 1994 peace treaty with Israel, Jordan has not been a full participant in the progress brought about by the Accords. Jordan's peace with Israel continues to be cold with little public support for relations with Israel, despite the significant benefits Jordan receives from its partnership with Israel. Are you familiar the Prosperity Blue and Prosperity Green plans between Israel, Jordan and the UAE? What role can the U.S. play in helping these projects come to fruition?

Answer. Jordan, Israel, and the UAE entered into the Project Prosperity agreement to bring UAE investment to Jordan to build a solar plant that would share clean, sustainable energy with Israel in exchange for water to help address Jordan's

acute water needs. At COP27, Jordan and Israel renewed their commitment to Project Prosperity and agreed to continue furthering the initiative with the UAE. The U.S., led by the Office of the Special Envoy for Climate Affairs, continues to work closely with Project Prosperity partners, emphasizing the shared benefit this project offers and encouraging the parties to sign binding agreements to implement the project in December at COP28.

Question. I understand you have played a leading role in the Negev Forum, which has grown out of the historic Abraham Accords. Despite the 1994 peace treaty with Israel, Jordan has not been a full participant in the progress brought about by the Accords. Jordan's peace with Israel continues to be cold with little public support for relations with Israel, despite the significant benefits Jordan receives from its partnership with Israel. How can we encourage Jordan to take part in the Negev Forum Working Groups, in a constructive manner, while not allowing complex issues related to the Palestinians to slow progress on unrelated issues that benefit all partners?

Answer. The United States strongly supports Jordan joining the Negev Forum.

By advancing projects and initiatives in the Negev Forum's six topical working groups that benefit the members and demonstrate the value of regional cooperation, we are optimistic that countries not yet part of the Negev Forum, including Jordan, will be incentivized to join. If confirmed, I will continue U.S. efforts to encourage Jordan to participate in the Negev Forum, which will help to strengthen Jordan's economy, security, and resilience.

Question. What is current U.S. policy on normalization with the Assad regime?

Answer. The Administration will not normalize relations with the Assad regime nor do we support others normalizing with Damascus. We will not lift sanctions on Syria or change our position to oppose reconstruction in regime areas of Syria until there is authentic progress toward a political solution consistent with UN Security Council Resolution 2254.

Question. How will you work as Ambassador to oppose efforts to "rehabilitate" Assad, who has murdered thousands of civilians in Syria?

Answer. The United States has made clear in our diplomatic discussions with partner countries that we do not support normalizing relations with the Assad regime. If confirmed, I will continue to strongly underline that position, as well as underscore the need for accountability for the Assad regime's horrific atrocities against Syrians and that anyone seeking to invest in Syria would risk sanctions exposure. The United States believes that stability in Syria can only be achieved through a political process in line with U.N. Security Council Resolution 2254, and will continue working with allies, partners, and the UN to ensure that a durable political solution remains within reach.

Question. Jordan has long played the role of mediator on Israeli-Palestinian issues. However, we've seen a Palestinian refusal to reposition security forces outside of Ramallah, U.S. assistance has failed to drive down levels of violence, the PA has lost significant credibility, and more Palestinians turn to terror groups to advance their causes. Why has our approach to Palestinian policy failed to change conditions on the ground?

Answer. The Administration is deeply concerned about rising levels of violence in the West Bank that have claimed both Israeli and Palestinian lives. As you note, Jordan has an important role to play on Israeli-Palestinian issues; earlier this year, we partnered with Jordan and Egypt to hold the first such Israeli-Palestinian meetings at the political level in nearly a decade. At these "Quint" meetings in Aqaba and Sharm El Sheikh in February and March respectively, we urged Israel and the Palestinian Authority (PA) to take steps to de-escalate tensions, including resuming security cooperation with Israel, ending incitement, and refraining from settlement activity and demolitions. The Aqaba and Sharm El Sheikh meetings helped to restore a measure of calm during the sensitive period in which Passover, Ramadan, and Easter converged. We will continue working with Israel, the PA, and our regional partners to stabilize the West Bank and build towards a just and lasting peace between Israelis and the Palestinians.

Question. Jordan has long played the role of mediator on Israeli-Palestinian issues. However, we've seen a Palestinian refusal to reposition security forces outside of Ramallah, U.S. assistance has failed to drive down levels of violence, the PA has lost significant credibility, and more Palestinians turn to terror groups to advance their causes. What role do you see for Jordan in Palestinian policy moving forward?

Answer. In recent months, Jordan's leadership was crucial in convening Israeli and Palestinian officials, along with representatives from Egypt and the United States, in Aqaba and in Sharm el-Sheikh, to advance de-escalatory measures. While more work remains to be done to reduce the levels of violence, Jordan's continued engagement with the parties remains indispensable to maintaining positive momentum toward a sustainable calm. If confirmed, I will work closely with Jordan in support of efforts to bolster stability in the West Bank, promoting security for Palestinians and Israelis alike, and preserving the prospects of a two-state solution.

Question. In the State Department's 2022 Trafficking in Persons Report, Jordan was identified as Tier 2 for sustained efforts to combat human trafficking, but did fall short several key areas. How will you work with the host government and civil society actors to address these issues if you are confirmed as Ambassador?

Answer. Overall, the Government of Jordan demonstrated significant and increasing efforts over the previous reporting period. However, it did not meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking in several key areas. If confirmed, I will continue the work of our Embassy to encourage the Government of Jordan to increase efforts to reduce lenient sentencing of convicted traffickers, proactively screen for and identify trafficking victims among vulnerable populations, and continue increasing efforts to investigate, prosecute, and convict sex trafficking and labor trafficking crimes. I will work with relevant government officials, international human rights NGOs, and members of Jordanian civil society toward this end.

Question. Do you commit to reporting accurate information as it pertains to the reality of the trafficking situation in Jordan?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to reporting accurate information on the topic of trafficking in persons in Jordan via our annual, Congressionally-mandated Trafficking in Persons (TIP) report and will work closely with the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons to encourage collaborative efforts with the Government of Jordan to combat human trafficking.

Question. In the State Department's 2021 International Religious Freedom report, Jordan was identified as generally lacking societal respect for religious freedom. What is your assessment of this particular issue and if confirmed, how will you work with the office of the Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom to bolster religious freedom in-country?

Answer. The Jordanian constitution safeguards "the free exercise of all forms of worship and religious rites," and stipulates there shall be no discrimination based on religion. Nevertheless, the government denies official recognition of most non-Abrahamic faiths, and converts from Islam to Christianity report societal ostracism, threats, and verbal and physical abuse. Jordanian law criminalizes some acts of free expression, including blasphemy against Abrahamic faiths and insulting the Prophet Muhammad, punishable by one to three years' imprisonment.

If confirmed, I will work with the Office of Ambassador-at-Large Rashad Hussain to engage the Government of Jordan at all levels to urge respect for freedom of religion or belief and work with civil society towards progress on peaceful coexistence.

Question. In the State Department's 2022 Human Rights Report, Jordan was identified as having significant human rights abuses, including violence against women and threats of violence against minorities, including the use of torture, censorship, arbitrary arrest, and more. If confirmed, what steps will you take to address these instances with the host government?

Answer. If confirmed, I will continue our Embassy's efforts to encourage the Jordanian government at all levels to uphold human rights and fundamental freedoms for all in Jordan, including, but not limited to, members of ethnic and religious minority groups, women and girls, LGBTQI+ persons, and persons with disabilities. I will also engage with international human rights NGOs, human rights defenders, journalists, and other members of Jordanian civil society to underscore our support for civil society, freedoms of expression, peaceful assembly, and association, and media freedom.

Question. In the State Department's 2022 Human Rights Report, Jordan was identified as having significant human rights abuses, including violence against women and threats of violence against minorities, including the use of torture, censorship, arbitrary arrest, and more. How will you direct your embassy to work with civil society organizations to improve the human rights situation on the ground?

Answer. If confirmed, the Embassy team and I will work with senior officials, international human rights NGOs, and Jordanian civil society to enhance judicial independence, promote accountability among the security forces, and instill respect

for the rule of law and human rights. I will also focus on expanding registration and operating space for civil society and addressing our concerns about the Government's use of broad criminal provisions to restrict those exercising fundamental freedoms. Prioritizing engagement with human rights defenders, journalists, and other members of Jordanian civil society is key to advancing our human rights priorities in Jordan.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO Yael Lempert by Senator Marco Rubio

Question. In May 2022, Secretary Blinken said that the People's Republic of China is the "only country with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do it." The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) clearly holds the reins of power in the People's Republic of China and has used this power to commit genocide in Xinjiang, flood our communities with fentanyl, and emit, by far the largest quantity of greenhouse gases in the world today. With their absolute control of Chinese society and industry, the CCP could stop all of these destructive actions tomorrow if they so choose. Is the Chinese Communist Party a threat to the United States?

Answer. The Administration has clearly identified the People's Republic of China (PRC) as "America's most consequential geopolitical challenge". Earlier this year, Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines testified that "the CCP represents both the leading and most consequential threat to U.S. national security and leadership globally". Under President Xi, the Chinese Communist Party has become more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad, seeking to undercut U.S. influence and alliances. If confirmed, I will work to advance U.S. national security interests and push back against the PRC's efforts to expand its influence, through robust and forthright diplomatic engagements, public diplomacy programming, and commercial advocacy to bolster the strong pillars of U.S.-Jordanian ties.

Question. Does the Chinese Communist Party undertake any activities that are beneficial to U.S. interests?

Answer. The Administration assesses the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) activities in the context of the PRC's track record of irresponsible disregard for international law and sovereignty of countries, and the CCP's increasingly aggressive posture internationally. According to the Office of the Director of National Intelligence's 2023 Annual Threat Assessment, the CCP is seeking to "undercut U.S. influence, drive wedges between Washington and its partners, and foster some norms that favor its authoritarian system".

Question. Do you believe that there are any areas within which the Chinese Communist Party would constructively work with the United States in good faith?

Answer. The United States would have to determine that any potential collaboration with the CCP would—first and foremost—advance very clearly defined U.S. national security interests. The United States would have to carefully weigh all possible benefits and downsides of such cooperation and ensure that the PRC would be unable to use such cooperation to advance its own narrow and/or opportunistic objectives. If confirmed, I will work with the Department of State's new Office of China Coordination, to advance U.S. objectives and counter harmful behavior by the PRC and other actors in the Middle East.

Question. If confirmed, will you approve any joint activity with organizations or representatives from the People's Republic of China in the country in which you will work?

Answer. If confirmed, my priority will be advancing U.S. national security interests in Jordan and countering efforts by our strategic and regional competitors to undermine those interests. The Administration has been clear that the PRC is the most consequential geopolitical challenge facing the United States, and that the United States is committed to working to strengthen our partners in the region. If confirmed, I will work closely with Department of State and interagency colleagues and Congress to counter China's efforts to expand its influence in Jordan and the region.

Question. What is your assessment of the current state of U.S.-Jordanian relations?

Answer. Our relationship is strong, as evidenced by our wide-ranging cooperation, and the 2022 signing of our \$10.15 billion, seven-year assistance MOU, the longest

and largest such MOU with Jordan. Jordan is a long-time, essential strategic partner of the United States on a wide range of shared concerns and regional challenges. We work closely together to advance mutual objectives on key issues, such as countering terrorism and extremism, including pursuing the enduring defeat of ISIS, promoting stability in Iraq, and preserving prospects for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Question. What is your assessment of the presence of Russian military forces along the Jordanian-Syrian border?

Answer. Russia maintains a nominal presence of military police in southern Syria.

Question. Is this a potential source of leverage for Russia over Jordan?

Answer. Russia maintains a nominal military presence in southern Syria. There is concern among some partners that the withdrawal of that presence could create a vacuum which could be exploited by Iran or its proxies. However, Jordan has consistently been aligned with us in voting on Ukraine at the United Nations. Jordan has demonstrated diplomatic support for Ukraine at key moments, including voting for major U.N. resolutions, such as a February 2023 U.N. General Assembly resolution calling for a cessation of hostilities and for Russia to “immediately, completely and unconditionally withdraw all of its military forces from the territory of Ukraine,” and on U.N. General Assembly resolutions in March and October 2022, rejecting Russia’s invasion and condemning Russia’s illegal annexation of four partially occupied regions in Ukraine.

Question. If Russia removes their security forces from Syria’s border with Jordan to fight in Ukraine, do you believe Iranian-backed militias, such as Hezbollah, would fill the void along Jordan’s border?

Answer. There is concern among some partners that the withdrawal of Russia’s nominal military presence in southern Syrian could create a vacuum which could be further exploited by the IRGC, Hizballah, and other groups commanded or supported by Iran that threaten regional stability and the security of our allies and partners. These forces play a particularly destabilizing role in Syria, threatening prospects for a peaceful resolution to the conflict. We are committed to countering the threats posed by Iran but are also clear-eyed on the destructive role Russia has played in Syria. We will continue to work with our allies and partners to push back against Iran’s destabilizing activities in Syria and to seek a political resolution to the Syrian conflict.

Question. Does Hezbollah’s presence in southern Syria pose a threat to Jordan?

Answer. Yes, along with other Iranian-aligned groups. Jordan shares our concerns about the malign presence of Iran and its proxies in Syria. U.S. security assistance to Jordan helps to bolster the security and stability of a vital partner against threats such as these. If confirmed, I will work to deepen our security and other cooperation with Jordan to continue addressing these threats.

Question. In your opinion, how porous is the border between Jordan and Syria?

Answer. United States security assistance has bolstered Jordan’s border security, enabling it to mitigate the spillover effects from the conflict in Syria and deter malign influences in the region, which helps to advance our mutual objectives on key issues such as pursuing the enduring defeat of ISIS. If confirmed, I will work to deepen our cooperation with Jordan on border security, and to ensure that instability in Syria does not threaten the security of such a critical partner.

Question. Is this a serious problem in regards to narcotics smuggling and for counterterrorism purposes?

Answer. The United States cooperates with regional partners, including Jordan, to strengthen local port and border security and counter narcotics smuggling through information sharing and capacity building. This includes efforts to counter captagon smuggling and consumption, which is a major issue in the region. In September 2022, the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement allocated \$2.5 million in annual INCLE funds to establish a bilateral program in Jordan to help it address the illicit drug trade, which will bolster regional stability and help deter malign actors.

Question. If confirmed, what will you do to assure Jordan that its security does not depend on Russian forces in Syria?

Answer. While Russia maintains a nominal presence of military police in southern Syria, United States security assistance enables Jordan to mitigate the spillover effects from the conflict in Syria and deter malign influences in the region through effective border security; this advances our mutual objectives on key issues such as

countering illegal drug trafficking and pursuing the enduring defeat of ISIS. If confirmed, I will support longstanding U.S. efforts to strengthen Jordan's border security and push back on Russia's destructive activities in Syria and throughout the region.

Question. Recently, a Jordanian Member of Parliament was arrested for allegedly smuggling weapons into Israel's Judaea and Samaria region. This has led to a deterioration in Jordan-Israel ties. How would you manage the bilateral relationship between Jordan and Israel?

Answer. If confirmed, I will continue to work with the Government of Jordan to identify areas of cooperation and mutual benefit with Israel that strengthen the diplomatic, economic, and people-to-people ties between the two countries. I will encourage Jordan to participate in regional coordination and integration efforts, such as the Negev Forum, and will continue U.S. support for efforts to address shared areas of concern, such as water scarcity, through Project Prosperity's water-for-solar energy initiative. I will underscore the importance of continued Jordanian-Israeli cooperation in the pursuit of regional stability, including through actions that ease tensions and encourage de-escalation, including through the "Quint" mechanism (U.S., Israel, Palestinian Authority, Jordan, Egypt) that has featured productive discussions between the parties in Aqaba and Sharm El Sheikh.

Question. At \$1.3 billion in foreign military financing, Jordan is expected to be one of the largest recipients of U.S. security assistance after Ukraine, Egypt, and Israel in FY2023, and U.S. assistance to Jordan accounts for approximately 40 percent of official aid Jordan receives annually. How is U.S. security enhanced by taxpayer investment in Jordan?

Answer. The Jordanian Armed Forces play a key role in regional stability. United States security assistance provides Jordan with strategic capabilities to support our partnership, including to ensure the enduring defeat of ISIS, providing border security, and deterring malign influences in the region. The strength of the U.S.-Jordanian partnership demonstrates our sustained commitment to partners in the Middle East and joint defense against hybrid threats by state and non-state actors. The U.S. will provide \$425 million in Foreign Military Financing (FMF) to Jordan in FY 2023. The high levels of FMF included in the seven-year bilateral Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)—a minimum request of \$400 million per year—reflect the outsized contribution by the Jordanian Armed Forces to regional security and stability. U.S. assistance contributes to a more resilient and stable Jordan, and consequently, a stronger and more capable partner for the U.S. as we address regional and security challenges.

Question. In your view, what would happen if the U.S. did not provide a high level of foreign military financing to Jordan?

Answer. U.S. security assistance to Jordan, including Foreign Military Financing, helps the United States confront a wide range of threats to our national security, including by enabling Jordan's participation in coalition efforts to ensure the enduring defeat of ISIS. U.S. support and security cooperation have also enabled Jordan to support other U.S. national security priorities. Because of our longstanding partnership, Jordan provided critical support over the years to our operations in Afghanistan. It has also enabled Jordan to participate in seven U.N. peacekeeping missions, including MONUSCO in the Democratic Republic of Congo and MINUSMA in Mali. Without U.S. security assistance, it is unlikely that Jordan would be able to cooperate with us on these and myriad other shared security priorities, which could create additional burdens for our own military.

Question. What is your view regarding Jordan's economy, given its debt load of 114 percent GDP in 2021, and that \$2.4 billion of its annual economic output comes from remittances from the estimated 800,000 Jordanian's living overseas?

Answer. Jordan faces a variety of internal and external challenges, including protracted regional crises that have disrupted trade, a chronic water deficit, and a burgeoning young population anxious for economic opportunities, as well as the lingering effects of the COVID-19 epidemic, which has contributed to limited economic growth and a high rate of unemployment. The Jordanian government has launched a home-grown, ten-year Economic Modernization Vision and a Public Sector Modernization Roadmap to systematically address these challenges.

The United States supports Jordan's modernization reform agenda. Our recently signed seven-year assistance MOU supports targeted assistance to help Jordan effectively tackle key aspects of its economic and modernization reform effort regarding economic growth, and water sector improvements, including deficit reduction.

Question. If confirmed, which aid programs will you focus on to promote Jordanian economic growth with U.S. business partners?

Answer. If confirmed, I will advocate for U.S. businesses and will focus on those aid programs that encourage and empower Jordan to attract foreign direct investment, including from the United States, which currently totals less than \$1 billion. If confirmed, I will continue to pursue programs intended to bolster digital infrastructure to help bolster broadband speed and drive down data costs in Jordan—key to improving the business investment climate. A sustainable water supply is also critical to Jordan's economic growth—and, ultimately, to its ability to partner with U.S. businesses. If confirmed, I will continue to use U.S. assistance to tackle Jordan's water scarcity through both improved infrastructure and water governance, as outlined in our bilateral MOU.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO Yael Lempert by Senator Todd Young

Question. If confirmed, how will you work with Jordan to continue deepening its relationship with our ally Israel? How do we increase the understanding amongst the Jordanian public of the importance of this relationship?

Answer. If confirmed, I will continue to work with the Government of Jordan to identify areas of cooperation and mutual benefit with Israel that strengthen their diplomatic, economic, and people-to-people ties. I will encourage Jordan to participate in regional coordination efforts, such as the Negev Forum. I will also encourage further regional economic integration that strengthens Jordan's security and resilience. Project Prosperity—the water-for-solar energy deal between Jordan and Israel—is an excellent example of such regional economic integration efforts. The positive benefits to Jordan help demonstrate to the Jordanian people the value of the Jordanian-Israeli relationship and the benefits of expanding cooperation.

Question. Are you familiar the Prosperity Blue and Prosperity Green plans between Israel, Jordan and the UAE? What role can the U.S. play in helping these projects come to fruition?

Answer. Jordan, Israel, and the UAE entered into the Project Prosperity agreement to bring UAE investment to Jordan to build a solar plant that would share clean, sustainable energy with Israel in exchange for water to help address Jordan's acute water needs. At COP27, Jordan and Israel renewed their commitment to Project Prosperity and agreed to continue furthering the initiative with the UAE. The U.S., led by the Office of the Special Envoy for Climate Affairs, continues to work closely with Project Prosperity partners, emphasizing the shared benefit this project offers and encouraging the parties to sign binding agreements to implement the project in December at COP28.

Question. How can we encourage Jordan to take part in the Negev Forum Working Groups, in a constructive manner, while not allowing complex issues related to the Palestinians to slow progress on unrelated issues that benefit all partners?

Answer. The United States strongly supports Jordan joining the Negev Forum. By advancing projects and initiatives in the Negev Forum's six topical working groups that benefit the members and demonstrate the value of regional cooperation, we are optimistic that countries not yet part of the Negev Forum, including Jordan, will be incentivized to join. If confirmed, I will continue U.S. efforts to encourage Jordan to participate in the Negev Forum, which will help to strengthen Jordan's economy, security, and resilience.

Question. What can the U.S. do to help Jordan stop the smuggling of arms and drugs across its borders?

Answer. Jordan continues to face spillover effects from the conflict in Syria, including the illicit trafficking of drugs and arms. Over the last 10 years, U.S. security assistance has significantly improved Jordan's ability to control its northern border and to interdict illicit smuggling attempts. The United States has supported the Jordan Border Security Program, an integrated border security surveillance, detection, and interdiction system, along 350 miles of Jordan's land borders. The United States continues to cooperate with regional partners, including Jordan, to strengthen local port and border security and counter narcotics smuggling through information sharing and capacity building. Additionally, in September 2022 the State Department's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement (INL) allocated \$2.5 million in annual INCLE funding to establish a bilateral INL program in Jordan to help

it address the threat posed to the Kingdom by illicit drugs, to bolster regional stability and help deter malign actors.

Question. Jordan is currently harboring Ahlam Tamimi a Palestinian terrorist responsible for the bombing of a pizzeria in Jerusalem that killed 15-year-old U.S. citizen Malki Roth and U.S. citizen Judith Greenbaum who was pregnant at the time. The United States has long sought the assistance of the Jordanian Government in sending Ms. Tamimi to stand trial in the U.S. for the murders. If confirmed, will you make this case a priority?

Answer. Yes. If confirmed, I will do everything in my power to ensure that Ahlam al-Tamimi faces justice in the United States for her horrific crimes.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO Yael Lempert by Senator Ted Cruz

Abraham Accords

In February 2021, the White House instructed the State Department to stop signaling support for the Abraham Accords. The State Department implemented that guidance, including through specific guidance distributed on February 4 by a staffer in the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs. That internal guidance instructed staffers to no longer even refer to the relevant agreements as “Abraham Accords,” and to instead call them “normalization agreements.” The guidance specifically stated that “we are no longer using ‘Abraham Accords’ to refer to the normalization of relations between Israel and other countries.” On April 1 Spokesperson Ned Price told reporters that the policy of the State Department was to “call them normalization agreements.” On May 18, White House Spokesperson Jen Psaki said “Aside from putting forward a peace proposal that was dead on arrival, we don’t think [the Trump administration] did anything constructive, really, to bring an end to the longstanding conflict in the Middle East.” On June 4 the Washington Free Beacon (WFB) confirmed the existence of the policy, citing “two internal State Department emails” reviewed by the outlet.

At the time you were a high-ranking official in NEA, and would afterwards be appointed Acting Assistant Secretary. The staffer who sent the internal guidance was a press officer for Israel and Palestinian Affairs, which at the time was overseen by then-Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Israel and Palestinian Affairs Hady Amr.

Question. When did you become aware of the guidance sent from the White House?

Answer. During the referenced time period, I was serving as Chargé d’Affaires, a.i. at the U.S. Embassy in London, which reports to the Bureau of European Affairs. I was not aware of any such guidance from the Department, and referred in any discussions I had in the United Kingdom about the Abraham Accords to them as such. I did not begin my current assignment in NEA until the end of August 2021.

Question. When did you become aware of the internal guidance issued by the NEA staffer?

Answer. I was not aware of any such guidance at the time. Subsequently, I became aware of questions about the existence of such guidance, but I have not seen it.

Question. Did you clear the internal guidance sent by email from the NEA staffer? If yes, please explain your rationale for clearing it. If no, do you believe it was appropriate for such guidance to be issued within your bureau without you clearing it?

Answer. I was serving at the U.S. Embassy in London during the referenced time period, and did not begin my current assignment in NEA until the end of August 2021. I thus did not clear on any internal guidance issued within NEA during this timeframe, and would have had no basis to do so, as I was not serving in NEA at that point.

Question. Did you ever discuss the internal guidance with Mr. Amr?

Answer. No, I did not discuss with Mr. Amr any internal guidance related to this topic as I was serving in the United Kingdom.

Question. Did you clear the language that Mr. Price used in his press briefings, and specifically his statement on April 1 that regarding the Abraham Accords the State Dept. “call[s] them normalization agreements?”

Answer. No. I was serving at the U.S. Embassy in London at the time, and did not begin my current assignment in NEA until the end of August 2021, so did not have any reason to review or clear on such a statement.

Question. Do you believe that the United States should not support the Abraham Accords?

Answer. Quite the opposite, I strongly support the Abraham Accords. The President, Secretary of State, and other officials, including myself, have been clear, privately and publicly, that the United States strongly supports the Abraham Accords, which are in the national security interests of the United States. As such, we are continuing to work with Israel and other regional countries to deepen them, build upon them, and expand the circle of peace. These efforts include the establishment of the Negev Forum, which I am proud to have played a role in creating and building.

Question. Do you believe that State Department officials should not use the phrase “Abraham Accords?”

Answer. No. State Department officials, from the Secretary of State down, regularly use the phrase “Abraham Accords.” When I began my current assignment in NEA at the end of August 2021, following my assignment at the U.S. Embassy in London, the first public engagement I had was to speak on behalf of the State Department at a September 15, 2021 event celebrating the one-year anniversary of the Abraham Accords, hosted by the Abraham Accords Institute of Peace. In my remarks, I repeatedly referred to the Abraham Accords, and have done so routinely since then, privately and publicly.

Question. Please transmit any other internal guidance which you cleared—emails, memos, cables, notes, decision memos, briefing papers, instructions, etc.—that instructed staffers not to signal support for the Abraham Accords, including by not using the phrase “Abraham Accords.”

Answer. As I never cleared on any such internal guidance, I have no documents to submit in response to this question. Any request for Department records will need to be addressed to the Department.

Question. Do you believe that the policy outlined in the February 4 email, i.e. to downplay the significance of the Abraham Accords as “normalization agreements,” was in the national security interests of the United States? Please also describe any effects that you believe it had on US diplomacy more broadly.

Answer. I was not aware of any such State Department policy. I regularly referred to the agreements as the “Abraham Accords” in any relevant discussions I had in the context of my then-assignment in the United Kingdom. Secretary Blinken noted in a January 27, 2021, press availability that, “First, as we’ve said, we very much support the Abraham Accords. We think that Israel normalizing relations with its neighbors and other countries in the region is a very positive development, and so we applauded them, and we hope that there may be an opportunity to build on them in the months and years ahead.”

The Abraham Accords are in the national security interests of the United States. The Biden administration’s strong embrace of the Abraham Accords, and efforts to build upon them in a variety of ways, has been a key focus of U.S. efforts in the region.

Question. In your own assessment, is Ms. Psaki’s May 18 assessment tenable, i.e. that the Trump administration did not do “anything constructive. to bring an end to the longstanding conflict in the Middle East.”

Answer. The Abraham Accords were more than constructive; they were historic. That is why the United States is continuing to work to expand, deepen, and build upon them. I have noted publicly that the Abraham Accords are historic and have created the opportunity for a transformation in the region. I have been at the center of the current Administration’s efforts to build on them, including through the creation of the Negev Forum, an unprecedented multilateral grouping of Israel and its regional partners, aimed at cementing and further advancing regional peace and regional integration.

Question. In May 2020, then-nominee and now-ambassador to Jordan Henry Wooster submitted written testimony to the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations in response to several questions I asked him about the case of Ahlam Aref Ahmad

Al-Tamimi. In 2017, the Department of Justice unsealed a criminal complaint against, and an arrest warrant for, al-Tamimi. She is charged with conspiring to use a weapon of mass destruction against U.S. nationals outside the U.S., resulting in death, for helping to mastermind an August 9, 2001 attack in Jerusalem. The attack killed 15 people, including two U.S. nationals, Judith Shoshana Greenbaum, a pregnant 31-year-old school teacher, and Malka Chana Roth, who was 15 years old. Al-Tamimi is a Jordanian national who is being harbored in Jordan, and whose address is known to the Government of Jordan. The United States has asked the Jordanians to extradite her. They have thus far refused.

In his written testimony, Ambassador Wooster committed to leveraging American assistance to Jordan, including potentially withholding aid, to secure al-Tamimi's extradition. I am now going to ask you the same questions I asked him, and I very much hope your answers will be the same.

Please describe the extent to which Jordan's refusal to extradite Tamimi has affected U.S.-Jordanian relations? For reference, Ambassador Wooster's answer to this question was "We continue to ask that the Government of Jordan arrest Ahlam Aref Ahmad Al-Tamimi and agree to extradite her to the United States. The Government of Jordan has been unwilling to accede to our request due to the Court of Cassation's ruling that our bilateral extradition treaty is not valid. We continue to dispute the court's claim, as we exchanged instruments of ratification that brought the treaty into force on July 29, 1995 and the treaty has not been terminated. We continue to raise this issue at the highest levels in order to reach a satisfactory solution."

Answer. The Administration continues to engage with the Government of Jordan at the highest levels to press that Jordan arrest Ahlam Aref Ahmad Al-Tamimi and agree to extradite her to the United States. Our assessment of the U.S.-Jordan extradition treaty remains the same. We continue to dispute the Court of Cassation's ruling that our bilateral extradition treaty is not valid. We continue to raise this issue at the highest levels in order to reach a satisfactory solution. In my current position, I have raised this issue with senior Jordanian officials. If confirmed, I commit to making this a priority and doing everything in my power to ensure that Ahlam Aref Ahmad al-Tamimi faces justice in the United States for her horrific crimes.

Question. In May 2020, then-nominee and now-ambassador to Jordan Henry Wooster submitted written testimony to the Senate Committee on Relations Committee in response to several questions I asked him about the case of Ahlam Aref Ahmad Al-Tamimi. In 2017, the Department of Justice unsealed a criminal complaint against, and an arrest warrant for, al-Tamimi. She is charged with conspiring to use a weapon of mass destruction against U.S. nationals outside the U.S., resulting in death, for helping to mastermind an August 9, 2001 attack in Jerusalem. The attack killed 15 people, including two U.S. nationals, Judith Shoshana Greenbaum, a pregnant 31-year-old school teacher, and Malka Chana Roth, who was 15 years old. Al-Tamimi is a Jordanian national who is being harbored in Jordan, and whose address is known to the Government of Jordan. The United States has asked the Jordanians to extradite her. They have thus far refused.

In his written testimony, Ambassador Wooster committed to leveraging American assistance to Jordan, including potentially withholding aid, to secure al-Tamimi's extradition. I am now going to ask you the same questions I asked him, and I very much hope your answers will be the same.

What options and leverage does the United States have to secure Tamimi, including potentially withholding assistance to the Government of Jordan? For reference, Ambassador Wooster's answer to this question was "The United States has multiple options and different types of leverage to secure Ahlam Aref Ahmad Al-Tamimi's extradition. We will continue to engage Jordanian officials at all levels not only on this issue, but also on the extradition treaty more broadly. U.S. generosity to Jordan in Foreign Military Financing as well as economic support and other assistance is carefully calibrated to protect and advance the range of U.S. interests in Jordan and in the region."

Answer. The Departments of State and Justice continue to pursue all viable means to ensure Ahlam Aref Ahmad al-Tamimi faces justice in the United States. As Ambassador Wooster noted, the United States has multiple options and different types of leverage to secure Ahlam al-Tamimi's extradition. If confirmed, I will continue to engage Jordanian officials at all levels not only on this issue, but also on the extradition treaty more broadly.

U.S. generosity to Jordan in Foreign Military Financing as well as economic support and other assistance is carefully calibrated to protect and advance the range of U.S. interests in Jordan and in the region.

Question. In May 2020, then-nominee and now-ambassador to Jordan Henry Wooster submitted written testimony to the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations in response to several questions I asked him about the case of Ahlam Aref Ahmad Al-Tamimi. In 2017, the Department of Justice unsealed a criminal complaint against, and an arrest warrant for, al-Tamimi. She is charged with conspiring to use a weapon of mass destruction against U.S. nationals outside the U.S., resulting in death, for helping to mastermind an August 9, 2001 attack in Jerusalem. The attack killed 15 people, including two U.S. nationals, Judith Shoshana Greenbaum, a pregnant 31-year-old school teacher, and Malka Chana Roth, who was 15 years old. Al-Tamimi is a Jordanian national who is being harbored in Jordan, and whose address is known to the Government of Jordan. The United States has asked the Jordanians to extradite her. They have thus far refused.

In his written testimony, Ambassador Wooster committed to leveraging American assistance to Jordan, including potentially withholding aid, to secure al-Tamimi's extradition. I am now going to ask you the same questions I asked him, and I very much hope your answers will be the same.

Can you commit to using those options and leverage to secure Tamimi's extradition? For reference, Ambassador Wooster's answer to this question was "If confirmed, I would explore all options to bring Ahlam Aref Ahmad Al-Tamimi to justice, secure her extradition, and address the broader issues associated with the extradition treaty."

Answer. If confirmed, I would explore all options to bring Ahlam Aref Ahmad al-Tamimi to justice, secure her extradition, and address the broader issues associated with the extradition treaty.

Background

The Biden administration has sought to pressure the Government of Egypt on issues ranging from energy to human rights. The administration has withheld assistance from the Government of Egypt, a policy that has been publicly justified by reference to Egypt's imprisonment of among others Muslim Brotherhood figures. Public reports suggest that Biden administration officials have in particular pressured Egypt regarding the case of Salah Soltan, a Muslim-Brotherhood linked preacher imprisoned by the Egyptian government on terrorism related charges. Soltan is a notorious hate preacher. He has said: "I travel all over the world, and I met supporters of Al-Aqsa, of the prisoners, of Jerusalem, and of Palestine—people who thirst for the blood of the Jews, and who are eager for the promised war against the sons of Zion, until Palestine is liberated in its entirety." He has also said "I want our brothers, and the whole world, to know what's going on these days, during Passover. Read Dr. Naghuib Al-Kilani's book, Blood for the Matzos of Zion. Every year, at this time, the Zionists kidnap several non-Muslims [sic]—Christians and others... By the way, this happened in a Jewish neighborhood in Damascus. They killed the French doctor, Toma, who used to treat the Jews and others for free, in order to spread Christianity. Even though he was their friend and they benefited from him the most, they took him on one of these holidays and slaughtered him, along with the nurse.

Then they kneaded the matzos with the blood of Dr. Toma and his nurse. the world must know these facts about the Zionist entity and its terrible corrupt creed. The world should know this." He has also said "Any Zionist—tourist or other—who enters Egypt must be killed. We will not kill tourists from any [other] country. We stress that this fatwa is directed only toward those Zionists, who destroyed our country, killed our people, and shed our blood on our land."

The Biden administration has also engaged Egypt regarding the administration's efforts to deliver gas to Lebanon through a route that includes Syria, in likely violation of American sanctions, including the Caesar Act.

Question. Have you engaged the Egyptian Government on the case of Salah Soltan in any way?

Answer. The Administration supports further strengthening the United States' strategic partnership with Egypt while seeking tangible improvements by the Government of Egypt on human rights. In that context, the Department of State has raised Mr. Soltan's case with Egyptian authorities. Other U.S. officials and I have encouraged the Government of Egypt to ensure Mr. Soltan and all detainees have access to appropriate medical care, the ability to meet with family members and lawyers, and other rights guaranteed to them under Egyptian and international law.

Question. Have you specifically conveyed requests to the Egyptian Government to release Soltan?

Answer. In my discussions with the Government of Egypt about Mr. Soltan, I have encouraged the Government of Egypt to ensure he has access to appropriate medical care, and other rights guaranteed to him under Egyptian and international law. I have also noted the bipartisan interest from some members of Congress in seeing a resolution to Mr. Soltan's case.

Question. Do you consider the Muslim Brotherhood to be a terrorist group?

Answer. To so designate a group, the Department of State uses credible, sourced evidence to demonstrate that the organization meets the statutory criteria. At this time, the Administration has not designated the Muslim Brotherhood as a foreign terrorist organization.

Question. Do you consider any of these statements by Mr. Soltan to be antisemitic hate speech?

Answer. I strongly condemn antisemitism in all its forms and share the deep concern about antisemitic rhetoric, including in Egypt. The referenced statements attributed to Mr. Soltan denigrating and calling for violence against Jewish people are reprehensible and are rightly condemned as antisemitic.

Question. Do you consider any of these statements by Mr. Soltan to advocate genocide against Jews?

Answer. The referenced statements attributed to Mr. Soltan denigrating and calling for violence against Jews are reprehensible and antisemitic.

Question. Do you consider Mr. Soltan to be a "hate preacher?"

Answer. The referenced statements attributed to Mr. Soltan clearly constitute hateful and reprehensible rhetoric.

Question. Have you engaged the Government of Egypt on issues related to the delivery of gas to Lebanon through Syria? If so, please describe those engagements.

Answer. Other U.S. officials and I have engaged the Government of Egypt to discuss the acute energy crisis in Lebanon. These engagements reflected that the proposal to deliver gas from Egypt to Lebanon, with potential World Bank support pending Lebanon's progress on required reforms, could potentially help Lebanon address its acute power crisis in a sustainable and transparent manner. We have informed all parties that Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control must review the final contracts and financing terms in order to be able to conduct its final sanctions assessment. A central element of all such engagements with the Government of Egypt has been that U.S. sanctions targeting the Assad regime remain in place, and are an important tool to press for accountability for the Assad regime, to include on its atrocious record of human rights abuses.

Question. What percent of U.S. assistance to Lebanon was used for activities or operations aimed at disarming Hizballah during your tenure as Ambassador? A rough estimate or a range will be sufficient.

Answer. I have never served as Ambassador to Lebanon. U.S. assistance strengthens the professional capacity of the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and reinforces its role as the sole legitimate defender of Lebanese territorial integrity. Thanks to U.S. training and equipment, the LAF continues to defend Lebanon from terrorist organizations and other militant groups, thereby undercutting Hizballah's claim that the Lebanese need Hizballah and its weapons to protect Lebanon from external threats.

Question. What percent of U.S. assistance to Lebanon was used for activities or operations aimed at disrupting Hizballah military activities other than through disarming them during your tenure as Ambassador, e.g. through roadblocks? A rough estimate or a range will be sufficient.

Answer. I have never served as Ambassador to Lebanon. U.S. security assistance strengthens the professional capacity of the Lebanese security services, enabling them to defend Lebanon from terrorist organizations and other militant groups, thereby undercutting Hizballah's claim that the Lebanese need Hizballah and its weapons to protect Lebanon from external threats. U.S. security assistance includes training and equipment that has also improved the frequency and sophistication of Lebanese anti-crime operations, including to counter drug trafficking, which works against Hizballah's interests.

Question. Please describe the degree to which, in your assessment, Hizballah continues to influence or exert control over the Beirut-Rafic Hariri International Airport or facilities located within the airport.

Answer. The Administration is clear-eyed about the threat that Hizballah poses and remains concerned by reports that Hizballah continues to exert influence over

Lebanese ports of entry. We continue to target Hizballah's financial and logistical capabilities through a range of tools, including sanctions. U.S. foreign assistance to the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and the Internal Security Forces (ISF) enables them to maintain a robust security presence in the airport, including elements which regularly benefit from U.S. training.

Question. Is it your assessment that the Beirut-Rafic Hariri International Airport maintains effective antiterrorism efforts?

Answer. Lebanon has taken steps to improve antiterrorism controls at Beirut International Airport. For example, Lebanon has made efforts to implement U.N. Security Council Resolutions 2396 and 2309 by collecting air travelers' biographic data and providing updates to the INTERPOL watchlist. Lebanese security services routinely coordinate with the United States to investigate individuals involved in terrorism and share information about falsified travel documents. Regrettably, government budget shortfalls have prevented significant progress on biometric collection and storage capabilities.

Question. Please describe the degree to which, in your assessment, Hizballah continues to influence or exert control over the Port of Beirut or facilities located within the port?

Answer. Hizballah's continued influence over the Port of Beirut remains a concern, as it supports the terrorist group's illicit activities and deprives the Lebanese government and people of much needed customs revenue. We continue robust engagement with the Government of Lebanon and likeminded partners on the need to strengthen security at Lebanon's ports of entry. We continue to use sanctions to target Hizballah's financial and logistics capabilities. For instance, in 2019 the United States designated Hizballah security official Wafiq Safa, who has exploited Lebanon's ports and border crossings to smuggle contraband, facilitate Hizballah travel, and facilitate the passage of illegal drugs and weapons into the Port of Beirut, routing certain shipments to avoid scrutiny.

Question. Is it your assessment that the Port of Beirut maintains effective antiterrorism measures?

Answer. The Port of Beirut was decimated by the explosion in August 2020, and due to budget shortfalls resulting from the economic crisis the government has not been able to fully rebuild it. Some security infrastructure at the container terminal remains dysfunctional. The Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) has maintained perimeter security at the port since the blast and plays an important role in deterring terrorist activity in and around the facility.

Question. In your capacity as an NEA official, did you convey concerns to the Lebanese Armed Forces or the Lebanese government that their level of coordination or cooperation with Hizballah during their 2017 Aarsal operations risked compromising American support, including but not limited to security assistance?

Answer. During that timeframe in 2017, I was serving as Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary for Egypt and North Africa, and thus did not engage Lebanese officials on this as it was not in my purview.

Question. Did you clear policies providing livelihood support for LAF and ISF members?

Answer. In my capacity as Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs (NEA), I maintained oversight of all offices in the bureau responsible for U.S. foreign assistance in the region, including the policies that drive them. NEA manages the livelihood support program for the Lebanese Armed Forces, while the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement manages the livelihood support program for the Internal Security Forces (ISF). Our teams worked together, along with other bureaus and offices within the Department, to design a program consistent with applicable U.S. laws. The Government of Israel is aware of this program and, in general, supports efforts to strengthen the role of Lebanon's legitimate security services in shoring up domestic stability.

Question. What steps has the State Department taken to ensure that livelihood support provided to LAF and ISF members are not spent in businesses owned by Hizballah or individuals linked to Hizballah?

Answer. The Department undertakes rigorous measures to mitigate the risk that U.S. assistance might benefit terrorist groups, including thorough oversight, vetting, project monitoring, and other risk mitigation practices carried out by the U.S. government and trusted implementing partners. Historically, the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and Internal Security Forces (ISF) have maintained exemplary compli-

ance with U.S. monitoring requirements. Through our engagement on the livelihoods program, LAF and ISF senior officers committed to safeguarding livelihood resources. To ensure accountability, in addition to U.S. government personnel monitoring and extensive reporting from the implementing partner, the Department mandated that this program utilize a third-party monitor, which will visit LAF and ISF units throughout the country to document where and how livelihood recipients are spending their funds.

Question. Please describe what you understand to be the statutory basis for providing livelihood support for LAF members.

Answer. The LAF livelihood support program was funded from Peacekeeping Operations (PKO) funds, which I understand are available for peacekeeping operations and other programs carried out in furtherance of the national security interests of the United States consistent with the authority in the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961.

Question. Please describe what you understand to be the statutory basis for providing livelihood support for ISF members.

Answer. The Internal Security Forces (ISF) livelihood support program was funded from the International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement (INCLE) account, which I understand is appropriated to carry out foreign assistance programming for counternarcotics and other anti-crime purposes consistent with the authority in the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961.

Question. Please describe what you understand to be any precedents for providing livelihood support for LAF members.

Answer. The United States has provided livelihood support to foreign security partners in extraordinary circumstances, as has been the case in Somalia using Peacekeeping Operations (PKO) funds. The Department works closely with all relevant interagency stakeholders to ensure such programs include robust risk mitigation protocols and clear exit plans.

Question. Please describe what you understand to be any precedents for providing livelihood support for ISF members.

Answer. International Narcotics and Law Enforcement (INCLE) funds have been used to provide limited stipends for targeted, vetted groups outside the region. The Department works closely with all relevant stakeholders to ensure such programs include robust risk mitigation protocols and clear exit plans.

Question. In January and March 2022, the ISF announced that it had dismantled 17 different Israeli espionage networks that were operating against Hizballah. Do you believe that these actions enhanced American national security?

Answer. The Department is concerned by any Lebanese government action that may benefit Hizballah, especially if it also affects Israel's security. I understand that our diplomats in Beirut constantly encourage our Lebanese security partners to focus on their core mission, which is to meet the internal security needs of the Lebanese people. Broadly speaking, I believe U.S. support for the Internal Security Forces (ISF) enhances American national security. Strengthening the Lebanese state, including its security forces, weakens Hizballah's flawed argument that it is the sole defender of Lebanon. Our support to the ISF continues to build the institution's professionalism and capacity to counter internal threats that have the potential to destabilize the country and the region.

Question. In April and May 2023, the LAF and ISF participated in the deportation of Syrian refugees back into territory controlled by the Assad regime. Do you believe that these actions enhance American national security?

Answer. The Administration is concerned by these reports and remains in contact with representatives of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees and the Lebanese government. We have conveyed our concerns to Lebanese authorities and continue to discuss the issue of Syrian refugee protections with involved stakeholders. We consistently reiterate that all refugees and displaced persons should be treated humanely, and anyone detained should be afforded all applicable legal protections.

Question. Did you clear the decision to rename NEA/IPA in April 2022? If not, do you agree with the decision? If you either cleared on the decision or agree with it, please describe your rationale for doing so.

Answer. I support the State Department's March 2022 decision to update the name of the "Office of Israel and Palestinian Affairs" to the "Office of Israeli and Palestinian Affairs." The updated name ensures greater consistency in naming conventions for country desks across the Department of State, using the adjectival form

of the country, region, or group, such as with the Office of North African Affairs, Office of Iraqi Affairs, and Office of Iranian Affairs in NEA; the Office of Northern European, Baltic, and Arctic Security Affairs in EUR; the Office of Canadian Affairs in WHA; and the Office of East African Affairs in AF, among others.

Question. Did you clear the decision to waive Congressional anti-terrorism sanctions in order to facilitate the October 2022 visit to Washington, D.C. by Secretary General of the Executive Committee of the PLO Hussein AlSheikh? If not, do you agree with the decision? If you either cleared on the decision or agree with it, please describe your rationale for doing so.

Answer. The U.S. Government unequivocally rejects terrorism in all its forms and has consistently condemned terrorist attacks and incitement by Palestinian actors and groups. I supported the State Department's decision to engage in the meetings that the Department and other agencies held with the PLO delegation because they were aimed at advancing U.S. interests, including our steadfast commitment to Israel's security and to enhancing Israeli-Palestinian cooperation, including security cooperation, and reinforcing commitments to non-violence and countering terrorism. The State Department's approach to, and decision to engage in, the meetings was consistent with advice obtained from the Office of Legal Counsel of the Department of Justice, which was subsequently published and shared with Congress. Per that advice, no "waiver" under the Anti-Terrorism Act of 1987 was required.

Question. Did you clear language accusing the Government of Israel of changing the status quo on the Temple Mount in January 2023? If not, do you agree with the decision to publicly accuse the Israelis? If you either cleared on the decision or agree with it, please describe your rationale for doing so.

Answer. While I am not familiar with the referenced language, the United States has consistently called for all parties to uphold the historic status quo on the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif, and to refrain from unilateral steps that exacerbate tensions. The United States also continues to respect the 1994 Israel-Jordan peace treaty, which recognizes the special role of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan in Muslim holy shrines in Jerusalem.

Question. Do you believe that publicly expressing concerns with the Government of Israel's efforts to advance judicial reform is in the national security interest of the United States? If yes, please describe your rationale for believing so.

Answer. As the President has said, "The genius of American democracy and Israeli democracy is that they are both built on strong institutions, on checks and balances, on an independent judiciary. Building consensus for fundamental changes is really important to ensure that the people buy into them so they can be sustained." The strength of the U.S.-Israel partnership is rooted in shared interests and democratic values, which have served to anchor bilateral cooperation for 75 years. Accordingly, the Administration works with Israel to advance both the interests and values central to the national security interests of both our countries.

Question. Is it your understanding that it is still the policy of the United States that "In light of new realities on the ground, including already existing major Israeli populations centers, it is unrealistic to expect that the outcome of final status negotiations will be a full and complete return to the armistice lines of 1949, and all previous efforts to negotiate a two-state solution have reached the same conclusion. It is realistic to expect that any final status agreement will only be achieved on the basis of mutually agreed changes that reflect these realities?"

Answer. Yes. President Biden has been clear that the vision of two states along the 1967 lines with mutually agreed land swaps remains the best way to achieve a peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians that protects Israel's long-term security and its status as a Jewish and democratic state.

Illegal Leaks of Trump Official's Health Status

In October 2020, the Washington Post revealed that the director of policy planning at the State Department, Peter Berkowitz, had tested positive for COVID-19 after a trip he had just taken to Britain, Hungary, and France. The Post cited "four U.S. and foreign officials familiar with the situation," including an official who "said that Berkowitz's mask-wearing and social distancing practices were lax during the trip." As you know, the leak of a U.S. official's medical status is illegal, and doing so to undermine allies' confidence in the State Dept. harms American interests. Indeed, the Post wrote "[f]ollowing Berkowitz's visit to London, British officials have started being more selective about approval of American delegations. [and] postponed an upcoming trip by Elliott Abrams, the U.S. special envoy for Iran

and Venezuela, officials said." You were the Deputy Chief of Mission at the U.S. Embassy in London when that leak occurred.

Question. Do you believe that the leaks of Mr. Berkowitz's health status to the Washington Post undermined confidence in the State Department among our allies?

Answer. Due to privacy considerations, I cannot provide information related to Mr. Berkowitz's health status at that time. In general, I take protecting personally identifiable information (PII) and other sensitive information as a core responsibility as a public servant and if confirmed, I will work to ensure all Embassy Amman personnel will strictly follow such rules and regulations.

I do not believe the referenced press article undermined confidence in the State Department among our allies. The U.S. Embassy in London acted in strict compliance with local regulations in place at the time, which our UK partners appreciated. Subsequent critical visits to London from Washington continued, without concerns raised by our UK partners.

Question. Were you involved in any internal investigations related to the leak? If so, please describe your role and any determinations from those investigations.

Answer. Once press inquiries about Mr. Berkowitz were made to the State Department and the U.S. Embassies in London and Paris, the press team at Embassy London immediately worked to determine how and from where a leak could have emanated. The conclusion, conveyed to the Ambassador and me, was that the leak did not emanate from Embassy London.

Question. If there were no investigations inside the U.S. Embassy in London related to the leaks, please describe your rationale for not conducting such investigations.

Answer. Once press inquiries about Mr. Berkowitz were made to the State Department and the U.S. Embassies in London and Paris, the press team at Embassy London immediately worked to determine how and from where a leak could have emanated. The conclusion, conveyed to the Ambassador and me, was that the leak did not emanate from Embassy London.

FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

Background

Egypt

In previous QFRs, I asked if you had specifically conveyed requests to the Egyptian Government to release Salah Soltan. You did not answer that question, but instead said that you "noted the bipartisan interest from some members of Congress in seeing a resolution to Mr. Soltan's case." You also said that you "have encouraged the Government of Egypt to ensure Mr. Soltan and all detainees have access to appropriate medical care, the ability to meet with family members and lawyers, and other rights guaranteed to them under Egyptian and international law."

I sent you a series of statements by Soltan calling for genocide against Jews, and asked you if you considered them to be anti-Semitic, including: "I travel all over the world, and I met supporters of Al-Aqsa, of the prisoners, of Jerusalem, and of Palestine—people who thirst for the blood of the Jews, and who are eager for the promised war against the sons of Zion, until Palestine is liberated in its entirety." Every year, at this time, the Zionists kidnap several non-Muslims [sic]—Christians and others... They killed the French doctor, Toma, who used to treat the Jews and others for free. Even though he was their friend and they benefited from him the most, they took him on one of these holidays and slaughtered him, along with the nurse. Then they kneaded the matzos with the blood of Dr. Toma and his nurse," and "Any Zionist—tourist or other—who enters Egypt must be killed. We will not kill tourists from any [other] country. We stress that this fatwa is directed only toward those Zionists, who destroyed our country, killed our people, and shed our blood on our land." You responded that you condemn antisemitism and that those statements were "attributed" to him.

Question. Did you specifically convey requests to the Egyptian Government to release Soltan?

Answer. No. I have noted to Egyptian Government officials the interest of some members of Congress in a resolution to Mr. Soltan's case. I have

separately urged the Egyptian Government to fulfill the legislative conditions on a portion of U.S. assistance that Egypt make clear and consistent progress in releasing political prisoners and in providing detainees with due process of law.

Question. Did you specifically convey requests on behalf of the Biden administration to the Egyptian Government to release Soltan?

Answer. No. I have urged the Egyptian Government to ensure that Mr. Soltan has access to appropriate medical care, and other rights guaranteed to him under Egyptian and international law. I have also noted the interest of some members of Congress in a resolution to Mr. Soltan's case. I have not conveyed a specific request on behalf of the Biden administration for Mr. Soltan's release.

Question. If you did specifically convey requests to the Egyptian Government to release Soltan, did you also encourage Egypt to release all detainees, by name? If not, please describe the policy rationale for prioritizing Soltan's release?

Answer. I did not specifically convey requests to the Egyptian Government for Mr. Soltan's release.

Question. Do you acknowledge that Soltan did indeed make those statements?

Answer. Yes, I acknowledge that Mr. Soltan made those statements.

I asked you whether you have "engaged the Government of Egypt on issues related to the delivery of gas to Lebanon through Syria." You answered that you did, and described a "proposal to deliver gas from Egypt to Lebanon," which I understand would include transiting gas through Syria. You also answered that "[a] central element of all such engagements with the Government of Egypt has been that U.S. sanctions targeting the Assad regime remain in place."

Question. Please describe why you believe that proposal would not violate sanctions targeting the Assad regime, including specifically the Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act.

Answer. No final determination has yet been made about the U.S. sanctions implications of that proposal. We received provisional contracts for both the electricity and gas deals last year. The final financing terms and contracts are still being discussed by the parties and the World Bank. The Departments of Treasury and State still need to review details of the final financing terms and contracts to assess any relevant sanctions concerns. Only at that time will we have the information needed to make any final determinations. The Department of State looks forward to continuing to consult with Congress on this important issue.

In previous QFRs, I asked you a series of questions regarding the degree to which U.S. assistance to Lebanon has been used for disarming or disrupting Hezbollah's military activities. You acknowledged that in your capacity as Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs (NEA) you maintained oversight of all offices in the bureau responsible for U.S. foreign assistance in the region. You did not answer those questions, and instead wrote about undermining Hezbollah's narrative. I also asked you whether in your assessment the Beirut-Rafic Hariri International Airport and Port of Beirut maintain effective antiterrorism efforts. You did not answer those questions either.

Question. What percent of U.S. assistance to Lebanon was used for activities or operations aimed at disarming Hezbollah during your tenure at NEA in the Biden administration? A rough estimate or a range will be sufficient.

Answer. All U.S. Government efforts are ultimately aimed at fostering a stable, sovereign Lebanese state free of Hizballah's malign influence. U.S. security assistance is aimed at increasing the Lebanese Armed Force's (LAF) professional capacity as the legitimate defender of Lebanese territorial integrity and as a strong state institution, which remains the best way to erode Hizballah's malign influence. Ultimately the LAF responds to the orders and guidance of the country's civilian leadership, which continues to express concern that attempts to disarm Hizballah by force could trigger civil war and destabilize the region. The LAF has proven itself capable of applying our assistance to face a broad range of evolving threats. U.S.

security assistance to Lebanon enables counter terrorism operations against ISIS, and Al-Qaeda affiliates, in addition to operations against captagon traffickers and arms smuggling networks on the Syrian border, some of whom are alleged to be affiliated with Hizballah.

Question. What percent of U.S. assistance to Lebanon was used for activities or operations aimed at disrupting Hezbollah military activities other than through disarming them during your tenure at NEA in the Biden administration, e.g. through roadblocks? A rough estimate or a range will be sufficient.

Answer. All U.S. Government efforts are ultimately aimed at fostering a stable, sovereign Lebanese state free of Hizballah's malign influence. U.S. security assistance strengthens the professional capacity of the Lebanese security services, enabling them to defend Lebanon from terrorist organizations and other militant groups, thereby undercutting Hizballah's claim that the Lebanese need Hizballah and its weapons to protect Lebanon from external threats. U.S. security assistance includes training and equipment that has also improved the frequency and sophistication of Lebanese anti-crime operations, including against captagon traffickers and smuggling networks on the Syrian border, which works against Hizballah's interests.

Question. Is it your assessment that the Beirut-Rafic Hariri International Airport maintains effective antiterrorism efforts?

Answer. The Department of State shares your concerns about Hizballah's influence at Beirut-Rafic Hariri International Airport; moreover, widespread corruption in Lebanon also undermines the integrity and effectiveness of anti-terrorism efforts at the airport. The Department of State would welcome the opportunity to offer a classified briefing to go into further details on our assessment of anti-terrorism efforts at the airport. The Department and the Embassy continue to engage senior Lebanese officials on the need to strengthen counterterrorism measures at the airport and other ports of entry and have seen a commitment on behalf of the Government of Lebanon to interdict high-risk individuals and cargo. U.S. foreign assistance to the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and the Internal Security Forces (ISF) enables them to maintain a robust security presence in the airport, including with elements which regularly benefit from U.S. training.

Question. Is it your assessment that the Port of Beirut maintains effective antiterrorism measures?

Answer. The Department of State shares your concerns about Hizballah's influence at the Port of Beirut; moreover, widespread corruption in Lebanon also undermines the integrity and effectiveness of anti-terrorism efforts of partners like the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), which maintains perimeter security at the port and plays an important role in deterring terrorist activity in and around the facility. As such, we are not satisfied with anti-terrorism efforts at the Port of Beirut. Due to the explosion in August 2020, some security infrastructure at the container terminal remains dysfunctional and the capacity of the port remains greatly diminished. As Lebanon looks to rebuild the port, the Department continues to engage senior Lebanese officials on the need to ensure security measures, including anti-terrorism measures, are in line with international best practices.

I asked you whether you cleared policies providing livelihood support for LAF and ISF members. You did not answer that question. You responded that "the Government of Israel is aware of this program and, in general, supports efforts to strengthen the role of Lebanon's legitimate security services in shoring up domestic stability." I also asked you what steps the State Department has taken to ensure that livelihood support provided to LAF and ISF members are not spent in businesses owned by Hezbollah or individuals linked to Hezbollah. You answered that the LAF and ISF maintain compliance with U.S. monitoring requirements, which is irrelevant to this question, and that "the Department mandated that this program utilize a third-party monitor, which will visit LAF and ISF units throughout the country to document where and how livelihood recipients are spending their funds."

Question. Did you clear policies providing livelihood support for LAF and ISF members?

Answer. Yes. In my capacity as Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs (NEA), I maintained oversight of all offices in the bureau responsible for U.S. foreign assistance in the region. This included

participating in the institutional clearance process that resulted in the recommendation to provide livelihood support to the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and Internal Security Forces (ISF). This temporary and extraordinary program was approved to offset the unprecedented financial and other strains on these two national security forces due to Lebanon's ongoing economic crisis. The LAF and ISF are the only remaining state institutions with cross-confessional support capable of guaranteeing the country's stability. The LAF and ISF have taken on new challenges, especially in maintaining domestic social order even as the collapse of Lebanon's currency has hollowed out personnel salaries. Buttressing both institutions figures as part of a larger Administration effort to bolster the Lebanese state and avoid outright collapse, which could precipitate the return of sectarian militias, prompt civil war, strengthen Hizballah, and threaten Israel's security. This temporary program supplements our larger efforts to press Lebanon's political leadership to move on critical reforms and government formation.

Question. Does the Government of Israel support this specific policy, of providing livelihood support for LAF and ISF members?

Answer. The Israeli Government has been briefed on this program and has not objected. I understand that the Government of Israel supports U.S. efforts to strengthen Lebanon's legitimate military and security services, and the Lebanese state itself as the country experiences a profound economic crisis which could impact domestic stability.

Question. Please provide details of the arrangement the State Department has with the third-party monitor, including who the third-party monitor is, how often they will be visiting those units, how many units they will be visiting, and so on.

Answer. The U.N. Development Programme (UNDP), as the primary implementer for the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and Internal Security Forces (ISF) livelihood support programs, issued a subcontract to consulting firm BDO as the third-party monitor for this program, according to a competitive process. Per the monitoring plan, BDO will gather data from all ISF and LAF barracks in Lebanon and provide reports on a monthly basis.

Each month, for the duration of the program, BDO will travel to each base location, collect data from ISF or LAF members, and cross-reference the recipients' information with the approved list of eligible recipients. BDO plans to collect 100 percent of all data via in-person interviews rather than via remote surveys.

Question. Please transmit any documents between the Department and this third-party monitor detailing the arrangement.

Answer. The Department of State entered into assistance agreements with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to implement the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and Internal Security Forces (ISF) livelihood support programs. UNDP contracted with consulting firm BDO to conduct monitoring surveys and data analysis. BDO designed its monitoring plan according to requirements defined by both UNDP and the Department of State and the Department has full access to the results of BDO monitoring. The Department did not enter into an agreement directly with BDO; they were subcontracted by UNDP as the primary implementer.

I asked you for the statutory basis for providing livelihood support for LAF members, and you responded that the program is funded from Peacekeeping Operations (PKO) funds. When the livelihood support program initially became public, reports indicated that the support from come from Foreign Military Financing (FMF) funds.

Question. In your capacity as Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for NEA, were you aware of plans to use FMF for livelihood support?

Answer. Yes, in my capacity as Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs (NEA), I was aware of the Department's discussions about the use of FMF for livelihood support to the LAF.

Question. In your understanding, why did the Department choose to use PKO funds instead?

Answer. The Department determined that this program was an appropriate use of PKO funding. In making this decision, the Department considered feedback provided during the Congressional consultation and notification process.

I asked you about operations by Lebanon's Internal Security Forces (ISF) to dismantle Israeli assets in Lebanon that were operating against Hezbollah. The U.S. funds the ISF, including providing livelihood support for ISF members. You answered that "Broadly speaking, I believe U.S. support for the Internal Security Forces (ISF) enhances American national security. Strengthening the Lebanese state, including its security forces, weakens Hizballah's flawed argument that it is the sole defender of Lebanon. Our support to the ISF continues to build the institution's professionalism and capacity to counter internal threats that have the potential to destabilize the country and the region." I consider this answer to be deeply troubling.

Question. Do you believe that it is in the U.S. national security interest for the ISF to dismantle Israeli assets that operate against Hezbollah, because it undermines Hezbollah's narrative?

Answer. No. The Department of State does not assess that any reported effort by the Internal Security Forces (ISF) to dismantle such networks is in the U.S. national security interest. This is why the Department continues to urge the ISF to focus on its core mission—bolstering stability and meeting the internal security needs of the Lebanese people. Our support to the ISF continues to build the institution's professionalism and capacity to counter internal threats that have the potential to destabilize the country and the region.

Question. Your original answer cited a "naming convention" that doesn't exist. I'd like to give you another opportunity to explain why you supported changing the name of NEA/IPA

Answer. The name change of NEA/IPA was an administrative action, not a policy decision. The administrative change made the name of NEA/IPA consistent in its use of the adjectival form. The State Department's regional bureaus, including NEA, routinely use the adjectival form of countries and sub-regions in the name of offices. While I did not personally sign the memo regarding the name change, I supported the decision on this basis. The name change did not have any policy implications on the state-to-state relationship with Israel, nor was it intended to have such implications.

Question. Do you believe that the name change signals that U.S. is leveling its relationship with Israel to the same level as the U.S.-Palestinian relationship?

Answer. No. The U.S.-Israel relationship dates back 75 years and is a strategic state-to-state partnership. The name change did not have any impact on policy and did not in any way change the way the U.S. views the special bond between the United States and Israel.

Question. I was not asking about a waiver under the Anti-Terrorism Act. The relevant waiver was issued pursuant to section 604 of the Foreign Relations Authorization Act, Fiscal Year 2003, i.e. "Denial of Visas to PLO and Palestinian Authority Officials." Did you clear the decision to provide that waiver and, if not, do you support providing it?

Answer. Yes, I participated in the institutional clearance process that resulted in the recommendation to the Secretary of State to find the PA/PLO non-compliant and to provide a waiver. In regard to section 604 of the Foreign Relations Authorization Act, Fiscal Year 2003, every Administration since its enactment, upon finding the PLO or PA in non-compliance with certain commitments, has taken the approach of imposing a sanction and waiving it upon the basis of such a waiver being in the national interest of the United States. Beginning in 2019, with the closure of the PLO Office in Washington, the previous Administration determined it was appropriate to impose the sanction of the denial of visas to PLO and PA officials, and then waive it. I participated in the institutional clearance process that resulted in the State Department clearance of packages recommending decisions to impose and waive the same visa sanctions in 2021 and 2022.

Question. Regarding the OLC advisory that you cited, did you clear the decision to request it, and if not, do you support that decision?

Answer. I fully support implementation of the Anti-Terrorism Act of 1987. In this vein, I supported the Department seeking advice from the Office of Legal Counsel (OLC) at the Department of Justice on compliance with the Anti-Terrorism Act.

Question. Do you agree with the decision not to have State Department officials meet with Minister Smotrich when he was in Washington, D.C.?

Answer. It is my understanding that Minister Smotrich did not request to meet with any State Department officials during his visit to Washington, D.C. As there were no requests, there was not a decision made about any meetings with State Department officials.

Question. If you do agree with that decision, please distinguish between the sorts of engagement you support with Secretary General Al-Sheikh about Israeli-Palestinian cooperation from the sorts of engagement that would have occurred with Minister Smotrich.

Answer. As noted in my previous response, there was no such decision about meetings with Minister Smotrich and State Department officials during his visit to Washington.

Question. Do you believe that Minister Ben-Gvir's visit was a change in the Temple Mount status quo?

Answer. No. I do not think the visit represented a change in the status quo. The United States expressed concern about the visit's potential to exacerbate tensions.

Question. In previous QFRs, I asked you about an October 2020 leak to the Washington Post of the medical data of Peter Berkowitz, who was then the director of policy planning at the State Department. The leak was in the context of a trip Berkowitz had just taken to Britain, Hungary, and France, and the Washington Post story included specific and extensive details related to U.S.-British diplomacy. You were the Deputy Chief of Mission at the U.S. Embassy in London when the leak occurred. I specifically asked you about any internal investigations related to the leak. You answered that there was an investigation conducted by the press team, and the conclusion—which was conveyed to the Ambassador and to you—was that the leak did not emanate from Embassy London. Please describe the press team's investigation.

Answer. I instructed the Embassy's press team to conduct a thorough review of who could have been in touch with the journalist from the Washington Post who reported the story. The press team's leadership queried all members of their staff to ensure none had violated Embassy policy on communicating with members of the press. I also asked the press team's leadership about any engagement with the Washington Post concerning the story. I reaffirmed to all Embassy section heads strict guidelines which prohibit any engagement with the media without prior approval from the Embassy's Public Affairs section.

Question. What other communications did you have with the press team about the leak? Did the press team interview you or the Ambassador in the context of trying to figure out who leaked, or just convey to you the results?

Answer. I communicated with the Embassy's press team that the Ambassador and I were upset about the leak, and coordinated with them on suggested press guidance to use in response to it, that they were working with Washington on (the Department had the lead in responding to incoming inquiries). The press team did not interview the Ambassador or me, knowing both of us had a strict policy of not speaking with journalists unless it was coordinated through them.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO Yael Lempert by Senator Bill Hagerty

The Kingdom of Jordan is one of the United States' most important friends in the Middle East. Jordan was designated a U.S. major non-NATO ally and the United States is Jordan's single largest provider of bilateral assistance. In fiscal year 2023, over \$1.6 billion was appropriated for bilateral assistance to Jordan. As you noted in your testimony, the \$400 million that the U.S. sends to Jordan in Foreign Military Financing is premised on Jordan playing a stabilizing role in the Middle East. However, recent statements made by King Abdullah, the Jordanian Foreign Minister, and members of the Jordanian parliament that incited violence against Israel are deeply concerning. Just one day before armed extremists recently barricaded

themselves inside the Al Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, reportedly with incendiary devices, King Abdallah of Jordan declared it, and I quote, "the duty of every Muslim to deter Israeli escalations against holy sites in Jerusalem," an implicit green light for potential violence.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to conveying to the Government of Jordan, in the strongest possible terms, that incitement to violence against Israel and Jews by Jordanian officials—at any level of the Government—is wholly unacceptable and will not be tolerated?

Answer. If confirmed, I will continue to make clear that encouraging violence against Israel and Jews is wholly unacceptable. I will also continue to work closely with both the Israeli and Jordanian Governments to encourage them to deepen bilateral cooperation and regional integration efforts.

Question. Did you find it alarming that a Jordanian Member of Parliament reportedly sought to smuggle hundreds of guns and assault rifles across the border, presumably to be used against Israelis?

Answer. I have seen media reports about the arrest of the Jordanian Member of Parliament. I would defer to the Governments of Israel and Jordan for further details on the specifics of the case. However, in general, any action to encourage violence, or in contravention of the law, should be condemned and that individual held accountable.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to making clear to the Government of Jordan that members of Parliament who partake in incitement to violence and who attempt to smuggle arms to extremists must be held fully accountable?

Answer. Yes. In general, any action to encourage violence, or in contravention of the law, should be condemned and that individual held accountable.

FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

Leak of Information About State Department Official

In October 2020, the Washington Post reported that Peter Berkowitz, at the time the State Department's Director of Policy Planning, had tested positive for COVID-19 after work travel to Britain, Hungary, and France. As you know, the leak of a U.S. official's medical information is illegal. You were serving as the Deputy Chief of Mission at the U.S. Embassy in London when that leak occurred, and thus were one of a small circle of people who had access to the leaked medical information.

Question. Do you have any information pertaining to who leaked Mr. Berkowitz's medical information?

Answer. I do not have any information pertaining to who leaked Mr. Berkowitz's medical information, which could have emanated from the range of foreign interlocutors that he met with, in addition to the U.S. embassies he visited or the Department of State.

I take protecting personally identifiable information (PII) and other sensitive information as a core responsibility as a public servant and if confirmed, I will work to ensure all Embassy Amman personnel will strictly follow such rules and regulations.

Question. Did the U.S. embassy in London conduct an investigation into the leak? If not, please describe your rationale for not conducting such an investigation. If yes, please describe the determinations of that investigation?

Answer. Once press inquiries about Mr. Berkowitz were made to the State Department and the U.S. embassies in London and Paris, the press team at Embassy London analyzed who may have shared the medical information. The conclusion, conveyed to the Ambassador and me, was that the information was not shared with the press by any Embassy London employee.

Leaks of Information While Serving on the National Security Council

You served on the National Security Council (NSC) during the Obama administration from 2014 until 2017. You subsequently served on NSC during the Trump Administration for a period of time in 2017.

Question. Did you sign and complete a Classified Information Nondisclosure Agreement (SF-312) prior to serving on the NSC during the Obama Administration and the Trump administration?

Answer. When I first started working at the State Department in 1998, I signed a non-disclosure agreement for classified information. I also completed all official forms I was requested to before and during my tenure on the NSC, and believe I signed the SF-312 form prior to starting my detail at the NSC in 2014. As a career public servant, I take protecting classified information as a core responsibility.

Question. While serving on the NSC during the Trump Administration, did any news reports emerge on President Trump's Middle East policies that contained unauthorized leaks of sensitive or classified information?

Answer. Yes.

Question. During the Trump administration, did you ever participate in unauthorized leaks of sensitive or classified information to news reporters?

Answer. Absolutely not. I have never participated in an unauthorized leak of any sensitive or classified information to news reporters, neither during the Trump Administration nor at any other time during my 25 years of government service.

Leaks of Information About a U.S. Department of State official (2nd follow-up)

In October 2020, the Washington Post reported that Dr. Peter Berkowitz—the Director of Secretary of State's Policy Planning Staff (S/P) at the time—had tested positive for COVID-19 after official State Department travel to Britain, Hungary, and France. As you know, the leak of a U.S. Government official's medical information is illegal. You were serving as the Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM) at U.S. Embassy London when that leak occurred and therefore were one of a small circle of people who had access to the leaked medical information.

In testimony to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, you stated that you "do not have any information pertaining to who leaked Mr. Berkowitz's medical information". Additionally, you stated: "the press team at Embassy London analyzed who may have shared the medical information. The conclusion, conveyed to the Ambassador and me, was that the information was not shared with the press by any Embassy London employee."

Question. Please provide step-by-step details about the structure of and the steps taken in this investigation, starting with who led the investigation and which personnel carried it out?

Answer. I instructed the Embassy's press team to conduct a thorough review of who could have been in touch with the journalist from the Washington Post who reported the story. The press team's leadership queried all members of their staff to ensure none had violated Embassy policy on communicating with members of the press. I also asked the press team's leadership about any engagement with the Washington Post concerning the story, and also discussed with other relevant section chiefs. I reaffirmed to all Embassy section heads strict guidelines which prohibit any engagement with the media without prior approval from the Embassy's Public Affairs section.

Question. Were you personally involved in the internal investigation related to the leak? If so, please describe your role.

Answer. I instructed the Embassy's press team to conduct a thorough review of who could have been in touch with the journalist from the Washington Post who reported the story. I also asked the press team's leadership about any engagement with the Washington Post concerning the story, and also discussed with other relevant section chiefs. I reaffirmed to all Embassy section heads strict guidelines which prohibit any engagement with the media without prior approval from the Embassy's Public Affairs section.

Question. Who else participated in overseeing the investigation?

Answer. The Minister-Counselor for Public Affairs and Press Spokesman queried their team, and assessed that inappropriate information, such as medical information, was not leaked by Embassy London, and could have emanated from the wide range of foreign interlocutors with whom Mr. Berkowitz met (who in accordance with contact tracing protocols at the time, would have been informed if they had been exposed to COVID), in addition to other U.S. embassies he visited or the Department of State.

Question. Did the press team at Embassy London interview you on the possibility that you leaked this information? If not, why not? If yes, was a simple denial sufficient?

Answer. The press team did not interview me, or the Ambassador, knowing both of us had a strict policy of not speaking with journalists unless it was coordinated through them.

Question. Were simple denials sufficient for all those questioned as part of the investigation?

Answer. Yes.

Question. Did the investigation of this leak include any analysis of phone records, e-mail correspondence, or other forms of electronic communication?

Answer. No.

Question. What specific role did you, in your capacity as Deputy Chief of Mission at U.S. Embassy London, play in the Embassy's preparation for Mr. Berkowitz's visit?

Answer. I reviewed the schedule that the Embassy team prepared for Mr. Berkowitz, and consulted with the team about what meetings to recommend for him with UK Government officials. I also joined some of his meetings with UK Government officials.

Question. Did you convey, in any way and at any time, any hostility towards Mr. Berkowitz or disapproval of Mr. Berkowitz's planned visit to U.S. Embassy London?

Answer. No, not that I recall.

Question. Did you convey, in any way and at any time, any guidance or direction to those responsible for the investigation that expressed hostility towards Mr. Berkowitz or disapproval of Mr. Berkowitz's visit to U.S. Embassy London?

Answer. No, not that I recall.

Question. Will you provide us with the conclusions of U.S. Embassy London's investigation into the leak of Mr. Berkowitz medical status?

Answer. The conclusion of the Embassy press team's review was that there was no reason to believe that inappropriate information, such as medical information, was shared with the press by an Embassy London employee. The information reported in the article could have emanated from the range of foreign interlocutors with whom Mr. Berkowitz met (who, in accordance with contact tracing protocols at the time, would have been informed if they had been exposed to COVID), in addition to the other U.S. embassies he visited or the Department of State.

Question. While you were at U.S. Embassy London, did any investigations into potential leaks of information about Trump administration officials ever conclude the Embassy was responsible for a leak?

Answer. In separate instances regarding potential disclosures of unclassified information regarding the Ambassador, the conclusion reached was that they likely emanated from personnel who had departed Embassy London, or could possibly have emanated from Embassy staff. The Ambassador and I underscored to Embassy staff that any such actions were unacceptable. We regularly reiterated the Embassy's policy which prohibits any engagement with the media without prior approval from the Embassy's Public Affairs section.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO ARTHUR W. BROWN BY SENATOR ROBERT MENENDEZ

Security

Ecuador is facing an increasingly dire security situation amid rising levels of drug trafficking, violence, targeted killings of government officials, and deadly prison riots. The magnitude of these security challenges has forced President Lasso to declare several state of emergencies and request additional international assistance, a request he personally made to our delegations both times. The United States should always strive to stand with democratic leaders who share our values and are seeking to improve the safety and security of their people. Failing to stand with Ecuador in its hour of need by bolstering security and law enforcement cooperation risks jeopard-

izing our commitment to democratic partners, regional security in the Americas, and ultimately U.S. national interests.

Question. Is it your assessment that current U.S. security and law enforcement assistance to Ecuador is sufficient to address Ecuador's security challenges?

Answer. U.S. security and law enforcement assistance to Ecuador is robust and effective. Drug seizures in Ecuador have reached historic levels. The United States and Ecuador also signed several instruments and established new programs to enhance counternarcotics and law enforcement cooperation. The Department of Defense provides equipment and training to the Ecuadorian military to increase patrols of the rivers used by drug traffickers on the Colombian border. I look forward to—if confirmed—continuing this collaboration while seeking more opportunities to expand security cooperation.

Question. If confirmed, what measures will you take to help Ecuador's government address these urgent security challenges?

Answer. If confirmed, I will lead the already fantastic work of the U.S. Mission in Ecuador equipping the police and justice sector institutions with investigative training, technical advisors, technology, software, vehicles, facilitating record drug seizures, as well as strengthening the ability of authorities to prosecute criminal activity. I will continue our active drug-demand reduction program, training social and health officials, community activists, and business leaders to join forces to push narcotrafficking out of neighborhoods. I will continue support for Department of Defense and State Department programs to boost Ecuadorian navy and air force capabilities to patrol maritime and aerial borders.

Economy

Under the Lasso Government, Ecuador has demonstrated a strong interest in bolstering economic ties with the United States. I am proud that the Biden administration has taken some important steps in this direction by updating our bilateral Trade and Investment Council Agreements and including Ecuador within the Americas Partnership for Economic Prosperity. But, there is more that we can do. That is why I wrote to U.S. Trade Representative Tai and Secretary of State Blinken last year to encourage them to take steps to set the stage for free trade negotiations with Ecuador. And that is why Ranking Member Risch and I introduced the Innovation and Development in Ecuador Act to make Ecuador eligible for inclusion under the Caribbean Basin Economic Recovery Act, which would reduce U.S. tariffs on nearly 50 percent of Ecuadorian exports to our country.

Question. Mr. Brown, what are your thoughts on both opening free trade negotiations with Ecuador and having Ecuador be included as a beneficiary country within the Caribbean Basin Economic Recovery Act? Do you support these efforts?

Answer. I support efforts to strengthen our bilateral economic and commercial ties. Still, the Biden-Harris Administration remains focused on strengthening the domestic economy through investments in American workers and competitiveness before signing new trade deals.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO ARTHUR W. BROWN BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

Question. Would you agree that the absence of a trade agreement with the United States puts Ecuador at an economic disadvantage compared to Colombia and Peru?

Answer. U.S.-Colombia and U.S.-Peru Free Trade Agreements certainly benefit both pairs of countries. The United States has a strong economic partnership with Ecuador, as demonstrated by the passage of the U.S.-Ecuador Partnership Act of 2022 as part of the NDAA and the signing of an Open Skies Agreement in November 2022. If confirmed, I will continue supporting our robust bilateral relationship to the benefit of both our countries, including continued coordination in implementing the Protocol on Trade Rules and Transparency that went into effect in August 2021. The Biden-Harris administration remains focused on strengthening the domestic economy through investments in American workers and competitiveness before signing new trade deals.

Question. If confirmed, what measures or actions do you intend to take improve the business environment for U.S. firms to compete effectively in Peru?

Answer. To improve the business environment for U.S. firms in Ecuador, if confirmed, I will maintain our focus on expanding bilateral trade and investment and strengthening effective economic governance and legal certainty in Ecuador. If confirmed, I will support continued implementation of the Protocol on Trade Rules and Transparency that went into effect in August 2021 while working to advance our robust commercial relationship with Ecuador, boosting U.S. exports and reducing trade barriers between the two countries.

Colombia's crop of illicit coca has reached historically high levels. Meanwhile, the Petro Government has stopped voluntary, forced, and aerial eradication, and it is seizing significantly lower amounts of cocaine and heroin than the previous government.

Question. What impact does this situation have on the security environment in Ecuador?

Answer. The Colombian Government continues to forcibly eradicate coca and seized approximately 210.9 metric tons of cocaine (184.6 metric tons of cocaine HCL and 26.3 metric tons of cocaine base) between January and April 2023. Nonetheless, given Ecuador remains a primary transit route for criminal organizations trafficking Colombian cocaine to the United States and other overseas markets, the anticipated increased coca cultivation and cocaine production in Colombia are cause for concern. We expect to see continued increases in violence and cocaine seizures as additional drugs transit Ecuadorian territory; if confirmed I will continue to work closely with Ecuador's security forces to prevent Ecuador being used as a transshipment point for drugs bound for the United States and Europe, and also to stem the record violence drug gangs are bringing to Ecuadorian streets.

Question. Please describe your understanding of the influence of Mexican drug cartels in Ecuador.

Answer. Since 2017, Ecuador has faced intensifying violence and citizen insecurity along the northern border with Colombia, and coastal cities, including Guayaquil. Violence is in part driven by Mexican drug trafficking groups exerting influence on local gangs, who provoked the worst prison riots in Ecuador's history in 2021 and record homicide rates last year.

Escalations in 2022 included targeted assassinations of police and prosecutors, IED attacks, coordinated attacks by narco-trafficking gangs against security forces, and a near doubling of the homicide rate.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to expedite security cooperation projects to increase security at Ecuador's ports and counternarcotic efforts in the Pacific?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to continue close cooperation with Ecuadorian authorities, including Ecuador's Navy, Coast Guard, custom's officials, and national police, to increase security at Ecuador's ports, and combat narcotics trafficking along the Pacific.

Question. Is the Chinese fishing fleet off the coast of Galapagos a source of concern regarding drug trafficking from South America?

Answer. The PRC fishing fleet off the coast of the Galapagos remains a source of concern regarding potential illicit activity, including illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing, drug trafficking, and other activities of concern.

We do not have concrete information about the scale of potential drug trafficking via this fleet, as shipments are primary headed to the Asia-Pacific region.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to engage Ecuadorian society and authorities about establishing competitive and transparent infrastructure project selection and public procurement processes that promote transparency, open competition, financial sustainability, and adherence to international global standards and norms?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed, I commit to engaging Ecuadorian partners including civil society and authorities to establish competitive and transparent infrastructure project selection and public procurement processes.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to prioritize engagements with Ecuadorian society and authorities about establishing frameworks or mechanisms to review and address the long-term financial sustainability and national security implications of foreign investments in strategic sectors or services in Peru?

Answer. If confirmed as the next U.S. Ambassador to Ecuador, I commit to engaging with Ecuadorian society and authorities to address long-term financial sustainability and national security implications of foreign investments in Ecuador.

Question. If confirmed, what concrete steps could you take to help Ecuador operationalize the prioritized recommendations contained in the TIP report?

Answer. By the end of 2021, the Government of Ecuador had increased prosecutions and convictions of traffickers, brought charges against three individuals in a high-profile case involving forced labor allegations, and continued to work with governments in the region to combat trafficking in persons. Earlier this year, Ecuador's National Assembly also passed an important law to better align the Government's efforts to combat trafficking in persons and protect victims. Despite ongoing progress, there remains work to be done. If confirmed, I will encourage authorities to criminally prosecute and convict labor traffickers and complicit officials, expand specialized services for all victims, increase funding and support for civil society actors, and combat domestic and transnational criminal groups involved in trafficking in persons, as well as other crimes.

Question. What is your assessment of this particular issue and if confirmed, how will you work with the Ambassador At Large for International Religious Freedom to bolster religious freedom in-country?

Answer. Freedom of religion or belief stands among the United States' most important founding principles, and remains central to the Biden-Harris Administration's commitment to upholding and advancing human rights. If confirmed, I commit to continue U.S. Embassy Quito's outstanding work promoting and bolstering Ecuador's societal respect for religious diversity. If confirmed, I also will work closely with Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom Rashad Hussain to build on existing efforts to promote religious freedom and combat intolerance in all its forms in Ecuador and around the world.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to personally engaging with civil society on this issue?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed, I commit to engaging directly with Ecuador's diverse civil society and religious and spiritual actors on this matter, including with Ecuador's Indigenous communities.

Question. If confirmed, what concrete steps can you take to help Ecuador increase their societal and governmental respect for religious freedom?

Answer. If confirmed, I will prioritize engaging with religious and spiritual actors, along with other civil society actors, to fully understand the myriad ways others disrespect religious freedom. From a place of understanding, I would collaborate with the Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom to leverage the appropriate tools to increase societal and governmental respect for religious freedom, if confirmed.

Question. How will you direct your embassy to work with civil society organizations to improve the human rights situation on the ground?

Answer. If confirmed, I will direct U.S. Embassy Quito to continue meeting with civil society, faith-based organizations, labor unions, and advocates of peace and human rights to incorporate their input wherever possible. Such sessions remain of incredible value to us as policymakers because they give us a broader and deeper view of the issues. I will also work with others throughout the Department, including the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, to ensure support for civil society-led efforts to strengthen democratic institutions and promote human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Question. Would you agree that the absence of a trade agreement with the United States puts Ecuador at an economic disadvantage compared to Colombia and Peru? Please answer yes or no, and explain why.

Answer. While a conclusive answer would require further comparative economic analysis, given the market access between partner FTA countries, I would answer yes with the information available to me. With that said, I understand Ecuador and the United States have expanded economic and commercial ties in the past few years. Both countries signed the Protocol on Trade Rules and Transparency in December 2020, facilitating trade across several sectors. In October 2022, USTR Tai and Ecuador's Production Minister Prado committed to establishing a Fair-Trade Working Group and exploring potential negotiations on labor, environment, and digital trade. Ecuador also ranked as a top beneficiary of the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) prior to its December 2020 expiry.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO ARTHUR W. BROWN BY SENATOR MARCO RUBIO

In May 2022, Secretary Blinken said that the People's Republic of China is the "only country with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do it." The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) clearly holds the reins of power in the People's Republic of China and has used this power to commit genocide in Xinjiang, flood our communities with fentanyl, and emit, by far the largest quantity of greenhouse gases in the world today. With their absolute control of Chinese society and industry, the CCP could stop all of these destructive actions tomorrow if they so choose.

Question. Is the Chinese Communist Party a threat to the United States?

Answer. The Chinese Communist Party has become more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad Under President Xi. If confirmed, I commit to helping defend U.S. national security and advancing our values and prosperity; defend international law, agreements, principles, and institutions that maintain peace and security; protect the rights of individuals and sovereign nations; and make it possible for all countries to coexist and cooperate. I will continue our work with Ecuador to strengthen democracy and the rules-based international order if confirmed.

Question. Does the Chinese Communist Party undertake any activities that are beneficial to U.S. interests?

Answer. It may be possible for the PRC to make constructive contributions toward solving challenges we and other countries face in common, despite the United States and the People's Republic of China (PRC) remaining strategic competitors. Any PRC contributions must be reviewed closely, however, to ensure they are neither launchpads for narrow PRC economic interests nor platforms to create more permissive conditions for its own authoritarian model.

Question. Do you believe that there are any areas within which the Chinese Communist Party would constructively work with the United States in good faith?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to supporting the United States' efforts to manage competition with the PRC responsibly. This includes maintaining openness to cooperation with Beijing where our interests may overlap and where our cooperation can advance solutions to transnational challenges. Such areas include possibly climate change, counter-narcotics, pandemic threats, non-proliferation, food security, and macroeconomics.

Question. If confirmed, will you approve any joint activity with organizations or representatives from the People's Republic of China in the country in which you will work?

Answer. If confirmed, I would maintain openness to U.S. involvement in cooperative efforts that involve PRC entities, Ecuador, and third countries or international organizations in areas where our collective interests align in line with the Administration's approach on competition and cooperation with the People's Republic of China. I would carefully review and encourage third parties to scrutinize any such arrangements to ensure they follow international norms, feature transparency, and delineate steps to verify regularly that all parties are working in good faith.

Under President Guillermo Lasso, Ecuador has sought a closer relationship with the U.S. However, the U.S. has not been responsive to Ecuador's request for a free trade agreement, and, as I noted in a letter late last year, the Development Finance Corporation (DFC) does not appear to be on track to honor the Trump administration's commitment to provide \$2.8 billion in investments for Ecuador. The United States is Ecuador's largest trading partner, with petroleum as the top export.

Question. If confirmed, what steps will you take to promote U.S.-led and international projects to develop energy resources and infrastructure in Ecuador?

Answer. Ecuador is an important market for the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation (DFC), not just in the Western Hemisphere but globally, and DFC is committed to continuing to work to strengthen Ecuador's private sector and the country's economic stability. In fact, DFC's largest exposure in the Western Hemisphere is in Ecuador with \$1.7 billion of loans and investments. DFC's investments in Ecuador include support for the country's health sector, small businesses, and major infrastructure, among others. If confirmed, I will continue facilitating DFC's great work to promote infrastructure and other sectors. I will also work with USTDA to help develop infrastructure, including through their recent expansion of

USTDA's Global Procurement Initiative in Ecuador, if confirmed. Additionally, I will work with the State Department's Bureau of Energy and Resources to facilitate technical assistance for Ecuador's energy sector.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to work with President Lasso's administration to continue to strengthen our relations and cooperation on security and counter narcotics programs?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed, I commit to working with President Lasso's administration to bolster growing security cooperation and deepen our bilateral relationship.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to working with the DFC to provide the full \$2.8 billion in investments to Ecuador, as promised by the previous administration?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to engaging the DFC to explore options for providing investments in Ecuador.

Ecuador incurred significant debt to China under President Correa's leftist policies. In January 2023, Ecuador and China concluded technical talks surrounding a free trade agreement, after receiving no positive indication from the United States for a U.S.-Ecuador free trade agreement.

Question. If confirmed, how do you aim to compete with China's increased leverage in Ecuador?

Answer. If confirmed, I will prioritize strengthening our bilateral trade relationship through our bilateral Trade and Investment Council.

Additionally, I will serve as a champion for U.S. business in Ecuador if confirmed. U.S. companies stand as partners of choice due to their fair and transparent business practices, state of the art technology, quality construction and engineering, and commitment to corporate social responsibility.

Question. What tools will you use to ensure Ecuador does not move closer to China and away from likeminded partners in the region?

Answer. If confirmed, I will continue U.S. efforts to address the PRC's inroads into the Western Hemisphere through extensive and productive diplomatic, economic, and security dialogues with our partners in the region. Mission Ecuador works with the Ecuadorian government to create a business and investment climate that thrives on transparency and competitiveness. This allows U.S. companies to compete with PRC companies on a more level field, particularly for government tenders and procurement contracts.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED
TO STEPHANIE SYPTAK-RAMNATH BY SENATOR ROBERT MENENDEZ

Mexico

Ms. Syptak-Ramnath, given your current post, I have one question about Mexico. On December 12, 2022, the United States and Mexico celebrated 200 years of diplomatic relations. While Mexico remains one of the United States' most important partners, many of President López Obrador's actions have set the clock back on both U.S.-Mexico relations and Mexican democracy. As you know, I've expressed significant concern about troubling backsliding on issues related to rule of law, human rights, and democracy under President López Obrador's watch. These include President López Obrador's politicization of the Mexican judiciary, failure to protect journalists, militarization of civilian institutions, and, most recently, erosion of the country's independent electoral system. Frankly, I have been disappointed by the lack of forceful, public rebuke of these actions by senior leadership at our Embassy in Mexico City.

Question. As you reflect on your time in Mexico City, do you believe the United States has been publicly vocal enough on issues of democratic backsliding under President López Obrador?

Answer. I share your commitment to democratic principles, human rights, and the rule of law in Mexico and around the world. The Administration and the Mission Mexico team regularly raise these issues with officials at the most senior levels of Mexico's Government and in meetings with members across all of Mexico's political parties and civil society organizations. Our security and economic frameworks highlight rule of law, anti-corruption, and accountability as key shared values.

We work across the U.S. Government to ensure strong public support for Mexico's democratic institutions, including the judicial and legislative branches. We partner with like-minded embassies to continue to raise the issue of press freedom in public fora, including through a joint Ambassadorial op-ed published this month on that topic. We remain fully committed to ensuring the enduring strength of democracy and good governance in Mexico and press these issues in public and private.

If confirmed as Ambassador to Peru, I will continue my life-long work to advance our country's commitment to democracy and human rights.

Question. What remain your biggest concerns for Mexico and our bilateral relationship moving forward?

Answer. My three tours in Mexico impressed upon me the critical nature of the U.S.-Mexico relationship and its daily impact on millions of U.S. citizens. My biggest concern is we find ways to maintain open, honest, respectful, and productive relations with the Government of Mexico—both federal and state—as well as with the Mexican public across administrations. We must strike a balance in our bilateral relationship that underscores our joint commitment to democratic principles, while continuing to build upon existing cooperation on shared priorities to stem irregular migration, strengthen security cooperation, combat the production and trafficking of fentanyl and other synthetic drugs, and fortify our economic ties.

Protests/Human Rights

Since President Castillo's unconstitutional attempt to dissolve the Peruvian Congress in December, there have been widespread, and oftentimes violent, anti-government protests throughout Peru. These protests have resulted in the tragic deaths of over 60 Peruvians, a significant number of which have occurred at the hands of Peruvian security forces, who have been credibly accused of excessive use of force and other human rights violations. Let me be clear. Violence by both the Government and protestors is unacceptable and will only result in the further erosion of Peru's hard-fought democracy. Peruvians must strive to express their political opinions peacefully, and the Peruvian Government must simultaneously ensure accountability for any human rights violations committed.

Question. Ms. Syptak-Ramnath, if confirmed, do you commit to publicly calling for accountability for human rights violations committed by Peruvian authorities, including violations committed in response to protests this year?

Answer. I share your concerns about the violence that marked the protests and its deleterious effects on Peru's democracy. Accountability is critical to ensure respect for human rights and to strengthen public confidence. Since the protests began on December 7, 2022, the United States publicly supported the right for peaceful demonstrations, respect for the rule-of-law, and the Peruvian Government's stated commitment to investigate all protest-related deaths. If confirmed, that message will be an inherent part of my engagement with Peruvians and partners in the region.

Question. What steps will you take to ensure that human rights issues remain a priority for the United States in Peru?

Answer. The promotion and protection of human rights are requisite for any democratic society and foundational values to U.S. engagement around the world. If confirmed, human rights will stand among my top areas of focus with government interlocutors. I will make clear that human rights form a critical component of USG assistance and engagement, and that safeguarding them strengthens Peru and the entire region. I will support the Government of Peru in its efforts to swiftly investigate potential violations of human rights and to bring to justice those responsible for any such violations, ensuring this USG priority remains clear. Military and police training in Peru—particularly in human rights—is critical, and I will make clear fundamental freedoms remain foundational to our partnership and our assistance.

Migration

Peru is the second-largest host country for Venezuelans, with about 1.5 million migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees living in the country as of late last year. Historically, the country has taken important steps to welcome Venezuelan refugees and migrants, including temporarily regularizing their status to provide them with the rights to work and access essential services. But as the current migration crisis in the Peru-Chile border shows, communities hosting refugees and migrants throughout the Americas, including those in Peru, are struggling with rising levels of regional migration and require additional support and assistance from the United States and the

international community, as I have called for in my regional plan to manage migration and refugee challenges.

Question. In your view, what more can be done to strengthen integration and inclusion programs for migrants and refugees in Peru?

Answer. The U.S. Embassy in Peru has done important work in supporting the integration and inclusion of migrants in Peru, including supporting the transfer of professional credentials that allow migrants to more easily find employment and working closely with the Government of Peru to ease economic burdens of migrant communities. If confirmed, I will continue this positive engagement with the Government of Peru at national and sub-national levels to identify gaps in existing programs for integration and inclusion for migrants as well as migrant-hosting communities. If confirmed, I will work across the interagency to direct U.S. Government support, including technical assistance, to assist Peru in targeting its highest priorities for these populations.

Peru endorsed the Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection, a framework that includes initiatives to support regularization and integration of migrants into their host communities. Peru leads the working group on “Combatting Xenophobia,” bringing together other endorsing countries to find collaborative and innovating ways to fight discrimination and better integrate migrants into their host communities. If confirmed, I will support the Peruvian Government’s efforts to turn its commitments under these lines of effort into reality.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED
TO STEPHANIE SYPTAK-RAMNATH BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

Question. Please provide an update on the negotiations with Peru on a Non-Lethal Air Interdiction Agreement.

Answer. I understand that negotiations remain ongoing with Peru on an agreement governing the use of U.S. assistance for non-lethal interception of civil aircraft. Such an agreement would further U.S. interests in ensuring our assistance is used effectively and consistent with U.S. and international law, including with respect to the safety of civil aircraft in service.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to expeditiously finalize and robustly implement the Non-Lethal Air Interdiction Agreement with Peru?

Answer. If confirmed, I intend to ensure the successful conclusion of the negotiation of this agreement remains a priority.

Question. In your opinion, what areas of engagement by the People’s Republic of China in Peru raise greatest concerns for U.S. interests?

Answer. In my opinion, the People’s Republic of China’s growing presence in Peru’s critical infrastructure and critical mineral sectors raise the greatest concerns for U.S. interests.

Question. If confirmed, how do you intend to engage with the Peruvian people and authorities about concerns regarding malign Chinese influence?

Answer. If confirmed, I intend to raise concerns regarding problematic People’s Republic of China activities directly with the Government of Peru. Our objective is not to stand against the Chinese people, but to stand up for democracy, fair competition, the environment, security, and human rights.

If confirmed, I will ensure all the Embassy’s programs and people serve as examples of the benefits of working with the United States, and that we effectively tell our story to the Peruvian people.

Question. If confirmed, how do you intend to improve the business environment for U.S. firms to compete effectively in Peru?

Answer. If confirmed, I will engage the Government of Peru and its financial institutions to ensure a level playing field for U.S. businesses. I will meet regularly with the U.S. private sector to both understand their challenges and work together to identify opportunities. My experiences in Mexico and Singapore have shown me that U.S. businesses bring innovation, transparency, excellence, and fair labor practices that can transform societies and the world. If confirmed, I will continue my strong support for our U.S. private sector partners and the values they represent.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to engage Peruvian society and authorities about establishing competitive and transparent infrastructure project selection and

public procurement processes that promote transparency, open competition, financial sustainability, and adherence to international global standards and norms?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed, I commit to promoting these practices critical to building public trust and ensuring quality investment. Peru aspires to attract quality investment, as evidenced by its interest in accession to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. While Peru is not a member of the World Trade Organization's Agreement on Government Procurement, promoting the practices you highlighted in your question would advance both the interests of the United States and Peru and deliver clear advantages for both of our citizenry.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to prioritize engagements with Peruvian society and authorities about establishing frameworks or mechanisms to review and address the long-term financial sustainability and national security implications of foreign investments in strategic sectors or services in Peru?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to undertaking this important work and to enlist the expertise of interagency partners in doing so.

Question. Peru is an important source for temporary guest-workers working as sheepherders in my home state of Idaho and across the U.S. If confirmed, do you commit to provide expeditious consular services to qualified H-2A visa applicants that are vital to our domestic agricultural industry, including sheepherders?

Answer. If confirmed, I will do so. Embassy Lima has a robust outreach program to communities that provides approximately 1,200 workers annually on H-2A visas to staff open range sheepherding operations in the Western United States. To meet this demand, the consular section conducts outreach through in-person visits and media in Peru and in 2022 introduced outreach materials in Indigenous languages spoken in several of these communities. Embassy Lima's Consular Section maintains regular communication with petitioning U.S. ranches and reserves sufficient visa appointments to ensure that all H-2A participants can quickly schedule visa interviews.

In the State Department's 2022 Trafficking in Persons Report Peru remained on Tier 2 for not fully meeting the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking but making significant efforts to do so.

Question. If confirmed, what concrete steps could you take to help Peru operationalize the prioritized recommendations contained in the TIP report?

Answer. The United States and Peru share a commitment to combating human trafficking in all its forms. If confirmed, I will engage the Peruvian Government to achieve progress on the priorities set forth in the recommendations in the TIP Report. Specifically, I will urge progress in increasing Peruvian Government funding to implement the National Policy Against Human Trafficking, including through allocating dedicated anti-trafficking budgets for relevant institutions; increasing Peruvian Government funding for victim protection, including availability of services to meet the needs of adult victims, boys, LGBTQI+ individuals, and labor trafficking victims; and strengthening and institutionalizing training for criminal justice officials on enforcing anti-trafficking laws, employing victim-centered, trauma-informed procedures, and awarding compensation to victims.

The U.S.-Peru Child Protection Compact (CPC) to combat child trafficking began in 2017 and now has been extended to 2024.

Question. What steps will you take to ensure that the progress achieved during the CPC will be sustained past the closure of the compact?

Answer. The U.S.-Peru CPC Partnership demonstrates our countries' multi-year commitment to address the crime of child trafficking in Peru. If confirmed, I will build upon the many accomplishments of the CPC and work with the Peruvian Government to implement the commitments they made under the Partnership over the last seven years. This includes advocating for the application of national TIP legislation when prosecuting traffickers; encouraging the expansion of comprehensive, trauma-informed protective services to child victims to areas outside the scope of the CPC Partnership, including increasing the funding allocated for child TIP shelters; and promoting the continued implementation of the National Policy Against Human Trafficking, which the CPC was instrumental in helping develop, pass, and implement across all relevant Peruvian ministries addressing this crime.

Question. What is your assessment of religious freedom in Peru and if confirmed, how will you work with the Ambassador At Large for International Religious Freedom to bolster religious freedom in-country?

Answer. Freedom of religion or belief stands among the United States' and Peru's most important founding principles, and remains central to the Biden-Harris Administration's commitment to upholding and advancing human rights.

Peru's constitution protects freedom of religion, and the Government of Peru and civil society widely support religious freedom in law and practice. Social cohesion across religious and spiritual lines is strong, making religious actors relevant interlocutors on human rights issues of concern.

For instance, the highly diverse Interreligious Council of Peru played a mediation role in efforts to deescalate violence in 2022.

If confirmed, I pledge to continue the U.S. embassy's good work to highlight the important role religious actors can serve in humanitarian efforts and to promote religious tolerance. If confirmed, I also will work closely with Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom Rashad Hussain to build on existing efforts to emphasize the importance of equal treatment of all religious groups under the law in Peru and around the world.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to personally engaging with civil society on promoting religious freedom?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed, I commit to engaging directly with Peru's diverse civil society, including religious and spiritual actors, representatives of Indigenous communities, and faith-based organizations, on this matter.

Question. If confirmed, what concrete steps can you take to help Peru increase their societal and governmental respect for religious freedom?

Answer. If confirmed, I will seek consultations with representatives of diverse faith and belief communities to better understand concerns regarding their free exercise of freedom of religion or belief. If confirmed, I will raise these concerns with governmental officials and pursue solutions to strengthen and exchange best practices on religious freedom at the bilateral level.

The State Department's 2022 Human Rights Report describes significant human rights issues in Peru including unlawful or arbitrary killings, restrictions on free expression and media and violence and threats against journalists.

Question. How will you direct your embassy to work with civil society organizations to improve the human rights situation on the ground?

Answer. Freedom of expression and freedom of association are fundamental freedoms and, I believe, the foundation of successful, prosperous democracies. That message will be inherent in all our engagement. If confirmed, I will prioritize hearing from civil society organizations of all types to understand their various perspectives. Once I hear their concerns, their needs, and their views, then I will have a clearer picture of how to direct my team and how to best partner with the diplomatic community and other international organizations.

Question. How will you approach addressing these serious human rights issues with the Peruvian Government?

Answer. If confirmed, human rights will be among my top areas of focus with government interlocutors. I will make clear that our partnership, our good work on migration, economic endeavors, and law enforcement all have protecting human rights as the common and primary thread. I will remind them of the imperative for Peru to investigate potential violations of human rights and bring to justice those responsible for any such violations. Military and police training in Peru—particularly in human rights—is critical, but, if confirmed, I will make clear that our partnership and our assistance demand a clear respect for human rights.

According to the Conduct in U.N. Field Missions online portal, there are four open allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse by Peruvian personnel deployed to U.N. peacekeeping missions, in cases from 2021 and 2023. The Peruvian Government has pending action in all the cases.

Question. How will you engage with the Peruvian Government to ensure that perpetrators of sexual exploitation and abuse from U.N. peacekeeping missions are held accountable?

Answer. I understand there are currently three open allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) by Peruvian personnel in U.N. peacekeeping missions since 2020–2023 pending the Peruvian Government's final action, according to the Conduct in U.N. Field Missions online portal. In one case, U.N. reimbursements to Peru have been suspended as an interim action.

If confirmed, I will encourage the Peruvian Government to hold perpetrators accountable for SEA if any of the cases are substantiated, and to report the final results of those efforts to the U.N. Additionally, I will encourage the Peruvian Government to conduct a comprehensive review of SEA within their military and develop steps to prevent SEA violations in the future.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO STEPHANIE SYPTAK-RAMNATH BY SENATOR MARCO RUBIO

In May 2022, Secretary Blinken said that the People's Republic of China is the "only country with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do it." The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) clearly holds the reins of power in the People's Republic of China and has used this power to commit genocide in Xinjiang, flood our communities with fentanyl, and emit, by far the largest quantity of greenhouse gases in the world today. With their absolute control of Chinese society and industry, the CCP could stop all of these destructive actions tomorrow if they so choose.

Question. Is the Chinese Communist Party a threat to the United States?

Answer. The Chinese Communist Party has become more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad under President Xi. We will continue to defend our U.S. national security interests and advance our core values and prosperity; defend international law and institutions that maintain peace and security; promote the rights of individuals and sovereign nations; and work to enable all countries to coexist and cooperate.

If confirmed, I will continue our work with the Government of Peru to strengthen our shared democratic values and the commitment to a rules-based international order.

Question. Does the Chinese Communist Party undertake any activities that are beneficial to U.S. interests?

Answer. While the United States and the People's Republic of China (PRC) are strategic competitors, it may be possible for the PRC to make constructive contributions toward solving shared challenges we and other countries have in common.

Any PRC activities must be scrutinized, however, to ensure they are neither springboards for narrow PRC economic interests nor platforms to create more permissive conditions for its own authoritarian model.

Question. Do you believe that there are any areas within which the Chinese Communist Party would constructively work with the United States in good faith?

Answer. While the United States competes vigorously with the People's Republic of China where we differ, we must manage this competition responsibly. This includes an openness to cooperation with Beijing where our interests overlap and where our cooperation can advance solutions to shared transnational challenges, to include possibly climate change, counter-narcotics, pandemic threats, non-proliferation, food security, and inclusive economic growth.

Question. If confirmed, will you approve any joint activity with organizations or representatives from the People's Republic of China in the country in which you will work?

Answer. In line with the Administration's approach on strategic competition and cooperation with the People's Republic of China (PRC), if confirmed, I would maintain openness to U.S. involvement in cooperative efforts that involve PRC entities, Peru, and third countries or international organizations in areas that align with our collective interests and are consistent with U.S. law. Importantly, I would scrutinize—and encourage third parties to scrutinize—any such arrangements to ensure they are in keeping with U.S. values, follow international norms, feature transparency, and delineate steps to verify regularly that all parties are working in good faith.

A critique of successive Peruvian governments and civil society writ large has been widespread corruption and inadequate public services. This has led to a dearth in public trust in Peru's leadership and the resignation or impeachment of four of the last six Presidents of Peru. In your previous role at the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City, you worked through many challenges,

including narco-gang violence, weak government institutions, and questionable rule of law practices.

Question. How do you assess the current government's stability and overall level of corruption in Peru?

Answer. Allegations of corruption and nepotism among former president Castillo's cabinet ministers and associates contributed to Peru's ongoing political turmoil. Frequent turnover of key personnel and a lack of political will to effect strategic and institutional change within the Ministry of Interior and the Peruvian National Police have previously made it difficult to implement lasting successes. President Boluarte recently ordered the removal of the Commanding General of the Peruvian National Police for allegations of bribery. We support President Boluarte's efforts to uncover corruption and acknowledge these types of activities as a sign the current administration is performing the required functions of a government committed to combatting corrupt practices. Transparency is key to earning the trust of citizens in countries around the world. If confirmed, I will support the Government of Peru, its citizens, and its civil society in their efforts to increase public trust.

Question. If confirmed, which programs will you focus on to increase the rule of law in Peru and counter corruption as U.S. Ambassador?

Answer. Effective and efficient justice systems are crucial to democracy, economic development, and limiting spaces where criminal organizations can operate and thrive. They begin with professional policing mechanisms and run through the courts where citizens look for justice and accountability. If confirmed, I will continue the Embassy's focus on the rule of law, access to justice for vulnerable populations, and successful prosecutions of criminal actors in order to address regional and global criminal and environmental threats. If confirmed, I will work with my team to continue building the capacity of Peruvian judges, prosecutors, police, and defense attorneys, and we will strengthen internal integrity bodies and anticorruption measures in the justice sector.

My experience in Mexico has taught me it is critical to work with host governments to address the financial infrastructure of criminal organizations, identify and confiscate assets derived from these crimes, and successfully prosecute the people and organizations responsible. If confirmed, I will work with the Government of Peru towards these ends.

The State Department has labeled their highest travel advisory level of "Do Not Travel" to the Peruvian-Colombian border due to drug trafficking and criminal activity.

Question. If confirmed, how will you increase the Peruvian ability to counter illicit cross-border drug trade and capacity to fight crime and secure their border?

Answer. We must focus on building sustainable programs that will disrupt illicit drug trafficking, promote efficient and transparent criminal justice system, and combat transnational criminal activity. If confirmed, I will continue to partner with the Peruvian National Police on national-level programs that demonstrate success in building the capacity of their forces in the border regions. This includes expanding support for interdiction operations, increasing training for Peruvian customs (SUNAT) and anti-narcotics police officials (DIRANDRO), and identifying additional areas where limited investments can have the greatest impact in securing Peru's borders. If confirmed, I will additionally examine ways that we can partner with U.S. Embassy Bogota to engage on these issues trilaterally.

Question. How will you support deepening Peru's relations with the United States?

Answer. The United States and Peru have a steadfast partnership based on shared respect for democracy, human rights, rule-of-law, security, and inclusive economic prosperity. If confirmed, I will work with my Peruvian counterparts to advance our shared goals and strengthen a bilateral relationship that has endured for close to 200 years. Critical to this relationship are the people-to-people programs that foster understanding and broaden our deep ties. If confirmed, I will work with the Department to strengthen programming across our large network of binational centers, increase educational exchange, and look for innovative ways to work with the Peruvian diaspora in the United States to ensure our mutual success.

Question. If confirmed, will you publicly support the Peruvian people's desires to maintain the democratic values enshrined in the country's constitution?

Answer. The United States remains committed to helping Peru strengthen its democratic institutions. The political turmoil that has prevailed over the last two decades has raised concerns about the erosion of Peruvians' confidence in their de-

mocracy and political stability. If confirmed, I will continue to voice my support publicly and privately to the Peruvian Government for our shared goal of preserving Peru's democracy and political stability. The people of Peru deserve stable democratic institutions that follow Peru's constitution, adhere to the Inter-American Democratic Charter, and carry out the mandates of democratic governance.

Last month, the current Ambassador to Peru celebrated the Ocho Sur, an American mining company. This prompted protests by an indigenous community that claims ancestral ties to the land Ocho Sur bought from the Peruvian government.

Question. What is your assessment of this claim to land owned by Ocho Sur?

Answer. My understanding is that Ocho Sur is a Peruvian palm oil company in eastern Peru. It is backed by U.S. investment and the current investors took ownership in 2016. As Ambassador Kenna publicly highlighted, it has created a significant amount of formal employment and economic development in that region. I also understand that Peru's highest court (constitutional court) ruled in 2022 that the Indigenous community's claims that their ancestral lands were taken was deemed of no merit. During Ambassador Kenna's visit, she met with members of that indigenous community who expressed support for Ocho Sur and their many social responsibility programs. I understand, furthermore, the community members have publicly derided actions by NGOs and other activist groups who have purported to act on their behalf but without community input or authorization.

Question. If confirmed, what will you do to ensure that U.S. investment in the region is not called into question by local communities?

Answer. If confirmed, I will hold U.S. companies to the high standards agreed upon through the United States-Peru Trade Promotion Agreement (PTPA). If confirmed, I will regularly meet with U.S. companies, individually and through local chambers, and encourage them to respect local laws and interests, uphold labor, environmental, and social safeguards, and foster inclusive growth in line with international best practices. U.S. firms remain subject to the Foreign Corrupt Practice Act, and foreign governments understand this. Wherever they go, U.S. investors help create economic growth and prosperity and increase the size and scope of the formal economy. If confirmed, I will work with the U.S. private sector to build strong relations with local communities as an important signal of the benefit of doing business with the U.S.

Since 2010, the People's Republic of China and Peru have maintained a free trade agreement and the PRC is now Peru's main trading partner in copper, precious metals, mineral fuels, and other commodity export fields. A Chinese company will soon complete construction of a "mega-port" in Chancay that could give the People's Liberation Army (PLA) a base to operate from in Latin America, given Beijing's strategy of establishing dual-use infrastructure throughout the developing world.

Question. What is your characterization of the existing relationship between Peru and China?

Answer. The People's Republic of China (PRC) has an extensive economic relationship with Peru. Driven by its growing demand for mineral ore and fish products, the PRC is the top destination for Peru's exports, with 28.29 percent export share (based on value) compared to 16.10 percent for the United States between 2016–2020. Building off their initial entry into Peru with large-scale infrastructure and resource extraction projects, PRC engineering companies have transitioned to secure smaller sub-national infrastructure contracts, often with the support of PRC banks. While PRC investment in mining has largely stalled, PRC companies continue to pursue opportunities in energy and transportation. We are concerned about the PRC's controlling interest and ownership of the megaport under construction in Chancay and its potential national security implications on Peru and the United States. If confirmed, I will continue to monitor these developments and search for partners within the United States and other western nations to offer alternatives to the PRC as well as to engage in dialogue with the Peruvian people and government on the long-term costs of doing business with the PRC.

Question. Is there a role for the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation in facilitating U.S. investment in Peru?

Answer. Yes, the DFC's role in providing loans and loan guarantees, equity investments, and political-risk insurance for development projects could help Peru address their infrastructure gap, while simultaneously providing an alternative to

PRC investment. If confirmed, I will work closely with the Department, the DFC, and other potential economic partners to facilitate U.S. investment in Peru.

Question. Do you agree that the DFC should be given more discretion to support investment in “high income” countries, like Peru, in order to provide a U.S.-alternative to Chinese investment bids?

Answer. DFC has a range of important tools under the BUILD Act to support private sector-led development and advance our foreign policy goals, including in countries like Peru and in Latin America more broadly. The Secretary of State, who chairs the DFC Board, provides a certification to Congress that investments DFC undertakes in upper middle-income countries, such as Peru, are in the national interest. A range of projects are covered under an existing, categorical certification for upper middle-income countries. The requirement for the Department’s certification of the national interest in upper middle-income countries supports DFC’s dual development and strategic priority mandate.

Currently, the Chinese Communist Party requires Chinese companies to ensure that ports overseas should be built so they can accommodate PLA navy ships. These guidelines stem from the PRC’s 2017 National Defense Transportation Law.

Question. Are you concerned that this law could apply to the Chancay port?

Answer. Yes, we have concerns about People’s Republic of China’s controlling interest and ownership of the megaport under construction in Chancay and its potential national security implications on Peru and the United States. If confirmed, I will work closely with colleagues at the Department and across the U.S. government to monitor developments on this project and to respond appropriately.

Question. How will you communicate the risks to the Peruvian Government of doing business with the PRC?

Answer. If confirmed, I intend to raise concerns regarding problematic People’s Republic of China (PRC) activities directly with the Government of Peru and the short, medium, and long-term costs of doing business with the PRC that we have seen around the world. Our objective is not to stand against the Chinese people, but to stand up for democracy, fair competition, the environment, security, and human rights. We share these values with our Peruvian partners.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to encourage the Peruvian Government to work with U.S. business to counter Chinese presence in the country?

Answer. U.S. companies promote unparalleled transparency, cutting edge technology, quality engineering, and a commitment to social and environmental responsibility. If confirmed, I commit to encouraging the Peruvian government to work with U.S. business to counter the predatory PRC economic practices we have seen around the world.

Question. Before the war in Ukraine, Peru imported significant amounts of fertilizer from Russia for food production and disruptions to this supply chain have caused food prices to sharply rise both in Peru and the region. If confirmed, which programs will you focus on to increase food security in Peru and promote self-reliance and resilience in the food sector as U.S. Ambassador?

Answer. USAID manages several ongoing programs to address food security concerns in Peru, including initiatives to help smallholder cacao and coffee farmers increase productivity and incomes, adapt to climate change, and reduce their dependence on imported synthetic fertilizer. USAID also partnered with the World Food Program to directly support 792 community kitchens with equipment, food, technical assistance, and transportation support, reaching an estimated 116,000 people since July 2021. In addition, USAID finances Save the Children and World Vision emergency food assistance programs in Peru that combat hunger among vulnerable populations, including migrants and refugees. USAID has committed \$42.6 million in FY 2022 to address food insecurity throughout Peru. If confirmed, I will continue this important focus of our USAID programming.

Question. How do you characterize the relationship between Peru and Russia? Are there existing elements of concern to our national security?

Answer. After initial reluctance to denounce Russia for its invasion of Ukraine, Peru has subsequently consistently voted to condemn Russia’s invasion in multilateral fora. Peru has been most affected by rising fertilizer prices as a result of the Kremlin’s unprovoked war. Peru also operates military equipment of Russian or Soviet origin but is interested in transitioning to other platforms. If confirmed, I will work with interagency partners and U.S. private sector to identify opportunities to

diminish Peru's dependence on Russian military equipment and other key commodities as well as to monitor any Russian activity that could threaten U.S. national security.

NOMINATIONS

TUESDAY, MAY 16, 2023

U.S. SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS,
Washington, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:06 p.m., in Room SD-419, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Christopher Murphy presiding.

Present: Senators Murphy [presiding], Kaine, Booker, Van Hollen, Ricketts, and Young.

Also Present: Representative Slotkin.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. CHRISTOPHER MURPHY, U.S. SENATOR FROM CONNECTICUT

Senator MURPHY. Good afternoon. It is my pleasure to convene the committee today for an important nominations hearing. You are all before us to represent the United States in key posts overseas in the Middle East and sub-Saharan Africa.

We want to collectively thank you for your willingness to serve the American people and this administration. We are going to make brief opening remarks and then we will turn it over to our nominees for your remarks and then we will engage in a series of dialogues.

Ms. Escrogima, the United States has a distinctive partnership with Oman as a country that plays a really important role in mediating different disputes and conflicts in the Gulf, especially when it comes to Iran and Yemen.

I was there a few years ago pushing the Omanis to take a more active role in midwifing peace negotiations in Yemen and today it is more important than ever before for our Ambassador to Oman to support that back channel role.

Ambassador Johnson, you are headed to Lebanon where the economic and political crises continue to deteriorate. As I told you privately, our Lebanon policy has helped prevent collapse but we have to admit it has not been successful in prompting the political elites to make the compromises necessary to rescue the economy. Your job will be to help us think out of the box as to how we allow Lebanon to make a major leap forward.

Mr. Massinga, the brutal conflict in Ethiopia's northern Tigray region was the world's deadliest conflict in 2022. All sides committed war crimes and crimes against humanity.

While many Ethiopians and the international community welcomed a preliminary peace deal signed by the federal government and the Tigrayan authorities in November, significant challenges

in the peace process lie ahead and other simmering conflicts remain unaddressed.

Mr. Hunt, there were mass protests in Sierra Leone last summer and the skyrocketing costs of living continue to drive unrest there. At least 20 civilians and six police officers died in those clashes with the economic situation still dire and political tensions running high ahead of elections next month. Working with our partners and allies to help prevent more violence there will be critical.

And, finally, Ambassador Popp, you are nominated to lead our post in Uganda. A lot to talk about with respect to Uganda but their parliament just passed one of the most extreme anti-LGBT laws in the world that puts LGBT individuals in Uganda in great danger and may embolden other countries in the region to crack down on those rights as well. The world is watching. We look forward to talking to you about that important topic.

I am looking forward to discussing how all of you are going to represent the administration and advance our U.S. interests and safeguard U.S. personnel abroad.

We thank you all for being here today for the sacrifice you are making on behalf of the country.

And with that I will turn it over to the ranking member, Senator Young.

**STATEMENT OF HON. TODD YOUNG,
U.S. SENATOR FROM INDIANA**

Senator YOUNG. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank our five nominees today for their distinguished careers in public service to the United States both at home and abroad.

The positions for which you have been nominated represent the front lines of American diplomacy in increasingly challenging times. I look forward to all our nominees today explaining their vision and plans for advancing American leadership and interest at their respective posts.

In Oman, our engagement with this strategic partner must continue to further U.S. interests and finding a sustainable peace in Yemen, reasserting clear control of vital sea lanes, and not permitting Iran the space to undermine security and stability in the region.

In Beirut our goals are increasingly undermined by prolonged political stasis supercharged by Hezbollah and public corruption and economic collapse. Nor can we forget the massive arsenal of increasingly sophisticated munitions Hezbollah has trained on Israel.

In Ethiopia our ambassador will immediately be responsible for reasserting American leadership and pursuing accountability in a country recently torn apart by horrific conflict, a conflict fueled in part by regional actors.

Our ambassador in Kampala will be tasked with moving our bilateral relationship beyond one of humanitarian and security aid and towards a U.S. position that actually pushes back attempts by strategic competitors to swallow that country whole.

And our ambassador to Sierra Leone will represent the U.S. in a country with immense potential but a need for sustained political and economic growth and stability.

So all of you have your work cut out for you and each of you will have a different perspective on what American leadership and engagement means for each of the posts you have been nominated for.

I look forward to our discussion today and thank you again for your willingness to continue serving the United States.

Senator MURPHY. Let me provide brief introductions and then I will ask you to all make opening statements in the order of introduction. I ask you to keep your opening comments to five minutes or less. Your full statement will be made part of the record.

Ms. Ana Escrogima currently serves as the general counsel at the U.S. Consulate General in Montreal. She has previously served our country in a variety of posts, mostly in the Middle East, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Algeria, Iraq, and Syria.

Ambassador Lisa Johnson is the principal deputy assistant secretary in the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs. She has previously served as an ambassador to Namibia from 2018 to 2022, coming before the committee for a second time.

Mr. Ervin Massinga is the principal deputy assistant secretary in the State Department's Bureau of African Affairs. He previously served as a United States Trade Representative trade policy officer. His postings overseas have included Sudan, Guinea, Chile, and the Dominican Republic.

Mr. Bryan Hunt serves currently as the senior policy adviser to the United States Transportation Command at the Scott Air Force Base in Illinois. His career in the State Department has a long list of overseas posts including Mozambique, Ghana, Papua New Guinea, Pakistan, Guinea Bissau, and Botswana.

And finally, Ambassador William Popp currently serves as our ambassador to Guatemala, again a second time before this committee, previously serving in Brazil, Kenya, Colombia, Angola, and Nicaragua.

Welcome to you all. I look forward to your testimony and to engaging with you over the course of this hearing. I will turn it over to you.

STATEMENT OF ANA A. ESCROGIMA, OF NEW YORK, A CAREER MEMBER OF THE SENIOR FOREIGN SERVICE, CLASS OF COUNSELOR, NOMINATED TO BE AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE SULTANATE OF OMAN

Ms. ESCROGIMA. Chairman Murphy, Ranking Member Young, and distinguished members of the committee, it is my honor to appear before you as President Biden's nominee to represent the United States as Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman. I am grateful for the trust that the President and Secretary Blinken have placed in me.

I want to take a moment to acknowledge my father, Pedro Escrogima, and my mother, Ana Fernandez, immigrants from the Dominican Republic and retired career public servants from the great city of New York. My siblings and my brother-in-law, who are here today, and myself, we all admire their example of courage of conviction and dedication to family.

I want to thank my husband Houssam, my partner on this exciting journey, which became more exciting with the arrival of our one-year-old son, Pedro. I understand that our little guy is watching on screen along with Grandma and Grandpa, although he may not exactly realize what is happening.

Senators, I have spent most of my career in the Foreign Service in the Middle East protecting the interests and security of the American people. If confirmed, I will draw on this experience to advance U.S. values and national security interests in Oman. I will work every day to ensure the safety and wellbeing of our Mission Oman team and the American citizens working, traveling, and studying in Oman.

The warm and enduring U.S. relationship with the Sultanate of Oman dates to the earliest days of our republic. We established commercial relations 190 years ago in our first trade agreement with an Arab state.

Today, the U.S.-Oman free trade agreement supports American jobs and drives bilateral trade, which reached a record high of \$4.2 billion in 2022, a 30 percent increase from the prior year.

This February Oman hosted the inaugural U.S.-Oman Strategic Dialogue where we pledged to build our economic relationship for the future.

We have a strategic opportunity to support Oman's economic diversification toward renewable energy, manufacturing, and logistics sectors.

We signed a \$500 million dollar EXIM MOU that will support American companies seeking to be a part of that transition. If confirmed, I will work with our Omani partners to grow trade and commercial ties and build opportunities for our countries to innovate, contribute to global energy security, and create further prosperity.

Now, the bright and prosperous future we seek in the region is only safeguarded if we can address the security challenges that affect Oman and its neighbors.

The Gulf is vital to key U.S. national security priorities and the Sultanate of Oman has consistently been a valued partner in advancing those priorities.

Together, we have worked to disrupt Iranian weapons smuggling and pursue peace in Yemen, which has seen the longest period of calm since the war began. We partner with Oman to address security challenges in the Strait of Hormuz through which 88 percent of the region's oil transits.

Since 1996 Oman has hosted the Middle East Desalination Research Center, the longest functioning regional integration mechanism that includes Israel.

If confirmed, I intend to build on these solid foundations to explore further avenues for deepening regional integration, prosperity, and security.

I will focus on countering Iran's destabilizing actions and on advancing concrete strategic alternatives to the PRC's aggressive practices in the region.

I will encourage Oman to build on its announcement permitting Israeli civilian over flight through its airspace by taking additional steps including consideration of full normalization with Israel.

We are in an exciting moment in the U.S.-Oman people-to-people relationship. We recently announced the resumption of the Fulbright Program for Omanis and a new partnership between Oman and the Arizona National Guard.

If confirmed, I would support exchanges that advance shared priorities and bring together students and experts to take our relationship forward into the future.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Escrogima follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF ANA A. ESCROGIMA

Chairman Murphy, Ranking Member Young, and distinguished Members of the committee: It is my honor to appear before you as President Biden's nominee to represent the United States as Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman. I am grateful for the trust that the President and Secretary Blinken have placed in me.

I am joined on this special occasion by my father, Pedro Escrogima, and my mother, Ana Fernandez, immigrants from the Dominican Republic and retired career public servants. My siblings and I admire their example of service and dedication to family. I want to thank my husband Houssam Eddine Beggas, my partner on this exciting journey, which became even more exciting with the arrival of our year-old son Pedro. I understand our little guy is watching on screen, although he may not exactly realize what is happening.

Senators, I have spent most of my Foreign Service career protecting the interests and security of the American people in the Middle East. If confirmed, I would draw on this experience to advance U.S. values and national security interests in Oman. I will work every day to ensure the safety and well-being of our Mission Oman team, and the American citizens working and traveling in Oman.

The warm and enduring U.S. relationship with the Sultanate of Oman dates to the earliest days of our republic. We established commercial relations 190 years ago, in our first trade agreement with an Arab state. Today, the U.S.-Oman Free Trade Agreement supports American jobs and drives bilateral trade, which reached a record high of \$4.2 billion in 2022, a 30 percent increase from the prior year. This February, Oman hosted the inaugural U.S.-Oman Strategic Dialogue, where we pledged to build our economic relationship for the future. We have a strategic opportunity to support Oman's economic diversification toward the renewable energy, manufacturing, and logistics sectors. We signed a \$500 million EXIM MOU that will support American companies seeking to be a part of that transition. If confirmed, I will work with our Omani partners to grow trade and commercial ties, and build opportunities for our countries to innovate, contribute to global energy security, and create further prosperity.

The bright and prosperous future we seek in the region is only safeguarded if we can address the security challenges that affect Oman and its neighbors. The safety and wellbeing of Americans in Oman will be my top priority. The Gulf is vital to key U.S. national security priorities in the region, and the Sultanate of Oman has consistently been a valued partner in advancing those priorities. Together, we have worked to prevent smuggling across Oman's borders and to pursue a resolution to the conflict in Yemen and move the peace process forward. We partner with Oman to address security challenges in the Strait of Hormuz, through which 88 percent of the region's oil transits. Oman has since 1996 hosted the Middle East Desalinization Research Center, the longest functioning regional integration mechanism that includes Israel.

If confirmed, I intend to build on these solid foundations to explore further avenues for deepening regional integration, prosperity, and security. I will focus on countering Iran's destabilizing actions, and on advancing concrete, strategic alternatives to the People's Republic of China's aggressive practices in the region. I will encourage Oman to build on its announcement permitting Israeli civilian overflights through its airspace by taking additional steps, including consideration of full normalization with Israel.

We are also in an exciting moment in the U.S.-Oman people-to-people relationship. We recently announced the resumption of the Fulbright program for Omanis and a new partnership between Oman and the Arizona National Guard. If confirmed, I would support exchanges that advance shared priorities and bring together students and experts to take our relationship forward into the future.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I look forward to your questions.

Senator MURPHY. Thank you very much.

STATEMENT OF LISA A. JOHNSON, OF VIRGINIA, A CAREER MEMBER OF THE SENIOR FOREIGN SERVICE, CLASS OF MINISTER-COUNSELOR, NOMINATED TO BE AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE LEBANESE REPUBLIC

Ms. JOHNSON. Chairman Murphy, Ranking Member Young, distinguished members of the committee, it is an honor to appear before you today as President Biden's nominee to serve as U.S. Ambassador to the Lebanese Republic.

I would like to express my gratitude to the President and Secretary of State for the confidence they have shown in me. If confirmed, I look forward to working very closely with this committee and with Congress more broadly to advance our nation's interests in Lebanon.

Please permit me to acknowledge my parents and my brother without whose steadfast support I would not be here today. I am deeply grateful for their encouragement as well as that of mentors, colleagues, and dear friends during my more than 32 years serving the American people at home and abroad.

If confirmed, I would be honored to return to Lebanon where I had the privilege of serving from 2002 to 2004. During that time, I gained a deep admiration for the vibrancy of the Lebanese people and a sobering appreciation for the challenges they face, including endemic corruption, poor governance, and Hezbollah's continued threat to their country's sovereignty and security.

Unfortunately, Lebanon today stands on the brink of collapse, battling what the World Bank has described as one of the world's three worst economic crises of the past 150 years.

In this, the Lebanese people bear the costs of their leaders' inaction. Lebanon's leaders have failed to implement critical economic reforms required for an IMF program, the country's only realistic path to recovery.

They also have yet to elect a president and form a government, depriving the Lebanese people of leadership when they need it most. The way forward is clear. Lebanon must elect a president, form an empowered government, and implement long overdue reforms.

If confirmed, I look forward to continuing U.S. efforts to support the Lebanese government and Lebanese people every step of the way.

I am grateful for the strong bipartisan congressional support for the Lebanese Armed Forces and Internal Security Forces as trusted partners in maintaining Lebanon's stability and security.

Since 2006, we have provided more than \$3 billion in security assistance, enabling these forces to strengthen Lebanon's sovereignty, mitigate instability, disrupt terrorists, and counter Hezbollah's false narrative that its illicit weapons are necessary to defend Lebanon.

We also remain committed to UNIFIL's mission and to the safety of U.N. peacekeepers who continue to play a critical role in defusing tensions in Lebanon. I am heartened, too, by the substan-

tial U.S. development assistance we provide to the Lebanese people. For example, last year we provided over \$100 million U.S.dollars to support the Lebanese private sector, enhance service delivery, and improve access to education.

Importantly, we also provided over \$400 million for critical humanitarian assistance for the most vulnerable, including both Syrian refugees and vulnerable Lebanese.

The way ahead for Lebanon will not be easy. I am all too aware there are entities that stand in the way of progress in pursuit of self-interest. As demonstrated by our recent sanctions designations, the United States remains committed to fighting corruption in Lebanon, which I will continue to prioritize, if confirmed.

I also am clear eyed about the threat Hezbollah poses to Lebanon's sovereignty and stability as well as to the United States, to Israel, and to the wider region.

Recent U.S. sanctions against financiers, drug traffickers, and a sanctions evasion network all demonstrate the United States is committed to targeting those with Hezbollah ties. If confirmed, I will continue to pursue all tools to advance U.S. counterterrorism objectives.

There is, however, cause for optimism. Lebanon's recent conclusion of a historic maritime boundary agreement with Israel, brokered by the United States, demonstrates what the country's leaders can achieve if they set aside partisan and personal interests and put those of the country and Lebanese people first.

If confirmed, I look forward to invoking that same sense of unity and purpose to press Lebanon's leaders along the path to both political and economic recovery.

Finally, as a former Ambassador, I know well that advancing U.S. interests is a team effort. If confirmed, I would be honored to lead Embassy Beirut's talented, dedicated, diverse team of American and Lebanese staff whose safety and security along with that of the more than 40,000 U.S. citizens residing in Lebanon will always be my top priority.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Johnson follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF LISA A. JOHNSON

Mr. Chairman, ranking member, distinguished Members of the Committee, it is an honor to appear before you today as President Biden's nominee to serve as U.S. Ambassador to the Lebanese Republic. I would like to express my gratitude to the President and Secretary of State for the confidence they have shown in me. If confirmed, I look forward to working closely with this committee, and Congress more broadly to advance our nation's interests in Lebanon.

Please permit me to acknowledge my parents and brother, without whose steadfast support I would not be here today. I am deeply grateful for their encouragement, as well as that of mentors, colleagues, and dear friends during my more than 32 years serving the American people at home and abroad.

If confirmed, I would be honored to return to Lebanon, where I had the privilege of serving from 2002 to 2004. During that time, I gained a deep admiration for the vibrancy of the Lebanese people and a sobering appreciation of the challenges they face, including endemic corruption, poor governance, and Hezbollah's threat to their country's sovereignty and security.

Unfortunately, Lebanon today stands on the brink of collapse, battling what the World Bank has described as one of the world's three worst economic crises in the past 150 years. In this, the Lebanese people bear the costs of their leaders' inaction.

Lebanon's leaders have failed to implement critical economic reforms required for an IMF program, the country's only realistic path to recovery. They also have yet to elect a president and form a government, depriving the Lebanese people of leadership when they need it most.

The way forward is clear: Lebanon must elect a president, form an empowered government, and implement long overdue reforms. If confirmed, I look forward to continuing U.S. efforts to support the Lebanese Government and people every step of the way.

I am deeply grateful for bipartisan congressional support for the Lebanese Armed Forces and Internal Security Forces as trusted partners in maintaining Lebanon's stability and security. Since 2006, we have provided more than \$3 billion in assistance, enabling these forces to strengthen Lebanon's sovereignty, mitigate instability, disrupt terrorists, and counter Hezbollah's false narrative that its illicit weapons and fighters are necessary to defend Lebanon. At the same time, we remain committed to UNIFIL's mission and the safety of U.N. peacekeepers, who play a critical role in diffusing tensions in southern Lebanon.

I am heartened, too, by the substantial development assistance the United States provides to the Lebanese people. Last year, we provided over \$100 million to support the private sector, enhance service delivery, and improve access to education. We also provided over \$400 million in humanitarian assistance for the most vulnerable, including Syrian refugees and vulnerable Lebanese.

The way ahead for Lebanon will not be easy. I am all too aware there are entities that stand in the way of progress in pursuit of self-interest. As demonstrated by our recent sanctions designations, the United States remains committed to fighting corruption in Lebanon, which I will continue to prioritize, if confirmed. I also am clear-eyed about the threat Hezbollah poses to Lebanon's sovereignty and stability, as well as to the United States, Israel, and the region. Recent U.S. sanctions against financiers, drug traffickers, and a sanctions evasion network demonstrate the United States is committed to targeting those with Hezbollah ties. If confirmed, I will continue to pursue all tools to advance U.S. counterterrorism objectives.

There is reason for optimism. Lebanon's conclusion of a historic maritime boundary agreement with Israel—brokered by the United States—demonstrates what the country's leaders can achieve if they set aside partisan and personal interests and put those of the country and people first. If confirmed, I look forward to invoking that same sense of unity and purpose to press Lebanon's leaders along the path to political and economic recovery.

As a former Ambassador, I know well that advancing U.S. interests is a team effort. If confirmed, I would be honored to lead Embassy Beirut's dedicated, talented, diverse team of American and Lebanese staff, whose safety and security—along with that of the more than 40,000 U.S. citizens residing in Lebanon—will always be my top priority.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today, and I look forward to your questions.

Senator MURPHY. Thank you very much. Just before you begin, let me welcome Representative Slotkin to the committee today, I believe here in support of her friend, Ms. Escrogima. Thank you very much for being here.

STATEMENT OF ERVIN JOSE MASSINGA, OF WASHINGTON, A CAREER MEMBER OF THE SENIOR FOREIGN SERVICE, CLASS OF MINISTER-COUNSELOR, NOMINATED TO BE AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE FEDERAL DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF ETHIOPIA

Mr. MASSINGA. Senator Murphy, Senator Young, and distinguished members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you and to answer your questions on my nomination to be the United States Ambassador to the Federal Republic of Ethiopia.

I thank President Biden and Secretary Blinken for this tremendous opportunity to serve my country, and my wife, Lauryne, for helping to make all of this possible in countless ways.

My story is like all Americans with my family having many different origins, from my mother's roots in Louisiana where her parents and grandparents worked tirelessly to establish an educational foundation for later generations despite the enormous challenges of that era, to my father's parents and grandparents who struggled with the Portuguese colonial regime in what is now Mozambique.

I am deeply humbled today to appear before the United States Senate as an ambassadorial nominee. My parents themselves provided clear guidance and instilled bedrock values that I have aspired to emulate from discipline, integrity, and treating with people with kindness and respect.

Public service has always been a hallmark of my family, from my mother's national level leadership in the social services arena to her father's service in World War II in a refinery and her mother's service as a school principal.

If confirmed by this body I pledge I will do my utmost to live up to those values and models in leading this important diplomatic mission.

My career includes challenging tours in China, Latin America, and leadership roles in Guinea, Sudan, and Washington, all of which have reinforced my core belief that there is no higher calling than to serve my fellow Americans and to also mentor the next generation of Foreign Service professionals.

Mr. Chair, the United States seeks a trusted partner in Ethiopia, a country significant not only for its strategic location and growing population but for its economic potential as well as its prominent role in history and the global community.

The last two years have tested our bilateral relationship. The conflict that began in late 2020 wrought horrific violations and abuses upon the citizens of Ethiopia.

In response, as required by U.S. law, the United States placed restrictions on our foreign assistance and suspended Ethiopia's trade benefits under the AGOA—Africa Growth and Opportunities Act.

But our diplomatic engagement never faltered, and to the credit of Ethiopian federal government and the Tigrayan regional authorities they left the door open to our efforts to seek a peace agreement in concert with our partners, notably the African Union, Kenya, and South Africa.

The November 2022 cessation of hostilities agreement silenced the guns and I am deeply proud of the role the Department of State played in facilitating that outcome.

We continue to focus on supporting the implementation of that agreement, be it through human rights monitors, humanitarian assistance, or transitional justice.

But more must be done to ensure peace in Ethiopia is durable. I believe we must be ready to support Ethiopia in all ways that further our own policy objectives.

Chief among those objectives is security and stability in the Horn of Africa. Historically, Ethiopia has been an exporter of stability, for example, being one of the largest global contributors to U.N. peacekeeping operations.

But instability within Ethiopia, notably Oromia, threatens to destabilize the region. We welcome the recent announcement of government talks with the OLA and we stand ready to facilitate those discussions if asked.

Ethnic tensions persist and youth unemployment is high, now exacerbated by the need to demobilize thousands of soldiers following the cessation of hostilities in the north.

Investment in the country's democratic and economic reforms will address the root causes of conflict, including economic and social fragility. At the same time we need to ensure there is accountability for the atrocities committed during the conflict. That is key to ensuring true reconciliation and durable peace.

To that end, we should support Ethiopia's nascent transitional justice efforts. Transitional justice is a key part of any country's path from war to peace and Ethiopia will be in urgent need of international support and technical expertise as it seeks to heal, pursuing the key transition justice elements of truth telling, accountability, reparations, and guarantees of nonrecurrence.

We should support these efforts not just out of a commitment to peace and human rights but also because a durable peace in Ethiopia will promote security throughout the Horn of Africa, making Americans at home and abroad safer.

Finally, we should be clear eyed about our primary mission in any overseas embassy, to protect and serve U.S. citizens. In that context, I echo the thanks extended to the government of Ethiopia for enabling the evacuations out of Sudan.

I am proud to make it my mission to ensure U.S. citizens in Ethiopia can expect the highest level of attention and service that they deserve.

Thank you very much.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Massinga follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF ERVIN J. MASSINGA

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Young, and Distinguished Members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you and to answer your questions on my nomination to be the U.S. Ambassador to the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.

I thank President Biden and Secretary of State Blinken for this tremendous opportunity to serve my country, and my wife Lauryne for helping to make all of this possible in countless ways.

My story is like all Americans, with my family having many different origins. From my mother's roots in Louisiana, where her parents and grandparents worked tirelessly to establish an educational foundation for later generations despite the enormous challenges of the era, to my father's parents and grandparents, who struggled with the Portuguese colonial regime in what is now Mozambique, I am deeply humbled today to appear before the United States Senate as an ambassadorial nominee. My parents themselves provided clear guidance and instilled bedrock values that I have aspired to emulate, from discipline, integrity, treating people with kindness and respect. Public service has always been a hallmark in my family, from my mother's national level leadership in the social services arena, to her father's service in a World War 2 refinery and her mother's service as a school principal. If confirmed by this body, I pledge I will do my utmost to live up to these values and models in leading this important diplomatic mission.

My career includes challenging tours in China, Latin America, and leadership roles in Guinea, Sudan and Washington, all of which have reinforced my core belief that there is no higher calling than to serve my fellow Americans and mentor the next generation of foreign policy practitioners.

Mr. Chair, the United States seeks a trusted partner in Ethiopia—a country significant not only for its strategic location and growing population, but for its eco-

nomic potential as well as its prominent role in the history and the global community.

The last two years have tested our bilateral relationship. The conflict that began in late 2020 wrought horrific violations and abuses upon the citizens of Ethiopia. In response, as required by U.S. law, the United States placed restrictions on our foreign assistance and suspended Ethiopia's trade benefits from the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act. But our diplomatic engagement never faltered, and to the credit of the Ethiopian federal government and Tigrayan regional authorities, they left the door open to our efforts to seek a peace agreement in concert with our partners—notably the African Union, Kenya, and South Africa.

The November 2022 cessation of hostilities agreement silenced the guns, and I am deeply proud of the role the State Department played in facilitating that outcome. We continue to focus on supporting the implementation of the agreement—be it through human rights monitors, humanitarian assistance, or transitional justice. But more must be done to ensure peace in Ethiopia is durable. I believe we must be ready to support Ethiopia in all ways that further our own policy objectives.

Chief among these objectives is security and stability in the Horn of Africa. Historically, Ethiopia has been an exporter of stability, for example by being one of the largest global contributors to UN peacekeeping operations. But instability within Ethiopia, notably in Oromia, threatens to destabilize the region; we welcome the recent announcement of government talks with the OLA and we stand ready to facilitate these discussions if asked. Ethnic tensions persist and youth unemployment is high—now exacerbated by the need to demobilize thousands of soldiers following the cessation of hostilities in the north. Investment in the country's democratic and economic reforms will address the root causes of conflict, including economic and social fragility.

At the same time, we need to ensure there is accountability for the atrocities committed during the conflict. That's key to ensuring true reconciliation and durable peace. To that end, we should support Ethiopia's nascent transitional justice efforts. Transitional justice is a key part of any country's path from war to peace, and Ethiopia will be in urgent need of international support and technical expertise as it seeks to heal, pursuing the key transitional justice elements of truth-telling, accountability, reparations, and guarantees of non-recurrence. We should support these efforts not just out of a commitment to peace and human rights, but also because a durable peace in Ethiopia will promote security throughout the Horn of Africa, making Americans at home and abroad safer.

Finally, we should be clear-eyed about our primary mission in any overseas embassy—to protect and serve U.S. citizens. In that context, I echo the thanks extended to the Government of Ethiopia for enabling the evacuations out of Sudan. I am proud to make it my mission to ensure U.S. citizens in Ethiopia can expect the high level of attention and service that they deserve.

STATEMENT OF BRYAN DAVID HUNT, OF VIRGINIA, A CAREER MEMBER OF THE SENIOR FOREIGN SERVICE, CLASS OF MINISTER-COUNSELOR, NOMINATED TO BE AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE

Mr. HUNT. Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Young, and Members of the committee, thank you for this opportunity to appear before you as President Biden's nominee to be the next U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Sierra Leone.

I would like to thank the President and Secretary Blinken for the trust they have placed in me with this nomination. If confirmed, I will work closely with this committee to advance our nation's partnership with Sierra Leone.

For more than two decades it has been my honor to serve as a member of the United States Foreign Service, oftentimes in dangerous and austere locations. I could not have done so without the love and support of my family and friends, many of whom are here today.

If confirmed, I look forward with their help to once again strive to advance U.S. interests in Africa, a region of the world on which

I have focused much of my career and one which I believe has the potential in the coming decade to play an even greater role on the world stage provided the democratic aspirations of its young and vibrant population are met.

The Republic of Sierra Leone has demonstrated that democratic progress is possible. Since the end of the country's devastating decade-long civil war in 2002 and with sustained support from international friends, including the United States, the people of Sierra Leone have rebuilt, maintained peace, and most importantly, hewed to a democratic path through four rounds of national elections that were broadly judged to be free and fair.

Next month Sierra Leoneans will once again head to the polls and much more important than the political outcome will be the manner and environment in which this latest electoral contest is conducted.

A free and fair election that is competitive, inclusive, and held peacefully is essential both for the prosperous future that the people of Sierra Leone desire and for an expanded U.S.-Sierra Leonean partnership.

If confirmed I will ensure that support for democracy and good governance remains at the forefront of the embassy's work with the goal of helping Sierra Leoneans institutionalize their democracy and ensure it delivers.

Despite progress, Sierra Leone ranks 181st out of 189 countries on the U.N.'s Human Development Index. The 2014 to 2016 Ebola epidemic and the COVID-19 pandemic have stressed a health system already struggling with high rates of maternal mortality, child malnutrition, neglected tropical diseases, and malaria.

Sierra Leone made effective use of U.S. health security investments to fully vaccinate 70 percent of its eligible target population against COVID-19.

Its government should, however, continue to allocate resources to the health sector not only to protect its own citizens but also to sustainably safeguard the region and the broader international community from future disease outbreaks.

If confirmed, I will work with Sierra Leonean leaders to ensure that public health remains a top national priority and that U.S. funding is used effectively to complement Sierra Leone's own efforts.

Sierra Leone has made progress in establishing a market-based economy and has taken steps to protect workers' rights. U.S. investment in and trade with Sierra Leone has the potential to advance prosperity both for Americans and Sierra Leoneans.

If confirmed I will work closely with the U.S. business community to advocate for reforms that enhance Sierra Leone's ability to attract high-quality foreign investment, including through regional market integration, while simultaneously using trade development tools to help ensure U.S. businesses remain competitive in the Sierra Leonean marketplace.

I hold paramount the safety and security of the hundreds of U.S. citizens resident in Sierra Leone and the entire U.S. Embassy team, including U.S. citizen employees, their families, and our Sierra Leonean colleagues. If confirmed, I would do everything within my power to ensure their security and wellbeing.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, members of the committee, I am committed to working with you all to advance American interests overseas. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you and I welcome your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Hunt follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF BRYAN DAVID HUNT

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Young, and members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to appear before you as President Biden's nominee to be the next U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Sierra Leone. I would like to thank the President and Secretary Blinken for the trust they have placed in me. If confirmed, I will work closely with you to advance our nation's partnership with Sierra Leone.

For more than two decades, it has been my honor to serve as a member of the U.S. Foreign Service—oftentimes in dangerous and austere locations. I could not have done so without the love and support of my family and friends, many of whom are here today. If confirmed, I look forward, with their help, to once again strive to advance U.S. interests in Africa—a region of the world on which I have focused much of my career and one which I believe has the potential in the coming decade to play an even greater role on the world stage—provided the democratic aspirations of its young and vibrant population are met.

The Republic of Sierra Leone has demonstrated that democratic progress is possible. Since the end of the country's devastating decade long civil war in 2002 and with sustained support from international friends, including the United States, the people of Sierra Leone have rebuilt, maintained peace, and most importantly hewed to a democratic path through four rounds of national elections that were broadly judged to be free and fair. Next month, Sierra Leoneans will once again head to the polls and much more important than the political outcome will be the manner and environment in which this latest electoral contest is conducted. A free and fair election that is competitive, inclusive, and held peacefully is essential both for the prosperous future that the people of Sierra Leone desire and for an expanded U.S.-Sierra Leonean partnership. If confirmed, I will ensure that support for democracy and good governance remains at the forefront of the embassy's work with the goal of helping Sierra Leoneans institutionalize their democracy and ensure it delivers.

Despite progress, Sierra Leone ranks 181st out of 189 countries on the U.N.'s Human Development Index. The 2014–2016 Ebola epidemic and the COVID–19 pandemic have stressed a health system already struggling with high rates of maternal mortality, child malnutrition, neglected tropical diseases, and malaria. Sierra Leone made effective use of U.S. health security investments to fully vaccinate 70 percent of its eligible target population against COVID–19. Its government should, however, continue to allocate resources to the health sector not only to protect its own citizens but also to sustainably safeguard the region and the broader international community from future disease outbreaks. If confirmed, I will work with Sierra Leonean leaders to ensure that public health remains a top national priority and that U.S. funding is used effectively to complement Sierra Leone's own efforts.

Sierra Leone has made progress in establishing a market-based economy and has taken steps to protect workers' rights. U.S. investment in and trade with Sierra Leone has the potential to advance prosperity both for Americans and Sierra Leoneans. If confirmed, I will work closely with the U.S. business community to advocate for reforms that enhance Sierra Leone's ability to attract high-quality foreign investment, including through regional market integration, while simultaneously using trade development tools to help ensure U.S. businesses remain competitive in the Sierra Leonean marketplace.

I hold paramount the safety and security of the hundreds of U.S. citizens resident in Sierra Leone, and the entire U.S. Embassy team, including U.S. citizen employees, their families, and our Sierra Leonean colleagues. If confirmed, I would do everything within my power to ensure their security and well-being.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, members of the Committee, I am committed to working with you all to advance American interests overseas. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you. I welcome your questions.

STATEMENT OF WILLIAM W. POPP, OF MISSOURI, A CAREER MEMBER OF THE SENIOR FOREIGN SERVICE, CLASS OF MINISTER-COUNSELOR, NOMINATED TO BE AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE REPUBLIC OF UGANDA

Mr. POPP. Mr. Chairman, Mr. Ranking Member, members of the committee, it is an honor to appear before you as the President's nominee to serve as the next United States Ambassador to the Republic of Uganda.

I would like to begin by thanking my family, particularly my wife of 24 years, Milena, and my daughter, Alicia Pilar. I am grateful to them for joining me in the privilege, joys, and sacrifices of serving our nation overseas.

As a career member of the Foreign Service for more than 23 years I have been honored to represent the United States in seven overseas assignments across Africa and the Western Hemisphere, including as our current U.S. Ambassador to Guatemala as well as serving in Washington.

In each of these duties I have advanced U.S. interests, promoted our democratic values, and worked with host nations to achieve shared goals. If confirmed, I believe this experience will be valuable in leading our mission, advancing bilateral goals with Uganda, and furthering our regional objectives.

Our relationship with Uganda has advanced important U.S. interests over the years, including working together through PEPFAR and other U.S. health programs to save millions of lives from HIV/AIDS, Ebola, and other health threats.

We have likewise strengthened regional security and counterterrorism including in Somalia. Uganda, with U.S. assistance, currently provides protection to more than 1.5 million refugees and asylum seekers who have been forced to flee their home countries in east and central Africa.

We have also faced challenges, including human rights violations and limited democratic space. These challenges impact not only Uganda but also the United States' interests in a freer, more prosperous, and secure region.

If confirmed, I will work steadfastly to advance U.S. interests and values and to pursue security, prosperity, good governance, and democracy with Ugandans.

First, we must protect our citizens' security. This includes cooperating to fight transnational criminal organizations, countering violent extremism, and strengthening border security. It also includes effectively preventing, detecting, and responding to health threats, addressing food insecurity, and supporting climate resilience.

Second, we must broaden prosperity for both countries through sustainable economic growth, mutually beneficial trade, and formal job creation. With one of the youngest populations in the world generating opportunities for Ugandan youth and women is particularly vital.

U.S. assistance is an important part of the solution but so is working with the public and private sectors to create an enabling environment for businesses to thrive and support entrepreneurship.

If confirmed, I will seek to create more opportunities that generate jobs, support U.S. businesses, and assist entrepreneurs.

Third, rule of law, transparency, good governance and respect for human and labor rights for all are essential for Ugandans to achieve the full potential of their democracy. U.S. engagement can help build the capacity of public institutions to deliver services to the Ugandan people. In working with civil society, the private sector, youth leaders and innovators, we can foster prosperity, opportunity, and integrity.

A more just and equitable Uganda will spur investment, stability, and development for all Ugandans. We also will continue to support the equal protection and nondiscrimination of members of all minority groups.

In addition to pursuing these objectives, if confirmed, I will make protecting the thousands of U.S. citizens living and traveling in Uganda my highest priority.

I will also lead the more than 600 U.S. and Ugandan professionals in the U.S. mission to advance our bilateral and regional agenda by creating a safe, equitable, and respectful workplace and I will vigilantly safeguard resources and maximize the effectiveness across U.S. agencies to build a brighter future with Uganda.

I also commit to working closely with you and the other members of the Senate, members of the House of Representatives, and your staffs. Thank you for the honor to appear before you today. I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Popp follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF WILLIAM W. POPP

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Ranking Member, Members of the Committee, it is an honor to appear before you as the President's nominee to serve as the next United States Ambassador to the Republic of Uganda.

I would like to begin by thanking my family, particularly my wife of 24 years, Milena, and my daughter Alicia Pilar. I am grateful to them for joining me in the privilege, joys, and sacrifices of serving our nation overseas.

As a career member of the Foreign Service for more than 23 years, I have been honored to represent the United States in seven overseas assignments across Africa and the Western Hemisphere, including as the current U.S. Ambassador to Guatemala, as well as in Washington. In each duty, I have advanced U.S. interests, promoted our democratic values, and worked with host nations to achieve shared goals. If confirmed, I believe this experience will be valuable in leading our Mission, advancing bilateral goals with Uganda, and furthering our regional objectives.

Our relationship with Uganda has advanced important U.S. interests over the years, including working together through PEPFAR and other U.S. health programs to save millions of lives from HIV/AIDS, Ebola, and other health threats. We have likewise strengthened regional security and countered terrorism, including in Somalia. Uganda, with U.S. assistance, currently provides protection to more than 1.5 million refugees and asylum-seekers who have been forced to flee their home countries in East and Central Africa.

We have also faced challenges, including human rights violations and limited democratic space. These challenges impact not only Uganda but also the United States' interest in a freer, more prosperous, and secure region.

If confirmed, I will work steadfastly to advance U.S. interests and values and to pursue security, prosperity, good governance, and democracy with Ugandans.

First, we must protect our citizens' security. This includes cooperating to fight transnational criminal organizations, countering violent extremism, and strengthening border security. It also includes effectively preventing, detecting, and responding to health threats, addressing food insecurity, and supporting climate resilience.

Second, we must broaden prosperity for both countries through sustainable economic growth, mutually beneficial trade, and formal job creation. With one of the youngest populations in the world, generating opportunities for Ugandan youth and

women is particularly vital. U.S. assistance is an important part of the solution, but so is working with the public and private sectors to create an enabling environment for businesses to thrive and support entrepreneurship. If confirmed, I will seek to create more opportunities that generate jobs, support U.S. businesses, and assist entrepreneurs.

Third, rule of law, transparency, good governance, and respect for human and labor rights for all, are essential for Ugandans to achieve the full potential of democracy. U.S. engagement can help build the capacity of public institutions to deliver services to the Ugandan people. Working with civil society, the private sector, youth leaders and innovators, we can foster prosperity, opportunity, and integrity. A more just and equitable Uganda will spur investment, stability, and development for all Ugandans. We must also continue to support the equal protection and non-discrimination of members of all minority groups.

In addition to pursuing these objectives, if confirmed, I will make protecting the thousands of U.S. citizens living and traveling in Uganda my highest priority. I will also lead the more than 600 U.S. and Ugandan professionals in the U.S. mission to advance our bilateral and regional agenda by creating a safe, equitable, and respectful workplace. And I will vigilantly safeguard resources and maximize effectiveness across U.S. agencies to build a brighter future with Uganda. I also commit to working closely with you and the other members of the Senate, members of the House of Representatives, and your staffs.

Thank you for the honor to appear before you today. I look forward to your questions.

Senator MURPHY. Thank you all very much for your testimony. We will start a round of five-minute questions. I will start with you, Ambassador Johnson.

I enjoyed our conversation together. I wanted to give you just an opportunity to expand upon your comments regarding the status of the Lebanese Armed Forces.

Every time I go I am more and more impressed at the capability of the Armed Forces and their willingness, often at great risk to themselves, to put themselves in between the factions inside that country that often are very close to coming to significant long-term conflict.

They have stood up for protesters, protected the right of people to provide their views, and they also were really one of the few things that stands in between Hezbollah having even more control of the insecurity environment than they do today.

Maybe I am making the case for you. But tell me if you agree with my assessment of the Lebanese Armed Forces and the reasons why we have had good bipartisan support for continued funding to keep them operational.

Ms. JOHNSON. Thank you very much, Senator, and I greatly appreciate your deep interest in Lebanon and support for the Lebanese Armed Forces and Internal Security Forces, as well as the bipartisan support of Congress for that purpose.

I share your view. We have spent a lot of funding on security assistance for the Armed Forces, developing them into a professional and capable force capable of meeting any threat in Lebanon.

Specifically, we bolstered the capabilities to defend Lebanon's territorial integrity, to mitigate instability, to combat terrorism, to dismantle drug trafficking and smuggling networks, to preserve—maintain law and order.

They have carried out these missions very well, as you have noted. They are a quite trusted partner for the United States with actually an absolutely exemplary end use monitoring record in terms of the way they keep track of the assistance that we provided to them.

I am very proud to continue partnering with them, and one of the most important things in supporting the Lebanese Armed Forces, in particular, is that it really undermines Hezbollah's narrative, their false claim that their weapons are necessary to defend Lebanon.

As we continue to see the Lebanese Armed Forces deploy effectively to meet, really, any threat it debunks that claim and lays it bare.

So, if confirmed, I would continue to advocate for very strong, robust security assistance to Lebanese Armed Forces and Internal Security Forces. They are doing a great job of bolstering stability and security in this part of the world at a very difficult time for Lebanon.

Senator MURPHY. Thank you very much.

Ambassador Popp, the attacks on homosexuals and LGBTQ individuals in Uganda are, frankly, extraordinary. The parliament passed legislation in March that goes further than making same-sex relations punishable by life in prison, which is an effect of the 2014 law.

It now creates a new offense of aggravated homosexuality that is punishable by death and by making the promotion of homosexuality punishable by up to 20 years in prison. It would criminalize failing to report knowledge of individuals engaged in homosexual conduct.

I guess I am interested that you did not mention this in your prepared testimony and I am worried that this sort of avoidance in your testimony of this extraordinary piece of legislation that is sitting in front of the president's desk for signature as we speak is a signal of an intent to deprioritize this issue because it might upset the Ugandan government.

Can you clarify your opening remarks and can you tell us what the U.S. response will be if the president signs this law?

Mr. POPP. Yes, Senator. Thank you for the question. And by no means my not mentioning it in the testimony am I deprioritizing it.

I would say that I share your concern. It is a very troubling piece of legislation. It is not yet signed, as you noted, but it is something that is very threatening not only to members of the LGBTQI community in Uganda but, frankly, to all Ugandans.

The implications and potential impact of this legislation if signed and enacted could have major negative repercussions for all Ugandans that are interested and need access to medical care, health care, particularly individuals who may be HIV or AIDS positive but also the impact that it could have, frankly, on Uganda's international reputation, its ability to attract investment, tourism, and, frankly, the opportunity to advance as a democratic society that includes all Ugandans.

So when I mentioned in my testimony, obviously, that we must continue to support all Ugandans and prevent discrimination that is, certainly, included in the element of LGBTQI and the anti-homosexual act.

Senator MURPHY. I appreciate that. I do not think it is enough to raise the general concern about fair treatment of individuals regardless of sexual orientation, race, ethnicity inside Uganda.

I think you have got pay special attention to this just abnormally vitriolic and dangerous attack on LGBTQ individuals and I appreciate your clarifying statement.

Senator Young?

Senator YOUNG. Mr. Massinga, the Ethiopian economy has shown significant growth and potential but it has also faced certain structural challenges and socio economic disparities.

How would you support Ethiopia in advancing sustainable economic development, attracting investments, and fostering job creation and how can these efforts be used to leverage accountability measures for the role of members of the government in Tigray conflict?

Mr. MASSINGA. Senator Young, thank you for the question.

If confirmed, helping Ethiopia and the Ethiopian people and economy get back on track, back on the track that we saw prior to the most recent conflict, would be uppermost in our—amongst our objectives.

The government prior to the conflict had engaged in a thorough set of reforms designed to enable the country to continue moving ahead forcefully on the economic side in telecommunications, banking, logistics, et cetera.

That was derailed by—to a great extent by the current conflict and in the current context the macro economy is struggling with the immense costs imposed by the conflict.

We look forward to working with the government, the people, the business community, to reinvigorate those reforms and those processes, and as the American ambassador I would be honored, if confirmed, to ensure that our model—our growth model, the Western growth model, the American growth model—would be one that the people of Ethiopia would recognize would be useful, if not essential, for growth forward.

It is no secret that there are others around the world, other major economic economies, that are interested in Ethiopia, that are interested in investing in Ethiopia. Our growth model is the strongest one for long-term growth and I will be steadfast, if confirmed, in ensuring that the people of Ethiopia recognize that.

Senator YOUNG. Thank you. And among the countries that is no doubt interested in supplanting the United States, certainly, competing against the influence of the United States in Ethiopia is China. In fact, Ethiopia is a central hub for China's Belt and Road Initiative to the tune of some \$4 billion.

What potential risks and challenges do you perceive in Ethiopia's increasing economic reliance on China and how would you work to mitigate any negative consequences for Ethiopia's long-term development and sovereignty?

Mr. MASSINGA. Senator, thank you for that follow-on question.

Again, China is deeply invested in Ethiopia and is looking to continue that investment. As we have seen in many countries around the world, that investment is not cost free nor is that model the most appropriate model for long-term growth.

And, Senator, if confirmed, I look forward to working with the Ethiopian business community and government to ensure that they understand the costs associated with that.

Senator YOUNG. Are there—are there government agencies—U.S. government agencies, regional partners, international organizations that you would regard as best placed to help address and, perhaps, counterbalance some of the malign influence of China and other adversaries in the country of Ethiopia?

Mr. MASSINGA. Of course. Within the United States government—Department of Commerce, USTR, other specialized agencies and telecommunications—certainly would be part of all that and, of course, the international community would also be essential to help demonstrate to the Ethiopian people and the government that that model really is the best way to go forward.

Senator YOUNG. Of course, some of those agencies hopefully have a presence in the embassy, right, which is a good thing.

Ambassador Johnson, China has been expanding its Belt and Road Initiative, of course, globally, as we just mentioned in Ethiopia. But Lebanon signed on to that initiative in 2017.

Are there any ongoing or proposed BRI projects that you are aware of in Lebanon that you believe could have negative long-term implications for the United States, our partners, or our interests?

Ms. JOHNSON. Yes, Senator. Thank you very much for the question.

Yes, Lebanon did sign on to the Belt and Road Initiative. However, my understanding is that there are no significant Chinese investments in Lebanon. We continually reiterate with our partners' concerns risks of deeper engagement with China, of problematic nontransparent financial and infrastructure investments.

That was very much a focus for me in my previous role as ambassador to Namibia and I can assure you it would be priority for me if confirmed as ambassador to Lebanon.

Senator Young [presiding]. Thank you so much.

Senator Kaine? Yes, sir.

Senator KAINE. Thank you, Senator Young, and congratulations to all of you nominees. It is a really well-qualified panel.

Ambassador Johnson, I want to drill down on the aspect of your testimony where you talked about the severity of the economic—really economic, political challenges facing Lebanon right now.

Sometimes in this committee and on the Hill there is a debate about, okay, how does it affect us—how does it affect the world, the internal challenges in Lebanon.

Should Lebanon continue on the path that it is on, a downward spiral characterized by a challenged economy, a lot of refugees, the inability to organize the government—should it continue on that path, what are the consequences for the region that the United States needs to be very worried about?

Ms. JOHNSON. Yes, Senator, it is a very important question. Thank you. Thank you for that.

The reason Lebanon remains a real priority for the United States is it is just at the intersection of U.S. national security interests in the Middle East. I mean, you have got Israel on the southern border, which has to defend itself from Hezbollah.

You have got Syria and instability and war the brutal dictator Assad has fomented. You have got Iran supporting through its

proxy Hezbollah destabilizing activity in both Lebanon and the region. We cannot ignore any of this.

And then there is, of course, the historic ties we have with the Lebanese people. Lebanese are—form a really important part of our diaspora here in the United States and the rich cultural fabric that they contribute to.

So, I do not think we can allow Lebanon to reach the worst-case scenario, which is why we are doing a number of things. I mean, I mentioned several in my opening statement—the humanitarian assistance for the most vulnerable and supporting the Lebanese Forces to provide stability while we push Lebanon's leaders to do the necessary things, the hard things they will need to do.

I mean, first, elect a president. They have got to form a government. That government has got to be capable of bringing in the different parties that are necessary to take the really hard decisions, to do the reforms they need to get done for that IMF package. It is the only way out.

Senator KAINE. The presence of Hezbollah poses a huge risk to Israel but there are at least some potential positives that the Lebanese government in the past has explored together with Israel, whether they might do energy projects in tandem in the Mediterranean.

So there is not only a need to protect against the influence of Hezbollah but there is the opportunity for some cooperation should the situation in Lebanon stabilize.

I want to associate myself with the comments you made earlier about the Lebanese Armed Forces, having visited Lebanon, spent time with them, spent time with the U.S. troops that are there training them.

They are not perfect. Nobody is perfect. But in terms of a stabilizing force in a nation that desperately needs one you do not really have many better options if there are any better options than the Lebanese Armed Forces. I agree with you on that.

Ambassador Popp, it is good to see you again. My colleagues and I really enjoyed being with you in Guatemala in the summer of 2021 and I will ask—I will just make one point about Uganda but then I am going to ask you some Guatemala questions since I have you.

I just want to associate myself with what Senator Murphy said about the need to be really active in trying to provide safe haven for LGBTQ Ugandans. We cannot dictate the internal politics of a country. That is not what diplomacy is about.

But as I have traveled around the world as a member of this committee often I have heard from LGBTQ activists in countries that were it not for the United States, were it not for the embassy, were it not for a consulate being a place of safe haven where they could come and dialogue about their hopes and aspirations and what they hope to contribute to their own countries, if it were not for the U.S. there would not be a safe space for them.

And so while we might not be able to have a huge impact on domestic politics in Uganda, the role of the ambassador is really important in creating a place where people can be treated with equality, the North Star virtue of this country. So I would just encourage you in that way.

When we talk about immigration issues at the border we often talk about the U.S.-Mexico border. But there are two other really important borders in terms of immigration flows to the United States in the Americas.

One is the border between Colombia and Panama, and the other is the border between Guatemala and Mexico. From your experience as the ambassador in Guatemala, how cooperative has Guatemala been in trying to help us deal with immigration issues in the south to north flow at their border with Mexico?

Mr. POPP. Thank you, Senator, for the questions.

First, I just want to make sure I am very clear. I fully agree with your point on the U.S. embassy and the U.S. Ambassador's role in supporting all communities including the LGBTQI community, and if confirmed as ambassador to Uganda I would be Chief of Mission that would be engaged with that community and continuing to have an active regular dialogue with them as I have done so in Guatemala.

In regards to your question about the border of Guatemala and their border security measures, they have been partners effectively not only with their border with Mexico, which is, as you note, a very important transit point for migrants headed north to our Southwest border, as well as their border with Honduras.

They have been effective on different occasions of stopping mass movements of individuals including caravans but also in working with us and U.S. law enforcement in particular to counter the alien smugglers and the human traffickers and the individuals who have been—are criminally taking advantage of migrants and, unfortunately, putting people in positions of great risk and danger.

Senator KAINE. Thank you. I am going to need to—I am a minute over so I want to cede time to my colleagues. But I appreciate that answer. Thank you.

Senator YOUNG. Thank you.

Senator Ricketts?

Senator RICKETTS. Thank you very much.

I would like to start by echoing what Chairman Murphy and Ranking Member Young said to say thank you for your service to our country and the sacrifices that you and your families make to be able to serve our great nation. It is appreciated and you all should be congratulated on being nominated for these posts.

Ambassador Johnson, I am going to start with you as this is the 70th anniversary of Israel, one of our closest friends in the world and, certainly, in the region, and Israel since its inception has endured attacks from state actors and nonstate actors, most recently Hamas.

We talked about Hezbollah, Palestinian Islamic jihad, the—Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, just to name a few, and I had the opportunity to see this personally when I was in Israel earlier this year.

You can see how small a country is when you fly in a helicopter you can see the ocean on one side and the Syrian border on the other side, and we were at the Lebanese border where Hezbollah had been digging tunnels through solid limestone for 10 years to be able to get inside Israel and attack them and that—and then, of course, during the Passover in early April Israel endured the

largest rocket attack coming from Lebanon since the Lebanese war in 2006 and, obviously, this is all being encouraged by—it is even being done by Hamas or Islamic jihad and certainly encouraged by the IRGC.

So what can we do to prevent southern Lebanon from becoming a staging area for these types of rocket attacks on Israel?

Ms. JOHNSON. Thank you, Senator, for your question.

I share your deep concern with the attacks that have been emanating on Israel both from Lebanon and more recently from Gaza.

The United States' commitment to Israel's security is absolutely ironclad and Israel will continue to exercise its inherent right to self-defense. But we have to do more. The Lebanese have to do more.

Hezbollah—there are a number of ways that we have been targeting Hezbollah, since 2005 over 200 sanctions on individuals and entities going after their finances, and that is important in terms of their ability to access weapons.

I understand that they are—that Hezbollah is under financial stress—economic stress—due to some of these sanctions. We have been able to enlist some of our partners in the Gulf—Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar—to join us in these sanctions.

Just last week the FBI seized 13 internet domains of Hezbollah, which is another way to try to cut off their support. We do continue very much to support UNIFIL's mission in southern Lebanon.

UNIFIL has played an effective role in monitoring the cessation of hostilities since the 2006 war between Israel and Lebanon and also plays a stabilizing role along—on the Blue Line with their reporting activities and especially the ability of the peacekeepers to get in there and defuse tense situations.

Now, I am not going to say that they have been able to fully implement their mandate. They have not. They have been prevented from accessing key areas of concerns like the tunnels that you mentioned.

If confirmed, I would call on the Lebanese authorities to uphold their responsibility to allow UNIFIL to operate in all the areas necessary to fulfill their mandate and we also need to continue to work with Lebanese Armed Forces to do more joint patrols and have a stronger presence in southern Lebanon. I do think those things will help.

Senator RICKETTS. Absolutely. I mean, again, 10 years to dig the tunnels through solid limestone was a very loud, noisy process, and as we observed from the Israeli side of the border Hamas is still there. I mean, they are still there watching us.

And, obviously, Lebanon has got—75 percent of its population is in poverty. They have not had a president in six months or whatever it is. Very complicated. The economy is in meltdown.

My understanding is the Iran foreign minister was there recently to talk—really, start trying to get their candidate, Suleiman Franjieh, to be the new president.

What would that mean if Suleiman Franjieh was actually the new president of Lebanon? How would that impact our relations with Lebanon and relations with how Lebanon was going to interact with Israel?

Ms. JOHNSON. Senator, thank you for the question. I share your concern about Iran's malign influence in Lebanon, including through Hezbollah.

What we have been continuing to advocate is that the Lebanese parliament is going to have to choose the next president. It is not for the international community to decide.

But we have really expressed the qualities that we believe are important—someone that is free from corruption, someone that can unite the country, that puts the interests of the people first, that can build a coalition to implement the reforms.

Some candidates will not meet that—will not meet that bar. We have been very clear with all across Lebanese political spectrum that that is what needs to happen. We have been delivering a united message with our partners, with France, with Saudi Arabia, with Qatar. We share the same goal and it is the one that I have stated.

Senator RICKETTS. All right. So real briefly because I have already run out of time, too, what is your analysis of the political stalemate? Where does it go?

Ms. JOHNSON. I am an optimist, Senator.

[Laughter.]

Ms. JOHNSON. Everything I read leads me to believe they are getting closer. They are getting closer. I just—they need to assume the urgency that the situation demands. This is—it is really time for the Lebanese leaders and political leadership to step up.

Electing the president is just the first step. It gets us to some of those next stages where we need to form a government that is capable of providing services to the people, that can operate transparently, that puts corruption in the rearview mirror.

The reforms are not going to be easy; I won't lie. But they really have to do it to secure that World Bank loan and get some necessary liquidity into the economy. So electing the president is the first step but it is a path and they are going to need our support.

Senator RICKETTS. Great. Thank you, Ambassador.

Senator MURPHY [presiding]. We do not generally make pessimists ambassadors but we do not—we definitely do not send pessimists to Lebanon.

[Laughter.]

Senator MURPHY. Senator Booker?

Senator BOOKER. I am deferring to Senator Van Hollen.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you. Thank you, Senator Booker, and thank you, Mr. Chairman. Congratulations to all of you on your nominations and thank you for your service as part of the Foreign Service.

And let me start with you, Ambassador Johnson, and on Lebanon, right, you have to be an optimist and I think you were there 20 years ago.

Senator Murphy and I were there in 2021 on a trip, and as I look at the situation today not that much has changed since our trip in 2021 and maybe it has not changed that much in 20 years. But let me—let me look to the future a little bit.

When Senator Murphy and I were last there it was just as they were coming out of the last political crisis and forming a new government for a little while. Now they are back in a political crisis.

But Salameh—as you know, Mr. Salameh, I think, has been the head of the central bank for a very long time. He has been indicted in many European countries, I believe. I also understand that his tenure will come to an end on June 30th.

Is that correct? And what would his departure mean for the opportunity to try to deal with some of the reform and corruption issues?

Ms. JOHNSON. Senator, thank you very much for the question.

Yes, his term is coming to an end. I think it is in July, but I would stand to be corrected. I believe it is also up to the president of Lebanon to appoint the next central bank governor. So, all the more reason that we need to have the Lebanese parliament get a president in place.

But we are very much looking forward to working with whoever the Lebanese decide who the next central bank governor will be. That person will be critical in undertaking the reforms necessary to get to that IMF package. Probably chief among them is the restructuring of the banking sector.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Got it.

On the electricity situation—I apologize if you already covered this territory before I arrived—but that, of course, has been a chronic problem, these—the limits on electricity each day in Lebanon.

Our current ambassador, Ambassador Shea, came up with an innovative idea some time ago to help Egypt produce some electricity that would be transported through Jordan, Syria, and on to Lebanon.

There were a number of issues that, obviously, had to be resolved to make sure it was compliant with the Caesar Act. But my question now is I understand that the main hang up now is the fact that Lebanon has not conformed to the World Bank proposals. Am I—is that correct?

Ms. JOHNSON. Largely correct, Senator. Where we are at—I mean, two hours of electricity a day you cannot run a business on that much less an economy or a country. So, it has been very important to the U.S. government to push for long-term sustainable energy solutions for Lebanon.

Chief among those has been discussion of a natural gas deal from Egypt and an electricity deal with Jordan that would be financed by the World Bank. So, where Lebanon is at right now, as you noted, is there are a number of kind of reforms that need to be done of the sector to get them to that World Bank loan and they are close.

I would actually like to commend some of the progress they have made. One is they raised electricity tariffs for the first time in over 30 years. That is an important part of the cost recovery plan requirement.

They have also advertised in *The Economist* magazine for a regulating—regulator authority. So, they have taken a number of the steps that would be necessary for that World Bank loan and they are getting close. But they need to complete those reforms so the World Bank can vote on that loan.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. No, I thank you. I appreciate that, and everything we can do, of course, to push them in the right direction would be helpful to the people of Lebanon.

I should say while we are on Lebanon I do believe we have two treasurers there, both in the American University of Beirut and the Lebanon University. I just met with the president of the latter and they are sort of islands of hope in the middle of a pretty desperate situation.

Very quickly, if I could turn to you, Mr. Massinga, and it is good to see you in person having talked to you, I think, via Zoom and, obviously, a very delicate situation in Ethiopia.

A number of the surrounding countries, the African Union, and the United States have worked hard to get the very fragile peace agreement.

What is your current assessment of that situation and, if confirmed, one of your really most important jobs will be to try to make sure we nurture that agreement and make sure that it is sustainable, going forward.

So, what do you see as the biggest challenge at this time?

Mr. MASSINGA. Thank you, Senator, for the question.

To be succinct, I think the biggest challenge, going forward, is the economic situation. We have seen tremendous progress in cementing the cessation of hostilities and some progress in establishing a reconciliation effort as well as transitional justice.

If confirmed it would be among my highest objectives to continue nurturing those two processes to move forward. But at the same time we have to be clear eyed and recognize that the people of Ethiopia are facing a very difficult economic situation which has been worsened enormously by the drought that is impacting the entirety of the Horn and, of course, the conflict itself.

But make no mistake, moving ahead in continuing to cement the peace, which has been hard won through efforts by the international community, the regional community, and the United States would be top on my list.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you. I look forward to supporting all your nominations. Congratulations.

Thank you.

Senator MURPHY. Senator Booker?

Senator BOOKER. Mr. Massinga, you and I have a commonality besides being bald Black men. We both have deep roots in Louisiana and there is no reason for me saying that besides the fact that I want to recognize.

I really want to go to another place, interestingly enough, I found out I have roots to from having my DNA tested, which is Sierra Leone.

There was this interesting 2020 study that showed that views of China are going down significantly in their political economic partnership while views of the United States are actually going up, and I am wondering is there something we can learn there as we have a bit of a rivalry on the African continent for influence in the continent as a whole. What can we learn from Sierra Leone in that sense?

Mr. MASSINGA. Well, I would say a couple of things, Senator.

First and foremost, China has not helped itself. It has done immense damage to its reputation in Sierra Leone through its own actions. Its continued engagement in illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing off the Sierra Leonean coast, its continued illegal logging in Sierra Leone's forests, its continued pursuit of mineral agreements that violate both international best practice and Sierra Leone's own environmental and labor standards have, frankly, left a bad taste in a lot of Sierra Leoneans' mouths towards what China brings to the table.

But I think complementary to that what my colleagues at the embassy have done is really to carry forward America's story and to try to offer real alternatives to what the People's Republic of China is putting on the table, I think, to the work that the Development Finance Corporation has done there and looking at projects that they can support American investment in.

I think of the work of the Millennium Challenge Corporation has done, very importantly, in trying to deliver first the initial threshold projects and now, hopefully, a full compact for the people of Sierra Leone, which will be transformational in terms of its infrastructure.

So, I think it is a combination of the people of Sierra Leone learning the realities of dealing with the People's Republic of China but also our own ability to offer alternatives for the country's development.

Senator BOOKER. I appreciate that and, if confirmed, how do you think we can further double down on those development of economic interests between Sierra Leone

—setting a standard, in a sense?

Mr. MASSINGA. Yeah. If confirmed, Senator, one of my top priorities will be to work with the American business community to try to make sure that they are actively engaged in helping Sierra Leone shape its future.

I believe there are immense opportunities for investment across the board in Sierra Leone and, certainly, with the investments that we have made through the Development Finance Corporation and the Millennium Challenge Corporation there are going to be opportunities for U.S. business that, frankly, can benefit not just Sierra Leone but also benefit us back home in the United States.

So, if confirmed, I would work very closely with those private sector elements—private sector elements of the U.S. that is present in Sierra Leone and also try to bring to the table an even more active Development Finance Corporation, an even more active MCC, an even more active trade development authority to make sure that we are actively offering those alternatives to what China is trying to still sell to the Sierra Leonean government.

Senator BOOKER. I am really grateful.

Ms. Escrogima, how are you?

I feel like you have been left out as well in this conversation and I am not sure if you were happy about that or were you——

[Laughter.]

Senator BOOKER. I am one of the Senate founding members of the Abraham Accords Caucus here and I am very concerned about—very hopeful about the possibility of normalizing relations going on in Oman.

And so I am wondering how does Oman view, in your opinion, the potential benefits of building relations with Israel, potential risks, and what kind of role can you play?

Ms. ESCROGIMA. Thank you, Senator.

As someone who has lived and worked in the region for the better part of 20 years let me say I think the Abraham Accords is one of the most positive developments we have seen in a generation and, if confirmed, I would, certainly, work to make the case to our Omani partners to consider normalization with Israel and participation in regional fora like the Negev Forum.

Oman is no stranger to this type of diplomacy, hosting since 1996 the longest lasting regional mechanism that has included Israel, the Regional Desalination Center.

Oman has hosted three visits from Israeli prime ministers, most recently in 2018, and, of course, in February Oman agreed to Israeli over flight, which has opened up new trade routes from Israel to Asia.

So, if confirmed, I would look forward to hitting the ground and working with my team to see how we can make the case with our Omani partners for pursuing normalization.

Senator BOOKER. Well, I look forward to trying to help from the Senate side and, perhaps, work with you to continue to expand that.

Mr. Popp, a lot has been discussed already. Uganda is frustrating to me because there are just a lot of human rights issues that are really pressing.

The State Department's latest human rights report documented serious restrictions of political rights and civil society—unlawful killings, forced disappearances, and even torture by state agencies, parts of Ugandans'—Uganda's government.

Add to that Senator Murphy already pointedly expressed concerns about a stunning—a law that is going to undermine our efforts and the successes we have through PEPFAR in the region.

They have an important role for this—our bilateral relationship is really important when it comes to United States interests, its regional interests in that area promoting democracy, human rights, but also just general security issues and it is just a very difficult balance.

Could you maybe address the concerns I have for a government that started out so hopeful years ago and now seems to be slipping towards a behavior that is demonstrably violent, unjust, and undemocratic?

Mr. POPP. Thank you, Senator.

Yes, you sum it up very clearly and accurately. I think the concern is that Uganda is headed in a direction that is not good for Ugandans in all of these areas, and as friends of Uganda and the region and of the people of Uganda we should be clear about where those challenges are, be clear eyed in how we assess ways to work forward with civil society, with other stakeholders in the country.

Obviously, issues of torture, violence, those types of abuses have to be rejected completely and clearly in our diplomacy, in our conversations and discussions with the host government, and also find ways to support increases in democratic space instead of restrictions.

That is everything from building space for NGOs and for organizations that are advocating for all the communities that are facing challenges.

It includes making sure that we are talking with all stakeholders in the country, including the political opposition, so that we are hearing very clearly about ways to find solutions, going forward, to change, hopefully, in a constructive way the trajectory that Uganda is on.

At the same time, as you note, there is a number of areas where Uganda has previously been an important partner on security and regional stability and, of course, we want to try to continue to find ways to work in those areas because it is an area that faces a lot of challenges, as we have seen even recently.

Senator BOOKER. And with the chair's indulgence a comment—a quick question and then a final comment. The quick question, yes or no, do you plan on meeting with LGBTQ leaders in Uganda, civil society groups that are advocating for the protection and the safety and security of the LGBTQ community there?

Mr. POPP. Yes, absolutely.

Senator BOOKER. Thank you.

And then the comment is just to the five of you. These are committee hearings we have often when it comes to confirming ambassadors. I just want to say thank you. My intention is to support each of you on the floor. It is a tremendous sacrifice and many of you have had a career doing this remarkable work.

When I travel around from Lebanon to the subcontinent of Africa I am just in awe of the commitment not just of our ambassadors there but also their staffs as well and the families of folks.

So to the families behind everyone, thank you, and to the five extraordinary servants of this country I just give you my gratitude.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator MURPHY. Thank you, Senator Booker.

The ranking member and I are going to hold you here for a short second round of questions and I will turn it over to Senator Young.

Senator YOUNG. Thank you, Chairman.

Ms. Escrogima, Oman is essential in efforts to constructively engage with Iran while also providing a check on its malign influences in the region. I am thinking here about Iranian harassment of commercial shipping vessels but there are, of course, other areas in which Oman has been and can be helpful, moving forward.

How will you work with the Omani government and private sector to encourage stronger compliance within Oman with U.S. sanctions on Iran?

Ms. ESCROGIMA. Thank you for the question, Senator.

As you noted, our security relationship with Oman is strong. It dates back four decades and includes military access, joint exercises.

We have stepped up maritime interdictions in the Gulf that has denied the flow of lethal aid to the Houthis and, certainly, this is an ongoing conversation and, if confirmed, I would look forward to arriving and checking with my team and seeing what more we can do and you have my pledge that I will ensure that Oman is compliant with all relevant sanctions.

Senator YOUNG. It is a good idea consulting with your team. I do it a lot. So I understand and I will look forward to following that important work.

I would like to get your views on Oman's efforts to promote regional peace in—regional peace and the Abraham Accords. It is clear that Oman favors engagement over confrontation even with countries whose interests do not completely align.

I was encouraged to learn of Oman permitting over flights of Israeli carriers earlier this year and in your testimony you're referred to the Mideast Desalinization Research Center.

However, Oman has yet to pursue normalization with Israel. In your view, what are the primary reasons for Sultan Haitham's hesitation in having Oman join the Abraham Accords and, if confirmed, how would you advocate for Oman to finally take this step?

Ms. ESCROGIMA. Thank you for raising this, Senator.

It is true Oman's commitment to mediation and de-escalation in the region makes it a vital partner in many of our efforts to engage in diplomacy to depressurize and deescalate tensions in the region, and the Omanis have told us that they would like to see more progress on the Israeli-Palestinian track of peace negotiations before looking at pursuing normalization with Israel and we, of course, keep our Omani partners briefed up on our efforts in that regard.

And at the same time I think it is important to continue making the case for the regional integration and economic benefits of pursuing normalization with Israel as we begin to see the impact of the Abraham Accords in the Negev Forum and the benefits that are accruing to states who are participating.

Senator YOUNG. Thank you.

Ambassador Johnson, you may recall that last year Senator Van Hollen and I urged Secretary Blinken and the administration to engage with Lebanon to ensure fairness and transparency in its parliamentary election.

Lebanon, nonetheless, appears no closer to having a complete government due to its inability to elect a president and it is a very thorny issue. But, if confirmed, what U.S. and multilateral policies would you support to help build consensus and finally break this political impasse?

Ms. JOHNSON. Well, Senator, yes, I very much share your concern about the stalled presidential election. As I have mentioned, Lebanon needs to elect a president so they can move forward on the reforms toward the IMF package.

So, we have to leverage—if confirmed, I would leverage all diplomatic tools to continue to push all sectors within Lebanon, all political leaders, to step up and do what they need to do for the Lebanese people and for parliament to elect a president, and the way we are going about this Ambassador Shea discusses all the time with all the leaders on the ground.

Our assistant secretary for Near Eastern affairs, Barbara Leaf, was just in Beirut in March. We have been meeting with our international partners. You mentioned the multilateral effort, and we thank very much the efforts of France, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Qatar, who partnered with us in the meeting in Paris in February to deliver a united message to the Lebanese political leadership.

So, if confirmed, I would continue to use those tools pressing across all spectrums of Lebanese society but also ensuring we deliver that unified message with our international partners.

Senator YOUNG. Thank you for your response. I have one more line of questioning for you and it pertains to Hezbollah. If confirmed, would you meet with leaders of Hezbollah?

Ms. JOHNSON. No, Senator, I would not. They—Hezbollah is a U.S.-designated terrorist organization.

Senator YOUNG. Will you work with ministries run by Hezbollah or its allies?

Ms. JOHNSON. Senator, I think we have been very careful. I would like to point to we have sanctioned members of parliament and allies in parliament for their ties to Hezbollah.

I think we are raising the costs for anyone of doing business with Hezbollah or seeking closer ties and I think it has sent a strong warning to others. It, certainly, complicates our diplomacy if key ministries are held by ministers who are aligned to Hezbollah.

Senator YOUNG. How should the U.S. deal with Lebanese parties or politicians that align themselves with Hezbollah?

Ms. JOHNSON. Senator, we do have tools that we can leverage to deal with that, and I would be committed to using those tools when there is evidence that the interagency and the United States could pursue.

Senator YOUNG. Can you elaborate on the tools?

Ms. JOHNSON. As I mentioned earlier, our sanctions tools have been very, very effective in going after them and we've designated over 200 individuals and entities.

Some of these are on the financial side. Some of these are facilitators. Some of these are weapons smugglers. Some of these are drug traffickers.

So there have been many ways we have been able to get at the things that enable Hezbollah to continue its illicit and terrorist activities.

Senator YOUNG. Thank you.

Mr. Hunt, I will sort of end my questions with you, sir. The mining sector is a crucial part of Sierra Leone's economy. But local Sierra Leoneans do not seem to be reaping the benefits of many of the large-scale projects.

China has sponsored gold mining operations and those have had a particularly brutal impact on Sierra Leone's land, their water. How would you promote responsible and sustainable mining practices that benefit both Sierra Leone and international investors?

Mr. HUNT. Senator, it is—there is no question that the PRC has blatantly ignored Sierra Leone's own environmental and labor standards while it has carried out its mining projects in Sierra Leone.

The Sierra Leonean people, from what we can tell based upon polling that your colleague referenced, have very clearly taken—are very clearly of the opinion that the PRC is not a trusted partner in this sector.

So, from my perspective, if confirmed, what I would attempt to do is to try to help identify trusted partners, primarily from the United States or other Western allies, who are prepared to follow

the various international regimes that are in place to ensure best practices in the mining sector.

Senator YOUNG. And who would you work with as you look to identify trusted private sector partners?

Yes, sir?

Mr. HUNT. Certainly. Ideally, I would hope to work with the U.S. Foreign Commercial Service, first and foremost, to see if we have private sector American businesses that can provide the technology and the investment that Sierra Leone needs.

In the absence of that I would turn to our closest friends and allies—the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia—who have well established—well established mining sectors in their economy.

Senator YOUNG. Sierra Leone has made efforts to attract foreign investment, improve its business environment. What measures would you support to encourage U.S. companies to invest in Sierra Leone beyond what you have indicated you would do as it pertains to trusted mining partners and how would you address any concerns related to bureaucracy, corruption, or legal protections for investors?

Mr. HUNT. Certainly, Senator.

I think it is a very important question. When I think about how best to attract investment to Sierra Leone, if confirmed, first and foremost, I would look to the Sierra Leone diaspora in the United States.

There are many of our own citizens who have deep ties to the country, deep interest in its future, and have expressed an interest already in coming and investing there.

Secondly, I would want to talk to those who are looking to invest as well as those who already have businesses in Sierra Leone to understand the obstacles that they are facing in engaging in trade and investment in the Sierra Leonean economy.

In the past in various posts where I have served in leadership roles I have been an active advocate for the reduction of bureaucracy, the reduction of obstacles, the implementation of international best practices, and if confirmed I would hope to do that as ambassador to Sierra Leone in close concert with the rest of our country team and the various agencies that have been set up in the U.S. government to support U.S. businesses working overseas.

Senator YOUNG. Thank you, sir. Thank you all.

Mr. Chairman?

Senator MURPHY. Thank you, Senator Young.

I am just—this panel reminds me of how well served we are at the State Department. We are all asking you questions as if you were already at posts, as if you are intimately familiar with these countries, and you are answering the questions as if you are already there, which just tells us how well suited you are for these roles, how well trained you are, how lucky we are to have you.

Just I have two final wrap-up questions. In the vein of maybe asking an unfair question to a nominee who is not on the ground yet I wanted to ask you, Mr. Massinga, about how the U.S. has viewed Abiy.

I mean, this is remarkable. We go from Nobel Prize to civil war within 12 to 18 months. We are celebrating him as a statesman who is willing to set aside grievance to make peace with his neigh-

bors, and some critics of our policy will say that we kind of misread the core political dynamics in the country and that our support for Abiy ended up underwriting his confrontational approach with his rivals, including the TPLF.

And so I just wonder what you think—in hindsight, was our assessment of Abiy off? Did we make a mistake to make this bet? Did we end up providing him with cover to allow him to engage in the kind of tactics that have gotten us to this sort of moment of crisis?

Mr. MASSINGA. Senator Murphy, in response to that question let me start with where we are now and then maybe loop back towards the historical part you are talking about.

The U.S. understands and regards all actors, all leaders in Ethiopia, through a clear-eyed lens. Ethiopia did not arrive at the position where it is now and the horrendous conflict that we have seen in recent years accidentally.

There were many factors that led and contributed to this conflict and the conflict was pitiless, and the leaders that were associated with that conflict we all understand and see them clearly and see all the dynamics very clearly for what they are.

Having said that, they are the leaders of the country and so we will work with them intensively to rebuild the country. We are seeing enormous energy and optimism amongst many of the former combatants to stitch that country together and, Senator, I look forward to working with them and all of you in that endeavor, if confirmed.

Going back to your somewhat difficult question, probably there was some level of excessive optimism. However, our engagement with Ethiopia over many years has been deep and intense due to the size of our diaspora—a very important diaspora in our country—and the love that many Americans have for Ethiopia, the size of their country, and the importance of that country in Africa and the region.

Going forward, again, I, as ambassador, if confirmed, will look forward to working with all of you and all stakeholders to recognize through a clear-eyed, again, manner the stakes involved and to help that country move forward.

Senator MURPHY. Optimists sometimes have a hard time learning lessons because we believe that if there are obstacles in the past they do not need to be obstacles in the future.

We can just do a better and more innovative and more thorough job of surmounting them the next time we need them. The U.S. is particularly bad at learning lessons, in part because we do not believe that there is any barrier that we cannot surmount.

And so I just ask that question to make sure that as we try to push forward with our friends and our partners in Ethiopia that we are also looking backwards as well.

Final question, Ambassador. I want to talk to you just a bit more about Lebanon. I just want to talk to you a little bit about what you know regarding Hezbollah's propaganda and information ability.

It was pretty stunning to me when I was there with Senator Van Hollen. As was mentioned, we put on the table this very innovative program to try to get gas delivered to Lebanon from Egypt and this was an initiative that the United States was leading on.

And, yet, it was a liability for us when we were there because Hezbollah had let people know that in fact it was the United States that was stopping this initiative, that the Caesar sanctions were the only thing standing in the way of Egyptian gas getting to Lebanon and that was the narrative that was the dominant narrative, not that the United States is trying to find innovative creative means to get gas to Lebanon but that the United States is standing in the way of gas getting to Lebanon.

It just feels to me that we are completely outgunned and outmanned when it comes to Hezbollah's effort to spin a narrative compared to our embassy and our State Department's ability to tell the real story of what is going on.

I am not necessarily looking for a full diagnosis of what is wrong with U.S. information operations but this is a capability that Hezbollah has that is serious and has to be confronted, correct?

Ms. JOHNSON. Absolutely, Senator. I agree with you. The disinformation is dangerous and seeks to undermine our objectives and the good work we are doing together with our Lebanese partners.

It is just—it shows, I mean, two things. The most important is the need for very active proactive public diplomacy on the part of the U.S. government. If confirmed I would very much look forward to a very active forward-leaning public diplomacy program in Lebanon.

One thing Lebanon does have is a very vibrant press corps. So, I think there are many opportunities to get our story out. At the same time we have to counter the disinformation that is out there.

Not the only way to do it but I was—I was heartened by the creative seizure by the FBI of the 13 internet domains last week and I would look forward to using all the tools at our disposal to counter Hezbollah disinformation, if confirmed. It is a very important point.

Senator MURPHY. Great. Well said.

Thank you all for your testimony. We really do appreciate you sticking with us and answering all these tough questions. We are going to allow members to submit questions for the record until the close of business tomorrow.

And with thanks to the committee, to our nominees, and to the staff, this hearing is now adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 3:29 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

Additional Material Submitted for the Record

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO ANA A. ESCROGIMA BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

Question. If confirmed, what concrete steps could you take to help Oman operationalize the prioritized recommendations contained in the TIP report?

Answer. As President Biden has said, the promotion of universal values, including human rights, is one of five pillars of our Middle East strategy, as laid out in the National Security Strategy. Human trafficking is a top priority. If confirmed, I will engage with the Omanis at the highest levels, including the Human Rights Commission, the Ministries of Labor and Foreign Affairs, the judiciary, law enforcement and others working on this topic, to increase their efforts to investigate, prosecute, and

convict traffickers for forced labor crimes, specifically of migrant workers and domestic servants.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to reporting the reality of the trafficking situation as accurately as possible?

Answer. Yes.

Question. In the State Department's 2022 International Religious Freedom Report, Oman was noted for having a lack of governmental and societal respect. What is your assessment of this particular issue and if confirmed, how will you work with the Ambassador At Large for International Religious Freedom to bolster religious freedom in-country?

Answer. Oman is an important partner to the United States; but I understand that limitations on civil society, freedom of expression, and freedom of association exist. If confirmed, I will work with Omani Government officials to reinforce U.S. support for freedom of religion and belief, including non-belief, and the needs of faith communities as well as agnostics and atheists. If confirmed, I will meet regularly all religious communities in Oman to discuss their needs and ability to practice their faith, in collaboration with our Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom .

Question. In the State Department's 2022 International Religious Freedom Report, Oman was noted for having a lack of governmental and societal respect. If confirmed, do you commit to personally engaging with civil society on this issue?

Answer. Yes. If confirmed, I will make it a priority to engage with Omanis and international civil society and, when appropriate, to elevate their concerns to the appropriate Omani officials. I also commit to engaging with the Government of Oman to honor and uphold fundamental freedoms.

Question. In the State Department's 2022 International Religious Freedom report, Oman was noted for having a lack of governmental and societal respect. If confirmed, what concrete steps can you take to help Oman increase their societal and governmental respect for religious freedom?

Answer. The Administration has been clear that human rights, including freedom of religion, are central to our foreign policy and that these concerns will continue to be raised with partners as well as adversaries. Oman has historically had a high degree of religious tolerance. Oman's Basic Law protects the right of individuals to practice other religions; however, recent blasphemy prosecutions were concerning. If confirmed, I will also meet regularly with leaders and representative of all religious communities in Oman to discuss their needs and ability to practice their faith.

Question. In the State Department's 2022 Human Rights Report, Oman was noted as having several significant human rights abuses, including arbitrary detention and arrest, restrictions on freedom of expression, and more. How will you direct your embassy to work with civil society organizations to improve the human rights situation on the ground?

Answer. The Administration has made clear that human rights are a key pillar of our foreign policy. I understand that Embassy Muscat and our leadership here engage regularly on human rights concerns. Department leadership just raised human rights with a delegation of senior Omani officials earlier this month. If confirmed, I will press the government of Oman to uphold and protect human rights, including loosening restrictions on fundamental freedoms and elevating TIP concerns. I also will engage with civil society and elevate their concerns, as appropriate, with relevant Omani officials.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO ANA A. ESCROGIMA BY SENATOR MARCO RUBIO

U.S.-Oman Relationship

In May 2022, Secretary Blinken said that the People's Republic of China is the "only country with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do it." The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) clearly holds the reins of power in the People's Republic of China and has used this power to commit genocide in Xinjiang, flood our communities with fentanyl, and emit, by far the largest quantity of greenhouse gases in the world today. With their

absolute control of Chinese society and industry, the CCP could stop all of these destructive actions tomorrow if they so choose.

Question. Is the Chinese Communist Party a threat to the United States?

Answer. Earlier this year, the Director of National Intelligence testified that “the CCP represents both the leading and most consequential threat to U.S. national security and leadership globally.” Under President Xi, the CCP has become more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad, seeking to undercut U.S. influence and alliances. If confirmed, I will advance U.S. national security interests and push back against PRC efforts to expand its problematic influence, through robust and forthright diplomatic engagements, public diplomacy, and commercial advocacy to bolster U.S.-Oman ties.

Question. Does the Chinese Communist Party undertake any activities that are beneficial to U.S. interests?

Answer. The Administration assesses the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) activities in the context of the fact that, as Secretary Blinken has said, the CCP has become more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad. According to the Office of the Director of National Intelligence’s 2023 Annual Threat Assessment, the CCP is seeking to “undercut U.S. influence, drive wedges between Washington and its partners, and foster some norms that favor its authoritarian system.”

Question. Do you believe that there are any areas within which the Chinese Communist Party would constructively work with the United States in good faith?

Answer. As the United States competes vigorously with the PRC, the United States manages this competition responsibly so that competition does not veer into conflict. The United States will work with the PRC to address transnational challenges, such as climate change, when it is in our interest to do so—as Secretary Blinken has said, not as a favor to us or anyone else, and never in exchange for walking away from our principles, but because it is what the world expects. If confirmed, I will work with the Department of State’s new Office of China Coordination to advance U.S. objectives and counter harmful behavior by the PRC and other actors in the Middle East.

Question. If confirmed, will you approve any joint activity with organizations or representatives from the People’s Republic of China in the country in which you will work?

Answer. If confirmed, my priority will be advancing U.S. national security interests in Oman and countering efforts by our strategic and regional competitors to undermine those interests. The Administration has been clear that the PRC is the most consequential geopolitical challenge facing the United States, and that the United States is committed to working to strengthen our partners in the region. If confirmed, I will work closely with Department of State and interagency colleagues and Congress to address China’s efforts to expand its influence in Oman and the region.

Question. The State Department describes the U.S.-Oman relationship as a long-standing one based upon economic, defense, and trade partnerships. Oman was the first Persian Gulf state to sign a long-standing strategic partnership in the 1980s and has received over \$853 million in aid since 1946. In addition to the aid, Oman permits the U.S. military to use its facilities and Oman has had over 70 Foreign Military Sales cases valued at over \$2.7 billion. The U.S. and Oman additionally enjoy a Free Trade Agreement that was ratified in 2006, with the U.S. being Oman’s largest trading partners. What is your assessment of the current state of U.S.-Omani relations?

Answer. Oman is a strategic partner in a critically important region, located at a key naval chokepoint through which 30 percent of the world’s maritime oil shipments pass. Our longstanding partnership with Oman helps to advance a wide range of shared goals, including regional stability and security, counterterrorism, and economic diversification. The 2023 U.S.-Oman Strategic Dialogue deepened our cooperation in trade, investment, clean energy, education, and people-to-people ties.

Question. How is U.S. security enhanced by taxpayer investment in Oman?

Answer. Oman promotes stability and peace in the Middle East. The United States and Oman work closely to promote freedom of navigation in the key naval chokepoint of the Strait of Hormuz to counter piracy and to combat weapons and narcotics trafficking. Oman permits the U.S. military to use its facilities. Oman has also been a valuable diplomatic partner, facilitating important regional mediation efforts that advance our goal to end the war in Yemen, secure the release of wrong-

fully detained American citizens, and deescalate other regional conflicts and tensions.

Arms Transfers to Oman

Question. In your view, what would happen if the U.S. did not provide a high level of foreign military sales to Oman?

Answer. Oman's purchase of U.S. military equipment reinforces our strategic and security cooperation; strengthens interoperability with U.S. forces; and contributes to the U.S. economy. Its decision to use its own funds to purchase U.S. equipment is a testament to the technical quality of our defense articles, as well as the strength of the bilateral relationship. Enhancing Oman's security promotes stability and prosperity in the region.

Question. If confirmed, which aid programs will you focus on to promote continued and improved economic growth with U.S. business partners in Oman?

Answer. If confirmed, I will focus on improving the climate for U.S. businesses in Oman, promoting economic bilateral ties, and advocating for U.S. companies. Tools like the Commercial Law and Development Program and the U.S. Advocacy Center at the Department of Commerce create a level playing field for U.S. companies and encourage inclusive economic growth. Our Free Trade Agreement with Oman is a tremendous resource to promote mutually beneficial trade and economic growth. EXIM's February 2023 MOU with Oman will also help catalyze U.S. exports and Oman's economic diversification and growth in strategic sectors.

China

Question. Oman and China have been cultivating ties regarding oil trade. Oman exports 85 percent of its oil to China and the CCP has lent more than \$3.6 billion in financing for an industrial park in the port of Duqm. Additionally, China is the 5th largest foreign investor in Oman, with one Chinese company taking a 49 percent stake in one of Oman's electricity transmission companies. What is your characterization of the existing relationship between Oman and China?

Answer. Oman rightfully considers the United States its strategic partner. The PRC enjoys no such special relationship in Oman. PRC investment in Duqm largely did not materialize, giving the Omani government a clear understanding of the risks of problematic PRC investment.

Sultan Haitham is actively diversifying Oman's economy away from hydrocarbons, shifting away from the PRC and other oil net importers. Many tools, including the Free Trade Agreement and EXIM financing, ensure the United States benefits from Oman's economic transformation.

Question. Are you concerned with their existing relationship? Please explain.

Answer. I am confident in the enduring strength of the U.S.-Oman partnership, which Oman prioritizes. The PRC is the only competitor with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do it. If confirmed, I will remain vigilant to promote trusted vendors and encourage Oman to be cautious of investments and projects that could infringe on its sovereignty—while ensuring that the United States remains present as a trusted strategic partner.

Question. Late last year, Arab leaders met CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping in Riyadh. It was then determined that China would hold a summit for Gulf Cooperation Council member states, including Oman, and Iran in 2023. This is in addition to the agreement that Beijing brokered between Riyadh and Tehran which was announced in April. What do you believe accounts for this recent win by China to supplant U.S. leadership in the Middle East?

Answer. The United States has a long and constructive track record promoting de-escalation and a reduction in Middle East regional tensions, and we welcome efforts that advance this goal. We will encourage our partners to press the PRC to hold Iran accountable for its commitments. Our engagement with the GCC remains regular and robust and, if confirmed, I will continue our engagement with GCC partners to increase cooperation on regional security and press for an end to destabilizing Iranian behavior.

Question. How would you, as Ambassador, seek to restore the United States' role as the region's main power broker?

Answer. Our commitment to the region is unshakeable. The United States will proactively deter threats, defend our people and interests, and support the defense of our partners in the region. In recent days, our military increased its defensive

posture in the Gulf to respond to Iranian attacks. The United States is uniquely positioned to serve as a strategic and security partner to the countries of the region, while also working to resolve conflicts such as the war in Yemen and to pursue new possibilities for regional integration and de-escalation.

Israel/Abraham Accords

Question. Oman has opened their airspace to Israeli commercial flights to Asia. This is a significant step towards normalization of relations between the two countries. If confirmed, how will you approach the Omani's regarding their possible adoption and entry into the Abraham Accords?

Answer. I strongly support the Abraham Accords. If confirmed, I will highlight the economic and diplomatic benefits of increased regional integration. Oman was the first Gulf state to host an Israeli prime minister. It subsequently hosted two more, including PM Netanyahu in 2018. Since 1997, Oman has hosted the Middle East Desalination Research Center (MEDRC), which brings together scientists from Israel and Arab states to water cooperation in the region. If confirmed, I will make it a priority to find opportunities to advance relations between Oman and Israel.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO LISA A. JOHNSON BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

In the State Department's 2022 Trafficking in Persons Report, Lebanon was ranked as Tier 2 but has significant work to do to better meet the minimum standards to combat trafficking.

Question. If confirmed, what concrete steps could you take to help Lebanon operationalize the prioritized recommendations contained in the TIP report?

Answer. If confirmed, I will engage with the Government of Lebanon to press for progress on the 2022 TIP Report recommendations, as well as the 2023 TIP Report recommendations, once released; those steps include establishing and implementing victim identification procedures, ensuring trafficking victims are not inappropriately penalized for crimes committed as a direct result of being trafficked, and enacting labor reforms to prevent exploitation of migrant workers, including workers under the visa sponsorship system and artiste visa program.

I will also work with U.S. Government stakeholders, including the Department of State's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons (J/TIP), to encourage programming on these issues. For example, J/TIP is currently funding a project with the International Organization on Migration (IOM) to strengthen protection assistance for victims of trafficking, prevent trafficking by building resilience of those at risk through awareness and empowerment initiatives, and strengthen the evidence base on trafficking to support reform advocacy efforts.

Question. If confirmed, how can you encourage the Lebanese caretaker government to better incorporate government procedures to identify victims of trafficking?

Answer. If confirmed, I will, in coordination with J/TIP and other stakeholders, engage with the government to finalize and implement standardized victim identification procedures. I will work to ensure these procedures are incorporated into frontline responders' daily work, including law enforcement and immigration officials. In addition, I will work with J/TIP to ensure stakeholders receive capacity-building training to better identify trafficking victims, including through the ongoing J/TIP-IOM project.

In the State Department's 2022 International Religious Freedom report Lebanon was noted as lack for religious freedom, but noted significant efforts by the U.S. Embassy to encourage interfaith dialogue.

Question. What is your assessment of this particular issue and if confirmed, how will you work with the Ambassador At Large for International Religious Freedom to bolster religious freedom in-country?

Answer. Religious freedom is a central American value and supporting international religious freedom is a key tenet of the Administration's foreign policy. I share your concerns about certain limitations on religious freedom, and freedom of conscience, in Lebanon. Civil marriage does not exist in Lebanon because many Christian and Muslim leaders continue to fear that permitting civil marriage would threaten their ability to administer their own religious affairs. Couples who want a non-religious ceremony typically travel to countries where civil marriages are allowed, such as Cyprus. If confirmed, I will work with the Ambassador At Large for

International Religious Freedom and our partners in Lebanon's vibrant civil society to promote and protect religious freedom in Lebanon.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to personally engaging with civil society on this issue?

Answer. Yes. If confirmed, I commit to engaging civil society organizations both in the United States and in Lebanon to promote religious freedom and the welfare of religious minority groups for the benefit of all Lebanese.

Question. If confirmed, what concrete steps can you take to help Lebanon increase their societal and governmental respect for religious freedom?

Answer. If confirmed, I will continue the Administration's existing efforts to promote interfaith dialogue and urge the country's religious leaders to take steps to counter violent extremism related to religious belief, including by continuing to engage Lebanese government officials on the need to encourage tolerance, dialogue, and mutual respect among religious groups, meeting with the leaders of all recognized sects on a regular basis to encourage interfaith dialogue, and exploring options to promote religious freedom through our existing bilateral assistance programs. I will also use outreach activities to the public, especially the younger generations, to foster a greater sense of the value of tolerance among faiths and interfaith dialogue.

In the State Department's 2022 Human Rights Report, Lebanon was noted for having a litany of significant human rights abuses, including serious restrictions on freedom of assembly, press, expression, and more.

Question. How will you direct your embassy to work with civil society organizations to improve the human rights situation on the ground?

Answer. I share your concerns about the range of reported significant human rights issues detailed in the 2022 Human Rights Report, including serious restrictions on freedom of expression, refoulement of Syrian refugees, widespread and endemic corruption, and violence against members of the LGBTQI+ community in Lebanon. If confirmed, my embassy team and I will work with the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, as well as directly with civil society organizations and human rights defenders in Lebanon to promote respect for human rights and help ensure that Lebanon stands as a vibrant and multicultural beacon for the rest of the region.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO LISA A. JOHNSON BY SENATOR MARCO RUBIO

In May 2022, Secretary Blinken said that the People's Republic of China is the "only country with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do it." The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) clearly holds the reins of power in the People's Republic of China and has used this power to commit genocide in Xinjiang, flood our communities with fentanyl, and emit, by far the largest quantity of greenhouse gases in the world today. With their absolute control of Chinese society and industry, the CCP could stop all of these destructive actions tomorrow if they so choose.

Question. Is the Chinese Communist Party a threat to the United States?

Answer. Earlier this year, the Director of National Intelligence testified that "the CCP represents both the leading and most consequential threat to U.S. national security and leadership globally." Under President Xi, the CCP has become more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad, seeking to undercut U.S. influence and alliances. If confirmed, I will work to advance U.S. national security interests and push back against the PRC's efforts to expand its problematic influence, through robust and forthright diplomatic engagements, public diplomacy programming, and commercial advocacy to bolster the strong pillars of U.S.-Lebanese ties.

Question. Does the Chinese Communist Party undertake any activities that are beneficial to U.S. interests?

Answer. The Administration assesses the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) activities in the context of the fact that, as Secretary Blinken has said, the CCP has become more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad. According to the Office of the Director of National Intelligence's 2023 Annual Threat Assessment, the

CCP is seeking to “undercut U.S. influence, drive wedges between Washington and its partners, and foster some norms that favor its authoritarian system.”

Question. Do you believe that there are any areas within which the Chinese Communist Party would constructively work with the United States in good faith?

Answer. As the United States competes vigorously with the PRC, the United States manages this competition responsibly so that competition does not veer into conflict. The United States will work with the PRC to address transnational challenges, such as climate change, when it is in our interest to do so—as Secretary Blinken has said, not as a favor to us or anyone else, and never in exchange for walking away from our principles, but because it is what the world expects. If confirmed, I will work with the Department of State’s new Office of China Coordination to advance U.S. objectives and counter harmful behavior by the PRC and other actors in the Middle East.

Question. If confirmed, will you approve any joint activity with organizations or representatives from the People’s Republic of China in the country in which you will work?

Answer. If confirmed, my priority will be advancing U.S. national security interests in Lebanon and countering efforts by our strategic and regional competitors to undermine those interests. The Administration has been clear that the PRC is the most consequential geopolitical challenge facing the United States, and that the United States is committed to working to strengthen our partners in the region. If confirmed, I will work closely with Department of State and interagency colleagues and Congress to address China’s efforts to expand its influence in Lebanon and the region.

Question. Iranian backed Hezbollah, which the State Department has designated as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO), operates freely in Lebanon as a militia force, a political party, and provides social services. Iran uses Hezbollah in Lebanon as a proxy force to threaten Israel’s existence. What is your assessment of the current state of U.S.-Lebanon relations?

Answer. The Administration remains clear-eyed about the threat Hezbollah poses to Lebanon’s sovereignty and stability, as well as to the United States, Israel, and the region. Iran’s malign influence in Lebanon, exercised through its proxy, Hezbollah, harms the Lebanese people, who also continue to grapple with one of the world’s worst economic crises. To combat Iran and Hezbollah’s destabilizing influence, the United States continues to support the Lebanese people and legitimate Lebanese security forces, and is pressing the political class to elect a president, form an empowered government, and implement critical reforms needed to secure an International Monetary Fund program.

If confirmed, I will continue to use all available tools—including diplomatic engagement and sanctions recommendations—to push back against Hezbollah and Iran’s influence and bolster Lebanon’s sovereignty, security, and stability.

Question. If confirmed, how would you work with the Government of Lebanon, which has members of an FTO actively participating in the Government?

Answer. I share your concerns about Hezbollah’s participation in Lebanon’s current caretaker government, which includes two cabinet ministers appointed by Hezbollah. The Administration does not engage with Hezbollah-appointed ministers; nor will I, if confirmed. We also do not provide assistance that has a high risk of benefitting ministries headed by Hezbollah-appointed ministers. If confirmed, I commit to continuing to ensure rigorous safeguards remain in place to mitigate the risk that any designated terrorist group benefit from U.S. Government activities in Lebanon.

Question. How will you incentivize a government infiltrated by Hezbollah to support U.S. goals in the region regarding security?

Answer. I understand that despite the presence of two Hezbollah ministers in the current Lebanese caretaker government, the Department does not assess that the Government is controlled by Hezbollah. If confirmed, I will use all available tools—including recommendations to the Department for imposition of sanctions alongside diplomatic engagement—to erode Hezbollah’s influence and counter its destabilizing activities. I also look forward to continuing robust U.S. assistance to Lebanon’s legitimate security forces, which helps build their capabilities and professionalism, as well as counter Hezbollah’s false narrative that it needs weapons to protect Lebanon.

Question. Since 2018, the U.S. has provided more than \$1 billion dollars for development, humanitarian, and security assistance to Lebanon, making the U.S. the

largest donor. USAID provides significant aid and according to USAID's Scaling Up Renewable Energy (SURE) website, the program aims to meet international climate commitments, strengthen energy security via private investment and procurement of clean electricity. However, many of the clean energy aid programs, such as solar-powered aid projects and wind turbines projects, source these products or components that are made in China, which is often linked to slave labor. Besides USAID subsidizing China's industry by using solar panels and wind turbines parts for aid projects, the production of these items in China is anything but "clean" and simply provides the veneer that these USAID projects somehow reduce CO₂ emission. Further, there is ample concern that components used in these projects are likely connected to forced labor in China. How will you ensure that USAID solar panels, wind turbines, or other "clean" energy products/components are not made in China by slave labor for use in Lebanon?

Answer. I understand that USAID/Lebanon has implemented safeguards to ensure that its partners are in compliance with U.S. laws and regulations regarding the prohibited use of forced labor, particularly in light of PRC human rights abuses in Xinjiang, China. USAID implementing partners are required to conduct due diligence of any proposed vendors of solar panels. The implementing partner also validates upon equipment delivery through an inspection report that equipment is not from any entities excluded from receiving federal assistance. As an extra safeguard, USAID requires implementing partners to notify their respective Contracting Officer's Representative (COR) prior to solar panel purchases to ensure adequate checks have been made. CORs are also required to conduct site visits to check that the equipment installed matches the list of approved equipment, including verifying the equipment matches the approved manufacturer.

If confirmed, I will work with my USAID colleagues to maintain strict adherence to these safeguards.

Question. If confirmed, how will you ensure implementing or third-party partners for these "clean" energy aid projects by USAID in Lebanon are required to source from non-China suppliers?

Answer. USAID requires implementing partners to include standard language in their subcontracts with local companies that prohibit the subcontractors from purchasing materials from prohibited PRC suppliers (following the H.R. 6256 the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act). If confirmed, I will work with my USAID colleagues to maintain strict adherence to this requirement.

Question. Are you aware that a current USAID project in Lebanon uses Chinese sourced solar-panels?

Answer. I understand that USAID's solar interventions are being implemented through mechanisms that allow the purchase of goods and services from the United States, Lebanon as the recipient country, and developing countries other than advanced developing countries. However, the allowable origin of goods is broad as long as it does not include any countries that are prohibited due to Office of Foreign Assets Control sanctions or country-specific legislation. China is not a prohibited source country, though certain manufacturers (as listed in Section 889 of the John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act and H.R. 6256 Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act) are prohibited.

If confirmed, I will work with my USAID colleagues to ensure U.S.-funded programs support U.S. and Lebanese businesses to the maximum extent possible.

Question. If confirmed, will future "clean" energy aid products, funded by USAID in Lebanon, contain Chinese produced solar panels or wind turbines?

Answer. If confirmed, I will work with my USAID colleagues to maintain strict adherence to all applicable restrictions related to purchasing goods and services from prohibited PRC suppliers. I understand that USAID's implementing partners must conduct due diligence to ensure compliance with all award terms and federal regulations, including provisions prohibiting implementing partners from using forced labor. USAID takes specific measures to encourage implementing partners engaged in projects related to solar energy to exercise thorough due diligence and engage appropriate legal advice, due to persistent concerns with the prevalent use of forced labor in solar panel supply chains. In addition, USAID requires implementing partners to prohibit subcontractors from purchasing materials from prohibited PRC suppliers.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO LISA A. JOHNSON BY SENATOR TED CRUZ

America's strategy in Lebanon has for decades been aimed at bolstering state institutions against Hezbollah, including prominently the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and the Internal Security Forces (ISF). Despite these efforts, Hezbollah continues to exert significant influence over Lebanese state institutions, which in turn are unwilling or unable to take action against the Iran-backed terror group. Additionally, in summer 2017 Hezbollah launched an offensive in the Aarsal Mountains alongside a campaign by the LAF, US-supplied weapons were used by the LAF in that operation, and Lebanese media outlets reported that the LAF was providing de facto fire cover for Hezbollah operations. These challenges—the fragility of state institutions, the influence of Iran-backed terrorist groups, the inefficiency of American security assistance, etc.—have persisted over several years when you have been a high-ranking official at the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL), which administers many of these policies.

More recently, the State Department has begun to provide livelihood support to LAF and ISF members, i.e. salaries for Lebanese troops and police officers. INL specifically oversees the livelihood support for the ISF. If confirmed, you would have significant responsibilities overseeing livelihood support to both the LAF and ISF. Hezbollah exercises significant control over sectors of the Lebanese economy, and operates businesses—supermarkets, gas stations, wholesale operations, and so on—which they use to finance terrorism against the United States and our allies, including Israel. It is not clear what if any steps the State Dept. has taken to ensure the salaries being provided to LAF and ISF members are not spent in those sectors or businesses, i.e. providing material support for terrorism.

Alongside these policies, the Biden administration has also sought to implement a proposal in which gas from Egypt would be delivered to Lebanon through a route that includes Syria, in what experts have described as a straightforward violation of American sanctions, including the Caesar Act.

Question. What percent of U.S. assistance to Lebanon was used for activities or operations aimed at disarming Hezbollah during your tenure at INL? A rough estimate or a range will be sufficient.

Answer. All U.S. Government assistance to Lebanon is ultimately aimed at fostering a stable, sovereign Lebanese state free of Hezbollah's malign influence. U.S. security assistance is aimed at increasing the professional capacity of both the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and the Internal Security Forces (ISF) as strong state institutions, which remains the best way to erode Hezbollah's influence. The LAF and ISF have proven themselves capable of applying our assistance to face a broad range of evolving threats, including counterterrorism operations against ISIS and Al-Qaeda affiliates, and operations against captagon traffickers and arms smuggling networks on the Syrian border, some of whom are alleged to be affiliated with Hezbollah.

Question. What percent of U.S. assistance to Lebanon was used for activities or operations aimed at disrupting Hezbollah military activities other than through disarming them during your tenure at INL, e.g. through roadblocks? A rough estimate or a range will be sufficient.

Answer. All U.S. Government assistance to Lebanon is ultimately aimed at fostering a stable, sovereign Lebanese state free of Hezbollah's malign influence. U.S. security assistance strengthens the professional capacity of the Lebanese security services, enabling them to defend Lebanon from terrorist organizations and other militant groups, thereby undercutting Hezbollah's claim that the Lebanese need Hezbollah and its weapons to protect Lebanon from external threats. U.S. security assistance includes training and equipment that has also improved the frequency and sophistication of Lebanese anti-crime operations, including against captagon traffickers and smuggling networks on the Syrian border, which works against Hezbollah's interests.

Question. Please describe the degree to which, in your assessment, Hezbollah continues to influence or exert control over the Beirut—Rafic Hariri International Airport or facilities located within the airport.

Answer. I share your concerns about Hezbollah's influence at Beirut-Rafic Hariri International Airport; moreover, I understand that widespread corruption in Lebanon also undermines the integrity and effectiveness of counterterrorism efforts at

the airport. The Department of State would welcome the opportunity to offer a closed briefing on our assessment of the degree to which Hezbollah continues to influence or exert control at the Beirut-Rafic Hariri International Airport. The Administration continues to engage senior Lebanese officials on the need to strengthen counterterrorism measures at the airport and other ports of entry and has seen a commitment on behalf of the Government of Lebanon to interdict high-risk individuals and cargo. U.S. foreign assistance to the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and the Internal Security Forces (ISF) enables them to maintain a robust security presence in the airport, including with elements that regularly benefit from U.S. training.

Question. In your assessment, does Hezbollah use the Beirut-Rafic Hariri International Airport for illicit activities related to the trafficking of narcotics internationally?

Answer. I assess that captagon, cocaine, and other narcotics trafficking, including but not limited to Beirut-Rafic Hariri International Airport, directly benefits malign actors including Hezbollah-affiliated groups and individuals. I share your concerns about use of the Beirut-Rafic Hariri International Airport to traffic illicit drugs, and I was heartened to see reports that Lebanese authorities have stepped up enforcement efforts, including, for example, through a reported seizure of more than half a million captagon pills at the airport in May 2022. Ending the scourge of drug trafficking the world over—including the captagon trade in the Middle East—is an Administration priority. If confirmed, I will bring to bear my INL experience to bolster the capacity of the Government of Lebanon to counter the rising drug trade in the region.

Question. In your assessment, does the Beirut—Rafic Hariri International Airport maintain effective antiterrorism efforts?

Answer. We assess that Lebanese security services, working with the U.S. Government and international partners, are working to improve counterterrorism controls at Beirut-Rafic Hariri International Airport, but that widespread corruption in Lebanon continues to undermine the integrity and effectiveness of counterterrorism efforts at the airport. The Department of State would be pleased to offer a closed briefing on antiterrorism efforts at Beirut-Rafic Hariri International Airport. U.S. foreign assistance to the Lebanese Armed Forces and Internal Security Forces enables them to maintain a robust security presence in the airport, including elements which regularly benefit from U.S. training. That said, further improvement is required. As such, the Department and the Embassy continue to engage senior Lebanese officials on the need to further strengthen counterterrorism measures at the airport and other ports of entry.

Question. Please describe the degree to which, in your assessment, Hezbollah continues to influence or exert control over the Port of Beirut or facilities located within the port?

Answer. I share your concerns about Hezbollah's influence at the Port of Beirut; moreover, widespread corruption in Lebanon also undermines the integrity and effectiveness of counterterrorism efforts of partners like the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), which maintains perimeter security at the port and plays an important role in deterring terrorist activity in and around the facility. The Department of State would welcome the opportunity to offer a briefing on our assessment of the degree to which Hezbollah continues to influence or exert control at the Port of Beirut.

Question. In your assessment, does Hezbollah use the Port of Beirut for illicit activities related to the trafficking of narcotics internationally?

Answer. I am concerned by reports that Hezbollah continues to exert influence over ports of entry, which both supports the terrorist group's illicit activities, including related to narcotics trafficking, and deprives the Lebanese people and government of much needed customs revenue. The best way to address malign influence at ports of entry is through strengthening the legitimate security agencies present at those same locations, a strategy we have already employed through, for example, providing training and equipment for the LAF and ISF.

Question. In your assessment, does the Port of Beirut maintains effective antiterrorism measures?

Answer. We assess that Lebanon has taken steps to better secure the Port of Beirut, including improving counterterrorism measures, but that widespread corruption in Lebanon continues to undermine the integrity and effectiveness of counterterrorism efforts at the Port of Beirut. The Department of State would be pleased to offer a closed briefing on antiterrorism efforts at the port of Beirut. The Lebanese Navy, with assistance from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and international

partners, is in the first phase of completely rebuilding the Beirut Naval Base at the port, which will increase surveillance and interdiction capabilities in the port area. The Lebanese Armed Forces benefits from coordinated U.S. training and support, including maintaining perimeter security at the port, which plays an important role in deterring terrorist activity in and around the port. That said, further improvement is required, including further strengthening counterterrorism controls. Moreover, the Port of Beirut still has not recovered full operability following the August 2020 explosion. Some security infrastructure at the container terminal remains dysfunctional and diminished port capacity persists. As such, the Department and the Embassy continue to engage senior Lebanese officials on the need to ensure security measures, including counterterrorism measures at the port, are in line with international best practices.

Question. Did you clear policies providing livelihood support for ISF members? If not, do you support providing livelihood support for ISF members?

Answer. Since serving as INL Deputy Assistant Secretary (DAS) from October 2021, Acting Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary (APDAS) since October 2022, and PDAS since February 2023, I have not cleared on any policies or programs related to Lebanon. When the program concept was approved in December 2021, I was serving as the INL DAS responsible for Europe and Asia, and therefore my duties did not include clearing policies related to INL's efforts in the Middle East. I do, however, support this program, as I understand that the Internal Security Forces (ISF) (as well as the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF)) plays a key role in bolstering the Lebanese state to avoid outright collapse, which could precipitate the return of sectarian militias, prompt civil war, strengthen Hezbollah, and threaten Israel's security.

Question. Do you support providing livelihood support to LAF members?

Answer. Yes, I understand that this temporary and extraordinary program was approved to offset the unprecedented financial and other strains on the LAF due to Lebanon's ongoing economic crisis. The LAF is a key state institution holding the country together in this time of crisis. Buttressing the LAF figures as part of a larger Administration effort to bolster the Lebanese state and avoid outright collapse, which could precipitate the return of sectarian militias, prompt civil war, strengthen Hezbollah, and threaten Israel's security. The LAF is one of the only remaining state institutions with cross-confessional support capable of guaranteeing the country's stability. The LAF has taken on new challenges, especially in maintaining domestic social order even as the collapse of Lebanon's currency has hollowed out personnel salaries. This temporary program supplements our larger efforts to press Lebanon's political leadership to move on critical reforms and government formation.

Question. What steps has the State Department taken to ensure that livelihood support provided to LAF and ISF members are not spent in businesses owned by Hezbollah or individuals linked to Hezbollah?

Answer. I understand that the Department of State has put in place robust and thorough risk mitigation measures to minimize the risk that U.S. assistance might benefit terrorist entities, including Hezbollah. These measures include counterterrorism namecheck vetting, financial oversight, in-person monitoring, and extensive reporting requirements. While I was not involved in the program's development when serving in INL, I understand that the program is utilizing a third-party monitor, which will conduct visits to LAF and ISF units throughout the country to document how livelihood recipients are spending their funds. This third-party monitoring is in addition to U.S. Government monitoring and extensive reporting from the implementing partner. If confirmed, I will do everything in my power to ensure that not a single dollar of U.S. assistance benefits Hezbollah.

Question. Please describe what you understand to be the statutory basis for providing livelihood support for LAF members.

Answer. The LAF livelihood support program was funded from Peacekeeping Operations (PKO) funds, which I understand are available for peacekeeping operations and other programs carried out in furtherance of the national security interests of the United States consistent with the authority in the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961.

Question. Please describe what you understand to be the statutory basis for providing livelihood support for ISF members.

Answer. The Internal Security Forces (ISF) livelihood support program was funded from the International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement (INCLE) account,

which I understand is appropriated to carry out foreign assistance programming for counternarcotics and other anti-crime purposes consistent with the authority in the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961.

Question. Please describe what you understand to be any precedents for providing livelihood support for LAF members.

Answer. The United States has provided livelihood support to foreign security partners in extraordinary circumstances, as has been the case in Somalia using Peacekeeping Operations (PKO) funds. The Department works closely with all relevant interagency stakeholders to ensure such programs include robust risk mitigation protocols and clear exit plans.

Question. Please describe what you understand to be any precedents for providing livelihood support for ISF members.

Answer. International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement (INCLE) funds have been used to provide limited stipends for targeted, vetted groups. The Department works closely with all relevant stakeholders to ensure such programs include robust risk mitigation protocols and clear exit plans.

Question. In January and March 2022, the ISF announced that it had dismantled 17 different Israeli espionage networks that were operating against Hezbollah. Do you believe that these actions enhanced American national security?

Answer. No. The Department of State does not assess that any reported effort by the Internal Security Forces (ISF) to dismantle such networks is in the U.S. national security interest. This is why the Department continues to urge the ISF to focus on its core mission—bolstering stability and meeting the internal security needs of the Lebanese people. Our support to the ISF continues to build the institution's professionalism and capacity to counter internal threats that have the potential to destabilize the country and the region.

Question. In April and May 2023, the LAF and ISF participated in the deportation of Syrian refugees back into territory controlled by the Assad regime. Do you believe that these actions enhance American national security?

Answer. No. I share your concerns about the Lebanese Armed Forces' (LAF) involvement in recent deportations of Syrians residing in Lebanon back to regime-controlled territory without ensuring access to all applicable legal protections. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), among those deported were individuals registered with or known to UNHCR. However, the LAF has denied deporting anyone with UNHCR documentation, and the LAF has since confirmed it has ceased any involvement in deportations. Further, I understand that according to the information available at this time, including from the U.N. and Lebanese Government and security services, the Internal Security Forces (ISF) may have been involved in the arrests of some Syrians but did not play a role in these recent deportations. If confirmed, I will continue to reiterate that all persons in Lebanon, including refugees, should be treated in accordance with international human rights law, that anyone detained should be afforded all applicable legal protections, and that the principle of non-refoulement should be respected.

Question. Do you support the Biden administration's proposal to bring gas to Lebanon via routes in Syria? If so, is it your assessment that the proposal would violate American sanctions against the Syrian regime, including the Caesar Act? If you do not believe the proposal violates sanctions, please explain why not.

Answer. Yes, I do support this proposal to help address Lebanon's acute energy crisis, which is having a devastating impact on critical life-saving infrastructure such as hospitals and the water supply. However, I understand that no final determination has been made about the U.S. sanctions implications of that proposal. The Administration received provisional contracts for both the electricity and gas deals last year. The final financing terms and contracts are still being discussed by the parties and the World Bank. The Departments of Treasury and State still need to review details of the final financing terms and contracts to assess any relevant sanctions concerns. Only at that time will we have the information needed to make any final determinations. The Administration looks forward to continuing to consult with Congress on this important issue.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO ERVIN JOSE MASSINGA BY SENATOR ROBERT MENENDEZ

In recent hearings on Sudan, the Sahel, and Russia I have expressed concern that the State Department's Africa Bureau appears to be allergic to sanctioning African government officials. On May 23, 2021, Secretary Blinken announced a visa restriction policy under Section 212(a)(3)(C) of the Immigration and Nationality Act on the issuance of visas for any current or former Ethiopian or Eritrean Government officials, or others responsible for, or complicit in, undermining resolution of the crisis in northern Ethiopia.

Question. Has the State Department designated anyone using this authority?

Answer. The Department of State has taken steps to impose restrictions on multiple individuals under the 3C visa restriction policy for current or former Ethiopian or Eritrean Government officials, members of the security forces, or other individuals as announced by the Secretary of State on May 23, 2021. This includes those who have engaged in wrongful violence, or other abuses, against people in northern Ethiopia, as well as those who have hindered access of humanitarian access to those in the region.

Question. Do you believe imposition of sanctions can be a useful policy tool?

Answer. Yes, foreign policy-related sanctions can be effective in helping to counter and deter threats to national security posed by particular activities of individuals, private enterprises and/or countries. The Department seeks to maximize their economic impact on targets and to minimize the damage to U.S. economic interests. Beyond the imposition of sanctions, the THREAT of sanctions is also a useful tool to use in complex negotiations. We also work to remove economic sanctions when appropriate to reward and incentivize improved behavior or demonstrate U.S. support for foreign government actions.

Question. Can the threat of sanctions be effective if sanctions are never actually imposed?

Answer. Yes, the announcement of a visa restriction or sanction regime as a first step, before any designations, has in some instances been helpful in deterring behavior contrary to U.S. foreign policy goals.

For example, since the outbreak of armed conflict in northern Ethiopia in November 2020, the United States has engaged in intense diplomacy and pressed the Government of Ethiopia and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) to cease hostilities without preconditions, ensure access to lifesaving humanitarian assistance, and end human rights abuses and violations. These efforts, implicitly back by the threat of possible sanctions in the event of continued fighting, helped incentivize the Government of Ethiopia and the TPLF signing a cessation of hostilities agreement on November 2, 2022. All options including sanctions remained on the table during this period, as they still do.

There are many such examples. Sometimes, the use of SOME sanctions against SOME actors serves as a warning to others that additional action by the United States may be forthcoming should our policy goals not be met.

On November 1, 2021, the Department of State amended the International Traffic in Arms Regulations to add and update the entry for Ethiopia to deny licenses and other approvals for exports of defense articles and defense services to certain end-users.

Question. Has the Administration revised the amendment since it took effect?

Answer. No, the Department of State has not made further revisions to the entry for Ethiopia, since amending the International Traffic in Arms Regulations (ITAR) on November 1, 2021. The 2021 amendment codified that it is the policy of the United States to deny licenses and other approvals for exports of defense articles and defense services to certain end-users in Ethiopia.

Question. If confirmed, what criteria will you recommend the Administration use to determine whether the U.S. should once again allow licenses and other approval for export of defense articles for Ethiopia?

Answer. The Department of State updated ITAR § 126.1 on November 1, 2021, consistent with the Secretary of State's May 21, 2021 announcement of human rights related restrictions with respect to Ethiopia and Eritrea. Since the signing of the cessation of hostilities agreement on November 2, 2022, the human rights situation in northern Ethiopia has improved dramatically and parties have acknowledged the need for transitional justice. That said, I would recommend that any pro-

posals for exporting defense articles to Ethiopia continue to be subject to a rigorous review process, including as necessary Leahy vetting, to ensure that those articles would be used as intended by cleared personnel to advance U.S. policy interests.

Question. In your view, should assistance to Ethiopia from the International Financial Institutions including the World Bank and International Monetary Fund be resumed? What safeguards, if any, should be put in place to assure that projects are carried out?

Answer. The State Department acts consistently with the IFI Act provision to not channel assistance to the government of any country which engages in a pattern of gross violations of internationally recognized human rights (GVHR)—unless such assistance is directed specifically to programs which serve the basic human needs of the citizens of such country. Since the November 2, 2022 cessation of hostilities agreement, there has been a marked improvement in the human rights situation in northern Ethiopia. As the human rights situation evolves in Ethiopia, the Secretary will continue to review the applicability of relevant restrictions.

Audits and other engagements of programs and operations across agencies can help ensure that foreign assistance programs are conducted effectively and efficiently, in accordance with statutory standards and authorities.

President Biden terminated Ethiopia from the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) effective January 1, 2022. Ethiopia did not meet the criteria due to gross violations of internationally recognized human rights being perpetrated by the Government of Ethiopia and other parties to the conflict in northern Ethiopia.

Question. Do you believe the Government of Ethiopia meets the criteria set in law?

Answer. The annual AGOA review process, in which State and the interagency review each country's eligibility, has just begun. AGOA eligibility determinations are made in September by the interagency Trade Policy Staff Committee. Although there has been significant progress towards meeting specific benchmarks related to the conflict in northern Ethiopia, Ethiopia must also satisfy the statutory requirements. Because the review has only just started, we are unable to pre-determine the State Department's position on Ethiopia's AGOA eligibility.

Question. What specific actions must the Government of Ethiopia take to meet the criteria?

Answer. AGOA criteria in U.S. law stipulates that, among other criteria, a country must not engage in gross violations of internationally recognized human rights. Offensive military operations in northern Ethiopia have ceased following the signing of the cessation of hostilities agreement on November 2, 2022. Ethiopia has clear benchmarks for a pathway toward reinstatement, and the United States will continue to work with the Government of Ethiopia to achieve that objective. Ethiopia's progress toward meeting its benchmarks and statutory requirements will be assessed by the interagency Trade Policy Staff Committee in September.

Question. What steps will you take, if confirmed, to ensure that individuals implicated in the diversion of U.S. donated food aid to Ethiopia are held accountable?

Answer. The U.S. Agency for International Development's Office of the Inspector General is investigating the diversion of food aid in Ethiopia, and we are engaging with partners (including WFP) at both the headquarters and field levels to ensure appropriate risk mitigation systems to strengthen program monitoring and oversight are in place. If confirmed, I would work closely with USAID's Bureau of Humanitarian Assistance to ensure that USAID-supported food assistance resumes only when strong oversight measures are in place and we are confident that assistance will reach the intended vulnerable populations based on the humanitarian principles of humanity, independence, impartiality, and neutrality.

The war in northern Ethiopia was characterized by egregious abuses by all parties to the conflict. On March 20, Secretary Blinken announced the determination that members of the Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF), EDF, TPLF forces, and Amhara forces committed war crimes during the conflict in northern Ethiopia, and that members of the ENDF, the EDF, and Amhara forces also committed crimes against humanity, including murder, rape and other forms of sexual violence, and persecution.

Question. If confirmed, what steps will you take to support accountability for these crimes?

Answer. If confirmed, I would continue to support ongoing transitional justice and accountability efforts in Ethiopia, which are key to securing a sustainable peace. Meaningful accountability can only take place through active participation by all parts of Ethiopian society in a credible transitional justice process, consultations for which are currently underway in Ethiopia. If confirmed, I will seek to strengthen the efforts of NGOs, civil society, and the international community to support fact-finding, documentation, and justice. We will also use the tools at our disposal to encourage accountability.

Question. Do you believe the Ethiopian judicial system can credibly prosecute perpetrators?

Answer. The Ethiopian judicial system will need the technical and political support of international partners. On the technical side, there are ongoing efforts to build capacity through small grants and trainings. On the political side, the international community must continue to push the Government toward sincere and robust justice and accountability in order to break the cycle of violence in Ethiopia. If confirmed, I would press the Government to approach the need for justice after the recent conflict seriously, honestly and transparently, and use the tools at our disposal to advance that goal.

Question. Does the State Department have a position on whether Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed bears any level of responsibility for the crimes committed in Ethiopia by Eritrean forces?

Answer. One of the goals of a robust transitional justice process would be to identify responsible parties and bring them to justice. This is why it is essential that we support nascent transitional justice efforts both technically and politically, as well as international fact-finding and documentation.

Related to the specific question concerning PM Abiy, this is a decision of the Ethiopian people to make through their judicial institutions.

In December of 2021, the United Nations Human Rights Council established the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (ICHREE). ICHREE's mandate includes investigating allegations of violations and abuses of international human rights law international humanitarian law and international refugee law in Ethiopia committed since 3 November 2020 by parties to the conflict. Its mandate ends in September of this year.

Question. I understand ICHREE's mandate will not be renewed. Considering the scale of the abuses in northern Ethiopia, why won't the mandate be renewed?

Answer. ICHREE, of which the mandate began in 2021, will provide a comprehensive report in September 2023. The European Union proposed creation of ICHREE and the United States Government supported the mandate. More recently, the European Union has made it clear it is not planning to seek renewal of its current mandate, which expires in September. It is our unambiguous understanding that there is very little international support, particularly among African states, for extending the mandate.

The U.S. Government will continue to support independent human rights organizations, including the United Nations, to paint a complete picture of the abuses that took place during the conflict.

Question. Did the State Department agree to allow ICHREE's mandate to expire in exchange for the Ethiopian Government dropping its efforts to disband ICHREE's mandate early?

Answer. As stated above, the European Union is not planning to pursue ICHREE's renewal. This decision takes into account the continued adherence to the cessation of hostilities agreement and the dramatic reduction in reports of human rights violations and abuses in northern Ethiopia. Our long-term goal is to support domestic capacity for human rights accountability and transitional justice, and ICHREE's comprehensive report in September 2023 will be a valuable contribution to this goal.

Question. If confirmed, how will you ensure the Ethiopian people, the Human Rights Council and U.N. headquarters receive regular, public reporting from an independent, credible entity about abuses and violations that occurred in the course of the conflict?

Answer. If confirmed, I will support independent and credible human rights organizations working in Ethiopia to document and investigate human rights violations and abuses. I will also coordinate with likeminded nations to ensure the inter-

national community speaks with one voice on the importance of credible and transparent reckoning with violations committed by all sides of the conflict. We believe credible efforts are being made on this front, but more must be done to ensure they have the technical and political backing they need to succeed.

Question. I understand the ICHREE investigators do not have unfettered access to Ethiopia. What will you do if confirmed to ensure they have full access to carry forward with their work until the end of its mandate?

Answer. ICHREE negotiates access issues directly with the Government of Ethiopia. We have pressed the Government of Ethiopia to support the ICHREE mission and allow the team access and have repeatedly noted that the cycle of violence in Ethiopia cannot be broken without meaningful steps towards accountability and justice. The U.S. Government will continue to support independent human rights organizations, including the U.N. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, to document and investigate human rights abuses that took place during the conflict. Our assessment of the situation on the ground will always be a composite of information we receive from many institutions and voices.

Question. What are the most important actions you have taken in your career to date to support democracy and human rights? What has been the impact of your actions?

Answer. I am proud of many actions undertaken to promote human rights, but sometimes the most important impact is that on just one family. While in China, I, along with colleagues, helped a Uigher family escape the PRC and come to the United States for resettlement. Beyond that, in Guinea as DCM, I worked intensively with the Ambassador to demand credible elections on the National and sub-national level, and personally worked with the electoral commission to ensure its work was honest. Again, in Guinea, I worked with USAID to ensure funding of a parallel vote tabulation system that proved effective in demonstrating to the public the elections reflected the will of the people.

In Sudan while in CDA status, I publicly demanded that the Government respect the rights of Christian worshippers who were being bullied by a powerful official over a land dispute—the Government convoked me to complain, but quietly backed down on the matter. More recently, during the Kenyan elections of 2022, as Acting Assistant Secretary I worked closely with Ambassador Whitman, State/DRL, and much of the policy making interagency to steer a course that was seen as balanced and effective in promoting our values while bolstering the stability of a key partner.

Question. What issues are the most pressing challenges to democracy or democratic development in Ethiopia? These challenges might include obstacles to participatory and accountable governance and institutions, rule of law, authentic political competition, civil society, human rights and press freedom. Please be as specific as possible.

Answer. There are many challenges to democratic development in Ethiopia, which stalled during the conflict in northern Ethiopia and remains threatened by violence in Oromia and Amhara regions. The absence of transitional justice throughout Ethiopia's history has entrenched impunity and degraded rule of law and public trust in the justice system. Further, as the most recent Human Rights Report highlighted, Ethiopia ranks poorly in press freedom, with journalists being arrested or intimidated. Civil society organizations that don't agree with the Government are also under threat. This has an overall chilling effect on freedom of speech. If confirmed, I will champion international support for Ethiopia's institutions that underpin participatory and accountable governance, rule of law, authentic political competition, civil society, human rights, and press freedom.

Question. What steps will you take—if confirmed—to support democracy in Ethiopia? What do you hope to accomplish through these actions? What are the potential impediments to addressing the specific obstacles you have identified?

Answer. The U.S. Government directly supports several democracy programs in Ethiopia in the form of small grants from USAID, State/DRL, and USIP. However, the current assistance pause prevents some programming that could advance key U.S. objectives in the country. More broadly, our policy towards Ethiopia is designed to be a combination of incentives (potential future reinstatement of AGOA and international funding support) and disincentives (Executive Order 14046 sanctions) to encourage the Government of Ethiopia to build on the progress in national dialogue and transitional justice it has made since November 2022.

Question. How will you utilize U.S. Government assistance resources at your disposal, including the Democracy Commission Small Grants program and other

sources of State Department and USAID funding, to support democracy and governance, and what will you prioritize in processes to administer such assistance?

Answer. With the resources at our disposal, we will focus on developing robust institutions, strengthening democratic systems, and supporting civil society organizations. It is my belief that long-term peace in Ethiopia depends not just on a willingness by leaders to lay down arms, but on developing a capacity to deal with future problems (and take account of those in the past) at a local level. We will therefore prioritize issues like transitional justice, press freedom, human rights, conflict prevention and mitigation, civic engagement, and accountability as we work with non-governmental actors to build capacity.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to meet with civil society members, human rights and other non-governmental organizations in the U.S. and with local human rights NGOs, and other members of civil society in Ethiopia? What steps will you take to pro-actively address efforts to restrict or penalize NGOs and civil society via legal or regulatory measures?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed I plan to meet regularly with civil society and NGOs. I will continue to use the policy and legal tools at our disposal to empower these organizations and encourage a greater role for NGOs and civil society in Ethiopia.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to meet with democratically oriented political opposition figures and parties? What steps will you take to encourage genuine political competition? Will you advocate for access and inclusivity for women, minorities, and youth within political parties?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed, I will meet with democratically-oriented political opposition figures and parties. One of our primary goals in Ethiopia is to promote democracy, an inclusive political system, and good governance, and I will continue our policy of meeting with both government and opposition leaders. Certainly women, minorities, and youth within democratically-oriented opposition groups will be key interlocutors with me and the Embassy staff if confirmed.

Question. Will you and your Embassy team actively engage with Ethiopia on freedom of the press and address any government efforts designed to control or undermine press freedom through legal, regulatory or other measures? Will you commit to meeting regularly with independent, local press in Ethiopia?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed I will meet and engage with members of the press, including local and independent press. The lack of press freedom was noted in the most recent Human Rights Report, and promoting press freedom is a key goal for this administration.

Question. Will you and your Embassy team actively engage with civil society and government counterparts on countering disinformation and propaganda disseminated by foreign state or non-state actors in the country?

Answer. Yes, I plan to build upon the collaboration I currently have with the State Department's Global Engagement Center and related USG institutions and will, if confirmed and through leading the whole country team, actively engage with civil society and government counterparts on countering disinformation and propaganda. This is not only a priority for the United States, it is a priority for the Government of Ethiopia. If confirmed, I will look for ways to work with external actors, the Global Engagement Center, and the GOE to counter disinformation and propaganda disseminated in Ethiopia.

Question. Will you and your Embassy teams actively engage with Ethiopia on the right of labor groups to organize, including for independent trade unions?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed, my team and I will actively engage with Ethiopia on the right to unionize and organize. Our Embassy colleagues currently liaise regularly with labor groups, including the Confederation of Ethiopian Trade Unions, and I would intend for our engagement on labor issues to remain robust.

Question. Will you commit to using your position, if confirmed, to defend the human rights and dignity of all people in Ethiopia, no matter their sexual orientation or gender identity?

Answer. Yes, I will commit to use my position as ambassador to defend the human rights and dignity of all people in Ethiopia, no matter their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Question. What challenges do the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) people face in Ethiopia?

Answer. As noted in State's most recent Human Rights Report, consensual same-sex sexual conduct is illegal in Ethiopia and punishable by three to fifteen years' imprisonment. While we are not aware of any recent prosecutions or incarcerations under this law, reports of violence against LGBTQI+ people occur, and discrimination against the LGBTQI+ community is permitted in Ethiopia. If confirmed, I will use my position to defend the human rights and dignity of all people in Ethiopia, no matter their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Question. What specifically will you commit to do to help LGBTQ people in Ethiopia?

Answer. If confirmed, I will ensure first and foremost that all employees within my purview receive the respect and dignity they deserve. I will protect staff from discrimination and create a safe working environment. Outside the Embassy, I will support civil society leaders and NGOs working to defend the rights of all people in Ethiopia, regardless of their sexual orientation, and lend my political and diplomatic support to their message as they carry out their important work.

Question. Will you commit, if confirmed, to ensuring that you fully brief Members of Congress and/or their staff each time you are in Washington for visits or consultations during your tenure as Ambassador to Ethiopia?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed, I will work with the Bureau of Legislative Affairs to offer briefings for Members of Congress and their staffs when I am back in Washington for visits or consultations. The Ethiopia team has actively and frequently engaged with the Hill; from my current role as PDAS in the Africa Bureau, I have noted and appreciated the mutual understanding this has fostered.

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility.

Question. How do you anticipate fostering diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility at the U.S. Embassy in Ethiopia?

Answer. If confirmed as Chief of Mission, I will lead the American and Ethiopian professionals in Mission Ethiopia to advance our national security agenda in a safe, inclusive, and respectful workplace. I will communicate my commitment to a workplace in which diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility are core tenants of our mission culture. I will also make clear that discrimination, harassment, and bullying are unacceptable and take swift action to address any such issues that may arise. I will demonstrate my commitment to equal employment opportunity (EEO) principals and the work of Mission EEO counselors and locally engaged staff advisors.

Question. What specifically will you do to prioritize and promote diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility, while also combating racism, discrimination, and inequality among locally employed staff in Ethiopia?

Answer. If confirmed as Chief of Mission, I will demonstrate through actions and words that diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) is a priority, and reinforce with my staff it should also be a priority for them. I will also make clear my strong opposition to harassment, discrimination, and bullying and ensure a prevention plan is in place. I will hold supervisors accountable and expect them to hold their team members accountable for acts of harassment, discrimination, or bullying. I will ensure mission personnel have access to all the resources they need to combat racism, discrimination, and inequality. If confirmed, I will meet regularly with post's DEIA council at Mission Ethiopia, participate in community activities to increase dialogue and inclusion, and promote a positive work environment among the Embassy team.

Question. In addition to focusing on diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility in our workforce, will you commit to engaging more equitably in operations and programming, particularly with potential partners and communities that traditionally have been marginalized, excluded, or underrepresented in ours and others' donor and partnership efforts? How do you anticipate utilizing local expertise, knowledge, and capacity to meet our foreign policy goals?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to engaging more equitably in our operations and programs and will lead Mission Ethiopia to build relationships with all communities in Ethiopian society through active outreach. I will carefully monitor, evaluate, and coordinate the design and implementation of programming and assistance and extend their reach as far as possible. I will ensure that our representational events and public diplomacy programs include marginalized and underrepresented groups and that our human resources team uses diverse panels in hiring processes to ensure applicants are not being disadvantaged. I will work with our locally employed

staff to expand our outreach efforts and leverage the various languages spoken within our mission to assist our U.S. officers in making connections beyond the capital.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO ERVIN JOSE MASSINGA BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

Question. What is your understanding of the division of labor between yourself as U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia, if confirmed, and Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa Hammer?

Answer. SEHOA plays an instrumental role in supporting the department's diplomatic goals in the region. My understanding is that if confirmed, I would lead the bilateral relationship within Ethiopia while SEHOA would focus on complementary efforts, such as ensuring implementation of the cessation of hostilities agreement, coordinating with regional actors, and participating in engagements outside of Ethiopia. I have worked with Ambassador Hammer effectively during his tenure as SEHOA, and fully anticipate that collaborative, productive working relationship will continue if confirmed.

Question. If confirmed, will you commit as U.S. Ambassador to placing a strong emphasis on thoughtful and balanced public diplomacy, including on social media, traditional press, and Embassy-produced content?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed, I will emphasize public diplomacy, including on social media, traditional press, and Embassy-produced content. Given recent ethnic tensions, Ethiopia is particularly susceptible to propaganda and hate speech. Countering false narratives and promoting and highlighting U.S. values-oriented policy messages will be a key pillar of my strategy.

On March 20, 2023, Secretary Blinken made an atrocities determination for Ethiopia, finding that actors committed war crimes, crimes against humanity, and ethnic cleansing throughout the conflict in northern Ethiopia. I publicly called for accountability for atrocities committed in Ethiopia in April 2021, May 2021, June 2021, August 2021, September 2021, November 2021, December 2021, March 2022, June 2022, July 2022, August 2022, and November 2022, and introduced S.Res.97 (117th Congress) and was the lead-cosponsor on S.3199 (117th Congress) with Senator Menendez to call for and require accountability measures. Additionally, Senate Foreign Relations Committee and House Foreign Affairs Committee staff repeatedly raised the question of an atrocities determination for the conflict in Northern Ethiopia in regular calls with the State Department for over two years.

Question. Given your role as Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs as deliberations about the atrocities determination were ongoing, what is your perspective on why the Department made the atrocities determination for the conflict in northern Ethiopia in March 2023 after two years of conflict and an agreement on the cessation of hostilities, and not used as an accountability tool when the atrocities were occurring?

Answer. We focused the core of our diplomatic efforts on bringing the parties together and facilitating a cessation of hostilities, given that most gross violations of human rights were occurring in the context of the fighting. While our assessment was that an atrocity determination during that sensitive period of diplomacy would not have contributed to ending the conflict or the human rights abuses, the parties to the conflict were aware that a determination was forthcoming, and that the United States had other tools at its disposal (such as sanctions authorities) to press for an end to the fighting and to promote negotiation. It is our view that the existence of sanctions authorities (as well as their use during various points during the conflict) as well as the knowledge an atrocities determination would eventually come contributed to the eventual decision of the parties to seek a negotiated solution.

After achievement of the cessation of hostilities agreement, the Secretary decided, based on a careful review of the law and facts, that an atrocity determination was necessary to document the serious human rights abuses during war and to highlight the need for justice and accountability. Justice and accountability will be of vital importance if peace is to hold in Ethiopia, and we are supporting (both financially and diplomatically) ongoing efforts to those ends.

Question. The State Department's 2022 Human Rights Report on Ethiopia notes the September 2022 finding by the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (ICHREE) that the Ethiopian federal government and allied re-

gional state governments implemented a “wide range of measures designed to systematically deprive the population of Tigray of material and services indispensable for its survival,” and ICHREE assessed that the federal government had committed the war crime of using “starvation as a method of warfare.” The State Department’s statement on its atrocities determination does not mention this—does the State Department concur with ICHREE’s finding that the federal government systematically deprived Tigray’s population of food and other indispensable materials?

Answer. The determination was not intended to be an exhaustive accounting of all acts that constituted atrocities over the course of the conflict.

Given that there have been allegations of many different specific war crimes in this armed conflict, we decided to address the category of war crimes collectively and not attempt to make public determinations as to each specific war crime. Our focus was on the final determination, which was that all parties to the conflict committed war crimes.

Question. How will the atrocities determination impact your approach to engaging with the Government of Ethiopia, the Tigray People’s Liberation Front, and the Ethiopian people in your role as U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia, if confirmed?

Answer. The determination does not speak to individual criminal responsibility, which will need to be determined through credible justice processes. The atrocities determination acknowledged the severity of crimes committed by all sides of the conflict, and we will continue to recognize these abuses and push for credible justice. This requires working with all sides to ensure that the transitional justice process continues to move forward, and continuing to emphasize that there must be accountability for those responsible for human rights violations and abuses, including those in positions of command.

Question. In your view, what implications does the atrocities determination have for the U.S./Ethiopia relationship?

Answer. The atrocities determination is a public declaration based on careful review of the law and the facts. The Ethiopian Government does not agree with the atrocity determination, which it has made clear in public statements. However, the determination underscores the extent of human rights abuses committed during the conflict and helps focus our policy on key priorities to ensure accountability and a durable peace, such as transitional justice, democracy, and human rights. It establishes new areas for bilateral cooperation.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to submitting any new information that may contribute to updating the Department’s atrocities determination?

Answer. The Secretary’s atrocities determination was not meant to be an exhaustive list of crimes. If confirmed, I would continue the Embassy’s ongoing efforts to gather information on atrocities and human rights violations, which will inform our general bilateral relationship and policy. We also continue to support comprehensive transitional justice, which must include truth telling and criminal accountability; credible transitional justice processes will also shed light on the abuses committed during the conflict. Whether or not a new or updated atrocity determination is appropriate will depend on the circumstances on the ground and the information that emerges.

On April 6, 2023, USAID notified my staff of the discovery of widespread diversion of U.S.-branded food aid in Tigray. Administrator Power announced the suspension of food aid to Tigray on May 4. Last week, USAID notified my staff of the discovery of widespread diversion of food aid—in the same manner as discovered in Tigray—in Gambella. USAID suspects that diversion occurred in other regions of Ethiopia, where a large segment of the population suffers from acute food insecurity. USAID, the World Food Programme (WFP), and other food aid implementers are conducting investigations across Ethiopia.

Question. As U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia, if confirmed, how will you engage with the Government of Ethiopia on the issue of the diversion of U.S.-sponsored food aid?

Answer. I have zero tolerance for any fraud, waste, or abuse of U.S. taxpayer-funded resources. I expect the ongoing USAID Office of the Inspector General investigation into food diversion in Ethiopia to lead to concrete recommendations for improving oversight over U.S.-funded assistance. In advance of these OIG determinations though, I will, if confirmed, insist on sustained access to ensure robust monitoring and oversight while also pressing for major reform of the existing food assistance system to ensure greater accountability among implementing partners and authorities at the federal, regional, and local levels. I will also press Ethiopian authori-

ties at all levels to hold accountable those found to be responsible for the diversion of U.S. assistance away from its intended beneficiaries. The Government of Ethiopia has formed a committee to coordinate with regional authorities on food diversion investigations.

Question. As U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia, if confirmed, will you commit to laying out specific actions the Ethiopian Government needs to measure their demonstrated cooperation on an investigation into the diverted food aid?

Answer. If confirmed, I will work with my USAID colleagues on identifying and communicating to the Government of Ethiopia the specific steps the Government must take to demonstrate their cooperation on the investigation into food diversion.

Question. If investigations find that there was collusion to divert U.S. food aid by Ethiopian officials at the national level, how should this impact the U.S./Ethiopia relationship?

Answer. I will press the Ethiopian leadership to hold everyone found to be responsible for the diversion of U.S. assistance to account—including Ethiopian Government authorities at all levels.

We cannot assess the potential impact on the U.S./Ethiopia relationship until the investigation is complete.

Question. What accountability tools should the U.S. pursue against those responsible for the widespread diversion of U.S. food aid to Ethiopia?

Answer. Ethiopian authorities are responsible for any criminal prosecution of those found to have been involved in the diversion of U.S. assistance away from its intended beneficiaries. If confirmed, I would insist that the Government and all implementing partners institute the appropriate oversight measures within their respective organizations.

Question. As Chief of Mission in Ethiopia, if confirmed, how will you work with the USAID Mission Director and other USAID colleagues to ensure that USAID is doing all it can to monitor the distribution of U.S. food aid to Ethiopia and to ensure against widespread diversion?

Answer. As previously stated, I have zero tolerance for any fraud, waste, or abuse of U.S. taxpayer-funded resources. If confirmed, I will work closely with the USAID team in Addis Ababa to ensure the full implementation of all recommendations put forward by USAID's Office of the Inspector General following its investigation into food diversion in Ethiopia.

Question. As U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia, if confirmed, how will you work with WFP colleagues to ensure that U.S.-sponsored food aid reaches its intended beneficiaries?

Answer. If confirmed, I will work closely with WFP and USAID to ensure American generosity is not misused. Our implementing partners must share the burden of accountability as we assist beneficiaries across Ethiopia. As WFP's largest donor in Ethiopia and globally, the United States should insist on WFP's full compliance with any recommendations put forward by USAID's Office of the Inspector General following its investigation into food diversion.

Question. Significant lobbying has been conducted in Washington to restore Ethiopia's eligibility under the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA). Should Ethiopia be eligible for trade preferences under the African Growth and Opportunity Act for 2024?

Answer. In November 2021, the United States Trade Representative (USTR) articulated specific human rights-related benchmarks to the Government of Ethiopia as a pathway toward reinstatement of AGOA eligibility. Although there has been significant progress towards meeting specific benchmarks related to the conflict in the north, Ethiopia must also satisfy the statutory requirements. The annual AGOA review process, in which State and the interagency review each country's eligibility, has just begun and so we are unable to pre-determine the State Department's position on Ethiopia's AGOA eligibility for 2024.

Question. As U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia, how will you engage with Ethiopian stakeholders on the AGOA issue if confirmed?

Answer. Ethiopia's ineligibility for AGOA privileges was triggered by the gross violations of internationally recognized human rights perpetrated by its government. If confirmed, I will work with international and domestic human rights monitors and organizations to press the Ethiopian Government to refrain from engaging in gross violations of human rights, and to encourage its active cooperation with relevant actors to investigate and hold to account perpetrators of such abuses.

Question. Given the State Department's determination that ethnic cleansing, among other crimes, has occurred in western Tigray, how is the Department determining whether Ethiopia has made progress in meeting the AGOA requirements in that area, given the continued lack of access by human rights monitors? Does the State Department consider Ethiopia's lack of cooperation with the ICHREE to constitute a lack of cooperation in international efforts to eliminate human rights violations (an AGOA eligibility requirement)?

Answer. To be eligible for AGOA benefits a country must "not engage in gross violations of internationally recognized human rights (GVHRs)." At this time, we have heard from credible human rights organizations with an on-the-ground presence in the north that they have not received new reports of ongoing GVHR by the Government of Ethiopia, including in western Tigray. We are also not aware of the Ethiopian Government preventing international human rights monitors from accessing western Tigray; rather, we understand current lack of travel to the region is based on security concerns. Our Embassy has pressed the Government to grant travel access to western Tigray, and to date has been largely unsuccessful.

On March 8, 2023, Secretary Blinken and First Lady Jill Biden honored Meaza Mohammed at the 2023 International Women of Courage Awards at the White House. Ms. Mohammed has a long history of supporting anti-Semitic and pro-genocide Ethiopian activists, including Tadio Tantu. In particular, after she attended the White House ceremony, Mohammed tweeted a picture with Secretary Blinken and First Lady Biden. The accompanying text advocated for the release of Tantu. Ms. Mohammed's support for Tantu is concerning because he has advocated for treating Tigrayans as the Germans treated the Jews. A 2004 article entitled Get Lost Judae has a particularly disturbing excerpt:

"This is an achievement of the German's struggle. The bees are stirred. The tigers are on the move. The bee knows what to do when its hive is messed with. The German lion is angered. It is on fire. It has no patience to tolerate the Jewish anymore. What about us, Ethiopians? How long are we to tolerate the Judaes? When will we stop petitioning to serve as underlings of our Judae rulers? How long will we be ruled by the enemy of the country and the people? How long will we buy goods from their businesses? How long shall Ethiopia continue pouring honey and milk for our ruler and their people? Why is our slavery limitless? Why don't we understand that we are waiting our death, though already as good as dead? Get closer and listen to them. You will listen our rulers' peoples discussing which model of heavy-truck to buy, while you and your friends talk about a warning letter from the servants of our rulers for failing to pay utility fee on time"

Question. Due to this alarming association with Tantu and the promotion of his racist cause, do you feel that the White House should revoke Ms. Mohammed's award?

Answer. Ms. Meaza is a journalist who has been outspoken in her advocacy for the women who have been victims of sexually-based violence in the northern conflict—whether from Amhara, Tigray, or Afar. She is also active in her advocacy for the release of individuals, especially journalists, who have been imprisoned by the Government of Ethiopia. Ms. Meaza's post celebrating the award read: "On #InternationalWomensDay we must all come together to be a voice for the voiceless. That is why I continue to call for justice for young women (students) kidnapped from Dembi Dolo University and to #FreeTadiosTantu, the elderly journalist." I am not familiar with the quotation attributed to Mr. Tantu, an outspoken columnist who has been arrested and imprisoned multiple times over the twenty years since the cited article was published.

Question. What role did the Bureau of African Affairs play in identifying Ms. Mohammed as a potential International Women of Courage awardee?

Answer. Ms. Meaza was nominated for consideration for this award by the Embassy in Addis Ababa, for her courage in continuing to report on and advocate for the victims of sexually-based violence in the northern conflict—whether from Amhara, Tigray, or Afar—despite multiple arrests and detentions in retaliation for her reporting.

Question. What vetting took place before awarding Ms. Mohammed with the International Women of Courage award? What was the Bureau of African Affairs' role?

Answer. Nominations for the International Women of Courage Award are submitted by embassies and consulates overseas, in response to an annual call for nominations by the Office of Global Women's Issues. In addition to interviewing the potential nominees, posts conduct research on their prospective nominees' associations and affiliations, current and past social media postings, public speaking engagements, and other publications, as well as media by or about the nominee. Ms. Meaza is an activist whose personal views do not reflect the policies of the USG. If confirmed, I will ensure a continued rigorous vetting process for nominees of all USG-funded programs.

Question. In light of the recent determination that atrocities, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and ethnic cleansing occurred in Ethiopia, do you condemn the narrative that Ms. Mohammed supported toward Tigrayans?

Answer. Ms. Meaza's nomination was in recognition of her advocacy for media freedom. I am not familiar with the quotation attributed to Mr. Tantu. Any rhetoric that encourages hate and division is deplorable, and I condemn it in the strongest terms.

Your testimony stated, "I believe we must be ready to support Ethiopia in all ways that further our own policy objectives."

Question. Beyond offering to facilitate talks between the Government of Ethiopia and the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA), what specific support do you envision?

Answer. Thus far the United States has not been involved in the ongoing talks between the Ethiopian Government and the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA). We have made clear to the Government as well as Oromo interlocutors with access to the OLA that we stand ready to support as long as U.S. involvement is agreeable to both sides. While it is too early to tell what support might be requested with regard to Oromia, in the case of the cessation of hostilities agreement between the Government and the TPLF, we provided transportation to the negotiations for the latter as well as technical advice on running productive negotiations. We could also consider supporting confidence-building measures to reduce mistrust between the parties, in coordination with international partners, to facilitate the negotiation, implementation and sustainability of any agreement reached in the talks.

Question. How should the U.S. support Ethiopia to "address the root causes of conflict, including economic and social fragility?" Please be specific.

Answer. Beyond historical grievances, we know that much of Ethiopia's recent instability has been exacerbated by youth unemployment, a lack of economic growth, entrenched impunity, and elite-level competition for political power and resources. Ethiopia's ethno-federalist structure may also contribute to ethnic tensions. The Ethiopian Government is endeavoring to address these challenges through its nascent transitional justice and accountability process, National Dialogue Commission, and economic reforms. The United States will support Ethiopia in making these initiatives credible, genuine, inclusive, and able to address the country's current instability and fragility.

I agree with your testimony that "we need to ensure there is accountability for the atrocities committed during the conflict [in northern Ethiopia]. That's key to ensuring true reconciliation and durable peace." President Biden issued an executive order "imposing sanctions on certain persons with respect to the humanitarian and human rights crisis in Ethiopia" on September 17, 2021; however to date, only Eritrean individuals and entities have been designated.

Question. What role did you play as Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs in deciding not to impose sanctions on any Ethiopian individuals or entities for atrocities committed during the war in northern Ethiopia?

Answer. Since the outbreak of conflict in northern Ethiopia in November 2020, the United States has engaged in intense diplomacy and pressed the Government of Ethiopia and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) to cease hostilities without preconditions, ensure access to lifesaving humanitarian assistance, and end human rights abuses and violations. These efforts, implicitly backed by the threat of sanctions in the event of continued fighting, helped incentivize the Government of Ethiopia and the TPLF signing a cessation of hostilities agreement on November 2, 2022. The Administration's decision to impose sanctions on individuals and entities is weighed alongside other policy tools to help us meet U.S. objectives—in this case, to end the conflict.

As the African Affairs PDAS, I was integrally involved in the policy-making discussions and processes in this decision, as I am in nearly all key policy matters.

Question. Under President Biden's executive order, do you feel that "ensuring accountability for the atrocities committed during the conflict" includes designating Ethiopian individuals and entities for sanctions? If not, why not.

Answer. If an Ethiopian individual or entity has been identified as committing an atrocity, supported with evidence defined under strict legal requirements and statutory information, and sanctioning furthers our prioritized foreign policy goals, then I support sanctioning. If confirmed, I will continue to do so within the interagency process.

Question. What other accountability measures should the United States employ?

Answer. In addition to the possibility of sanctioning individuals and entities for atrocities, we have suspended most bilateral foreign assistance as well as support for international financial institutions' programs that go beyond addressing basic human needs. We have also suspended Ethiopia's eligibility for the African Growth and Opportunity Act. Moreover, we are supporting the transitional justice and accountability process, which should be the centerpieces of truth, reconciliation and transparency that the victims of the atrocities committed during the conflict deserve. We will consider additional measures if appropriate.

During your confirmation hearing, you responded to a question from Sen. Young that "you would be steadfast in ensuring that the people of Ethiopia understand" that the American growth model is the strongest for long-term growth.

Question. How will you carry this out in practice if confirmed?

Answer. Ethiopians and the Ethiopian Government already understand that the American free-market growth model is the strongest one for long-term development and prosperity. Once assistance restrictions are lifted when warranted under law and consistent with our policy and values, the United States should re-engage Ethiopia in the broad range of economic growth programs offered by U.S. Government agencies and international organizations, including USAID, USTDA, USTR, the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, Power Africa, DFC, MCC, etc. The United States should also be ready to provide technical assistance to the Government of Ethiopia as it redoubles efforts to implement its free-market economic reform plan. When appropriate, I plan to serve as a strong champion of U.S. and likeminded countries' corporate investment and engagement with Ethiopia.

Question. As U.S. Ambassador, if confirmed, will you communicate publicly about the costs associated with Chinese predatory lending, Belt and Road Initiative, and other malign projects and investments?

Answer. If confirmed, I will be forthright in my public statements and diplomatic engagement about the differences between Chinese bilateral lending and multilateral or private lending, as well as the associated consequences for Ethiopia. Whenever possible, I will present alternatives with likeminded partners, multilateral organizations, and the private sector as a counter Chinese bilateral lending, projects, and investments.

In response to Senator Murphy, who discussed the "remarkable" shift with Prime Minister Abiy from "Nobel Prize to civil war within 12-18 months" and how critics would say that the U.S. "misread the core political dynamics in the country and that our support for Abiy ended up underwriting his confrontational approach with his rivals, including the TPLF," you said, "probably there was some level of excessive optimism."

Question. How will you, as U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia, if confirmed, approach all actors in Ethiopia, including Prime Minister Abiy, "for what they are?"

Answer. If confirmed, I will continue to engage key actors in Ethiopia but remain clear-eyed about our expectations and U.S. policy goals. Diplomacy has a key role to play in creating and sustaining a bilateral relationship that both supports the people of Ethiopia and helps us achieve our policy goals. The leadership of Ethiopia, at the federal and regional level, are the primary actors responsible for ending the savage conflict of recent years and establishing a durable governance foundation upon which the country can move forward on a solid, sustainable basis. In that context, we must focus on what is possible and attainable while holding to our core values.

Question. What other situations have the Bureau of African Affairs approached with “excessive optimism?”

Answer. While it would be imprudent to directly compare Ethiopia to other countries in the region, it is the case that diplomacy exists in a space of incomplete and sometimes inaccurate information. We do our best to make informed decisions, but none of our policies is perfect or beyond fault. The most important thing, for me, is that we continue to try to make the best, most informed decisions based on our core values and policy goals, engage in course correction when needed, and ensure our policymaking processes fully incorporate diverse voices, opinions and approaches.

Sudan

While those directing Sudan policy within the Administration were preparing for an imminent declaration of a civilian government, they seem to have missed obvious signs of the impending collapse of the negotiation process and ensuing civil war that forced American diplomats to dodge roving gun battles and airstrikes.

Question. How did the State Department fail to respond to the apparent signs of an impending crisis in Sudan? Why was the Biden Administration caught flat-footed in its crisis response, which needlessly endangered U.S. Embassy personnel and did not sufficiently forewarn American citizens?

Answer. We share the Sudanese people’s deep disappointment in the conflict started by Sudan’s military leaders. Our engagement since the October 2021 military takeover focused on restoring the promise of the revolution and fostering the resumption of the civilian-led transition. We supported Sudanese-led efforts and process. In supporting a Sudanese-led process, our approach emphasized the need for the military to finally move from political control to an appropriate role—protecting the people of Sudan and the country’s borders—under civilian-led rule. Neither the Department nor our diplomats were blind to the risks. We understood the pathway to restoring a civilian-led government was always going to be difficult, as was establishing a unified military.

The U.S. Department of State and our embassies and consulates abroad have no higher priority than the safety and security of U.S. citizens abroad. Our Travel Advisory for Sudan has been Level 4: Do not Travel since August 2021. Once the crisis began, Secretary Blinken’s around-the-clock diplomatic efforts enabled the security conditions to allow the United States and our allies and partners to undertake departure operations by air, land, and sea.

Question. What, if anything, did the State Department do to address concerns reportedly raised by international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with the Embassy and USAID in the aftermath of the 2021 coup (and previously) that the international community would not be able or willing to support the evacuation or extraction of international staff of NGOs?

Answer. We remained in close communication with our NGO partners throughout our work to support Sudanese-led efforts to transfer power to a civilian government; that regularly communication included discussions related to security. After April 15 once fighting between the SAF and RSF broke out. In a multinational effort, the USG, in concert with allies and partners, supported the departure from Sudan of more than 2000 private U.S. citizens, lawful permanent residents, locally employed staff, their immediate family members, NGO staff, and nationals from allied and partner countries.

Question. What direct role did you have, if any, in the evacuation planning and staffing decisions of the Embassy in the weeks leading up to the evacuation?

Answer. Assistant Secretary Phee and I remained in close communication with Ambassador Godfrey in the weeks leading up to the crisis that started on April 15. I was in official training from April 17 for three weeks.

Question. What problems did Embassy Khartoum encountered in trying to implement its evacuation plan, and what lessons were learned?

Answer. Regardless as to how much time is spent developing an evacuation plan, no amount of planning can foresee every possibility. As the Department does for every evacuation, Embassy Khartoum will document lessons learned in order to improve future evacuation efforts. Learning from what happened with the Khartoum evacuation, AF is already asking posts to maintain communication groups through popular mobile chat applications to facilitate alternate means of quick communication with locally employed staff.

Question. Did Embassy Khartoum have contingency plans in place in case post could not execute the emergency evacuation plan? Were these contingency plans implemented? Why or why not?

Answer. Embassy Khartoum maintained an Emergency Action Plan that included multiple evacuation plans for getting staff out and plans for if staff were cut off from the Embassy. These plans were implemented and helped successfully consolidate staff to the Alternate Command Center, before moving all American staff and their family members to the Embassy prior to evacuation.

Question. With evidence of a deteriorating security situation in Sudan, did the Department consider moving to authorized or ordered departure before fighting broke out? Please describe the Department's deliberations on this matter, including your input.

Answer. No, the post Emergency Action Committee did not consider moving to authorized or ordered departure prior to the initial request due to the presence of armed fighters in the streets of Khartoum. As soon as it was safe to move staff and families, the Embassy suspended operations and evacuated all staff members and families.

As stated earlier, I was in official training from April 17 for three weeks.

Question. Do all posts in sub-Saharan Africa maintain emergency evacuation plans? If so, what direct role have you played, if any, in their development?

Answer. Each diplomatic post around the world maintains an emergency action plan, which includes an evacuation plan. These plans are largely developed by posts overseas, as on-the-ground experts. The plans must be reviewed and revalidated annually. As the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of African Affairs, I do not have a direct role in their development.

Question. How often are emergency evacuation plans updated for posts in sub-Saharan Africa?

Answer. Emergency Action Plans, which include sections on evacuation planning, are reviewed and revalidated annually.

Question. Do emergency evacuation plans for posts in Sub-Saharan Africa include contingencies in case the primary plan is not executable?

Answer. Yes, Embassies in Sub-Saharan Africa all have Emergency Action Plans, that include sections on evacuation planning. These plans include contingency plans if primary routes are unavailable.

Question. In your role as Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Africa Bureau, did you ever raise concerns within the Department regarding contingency planning for any evacuation plans at an Embassy in Africa? If so, where and when?

Answer. The Department periodically reviews the viability of maintaining diplomatic missions at our higher risk posts abroad. As the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Africa Bureau, I present to Department leadership the political justifications and risks associated with maintaining our diplomatic presence at many of our posts in Africa, to include our posts in Nigeria (April 2023), Somalia, Sudan and South Sudan (February 2023), Mali and Burkina Faso (October 2022), and Ethiopia (June 2022). These reviews consider contingency plans and risks prior to needing to evacuate.

Question. How will you draw upon the lessons of the crisis in Sudan to adapt to your role as Chief of Mission at the U.S. Embassy in Addis Ababa, a post with a high risk for conflict but with significantly more personnel, if confirmed?

Answer. More posts evacuate or draw down in AF than all the other geographic regions combined. I plan to incorporate lessons learned from these evacuations into Embassy Addis Ababa's crisis planning. This includes, inter alia, developing an approachable leadership structure to ensure I remain informed of fluid situational developments and that the Embassy has mechanisms in place to communicate with staff at all times.

The size of Embassy Addis Ababa requires focused attention in the context of emergency planning, a lesson learned from the 2021 period of Ordered Departure.

Question. What is the current posture of the Department in Sudan?

Answer. The Department temporarily suspended operations at U.S. Embassy Khartoum and evacuated all official Americans from Sudan.

Question. Under what conditions would the Department decide to move Embassy personnel back to Khartoum?

Answer. As conditions in Sudan improve, Embassy Sudan's Emergency Action Committee will meet to discuss changes to the security environment. The committee will then make a recommendation to the Ambassador, who may then request the Department reopen the Embassy. Any decision to restart operations will be based on verified changes to the security environment in Sudan.

Question. What is the timeline for returning to Embassy Khartoum once the Department decides to do so?

Answer. Prior to temporarily suspending operations, the Embassy disabled and destroyed sensitive computer networks and communications equipment and sealed the building. Before returning to full operations, the Bureau of Diplomatic Security, in conjunction with the Bureau of Information Resource Management and the Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations would need to determine the timeline for resuming operations based on any damages sustained to the physical plant, security systems, and in controlled access areas and availability of locally employed staff to assist.

Question. Did Embassy personnel have to abandon their personal belongings to be evacuated? If yes, is the Department compensating them for their losses?

Answer. Yes. Given the short timeline to departure and the non-permissive environment at the time of evacuation, unfortunately personnel had to abandon personal belongings. Employees will be able to file claims through private insurance, once it is officially determined that there has been a loss. Claims denied by private insurance may then be resubmitted to the Department for adjudication of a loss claim.

Question. Has there been any damage to Embassy Khartoum or personnel housing, including the Chief of Mission residence?

Answer. The Embassy compound and some personnel housing units have sustained damage.

Question. Is it the Department's policy to allow Mission Chiefs to take annual leave regardless of conditions in the host country? If not, under what conditions would a Chief of Mission have annual leave denied or canceled if previously approved?

Answer. Like all employees, Chiefs of Mission are entitled to annual leave, which is vital to an employee's wellbeing and resiliency. An Assistant Secretary, as the supervisor for a Chief of Mission, may cancel previously approved annual leave or deny annual leave at his/her discretion.

Question. As Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Africa Bureau, what role did you play in deciding to not recall Ambassador Godfrey from his leave back to Khartoum earlier?

Answer. Ambassador Godfrey was given permission to be away from post before the fighting escalated. He unilaterally returned to post earlier than originally planned. I was not involved in this decision.

The two warring generals, Burhan and Hemetti, have direct links to the genocide in Darfur, oversaw the death of many Sudanese civilians and the abuse of countless more during their reign, and continue to steal Sudan's resources. They also removed a sitting civilian-led transitional government in October 2021. The United States has not held these generals accountable but instead fed their lust for legitimacy by repeatedly making them central to the Administration's policy for a "democratic transition" in Sudan. As a result, the U.S. has less leverage today in Sudan since the removal of Omar al-Bashir in 2019. It seems to me we helped elevate these two monsters.

Question. Do you assess the United States should have taken action against the warring generals, Burhan and Hemetti, their vast financial interests, and/or their foreign backers to contain and weaken their stranglehold on the Sudanese people earlier?

Answer. We put pressure on the military government and led, with our partners, international efforts to support a Sudanese-led process to form a civilian-led government. This pressure included a sanctions designation on the Central Reserve Police, the suspension of all assistance to the Government, including from the \$700 million appropriated by Congress in FY 2021, and coordinating multilateral action to pause HIPC Debt Relief and any support from international financial institutions.

On May 4, President Biden issued an executive order (EO) imposing sanctions on certain persons destabilizing Sudan and undermining the goal of a democratic transition. However, as we have seen in Ethiopia, the Adminis-

tration has not designated any individuals or entities for sanctions since the announcement of the EO.

Question. What is the Department of State's perspective on designating Sudanese individuals and entities under the executive order issued by President Biden on May 4 related to Sudan?

Answer. The Executive Order underscores our policy aims to end the conflict, support Sudan's transition to democracy, and to promote accountability for those who undermine it or commit serious human rights abuses. As the Secretary said on May 22, if the ceasefire is violated, we will know, and we will hold violators accountable through our sanctions and other tools at our disposal. We continue to intensively monitor and evaluate ceasefire conditions up to the time of submission of these questions for the record.

Question. In your role as Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Africa Bureau, did you advocate against sanctioning Generals Burhan or Hemetti at any time during your tenure? If so when?

Answer. Between October 25, 2021, and April 15, 2023, I and other State Department officials frequently reassessed our approach to Sudan, explored alternatives, and prepared for contingencies including the use of sanctions. Throughout this period, the Bureau has explored the use of other pressures, including the suspension of direct assistance and preventing HIPC Debt Relief or support from international financial institutions, and use of sanctions and visa restrictions on those responsible for human rights abuses.

As PDAS, I coordinate and orchestrate policy review processes. It is not appropriate to characterize one official's position, including my own, in the policy development process.

Question. What accountability measures do you think the United States should use in the case of Sudan?

Answer. We have consistently supported the Sudanese people's demands for freedom, peace and, critically, justice. We will continue to support Sudanese-led efforts to advance justice and accountability, including ongoing efforts, such as documentation of human rights abuses and violations, to lay the groundwork for justice accountability in the future.

On May 11, 2023, the parties to the conflict—the SAF and RSF—signed the Jeddah Declaration of Commitment to Protect the Civilians of Sudan with the facilitation of Saudi Arabia and the United States. While the Jeddah Declaration does secure commitments from the parties to protect civilians and the movement of humanitarian aid, it only achieved a commitment “to prioritizing discussions to achieve a short-term ceasefire,” and to “scheduling subsequent expanded discussions to achieve a permanent cessation of hostilities.”

Question. What, if any, practical impact has the outcome from the Jeddah talks had on the situation on the ground in Sudan?

Answer. Given the brutality of the conflict, our immediate focus has been on stopping the fighting to relieve the suffering of the Sudanese people. The Jeddah talks have focused on a short-term ceasefire to facilitate humanitarian assistance and restoration of essential services. This is in line with the step-by-step approach agreed by the parties. The Sudanese people have not given up hope and neither should we.

Question. Instead of subsiding, fighting in Khartoum and West Darfur has intensified since the Jeddah talks. Reports of rape by RSF combatants have increased significantly, and reports from humanitarian organizations suggest that SAF-affiliated authorities have increased bureaucratic impediments to aid operations. How have humanitarian and human rights pledges agreed to at the Jeddah talks impacted the bureaucratic barriers to aid operations and cases of sexual violence since given that they both seemingly have worsened?

Answer. We have received deeply disturbing reports about an increasing number of attacks, gender-based violence, including sexual violence, and looting against Sudanese civilians and foreign civilians, to include humanitarian workers, and humanitarian facilities and assets. As Ambassador Godfrey tweeted on May 16, we are deeply alarmed by reports of sexual violence at the hands of armed actors across Sudan. All parties to the conflict must fulfill their obligations under international humanitarian law and undertake efforts to prevent such violence, enable medical care and other services for survivors, and to seek accountability for perpetrators.

We continue to monitor these reports and commend local and international organizations who are providing services to survivors and taking steps to help break the

cycle of impunity. We continue to document these abuses and violations. It's imperative for perpetrators to be held accountable.

Question. To what extent are U.S. diplomats in Jeddah focused on seeking a ceasefire versus pressing the parties to allow unhindered humanitarian access while negotiations continue?

Answer. They are deeply focused on humanitarian access, both in terms of pressing for removal of obstacles and achieving a ceasefire to facilitate humanitarian assistance and restoration of essential services. The parties agreed to a seven-day, short-term ceasefire starting May 22 to facilitate the delivery and distribution of humanitarian assistance, restore essential services, and withdraw forces from hospitals and essential public facilities. The parties also agreed to facilitate the safe passage of humanitarian actors and commodities, allowing goods to flow unhindered from ports of entry to populations in need.

Question. How is Ambassador Godfrey coordinating his outreach to Sudanese civilians with other regional and international actors undertaking similar efforts, including UNITAMS, the African Union, and East African governments?

Answer. Ambassador Godfrey and other senior officials are frequently engaging Sudanese civilian leaders, Resistance Committees, and civil society to work toward the shared goal of establishing civilian democratic governance in Sudan as soon as possible, and to harmonize civilian and international assistance efforts. We are coordinating this outreach with the African Union, IGAD, East African governments, and UNITAMS and other partners.

In the Foreign Policy article "How the U.S. Fumbled Sudan's Hopes for Democracy," a spokesperson for the State Department stated "U.S. engagement after the October 2021 military takeover was centered on supporting Sudanese civilian actors in a Sudanese-led process to re-establish a civilian-led transitional government."

Question. Do you agree with that characterization of the U.S. policy after the October 2021 coup?

Answer. I would agree that U.S. engagement after the October 2021 military takeover was centered on supporting Sudanese civilian actors in a Sudanese-led process to re-establish a civilian-led transitional government in line with the democratic aspirations of the Sudanese people.

The same Foreign Policy article references an early 2022 "memo [that] was written and circulated within the State Department's Bureau of African Affairs warning of the risks of current U.S. policy on Sudan and listing potential scenarios that could emerge from the rivalry between Burhan and Hemetti, including those tensions erupting into a full-scale conflict [the memo] was meant to go to U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken's desk, but the draft was heavily edited, watered down, and never passed out of the bureau."

Question. Are you aware of the existence of this memo? If yes, did you ever see it? Did you contribute to the memo?

Answer. In the normal course of the work in this area there have routinely been products prepared by staff working on Sudan that discussed a variety of risks, including that of conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces and how best to mitigate against those risks. Since 2021, senior State officials have been well aware of ongoing tensions between SAF and RSF leadership, and have engaged in frequent diplomacy, often working closely with civilians, to defuse tensions between the SAF and RSF, including in the days before April 15, 2023. As an institutional matter, as PDAS I would have reviewed products that included those circulated to the A/S and to the 7th floor.

Question. Were you part of conversations where the memo was discussed internally? If yes, what decisions were made as to how to handle it?

Answer. There have been a number of memos and internal deliberations on this subject. We carefully considered policy proposals and different opinions on our policy on Sudan and did not dismiss dissenting views. AF's recommendations on this subject over this period were used to structure frequent, intensive diplomacy over many months designed to defuse and end tensions between the SAF and RSF.

Question. Did you edit or change the contents of the memo? If so, what were your changes?

Answer. As PDAS I focused on ensuring that all memos had concise and cogent analysis and clear policy recommendations, including on memos related to supporting a democratic transition in Sudan.

I do not feel it is appropriate to characterize one official's position, including my own, in the policy development process.

South Africa

Question. Last week, a delegation of senior South African officials travelled to the United States to meet with State Department officials, ostensibly about the U.S.-South Africa relationship. On May 11, U.S. Ambassador to South Africa Brigety, in a press conference in Johannesburg, “bet [his] life” on the claim that South African weapons and ammunition were loaded onto Russian vessel the “Lady R” from December 6–8, 2022. South Africa’s foreign ministry has denied the claim. Then, on May 12, Amb. Brigety apologized for his remarks to Foreign Minister Pandor after being summoned to a meeting with her. Secretary Blinken did the same in a call with Minister Pandor. Was Ambassador Brigety authorized to accuse the South African Government of supplying arms to Russia publicly? If no, why not?

Answer. Ambassador Brigety was authorized to speak with local South African press about the visit in early May of a delegation of South African officials to Washington, D.C. Those meetings in early May included discussion of the Lady R and South Africa’s assurance that an investigation was underway, as President Ramaphosa subsequently confirmed in a statement. As Ambassador Brigety subsequently clarified, as did the State Department spokesperson, we intend to keep conversations with the South Africans regarding our serious concerns in diplomatic channels moving forward.

Question. Did the Department raise the issue of potential transfer of arms to the Russian Government or Russia-affiliated entities or on a Russian-sanctioned vessel with the South African Government? If so, when, and were you personally involved or present for any of those conversations?

Answer. Since the docking of the Lady R in a South African naval port in early December 2022, U.S. officials—including Secretary Blinken, APNSA Sullivan, Assistant Secretary Phee, and others—have raised the matter on multiple occasions with South African counterparts. I was not personally present at those conversations.

Question. Do you agree with the State Department’s decision to not publicly pushback against the South African Government and ANC party members when they personally attacked and portray Ambassador Brigety negatively and make anti-American statements?

Answer. In my capacity as Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary, and in Acting Assistant Secretary status of the time the interview with Ambassador Brigety was made public, I was integrally part of discussions about how to manage our diplomatic relations with South Africa before and after Ambassador Brigety’s interview. Our goal was to ensure that South African officials understood the depth of our concern about the Lady R and our desire to continue conversations about it in diplomatic channels without letting those conversations disrupt work on common priorities. I stand by our decision to keep those priorities in balance.

Question. How do you think the apologies and walking back of the accusations will impact the U.S. relationship with South Africa?

Answer. I believe our relationship with South Africa is both complex and resilient. We will continue to have frank and sometimes difficult conversations with South African officials when we disagree—as is the case when South Africa takes actions that appear to contradict its stated position of “non-alignment”—but we will at the same time pursue a robust and affirmative agenda on long-standing priorities like health and trade.

Question. What signals do you think the apologies and walking back of the accusations send to other governments who are considering acting against the national security interests of the United States?

Answer. I do not think there is any government in the world that does not understand how seriously the United States takes our national security interests and the interests of our allies and partners, nor do I think any country doubts our resolve and our willingness to take action. South Africa is undertaking an investigation of the Lady R matter, and our bilateral relationship continues to address a wide range of complex matters. We are moving past this.

Question. Did Secretary Blinken raise with Foreign Minister Pandor the photos and other accounting of her meeting with Ambassador Brigety released publicly that were seemingly intended to portray him as being scolded and spoken down to by the South African Government?

Answer. Secretary Blinken spoke with Minister Pandor immediately after her meeting with Ambassador Brigety, and therefore the photos and descriptions in question were not yet public when they spoke.

Question. How is the State Department engaged with the United States Trade Representative on South Africa's eligibility under the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA)?

Answer. The State Department and USTR are in regular contact regarding AGOA matters. AGOA eligibility is determined by the Trade Policy Staff Committee, which consists of multiple agencies across the U.S. Government.

Question. If there is evidence that elements within South Africa's Government or ruling ANC party took part in facilitating a reported arms transfer to the Russian Government or Russia-affiliated entities or on a Russian-sanctioned vessel, do you think the Administration should use its existing authorities to hold those individuals and entities accountable?

Answer. We do not publicly preview sanctions decisions. The Biden-Harris Administration has shown that it does not hesitate to use existing authorities as appropriate to curtail Putin's ability to fund and supply his war machine. As you know, I have been deeply involved in policymaking efforts to attack and degrade Russian PMC's Wagner's African reach and fundraising capabilities—I am a serious, committed officer on the Russia security portfolio.

The Department of State is, as always, open to classified discussions with you and your colleagues to discuss in further detail.

Question. As of May 17, 2023, which senior members of Africa Bureau leadership had direct conversations with Ambassador Brigety about the South Africa press conference and reaction?

Answer. I and other Africa Bureau leadership speak regularly with Ambassador Brigety, as we do with all our Chiefs of Mission in the field, on a range of topics. I spoke with Ambassador Brigety immediately following the press conference. Deputy Assistant Secretary Robert Scott spoke to him on multiple issues pertaining to the bilateral relationship, both before the Ambassador's comments in question and the week subsequent to them (Scott was on official travel the week of the actual press conference).

Elections

Elections are expected to be called for late July in Zimbabwe. In addition to the persistent restrictions on political and civic space in Zimbabwe and the regular use of the institutions and resources of the state to the benefit of the ruling ZANU-PF party, the pre-election period in Zimbabwe has been marred by: the jailing (without bail) and convictions of opposition leaders and critical voices on politically-motivated charges; the threat of draconian legislation regulating NGOs; and significant flaws in the voter registration process.

Question. What is your view on the prospects for democratic elections in Zimbabwe later this year?

Answer. The Government of Zimbabwe has tilted the playing field in the ruling ZANU-PF's favor using intimidation, coercion, patronage, lawfare tactics, and at times, violence. Absent significant change in the immediate term, it is difficult to see how this can lead to free and fair elections in 2023.

Question. How have you prepared your colleagues at Embassy Harare for the inevitable increased strain on the bilateral relationship and pressure placed on the staff in country from a deteriorating political environment in Zimbabwe leading up to the 2023 polls?

Answer. In my capacity as Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of African Affairs, I directed the Bureau of African Affairs to connect with Washington-based counterparts in the Department of State and USAID to identify support mechanisms for Embassy Harare's election preparations. The AF Bureau has worked closely with Embassy Harare to develop and deliver messages to the Government of Zimbabwe on our expectations regarding this year's elections. Further, the Embassy team conducted scenario planning and crisis management exercises to prepare for a range of election-related outcomes.

Question. At what point do the pre-election conditions make it impossible for Zimbabwe to hold legitimate democratic elections?

Answer. The United States will use all tools at its disposal to determine whether the 2023 harmonized elections in Zimbabwe are free and fair. I remain concerned about the worrying trends in the lead-up to the elections, including the Government of Zimbabwe's use of intimidation, coercion, patronage, lawfare tactics, and at times, violence.

Elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) are expected for December of this year. In addition to the logistical challenges posed by holding nation-wide elections in DRC, the ongoing State of Siege and conflict in Eastern Congo, exacerbated by the presence of Rwanda-backed M23 rebels and the delays in conducting a legitimate voter registration exercise (among other issues) make it near certain that elections will be delayed and/or impossible to hold across the country.

Question. What lessons have you learned from the State Department's handling of the 2019 electoral process in DRC, including the controversial "victory" of President Tshisekedi?

Answer. Successful elections in 2023 should be free and fair, with inclusive, transparent and impartial electoral processes, and held in accordance with constitutional deadlines. President Tshisekedi has firmly expressed his commitment to free and fair elections, held on time, but we must remain engaged at the highest levels throughout the elections planning process to ensure the DRC Government takes the necessary legal, financial, and technical actions to ensure a better election in 2023.

Question. Have you been satisfied with the Presidency of Felix Tshisekedi, whom the State Department was quick to support as the "winner" of the 2019 elections despite serious questions about the legitimacy of the outcome?

Answer. Since he assumed power in 2019, President Tshisekedi and his administration have shown a commitment to working closely with the United States on areas of bilateral interest, including peace in eastern DRC, preservation of the environment, public health, and strategic minerals. Our bilateral relationship has also allowed us to engage critically with the DRC Government on areas of concern, such as combatting trafficking-in-persons, anti-corruption efforts, and professionalization of the Congolese security sector.

No leader is perfect, and the Democratic Republic of Congo remains a country suffering weak institutions. The United States continues to work with the Government and President Tshisekedi on these and other matters of concern to us and the people of that country and region.

Question. How is the State Department engaging with Congolese officials, including President Tshisekedi, on the challenges to the current electoral process?

Answer. The Department continues to call on the DRC Government to ensure that political and civic space remains open in the lead up to the elections so that the Congolese people can express their views peacefully. The United States is the largest donor of funding for activities in support of free and fair 2023 elections, providing \$24.75 million that: strengthens transparency of electoral processes and electoral administration, improves civic education, and empowers communities to participate in elections.

Question. What accountability measures are being discussed for spoilers to elections in DRC?

Answer. The U.S. Government is willing to consider the full range of diplomatic and legal tools, including sanctions, in order to promote accountability and help ensure the DRC can hold free and fair elections in accordance with constitutional deadlines.

Nigeria

Question. I have been engaged in discussions with the Department over security assistance to Nigeria, considering both the acute security challenges Nigeria faces and the concerning human rights record of the Nigerian military. In your opinion, how should the Department balance these considerations as it engages with the Nigerian Government on security assistance and in combatting the insurgent threat posed by Boko Haram and other groups in the North East, and other security challenges across Nigeria?

Answer. The Department shares your commitment in ensuring that our security cooperation takes human rights concerns into account and is consistent with our objective of strengthening respect for human rights in Nigeria. Our security coopera-

tion seeks to strengthen the capacity of Nigeria's Armed Forces to more effectively address security threats, protect civilians, and institutionalize respect for human rights and the laws of armed conflict. Pursuant to the Leahy laws, the Department does not provide security assistance to any security force unit if there is credible information that the unit has committed a gross violation of human rights. We will continue to vet all Nigerian security force units nominated for assistance. Human rights considerations play a critical role in the evaluation of any arms sales.

A focus on human rights and civilian protection is fundamental to, and built into, every major U.S. security cooperation engagement with Nigeria. The Department is committed to ensuring that this remains the case as we prepare to work with a new Nigerian Administration.

Nigeria held national-level elections on February 25, 2023 and state-level elections on March 11 [sic], 2023. On March 1, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) announced Bola Tinubu of the All Progressives Congress won the presidential election with 36.61 percent of the vote. That same day (March 1), State Department spokesman Ned Price stated from the podium that the "United States congratulates the people of Nigeria, President-elect Tinubu, and all political leaders on the results of the February 25th presidential election. This competitive election represents a new period for Nigerian politics and democracy." The February 25 elections were marred by technical challenges and low voter turnout, and reports of vote buying, voter intimidation, attacks on polling stations, and accusations of fraud. Presidential candidates Peter Obi and Atiku Abubakar challenged the results in Nigerian courts. The Nigerian Court of Appeal began proceedings on the election challenges on May 8. The inauguration of President-elect Tinubu is scheduled for May 29, 2023.

Question. What is your assessment of Nigeria's 2023 electoral process?

Answer. Domestic and international observers noted significant logistical and technical shortcomings on February 25 for the national elections, as well as concerns about incidents of violence and intimidation, especially surrounding the March 18 state-level elections. For many Nigerians, the electoral process did not meet their expectations. The United States echoed many of these concerns in its public statements following the elections.

Despite these shortcomings, many neutral observers believed the official outcome reflected the will of those who voted. A comprehensive, USAID-supported Parallel Vote Tabulation process of the February 25 presidential race, run by a highly respected implementing partner that has carried out such tabulations in multiple previous Nigerian presidential elections, produced data that was consistent with the official results in 35 out of 37 states; the discrepancies in the two other states were not close to changing the overall outcome.

Nigeria's February and March 2023 elections were also highly competitive. In the presidential election, each of the top three candidates was the leading vote-getter in twelve states, a remarkable first in Nigeria's modern political era, reflecting the diversity of views that characterized the campaign and the wishes of voters. In more than half of Nigeria's states—twenty—the winning presidential candidate represented a different party than that of the incumbent governor. Many of Nigeria's state-level elections were also highly competitive, with the control of six governorships changing party hands. Although voter turnout proved to be disappointingly low, engagement by civil society and the media before, during, and following the elections was robust and energized, and advanced the cause of informed, issue-based politics.

In response to incidents of violence and voter intimidation during the election cycle, the U.S. Government-imposed visa restrictions on specific individuals for undermining the democratic process.

Question. Do you think it was premature for the State Department to congratulate president-elect Bola Tinubu and the Nigerian people on the conduct and outcome of the February 25 election on March 1?

Answer. I understand your concerns, and we carefully considered what would be an appropriate response. We believed it was important immediately after the election to recognize the determination and commitment to democracy of the Nigerian people, especially amidst the challenges that they confronted during the voting process.

In addition to our understanding through the Parallel Vote Tabulation that the announced results accurately reflected the national vote, the State Department offered congratulations to President-elect Tinubu based on the official declaration of the outcome by the sole body empowered by the Nigerian constitution to do so—the

Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). Presidential candidates Peter Obi and Atiku Abubakar were fully within their rights to file legal challenges using the well-established mechanisms for doing so; indeed, legal challenges have been filed by losing candidates in almost every presidential election since democracy returned to Nigeria in 1999. The Court of Appeals' Electoral Tribunal is currently holding hearings regarding these challenges, and per the Nigerian constitution has 180 days to issue a ruling; if an appeal of that ruling is filed by the losing party, the Supreme Court will have 60 days to make a final, binding ruling. The legal process will thus extend well past the May 29 inauguration date, as it has in previous presidential election cycles.

Given these factors, the Department made the decision to recognize the announced victory of Mr. Tinubu.

However, the State Department's March 1 statement did not diminish U.S. concerns about the technical shortcomings of an electoral process that clearly failed to meet Nigerians' expectations. That same statement also called on Nigeria's Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to address such issues ahead of Nigeria's then-upcoming state-level elections.

In December 2022, Reuters published a deeply troubling investigative piece on forced abortions and child killings by Nigeria's military. On April 19, 2023, Reuters published a follow up piece "More women describe enduring forced abortions in Nigerian Army programme."

Question. What is your assessment of the Nigerian National Human Rights Commission's investigation into these allegations?

Answer. Nigeria's National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) is conducting a serious and thorough investigation into the deeply troubling allegations reported by Reuters. On February 7, the NHRC inaugurated the Special Independent Investigative Panel on Human Rights Violations in Counter-Insurgency Operations in North-East Nigeria. Since opening its investigation, the Panel—which is headed by Abdu Aboki, a well-respected former Supreme Court justice, along with six legal, medical, and civil society experts, plus a military liaison—has made multiple visits to Nigeria's North East and interviewed dozens of witnesses, including health care workers, NGO workers, military personnel, and government and U.N. officials. The NHRC recently told our Embassy staff that it was planning additional trips to Borno State in order to reach more rural areas as they seek to the fullest possible picture of what may have transpired. The NHRC has reported that the military is cooperating with the investigation and is offering the NHRC full access to military personnel and installations.

We continue to monitor the work of the NHRC investigative panel, which is expected to last several more months, and press Nigeria's Government to ensure accountability for wrongdoing based on its findings and recommendations. I do not wish to pre-judge the results of any investigation currently underway.

Question. What is your assessment of how the U.S. Embassy in Abuja responded to the Reuters report?

Answer. I was satisfied with the work our Embassy in responding immediately to these reports, which involved immediate outreach to dozens of contacts across the full spectrum of our relationship, in order to gather initial perspectives. The Department was shocked and remains deeply concerned by the allegations in Reuters' reports. After the reports were published, U.S. officials in Abuja and Washington pressed the Nigerian Government to conduct a thorough and transparent independent investigation and ensure accountability for any wrongdoing. From this, we have seen results—on February 7, Nigeria's National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) inaugurated its investigative panel with a mandate to investigate Reuters' allegations, and determine culpability, compel appropriate damages or compensation, and recommend appropriate legal action by civil or military justice systems if warranted. Senior Nigerian officials—including President Buhari and Chief of Defense Staff Irabor (in a change from his initial comments)—pledged to support the investigation and assured that the Government would help facilitate its work. Everything we have seen since suggests that has been the case, and we recently learned that President Buhari has agreed to provide supplemental funding to the NHRC to support the Special Panel.

In the State Department's 2022 Trafficking in Persons Report, Ethiopia was listed as Tier 2 Watch List for the second year in a row for its lack of sustained efforts to meet the minimum standards to combat trafficking.

Question. If confirmed, what concrete steps could you take to help Ethiopia operationalize the prioritized recommendations contained in the TIP report?

Answer. The most recent TIP report outlined several steps Ethiopia could take to improve its anti-TIP efforts, including expanding training to regional officials outside of Addis, screening for trafficking indicators among vulnerable populations, developing a national action plan, and collaborating with international NGOs to increase the Government's capacity to combat trafficking. My understanding is the Ethiopia in making good progress in implementing these recommendations and, if confirmed, I will support these efforts within legal and policy guidelines.

In the State Department's 2022 International Religious Freedom report Ethiopia had significant religious freedom issues in country.

Question. What is your assessment of this particular issue and if confirmed, how will you work with the Ambassador At Large for International Religious Freedom to bolster religious freedom in-country?

Answer. Many of the religious tensions in Ethiopia are rooted in political and ethnic conflicts. Therefore, the key to ending religious persecution in Ethiopia is achieving lasting political peace. If confirmed, I will work to facilitate peace in Ethiopia and make the free expression of religion one of my core priorities.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to personally engaging with civil society on this issue?

Answer. Yes. If confirmed, I commit to engaging with civil society on the importance of religious freedom. This is something the Embassy team does already, and I look forward to continuing the great work it does in this area.

Question. If confirmed, what concrete steps can you take to help Ethiopia increase their societal and governmental respect for religious freedom?

Answer. The most important step that can be taken to help Ethiopia increase its societal and governmental respect for religious freedom is the achievement of a durable peace in the country. Religious conflicts in Ethiopia are often rooted in political and ethnic conflicts. If confirmed, I would stress with all interlocutors that the United States considers the respect for religious freedom a fundamental human rights issue—and one with far-reaching effects on the overall health of the bilateral relationship.

In the State Department's 2022 Human Rights Report there were a litany of significant human rights abuses attributed to the Government in Ethiopia.

Question. How will you direct your Embassy to work with civil society organizations to improve the human rights situation on the ground?

Answer. Civil society organizations have a vital role to play in ensuring the respect for human rights in Ethiopia. If confirmed, I would continue ongoing efforts to support—both financially and diplomatically—human rights-based organizations working in the country. Outside perspective and technical knowledge will be a key component in ensuring a durable and lasting peace in Ethiopia.

State Management and Oversight

Please answer the following questions based on your experience as Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs from 2021–present.

Question. What is the process within the Bureau of African Affairs for decision making, particularly related to difficult or controversial issues?

Answer. Prior to deciding on a difficult or controversial issue, I endeavor to ensure that the Bureau gathers all available facts and surfaces perspectives from as many viewpoints as possible, including dissenting views relative to existing policy. I invite stakeholders in to discuss viewpoints and rigorously test hypotheses and policy concepts before the Bureau makes a final decision.

No process is perfect—we will never have all the facts, and ensuring all viewpoints are heard and engaged is our aspiration, but not possible to achieve without fault. What is important in my estimation of leadership is the ability of an institution to be able to make course corrections with new information, new insights and when we see current approaches falling short.

Question. What role do you play, as a member of Bureau leadership, in decision making processes?

Answer. I am the decision maker when the Assistant Secretary is out of the office or unavailable. When the Assistant Secretary is in the office, I coordinate the policy review processes of the Bureau, provide my own recommendation if appropriate, and ensure that she has the information and strongest analysis we can muster to make a well-informed decision. I try to maintain a constant policymaking assessment apparatus, to ensure the decisions made remain fit for purpose and consistent with evolving circumstances.

Question. Is there space for communicating dissent within the Bureau for African Affairs?

Answer. I aspire to achieve an unequivocal “yes” to the question, and constantly strive to live up to that aspiration.

Valuing opinions, trust, and fostering a harassment-free workplace are all key to ensuring dissenting views are expressed and heard. In the Bureau of African Affairs, we actively promote sharing of various opinions and do not tolerate employee harassment. Employees may express dissent through the formal Department-wide dissent process, but are also welcome to use less formal mechanisms, such as offering multiple perspectives in decision memos or through face-to-face interactions.

The Assistant Secretary and I purposely solicit wide ranging views on difficult topic to test current policy thinking and inform new or review policy processes. Our aim cannot be to incorporate every view into every policy, but to ensure we understand the range of options, tools, tradeoffs, and cost/benefit assessments.

Question. How do you manage dissent within the Bureau of African Affairs?

Answer. As stated above, by valuing opinions, trust, and fostering a harassment-free workplace are all key to encouraging and managing dissent. In the Bureau of African Affairs, we actively promote sharing of various opinions and do not tolerate employee harassment. When personnel communicate policy disagreement, I will organize appropriate discussions with key stakeholders to test the proposition.

Many U.S. missions have been under enormous stress over the last several years, in large part due to COVID.

Question. What is your understanding of morale throughout Mission Addis Ababa?

Answer. The aftermath of a three-month ordered departure from November 2021 to February 2022, combined with continuing in-country travel restrictions related to the conflict in northern Ethiopia, have impacted morale at Embassy Addis Ababa. It is now more challenging to recruit diplomatic staff and many of our positions remain vacant without qualified bidders. Our Locally Employed Staff are still impacted by conflict-related issues that continue to arise. The Mission strives to support all employees through these challenges while meeting Mission objectives.

Question. How do you intend to improve morale at Mission Addis Ababa?

Answer. If confirmed, I will demonstrate my commitment to respect for all, customer service, professional development, safety and security, and quality of life issues. I will ensure the mission has access to resources to support a positive, respectful, and inclusive workplace. I will hold supervisors accountable and expect them to hold their teams accountable for conduct and performance. Incidents will be addressed immediately.

I will recognize and reward high performers and promote work-life balance and safe social activities to build community resilience.

Question. How do you intend to create a unified mission and vision at Mission Addis Ababa?

Answer. If confirmed as Chief of Mission, I will lead the American and Ethiopian professionals in Mission Ethiopia to advance our national security agenda in a safe, inclusive, and respectful workplace. I will continue to ensure our Embassy in Ethiopia is working together as a team, including through an active diversity council, Federal Women's Program, and professional development program that promote respect for each other and a shared commitment to advancing U.S. national interest through diplomacy, public outreach, and programs.

Question. How do you intend to improve morale at Mission Addis Ababa?

Answer. If confirmed, I will demonstrate my commitment to respect for all, customer service, professional development, safety and security, and quality of life issues. I will ensure the mission has access to resources to support a positive, respectful, and inclusive workplace. I will hold supervisors accountable and expect them to hold their teams accountable for conduct and performance. Incidents will be addressed immediately.

I will recognize and reward high performers and promote work-life balance and safe social activities to build community resilience.

Management is a key responsibility for Chiefs of Mission.

Question. How would you describe your management style?

Answer. I would ideally compare myself to a musical conductor or band leader—setting the tone, pace and overall direction, but inviting creativity, individual and group excellence to shine, and innovation. I would also describe my management style as respectful, collaborative, dedicated, and committed to integrity.

Ultimately, I strive to serve the mission team and community. I lead with a consistent goal for excellence in our internal management and operational platforms in the mission, high customer service, and high morale in the community as essential ingredients to achieving success in our external diplomatic, public outreach, and programmatic goals. I also firmly believe in the principle that the “buck stops with me.” Meaning, I try to take full responsibility for actions taken by those who I supervise and institutions I direct.

Question. Do you believe it is ever acceptable or constructive to berate subordinates, either in public or in private?

Answer. As I mentioned in my statement before the committee on May 16, my parents provided clear guidance and instilled bedrock values that I aspire to emulate, including discipline, integrity, and treating people with kindness and respect. It is never acceptable or constructive to berate subordinates or other individuals, either in public or in private.

Question. How do you envision your relationship with the deputy Chief of Mission?

Answer. As a previous two-time deputy Chief of Mission and a current Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary, I have over a decade of experience serving successfully in a deputy role or supervising. I believe that the deputy and Chief of Mission must communicate well with one another and with the mission team, have a shared commitment to integrity, and both be focused on serving the community and their mission team. I believe in working as a partner with my deputy, complementing and reinforcing each other wherever possible. I know my deputy will be called upon to have important conversations with me from time to time to express a viewpoint that is not appropriate for a wider audience within the Mission, even with the senior personnel.

Question. If confirmed, what leadership responsibilities do you intend to entrust to your deputy Chief of Mission?

Answer. I believe in developing the skills of my deputy Chief of Mission to be ready to lead at any moment. This means including the deputy Chief of Mission in operations and external engagements, while also identifying specific leadership responsibilities. If confirmed, I would delegate to my deputy responsibilities such as the leading professional staff development programs, chairing key coordination working groups, and supervising emergency and crisis response exercises. I would support and reinforce those duties wherever helpful.

In order to create and continue employee excellence at the Department, accurate and direct employee evaluation reports (EERs) for Foreign Service Officers are imperative, though often lacking

Question. Do you believe that it is important to provide employees with accurate, constructive feedback on their performance in order to encourage improvement and reward those who most succeed in their roles?

Answer. Yes, I believe it is essential to provide all employees with accurate, constructive feedback on their performance, as well as reward employees who successfully fulfill their roles. Throughout my Foreign Service career have actively provided such feedback and recognition, including for Locally Employed Staff, and by implementing additional recognition mechanisms such as Local Staff Member of the Month and Local Staff Member of the Year awards in my last two postings.

Question. If confirmed, would you support and encourage clear, accurate, and direct feedback to employees in order to improve performance and reward high achievers?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed, I would support and encourage clear, accurate, and direct feedback to all employees to improve performance and reward high achievers, as I have done throughout my Foreign Service career.

It is imperative that U.S. diplomats get outside of posts abroad to meet with local actors, including host government officials, non-government organizations, and local citizens.

Question. In your experience, do U.S. diplomats get outside of our Embassy walls enough to fully accomplish their missions?

Answer. In my experience U.S. diplomats generally strive to get outside our Embassy walls to advance mission goals. I believe that with clear and coordinated planning, consistent security and emergency accountability training, and prioritization on public outreach, it is possible, and essential, for U.S. diplomats to get outside of embassies and the capital cities of their host countries as much as possible. If confirmed, I would lead Mission Addis Ababa to actively and safely engaging in robust public outreach and travel outside of the Embassy and Addis Ababa.

Question. How do you intend to improve the ability of U.S. diplomats to better access all local populations?

Answer. If confirmed, I would work closely with the Embassy's Regional Security Office and Public Affairs Office to ensure that all U.S. diplomats and local staff have the necessary training, communications platforms for emergency accountability tools to safely travel and access local populations. I would also work with the Public Affairs Office to ensure that all staff have training in public messaging to engage Ethiopians in all parts of the country. Finally, I would work with the Management team and Washington to budget sufficient travel resources to support appropriate outreach to advance our U.S. national interests in Ethiopia.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO ERVIN JOSE MASSINGA BY SENATOR MARCO RUBIO

Question. In May 2022, Secretary Blinken said that the People's Republic of China is the "only country with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do it." The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) clearly holds the reins of power in the People's Republic of China and has used this power to commit genocide in Xinjiang, flood our communities with fentanyl, and emit, by far the largest quantity of greenhouse gases in the world today. With their absolute control of Chinese society and industry, the CCP could stop all of these destructive actions tomorrow if they so choose. Is the Chinese Communist Party a threat to the United States?

Answer. Earlier this year, the Director of National Intelligence testified that "the CCP represents both the leading and most consequential threat to U.S. national security and leadership globally." Under President Xi, the CCP has become more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad, seeking to undercut U.S. influence and alliances. If confirmed, I will advance U.S. national security interests and push back against the People's Republic of China (PRC) efforts to expand its problematic influence, through robust and forthright diplomatic engagements, public diplomacy, and commercial advocacy to bolster U.S.-Ethiopia ties. As an officer with substantial experience working in China and interfacing directly with PRC officials, I understand the stakes, the PRC's tools and approaches, and its weaknesses.

Question. Does the Chinese Communist Party undertake any activities that are beneficial to U.S. interests?

Answer. The Administration assesses the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) activities in the context of the fact that, as Secretary Blinken has said, the CCP has become more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad. According to the Office of the Director of National Intelligence's 2023 Annual Threat Assessment, the CCP is seeking to "undercut U.S. influence, drive wedges between Washington and its partners, and foster some norms that favor its authoritarian system."

Question. Do you believe that there are any areas within which the Chinese Communist Party would constructively work with the United States in good faith?

Answer. As the United States competes vigorously with the PRC, the United States manages this competition responsibly so that competition does not veer into conflict. The United States will work with the PRC to address transnational challenges, such as climate change, when it is in our interest to do so—as Secretary Blinken has said, not as a favor to us or anyone else, and never in exchange for walking away from our principles, but because it is what the world expects. If confirmed, I will energetically advance U.S. objectives and counter harmful behavior by the PRC.

Question. If confirmed, will you approve any joint activity with organizations or representatives from the People's Republic of China in the country in which you will work?

Answer. If confirmed, my priority will be advancing U.S. national security interests in Ethiopia and countering efforts by our strategic and regional competitors to undermine those interests. The Administration has been clear that the PRC is the most consequential geopolitical challenge facing the United States, and that the United States is committed to working to strengthen our partners in the region. If confirmed, I will work closely with Department of State and interagency colleagues and Congress to address the PRC's efforts to expand its influence in Ethiopia and the region.

Question. Despite the March 2022 African Union-brokered truce between the Ethiopian Government and Tigray forces in the north, ethnic tensions remain. All sides engaged in the conflict, including neighboring Eritrean forces who invaded and occupied the north of the country, are accused of forced recruitment, committing crimes against humanity, and carrying out war crimes. Some estimates state that more than 500,000 have died during the war from killings, starvation, and lack of health care. What is your assessment of the current state of U.S.-Ethiopian relations?

Answer. A stable, prosperous, and democratic Ethiopia is in the U.S. national interest. Two years of conflict strained the bilateral relationship but also weakened Ethiopia economically and exacerbated interethnic tensions within its borders. The United States seeks to restore this relationship and help Ethiopia rebuild, but our ability to provide financial assistance will be limited until we assess there is no longer a pattern of gross violations of human rights committed by the Government of Ethiopia. We are pleased to observe significant progress in this area. To ensure durable peace, we are urging Ethiopia to address recent atrocities through an independent, inclusive, and comprehensive transitional justice process. If confirmed, I will encourage further progress in this regard.

Question. Who or what is the greatest threat to the peace process currently in place?

Answer. We are confident the signatories to the cessation of hostilities agreement—the Government of Ethiopia and the Tigray People's Liberation Front—are committed to its successful implementation and note significant progress. Remaining challenges include the continued presence of Eritrean Defense Forces in border areas as well as Amhara irregular forces in contested parts of Tigray regional state. There is also a need for Ethiopia to source financial support for its nationwide disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) initiative. If confirmed, I will help mobilize international partners to share the financial responsibility for DDR in Ethiopia.

Question. Civil conflict in Tigray is not the only internal conflict. How would you describe the violence in other parts of the country and ethnic groups?

Answer. Poverty, unemployment, ethnic tensions, and a lack of trust in regional and federal authorities continue to be drivers of violence, well after silencing the guns in Tigray. This is especially the case in Amhara and Oromia regions. Developing dispute resolution mechanisms at the community level and among civil society groups are a core focus of U.S. development funding in Ethiopia. If confirmed, I will encourage Ethiopia's national dialogue process to address long-standing grievances that have been historical drivers of conflict.

Question. The U.S. is Ethiopia's largest donor, providing approximately \$2.5 billion in aid over the past two years. USAID recently suspended aid to the northern region of Ethiopia due to theft and diversion of humanitarian supplies. If confirmed, how will you ensure U.S. taxpayer assistance is used for what it is intended?

Answer. I have zero tolerance for any fraud, waste, or abuse of U.S. taxpayer-funded resources. I expect the ongoing USAID Office of the Inspector General investigation into food diversion in Ethiopia to lead to concrete recommendations for improving oversight over U.S. assistance. These will likely include additional use of third-party monitoring as well as greater accountability among implementing partners and authorities at the federal, regional, and local levels. If confirmed, I will press Ethiopian authorities at all levels to hold accountable those found to be responsible for the diversion of U.S. assistance away from its intended beneficiaries.

Question. Will you commit to this Committee and American citizens that USAID employees under your authority will provide appropriate oversight and not solely utilize implementing partners to verify aid is not stolen or diverted?

Answer. Yes, I commit to this.

Question. In your opinion, what assurances must be in place before assistance is resumed for these challenging areas?

Answer. Assurances for better oversight and accountability with regard to aid diversion must come from Ethiopian authorities at the federal, regional, and local levels. I also believe our implementing partners responsible for the actual distribution of assistance—be they U.N. organizations or non-governmental organizations—should provide assurances that they have increased their capacity to oversee operations across the entire country. If confirmed, I would hold all parties involved to the highest standards.

Question. Ethiopia maintains strong ties with China, as their largest trading partner and foreign investor. It is estimated that Ethiopia has more than \$13 billion in loans for significant infrastructure projects. What is your characterization of the existing relationship between Ethiopia and China?

Answer. The PRC is Ethiopia's largest bilateral lender and investor. The Government of Ethiopia views the PRC as an important partner that has helped the country accomplish key infrastructure development objectives, but the relationship is transactional, and the PRC's non-concessional approach to lending, in addition to often poor quality of infrastructure built and weak skills transfer mechanisms, increasingly shows itself as a poor model for development. There are not deep person-to-person or cultural ties like those that exist between the United States and Ethiopia. If confirmed, I will engage Ethiopia on its own terms, continue to deepen our person-to-person diplomacy, and advance our affirmative agenda.

Question. The Development Finance Corporation (DFC) was considering a multi-billion-dollar investment in Ethiopia, to include multinational bids for a telecom license in Ethiopia, however these plans were frozen in 2021. If confirmed, will you press DFC to resume looking for investment projects in Ethiopia?

Answer. Despite current economic headwinds, Ethiopia has promising, long-term growth prospects and represents a potentially attractive market for U.S. business. Prior to the northern conflict, its economy was among the fastest growing in the world. If confirmed, I will press the DFC to resume looking for investment opportunities in Ethiopia that meet the organization's legally mandated due diligence criteria.

Question. Which other programs will you support which will deepen U.S. investment in and with Ethiopia to counter Chinese initiatives?

Answer. If confirmed, I will focus on ensuring a level playing field for American businesses and calling out coercive and questionable business practices by unscrupulous actors like the PRC when necessary. Ethiopians and the Ethiopian Government already understand that the American free-market growth model is the strongest one for long-term development and prosperity. Once assistance restrictions are lifted when warranted under law and consistent with our policy and values, the United States should re-engage Ethiopia in the broad range of economic growth programs offered by U.S. Government agencies and international organizations, including USAID, USTDA, USTR, the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, Power Africa, DFC, MCC, etc. The United States should also be ready to provide technical assistance to the Government of Ethiopia as it redoubles efforts to implement its free-market economic reform plan. When appropriate, I plan to serve as a strong champion of U.S. and likeminded countries' corporate investment and engagement with Ethiopia.

I will also draw attention to the Partnership for Global Infrastructure Investment (PGII) as a viable alternative to PRC infrastructure investment. PGII was launched at the November 2022 G20 meeting and will introduce collaboration mechanisms among G7 countries and across all U.S. Government agencies to direct investment to projects in developing countries focused on climate and energy security, digital connectivity and health and health security—including related transportation infrastructure like ports, railroads, and other connective infrastructure.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO BRYAN DAVID HUNT BY SENATOR ROBERT MENENDEZ

Question. What are the most important actions you have taken in your career to date to support democracy and human rights? What has been the impact of your actions?

Answer. I have focused much of my State Department career on the promotion of democracy and respect for human rights. As Chargé in Georgetown, Guyana, I led our team in collaborative efforts with like-minded international partners to advance free and fair local and national elections. Our combined efforts resulted in the first peaceful transition of power in the country in more than two decades following national elections that were judged by international and domestic observers to be free and fair and to reflect the will of the people and the organization of long-delayed local government elections judged to be free and fair and reflect the will of the people. During my time as Principal Officer in Lahore, Pakistan, I helped lead U.S. Mission efforts to push-back against efforts by the then-military regime to declare martial law, jail politicians and civil society activists, and permanently disrupt the planned transition back to civilian rule. U.S. Mission efforts pressured the military to abandon its attempt and ensured a transition back to civilian rule, including national elections that were judged to be broadly free and fair.

Question. What issues are the most pressing challenges to democracy or democratic development in Sierra Leone? These challenges might include obstacles to participatory and accountable governance and institutions, rule of law, authentic political competition, civil society, human rights and press freedom. Please be as specific as possible.

Answer. The lack of independence of key election-related institutions, insufficient judicial independence, insufficient legislative oversight, and endemic corruption stand out as some of the most significant challenges to democracy and democratic development in Sierra Leone. I understand that as the country moves toward elections in June 2023, our Embassy has already raised concerns about the need to ensure a level playing field for all political parties, the importance of sustained media freedom, and the imperative of ensuring freedoms of association and peaceful assembly.

Question. What steps will you take—if confirmed—to support democracy in Sierra Leone? What do you hope to accomplish through these actions? What are the potential impediments to addressing the specific obstacles you have identified?

Answer. If confirmed, I would hope to use Sierra Leone's 2023 national elections as a catalyst to encourage the government, political opposition, civil society, and other stakeholders to embark on a national reflection on the state of Sierra Leone's democratic institutions. I would work closely with like-minded partners to ensure that recommendations from the 2023 international and domestic election observation reports—particularly those related to the politicization of key electoral institutions—formed a key part of that reflection and resulting reforms. I would seek to use available U.S. democracy and governance funding to support the long-term strengthening of institutions identified for genuine reform and to support an independent judiciary, democratic political parties, and effective and independent civil society and media institutions. My hope would be to advance more independent, non-partisan institutions able to ensure the long-term viability of Sierra Leone's democracy and deliver for all Sierra Leonean people. Potential impediments include the highly partisan nature of Sierra Leone's politics, the intersection of partisan politics and ethnic identity, ingrained corruption, and the lack of human capacity. It is my hope that addressing these challenges will help Sierra Leone build on the gains it has made since the end of its civil war in 2002.

Question. How will you utilize U.S. government assistance resources at your disposal, including the Democracy Commission Small Grants program and other sources of State Department and USAID funding, to support democracy and governance, and what will you prioritize in processes to administer such assistance?

Answer. I understand that the U.S. Government assistance resources for promotion of democracy and governance in Sierra Leone are limited. If confirmed, I would, therefore, seek to focus those limited resources on capacity-building programming that is central to reforming and strengthening Sierra Leone's democratic institutions and holding those institutions, including political parties, accountable to the country's citizens, particularly those historically underrepresented in national politics. I would also support efforts to strengthen accountable governance both at the national and local council level and will promote initiatives that prevent violence and foster peace and national cohesion. This would include continuing our work to strengthen civil society, build independent media, and advance the independence of key electoral and judicial institutions. In the processes used to administer such assistance, I would prioritize capacity building of Sierra Leonean institutions, ensuring funding awards are made in a transparent fashion, and overseeing our implementing partners to facilitate delivery of results.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to meet with civil society members, human rights and other non-governmental organizations in the U.S. and with local human rights NGOs, and other members of civil society in Sierra Leone? What steps will you take to pro-actively address efforts to restrict or penalize NGOs and civil society via legal or regulatory measures?

Answer. Yes. Human rights, civil society, and other non-governmental organizations all play an essential role in advancing democratic governance, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and assisting Sierra Leone to develop into a more stable, secure, and prosperous partner for the United States. If confirmed, I commit to meet with civil society members, human rights and other non-governmental organizations in the United State, local human rights non-governmental organizations, and other members of civil society in Sierra Leone. It is essential that non-governmental organizations and civil society are afforded freedom to express their opinions and conduct their activities. If confirmed, I would advocate this position to government, non-governmental, and civil society leaders. I would continue and expand upon the Embassy's efforts to facilitate connections between government and civil society organizations to build trust and mitigate unhelpful restrictions on civil society or non-governmental organizations.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to meet with democratically oriented political opposition figures and parties? What steps will you take to encourage genuine political competition? Will you advocate for access and inclusivity for women, minorities and youth within political parties?

Answer. Yes. If confirmed, I would engage with representatives from across the democratically oriented political spectrum, including the ruling party and opposition parties, and would ensure that Embassy colleagues did the same. I would also advocate for political parties to adopt credible, internal democratic mechanisms. I understand that the Embassy has joined international partners in calling for an increased commitment to issues-based politics and dialogue and cooperation among political parties on issues of national interest. If confirmed, I would continue this practice, as well as the Embassy's advocacy for access and inclusivity for women, minorities, and youth within political parties.

Question. Will you and your Embassy team actively engage with Sierra Leone on freedom of the press and address any government efforts designed to control or undermine press freedom through legal, regulatory or other measures? Will you commit to meeting regularly with independent, local press in Sierra Leone?

Answer. Yes. I am committed to supporting media freedom and strengthening journalistic professionalism and to meeting regularly with independent, local press in Sierra Leone. If confirmed, I would continue the Embassy's practice of engaging with the media, like-minded partners, civil society, and non-governmental organizations to underscore the importance of an independent, professional, and open media to a free and democratic society. I would work to address any government efforts designed to control or undermine press freedom through legal, regulatory, or other measures. If confirmed, I would also support expanded educational and exchange opportunities for local media to help strengthen journalistic professionalism and build capacity. I understand that in the past, the Embassy has hosted these exchanges to raise awareness on issues such as public health, mis/disinformation, democracy, and elections. If confirmed, I would seek to continue those efforts.

Question. Will you and your Embassy team actively engage with civil society and government counterparts on countering disinformation and propaganda disseminated by foreign state or non-state actors in the country?

Answer. Yes. If confirmed, I would engage with like-minded international partners, civil society, the media, and government counterparts to counter disinformation and propaganda disseminated by foreign state and non-state actors in Sierra Leone and would ensure that the Embassy team did likewise.

Question. Will you and your Embassy teams actively engage with Sierra Leone on the right of labor groups to organize, including for independent trade unions?

Answer. If confirmed, I would continue our Embassy's efforts to promote internationally recognized labor rights, including for independent trade unions. I understand that the government of Sierra Leone generally protects the right to bargain collectively. If confirmed, I would advocate for continued improvements in this area as well as fair and consistent enforcement of labor laws.

Question. Will you commit to using your position, if confirmed, to defend the human rights and dignity of all people in Sierra Leone, no matter their sexual orientation or gender identity?

Answer. I understand that the U.S. Embassy in Sierra Leone is already working to defend the human rights and the dignity of all people in Sierra Leone, no matter their sexual orientation or gender identity. If confirmed, I am committed to continuing and building upon this work.

Question. What challenges do the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) people face in Sierra Leone?

Answer. According to the 2022 Human Rights Report, “LGBTQI+ advocates reported the community faced challenges ranging from stigma and discrimination to denial of public services such as health care and justice.” Human rights defenders in Sierra Leone report that societal prejudice against LGBTQI+ persons is strong and dissuades many LGBTQI+ persons from publicly identifying as such. This prejudice has significant impacts on the ability of LGBTQI+ persons to access employment, health care, and housing. Sierra Leone maintains a colonial-era law that criminalizes same-sex activity among men, but not among women.

Question. What specifically will you commit to do to help LGBTQ people in Sierra Leone?

Answer. If confirmed, I would support LGBTQI+ persons in Sierra Leone through outreach and inclusion in mission activities, and by speaking out on the importance of protecting the human rights of members of the LGBTQI+ community. I would meet periodically, and ensure that staff met regularly, with members of the LGBTQI+ community, to ensure the Mission’s work continues to “do no harm” and was always cognizant of the priorities of LGBTQI+ persons in Sierra Leone. I would facilitate linkages between LGBTQI+ groups and other human rights-oriented civil society groups to ensure that the human rights of LGBTQI+ individuals are included as part of broader human rights advocacy efforts with the Sierra Leonean government. I would seek to advocate with the Sierra Leonean government for the protection of human rights of all in Sierra Leone, including members of the LGBTQI+ community, and would prioritize advocacy for the issues of greatest importance to the LGBTQI+ community. I would also seek opportunities, where appropriate, to demonstrate U.S. support for the protection of the human rights of LGBTQI+ individuals publicly.

Question. Will you commit, if confirmed, to ensuring that you fully brief Members of Congress and/or their staff each time you are in Washington for visits or consultations during your tenure as Ambassador to Sierra Leone?

Answer. I have great respect for and place high value on the importance of the relationship between the executive and legislative branches of government. If confirmed, I commit to, working through the Department, to make myself available to fully brief Members of Congress and/or their staff each time I am in Washington for visits and consultations during my tenure as Ambassador to Sierra Leone.

Question. How do you anticipate fostering diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility at the U.S. Embassy in Sierra Leone?

Answer. If confirmed as chief of mission, I will lead the American and Sierra Leonean professionals in Mission Sierra Leone to advance our national security agenda in a safe, inclusive, and respectful workplace. I will communicate my commitment to a workplace in which diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility are core tenets of our mission culture. I will also make clear that discrimination, harassment, and bullying are absolutely not acceptable and take swift action to address any such issues that may arise. I will demonstrate my commitment to equal employment opportunity (EEO) principals and the work of Mission EEO counselors and locally engaged staff advisors. I will support and participate in programs that promote respect and diversity.

Question. What specifically will you do to prioritize and promote diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility, while also combating racism, discrimination, and inequality among locally employed staff in Sierra Leone?

Answer. If confirmed as chief of mission, first, I will demonstrate that diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) is a priority, through actions and words, and reinforce with my staff it should also be a priority for them. I will also make clear my strong opposition to harassment, discrimination, and bullying and ensure a prevention plan is in place. I will hold supervisors accountable and expect them to hold their team members accountable for acts of harassment, discrimination, or bullying. I will ensure mission personnel have access to all the resources they need to combat racism, discrimination, and inequality. If confirmed, I will meet regularly with post’s DEIA council at Mission Sierra Leone, participate in community activi-

ties to increase dialogue and inclusion, and promote a positive work environment among the Embassy team.

Question. In addition to focusing on diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility in our workforce, will you commit to engaging more equitably in operations and programming, particularly with potential partners and communities that traditionally have been marginalized, excluded, or underrepresented in ours and others' donor and partnership efforts? How do you anticipate utilizing local expertise, knowledge, and capacity to meet our foreign policy goals?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to engaging more equitably in our operations and programs and will lead Mission Sierra Leone to build relationships with all communities in Sierra Leonean society through active outreach. I will carefully monitor, evaluate, and coordinate the design and implementation of programming and assistance and extend their reach as far as possible. I will ensure that our representational events and public diplomacy programs include marginalized and underrepresented groups and that our human resources team uses diverse panels in hiring processes to ensure applicants are not being disadvantaged. I will work with our locally employed staff to expand our outreach efforts and leverage the various languages spoken within our mission to assist our U.S. officers in making connections beyond the capital.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO BRYAN DAVID HUNT BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

Democracy and Elections

Sierra Leone will hold elections on June 24. While elections will likely occur before you arrive at post, if confirmed, you will serve as U.S. Ambassador to Sierra Leone in the post-election period and in the initial months of the term of the president, parliament and local authorities.

Question. What is your view of the role of a U.S. Ambassador in supporting democratic institutions and democratic governance?

Answer. I view the role of a U.S. Ambassador in supporting democratic institutions and democratic governance as four-fold. First, the U.S. Ambassador should work in tandem with like-minded partners to advocate with political actors—both inside and outside of government—to strengthen democratic institutions and democratic governance practices in line with international best practices. In doing so, the U.S. Ambassador should advocate for transparency and accountability in government decision making and space in which political parties, civil society, and independent media can operate freely. Second, the U.S. Ambassador should work closely with independent, host country pro-democracy voices to help amplify their calls for review/reform of democratic institutions and democratic governance practices and to press for debate, consideration, and, as appropriate, enactment of reforms. Third, the U.S. Ambassador in a post-electoral environment should be pressing government institutions, opposition parties, and civil society to review and act upon the recommended reforms contained in national and international observation reports on the electoral contest to ensure that future contests are conducted in-line with international best practices. Finally, the U.S. Ambassador should be working with the Country Team and Washington to assess the democracy and governance programs in which the U.S. Government is involved and to ensure that such programs are adequately working to provide technical support for strengthening of key democratic institutions—both governmental and non-governmental.

Question. Do you commit to using your platform as U.S. Ambassador to Sierra Leone, if confirmed, to publicly amplify and support the democratic aspirations of the people of Sierra Leone?

Answer. Yes. If confirmed, I commit to using my platform as U.S. Ambassador to Sierra Leone to publicly amplify and support the democratic aspirations of the people of Sierra Leone.

Question. In your view, how can the United States better support the democratic aspirations of the people of Sierra Leone?

Answer. The lack of independence of key election-related institutions, insufficient judicial independence, insufficient legislative oversight, and endemic corruption stand out as some of the most significant challenges to the democratic aspirations of the people of Sierra Leone. To better support these aspirations, if confirmed, I would work with Sierra Leonean pro-democracy stakeholders and like-minded inter-

national partners to use Sierra Leone's 2023 national elections as a catalyst to encourage the Government, political opposition, civil society, and other stakeholders to embark on a national reflection on the state of Sierra Leone's democratic institutions. The United States should advocate that the recommendations from the 2023 international and domestic election observation reports—particularly those related to the politicization of key electoral institutions—form a key part of that reflection and resulting reforms. Available U.S. democracy and governance funding should be used to support the long-term strengthening of institutions identified for genuine reform and to further develop an independent judiciary, democratic political parties, and effective and independent civil society and media institutions.

Relationship with USAID

Question. As U.S. Ambassador to Sierra Leone, you will be Chief of Mission in a country with significant development challenges. While the U.S. has a significant foreign assistance portfolio in Sierra Leone, the USAID/Guinea Mission covers Sierra Leone from Conakry. How will you approach partnership with the USAID Mission Director and other USAID colleagues covering Sierra Leone remotely?

Answer. I recognize that, if confirmed, I would be leading a U.S. Government team comprised of personnel from multiple agencies, some based outside of Freetown. If confirmed, I would work closely with my USAID colleagues covering Sierra Leone remotely by holding regular coordination meetings involving USAID senior staff in Freetown, the USAID Mission Director in Conakry, and, as needed, key USAID personnel in Washington. Open and robust communication between the USAID Mission in Conakry and the Embassy in Sierra Leone is a must whether it is about planning for USAID activities in Sierra Leone, including the development of strategic priorities; implementation and evaluation of USAID programming in Sierra Leone; or international donor coordination. I would seek to ensure that a common approach that meets the needs of all stakeholders is adopted on key issues and already have assurances from USAID that they welcome increased collaboration. If confirmed, I would plan to make regularly scheduled visits to the USAID Mission in Conakry and, again, have received assurances from USAID that they will also schedule routine visits, including the USAID Mission Director, to Freetown.

Trade and Investment

Marampa Mines is the largest U.S. investment in Sierra Leone. Owned by the Gerald Group, in partnership with the Government of Sierra Leone, this major investment to increase iron ore production has led to the direct employment of some two thousand Sierra Leoneans, with a positive ripple effect in the local economy. In our competition with China, we should be supporting U.S. mining operations throughout Africa. Over the last several years, the U.S. Embassy in Freetown has been supportive of this project, advocating on its behalf with the Government and publicly visiting its site on at least two occasions.

Question. Are you aware of Marampa Mines?

Answer. Yes. I am aware of Marampa Mines and if confirmed, would seek to engage regularly with its leadership, and to provide Embassy support and advocacy where appropriate.

In your testimony, you stated that a priority of yours will be to “work closely with the U.S. business community to advocate for reforms that enhance Sierra Leone’s ability to attract high-quality foreign investment, including through regional market integration, while simultaneously using trade development tools to help ensure U.S. businesses remain competitive in the Sierra Leonean marketplace.”

Question. How would you practice commercial diplomacy on behalf of U.S. investments in Sierra Leone?

Answer. I understand that Sierra Leone's economy has significant potential for private sector investment, with abundant mineral resources, large areas of fertile land, well-stocked fisheries, and tourist development potential. If confirmed, I would work with Embassy Freetown's Deal Team to enhance our efforts to link U.S. firms with opportunities in Sierra Leone, whether through the International Trade Administration's (ITA) Express Leads system, reverse trade missions, or other commercial diplomacy tools at our disposal. I would ensure that our economic officers leverage our substantial economic toolkit, which includes Prosper Africa, Power Africa, USTDA, the Export Import Bank, and the DFC to help support U.S. businesses seeking to invest in or trade with Sierra Leone. If confirmed, I would utilize DFC and other trade development tools such as the Trade Development Agency and the

Export-Import Bank to offer viable alternatives to PRC-proposed debt-financed infrastructure projects. If confirmed, I would meet regularly with U.S. companies doing business in Sierra Leone and those interested in expanding their presence in Africa to understand investment and trade impediments in Sierra Leone and would advocate for their removal, using USAID trade and investment policy development tools as appropriate to support the Government of Sierra Leone in such reform efforts. Given the comparatively small size of the Sierra Leonean market, I would advocate for Sierra Leone's further economic integration into the wider West African marketplace and for continued reduction in tariff and non-tariff barriers to trade with its neighbors.

Question. What is your assessment of Sierra Leone's greatest barriers to increased two-way trade and investment with the United States?

Answer. Although the Government of Sierra Leone has a generally favorable attitude toward two-way trade and investment with the United States, and generally treats U.S. companies in a non-discriminatory fashion, U.S. businesses face obstacles, including corruption, low human capital development, poor infrastructure, and intermittent rule of law concerns. In addition, the small size of the Sierra Leonean domestic economy deters some U.S. businesses from the cost of entry into this new market. If confirmed, I would continue to urge the Government of Sierra Leone to improve on these investment and trade climate issues to strengthen their economy and make it a more attractive location for American businesses including through continued pursuit of full economic integration with other West African states.

Question. What is your understanding of the tools at your disposal—including through Prosper Africa—as U.S. Ambassador to Sierra Leone, if confirmed, to support addressing barriers to trade and investment in the enabling environment, including the need for economic and political reforms?

Answer. If confirmed, I understand that I would be able to access expertise within the State Department, USAID, and the Department of Commerce, including through Prosper Africa, to support addressing barriers to trade and investment in the enabling environment, including the need for economic and political reforms. Each of these agencies have programs that could potentially be utilized to assist the Government of Sierra Leone in analyzing barriers to trade and investment and in developing reform strategies to address such barriers. In addition, it is my understanding that, if confirmed, I would be able to use the full-range of U.S. Government trade and investment development agencies—including USTDA, the Export Import Bank, and DFC—to provide direct USG assistance to U.S. companies looking to expand trade and investment in Sierra Leone. Such assistance could help overcome barriers to trade and investment such as project financing and political risk. My understanding is that Prosper Africa serves as a one-stop shop through which U.S. and African companies can access USG assistance for expanded two-way trade and investment.

Question. How will you work with Prosper Africa leadership to ensure that Sierra Leone can benefit from Prosper Africa resources, tools and expertise?

Answer. If confirmed, I would seek to identify through consultation with the U.S. business community active in Sierra Leone those areas in which USG expertise could be most beneficial to removing barriers to trade and investment in Sierra Leone. I would work with Prosper Africa leadership and the Sierra Leonean Government to identify ways in which Prosper Africa could engage on such issues and provide technical assistance to advance necessary reforms. I would also anticipate a regular dialogue with Prosper Africa leadership, both in Washington D.C. and on the continent, to identify resources, tools and expertise that are best fitted to Sierra Leone.

Moreover, I would look to expand contact between the Embassy Deal Team and Prosper Africa to ensure that Prosper Africa was fully aware of emerging opportunities in the Sierra Leonean marketplace with an eye to bringing its tools, resources, and expertise to bear in identifying and assisting U.S. companies to take advantage of such opportunities—particularly in cases where an alternative to PRC investment is required.

Sudan

From 2019–2022, you worked in the Office of South Sudan and Sudan within the Bureau of African Affairs, including as the office director. You also served as the Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary for East Africa and the Sudans within the Bureau of African Affairs in 2021. Understanding that you have not been involved with Sudan policy since 2022, the following

questions are about your work on Sudan from the ouster of President Omar al-Bashir in 2019.

Question. In your experience, what is the process within the Bureau of African Affairs for decision making, particularly related to difficult or controversial issues? Was bureau leadership welcoming of opinions and/or dissent? How was dissent, in your experience, handled?

Answer. During my time as Office Director for South Sudan and Sudan, I worked for three different Africa Bureau Front Offices. While each had its own processes for decision making, in general terms, I found that each consulted closely with the Sudan Office, Embassy Khartoum, the Sudan Special Envoy (when filled), and other State Department and interagency stakeholders to assess all of the courses of action available to us—consistent with State Department senior leadership guidance—in order to advance the democratic transition in Sudan and to understand fully the risks and benefits of each potential course of action prior to making final decisions. In my experience, discussion on policy options was robust, and the Africa Bureau Front Offices welcomed feedback on whether or not courses of action being pursued were achieving desired results. In my experience, the Africa Bureau Front Offices were willing to adjust policy approaches based on feedback and the evolution of events on-the-ground. I also found them open to innovative thinking on alternative courses of action.

In the Foreign Policy article “How the U.S. Fumbled Sudan’s Hopes for Democracy,” a spokesperson for the State Department stated “U.S. engagement after the October 2021 military takeover was centered on supporting Sudanese civilian actors in a Sudanese-led process to re-establish a civilian-led transitional government.”

Question. Do you agree with that characterization of the U.S. policy after the October 2021 coup?

Answer. I would agree that U.S. engagement after the October 2021 military takeover was centered on supporting Sudanese civilian actors in a Sudanese-led process to re-establish a civilian-led transitional government in line with the democratic aspirations of the Sudanese people.

The same Foreign Policy article references an early 2022 “memo [that] was written and circulated within the State Department’s Bureau of African Affairs warning of the risks of current U.S. policy on Sudan and listing potential scenarios that could emerge from the rivalry between Burhan and Hemeti, including those tensions erupting into a full-scale conflict [the memo] was meant to go to U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken’s desk, but the draft was heavily edited, watered down, and never passed out of the bureau.”

Question. Are you aware of the existence of this memo? If yes, did you ever see it? Did you contribute to the memo?

Answer. I am not in a position to comment upon the accuracy or characterizations of media reports not based upon official Department communications. There were, of course, a large number of memos and policy papers that were drafted during my time in the Office of South Sudan and Sudan, including papers that discussed generally the risks of conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces, and, of course, included discussions of how to avoid and mitigate against those risks. Given my institutional position in the office, I would likely have reviewed and contributed to all such papers.

Question. Were you part of conversations where the memo was discussed internally? If yes, what decisions were made as to how to handle it?

Answer. Again, I am not in a position to comment upon press reporting that is not based upon official Department communications. In my institutional position, I would receive feedback from the Africa Bureau Front Office on various and numerous internal written products. Aside from the timeframe when I served as Acting DAS, I was not generally involved in discussions related to when, whether, or in what final form to move written products forward to senior State Department principals.

Question. Did you edit or change the contents of the memo? If so, what were your changes?

Answer. Again, I am not in a position to comment on any matters in press reporting where such reporting is not based upon official Department communications. Consistent with my institutional role as an Office Director, I provided input to nu-

merous products designed to ensure that the challenges and recommended courses of action to senior policymakers were clearly articulated and that they reflected Africa Bureau Front Office policy guidance. My edits on products related, in general terms, to the prospect for conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces would have focused on ensuring that the risk of conflict was clearly articulated and that policy recommendations reflected effective approaches to diminish further the political and economic influence of military actors.

On May 4, 2023, President Biden issued an executive order on imposing sanctions on certain persons destabilizing Sudan and undermining the goal of a democratic transition. To date, no individuals or entities have been designated for sanctions under the executive order. We understand that there were robust debates within the State Department as to whether or not to pursue sanctions for certain individuals and entities, dating back to at least the October 2021 coup.

Question. During your time in the Bureau for African Affairs covering Sudan after the October 2021 coup, what was your stance on whether or not to pursue sanctions against the leadership of Sudan's military junta?

Answer. Between October 25, 2021, and July 2022, I and other State Department officials frequently reassessed our approach to Sudan, explored alternatives, and prepared for contingencies including the use of sanctions. I, and others, have preferred the use of other pressures that were more likely to have a meaningful impact on military regime leaders' finances, given the lack of their financial assets subject to U.S. jurisdiction. These included the suspension of direct assistance and preventing HIPC Debt Relief or support from international financial institutions, advising international businesses against investing in Sudanese military/government-controlled companies, restricting USG and international contracting with Sudanese military-owned security and logistics companies, establishing international mechanisms to restrict the export of Sudanese gold by military and military-linked companies, and use of sanctions and visa restrictions on those responsible for human rights abuses. I also favored working with Congress to craft legislation that would have allowed for sanctions against third country entities handling financial assets belonging to leaders of the military regime, their family members, and businesses.

Trafficking in Persons

In the State Department's 2022 Trafficking in Persons Report Sierra Leone remained on Tier 2 for its efforts to meet the minimum standards to combat trafficking.

Question. If confirmed, what concrete steps could you take to help Sierra Leone operationalize the prioritized recommendations contained in the TIP report?

Answer. I understand that the State Department's Office to Combat Trafficking-in-Persons has provided a grant to the University of Georgia to work with the Government of Sierra Leone and non-governmental organizations to strengthen efforts to prevent trafficking-in-persons, specifically the sex and labor trafficking of children. This program would carry out similar, integrated work in other regional countries and would, if successfully implemented, help address many of the recommendations contained in the Sierra Leone Trafficking in Persons report. If confirmed, I would press the Government of Sierra Leone to take full advantage of this assistance, to adopt the legal and procedural reforms recommended as part of it, and to cooperate fully with regional partners in combating trafficking. I would also meet regularly with implementors of this grant on-the-ground to ensure effective implementation.

Religious Freedom

In the State Department's 2022 International Religious Freedom report, Sierra Leone was noted as generally having governmental and societal respect for religious freedom.

Question. What is your assessment of this particular issue and if confirmed, how will you work with the Ambassador At Large for International Religious Freedom to bolster religious freedom in-country?

Answer. The Sierra Leonean constitution provides for the protection of fundamental human rights and freedoms of the individual, including freedom of thought and of religion. The law prohibits religious discrimination and allows all persons to observe their own religious practices and to change religions without interference from the Government or members of other religious groups. If confirmed, I would continue the Embassy's long-standing advocacy for religious tolerance and freedom,

and engagement with members of all faiths in Sierra Leone. I would work closely with the Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom and Office for International Religious Freedom, so our approach in Sierra Leone to promoting religious freedom is informed by the most recent guidance and best practices.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to personally engaging with civil society on this issue?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to personally engage with civil society on promoting religious freedom.

Question. If confirmed, what concrete steps can you take to help Sierra Leone increase their societal and governmental respect for religious freedom?

Answer. If confirmed, I would use my position to host religious leaders for roundtable discussions, and I would meet with religious leaders during in-country trips to emphasize the important role they can play to prevent and mitigate conflict. I would leverage our Public Diplomacy programming and exchanges to find opportunities to expose young leaders to religious freedom issues. I would also seek opportunities for U.S.-based experts on religious freedom to visit Sierra Leone and interact with various audiences in and out of the capital.

Human Rights

In the State Department's 2022 Human Rights Report, Sierra Leone was noted for having significant human rights abuses which included corruption, a lack of freedom of expression and assembly, and more.

Question. How will you direct your Embassy to work with civil society organizations to improve the human rights situation on the ground?

Answer. Working with civil society organizations is critical to our understanding of the human rights situation in Sierra Leone as they are on the frontline of addressing challenges facing their communities. If confirmed, I would encourage my team to continue to work closely with civil society so that the United States has an accurate picture of human rights concerns so that we can address them with the Government and design programming to improve the human rights situation in Sierra Leone. I understand the Embassy discusses human rights issues with the Government at the highest level and I would continue to do this, if confirmed. In such interactions, I would seek to be forthright with the Government about our concerns and would press for transparent, independent legal processes through which accountability could be addressed.

State Management and Oversight

Many U.S. missions have been under enormous stress over the last several years, in large part due to COVID.

Question. What is your understanding of morale throughout Mission Freetown?

Answer. My understanding is that morale is good at Mission Freetown despite the challenging environment and the lingering impact of stress from COVID-19. Personnel in Freetown have a strong sense of purpose and mission. They see the results of their work and see the rewards, including through promotions.

Question. How do you intend to improve morale at Mission Freetown?

Answer. My tours overseas have taught me the importance of being attentive to each employee's professional development and ensuring that they know how their work fits into the Embassy's mission and achievement of Department goals. It also is important to take care of the needs of eligible family members through employment, quality education, and activities that bring the community together. Creating and maintaining an environment free of harassment and bullying is a hallmark of my leadership style and essential for employees to flourish. If confirmed, I would model the importance of work-life balance and ensure our managers know how to set priorities and negotiate deadlines to avoid employee burn out and promote resilience. I would advocate with Washington to ensure that assigned workload and deadlines are appropriate for a post of Sierra Leone's limited size and would seek to ensure that assigned workload dovetails with our agreed-upon policy objectives in Sierra Leone.

Question. How do you intend to create a unified mission and vision at Mission Freetown?

Answer. If confirmed, I would be leading a U.S. Government team comprised of personnel from multiple agencies. This means ensuring all agencies understand the mission and activities of others and discussing the tradeoffs that often need to be made on foreign policy goals or Embassy operations together. I have found that a

structured approach should include weekly Country Team meetings, weekly meetings with agency leaders that include the DCM to discuss programs and events, and mission-wide participation in the Integrated Country Strategy and Mission Resource Request planning cycles. Mission-wide off-sites and professional development days would be used to review our progress and develop our workforce skillsets and build a sense of community and mission. Finally, if confirmed, under my leadership, Mission Freetown would review our goals and achievements as we update our Integrated Country Strategy. This is an effective tool to keep all agency activity in-line with our mission goals.

Management is a Key Responsibility for Chiefs of Mission

Question. How would you describe your management style?

Answer. I strive to maintain a workplace atmosphere where mistakes are turned into learning opportunities. I would coach our employees through decision-making processes to develop their leadership skills and provide regular mentoring and support. I am decisive, but inclusive of a wide range of views and will communicate the “why” of a decision to make sure those who were involved and those not involved understand what the Executive Office will be doing and the rationale for it. If confirmed, the Deputy Chief of Mission and I would be attentive to workplace issues and create an environment free from bullying, harassment, and discrimination.

Question. Do you believe it is ever acceptable or constructive to berate subordinates, either in public or in private?

Answer. It is never acceptable or constructive to berate subordinates. Performance and conduct management needs to be a regular and ongoing process. Mistakes are learning opportunities and correcting them should be an inclusive, constructive process that is done in private.

Question. How do you envision your relationship with the Deputy Chief of Mission?

Answer. As a former DCM and long-term Charge d’Affaires myself, I understand what it takes to establish and nurture a strong, collaborative relationship between the Ambassador and DCM. If confirmed, I would listen and learn from the experience of the current DCM and respect the relationships she has established with Sierra Leonean officials and within the mission. I view the DCM role as a force multiplier and as someone who must be ready to step in during my absence, so she will be involved in key internal and external meetings. I would expect her to deliver her honest, frank opinion so that together we can make the best decisions possible. I would create an environment in which she can feel free to disagree with me when we consider options or suggest course corrections but would ensure that we present a united front to the mission once a decision is made. Leadership at the top must be proactive, consistent, and fair. If confirmed, I am confident the DCM and I would be able to create a positive work experience for our team in Freetown.

Question. If confirmed, what leadership responsibilities do you intend to entrust to your Deputy Chief of Mission?

Answer. The Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM) is arguably the most difficult position at post. If confirmed, I would leverage my experience as a DCM to establish a strong and symbiotic relationship to oversee mission operations and conduct our foreign policy. If confirmed, as I lead the mission, I would need to be able to work through the DCM to ensure that we are protecting U.S. Government resources across agencies, running an efficient Interagency Cooperative Services platform, and supporting our personnel needs. The DCM would play the role of chief operating officer of the mission but also be involved in our foreign policy agenda. I would include her in meetings with government officials and in communications with Washington. She would ensure that performance management, budget oversight, and human resources platforms are performing effectively, and our operations soundly steward U.S. Government resources. I would expect her to develop her managerial skills across all aspects of mission life and would coach her as needed. I also would ensure that the DCM and our other employees share in our representational activities to expand our outreach activities. I would expect the DCM to oversee our leadership, mentoring, Family Advocacy, and Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility programs.

In order to create and continue employee excellence at the Department, accurate and direct employee evaluation reports (EERs) for Foreign Service Officers are imperative, though often lacking.

Question. Do you believe that it is important to provide employees with accurate, constructive feedback on their performance in order to encourage improvement and reward those who most succeed in their roles?

Answer. Yes. I believe that establishing open communications between employees and their supervisors is at the core of effective performance management. Throughout my career, I have mentored supervisors on how to provide effective feedback and write employees' performance reviews and counseling documents. If confirmed, I would continue to pay close attention to developing the performance management skills of our supervisors and the employee's understanding of how the system benefits their professional development. I would seek to ensure that top performers are rewarded and that those with performance challenges receive the appropriate, constructive feedback and support required to address them.

Question. If confirmed, would you support and encourage clear, accurate, and direct feedback to employees in order to improve performance and reward high achievers?

Answer. Yes. I believe that establishing open communications between employees and their supervisors is at the core of effective performance management. Throughout my career, I have mentored supervisors on how to provide clear, accurate, and direct feedback and write employees' performance reviews and counseling documents that include such feedback. If confirmed, I would continue to pay close attention to developing the performance management skills of our supervisors and the employee's understanding of how the system benefits their professional development. I would seek to ensure that top performers are rewarded and that those with performance challenges receive the clear, accurate, and direct feedback and professional development support required to address them.

It is imperative that U.S. diplomats get outside of posts abroad to meet with local actors, including host government officials, non-government organizations, and local citizens.

Question. In your experience, do U.S. diplomats get outside of our Embassy walls enough to fully accomplish their missions?

Answer. I believe that Mission leadership largely sets the tone and the expectations that determine whether U.S. diplomats sufficiently get outside of our Embassy walls. Throughout my career, I have consistently modeled going outside of the mission walls to meet and cultivate a wide range of contacts in and outside the capital and major cities. I do not believe that it is possible to be effective as a diplomat without such significant outreach. If confirmed, I would continue to reach beyond the Embassy walls and to encourage all Embassy staff to do likewise. To enable these efforts, I would work closely with my DCM and the Regional Security Office to ensure that we are managing any associated risks smartly and proactively and that we identify and receive the resources necessary to support robust Mission in-country travel.

Question. How do you intend to improve the ability of U.S. diplomats to better access all local populations?

Answer. If confirmed, I would encourage and support in-country travel with adequate security resources and mentor employees on thinking-outside-the-box on how to reach local populations. On a regular basis, I would ensure that our employees are maintaining contacts with regional leaders at all levels and meeting with them in their areas and when they come to the capital. This also means ensuring that employees are using representational events and funds to cultivate contacts and promote mission goals. I would support cross-cultural learning from our locally employed staff and U.S. employees as well as learning of local languages.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO BRYAN DAVID HUNT BY SENATOR MARCO RUBIO

Question. In May 2022, Secretary Blinken said that the People's Republic of China is the "only country with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do it." The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) clearly holds the reins of power in the People's Republic of China and has used this power to commit genocide in Xinjiang, flood our communities with fentanyl, and emit, by far the largest quantity of greenhouse gases in the world today. With their absolute control of Chinese society and indus-

try, the CCP could stop all of these destructive actions tomorrow if they so choose. Is the Chinese Communist Party a threat to the United States?

Answer. Earlier this year, the Director of National Intelligence testified that “the CCP represents both the leading and most consequential threat to U.S. national security and leadership globally.” Under President Xi, the CCP has become more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad, seeking to undercut U.S. influence and alliances. If confirmed, I would advance U.S. national security interests and push back against People’s Republic of China (PRC) efforts to expand its problematic influence, through robust and forthright diplomatic engagements, public diplomacy, and commercial advocacy to bolster U.S.- Sierra Leone ties.

Question. Does the Chinese Communist Party undertake any activities that are beneficial to U.S. interests?

Answer. The Administration assesses the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) activities in the context of the fact that, as Secretary Blinken has said, the CCP has become more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad. According to the Office of the Director of National Intelligence’s 2023 Annual Threat Assessment, the CCP is seeking to “undercut U.S. influence, drive wedges between Washington and its partners, and foster some norms that favor its authoritarian system.”

Question. Do you believe that there are any areas within which the Chinese Communist Party would constructively work with the United States in good faith?

Answer. As the United States competes vigorously with the PRC, the United States manages this competition responsibly so that competition does not veer into conflict. The United States will work with the PRC to address transnational challenges, such as climate change, when it is in our interest to do so—as Secretary Blinken has said, not as a favor to us or anyone else, and never in exchange for walking away from our principles, but because it is what the world expects. If confirmed, I would work with the Department of State’s new Office of China Coordination to advance U.S. objectives and counter harmful behavior by the PRC.

Question. If confirmed, will you approve any joint activity with organizations or representatives from the People’s Republic of China in the country in which you will work?

Answer. If confirmed, my priority will be advancing U.S. national security interests in Sierra Leone and countering efforts by our strategic and regional competitors to undermine those interests. The Administration has been clear that the PRC is the most consequential geopolitical challenge facing the United States, and that the United States is committed to working to strengthen our partners in the region. If confirmed, I would work closely with Department of State and interagency colleagues and Congress to address the PRC’s efforts to expand its influence in Sierra Leone and the region.

Question. U.S. and Sierra Leone relations have been described as warm and cordial, and in early 2021, the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) concluded a four-year, \$44.4 million project to deliver water and electrical services in and around Freetown. What are the outcomes of the MCC program?

Answer. MCC and the Government of Sierra Leone completed the \$44 million threshold program in March 2021. The program supported reforms and improved governance in the water and electricity sectors. By supporting independent regulation, strengthening public utilities, and increasing transparency and accountability, the program helped to deliver water and electricity services more effectively to the people of Sierra Leone. The tariff reforms adopted by the national electricity utility as part of the threshold program increased revenues by \$1 million USD per month. The threshold program improved clean water access through the construction of 10 new water kiosks operating under a public, private partnership model. The newly constructed water kiosks are providing safe, accessible, and sustainable water to 15,000 residents, while also significantly reducing the time spent by community members on water collection. A new digital map of Freetown’s water distribution system allows the Guma Valley Water Company to better assess the water system’s performance and more efficiently address service delivery problems. The threshold program also “set the stage” for expanding critical access to electricity for Sierra Leoneans and supported the U.S. Government’s Power Africa initiative.

Question. What are the other major opportunities of the U.S.-Sierra Leone partnership?

Answer. U.S. partnership with Sierra Leone has the ability to solidify Sierra Leone’s rejection of the PRC’s authoritarian, state-centric model of development. Through continuing to offer viable private sector infrastructure development alter-

natives and investing in democratic institutions that deliver effective services to the Sierra Leonean people, the United States can advance the democratic, free-market development model desired by most Sierra Leoneans, undercut PRC inroads in West Africa, advance global health security, and advance prosperity for both Americans and Sierra Leoneans. If confirmed, I would focus on the strengthening of democratic institutions, development of Sierra Leone's public health sector, and advancing U.S. investment in and trade with Sierra Leone in order to further the U.S.-Sierra Leone partnership.

Question. If confirmed, how would you further utilize U.S. Development Finance Corporation projects, like the one regarding debt finance for a new power plan in Freetown?

Answer. I understand the Embassy has robust engagement with Sierra Leone on project identification and financing and that DFC representatives visit Sierra Leone often to determine how to support possible U.S. investment in local projects. For example, DFC CEO Scott Nathan visited in July 2022. If confirmed, I would direct our Deal Team to enhance our efforts to link U.S. firms with opportunities in Sierra Leone appropriate for DFC financing, whether through the International Trade Administration's (ITA) Express Leads system, reverse trade missions, or other commercial diplomacy tools at our disposal. I would pay particular attention to utilizing DFC to offer viable alternatives to PRC-proposed debt-financed infrastructure projects. If confirmed, I would meet regularly with U.S. companies interested in expanding their presence in Africa to discuss opportunities in Sierra Leone and to underscore DFC as a potential tool to support their businesses.

Question. China is Sierra Leone's top trade partner in the mining industry and the CCP has financed a number of the country's infrastructure projects, including port, rail, and ore mining projects. While President Bio canceled some CCP projects upon assuming office, Bio has since continued to express support and signed new contracts with CCP firms and projects. Do Sierra Leonean ties to China threaten U.S. interests?

Answer. I understand that Beijing's engagements in Africa are expanding, including in Sierra Leone. I also understand that the PRC continues to exploit—both legally and illegally—Sierra Leonean resources, particularly in the fisheries, forestry, and minerals sectors. I am gravely concerned that such PRC activities and its proposed infrastructure investments in Sierra Leone are not being carried out in line with internationally accepted standards, such as those spelled out in the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, and the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights. If confirmed, I would seek to identify and promote socially responsible foreign investment alternatives to those being pushed by the PRC—particularly U.S. investment—that promote sustainable development and respect for human rights of all individuals.

Question. According to reports, positive perceptions of China in Sierra Leone dropped between 2015 and 2020. What do you believe accounts for this drop?

Answer. Despite billions in PRC investment and over 50 years of relations with Sierra Leone, the United States remains the partner of choice for most Sierra Leoneans. A recent Afrobarometer survey found that Sierra Leoneans view the economic and political influence of the United States on their country more favorably than that of the PRC. The U.S. Embassy promotes sustainable development and respect for human rights of all individuals. U.S. Embassy engagement on important issues such as public health, democracy and governance, and trafficking in persons are often featured on the front page of newspapers, discussed on the radio and television, and posted on social media. I believe that U.S. Embassy engagement on these topics throughout the country has provided an opportunity for Sierra Leoneans to see and hear from the United States to better understand our core values and partnership with Sierra Leone. If confirmed, I will continue these engagements and meet with Sierra Leoneans all over the country to demonstrate U.S. commitment to deepening our partnership.

There is also a substantial Sierra Leonean diaspora population residing in the United States with close connections to the country. If confirmed, I will engage with the Sierra Leone diaspora in the United States.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO WILLIAM W. POPP BY SENATOR ROBERT MENENDEZ

Question. The Department of State's 2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for Uganda documents arbitrary killings, forced disappearance, restriction to freedom of expression, and torture by government agencies. On March 28, 2022, I asked the Administration to provide (1) "a list of detention facilities known to be used by Ugandan security forces for illegal detention and torture, as well as the units that operate these facilities and the senior officers responsible for their operation;" and (2) "a list of units and security force members in Uganda barred from receiving training and assistance under the Leahy Laws." With regard to Ugandan units and security force members barred under Leahy, the Africa Bureau stated that "we have not worked with the Special Forces Command since early 2016; we also do not work with elements of the Chieftancy of Military Intelligence, which have been credibly implicated in gross violations of human rights."

Please clarify the following: Have the Chieftancy of Military Intelligence (CMI) and the Special Forces Command been denied training under the Leahy Laws?

Answer. Following interagency reviews of the human rights practices of the Special Forces Command (SFC) and elements within the Chieftancy of Military Intelligence (CMI), these groups were determined to be ineligible for U.S. training and assistance. All support to the SFC ceased in 2016. The SFC and CMI have not been proposed for further training or assistance since that time, so application of the Leahy law has not arisen.

Question. The U.S. imposed visa restrictions on the former head of CMI under a previous administration. Has the U.S. also imposed visa restrictions on the current or former leadership of the Ugandan Special Forces Command? If not, why not?

Answer. Designations under some legal authorities may or must be privately held. On April 16, 2021, Secretary Blinken announced visa restrictions under Section 212(a)(3)(C) of the Immigration and Nationality Act, but under U.S. law, individual visa records are confidential. We cannot provide details about who is affected, but Secretary Blinken did announce that they would be applied against Ugandan security forces who were "responsible for the deaths and injuries of dozens of innocent bystanders and opposition supporters, as well as violence against journalists that occurred before, during, and after the elections." I understand additional visa restrictions will be considered as new evidence and information become available.

Question. Are there other "elements" of CMI that continue to receive U.S. assistance? If yes, please specify what "elements" of CMI continue to receive U.S. assistance, what type assistance they receive, and why these "elements" of CMI have not also been banned under Leahy for human rights abuses.

Answer. Some units and individuals of CMI that are not accused of human rights abuses remain eligible for technical assistance. These units and individuals primarily have investigatory responsibilities under policing functions and have received limited U.S. technical assistance to counter illicit trade in goods. As the Ugandan military has expanded its role into a variety of non-military functions, including law enforcement, U.S. Government agencies believe that continuing to retain very limited and focused contact with law enforcement investigatory offices that fall under the CMI umbrella, but which have no human rights concerns, furthers U.S. security and law enforcement interests. For example, recently, the U.S. Government provided assistance to a unit of CMI that is active in combatting illegal trafficking of conflict minerals to help reduce the trafficking of illegally obtained minerals from eastern DRC through Uganda.

Question. Please provide, as requested more than a year ago, a full list of the names of Ugandan security force members and units denied training under Leahy.

Answer. As the nominee to serve as Ambassador to Uganda, I have not been involved any decisions or vetting of Ugandan security force members or units. However, I understand that no list of names or units denied training exists because so few have been candidates for training in recent years and of the few individuals trained, all have passed Leahy vetting. In that time, U.S. Government agencies have only provided very limited technical assistance to a small component of CMI, where there was no evidence that any training recipient has engaged in human rights violations or abuses. The training assistance was non-military in nature and all of the participants nominated to participate in this training passed Leahy vetting. Additionally, for the very limited assistance available to Ugandan military forces primarily for peacekeeping operations, I understand that the U.S. Embassy in Kampala has fully Leahy vetted all participants and restricted the training to that which incorporates human rights components.

In recent hearings on the Sudan, the Sahel, and Russia I have expressed concern that the State Department's Africa Bureau appears to be allergic to sanctioning African Government officials. In Uganda, where the Government relies on torture, forced disappearances, and extra judicial killings to silence critics, sanctions could be an important tool for pressuring Ugandan officials to respect rule of law and basic democratic and human rights norms. But sanctions cannot work if we do not use them. Under Section 7031(c) visa restrictions are mandatory if the Secretary of State has "credible information" implicating—either directly or indirectly—a current or former government official in corruption or human rights abuses. During your tenure as Ambassador to Guatemala, the United States sanctioned dozens of individuals in Guatemala. In Uganda, on the other hand, this Administration has announced only one sanction under 7031(c) for human rights abuses and that designation—while revealed publicly in December 2021—was actually made several years before. This Administration has not imposed any new 7031(c) restrictions on any Ugandan officials for human rights abuses or corruption, despite widespread human rights violations and corruption within the Museveni regime.

Question. How many individuals were subjected to sanctions in Guatemala during your tenure as Ambassador? How many of these individuals were Guatemalan Government officials?

Answer. Since 2020, 65 individuals have been designated in Guatemala under either Global Magnitsky, Section 7031(c), or the Section 353 Corrupt and Undemocratic Actors Report. Of that total, 38 have been government officials (including the judiciary, legislative, and executive branches) or former government officials designated for their activities during their public tenure. The other designees have been from the private sector or members of family of primary designees. Additional individuals have been privately designated under Section 212(a)(3)(c) authorities.

Question. Based on your experience, are sanctions effective? Please provide some examples of how sanctions had an impact during your tenure as U.S. Ambassador to Guatemala.

Answer. I believe we should use the tools Congress has given the Executive Branch to fight corruption and prevent human rights violations and abuses. The use of sanctions and visa restrictions can be effective when based on clear facts and applied as part of an overall strategy to support respect for human rights, counter corruption, and encourage democratic governance.

While I served as U.S. Ambassador in Guatemala, the United States designated more than 60 individuals and their family members in accordance with authorities provided by the U.S. Congress. We have used all available tools, including Global Magnitsky for the first time and, where possible, have done coordinated joint designations with likeminded international partner governments. Many of the designations have received prominent public attention, helping dissuade corrupt officials, impeded malign actors, increased transparency in economic sectors threatened by corruption, and increased accountability for violators of human rights.

If confirmed, I will work diligently with willing Ugandan authorities, national and international non-government organizations, and U.S. Government agencies to support the rule of law. Such efforts, combined with targeted use of sanctions and visa restrictions in accordance with U.S. law, can help demonstrate that the United States is a tireless and sure partner on human rights issues in keeping with our nation's values.

Question. If confirmed, will you commit to considering using sanctions as a tool to increase pressure on governments and individual government officials to respect basic democratic and human rights norms?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed I commit to doing so in accordance with the statutory requirements of the sanctions, designations, and visa revocations authorities provided by the U.S. Congress to the U.S. Executive Branch.

Question. Does the Department currently have a sanctions strategy for Uganda? If not, will you commit to drafting one if confirmed?

Answer. The Department of State remains committed to continually evaluating the potential for new sanctions and visa restrictions targets for Uganda, particularly in acute cases such as recent legislation which would violate the human rights of the LGBTQI+ community. In general, the Department continually gathers evidence of allegations of human rights abuses and violations and corruption for consideration of new sanctions proposals. If confirmed, I commit to developing a working group within the Embassy comprised of all stakeholder offices and agencies at post

to ensure coordination in the gathering of evidence, sharing information on alleged perpetrators of human rights abuses and violations and corruption, and development of nominations for designations review in Washington. I initiated this approach at U.S. Embassy Guatemala, which was productive in enhancing coordination and use of the tools that the Congress has given the Executive Branch to fight corruption and prevent human rights abuses.

Earlier this year, the Ugandan parliament passed “anti-homosexuality” legislation that will violate the human rights of all Ugandans, increase violence toward LGBTQI+ individuals, and greatly undermine efforts to combat the spread of HIV/AIDS. When Uganda adopted similar legislation in December 2013, the United State redirected funding away from the Ugandan Government, cut some security assistance, and imposed travel bans on senior Ugandan officials implicated in human rights abuses or corruption.

Question. How do you intend to engage with the Ugandan Government on this issue? Please outline specific strategies that you plan to use to advocate for the protection of the rights of LGBTQI+ individuals in Uganda.

Answer. If confirmed, and after consultation with the local LGBTQI+ community to ensure our actions “do no harm,” I would engage the Ugandan Government and Ugandan stakeholders directly about how the anti-homosexuality bill has increased the threat of violence against the LGBTQI+ community and undermined respect for human rights. If President Museveni signs the bill into law and it is implemented, the law could impact U.S. foreign assistance and deter trade, investment, and tourism to Uganda. It could also have serious consequences for the viability of the U.S. PEPFAR program, the fight against HIV/AIDS, and the health of all Ugandans.

I would engage the Ugandan Government on the importance of protecting the fundamental human rights and safety of LGBTQI+ people as well as upholding Uganda’s international legal commitments to protect and defend the human rights of all people. I would point out that individuals responsible for violence or human rights abuses against LGBTQI+ persons could be subject to sanctions, public designations, and/or visa restrictions under U.S. law. I would work with the Embassy team to publicly and privately engage civil society organizations, including those that represent the LGBTQI+ community or are working in public health areas including HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment. I would coordinate with international and local implementing partners to publicly underscore how the fear and discrimination stoked by the AHA is deterring people from receiving health treatment, thereby risking the lives of Ugandans from all backgrounds. I would also consult with civil society on their priorities to protect LGBTQI+ persons from violence and work to identify areas in which U.S. assistance programs could be directed or increased to help prevent violence and discrimination. Finally, I would ensure that our programming and resources for advancing human rights and governance goals for all Ugandans, regardless of their identity or background, are implemented efficiently and effectively.

Question. What steps will the Department take now to ensure that our response to the new iteration of Uganda’s “anti-homosexuality” bill includes and expands upon the actions the U.S. took nearly ten years ago in 2014?

Answer. The Ugandan president has not yet signed and implemented the Anti-Homosexuality Bill of 2023. The U.S. Government interagency is reviewing all appropriate measures should the president choose to sign the bill into law and implement it, including expanding on USG responses from 2014. While no final decision has yet been made, U.S. Government agencies are examining using existing authorities to impose visa restrictions and sanctions on those who may violate the human rights of Ugandans, including LGBTQI+ individuals, undermine democracy or engage in corruption under the law. They are also investigating the possibility of new visa restrictions, continued eligibility for trade preferences like AGOA, the impact the AHA may have on our assistance programs, updating our travel warning to Uganda, and additional measures.

Question. Will you commit to regularly meet, in person and on a bilateral basis, with Ugandan LGBTQI+ activists and organizations?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed, I commit to regularly meet with Ugandan LGBTQI+ persons and organizations, as well as other human rights defenders and organizations.

Question. Will you commit to regularly meet with and brief U.S.-based human rights groups on actions the U.S. Embassy in Kampala is taking to defend the rights of LGBTQI+ individuals in Uganda?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed, I commit to regularly meet and brief U.S.-based human rights groups on the actions the U.S. Embassy in Kampala and U.S. Government are taking to defend the rights of LGBTQI+ persons in Uganda.

Question. My understanding is that the Center for Disease Control continues to provide significant direct support to the Ugandan Ministry of Health to include business class travel for the Ugandan Health Minister—who was filmed praying for the passage of the “anti-homosexuality” law in the office of the Ugandan Speaker of Parliament the day the bill was adopted. Do you think it is appropriate, in light of Uganda’s passage of new “anti-homosexuality” legislation, for the United States to continue to provide funding directly to Ministry of Health and fund the Health Minister’s business class travel? Will this support for the Ugandan Health Ministry and Health Minister continue on your watch as U.S. Ambassador to Uganda if confirmed?

Answer. The Ministry of Health (MOH) is the official Ugandan public institution responsible for ensuring health service delivery for Ugandans and has been a long-standing institutional partner in efforts to control HIV, tuberculosis (TB), malaria and to promote global health security in Uganda and globally for over two decades. The MOH has stated its support to non-discriminatory health services in the past. If confirmed, I would continue to actively engage the MOH to not discriminate against any person. I would also clearly convey the potential impacts, including potential funding cuts, that the AHA could make necessary if the legislation is enacted. At the same time, I would lead U.S. health agencies at post to thoroughly review and explore all feasible options for increasing work with any non-governmental organizations or alternative institutions that could provide access to health care services to LGBTQI+ community members in the event of decreased cooperation with the MOH, understanding that NGOs could face significant limitations to providing equivalent capabilities as the MOH.

Question. In light of Uganda’s passage of “anti-homosexuality” legislation, how will you work to ensure that all U.S. agencies and implementing partners, as well as International Financial Institutions to include the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, are complying with nondiscrimination agreements and in full compliance with nondiscrimination policies?

Answer. If confirmed, I will work with Embassy and U.S. agencies in Washington to require inclusive programming and closely monitor partner compliance with their agreements. Further, I would continue efforts that I understand are underway to engage the World Bank, the IMF and other like-minded development partner groups, to which the United States is a significant donor, to enforce existing contractual agreements and to identify additional measures that could be considered and included in new financing with the Government of Uganda. I will likewise advocate that the U.S. Government engage its full set of diplomatic, economic and contractual rights and responsibilities to further U.S. foreign policy objectives.

The Ugandan military has been engaged in Somalia for nearly two decades and received significant U.S. support. Inside Uganda, however, the same military is responsible for widespread gross violations of human rights going back decades.

Question. What is the total value of U.S. security assistance and security cooperation for the Ugandan military?

Answer. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2023, State Department-funded security assistance for Uganda’s military is approximately \$18 million, with \$760,000 in bilateral funds (International Military Education and Training, IMET), about \$8 million in peace-keeping operations (PKO) funding to support Uganda’s participation in the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) and \$9 million from Global Peace Operations Initiative (GPOI) for continued programming to build Uganda’s peace-keeping capacity. The Department of Defense-implemented PEPFAR programming is worth about \$16 million, but it is not considered security assistance or security cooperation. About \$12 million is channeled through the public health sector aiding civilians through HIV/AIDS programming, infectious diseases surveillance, and medical research and an additional \$4 million supports HIV/AIDS programs which primarily benefit Uganda People’s Defense Forces soldiers but aids the overall goal of ending HIV/AIDS as a public health threat by 2030.

Question. Please list the full range of U.S. sponsored engagements, trainings, or other planned support for the Uganda military in 2023.

Answer. I understand that engagement with the Ugandan military can shift depending on funding and scheduling. Nevertheless, it is always consistent with U.S.

policy regarding Leahy vetting and human rights concerns. Engagement currently focuses on support for Uganda's peacekeeping operations in other countries, as well as professionalization training which includes human rights elements and enables the United States to offset engagement by strategic competitors. For 2023, U.S. engagement includes: advisors for Uganda's Peace Support Operations Training Center which supports pre-deployment training for ATMIS in Somalia; health assistance to provide HIV/AIDS support which furthers our goal of ending the epidemic as a public health threat by 2030; Defense Institute of International Legal Studies programs on human rights training; an ATMIS Lessons Learned Workshop; an ATMIS Legal Advisors Roundtable; International Military Education Training (IMET) exchanges; pilot training for personnel operating ATMIS aircraft in Somalia; and training on anti-wildlife trafficking practices.

Question. What specific steps has the United States taken to hold individual senior Ugandan military officials responsible for gross violations of human rights perpetrated against Ugandan citizens in Uganda?

Answer. Two military officials, Gen. Kale Kayihura (2019) and Maj. Gen. Abel Kandiho (2021), were designated for financial sanctions by the U.S. Department of the Treasury under Global Magnitsky for serious human rights abuse. Designations under other legal authorities may or must be privately held. On April 16, 2021, Secretary Blinken announced visa restrictions under Section 212(a)(3)(C) of the Immigration and Nationality Act, but names of individuals were not publicly announced, as visa confidentiality laws prohibit public disclosure of any individual visa restrictions under Section 212(a)(3)(C). Secretary Blinken stated "Ugandan security forces were responsible for the deaths and injuries of dozens of innocent bystanders and opposition supporters, as well as violence against journalists that occurred before, during, and after the elections." I understand that consideration of additional visa restrictions against officials in the security services continues as information and evidence comes to light. If confirmed, I would support the use of Global Magnitsky sanctions and public visa restrictions, in accordance with the evidentiary requirements under U.S. law, against any individuals in the Ugandan military and security services responsible for gross violations of human rights or serious human rights abuses.

President Museveni has been in power since January 1986. He has twice changed the Ugandan constitution to extend his time in office by lifting first term limits, then age limits. He has consistently used Ugandan Government security forces to intimidate, threaten, and hobble his political opponents while turning a blind eye to the corruption and abuses perpetuated by his own military and police force, members of the first family, and senior members of the National Resistance Movement (NRM) party. Uganda's last elections were marred by violence, corruption, and human rights abuses. Scores of pro-democracy protesters were killed. President Museveni's main political opponent was severely beaten.

Question. If confirmed, what steps will you take between now and Uganda's next presidential election in 2026 to level the political playing field and increase the likelihood of credible and peaceful elections?

Answer. If confirmed I would lead the U.S. Embassy in Kampala to support the Ugandan people's right to choose leaders in free and fair elections that are credible and peaceful. I would start by regularly messaging publicly and privately in support of democratic processes, norms, and institutions. I would support dialogue between Ugandan stakeholders, integrate U.S. assistance to build capacity of electoral institutions, civil society organizations, and electoral observation organizations. I would also support voter education and conflict mitigation mechanisms through our assistance and public diplomacy platforms.

Question. What are the most important actions you have taken in your career to date to support democracy and human rights? What has been the impact of your actions?

Answer. I have supported human rights and democracy across my nearly 24-year diplomatic career, helping to facilitate free and fair elections, increase space for civil society, establish police oversight mechanisms, and protect labor activists and independent media. In Kenya, I worked closely with U.S. Government agencies, international partners, civil society, and Kenya's electoral commission to prepare for and conduct free, fair, credible, and peaceful elections in 2017.

In Guatemala, as Ambassador, I worked to support protection for multiple justice and human rights defenders from persecution as well as supported the continued operation of the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

office. I likewise worked to ensure robust local civil society and international observation of the 2023 elections. I also engaged authorities to provide transparency around the NGO registration law and fair treatment for all civil society organizations.

If confirmed, I would implement similar successful whole-of-mission strategies with host government, civil society and international partners in support of democracy and human rights.

Question. What issues are the most pressing challenges to democracy or democratic development in Uganda? These challenges might include obstacles to participatory and accountable governance and institutions, rule of law, authentic political competition, civil society, human rights and press freedom. Please be as specific as possible.

Answer. Uganda faces several pressing human rights challenges, including the need to protect human rights activists, gender-based violence, abuses by security forces, threats to freedom of expression, and violence or threats of violence targeting LGBTQI+ persons with the criminalization of consensual same-sex sexual conduct. Human rights concerns have become an increasing focus of our bilateral relationship over the last decade. Political tensions have increased, election violence has persisted, and democratic space, especially for civil society, is shrinking. Ugandan security forces continue to harass and intimidate members of the opposition, including through forced disappearances, kidnappings, and torture. The NGO Bureau has made it difficult to near impossible for NGOs to register and operate in the country.

If confirmed, I will work diligently with the Government, national and international non-government organizations, and the many U.S. Government agencies that work to address these concerns. I would, among other actions, engage with and message continuously to the Ugandan Government on the importance of promoting and protecting the human rights of all people; help and consult with civil society organizations on their priorities so that they can safely operate; ensure that our programming and resources are efficient and effective; and work to address the consequences of the dangerous anti-homosexuality bill, which has exacerbated homophobia, undermined respect for human rights, would put American citizens in Uganda at risk, and could also have serious consequences for the fight against HIV/AIDS and the health of all Ugandans. I believe through such efforts, we can demonstrate to the Ugandan Government and its people that the United States is a tireless and sure partner on human rights issues in keeping with our nation's values.

Question. What steps will you take—if confirmed—to support democracy in Uganda? What do you hope to accomplish through these actions? What are the potential impediments to addressing the specific obstacles you have identified?

Answer. If confirmed, I will work to eliminate corrupt influences in Uganda through our diplomatic engagements, public messaging, and U.S. assistance programs supporting anticorruption efforts and the rule of law. I will also actively engage human rights defenders, civil society organizations, and those experiencing human rights violations and abuses to address and improve respect for human rights. If confirmed, I will work to ensure U.S. assistance aligns with our important policy goals of supporting democracy and good governance. I will also closely examine our existing support to key NGOs operating in this sector, advocate for new resources if needed, and promote transparency during my engagements with government officials.

Through such efforts I would hope to advance our longstanding values of freedom, democracy, individual liberty, and human dignity. Increasing adherence to rule of law, reducing corruption, and ending impunity would increase security, stability, and prosperity, not only in Uganda, but throughout the region and the world.

Entrenched corruption, abuses of human rights, and limited democratic space are key impediments to advancing democratic development, but if confirmed, I will also be prepared to use the tools Congress has made available including the Global Magnitsky Act and Section 7031(c) of the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Act, to hold corrupt actors and human rights violators accountable and prevent them from utilizing resources in the United States.

Question. How will you utilize U.S. Government assistance resources at your disposal, including the Democracy Commission Small Grants program and other sources of State Department and USAID funding, to support democracy and governance, and what will you prioritize in processes to administer such assistance?

Answer. If confirmed, I will work closely with all U.S. assistance agencies and programs to ensure the maximum integration and coordination possible, including in support of democracy and governance. I would prioritize civil society capacity building, including helping local organizations become administratively capable, in-

cluding necessary financial oversight, of receiving direct assistance from USAID, Department of State, the Small Grants program, or other sources. I would also prioritize civic and voter education activities, including for youth, women, and minority communities, to prepare for the 2026 elections. I would also prioritize activities to support independent media, counter disinformation, and protect press freedom. Finally, I would seek out opportunities to assist in political party capacity building in order to support full and transparent participation in the 2026 elections.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to meet with civil society members, human rights and other non-governmental organizations in the U.S. and with local human rights NGOs, and other members of civil society in Uganda? What steps will you take to pro-actively address efforts to restrict or penalize NGOs and civil society via legal or regulatory measures?

Answer. Yes. If confirmed, I will absolutely be committed to meeting and engaging with those organizations. They have their ear to the ground and a deep understanding of the issues. I will listen to their concerns and recommendations, but also leverage their expertise and resources to further democratic governance. If confirmed, one of my top priorities will be to ensure NGOs can operate safely in Uganda. I would work to communicate to the Ugandan Government the benefits NGOs have for millions of Ugandans. If confirmed, I will continue demonstrating to the Ugandan Government and key stakeholders that NGOs are not a threat and are of critical importance. From Uganda's Ebola response, to improving food security, to protecting vulnerable communities, Uganda needs these NGOs. These NGOs make Uganda healthier and safer, which leads to economic growth and stability.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to meet with democratically oriented political opposition figures and parties? What steps will you take to encourage genuine political competition? Will you advocate for access and inclusivity for women, minorities and youth within political parties?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed, I will meet with people from across the democratically oriented political spectrum, and from all walks of Ugandan life. As Ambassador, I would interact with as diverse a range of Ugandan citizens as possible, across political, economic, geographic, social, and ethnic groups. If confirmed, I would engage not only with government and opposition figures and political parties, but also with civil society, independent media, community, labor and human rights organizations and activists, including from the LGBTIQ+ community. I would also reach out to youth, minority, and women's groups on areas of entrepreneurship, rights promotion, education, and other key issues.

Question. Will you and your Embassy team actively engage with Uganda on freedom of the press and address any government efforts designed to control or undermine press freedom through legal, regulatory or other measures? Will you commit to meeting regularly with independent, local press in Uganda?

Answer. Yes. Supporting an active and free press is a fundamental part of U.S. Government diplomacy and programming overseas. If confirmed, I would work diligently with the Embassy team to promote the importance of a free press with Ugandan officials, while using programming such as our International Visitor Leadership Program to support efforts to share with local journalists best practices in investigative journalism. I commit, if confirmed, to meeting regularly with independent, local press in Uganda. I fully believe that a free and fair press is critical to a healthy democracy and will continue to support efforts to promote press freedom in Uganda.

Question. Will you and your Embassy team actively engage with civil society and government counterparts on countering disinformation and propaganda disseminated by foreign state or non-state actors in the country?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed, I will work with our team at the U.S. Embassy in Uganda to engage with civil society and government counterparts on countering disinformation and propaganda disseminated by foreign state or non-state actors in Uganda. There is increased interest in the region by the People's Republic of China (PRC) and Russia and the entities they control. If confirmed, I will work diligently to deter and counter malign influence by foreign state and non-state actors in country, and help Ugandan understand how to protect themselves from disinformation.

Question. Will you and your Embassy teams actively engage with Uganda on the right of labor groups to organize, including for independent trade unions?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed, I will lead my Embassy team to actively engage with Ugandan labor organizations, including independent trade unions, to support rights under Ugandan law and Uganda's international commitments to organize and to protect fair treatment.

Question. Will you commit to using your position, if confirmed, to defend the human rights and dignity of all people in Uganda, no matter their sexual orientation or gender identity?

Answer. Yes. If confirmed, I will support the efforts of the United States Government to defend the human rights and dignity of all people, no matter their sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or sex characteristics.

Question. What challenges do the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) people face in Uganda?

Answer. Uganda's LGBTQI+ community has been consistently marginalized, discriminated against, and targeted by the Ugandan Government, homophobic organizations, and vigilantes. Parliament's recent passage of the repressive Anti-Homosexuality Act further undermines respect for human rights. If the legislation is enacted, it could have serious and negative consequences for LGBTQI+ persons in Uganda as well as the viability of the U.S. PEPFAR program, the fight against HIV/AIDS, and the health of all Ugandans.

Question. What specifically will you commit to do to help LGBTQ people in Uganda?

Answer. If confirmed, I will support U.S. assistance programs that seek to protect the human rights of, and respect for all Ugandans, including LGBTQI+ people. I would also maintain consistent dialogue with LGBTQI+ activists and NGOs, ensuring our actions "do no harm," as well as support accurate and timely reporting on abuses against the LGBTQI+ community. Where U.S. sanctions law and authorities are applicable against perpetrators of gross violations of human rights, I would support the lawful application of such authorities.

Question. Will you commit, if confirmed, to ensuring that you fully brief Members of Congress and/or their staff each time you are in Washington for visits or consultations during your tenure as Ambassador to Uganda?

Answer. Yes, organized through the Department of State's Bureau of Legislative Affairs and conducted in accordance with long-standing Department and Executive Branch practice.

Question. How do you anticipate fostering diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility at the U.S. Embassy in Uganda?

Answer. If confirmed as Chief of Mission, I will lead the American and Ugandan professionals in Mission Uganda to advance our national security agenda in a safe, inclusive, and respectful workplace. I will communicate my commitment to a workplace in which diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility are core tenants of our mission culture. I will also make clear that discrimination, harassment, and bullying are unacceptable and take swift action to address any such issues that may arise. I will demonstrate my commitment to equal employment opportunity (EEO) principals and the work of Mission EEO counselors and locally engaged staff advisors. I will support and participate in programs that promote respect and diversity.

Question. What specifically will you do to prioritize and promote diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility, while also combating racism, discrimination, and inequality among locally employed staff in Uganda?

Answer. If confirmed as Chief of Mission, I will first demonstrate that diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) is a priority, through actions and words, and reinforce with my staff it should also be a priority for them. I will also make clear my strong opposition to harassment, discrimination, and bullying and ensure a prevention plan is in place. I will hold supervisors accountable and expect them to hold their team members accountable for acts of harassment, discrimination, or bullying. I will ensure mission personnel have access to all the resources they need to combat racism, discrimination, and inequality. If confirmed, I will meet regularly with post's DEIA council at Mission Uganda, participate in community activities to increase dialogue and inclusion, and promote a positive work environment among the Embassy team.

Question. In addition to focusing on diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility in our workforce, will you commit to engaging more equitably in operations and programming, particularly with potential partners and communities that traditionally have been marginalized, excluded, or underrepresented in ours and others' donor and partnership efforts? How do you anticipate utilizing local expertise, knowledge, and capacity to meet our foreign policy goals?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to engaging more equitably in our operations and programs and will lead Mission Uganda to build relationships with all communities

in Ugandan society through active outreach. I will carefully monitor, evaluate, and coordinate the design and implementation of programming and assistance and extend their reach as far as possible. I will ensure that our representational events and public diplomacy programs include marginalized and underrepresented groups and that our human resources team uses diverse panels in hiring processes to ensure applicants are not being disadvantaged. I will work with our locally employed staff to expand our outreach efforts and leverage the various languages spoken within our mission to assist our U.S. officers in making connections beyond the capital.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO WILLIAM W. POPP BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

Question. As U.S. Ambassador to Uganda, if confirmed, do you commit to speaking publicly about the current state of Uganda's political and electoral system, and to amplify and support the democratic aspirations of the Ugandan people?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed, I would speak publicly and clearly about the current state of Uganda's political and electoral system in support of democracy in Uganda.

Question. In your view, how can the United States better support the democratic aspirations of the Ugandan people?

Answer. If confirmed, I would work with all U.S. Government agencies at post and in Washington to support increased investment in civil society capacity building, protection of independent media and human rights defenders, and countering corruption. I would work to maximize integration of our democracy and governance assistance with our diplomatic engagement for a freer, more transparent, and democratic Uganda. I would also support the early design and implementation of assistance in support of free and fair elections that are credible and peaceful in 2026.

Question. How will you, as U.S. Ambassador to Uganda, engage Ugandan officials on issues related to democracy and elections?

Answer. If confirmed, I would engage directly and clearly with Ugandan officials to convey U.S. commitment to supporting good governance, strengthening democratic institutions, and free and fair elections in 2026 that are credible and peaceful. I would speak through media and public outreach about U.S. interests and values in support of democracy and seek to publicly engage with Ugandan civil society and citizens dedicated to fostering democratic governance in Uganda. I would support bolstering our democracy, human rights, and governance assistance to support civil society, freedom of expression, voter and civic education, and electoral institution and political party capacity building wherever possible. I would speak publicly to the right of all Ugandans to choose the leaders who will lead the country to a more prosperous and democratic future. I would also support use of tools such as sanctions, designations, and visa restrictions, in accordance with the evidentiary requirements under U.S. law, against individuals responsible for human rights violations and abuses, electoral violence, or corruption. In all these efforts, I would effectively coordinate our engagement across agencies at post.

Question. How will you, as U.S. Ambassador to Uganda, engage Ugandan political parties on issues related to democracy and elections?

Answer. If confirmed, I would actively engage with Ugandan political parties in support of democracy and free and fair elections that are credible and peaceful. I would meet with all political parties committed to democratic and peaceful principles. I would also use public messaging to underscore that suppression of and violence against opposition political parties is unacceptable. Wherever appropriate, I would seek to connect political parties committed to democratic governance to U.S. programs to strengthen their institutional capability.

Question. How will you, as U.S. Ambassador to Uganda, engage with Ugandan civil society on issues related to democracy and elections?

Answer. If confirmed, I would actively engage with Ugandan civil society in support of democracy and free and fair elections that are credible and peaceful. I would seek to meet with a broad range of voices committed to free and fair elections and democratic governance, including through travel outside of Kampala to all regions of the country. I would seek to connect civil society organizations to U.S. assistance programs where practical and work to partner with like-minded international donors to build networks in support of democratic governance. I would also aim, wherever possible, to build capacity of local civil society organizations to receive direct assistance and strengthen their institutional capability.

Question. In your view, how can the United States better support the democratic aspirations of the Ugandan people?

Answer. We should continue to meet with leaders of all political groups, in addition to civil society, youth, and women leaders, in support of strengthening democratic norms. We should arrange for more senior opposition leaders to meet with U.S. Government officials in the United States, and connect visiting U.S. officials with local civil society, community organizations and political parties in Uganda. In addition, we should seek to design and implement additional democracy and governance programs that promote a level playing field for the 2026 elections, including robust electoral observation, voter education, citizen participation, and counter-disinformation activities.

Question. Do you commit to working with the USAID Uganda Mission Director to support a robust portfolio of democracy and governance programs for Uganda ahead of the 2026 elections?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed, I would work closely with the USAID Uganda Mission Director and the entire USAID team, as well as other elements of the Embassy, to support a robust portfolio of democracy and governance programs in Uganda ahead of the 2026 elections. If confirmed, I would treat this as an immediate priority in order to prepare for the elections in less than three years.

Question. What is your view of the conditions for legitimate democratic elections in Uganda in 2026?

Answer. Conditions are challenging for legitimate democratic elections in Uganda in 2026. Since the flawed 2021 elections, democratic space has continued to shrink. Corruption is persistent and independent media are under pressure. Human rights abuses are pervasive and marginalized populations, such as the LGBTQI+ community, are at an increased risk of violence and persecution. Political opposition parties and independent NGOs are threatened. At the same time, Ugandan youth continue to aspire to a freer, more transparent, and peaceful Uganda. Engaging Ugandans, particularly youth and women, in civic participation and voter education activities to maximize democratic inclusion and election participation could help increase the chances of legitimate democratic elections. Likewise, beginning as soon as possible, support for transparent electoral administration and observation in 2026 will be vital. Finally, holding accountable corrupt and undemocratic actors, as well as violators of human rights and perpetrators of political violence wherever possible is important to uphold justice and protect remaining democratic space.

Question. How will you, as U.S. Ambassador to Uganda, engage with Ugandan officials at the highest levels on abuses of internationally-recognized human rights?

Answer. If confirmed, I would convey to them clearly that abuses of internationally recognized human rights and violence of any kind are unacceptable. I would emphasize that all potential recipients of any U.S. security cooperation must be Leahy vetted and that any individuals or units identified as responsible for human rights violations are automatically ineligible. I would also convey that United States is prepared to use sanctions, designations, and visa restrictions, in accordance with evidentiary requirements under U.S. law, against individuals responsible for human rights violations and abuses.

Question. How will you, as U.S. Ambassador to Uganda, engage with Ugandan officials on the issue of abductions and forced disappearances?

Answer. If confirmed, I would convey to Ugandan officials clearly that abductions and forced disappearance are unacceptable. I would emphasize that the U.S. Government will publicly report on any substantiated incidents through the Congressionally-mandated annual Human Rights Report and that I and other U.S. Government officials will publicly call for thorough investigations of all cases and justice for all victims. I would convey that United States is prepared to use sanctions, designations, and visa restrictions, in accordance with evidentiary requirements under U.S. law, against individuals responsible for abductions and forced disappearances.

Question. In your view, how should the United States pursue and support accountability for violations of internationally-recognized human rights in Uganda, including abductions and forced disappearances by state security forces?

Answer. I believe the United States should support, where possible, any Ugandan public and non-government organizations sincerely committed to investigating, arresting, prosecuting, and convicting individuals responsible for human rights violations, including abductions and forced disappearances. I believe we should use our assistance programs to build institutional capacity and train individuals to protect human rights in compliance with Ugandan law and international commitments. I

would ensure that Leahy vetting is done to ensure any training for security forces is only offered to individuals and units with no involvement in violations and abuses and that all training has clear components of respect for human rights. Finally, if evidence can be obtained that meets U.S. legal requirements, we should utilize the public sanctions, designations, and visa restrictions authorities such as Global Magnitsky and 70311 against perpetrators of human rights violations and abuses.

Question. On May 2, Uganda's parliament passed an updated version of draconian anti-LGBT legislation, to include the death penalty. While President Museveni has not yet signed the legislation into law, the effects of the legislation's passage in parliament is already being felt in Uganda and the broader region.

You did not directly mention the anti-LGBT legislation in your testimony. Were you advised by leadership of the Bureau of African Affairs or other State Department leadership to do this? If yes, was the guidance given so as to avoid confronting and displeasing the Government of Uganda?

Answer. As cited in my written statement submitted to the Committee, I strongly believe that the United States must support equal protection and non-discrimination for all persons. As emphasized in my responses in the confirmation hearing discussion, this absolutely includes the LGBTQI+ community and underscoring the risks, including of imprisonment and capital punishment, posed by the deeply troubling and dangerous Anti-Homosexuality Bill. If confirmed, I would speak clearly to the Government of Uganda about the United States Government's deep concern about the legislation's threat to lives, about Ugandan officials' hateful rhetoric, and the very negative impact that the legislation has for respect of human rights, the potential to undermine progress on preventing and treating HIV/AIDS, and in deterring trade, investment, and tourism that would only deepen poverty for all Ugandans. My views on these issues, which are fully consistent with the policy views of the Administration and the Department, are my strongly held personal views as well.

Question. The passage of the repressive anti-LGBT legislation has implications for U.S. foreign assistance to Uganda, including in the global health and democracy and human rights space. As U.S. Ambassador to Uganda, if confirmed, how will you work with your USAID and State Department colleagues to adjust the US assistance portfolio as appropriate?

Answer. If confirmed, I would lead USAID and State Department colleagues at post to carefully identify and propose adjustments necessary to the U.S. assistance portfolio if the repressive Anti-Homosexuality Act (AHA) is signed and enacted into law. In the interest of our priority to "do no harm," I would also consult with local civil society, including the LGBTQI+ community, and health care implementing partners and experts to identify areas for adjustment. I would also have health and assistance experts examine the continued viability of partnerships with the Ministry of Health. As the dangerous AHA is representative of a larger trend in the closing of democratic space and reduction in respect for human rights of all Ugandans, I believe it would be necessary to carefully consider the need to increase democracy and governance programming, as well as partnerships with international and local civil society organizations. I would also look closely for opportunities to increase coordination with other international donors to leverage joint diplomatic and assistance efforts. Finally, I would use public outreach to underscore the value of U.S. assistance and the jeopardy in which the dangerous AHA and other steps against human rights and democratic governance are putting all Ugandans. I would of course consult with the Bureau of African Affairs, USAID and other relevant agencies, as well as Congress, prior to moving forward with any adjustments.

Question. As U.S. Ambassador to Uganda, if confirmed, how will you engage with the Government of Uganda on impacts of the anti-LGBT legislation, including any restrictions or reductions on U.S. global health programming to combat HIV/AIDS?

Answer. If confirmed, and after consulting the local LGBTQI+ community to ensure our actions would "do no harm," I would engage the Ugandan Government directly about the consequences of the anti-homosexuality bill that has increased homophobia, the risk of violence against the LGBTQI+ community, and undermined respect for human rights generally. If President Museveni signs the bill into law and it is implemented, the law could impact U.S. programming as well as deter trade, investment, and tourism to Uganda and thereby increase poverty. It could also have serious consequences for the viability of ongoing PEPFAR programming, the fight against HIV/AIDS, and the health of all Ugandans. I would communicate the potential for negative impacts on U.S. assistance, particularly on health and HIV/AIDS programs, and the potential to severely restrict our ability to help protect lives in Uganda and enable Ugandans from all backgrounds to access quality health care. I would also engage the Ugandan Government on the importance of protecting

fundamental human rights and safety as well as upholding Uganda's international commitments to protect and defend the human rights of all people, including LGBTQI+ persons.

Question. As U.S. Ambassador to Uganda, if confirmed, how will you lead Mission Uganda to plan for and respond to attacks on U.S. implementing partners, Ugandan health facilities, Ugandan health workers, and/or Ugandan organizations receiving U.S. assistance who provide services to marginalized communities?

Answer. If confirmed, and after consulting the local LGBTQI+ community to ensure actions "do no harm," I would work with the Embassy team to publicly and privately support civil society organizations, including those that represent the LGBTQI+ community and those working in public health areas including HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment. I would communicate to the Ugandan Government the benefits that such NGOs provide millions of Ugandans. If confirmed, I would work to convince the Ugandan Government that implementing partners are of critical importance for the health care system and the health for all Ugandans. I would emphasize attacks on partners, as well as Ugandan health facilities and workers or organizations receiving U.S. assistance, would be completely unacceptable. I would remind the Ugandan security and justice authorities of their responsibilities to prevent any such attacks and the potential impacts of impunity for perpetrators and I would convey that the United States will use Congressionally provided tools and other existing authorities to sanction, designate, and restrict visas to individuals perpetrating human rights violations and abuses. Finally, I would ensure our programs, planning, and messaging are coordinated as much as possible with like-minded international partners to maximize prevention of any attacks and support accountability in the event of any incidents.

Question. Do you view the roles and responsibilities of the U.S. Ambassador to Uganda to include supporting U.S. companies currently investing and interested in investing in Uganda?

Answer. If confirmed I would work to support U.S. companies invested in or interested in investing in Uganda, in accordance with United States national interests. I would ensure that the companies had a full picture of the challenges and opportunities for doing business in Uganda. I would also ensure that U.S. companies understand threats posed by corruption and closing civic space in Uganda. I would work with the Embassy team and the Prosper Africa Executive Secretariat to help U.S. companies present in Uganda and potential U.S. investors access the full slate of commercial and investment tools available through the Development Finance Corporation (DFC), the U.S. Trade and Development Agency (USTDA), and the Export-Import Bank, among other U.S. Government agencies.

Question. As U.S. Ambassador to Uganda, if confirmed, how will you approach supporting U.S. companies currently investing and interested in investing in Uganda?

Answer. If confirmed I would work to support U.S. companies invested in or interested in investing in Uganda, in accordance with United States national interests. I would ensure that the companies had a full picture of the challenges and opportunities for doing business in Uganda. I would also ensure that U.S. companies understood threats posed by corruption and closing civic space in Uganda. Finally, I would work with the Embassy team and the Prosper Africa Executive Secretariat to help U.S. companies present in Uganda and potential U.S. investors access to the full slate of commercial and investment tools available through the Development Finance Corporation (DFC), the U.S. Trade and Development Agency (USTDA), and the Export-Import Bank, among other U.S. Government agencies.

Question. What is your understanding of the tools Prosper Africa provides to U.S. Missions in Africa to support two-way trade and investment?

Answer. I understand that the Prosper Africa initiative through the 17 participating agencies provides a number of tools to advance two-way trade and investment. This includes helping companies access U.S. Government services, as well as for embassies that need to refer potential deals to the relevant agency for further examination and potential support. For example, USTDA can provide feasibility studies and reverse trade missions to facilitate project preparedness to increase potential exports; the Department of Commerce can provide advocacy and facilitate market entry; the DFC can provide debt, equity and political risk insurance; and U.S. African Development Foundation provides grant capital capacity building assistance to grow African enterprises. USAID can also direct its programs to provide U.S. companies and investors with market information; facilitate buyer-supplier linkages; advise companies on accessing finance; and build the capacity of local busi-

nesses, among other things. Prosper Africa assists U.S. missions to advance trade and investment by tapping into all of these resources. If confirmed, I will work with the U.S. Embassy team in Uganda and Prosper Africa participating agencies in Washington to support mutually beneficial and job-creating bilateral trade and investment wherever possible.

Question. In your view, does Uganda meet the statutory requirements for eligibility for preferential trade benefits under the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA)?

Answer. Given the deep concern about the Anti-Homosexuality Act (AHA) legislation along with the broader erosion of respect for human rights and democratic space for all Ugandan citizens, I understand that U.S. Government agencies are continuing to evaluate Uganda's eligibility for African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) preferential trade benefits. The AGOA legislation requires the Administration to review annually whether beneficiary countries such as Uganda are meeting the statute's eligibility criteria, including with respect to gross violations of internationally recognized human rights by the Government. During the AGOA eligibility review process conducted for calendar year 2023, I understand that the U.S. Government warned the Government of Uganda that continuing human rights violations or abuses, including those targeting LGBTQI+ persons, could jeopardize its AGOA eligibility. If confirmed, I would support a careful review of Uganda's continued eligibility for AGOA for 2024.

Question. Many U.S. missions have been under enormous stress over the last several years, in large part due to COVID. What is your understanding of morale throughout Mission Kampala?

Answer. Many posts around the world have suffered through heavy workloads, limited staffing, barriers to health care access, and many other challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic. Mission Kampala has had to face many of those challenges as well as a recent outbreak in late 2022 and early 2023 of Ebola. As a high hardship differential post and with persistent staffing gaps that affect most of the U.S. embassies in Africa, the Embassy community works under challenging circumstances. Nevertheless, I understand the Embassy has remained resilient, is emerging from the COVID-19 and Ebola health restrictions and has attained very important achievements under difficult circumstances.

Question. How do you intend to improve morale at Mission Kampala?

Answer. If confirmed, I will demonstrate through actions and words my commitment to respect for all, customer service, professional development, safety and security, and quality of life issues. I will ensure the mission has access to all the resources available to support a positive, respectful, and inclusive workplace. I will hold supervisors accountable and expect them to hold their team members accountable for conduct and performance. Any incidents that arise will be addressed immediately. I will participate fully in community activities and encourage participation from all parts of the Embassy community. I will actively support performance and service recognition, through awards and other forms of recognition. Finally, I will support work-life balance, community wellbeing, and promoting a positive work environment among the Embassy team.

Question. How do you intend to create a unified mission and vision at Mission Kampala?

Answer. If confirmed as Chief of Mission, I will lead the American and Ugandan professionals in Mission Uganda to advance our national security agenda in a safe, inclusive, and respectful workplace. I will continue to pursue the active approach that I did as Ambassador at the U.S. mission to Guatemala and as Deputy Chief of Mission at the U.S. mission to Brazil by ensuring our Embassy in Uganda is working together as a team, including through an active diversity council, Federal Women's Program, and professional development program that promote respect for each other and a shared commitment to advancing U.S. national interest through our Embassy's diplomacy, public outreach, and programs. I will also ensure that our Integrated Country Strategy objectives and goals are clearly communicated and understood by all mission personnel to forge a shared vision. Finally, I will work with the Management team and all other service providers to achieve the highest level of efficiency and customer service for mission operations to Embassy personnel.

Question. How do you intend to improve morale at Mission Kampala?

Answer. If confirmed, I will demonstrate through actions and words my commitment to respect for all, customer service, professional development, safety and security, and quality of life issues. I will ensure the mission has access to all the re-

sources available to support a positive, respectful, and inclusive workplace. I will hold supervisors accountable and expect them to hold their team members accountable for conduct and performance. Any incidents that arise will be addressed immediately. I will participate fully in community activities and encourage participation from all parts of the Embassy community. I will actively support performance and service recognition, through awards and other forms of recognition. Finally, I will support work-life balance, community wellbeing, and promoting a positive work environment among the Embassy team.

Question. Management is a key responsibility for Chiefs of Mission. How would you describe your management style?

Answer. I would describe my management style as respectful, collaborative, dedicated, and committed to integrity. Ultimately, I strive to serve the mission team and community. I lead with a consistent goal for excellence in our internal management and operational platforms in the mission, high customer service, and high morale in the community as essential ingredients to achieving success in our external diplomatic, public outreach, and programmatic goals.

Question. Do you believe it is ever acceptable or constructive to berate subordinates, either in public or in private?

Answer. No. It is never acceptable or constructive to berate subordinates or other individuals, either in public or in private. Such behavior has never been a part of my leadership or management style in my nearly 24 years of Foreign Service experience supervising local or U.S. direct hire personnel.

Question. How do you envision your relationship with the Deputy Chief of Mission?

Answer. As a previous Deputy Chief of Mission and deputy principal officer as well as a long-term Charge d'Affaires and a current Chief of Mission, I have over a decade of experience serving successfully in a deputy role or supervising a deputy. I believe that the deputy and Chief of Mission must communicate well between each and with the mission team, have a shared commitment to integrity, and both be focused on serving the community and mission team they lead. I believe in working as a partner with my deputy, complementing and reinforcing each other wherever possible.

Question. If confirmed, what leadership responsibilities do you intend to entrust to your Deputy Chief of Mission?

Answer. I believe in helping develop the overall skills of my Deputy Chief of Mission to be able to successfully lead the mission in any moment. This means including the Deputy Chief of Mission in all aspects of mission operations and engagement. At the same time, identifying specific leadership responsibilities for the deputy is vital to the Deputy Chief of Mission's professional development as well as the efficient and effective workload management for the Embassy front office. If confirmed, responsibilities such as the leading professional development programs for U.S. direct hire and locally employed personnel, chairing key coordination mechanisms such as the law enforcement working group, and supervising emergency and crisis response trainings and preparations are examples of some of the key areas I would entrust my deputy to lead while I would support and reinforce those duties wherever helpful.

In order to create and continue employee excellence at the Department, accurate and direct employee evaluation reports (EERs) for Foreign Service Officers are imperative, though often lacking.

Question. Do you believe that it is important to provide employees with accurate, constructive feedback on their performance in order to encourage improvement and reward those who most succeed in their roles?

Answer. Yes, I believe it is essential to provide all employees with accurate and constructive feedback on their performance, as well as reward employees who successfully perform their duties. Throughout my Foreign Service career I have actively provided such feedback and recognition, including for Locally Employed Staff and by implementing additional recognition mechanisms such as Local Staff Member of the Month and Local Staff Member of the Year awards in my last two postings.

Question. If confirmed, would you support and encourage clear, accurate, and direct feedback to employees in order to improve performance and reward high achievers?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed, I would support and encourage clear, accurate, and direct feedback to all employees to improve performance and reward high achievers, as I have done throughout my Foreign Service career.

Question. It is imperative that U.S. diplomats get outside of posts abroad to meet with local actors, including host government officials, non-government organizations, and local citizens. In your experience, do U.S. diplomats get outside of our Embassy walls enough to fully accomplish their missions?

Answer. While a challenge in some high-threat security environments and over the last three years due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in my experience generally U.S. diplomats strive to get outside our Embassy walls to advance their mission goals. I believe that with clear and coordinated planning, consistent security and emergency accountability training and procedures, and prioritization on public outreach, it is possible and essential for U.S. diplomats to get outside of their Embassy and the capital of their host country as much as possible. If confirmed, I would lead the Embassy in Uganda actively and safely engaging in robust public outreach and travel outside of the Embassy and Kampala.

Question. How do you intend to improve the ability of U.S. diplomats to better access all local populations?

Answer. If confirmed, I would work closely with the Embassy's Regional Security Office and Public Affairs Office to ensure that all U.S. diplomats and local staff have the necessary training, communications platforms for emergency accountability tools to safely travel and access local populations. I would also work with the Public Affairs Office to ensure that all staff have training in public messaging to engage with Ugandans in all parts of the country. Finally, I would work with the Management team and Washington to budget sufficient travel resources to support appropriate outreach to advance our U.S. national interests in Uganda.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO WILLIAM W. POPP BY SENATOR MARCO RUBIO

Question. In May 2022, Secretary Blinken said that the People's Republic of China is the "only country with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do it." The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) clearly holds the reins of power in the People's Republic of China and has used this power to commit genocide in Xinjiang, flood our communities with fentanyl, and emit, by far the largest quantity of greenhouse gases in the world today. With their absolute control of Chinese society and industry, the CCP could stop all of these destructive actions tomorrow if they so choose. Is the Chinese Communist Party a threat to the United States?

Answer. Earlier this year, the Director of National Intelligence testified that "the CCP represents both the leading and most consequential threat to U.S. national security and leadership globally." Under President Xi, the CCP has become more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad, seeking to undercut U.S. influence and alliances. If confirmed, I will advance U.S. national security interests and push back against the People's Republic of China (PRC) efforts to expand its problematic influence, through robust and forthright diplomatic engagements, public diplomacy, and commercial advocacy to bolster U.S.-Uganda ties.

Question. Does the Chinese Communist Party undertake any activities that are beneficial to U.S. interests?

Answer. The Administration assesses that the CCP has become more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad. According to the Office of the Director of National Intelligence's 2023 Annual Threat Assessment, the CCP is seeking to "undercut U.S. influence, drive wedges between Washington and its partners, and foster some norms that favor its authoritarian system."

Question. Do you believe that there are any areas within which the Chinese Communist Party would constructively work with the United States in good faith?

Answer. As the United States competes vigorously with the PRC, the United States manages this competition responsibly so that competition does not veer into conflict. The United States will work with the PRC to address transnational challenges, such as climate change, when it is in our interest to do so—as Secretary Blinken has said, not as a favor to us or anyone else, and never in exchange for walking away from our principles, but because it is what the world expects. If con-

firmed, I will work with the Department of State's new Office of China Coordination to advance U.S. objectives and counter harmful behavior by the PRC.

Question. If confirmed, will you approve any joint activity with organizations or representatives from the People's Republic of China in the country in which you will work?

Answer. If confirmed, I would prioritize advancing U.S. national security interests in Uganda and countering efforts by our strategic and regional competitors to undermine those interests. The PRC is the most consequential geopolitical challenge facing the United States and the United States is committed to working to strengthen our partners in the region. If confirmed, I will work closely with Department of State and interagency colleagues and Congress to address PRC's efforts to expand its influence in Uganda and the region and disinclined to undertake joint activities.

Question. Uganda receives almost \$1 billion annually in aid from the U.S., with Uganda making overtures to China and Russia on increased relations. The Ugandan parliament passed a highly restrictive bill on LGBTQ rights in March 2023, which received critiques from U.S. and European officials. Uganda in turn accused Western countries of trying to "impose" homosexuality on Uganda. How does lecturing the Ugandan Government on a divisive social issue help us counter CCP and Russia influence in Uganda?

Answer. We engage the Ugandan Government on actions, policies, and decisions that could threaten the human rights of Ugandan citizens, negatively impact the delivery of our health and humanitarian assistance, impact foreign investment, and deter tourism. The Anti-Homosexuality Bill, if signed into law, may jeopardize aspects of American public health assistance that are required to end HIV/AIDS as a public health threat by 2030 in Uganda. Imposing the death penalty for persons exercising their basic human rights is counter to American values. We also engage the Government of Uganda regularly to counter PRC and Russian influence and false narratives and to encourage support for U.S. foreign policy goals.

Question. What is the U.S. doing to counter Russian activities and propaganda in Uganda?

Answer. The USG works to counter Russian disinformation primarily by disseminating clear, timely, and fact-based information on U.S. foreign policy decisions and actions in local print, social, and broadcast media. We also directly respond to disinformation when deemed necessary. We amplify credible non-USG voices by providing platforms for diverse perspectives. The Dignity Dialogues program, for example, identified Ugandan experts to discuss food and energy insecurity due to Russia's war against Ukraine, thereby countering Russian narratives that demonized the United States support for Ukraine.

Question. China has reportedly provided more than \$3.5 billion to Uganda, prompting U.S. concerns. Huawei has provided surveillance equipment, including facial-recognition technology, and President Museveni has praised China's non-interference foreign policy approach, while criticizing Western donor conditionality. How would you characterize Uganda's relationship with China?

Answer. The PRC has an extensive commercial relationship with Uganda and seeks to influence Uganda in other areas as well. We offer Uganda alternatives to the PRC model and as a partner on economic issues, we advocate for U.S. businesses who seek to do business in Uganda. If confirmed, I will work with the Embassy team as well as with all agencies and branches of the U.S. Government to emphasize to Ugandans the advantages and opportunities of working with trustworthy partners like the United States.

Question. What are the main barriers to U.S. direct investment in Uganda?

Answer. While some U.S. companies are present and thriving in Uganda with U.S. Government support, problems with corruption, the rule of law, respect for human rights, and basic infrastructure are impediments to deeper economic ties.

Question. Is there an expanded role for the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation in facilitating U.S. investment in Uganda?

Answer. The U.S. International Development Finance Corporation (DFC) supports investments that address critical development challenges throughout sub-Saharan Africa. The agency has invested more than \$10 billion across sub-Saharan Africa and continues to seek opportunities to invest in bankable projects, including in Uganda, that comply with DFC standards.

NOMINATIONS

WEDNESDAY, MAY 17, 2023

U.S. SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS,
Washington, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:47 p.m., in Room 419, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Chris Van Hollen presiding.

Present: Senators Van Hollen [presiding], Duckworth, and Ricketts.

OPENING STATEMENT HON. CHRIS VAN HOLLEN, U.S. SENATOR FROM MARYLAND

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Good afternoon, everybody, and welcome. The nomination hearing of the Senate Foreign Relations committee will come to order. I would like to first welcome all of our nominees here. Congratulations on your nominations and thank you for your continued commitment to serving our nation.

I would also like to thank your family members, and I want to encourage anyone who wants to introduce any members of their family that are here, because I know that they also have made sacrifices on behalf of our country, often enduring long distances from their loved ones or moving across the globe to be with their loved ones. And I know my colleagues join me in gratitude to all of you and your families.

I really want to thank Senator Ricketts for being the ranking member for this committee and for being an active member of this committee. He and I have agreed that in the interests of hearing a little less from us and more from you, that we are going to forgo any long formal opening statements. I would like to extend my condolences to the families and colleagues of the U.S. Embassy's local employees killed in Nigeria yesterday.

As career Foreign Service officers, you know that locally employed staff, foreign nationals are essential to the success of our embassy and missions abroad, and we all feel this loss. And I want to thank them and the other foreign nationals who help support our embassy operations overseas, and I know you join me in doing that as well.

So now I am going to introduce each of you, and after that, we will hear from you, and then we will ask some questions. That sound good? All right. So, Ms. Jennifer Adams is the nominee, the President's nominee to be Ambassador to Cabo Verde. She is a member of the Senior Foreign Service for USAID. She joined the

National War College as a USAID faculty representative in January of 2022.

Before that, she served as USAID Mission Director to Mozambique, and from 2014 to 2017, she served as USAID's Bureau for Global Health Deputy Assistant Administrator and then Acting Assistant Administrator for Global Health. Her 25 years of service have also taken her to China, Senegal, and Brazil.

Before that, I am pleased to say she was from Baltimore and she graduated from Johns Hopkins, a great Maryland institution. Welcome to you, Dr. Adams. Ms. Heather Variava is the nominee to be the Ambassador to the Lao People's Democratic Republic. She is also a career member of the Senior Foreign Service and currently serves as Deputy Chief of Mission at the U.S. Embassy in Manila.

Prior to her appointment to the Philippines, Ms. Variava was Deputy Chief of Mission and Chargé d'Affaires at the U.S. Embassy in Jakarta, and was the U.S. Consul General in Surabaya, Indonesia. She also served in Washington as Director of the Office of Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Maldives, and Bhutan in the Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, in addition to several other posts across South and Southeast Asia, making her a true expert on our partners in the region. Congratulations on your nomination.

Ms. Julie Turner is the nominee to be Special Envoy on North Korean human rights issues. She is currently the Director of the Office of East Asia and the Pacific in the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor at the Department of State.

She has also served as the Director for Southeast Asia at the National Security Council. In addition to more than 16 years of service in the Office of East Asia and the Pacific, she has dedicated much of her service to promoting human rights in North Korea and her experience overseas, including a tour as Special Assistant in the Office of the Special Envoy on Korean human rights issues—gives her a special expertise in this position. She also, to my friend, Senator Ricketts, also earned a degree from the University of Maryland. Congratulations on your nomination.

Mr. Matthew Murray is the nominee to be the United States senior official to the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, APEC, with the rank of Ambassador. He is also a career member of the Senior Foreign Service. He has served as United States Senior Official for APEC since February 2022.

Mr. Murray previously led the State Department's Bureau of Economic and Business Affairs as the Senior Bureau Official from August 2021 to January 2022, and served as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Trade Policy and Negotiations from September 2020 to August 2021.

His career has taken him to Beijing, Shanghai, Dar es Salaam, and New Delhi. And again, I know you will not forget your Maryland roots. Someone is nominating some great Marylanders.

[Laughter.]

Senator RICKETTS. I have noticed you have not called out anybody else's home state, town, or university.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. I am sure you will fill in the blanks—
[Laughter.]

Senator VAN HOLLEN [continuing]. Ms. Jennifer Johnson is the nominee to be Ambassador to the Federated States of Micronesia. She is a career member of the Senior Foreign Service and is currently serving as Chief of Staff to the Undersecretary for Management.

Her career has taken her around the world to Cuba, Chile, and the UAE, and Turkey. She has also held positions here at home at the U.S. mission to the United Nations in New York, the Office of Undersecretary for Management, the Executive Secretariat, the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs, and the Bureau of Global Talent Management. Congratulations on your nomination.

So, thank all of you for your service to our country. And with that, I am going to turn it over to you, Dr. Adams, for your testimony.

STATEMENT OF DR. JENNIFER M. ADAMS, OF VIRGINIA, A CAREER MEMBER OF THE SENIOR FOREIGN SERVICE, CLASS OF CAREER MINISTER, NOMINATED TO BE AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE REPUBLIC OF CABO VERDE

Dr. ADAMS. Thank you. Chairman Van Hollen, Ranking Member Ricketts, and distinguished members of the committee, I am honored to appear before you today. I am deeply grateful to President Biden and Secretary Blinken for the confidence they have shown in me as the President's nominee for U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Cabo Verde. If confirmed, I will work closely with you and other members of Congress to advance our nation's security and foreign policy interests.

I would like to thank my family, especially my husband, Dr. Wayne Quillin, and my three sons, Eugene, Sam, and Kelly, for all their support and for sharing our family life overseas. Mr. Chairman, my interest in economic development in Africa began with my college education, and deepened as a Marshall Scholar in the UK, where I completed a Ph.D. in economics at Cambridge University after fieldwork in a rural area of Zimbabwe.

I have proudly served the American people for the past 30 years as a Foreign Service Officer with the U.S. Agency for International Development. With USAID, I successfully advanced U.S. goals in sub-Saharan Africa, Brazil, and Asia, and managed large, complex interagency programs such as PEPFAR, the President's Malaria Initiative, Power Africa, Feed the Future, anti-wildlife trafficking, and humanitarian disaster relief.

I have enjoyed mentoring and promoting employees of every color, race, religion, gender, and sexual orientation, and I have focused on listening to and working closely with our locally employed staff overseas.

If confirmed, I will continue to support and enhance diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts in our workforce and in our programs. Cabo Verde is a longstanding partner and the site of our first consulate in Africa over 200 years ago. Cabo Verde is a success story in terms of economic development and improving the lives of its people, having progressed from deep poverty at independence from Portugal in 1975 to lower middle-income status today.

Cabo Verde is also a thriving democracy with a multi-party system, free and fair elections, and a vibrant civil society, and is a strong partner on promoting respect for human rights in the region and on the international stage.

The United States, especially the Northeast, is home to many people of Cabo Verdean descent, and this diaspora community is an important link between our countries. I know from my one visit to Cabo Verde in the mid-2000s that the warm and hospitable Cabo Verdean people admire American culture and traditions, and welcome further partnership with the United States.

Strengthening security cooperation is a key objective between the United States and Cabo Verde, including maritime security and law enforcement partnerships that protect the country's exclusive economic zone, combat drug and other illicit trafficking, reduce illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing, and oppose transnational crime, increasing U.S. investment and bilateral trade, similarly, a key objective that will deepen commercial ties and support Cabo Verde as its economy recovers from the COVID pandemic.

Further engagement with Cabo Verde, a small island nation, on climate action, will promote greater economic resilience, socio and economic inclusion of remote and vulnerable populations, and progress toward development goals.

Given the opportunity, I will support these key U.S. policy objectives. If confirmed, I would seek to leverage Cabo Verde's strong historical links and shared values with the United States to foster a cooperative environment for increased partnerships in security cooperation, commerce, education, and public diplomacy.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members, for the opportunity to address you today, and I am happy to answer any questions.

[The prepared statement of Dr. Adams follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF JENNIFER MARIE ADAMS

Chairman Van Hollen, Ranking Member Ricketts, and distinguished Members of the committee, I am honored to appear before you today. I am deeply grateful to President Biden and Secretary Blinken for the confidence they have shown in me as the President's nominee for U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Cabo Verde. If confirmed, I will work closely with you and other Members of Congress to advance our nation's security and foreign policy interests. I would like to thank my family—especially my husband Dr. Wayne Quillin and my three sons, Eugene, Sam and Kelly—for all their support and sharing our family life overseas.

Mr. Chairman, my interest in economic development in Africa began with my college education and deepened as a Marshall Scholar in the UK, where I completed a Ph.D in Economics at Cambridge after fieldwork in a rural area of Zimbabwe. I have proudly served the American people for the past 32 years as a Foreign Service Officer with the U.S. Agency for International Development. With USAID, I successfully advanced U.S. goals in sub-Saharan Africa, Brazil and Asia, and managed large, complex inter-agency programs such as PEPFAR, PMI, Power Africa, Feed the Future, anti-wildlife trafficking and humanitarian disaster relief. I have enjoyed mentoring and promoting employees of every color, race, religion, gender, and sexual orientation and have focused on listening to and working closely with our locally employed staff overseas. If confirmed, I will continue to support and enhance diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts in our workforce and our programs.

Cabo Verde is a long-standing partner and the site of our first consulate in Africa over 200 years ago. Cabo Verde is a success story in terms of economic development and improving the lives of its people, having progressed from deep poverty at independence from Portugal in 1975 to lower middle-income status today. Cabo Verde is also a thriving democracy with a multi-party system, free and fair elections, and a vibrant civil society, and a strong partner on promoting respect for human rights in the region and on the international stage. The United States, especially the

Northeast, is home to many people of Cabo Verdean descent and this diaspora community is an important link between our countries. I know from my one visit to Cabo Verde in the mid-2000s that the warm and hospitable Cabo Verdean people admire American culture and traditions and welcome further partnership with the United States.

Strengthening security cooperation is a key objective between the United States and Cabo Verde, including maritime security and law enforcement partnerships that protect the country's exclusive economic zone, combat drug and other illicit trafficking, reduce illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing, and oppose transnational crime. Increasing U.S. investment and bilateral trade is similarly a key objective that will deepen commercial ties and support Cabo Verde as its economy recovers from the COVID pandemic. Further engagement with Cabo Verde, a small island nation, on climate action will promote greater economic resilience, social and economic inclusion of remote and vulnerable populations, and progress toward development goals.

Given the opportunity, I will support these key U.S. policy objectives. If confirmed, I would seek to leverage Cabo Verde's strong historical links and shared values with the United States to foster a cooperative environment for increased partnerships in security cooperation, commerce, education, and public diplomacy.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and Members of the committee for the opportunity to address you today. I am happy to answer any questions.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you, Dr. Adams. Next, we will turn to Ms. Variava.

STATEMENT OF HEATHER ROACH VARIAVA, OF IOWA, A CAREER MEMBER OF THE SENIOR FOREIGN SERVICE, CLASS OF MINISTER-COUNSELOR, NOMINATED TO BE AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC

Ms. VARIAVA. Chairman Van Hollen, Ranking Member Ricketts, and distinguished members of the committee, thank you for considering my nomination to be the next United States Ambassador to the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

I am grateful for the faith that President Biden and Secretary Blinken have placed in me to represent the United States in Laos. I appreciate the opportunity to answer your questions and hear firsthand your thoughts about our relationship with Laos.

If confirmed, I look forward to working with the committee and other members of Congress to advance the interests of the United States, protect the safety of our citizens, and strengthen the bilateral relationship for the benefit of both our countries.

I would like to take a moment to thank some of my family whose support and guidance have shaped my life in important ways. First, my mother, Catherine, and my late father, Martin, a U.S. Navy veteran, who fostered my lifelong love of learning and who have supported me every step of the way, even when it took me far from home.

I would like to thank my husband, Billy, whose unwavering support and patience has been a strong foundation for our family, including our sons Nick and Nate. They have embraced life in the U.S. Foreign Service with fortitude and good humor.

And as a proud mom, I have to note that my older son just graduated from Creighton University in Omaha. I just came back from Nebraska—

Senator RICKETTS. Thank you.[Laughter.]

Ms. VARIAVA [continuing]. In addition to my family, I also want to thank the many U.S. Embassy and Consulate teams with whom

I have had the honor to serve, especially the dedicated local staff who are the backbone of our overseas operations.

During nearly 27 years in the Foreign Service, I have served in South and Southeast Asia, and advocating for U.S. interests, building strategic partnerships, and engaging a diverse range of stakeholders to promote democratic values and private sector led economic growth. My experience in the Philippines, Indonesia, and Vietnam, among others, has underscored for me the importance of American leadership to ensure a free, open, and resilient Indo-Pacific region.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Ricketts, as part of our Indo-Pacific strategy, the United States welcomes a strong and unified association of Southeast Asian Nations, or ASEAN, that leads in the Southeast Asia and beyond. We support ASEAN in its efforts to deliver sustainable solutions to the region's most pressing challenges.

As part of our work in ASEAN, I believe close cooperation with Laos is essential for a stronger, safer, more prosperous region, and for U.S. interests in the Indo-Pacific. Laos is playing an increasingly important role in the region and will be in the driver's seat next year as ASEAN chair.

The United States, of course, has a complicated history with Laos. During our involvement in the war in Indo-China in the 1960s and 70s, more than 2 million tons of bombs were dropped over Laos. The relationship between the United States and Laos remains influenced by this war legacy.

Thanks to Congress's continued support, the United States has partnered with Laos to address unexploded ordnance, even as the Laos government has actively supported the fullest possible accounting for U.S. personnel still missing in Laos from the war years. If confirmed, I look forward to working closely with Congress on our efforts to remove unexploded ordnance from Laos. I will ensure we continue to address this history, while also working to expand and further normalize our relationship.

Our programs in health, nutrition, agriculture, education, English language training, law enforcement cooperation, and more show our commitment to the U.S., Laos relationship. We will also continue to work with Laos as the country implements a strategy to diversify its economy, and where appropriate, educate U.S. firms about the benefits of doing business in Laos.

As our relationship with Laos has grown, so has our outreach to the people of Laos. There is no better example of a U.S. commitment to Laos than our American center in the capital of Vientiane, which, with the support of Congress, is scheduled for a significant expansion.

A larger American center will help us respond to the young people of Laos who have a huge interest in the United States and in English language training. Our experienced U.S. Embassy team in Vientiane is dedicated to defending U.S. national interests and strengthening the U.S., Lao relationship. If confirmed, I will be honored to lead them.

I will make their safety and well-being my top priority and will join their efforts to support the Laos people and help Laos develop

into a truly independent, successful country that is a valuable partner in pursuing our joint goals of regional peace and prosperity.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Ricketts, and members of the committee, thank you for your consideration of my nomination, and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Variava follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HEATHER VARIAVA

Chairman Van Hollen, Ranking Member Ricketts, and distinguished Members of the committee, thank you for considering my nomination to be the next United States Ambassador to the Lao People's Democratic Republic. I am grateful for the faith that President Biden and Secretary Blinken have placed in me to represent the United States in Laos. I appreciate the opportunity to answer your questions and hear firsthand your thoughts about our relationship with Laos. If confirmed, I look forward to working with the committee and other Members of Congress to advance the interests of the United States, protect the safety of our citizens, and strengthen the bilateral relationship for the benefit of both of our countries.

I would like to take a moment to thank some of my family, whose support and guidance have shaped my life in important ways: First, my mother, Catherine, and my late father, Martin, a U.S. Navy veteran, who fostered my life-long love of learning and who have supported me every step of the way, even when it took me far from home. I would like to thank my husband Billy, whose unwavering support and patience have been a strong foundation for our family, including for our sons, Nick and Nate. They have embraced life in the U.S. Foreign Service with fortitude and good humor. In addition to my family, I also want to thank the many U.S. Embassy and Consulate teams with whom I have had the honor to serve—especially the dedicated local staff who are the backbone of our overseas operations.

During nearly 27 years in the Foreign Service, I have served in South and Southeast Asia, advocating for U.S. interests, building strategic partnerships, and engaging a diverse range of stakeholders to promote democratic values and private sector-led economic growth. My experience in the Philippines, Indonesia, and Vietnam, among others, has underscored for me the importance of American leadership to ensure a free, open, and resilient Indo-Pacific region.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Ricketts, as part of our Indo-Pacific Strategy, the United States welcomes a strong and unified Association of Southeast Asian Nations, or ASEAN, that leads in Southeast Asia and beyond. We support ASEAN in its efforts to deliver sustainable solutions to the region's most pressing challenges, and we are committed to deepening our long-standing cooperation on health, the environment, energy, transportation, human rights, and other issues.

As part of our work in ASEAN, I believe close cooperation with Laos is essential for a stronger, safer, more prosperous region, and for U.S. interests in the Indo-Pacific. Laos is playing an increasingly important role in the region and will be in the driver's seat next year as ASEAN Chair.

The United States, of course, has a complicated history with Laos. During our involvement in the war in Indochina in the 1960s and 1970s, more than two million tons of bombs were dropped over Laos. The relationship between the United States and Laos remains influenced by this war legacy. Thanks to Congress's continued support, the United States has partnered with Laos to address unexploded ordnance, even as the Lao Government has actively supported the fullest possible accounting for U.S. personnel still missing in Laos from the war years.

If confirmed, I look forward to working closely with Congress on our efforts to remove unexploded ordnance from Laos. I will ensure we continue to address this history, while also working to expand and further normalize our relationship. Our programs in health, nutrition, agriculture, education, English language training, law enforcement cooperation, and more show our commitment to the U.S.-Laos relationship and demonstrate the United States' dependability as a partner. We will also continue to work with Laos as the country implements a strategy to diversify its economy, and where appropriate, educate U.S. firms about the benefits of doing business in Laos.

As our relationship with Laos has grown, so has our outreach to the people of Laos. There is no better example of U.S. commitment to Laos than our American Center in Vientiane, which, with the support of Congress, is scheduled for a significant expansion. A larger American Center will help us respond to the huge interest from the young people of Laos in the United States and in English language training.

Our experienced U.S. Embassy team in Vientiane is dedicated to defending U.S. national interests and strengthening the U.S.-Lao relationship. If confirmed, I will be honored to lead them. I will make their safety my top priority and will join their efforts to support the Lao people and help Laos develop into a truly independent, successful country that is a valuable partner in pursuing our joint goals of regional peace and prosperity.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Ricketts, Members of the committee, thank you for your consideration of my nomination. I look forward to your questions.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you, Ms. Variava. And now we will turn to Ms. Turner.

STATEMENT OF JULIE TURNER, OF MARYLAND, NOMINATED TO BE SPECIAL ENVOY ON NORTH KOREAN HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES, WITH THE RANK OF AMBASSADOR

Ms. TURNER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Chairman Van Hollen, Ranking Member Ricketts, and distinguished members of the committee, I am honored to appear before you today as President Biden's nominee to serve as the Special Envoy on North Korean human rights issues, with the rank of Ambassador.

I am grateful for the confidence shown by the President and Secretary Blinken in nominating me. As a Korean American adoptee, it was my childhood dream to serve the country that welcomed me, and I have been privileged to do so as a career civil service employee for 20 years.

I entered the State Department in 2003 as an eager Presidential management fellow, finding a home in the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, and having an opportunity to work at the National Security Council as well.

I spent the last two decades promoting human rights, not just as U.S. values, but as critical interests directly tied to our National Security. One of my first assignments in DRL was to staff the first Special Envoy on North Korean human rights during President George W. Bush's administration.

With great humility and appreciation, I sit here today seeking your support for that same position. If confirmed, I will work closely with you and all members to advance our nation's interests through the promotion of human rights in North Korea.

The human rights situation in the DPRK is one of the most protracted human rights crises in the world, and the COVID-19 pandemic has allowed Kim Jong Un to tighten his control over all aspects of life in the isolated country.

As the DPRK's human rights record has deteriorated, the connection between its widespread violations and abuses, and the threat it poses to international security are clear. The regime's human rights abuses are inextricably linked to its weapons program, which are funded through the exploitation and abuse of the North Korean people.

Thousands of North Koreans are exported abroad and subjected to conditions that amount to forced labor. Schoolchildren are subject to mass mobilizations, and food distribution policies favor the military, leaving millions of North Koreans food insecure. The people of North Korea have suffered far too long under these abusive policies. If confirmed, I will focus on five key areas.

First, I will work with partners and allies, including ROK, to reenergize international efforts to promote human rights and in-

crease access to uncensored information in the DPRK. I will also empower and elevate the efforts of North Korean escapees, whose firsthand experiences, networks, and analysis are invaluable. Second, I will seek to reinvigorate accountability efforts at the UN.

I will prioritize efforts to resume the open briefing at the U.N. Security Council on the human rights situation in the DPRK, and coordinate with like-minded governments in advance—to advance accountability for those responsible for human rights violations in the DPRK. Third, I will undertake efforts to urge the DPRK to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms, and to provide for the needs of the people.

I will call for the repeal of repressive laws and for assurances that international aid organizations will have access to provide assistance in an independent and principled manner, including to the most vulnerable populations.

Fourth, I will focus on protection of North Korean refugees, including by pressing governments to uphold their respective non-refoulement obligations, working with governments to facilitate UNHCR access to North Korean asylum seekers and working to ensure North Koreans continue to have access to U.S. resettlement programs. I have had the honor of welcoming many North Korean escapees to the United States over the years, and I am proud to call many of them my friends.

These individuals overcame unimaginable odds in search of freedom and are now business owners, soldiers, civil service employees, and great Americans. Fifth, I will engage with the Korean-American community to identify divided families in the United States who have family members in the DPRK and to advocate for the urgent reunification of these families.

To that end, I will partner closely with the Republic of Korea to advance family reunions, including for Korean abductees and their loved ones, and I will also work with Japan and other partners to press for the immediate resolution of the Japanese abductees issue.

In closing, I want to thank my parents, Fred and Joan, and my siblings, Brad and Lindsey, for teaching me to have faith, to work hard, and to serve others. I also want to thank my talented and compassionate children, Olivia, Eli, Elise, and Emma, who drive me to be a better human, along with my best friend and partner, George. I love you all.

Thank you for your unwavering support and gracious understanding when humanitarian crises have kept me at work late. Lastly, thank you to my colleagues at DRL and the State Department who have mentored, encouraged, and inspired. Mr. Chairman, ranking member, members of the committee, thank you for your consideration of my nomination, and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Turner follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF JULIE TURNER

Chairman Van Hollen, Ranking Member Ricketts, and distinguished Members of the Committee, I am honored to appear before you today as President Biden's nominee to serve as the Special Envoy on North Korean Human Rights Issues, with the rank of Ambassador. I am grateful for the confidence shown by the President and Secretary Blinken in nominating me.

As a Korean American adoptee, it was my childhood dream to serve the country that welcomed me, and I have been privileged to do so as a career civil service employee for 20 years. I entered the State Department in 2003 as an eager Presidential Management Fellow, finding a home in the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL), and having the opportunity to work at the National Security Council as well. I have spent the last two decades promoting human rights, not just as U.S. values, but as critical interests directly tied to our national security.

One of my first assignments in DRL was to staff the first Special Envoy on North Korean Human Rights during President George W. Bush's administration. With great humility and appreciation, I sit here today seeking your support for that same position. If confirmed, I will work closely with you and all Members to advance our nation's interests through the promotion of human rights for North Koreans.

The human rights situation in the DPRK is one of the most protracted human rights crises in the world, and the COVID-19 pandemic has allowed Kim Jong Un to tighten his control over all aspects of life in the isolated country even more.

As the DPRK's human rights record has deteriorated, the connection between its widespread violations and abuses and the threat it poses to international security are clear. The regime's human rights violations and abuses are inextricably linked to its weapons programs, which are funded through the exploitation and abuse of the North Korean people. Thousands of North Koreans are exported abroad and subjected to conditions that amount to forced labor. School children are subject to mass mobilizations, and food distribution policies favor the military, leaving millions of North Koreans food insecure. The people of North Korea have suffered far too long under these abusive policies.

If confirmed, I will focus on five key areas:

- First, I will work with partners and allies, including the ROK, to reenergize international efforts to promote human rights and increase access to uncensored information in the DPRK. I will also empower and elevate the efforts of North Korean escapees, whose firsthand experiences, networks, and analysis are invaluable.
- Second, I will seek to reinvigorate accountability efforts at the U.N. I will prioritize efforts to resume the open briefing at the U.N. Security Council on the human rights situation in the DPRK and coordinate with likeminded governments to advance accountability for those responsible for human rights violations and abuses in the DPRK.
- Third, I will undertake efforts to urge the DPRK to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms and provide for the needs of its people. I will call for the repeal of repressive laws, such as the Reactionary Thought and Culture Denunciation Law, and for assurances that international aid organizations will have access to provide assistance in an independent and nondiscriminatory manner, including to the most vulnerable populations.
- Fourth, I will focus on the protection of North Korean refugees, including by pressing governments to uphold their respective non-refoulement obligations, to allow UNHCR access, and to ensure access to U.S. resettlement programs. I have had the honor of welcoming many North Korean escapees to the United States over the years and am proud to call many of them friends. These individuals overcame unimaginable odds in search of freedom and are now business owners, soldiers, civil service employees, and great Americans.
- Fifth, I will engage with the Korean American community to identify divided families in the United States who have family members in the DPRK and advocate for the urgent reunification of these families with their immediate relatives. To that end, I will partner closely with the Republic of Korea to advance family reunions, including for Korean abductees and their loved ones. I will also work with Japan and other partners to press for the immediate resolution of the Japanese abductees issue.

In closing, I want to thank my parents, Fred and Joan, and my siblings, Brad and Lindsey, for teaching me to have faith, to work hard, and to serve others. I also want to thank my talented and compassionate children—Olivia, Eli, Alise, and Emma—who drive me to be a better human, along with my best friend and partner, George. I love you all. Thank you for your unwavering support and gracious understanding when humanitarian crises have kept me at work late. Lastly, thank you to my colleagues in DRL and the State Department, who have mentored, encouraged, and inspired me.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, Members of the committee, thank you for considering my nomination. I look forward to your questions.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you. Thank you, Ms. Turner. Now we are going to turn to Mr. Murray.

STATEMENT OF MATTHEW D. MURRAY, OF MARYLAND, A CAREER MEMBER OF THE SENIOR FOREIGN SERVICE, CLASS OF COUNSELOR, NOMINATED TO BE THE UNITED STATES SENIOR OFFICIAL FOR ASIA-PACIFIC ECONOMIC COOPERATION (APEC) WITH THE RANK OF AMBASSADOR DURING HIS TENURE OF SERVICE

Mr. MURRAY. Chair Van Hollen, Ranking Member Ricketts, it is an honor to appear before the committee today as the nominee for the rank of Ambassador during the tenure of my service as a U.S. Senior Official for Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation.

I would like to thank President Biden and Secretary Blinken for the trust they have placed in me, as well as for the signal this nomination sends to the Asia-Pacific region of the United States' commitment to APEC. If confirmed, I look forward to working closely with the Senate to advance our goals in this important multilateral organization.

I am proud to have served the United States as a State Department Foreign Service Officer for the past 25 years, and I am blessed to have made this journey together with my wife, Sharla, who is here with me today, and our three sons, Joshua, a middle school teacher in York, Pennsylvania, Noah, a cadet at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, and Daniel, an aspiring computer scientist and engineer who will begin his university studies at Virginia Tech this fall.

Together, our family has experienced 6 foreign postings and 11 international moves, with all of the highs and lows such a life entails. Like all Foreign Service families, our family endured many challenges in service to our country, and I will always be grateful to Sharla, Joshua, Noah, and Daniel for their selfless service.

Sharla and I both learned a commitment to service from fathers who grew up poor but worked incredibly hard to provide for their families and contribute to their communities. And for mothers who espouse the virtues of education, my own mother, Susan, was an elementary school teacher for more than three decades.

Sharla and I both attended Anne Arundel County Public Schools in Maryland, and both attended college and graduate school with the aid of scholarships. So, today's hearing, therefore, is further evidence to our family that the American Dream is still achievable for hardworking families across our great country.

I first traveled to the Asia Pacific region as a student intern with USAID in Jakarta, Indonesia, in 1995. That summer was life changing for me as I was inspired by the region's economic dynamism and opportunity.

Since joining the State Department in 1998, I have dedicated most of my career across five Presidential Administrations to enhancing U.S. economic engagement with and upholding international rules and principles in the Asia Pacific region, including through APEC.

APEC's 21 member economies account for nearly half of global trade, including 7 of the United States top 10 trading partners, and

companies from APEC economies have invested more than \$1.7 trillion in the United States.

Our economic prosperity, therefore, relies on continued U.S. leadership in this pivotal region. APEC includes partners on both sides of the Pacific with a wide range of economic conditions, and it provides a platform to engage 21 economies, including importantly, Taiwan, which is a full member of APEC.

APEC historically has been an incubator for innovative solutions to economic challenges, and the United States hosted the first ever APEC leaders meeting in Seattle in 1993. Thirty years later, we are hosting APEC again this year, building on the impactful U.S. host year in 2011, when we advanced significant policy initiatives on women's economic empowerment, green growth, and regulatory reform.

Of course, APEC today faces daunting challenges, including global economic headwinds and the need for our region's economies to recover fully from the COVID-19 pandemic, Russia's war against Ukraine, the PRC's efforts to undermine the rules based international order, environmental challenges that need to be addressed, especially the climate crisis, and the imperative to develop digital rules for the 21st century.

And we need to ensure economic growth is inclusive and strengthens communities across our region, including in our own country. Ultimately, our work in APEC must prioritize helping communities at home. Our whole of Government interagency effort in APEC is a diplomatic effort, but it will mean nothing if we are not lifting up communities across the United States.

Our focus in APEC should be on creating American jobs, supporting businesses large and small, attracting foreign investment, advancing the industries of the 21st century by promoting better rules and norms, setting a path to sustainability, and ensuring workers in underrepresented groups are full participants in the economy of the future.

Given these ambitious goals against the backdrop of the significant geopolitical and economic challenges the Asia-Pacific region faces, I would argue that U.S. engagement in APEC is more important than ever before.

If confirmed, I would pledge to be an Ambassador for all Americans in this effort, consistent with the U.S., APEC host year theme of creating a resilient and sustainable future for all. Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Murray follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF MATTHEW D. MURRAY

Chair Van Hollen, Ranking Member Ricketts, it's an honor to appear before the committee today as the nominee for the Rank of Ambassador during the tenure of my service as U.S. Senior Official for Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation.

I'd like to thank President Biden and Secretary Blinken for the trust they have placed in me, as well as for the signal this nomination sends to the Asia-Pacific region of the United States' commitment to APEC.

If confirmed, I look forward to working closely with the Senate to advance our goals in this important multilateral organization.

I am proud to have served the United States as a State Department Foreign Service Officer for the past 25 years. And I am blessed to have made this journey together with my wife, Sharla, and our three sons—Joshua, a middle school English teacher in York, Pennsylvania; Noah, a Cadet at the U.S. Military Academy at West

Point; and Daniel, an aspiring computer scientist and engineer, who will begin his university studies at Virginia Tech this fall.

Together, our family has experienced 6 foreign postings and 11 international moves with all of the highs and lows such a life entails. Like all Foreign Service families, our family endured many challenges in service to our country, and I always will be grateful to Sharla, Joshua, Noah, and Daniel for their selfless service.

Sharla and I both learned a commitment to service from fathers who grew up poor but worked incredibly hard to provide for their families and contribute to their communities, and from mothers who espoused the virtues of education—my own mother, Susan, was an elementary school teacher for more than three decades.

Today's hearing therefore is further evidence to our family that the American Dream is still achievable for hard-working families across our great country.

I first traveled to the Asia-Pacific region as a student intern with USAID in Jakarta, Indonesia, in 1995. That summer was life-changing for me, as I was inspired by the region's economic dynamism and opportunity.

Since joining the State Department in 1998, I have dedicated most of my career across five Presidential administrations to enhancing U.S. economic engagement with, and upholding international rules and principles in, the Asia-Pacific region, including through APEC.

APEC's 21 member economies account for nearly half of global trade, including seven of the United States' top 10 trading partners, and companies from APEC economies have invested more than \$1.7 trillion in the United States.

Our economic prosperity therefore relies on continued U.S. leadership in this pivotal region. APEC includes partners on both sides of the Pacific with a wide range of economic conditions, and it provides a platform to engage 21 economies, including importantly, Taiwan, which is a full member of APEC.

APEC historically has been an incubator for innovative solutions to economic challenges, and the United States hosted the first-ever APEC Leaders' meeting in Seattle in 1993. Thirty years later, we are hosting APEC again this year, building on the impactful U.S. host year in 2011 when we advanced significant policy initiatives on women's economic empowerment, green growth, and regulatory reform.

Of course, APEC today faces daunting challenges, including: global economic headwinds and the need for our region's economies to recover fully from the COVID-19 pandemic; Russia's war against Ukraine, the PRC's efforts to undermine the rules-based international order; environmental challenges that need to be addressed, especially the climate crisis; and the imperative to develop digital rules. Ultimately, our work in APEC must prioritize helping communities at home. Our whole-of-government interagency effort in APEC is a diplomatic effort, but it will mean nothing if we're not lifting up communities across the United States.

Our focus in APEC should be on creating American jobs, supporting businesses large and small, attracting foreign investment, advancing the industries of the 21st century by promoting better rules and norms, setting a path to sustainability, and ensuring workers and underrepresented groups are full participants in the economy of the future.

Given these ambitious goals against the backdrop of the significant geopolitical and economic challenges the Asia-Pacific region faces, I would argue that U.S. engagement in APEC is more important than ever before.

If confirmed, I would pledge to be an Ambassador for all Americans in this effort—consistent with the U.S. APEC host year theme of, "Creating a Resilient and Sustainable Future for All."

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you, Mr. Murray. And now we will turn to Ms. Johnson.

STATEMENT OF JENNIFER L. JOHNSON, OF NEW YORK, A CAREER MEMBER OF THE SENIOR FOREIGN SERVICE, CLASS OF MINISTER-COUNSELOR, NOMINATED TO BE AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE FEDERATED STATES OF MICRONESIA

Ms. JOHNSON. Thank you, Chairman Van Hollen, Ranking Member Ricketts, and distinguished members of the committee.

I am honored to appear before you today as the President's nominee to serve as U.S. Ambassador to the Federated States of Micro-

nesia. I am grateful for the confidence that President Biden and Secretary Blinken have placed in me with this nomination.

If confirmed, I look forward to closely working with Congress to advance U.S. National Security interests by reinvigorating our ties with our Pacific neighbors, particularly with our close friend and partner, the Federated States of Micronesia. I would like to thank my family, my husband, Pat, who is here today, my daughters, Maryn and Nola, for their support and willingness to join me around the world.

I would also like to thank my parents, siblings, and Foreign Service colleagues and mentors. I am grateful for their guidance, inspiration, and support. And thank you, Senator Van Hollen, for all the work that you and Senator Sullivan do for our Foreign Service community.

My interest in the Pacific Islands began when I was a student in Australia, and it has only grown over the years. Serving the American people is a tradition that runs deep in my family. My grandfather served in World War II, one with the Navy in the Pacific, and the other received a Purple Heart while serving in the Army.

My parents were schoolteachers, as is my sister. My grandmother and mother-in-law were nurses, and my father in law is a Marine. The United States is a Pacific nation. We enjoy a close partnership with the Federated States of Micronesia based on deep historical, economic, and cultural ties, and our shared democratic values.

If confirmed, I look forward to deepening the already strong ties between our two countries by supporting their sovereignty and security and working together to strengthen democratic institutions. For the Federated States of Micronesia, agreement on economic assistance related to the compact is imminent.

If confirmed, and pending the approval of implementing legislation, I look forward to operationalizing the new agreements to make tangible and lasting improvements in the lives of their citizens. During the pandemic, we saw the strength of the partnership.

The Federated States of Micronesia was included as part of the rollout of vaccines and the distribution of PPE from the very start. If confirmed, I look forward to working with Micronesia to help the country continue to recover from the economic effects of the pandemic, strengthen the health care system, and combat transnational threats.

The Pacific Islands are highly vulnerable to natural disasters, whose devastating effects have imperiled the livelihoods of many. If confirmed, I will work closely with key stakeholders to improve disaster preparedness and strengthen climate resilience.

The United States is responsible for the defense of the Federated States of Micronesia, and their citizens, in turn, serve in the U.S. Military. Their service is a sacred trust, and if confirmed, I will work with the Department of Veterans Affairs to improve the assistance that these veterans receive. Over the course of my career, one thing has always been clear, our people are our most important asset.

If confirmed, I will make the safety and security of U.S. citizens and our embassy team my top priority. As we expand our footprint

across the Pacific, I will support our teams in these remote locations to develop a new cadre of Pacific experts who will be ready to lead in the decades ahead on Indo-Pacific issues.

Chairman Van Hollen, Ranking Member Ricketts, if confirmed, I look forward to working with you and the members of this committee to advance U.S. interests in the Federated States of Micronesia and the broader Indo-Pacific, and to sustain and expand the progress that we have achieved in this important partnership. Thank you for inviting me here today and considering my nomination. I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Johnson follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF JENNIFER L. JOHNSON

Thank you, Chairman Van Hollen, Ranking Member Ricketts, and distinguished Members of the Committee.

I am honored to appear before you today as the President's nominee to serve as U.S. Ambassador to the Federated States of Micronesia. I am grateful for the confidence that President Biden and Secretary Blinken have placed in me with this nomination.

If confirmed, I look forward to working closely with Congress to advance U.S. national security interests by reinvigorating our ties with our Pacific neighbors, particularly with our close friend and partner, the Federated States of Micronesia.

I'd like to thank my family—my husband, Pat, and my daughters Maryn and Nola—for their support and willingness to join me around the world. I'd also like to thank my parents, siblings, and Foreign Service colleagues and mentors. I am deeply grateful for their guidance, inspiration, and support.

My interest in the Pacific Islands began when I was a student in Australia, and it has only grown over the years. Serving the American people is a tradition that runs deep in my family, and I feel privileged to continue it. My grandfathers both served in World War II—one with the U.S. Navy in the Pacific, and the other received a Purple Heart while serving with the U.S. Army. My parents were school-teachers, as is my sister, my grandmother and mother-in-law were nurses, and my father-in-law is a U.S. Marine.

The United States is a Pacific nation. The United States and the Federated States of Micronesia enjoy a partnership based on deep historical, economic, and cultural ties, and our shared democratic values. If confirmed, I look forward to deepening the already strong ties between the United States and the Federated States of Micronesia by supporting their sovereignty and security and working together to strengthen democratic institutions and human rights.

For the Federated States of Micronesia, agreement on economic assistance related to the Compact is imminent. If confirmed, and pending the approval of implementing legislation, I look forward to operationalizing the new agreements to make tangible and lasting improvements in the lives of the citizens of the Federated States of Micronesia.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, we saw the strength of this partnership. The Federated States of Micronesia was included, along with U.S. states and territories, as part of the rollout of vaccines and the distribution of Personal Protective Equipment from the very start. If confirmed, I look forward to working with Micronesia to help the country continue to recover from the economic effects of the pandemic, strengthen the health care system against future pandemics, and combat transnational threats.

The Pacific Islands are highly vulnerable to natural disasters, whose devastating effects have imperiled the livelihoods of many Micronesians. If confirmed, I will work closely with the government, likeminded partners, and multilateral development banks to improve disaster preparedness and strengthen climate resilience.

The Federated States of Micronesia does not have armed forces of its own. Instead, the United States is responsible for its defense, and their citizens, in turn, serve in the U.S. military. Their service is a sacred trust and if confirmed, I will work with the Department of Veterans Affairs to improve the assistance Micronesian veterans receive.

If confirmed, I look forward to supporting our deep people-to-people ties. Existing initiatives, such as the Young Pacific Leaders Program, have been enriched by Micronesian participation. I will also help Micronesia to participate in new areas, including the U.S.-Pacific Institute for Rising Leaders.

Over the course of my career, one thing has always been clear: our people are our most important asset. If confirmed, I will make the safety and security of U.S. citizens and our Embassy team my top priority. As we expand our footprint across the Pacific, I will support our teams in these remote locations to develop a new cadre of Pacific experts who will be ready to lead in the decades ahead on Indo-Pacific issues.

Chairman Van Hollen, Ranking Member Ricketts, if confirmed, I look forward to working with you and the members of this Committee to advance U.S. interests in the Federated States of Micronesia and the broader Indo-Pacific and to sustain and expand the progress we have achieved in this important partnership.

Thank you for inviting me here today and considering my nomination. I look forward to your questions.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you, Ms. Johnson. Thank all of you for your testimony. And in listening to all of you, it is clear to me why the President nominated each of you for these positions.

Ms. Johnson, if I could start with you, and you referenced in your testimony the upcoming signing of the next agreement, the Compact of Free Association. I know the President had hoped to be in Papua New Guinea.

It is unfortunate that he has had to cancel his trip to get back here, although I hope we will resolve the budget issues. But could you speak a little bit to what you expect to see in the New Compact, and what your role as Ambassador, if confirmed, will be in terms of implementing that?

So, what is different about the Next Compact compared to the current one, and how will you go about implementing it?

Ms. JOHNSON. Absolutely. Thank you for your question. So, I actually have not seen the New Compact because Ambassador, our Special Envoy, Ambassador Joe Yoon, is in the region right now and they are putting the final touches on the Compact with the Federated States of Micronesia.

Hopefully in the next few days or weeks, we will see the actual document. I see the Ambassador's role administering the Compact as twofold. I see it as working closely with the Department of Interior to ensure that U.S. tax dollars are used responsibly in all the areas that they are being used in.

And I also see it as making sure that we can improve the economic climate in the Federated States of Micronesia so that it can be implemented successfully.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. I appreciate that. I had a number of discussions over the last couple of years with some of the people involved in the negotiations. I know one of the things that Micronesia was interested in was a little more input and influence over exactly how some of their funds were spent on issues regarding local economic development, other economic issues.

So, when we do see the final agreement, we look forward to working with you, if confirmed on next steps. Mr. Murray, if I could ask you about APEC, because I agree with you, it is a very important organization. We have lots of important economic issues at stake in the Indo-Pacific.

I returned recently from a trip to both Vietnam and Indonesia, where there were all sorts of discussions about greater U.S. investment. And of course, we are working to try to get agreement on IPEF.

And there is a significant overlap, as you know, between the countries we are seeking to have participate in IPEF and the

APEC members, although there are some members of APEC that are clearly not part of that, including China and Russia.

Can you speak a little bit to what the role of APEC is, if any, what role you will have in using that as a forum to advance IPEF? And if not IPEF, you know, what other specific initiatives do you see you being most focused on, if confirmed?

Mr. MURRAY. Well, thank you, Senator, for the question. You know, the Biden administration, as you know, has been very focused in its Indo-Pacific strategy on trying to have a very comprehensive approach to the region, and certainly that includes the economic prosperity pillar.

And, you know, I think it is really important as we go out and engage, that we recognize that there are a number of different mechanisms, different organizations that we can work with, and different partners that we can work with to achieve some of these goals. I think the overarching objectives are, you know, very straightforward, as you have already heard from partners in the region.

We need, you know, better trade investment flows, trade facilitation. We need supply chains that work for everyone. We need to address some of the decarbonization goals. We need to move forward on anti-corruption and regulatory reform. And these are some of the similar objectives that we work towards, whether we are looking at it through IPEF or through ASEAN, or through the quad, or through APEC.

And so, I think that there is a complementarity across all of these different regional groupings which can, you know, work all in the same direction. I think where APEC comes into that is the ability, through a consensus based, non-binding way, to try to work to resolve a lot of the behind the border challenges and some of the issues surrounding sustainability, the digital economy also, which is economic resiliency broadly, and trying to be mutually supportive of what we are doing in IPEF.

There are 12 partners in common between IPEF and APEC, and it certainly would be our goal to work with the others in the Administration who are working on IPEF to make sure that our—you know, our work is all moving in the same direction. And as you point out, importantly, to be able to support our businesses as they go overseas, and also to attract additional investment to the United States.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you. Appreciate it. Senator Ricketts.

Senator RICKETTS. Great. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And again, congratulations on your nominations to everybody here on the panel. And again, thank you for your service to our great nation.

And also thank you to your families, because I know they serve alongside with you, whether it is Ms. Turner's late hours or being stationed overseas. And as a former Governor who led a number of trade missions, I want to especially thank Foreign Service members who do live overseas, because I know that that can sometimes be tough duty, and I really appreciate it. I have always found our embassies in every part of the world just staffed by those highly qualified people, so really appreciate what you have done for us.

Mr. Murray I like talking about APEC as well. So, Russia has launched this illegal war against Ukraine. 8 million people are displaced outside the country, 5 million people displaced within the country. The Russians have targeted civilians' apartment buildings and so forth with rocket attacks, missiles, airstrikes. 8,500 civilians have been killed. 14,000 have been wounded. 6,000 Ukrainian children have been kidnaped and taken to Russia.

There are reports of, you know, 65,000 war crimes, including rape and summary executions. And yet in your statement in December, you said that as good stewards of APEC, the United States, when it hosts the leaders conference this fall in November in San Francisco, that we will invite Russia.

So, my question is, is there anything Russia can do that would get them reconsidered as a membership? Is it appropriate now to reconsider Russia's membership? And if—you know, if you were confirmed, how are you thinking about Russia's participation in APEC?

Mr. MURRAY. Yes, thank you for the question, Senator. We very much share the concern that you have just outlined about Russia's aggression towards and invasion of Ukraine.

And you know, at APEC, with Russia as a member, one of the things the United States has done is worked very closely with like-minded partners to make sure that in that organization we are condemning Russia's invasion and condemning the war. And —

Senator RICKETTS. So, I think they did at your last conference. Would you do that again in San Francisco? Would you organize that again?

Mr. MURRAY. So, yes. So, in the leaders meeting in November in Bangkok, there was a—part of the leaders statement was condemning the war in Ukraine and condemning Russia for its actions, and also talking about the economic impacts that Russia's invasion of Ukraine is also having on the region at large.

And, you know, APEC is an economic organization. That is, you know, one way in which we are pushing back is to highlight those economic impacts. I think what we have said about our U.S. host year, and I think the interview you are referring to in December, is to say that we have invited so far Russia to, you know, participate in meetings, and they have participated in a couple of the lower level meetings that we are having, including meetings that we are having this week in Detroit.

But we have not made any decisions yet on the leaders participation and certainly not on Vladimir Putin's participation. And that will be a decision that the White House will have to make, and that will be an issue that we will continue to want to consult very closely with the committee on as we go forward.

Senator RICKETTS. All right, great. Well, let us talk about the People's Republic of China, because you mentioned Taiwan as well, and this being one of the organizations that they are in, albeit it is Chinese Taipei.

And there has been the suggestion—and of course, the People's Republic of China has been working to isolate Taiwan. There has been the suggestion that President Biden invite President Tsai to come to the meeting this year.

I do not believe the President of Taiwan has ever been to one of these meetings, correct me if I am wrong on that. If that were to happen, would you support the President in inviting President Tsai to come to San Francisco?

Mr. MURRAY. Well, as you refer to, Senator, there has been a three decade long common practice of Taiwan choosing to send a leaders representative to each of the APEC leaders meetings. And that has been the case in the past. But certainly, you know, we want to be able to support Taiwan to the fullest extent possible.

I think if confirmed, the—having the Ambassador rank would be very helpful as well, because I will be, you know, traveling out, planning to travel out to Taiwan to also engage them, and extended an invitation for a leaders representative to attend the Leaders Week in November.

But certainly, again, we would be consulting closely with the White House, and we want to consult closely with the committee as we go forward on the decision on who attends from Taiwan.

Senator RICKETTS. Great. Appreciate that. If that was possible, and because the People's Republic of China would also presumably have folks, do you think there is an opportunity then to maybe create some dialog between the People's Republic and Taiwan at that meeting?

Mr. MURRAY. I do think one of the strengths of APEC is that every single time there are meetings, that there is that opportunity for discussions between China and Taiwan.

It is really unique in that way. One of the only organizations in the world where both of them participate. And so, to the extent that we can create opportunities like that, that is, I think, a wonderful benefit of APEC as a platform. And certainly, if there are those kinds of opportunities to facilitate, we would certainly want to support that.

Senator RICKETTS. Great. Thank you, Mr. Murray.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you—thank you, Senator. Ms. Turner, congratulations again on your nomination and your story about how one of your first jobs at the State Department was staffing the person who is now—who held the position you are nominated for now is, I think, an important, informative story about sticking to it, and we are glad to have your nomination.

You know, the last time the U.N. Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights looked at the situation in the DPRK, they found that the North Korean is committing horrible atrocities, including crimes against humanity, against its own people.

Unfortunately, that situation has not changed since that U.N. commission of inquiry was conducted. When I was in the Republic of Korea, I think five years ago now, one of my starkest memories is talking to escapees from North Korea. And we, of course, have escapees in South Korea.

We have them in the United States. Could you maybe talk a little bit about how you can use this position to tell their stories and have the public get a better understanding of the human rights atrocities? Because we all know about, you know, North Korea's nuclear brinkmanship.

And there is a lot of focus on that, appropriately so. But I think we all collectively need to do a better job of talking about the atro-

cious human rights situation in North Korea. So, you can you talk about how we can better get that story out there?

Ms. TURNER. Yes, thank you for that question, Mr. Chairman. I, 100 percent, agree that the voices of North Korean escapees are absolutely critical at helping to expose to the world the types of gross human rights violations that are happening in North Korea.

One of my top priorities will be seeking ways to help amplify those voices in the multilateral space in particular, and where possible, to press for and have the U.S. lead on side events at the United Nations Human Rights Council, as well as the U.N. General Assembly.

I think also having the North Korean human rights situation in place back on the U.N. Security Council's agenda is another opportunity to have those escapee voices heard on a broader international level. I think the other area in which I would seek to engage with the escapee community is also with regard to the U.S. Government's access to information programs.

Our USAGM has, through Voice of America and Radio Free Asia, for many years broadcast information into North Korea. And I think the authentic voices of North Korean escapees are really critical in that process, and so we are looking for ways to incorporate them in sending messages back to North Koreans so that they know that the U.S. and others around the world support them, would be a very helpful tool.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you. And I look forward to stay in touch on those issues. Ms. Variava, we obviously have lots of room to grow in terms of our bilateral relationship with Laos. As you mentioned in your testimony, they will also be assuming the chairmanship, the head of ASEAN next year.

I was recently in Indonesia and, you know, my perception is they are trying to make the most of their opportunity at the head. I think the—I think President Obama was in Laos back in 2016 or 2017, in that—2016 for the ASEAN meeting.

So, as we look forward, as we look to the passing the baton at some point from Indonesia to Laos, what can you do, if you are confirmed as Ambassador, to make sure that the chairmanship of ASEAN under Laos addresses our concerns and appropriately reflects the views of all the ASEAN members?

Ms. VARIAVA. Thank you very much, Senator. Yes. I believe in Laos, they still talk about the visit of President Obama back in 2016 when Laos hosted ASEAN the last time. They are preparing, as I understand it, for their upcoming host year in 2024. And the United States and other like-minded partners are helping Laos to prepare for that. It is a heavy lift with a lot of meetings throughout the year.

So, we are looking forward to helping them get ready for that chair year, and to support them and advocate with them on the issues that are of importance to us in the ASEAN region, and to continuing to pursue the goals that we have in ASEAN, which is a fundamental partner in our Indo-Pacific strategy. And I look forward, if confirmed, to supporting Laos in that regard.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you. Senator Ricketts.

Senator RICKETTS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Ms. Johnson let us talk about Micronesia. So, we all know that the People's Republic

of China has been trying to undermine our authority in the world. President Xi has said that he wants to be the world dominating power, and they do not like the system that we have set out that has kept world peace essentially since World War II.

As part of that, a letter was leaked in March from the outgoing President of the Federated States of Micronesia, David Panuelo, who really showed the depths of how the CCP is different. They have different values than we have. In his letter, it detailed a number of extraordinary things on a political warfare, really operating inside the gray zone of what is legal or crossing over that line.

What they were—what he described as Chinese envelopes of cash and trips on private planes, trying to create influence among politicians and administrators to advance their personal interests in lieu of the national interest? In another instance, the Chinese ambassador kept calling to push the Chinese COVID-19 vaccine so much, the President had to change his cell phone number.

And when the gifts did not work, he claimed that the Chinese ambassador had made direct personal threats—or Chinese officials made direct personal threats against his safety. He also recommended that Micronesia actually switch its diplomatic recognition to Taiwan and claim to have secured a promise of \$50 million from Taiwan, plus an annual payment of \$50 million to plug in the gap there.

And I was glad to see—I am glad to hear you also talked about the U.S., Micronesia Compact of Free Association and how that is going. So, Mr. Johnson, were you aware of this letter that had been leaked earlier this March? And if so, what are your thoughts on the CCP's pressuring of the Federated States of Micronesia?

Ms. JOHNSON. Thank you for the question, Senator. Yes, I am aware of former President David Panuelo's letter from March 9th, and I share your concern. The PRC is America's most consequential geopolitical challenge.

And as their involvement in the region has grown, we have seen a range of increasingly problematic behavior. I think it is really important to approach this eyes wide open, and work with our allies and partners, and show up, listen, and help the Federated States of Micronesia build their resilience and help them avoid these predatory economic practices.

I think there are many ways that we can do this, and if confirmed, I would work closely with the Federated States of Micronesia on this. I think it is a top priority.

Senator RICKETTS. Do you think the President's comments in his letter are credible?

Ms. JOHNSON. Sir, I believe there is probably some credibility to them.

Senator RICKETTS. All right. Dr. Adams, island nations off the coast of Africa are increasingly becoming part of our strategy to be able to counter the People's Republic of China. What is your assessment of the People's Republic of China's involvement in Cabo Verde, and how much does a CCP influence pose a threat to our interests there, and what can we best do to counter that?

Dr. ADAMS. Thank you, Senator. Cabo Verde has indicated, I think consistently, that their preferred partner is the United States. There is Chinese investment. There are Chinese people.

There is a Chinese presence in Cabo Verde. I think Cabo Verde is in a less debt distressed situation compared to other African nations that owe quite a lot of debt to the PRC. But I do think there is cause for concern.

I share your perception that we need to continue to monitor. We need to continue to do our best to be a partner to Cabo Verde and to advance our interests, both in the security and economic realm.

Senator RICKETTS. Great. Thank you very much. Mr. Chairman, I shall turn it back to you since we have got Senator Duckworth here.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you. Senator Duckworth.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you to the chairman, the ranking member. Ms. Variava, it is good to see you again. You started to talk about ASEAN and also Laos's upcoming chairmanship year. We have also seen in fits and starts, to be sure, regional efforts to improve the resiliency of more vulnerable members of the Mekong sub region against PRC dominance.

The Thailand initiated Ayeyawady-Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Corporation Strategy, the ACMECS, which Laos currently chairs, shows real potential in this regard. Is there more that we can do? Is there more perhaps under the rubric of the Mekong, U.S. partnership or the ACMECS that would strengthen regional supports for Laos?

Ms. VARIAVA. Thank you, Senator. It is great to see you again. Yes, I do believe there is more that can be done in the Mekong region. And if confirmed, I look forward to working with Laos and other partners in this regard. One of the big areas in which—through which the United States partners with the Mekong region is the Mekong, U.S. partnership, which Laos co-chairs with the United States.

We have programs through that partnership that help improve the sustainability of projects in development, ensuring that the benefits of the Mekong are used in a sustainable way, that we are looking after water flows, the environment, fisheries, and the livelihoods of the people who live along the Mekong so that—and there are other areas, and we partner as well, including in power.

So, there are a lot of different ways that we can work with the Laos and the Mekong countries to improve the sustainable use of the Mekong River.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you. Thank you. Mr. Murray, you have described incorporating gender equity into economic development as an important priority for the United States, for APEC. Can you describe how that translates into action during the U.S., APEC chair year?

Mr. MURRAY. Absolutely. Thank you, Senator, for the question. So, we have a very strong legacy in APEC because it was in 2011 that, during the U.S. host year, that we launched the women's economic empowerment work that has continued for the last 12 years.

And so, one of the things that we are—continue to try to do right now is to build on that through not only, you know, working at the government level, but also incorporating a broad array of stakeholders and also public private collaboration to really try to advance that.

And one of the real areas of focus this year is on women-run small and medium sized enterprises, which, as you know, across the region, is a real backbone of many of the economies in the Asia-Pacific region, and one that needs—you know, a backbone that needs a lot of support right now, particularly coming out of the COVID pandemic.

So, one of the things that we are trying to do through APEC is not just look at women's economic empowerment as one economic forum that will host or one event, but really try to embed gender equity across all of the various work streams that we are advancing in APEC. So, working on it through, for example, small and medium sized enterprise work streams.

Working on it as well through our health work streams and looking at gender equity in that space, and really trying to, you know, advance that priority as we go forward in the year. And so, it is definitely a top priority for us.

I think we have a really strong legacy of that in the United States, but also it is not just the right thing to do, but it is the best thing for the economies of the region, because if we are not fully engaging all members of society in the economy, then we are leaving, you know, billions and billions of dollars in potential productivity on the table.

Senator DUCKWORTH. I could not agree with you more. I think there is just so many ways that we can engage within the Indo-Pacific. I mean, during my regular travels to the Indo-Pacific, I have really reinforced my belief that our engagement with regional partners cannot be built primarily solely around a strategic competition with the PRC.

But whether it is gender equity, whether it is environmental policy, there are many opportunities to strengthen and deepen those relationships. I think we need to meet our partners where they are and meet them with the challenges that they currently face and figure out how we can work together to meet those needs, as well as our own needs as a nation.

And one of those needs, I think, is dealing with climate change. And dealing climate change, and in particular sea level rise, and potentially—this is potentially an existential threat for many of the Pacific Island nations.

Ms. Johnson, I know we touched on this when we sat down together earlier this year, but I want—what do you see as the key challenges for the United States in our efforts to bring the Pacific Island countries into closer partnership with the United States?

And if confirmed, how would you work to address those challenges in the Federated States of Micronesia?

Ms. JOHNSON. Thank you for the question, Senator. It is great to see you again. I think the biggest challenges aside from natural disasters and the PRC, are the location. And the Federated States of Micronesia is geographically far from here.

And it is spread out over a million square miles, and it has a vast space, and it is difficult to get to via flights. Therefore, I think trying to keep the momentum going from everything that we have seen that has been such a positive advance over such a vast space will be challenging. However, if confirmed, I am up for that challenge.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you. I am out of time, Mr. Chairman.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you, Senator Duckworth. I do have one more question for you, Dr. Adams, on Cabo Verde. And I think it was you indicated in your testimony, Cabo Verde is one of the strongest democracies in the region.

And I do want to point out that last year, AFRICOM and Interpol conducted joint interdiction operations with Cabo Verde's law enforcement authorities to stop suspected illegal fishing and convergent crimes in the waters along the coast of West Africa and the EEZ of Cabo Verde.

I understand this cooperation resulted in the seizure of 6.5 tons of suspected cocaine, worth more than \$350 million. Can you talk about how you could continue to build on that form of cooperation? And how important is that kind of cooperation in terms of protecting the EEZ to Cabo Verde and other countries in West Africa?

Dr. ADAMS. Thank you, Senator. It is an important question. Definitely, if confirmed, I would seek to support and further the partnerships that have begun between the United States and Cabo Verde regarding maritime security, and also regarding border security. As was previously mentioned, for small island nations, it is a big challenge. It is a big ocean.

And so, I think all of us would want to continue those partnerships, to deepen those partnerships, and to expand them, partly because of the interest that Cabo Verde has in that security cooperation, and also the location in West Africa and the importance for that region as a whole.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you. Senator Ricketts.

Senator RICKETTS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Ms. Variava let us talk about Laos and debt. We know a lot of countries have run up debt under the People's Republic of China's Belt and Road Initiative, and Laos, unfortunately, is one of those countries.

I think they had a project to build a railway from Vientiane to Yuan Province—Hunan Province of Southern China. I think the initial cost was \$6 billion and now their overall debt—and that was part of an overall infrastructure spending effort that has now racked up at the end of 2021, \$14.5 billion worth of debt. It could be higher now since we are much on that—and at that time it represented 89 percent of GDP.

And of course, that was not the only project. The People's Republic of China helped build dams on the tributaries to Mekong, including two on the Mekong River. What—you know, with—actually, it has been over a year now since this railway has been opened.

Has it been able to deliver the economic results that they were expecting from having that railway open?

Ms. VARIAVA. Thank you, Senator. I do not believe—I do not know yet what the economic outcomes have been from opening the new railway line, which I think has been slow to get started, in part because of pandemic closures of borders and so forth.

However, there is no question that China—excuse me, Laos is heavily indebted to the PRC and that is a serious concern.

If confirmed, I would look forward to working with like-minded nations and international finance institutions to help give Laos the tools it needs to manage this debt, to make sure that agreements that it enters into with other nations, including the PRC, are done in a way that benefit Laos and do not take advantage of Laos.

So, these are some of the things that I would do, if confirmed, to support Laos to be an independent, strong nation, even as it borders China.

Senator RICKETTS. Do you think this project poses a financial risk?

Ms. VARIAVA. I think the project, as part of the overall debt, certainly does pose financial risk, yes, sir.

Senator RICKETTS. And do you think that if there needs to be a debt restructuring, that the People's Republic of China will be interested in helping Laos out with some sort of restructuring, because you mentioned giving them the tools. What do you think?

Ms. VARIAVA. I cannot speculate about what the PRC will do. Certainly, we will be looking to give Laos the tools it needs to manage its debt properly. And I think that we want to give Laos a variety of tools to manage debt, to look for other solutions, and to pressure the PRC, if necessary, to ensure that Laos does not fail financially.

Senator RICKETTS. My understanding is the People's Republic of China is generally not very keen on loan forgiveness. So, I think there may be—have to be other solutions. But with that, Mr. Chairman, I will turn back over to you. Thank you.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you. Thank you, Senator Ricketts. And I think Senator Ricketts is right. It is important that all of you, if confirmed as our Ambassadors, inform the countries that you are going to be dealing with, that there are big risks to doing business with China, including debt traps.

At the same time, and I think both Senator Ricketts and I would agree, we also have to step up our own game as what we are offering in each of these countries. And all of you are going to be part of that effort, not just with respect to our competition with China, but just to build on strong bilateral relations between the United States and each of the countries you are—you would be representing—where you would be representing the United States if confirmed.

And I do have to say that, you know, the President right now is on his way, of course, to the G7, or he has arrived at the G7 meeting in Hiroshima. And I know a big part of that discussion will be how do we deal with the challenges in the Indo-Pacific, including making sure that we work collectively to really enforce the sanctions against Russia, but also that we address the very real challenges posed by the PRC throughout the region.

It is unfortunate that the President will not be able to go to Papua New Guinea. He would be, as I understand it, the first President of the United States to visit a Pacific Island country, and I know he was looking forward to the quad meeting in Australia.

So, I—that is unfortunately going to do some damage, the fact that the President has to return back here to deal with a very real situation regarding our budget. And I know we both agree that we

got to avoid default, but it is one of those costs that we are seeing from the moment that we are in here.

Let me just close by thanking Senator Ricketts, thanking all of you for your service to our country. I think, Ms. Johnson, you said that people are our most important asset, and I know you were referring to the people you will be working with, but it also holds true of all of you.

Thank you for mentioning the work Senator Sullivan and I do as co-chairs of the Foreign Service Caucus. And hearing all of you today just reminds me of, you know, why the two of us are so proud to co-chair of the Foreign Service Caucus.

So, thank you. Thank your families. I look forward to supporting your nominations, and hopefully we can get you out to these posts or your other assignments as quickly as possible so you can do this work on behalf of our country. Thank you very much.

Oh, let me—yes, my housekeeping. Thank you. Thank you for reminding me. For the information of the members, the record will be kept open until close of business tomorrow, Thursday, May 18th. And with that, this hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 3:52 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

Additional Material Submitted for the Record

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO JENNIFER M. ADAMS BY SENATOR ROBERT MENENDEZ

Question. During a recent visit to Cabo Verde, the U.N. Secretary-General said that Cabo Verde is “on the frontlines of an existential crisis”—meaning climate change. The impacts of climate change on small island nations like Cabo Verde can be significant—reducing coastlines, depleting fishing stocks, undermining food security, and exposing inhabitants to more frequent, and more dangerous, weather events. What threat does climate change pose to Cabo Verde specifically, and what will you do, if confirmed, to support Cabo Verde in its efforts to resist and adapt to the impacts of climate change?

Answer. I understand that climate change threatens Cabo Verde’s plans of development, dramatically impacting coastal areas (where 80 percent of the population lives) and causing displacement. Other negative outcomes also include constraints on tourism, loss of habitat, biodiversity and fisheries. Droughts caused by climate change are the most concerning as they impact the nation’s food security, decrease water availability to promote socio-economic development and add to desertification. If confirmed, I will continue to advocate for the United States to support efforts to protect marine fauna and draw interest from U.S. energy firms to help facilitate ambitious government plans to privatize the state-owned electric utility and transition to 50 percent renewables by 2030 and 100 percent by 2040. I will also continue to advocate for disaster assistance when Cabo Verde suffers from adverse weather events and food insecurity.

Question. Cabo Verde has one of Africa’s strongest democracies. At a time when many other countries in Africa are experiencing coups or backsliding, are there opportunities to work with Cabo Verde to show other countries the benefits of democratic governance? If confirmed, what will you do to encourage Cabo Verde to be outspoken at African multilateral institutions on issues related to democracy and good governance?

Answer. Cabo Verde was an eager participant in the 2023 Summit for Democracy, and if confirmed as Ambassador, I would encourage Cabo Verde to participate actively in similar forums in the future. I will also support and encourage Cabo Verde’s participation at African and other multilateral institutions to spread the message of their good example as a vibrant democracy.

Question. Cabo Verde’s strategic location has attracted significant attention from both the United States and China. While U.S. engagement has focused on defense

and law enforcement assistance, China is investing in Cabo Verde's logistical and digital infrastructure. To what extent is strategic competition shaping our policies and activities in Cabo Verde—and are we offering an innovative, attractive alternative to China?

Answer. I understand that the current relationship between Cabo Verde and the PRC is conspicuous in such areas as government infrastructure and healthcare, as in many African nations. PRC entities have a ubiquitous presence in the country's ICT sector. If confirmed, I will continue to monitor the PRC's influence on Cabo Verde and promote strategies that will further advance the United States-Cabo Verde bilateral economic and security partnerships. I would look to expand contact between the Embassy Deal Team and Prosper Africa to ensure that Prosper Africa was fully aware of emerging opportunities in the Cabo Verdean marketplace with an eye to bringing its tools, resources, and expertise to bear in identifying and assisting U.S. companies to take advantage of such opportunities—particularly in cases where an alternative to PRC investment is required.

Democracy & Human Rights

Question. What are the most important actions you have taken in your career to date to support democracy and human rights? What has been the impact of your actions?

Answer. Supporting democracy and promoting respect for human rights is a priority for all Foreign Service officers overseas. I have worked hard to advance these goals in my career through aligning and assisting local advocates and champions as well as through USAID program mechanisms in the areas of civil society strengthening education, training, and sustainable development. If confirmed, I would take advantage of State and USAID programs to support Cabo Verdean institutions such as the Commission on Human Rights, the implementors of the Child-Friendly Justice Project and others to support the ongoing efforts of Cabo Verdean to advance concrete actions in the democracy and human rights agenda.

Question. What issues are the most pressing challenges to democracy or democratic development in Cabo Verde? These challenges might include obstacles to participatory and accountable governance and institutions, rule of law, authentic political competition, civil society, human rights and press freedom. Please be as specific as possible.

Answer. According to the 2022 Human Rights Report, the Republic of Cabo Verde is a parliamentary representative democratic republic largely modeled on the Portuguese system. The National Elections Commission and international observers declared the 2021 nationwide legislative and presidential elections generally free and fair. Cabo Verde is a regional model of democracy, political stability, respect for human rights, and good governance. If confirmed, I will also engage with civil society and human rights organizations to understand what they see as human rights challenges in Cabo Verde.

Question. What steps will you take—if confirmed—to support democracy in Cabo Verde? What do you hope to accomplish through these actions? What are the potential impediments to addressing the specific obstacles you have identified?

Answer. Cabo Verde was an eager participant in the 2023 Summit for Democracy and submitted a detailed action plan early in the planning stages. Civil society should be part of monitoring and implementing this action plan. If confirmed as ambassador, I would engage with civil society and the Government of Cabo Verde in implementing this action plan for democracy.

Question. How will you utilize U.S. Government assistance resources at your disposal, including the Democracy Commission Small Grants program and other sources of State Department and USAID funding, to support democracy and governance, and what will you prioritize in processes to administer such assistance?

Answer. I understand that the U.S. Government assistance resources for promotion of democracy and governance in Cabo Verde are limited. If confirmed, I would, therefore, seek to focus those limited resources on capacity-building programming that is central to strengthening Cabo Verde's democratic institutions and holding those institutions, including political parties, accountable to the country's citizens, particularly those historically underrepresented in national politics. I would also support efforts to strengthen accountable governance both at the national and local council level and will promote initiatives that prevent violence and foster peace and national cohesion. This would include continuing our work to strengthen civil society, build independent media, and advance the independence of key electoral and judicial institutions. In the processes used to administer such assistance, I

would prioritize capacity building of Cabo Verdean institutions, ensuring funding awards are made in a transparent fashion, and overseeing our implementing partners to facilitate delivery of results.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to meet with civil society members, human rights and other non-governmental organizations in the U.S. and with local human rights NGOs, and other members of civil society in Cabo Verde? What steps will you take to pro-actively address efforts to restrict or penalize NGOs and civil society via legal or regulatory measures?

Answer. Yes. Human rights, civil society, and other non-governmental organizations all play an essential role in advancing democratic governance, promoting respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and supporting Cabo Verde as a more stable, secure, and prosperous partner for the United States. If confirmed, I commit to meet with civil society members, human rights and other non-governmental organizations in the United States, local human rights non-governmental organizations, and other members of civil society in Cabo Verde. It is essential that members of non-governmental organizations and civil society are afforded freedom to express their opinions and conduct their activities. If confirmed, I would advocate this position to government, non-governmental, and civil society leaders. I would continue and expand upon the embassy's efforts to facilitate connections between government and civil society organizations to build trust and mitigate unhelpful restrictions on civil society or non-governmental organizations.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to meet with democratically oriented political opposition figures and parties? What steps will you take to encourage genuine political competition? Will you advocate for access and inclusivity for women, minorities and youth within political parties?

Answer. Yes. If confirmed, I would engage with representatives from across the democratically oriented political spectrum, including the ruling party and opposition parties, and would ensure that Embassy colleagues did the same. I would also advocate for political parties to adopt resilient internal democratic mechanisms. If confirmed, I would advocate for access and inclusivity for women, minorities, and youth within political parties.

Question. Will you and your Embassy team actively engage with Cabo Verde on freedom of the press and address any government efforts designed to control or undermine press freedom through legal, regulatory or other measures? Will you commit to meeting regularly with independent, local press in Cabo Verde?

Answer. Yes. I am committed to supporting media freedom and strengthening journalistic professionalism and to meeting regularly with independent, local press in Cabo Verde. If confirmed, I would continue the Embassy's practice of engaging with the media, like-minded partners, civil society, and non-governmental organizations to underscore the importance of an independent, professional, and open media to a free and democratic society. I would work to address any government efforts designed to control or undermine press freedom through legal, regulatory, or other measures. If confirmed, I would also support expanded educational and exchange opportunities for local media to help strengthen journalistic professionalism and build capacity. I understand that in the past, the Embassy has hosted these exchanges to raise awareness on issues such as public health, mis/disinformation, democracy, and elections. If confirmed, I would seek to continue those efforts.

Question. Will you and your Embassy team actively engage with civil society and government counterparts on countering disinformation and propaganda disseminated by foreign state or non-state actors in the country?

Answer. Yes. If confirmed, I would engage with like-minded international partners, civil society, the media, and government counterparts to counter disinformation and propaganda disseminated by foreign state and non-state actors in Cabo Verde and would ensure that the Embassy team did likewise.

Question. Will you and your Embassy teams actively engage with Cabo Verde on the right of labor groups to organize, including for independent trade unions?

Answer. If confirmed, I would continue our embassy's efforts to promote internationally recognized labor rights, including for independent trade unions. I understand that the Government of Cabo Verde generally protects the right to bargain collectively. If confirmed, I would advocate for continued improvements in this area as well as fair and consistent enforcement of labor laws.

Question. Will you commit to using your position, if confirmed, to defend the human rights and dignity of all people in Cabo Verde, no matter their sexual orientation or gender identity?

Answer. I understand that the U.S. Embassy in Cabo Verde is already working to defend the human rights and the dignity of all people in Cabo Verde, no matter their sexual orientation or gender identity. If confirmed, I am committed to continuing and building upon this work.

Question. What challenges do the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) people face in Cabo Verde?

Answer. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI+) persons enjoy greater protections in Cabo Verde than in many other African countries. According to the 2022 Human Rights Report, there are no laws criminalizing consensual same-sex conduct between adults, there were no reported instances of state or nonstate actor violence targeting LGBTQI+ persons, there were no reports of restrictions on those speaking out on LGBTQI+ issues. The Government has anti-discrimination laws exist and generally enforces them.

Question. What specifically will you commit to do to help LGBTQ people in Cabo Verde?

Answer. If confirmed, I would support LGBTQI+ persons in Cabo Verde through outreach and inclusion in mission activities, and by speaking out on the importance of continuing to promote and protect the human rights of members of the LGBTQI+ community. I would meet periodically, and ensure that staff met regularly, with members of the LGBTQI+ community, to ensure the Mission's work continues to "do no harm" and was always cognizant of the priorities of LGBTQI+ persons in Cabo Verde.

Congressional Consultations

Question. Will you commit, if confirmed, to ensuring that you fully brief Members of Congress and/or their staff each time you are in Washington for visits or consultations during your tenure as Ambassador to Cabo Verde?

Answer. I have great respect for and place high value on the importance of the relationship between the executive and legislative branches of government. If confirmed, I commit working through the Department, to make myself available to fully brief Members of Congress and/or their staff each time I am in Washington for visits and consultations during my tenure as Ambassador to Cabo Verde.

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility

Question. How do you anticipate fostering diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility at the U.S. Embassy in Cabo Verde?

Answer. If confirmed as chief of mission, I will lead the American and Cabo Verdean professionals in Mission Cabo Verde to advance our national security agenda in a safe, inclusive, and respectful workplace. I will communicate my commitment to a workplace in which diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility are core tenets of our mission culture. I will also make clear that discrimination, harassment, and bullying are absolutely not acceptable and take swift action to address any such issues that may arise. I will demonstrate my commitment to Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) principals and the work of Mission EEO counselors and locally engaged staff advisors. I will support and participate in programs that promote respect and diversity.

Question. What specifically will you do to prioritize and promote diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility, while also combating racism, discrimination, and inequality among locally employed staff in Cabo Verde?

Answer. If confirmed as chief of mission, first, I will demonstrate that diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) is a priority, through actions and words, and reinforce with my staff it should also be a priority for them. I will also make clear my strong opposition to harassment, discrimination, and bullying and ensure a prevention plan is in place. I will hold supervisors accountable and expect them to hold their team members accountable for acts of harassment, discrimination, or bullying. I will ensure mission personnel have access to all the resources they need to combat racism, discrimination, and inequality. If confirmed, I will meet regularly with post's DEIA council at Mission Cabo Verde, participate in community activities to increase dialogue and inclusion, and promote a positive work environment among the embassy team.

Question. In addition to focusing on diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility in our workforce, will you commit to engaging more equitably in operations and programming, particularly with potential partners and communities that traditionally have been marginalized, excluded, or underrepresented in ours and others' donor

and partnership efforts? How do you anticipate utilizing local expertise, knowledge, and capacity to meet our foreign policy goals?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to engaging equitably in our operations and programs and will lead Mission Cabo Verde to build relationships with all communities in Cabo Verdean society through active outreach. I will carefully monitor, evaluate, and coordinate the design and implementation of programming and assistance and extend their reach as far as possible. I will ensure that our representational events and public diplomacy programs include marginalized and underrepresented groups and that our human resources team uses diverse panels in hiring processes to ensure applicants are not being disadvantaged. I will work with our locally employed staff to expand our outreach efforts and leverage the various languages spoken within our mission to assist our U.S. officers in making connections beyond the capital.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO JENNIFER M. ADAMS BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

During your hearing, Senator Ricketts asked for your assessment of how much the Communist Chinese Party (CCP) influence poses “a threat to our interests there and what can we best do to counter that?” You did not directly answer his question except to acknowledge it as a concern and share this perception. You also said, “We need to continue to do our best to be a partner to Cabo Verde and to advance our interests both in the security realm, as well as in the economic realm.”

Question. How much of a threat does the CCP pose to U.S. interests in Cabo Verde?

Answer. Earlier this year, the Director of National Intelligence testified that “the CCP represents both the leading and most consequential threat to U.S. national security and leadership globally.” Under President Xi, the CCP has become more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad, seeking to undercut U.S. influence and alliances. If confirmed, I will advance U.S. national security interests and push back against People’s Republic of China (PRC) efforts to expand its problematic influence, through robust and forthright diplomatic engagements, public diplomacy, and commercial advocacy to bolster U.S.- Cabo Verdean ties.

Question. How should the United States improve its partnership and strengthen relations with Cabo Verde to counter the threats the CCP poses to our interests there?

Answer. If confirmed, my priority will be advancing U.S. national security interests in Cabo Verde and countering efforts by our strategic and regional competitors to undermine those interests. The United States will continue to lead with an affirmative agenda for Africa, including in Cabo Verde, to demonstrate the benefits of our governance and economic model. We will use diplomatic engagement, foreign assistance, and public messaging to strengthen U.S. partnerships and increase African partner resilience.

Question. What are U.S. interests in the “security realm” in Cabo Verde?

Answer. I understand that the United States is Cabo Verde’s “security partner of choice.” U.S.-Cabo Verde security cooperation is critical to building capacity needed to combat the drug trafficking, organized crime, and the illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing that occurs in the country’s vast exclusive economic zone (EEZ). Together these activities threaten the rule of law, food security, Cabo Verde’s economic interests abroad, and destabilize maritime security across the Atlantic Basin. If confirmed, I hope to respond with support for continued growth for our security partnership.

Question. How does the U.S. best advance our interests in the “security realm” in Cabo Verde?

Answer. I understand that the United States best advances our security interests in Cabo Verde through assistance to and collaboration with both the country’s military and justice/law enforcement sectors. Efforts supported by AFRICOM, the New Hampshire National Guard’s State Partnership Program, and other Department of Defense elements, along with Department of State support through International Military Education and Training (IMET) and the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement, are vital to building Cabo Verde’s capacity to monitor and control its borders and vast maritime territory and combat illicit trafficking and or-

ganized crime. If confirmed, I would continue to deepen the security partnership to enhance both Cabo Verdean and U.S. security.

Question. What are U.S. interests in the “economic realm” in Cabo Verde?

Answer. Cabo Verde has the potential to act as a gateway to Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) economies, which cumulatively represent a market of 300 million consumers. Furthermore, implementation of plans to diversify the economy and open technology and Special Economic Zone of Maritime Economy could present further opportunities for U.S. investors.

Question. How does the U.S. best advance our interests in the “economic realm” in Cabo Verde?

Answer. The United States has prioritized expanding bilateral commercial relations through Africa Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) trade benefits to encourage exports from diverse sectors beyond fisheries. If confirmed, I will utilize Prosper Africa to connect U.S. and African companies with U.S. Government tools to advance trade and investment deals. While USAID does not have a presence in Cabo Verde, I would utilize the West African Trade and Investment Hub and USAID’s Power Africa program to support economic growth and U.S. business partners in Cabo Verde.

Question. What are the CCP’s primary interests in Cabo Verde?

Answer. I understand that the current relationship between Cabo Verde and the PRC is conspicuous in such areas as government infrastructure and healthcare, as in many African nations. PRC entities have a ubiquitous presence in the country’s ICT sector. Beijing funded a blueprint for a Special Economic Zone of Maritime Economy on the island of Sao Vicente. Compared to other African nations, Cabo Verde owes minimal debt to PRC. If confirmed, I will continue to monitor the PRC’s influence on Cabo Verde and promote strategies that will further advance the United States-Cabo Verde bilateral economic and security partnerships.

The U.S./Cabo Verde Relationship

Question. What opportunities do you see for strengthening the U.S./Cabo Verde relationship?

Answer. Cabo Verdean officials rarely pass up an opportunity to stress their view of the United States as Cabo Verde’s “partner of choice.” If confirmed as Ambassador, I hope to respond with support for continued growth for our security partnership, supporting a resilient democracy in Cabo Verde, and deepening trade and investment ties.

Question. What particular insights and areas of expertise do you envision bringing to the role of US Ambassador to Cabo Verde given your significant experience with USAID, including having served as USAID Mission Director twice, including in Mozambique?

Answer. USAID officers regularly engage with a wide range of partners, and I would bring that practice to my assignment in Cabo Verde. In Mozambique and other posts, I was fortunate to meet regularly and engage in joint activities with a broad swath of local representatives at all levels of society. As many of USAID’s programs target poor and marginalized populations, I have the experience of traveling widely within my country of assignment to understand better issues from the ground up. Among our partners are local and international private sector actors, and USAID brings the private sector to assist on many development issues; including them is a best practice.

If confirmed, I will carry my expertise of aligning and assisting local advocates and champions, civil society strengthening, education and training and sustainable development. USAID supported programs have helped to advance democracy and human rights in the countries where I have worked and if confirmed, I will continue with assistance initiatives; improving the lives of the population and continue to develop other sectors.

Question. From your perspective, what should be the top priorities for US policy toward Cabo Verde?

Answer. If confirmed, I will advance three U.S. policy priorities: promote broad-based, mutually beneficial economic development, improve Cabo Verdean security sector capabilities through expanded bilateral cooperation and strengthen Cabo Verde’s resilience to environmental vulnerability and the impacts of climate change while promoting inclusive development.

Question. While Cabo Verde is seen as one of the strongest democracies in Africa, what can the U.S. do to support the further development, strengthening and resilience of Cabo Verde's democratic institutions?

Answer. Cabo Verde was an eager participant in the 2023 Summit for Democracy and submitted a detailed action plan early in the planning stages. If confirmed as Ambassador, I would support the Government of Cabo Verde in implementing this action plan for democracy.

Question. In November 2020, I published a Senate Foreign Relations Committee majority report entitled "The United States and Europe: A Concrete Agenda for Transatlantic Cooperation on China." The report gave several recommendations on increased transatlantic cooperation, including in Africa, to counter Chinese malign influence more effectively. In what ways should the United States partner with European countries to build on likeminded interests Cabo Verde and counter the malign influence of China?

Answer. State Department officials meet routinely with our European partners, bilaterally and multilaterally, to discuss PRC-related issues. State Department officials meet with European counterparts in multilateral formats such as the G7 Africa Directors Meeting. We coordinate U.S. and European messaging for African political leaders and publics regarding the PRC's engagement in the region. The Assistant Secretary for African Affairs regularly speaks with European counterparts to coordinate European and U.S. cooperation and messaging in sub-Saharan Africa, including related to the PRC and Russia. We will continue to build on these current efforts.

Trade and Investment

Question. In your opinion, is Cabo Verde a good target for increased U.S. investment? If yes, how will you support increased U.S. trade and investment with Cabo Verde as Ambassador, if confirmed?

Answer. Opportunities are abundant in transportation, tourism, renewable energy, and digital economy. If confirmed, I will work closely with private sector partners and the Government of Cabo Verde to expand opportunities for U.S. private investment.

Question. What is your understanding of the tools at your disposal—including through Prosper Africa—as U.S. Ambassador to Cabo Verde if confirmed, to bolster two-way trade and investment between the U.S. and Cabo Verde?

Answer. If confirmed, I understand that I would be able to access expertise within the State Department, USAID, and the Department of Commerce, including through Prosper Africa, to support addressing barriers to trade and investment in the enabling environment, including the need for economic and political reforms. Each of these agencies have programs that could potentially be utilized to assist the Government of Cabo Verde in analyzing barriers to trade and investment and in developing reform strategies to address such barriers. In addition, it is my understanding that, if confirmed, I would be able to use the full-range of U.S. Government trade and investment development agencies—including USTDA, the Export Import Bank, and DFC—to provide direct USG assistance to U.S. companies looking to expand trade and investment in Cabo Verde. Such assistance could help overcome barriers to trade and investment such as project financing and political risk. My understanding is that Prosper Africa serves as a one-stop shop through which U.S. and African companies can access USG assistance for expanded two-way trade and investment.

Question. How will you work with Prosper Africa leadership to ensure that Cabo Verde can benefit from Prosper Africa resources, tools and expertise?

Answer. If confirmed, I would seek to identify through consultation with the U.S. business community active in Cabo Verde those areas in which USG expertise could be most beneficial to removing barriers to trade and investment in Cabo Verde. I would work with Prosper Africa leadership and the Cabo Verdean Government to identify ways in which Prosper Africa could engage on such issues and provide technical assistance to advance necessary reforms. I would also anticipate a regular dialogue with Prosper Africa leadership, both in Washington, D.C. and in the field, to identify resources, tools and expertise that are best fitted to Cabo Verde. Moreover, I would look to expand contact between the Embassy Deal Team and Prosper Africa to ensure that Prosper Africa was fully aware of emerging opportunities in the Cabo Verdean marketplace with an eye to bringing its tools, resources, and expertise to bear in identifying and assisting U.S. companies to take advantage of such opportunities—particularly in cases where an alternative to PRC investment is required.

Trafficking in Persons

In the State Department's 2022 Trafficking in Persons Report, Cabo Verde remained on Tier 2 for its continued efforts to meet the minimum standards to eliminate trafficking.

Question. If confirmed, what concrete steps could you take to help Cabo Verde operationalize the prioritized recommendations contained in the TIP report?

Answer. If confirmed as Ambassador, I will encourage the Government to continue to strengthen anti-trafficking efforts, including by strengthening the implementation of standard operating procedures for victim identification and referral to services, increasing anti-trafficking law enforcement efforts, improving data sharing and coordination among agencies, and supporting increased resources and training for anti-trafficking stakeholders.

Religious Freedom

In the State Department's 2022 International Religious Freedom report, Cabo Verde was noted for generally having governmental and societal respect for religious freedom.

Question. What is your assessment of this particular issue and if confirmed, how will you work with the Ambassador At Large for International Religious Freedom to bolster religious freedom in-country?

Answer. The 2022 International Religious Freedom report states the Cabo Verdean constitution and other laws protect the right of individuals to choose, practice, profess, and change their religion, and violations of religious freedom are crimes subject to punishment. I understand that Cabo Verde receives high marks in international assessments of respect for human rights and, if confirmed, I look forward to working with the Ambassador at Large and religious leaders to stress the importance of religious tolerance and encourage interfaith engagement to promote broad support for religious freedom.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to personally engaging with civil society on this issue?

Answer. If confirmed, I do commit to personally engaging with civil society on this issue.

Question. If confirmed, what concrete steps can you take to help Cabo Verde increase their societal and governmental respect for religious freedom?

Answer. If confirmed, I would use my position to host religious experts for round-table discussions, and I would meet with religious leaders during in-country trips to emphasize the important role they can play to prevent and mitigate conflict. I would leverage our Public Diplomacy programming and exchanges to find opportunities to expose young leaders to religious freedom issues. I would also seek opportunities for U.S.-based experts on religious freedom to visit Cabo Verde and interact with various audiences in and out of the capital.

Human Rights

In the State Department's 2022 Human Rights Report, Cabo Verde was listed as having no significant human rights abuses, but there is always room to better promote internationally-recognized human rights.

Question. How will you direct your Embassy to work with civil society organizations to improve the human rights situation on the ground?

Answer. Working with civil society organizations is critical to our understanding of the human rights situation in Cabo Verde as they are on the frontline of addressing challenges facing their communities. If confirmed, I would encourage my team to continue to work closely with civil society so that the United States has an accurate picture of human rights concerns so that we can address them with the Government and design programming to improve the human rights situation in Cabo Verde. I would also take advantage of State and USAID programs to support Cabo Verdean institutions such as the Commission on Human Rights, the implementors of the Child-Friendly Justice Project and others to support the ongoing efforts of Cabo Verdean to advance concrete actions in the democracy and human rights agenda.

I understand the Embassy discusses human rights issues with the Government at the highest level and I would continue to do this, if confirmed. Supported with U.S. funding, the Cabo Verdean Human Rights Commission issued a groundbreaking study on the social and legal situation of members of the country's LGBTI+ community and drafted legislation to prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation. If confirmed, I would support further dissemination of this study

and support the legislative process as the bill proceeds through parliament. In such interactions, I would seek to be forthright with the Government about our concerns and would press for transparent and independent legal processes through which accountability for allegations of abuse could be addressed.

State Management and Oversight

Many U.S. Missions have been under enormous stress over the last several years, in large part due to COVID.

Question. What is your understanding of morale throughout Mission Praia?

Answer. My understanding is that morale is good at Embassy Praia despite the challenging environment and the lingering impact of stress from COVID-19. Personnel in Praia have a strong sense of purpose and mission. They see the results of their work and see the rewards, including through promotions.

Question. How do you intend to improve morale at Mission Praia?

Answer. My tours overseas have taught me the importance of being attentive to each employee's professional development and ensuring that they know how their work fits into the embassy's mission and achievement of Department goals. It also is important to take care of the needs of Eligible Family Members through employment, quality education, and activities that bring the community together. Creating and maintaining an environment free of harassment and bullying is a hallmark of my leadership style and essential for employees to flourish. If confirmed, I would model the importance of work-life balance and ensure our managers know how to set priorities and negotiate deadlines to avoid employee burn out and promote resilience. I would advocate with Washington to ensure that assigned workload and deadlines are appropriate for a post of Praia's limited size and would seek to ensure that assigned workload dovetails with our agreed-upon policy objectives in Cabo Verde.

Question. How do you intend to create a unified mission and vision at Mission Praia?

Answer. If confirmed, I would be leading a U.S. Government team comprised of personnel from multiple agencies. This means ensuring all agencies understand the mission and activities of others and discussing the tradeoffs that often need to be made on foreign policy goals or embassy operations together. I have found that a structured approach should include weekly Country Team meetings, weekly meetings with agency leaders that include the DCM to discuss programs and events, and mission-wide participation in the Integrated Country Strategy and Mission Resource Request planning cycles. Mission-wide off-sites and professional development days would be used to review our progress and develop our workforce skillsets and build a sense of community and mission. Finally, if confirmed, under my leadership, Embassy Praia would review our goals and achievements as we update our Integrated Country Strategy. This is an effective tool to keep all agency activity in-line with our mission goals.

Question. Management is a key responsibility for Chiefs of Mission. How would you describe your management style?

Answer. I have worked at a wide variety of posts overseas, at different levels throughout my career, and in each I have endeavored to be as open and available to colleagues as possible. This requires some flexibility and adaptation to be able to ensure that Mission staff feel comfortable and able to participate fully and know that their input and views are welcomed.

I strive to maintain a workplace atmosphere where mistakes are turned into learning opportunities. I would coach our employees through decision-making processes to develop their leadership skills and provide regular mentoring and support. I am decisive, but inclusive of a wide range of views and will communicate the "why" of a decision to make sure those who were involved and those not involved understand what the Executive Office will be doing and the rationale for it. If confirmed, the Deputy Chief of Mission and I would be attentive to workplace issues and create an environment free from bullying, harassment, and discrimination.

Question. Do you believe it is ever acceptable or constructive to berate subordinates, either in public or in private?

Answer. It is never acceptable or constructive to berate subordinates. Performance and conduct management needs to be a regular and ongoing process. Mistakes are learning opportunities and correcting them should be an inclusive, constructive process that is done in private.

Question. How do you envision your relationship with the deputy chief of mission?

Answer. I understand what it takes to establish and nurture a strong, collaborative relationship between the Ambassador and DCM. If confirmed, I would listen and learn from the experience of the current DCM and respect the relationships she has established with Cabo Verdean officials and within the mission. I view the DCM role as a force multiplier and as someone who must be ready to step in during my absence, so she will be involved in key internal and external meetings. I would expect her to deliver her honest, frank opinion so that together we can make the best decisions possible. I would create an environment in which she can feel free to disagree with me when we consider options or suggest course corrections but would ensure that we present a united front to the mission once a decision is made. Leadership at the top must be proactive, consistent, and fair. If confirmed, I am confident the DCM and I would be able to create a positive work experience for our team in Praia.

Question. If confirmed, what leadership responsibilities do you intend to entrust to your deputy chief of mission?

Answer. The Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM) is arguably the most difficult position at post. If confirmed, I would leverage my experience as a USAID Mission Director to establish a strong and symbiotic relationship to oversee mission operations and conduct our foreign policy. If confirmed, as I lead the mission, I would need to be able to work through the DCM to ensure that we are protecting U.S. Government resources across agencies, running an efficient Interagency Cooperative Services platform, and supporting our personnel needs. The DCM would play the role of Chief Operating Officer of the mission but also be involved in our foreign policy agenda. I would include her in meetings with government officials and in communications with Washington. She would ensure that performance management, budget oversight, and human resources platforms are performing effectively, and our operations soundly steward U.S. Government resources. I would expect her to develop her managerial skills across all aspects of mission life and would coach her as needed. I also would ensure that the DCM and our other employees share in our representational activities to expand our outreach activities. I would expect the DCM to oversee our leadership, mentoring, Family Advocacy, and Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility programs.

Question. In order to create and continue employee excellence at the Department, accurate and direct employee evaluation reports (EERs) for Foreign Service Officers are imperative, though often lacking. Do you believe that it is important to provide employees with accurate, constructive feedback on their performance in order to encourage improvement and reward those who most succeed in their roles?

Answer. Yes. I believe that establishing open communications between employees and their supervisors is at the core of effective performance management. Throughout my career, I have mentored supervisors on how to provide effective feedback and write employees' performance reviews and counseling documents. If confirmed, I would continue to pay close attention to developing the performance management skills of our supervisors and the employee's understanding of how the system benefits their professional development. I would seek to ensure that top performers are rewarded and that those with performance challenges receive the appropriate, constructive feedback and support required to address them.

Question. If confirmed, would you support and encourage clear, accurate, and direct feedback to employees in order to improve performance and reward high achievers?

Answer. Yes. I believe that establishing open communications between employees and their supervisors is at the core of effective performance management. Throughout my career, I have mentored supervisors on how to provide clear, accurate, and direct feedback and write employees' performance reviews and counseling documents that include such feedback. If confirmed, I would continue to pay close attention to developing the performance management skills of our supervisors and the employee's understanding of how the system benefits their professional development. I would seek to ensure that top performers are rewarded and that those with performance challenges receive the clear, accurate, and direct feedback and professional development support required to address them.

Question. It is imperative that U.S. diplomats get outside of posts abroad to meet with local actors, including host government officials, non-government organizations, and local citizens. In your experience, do U.S. diplomats get outside of our Embassy walls enough to fully accomplish their missions?

Answer. I believe that Mission leadership largely sets the tone and the expectations that determine whether U.S. diplomats sufficiently get outside of our Embassy

walls. Throughout my career, I have consistently modeled going outside of the mission walls to meet and cultivate a wide range of contacts in and outside the capital and major cities. I do not believe that it is possible to be effective as a diplomat without such significant outreach. If confirmed, I would continue to reach beyond the Embassy walls and to encourage all Embassy staff to do likewise. To enable these efforts, I would work closely with my DCM and the Regional Security Office to ensure that we are managing any associated risks smartly and proactively and that we identify and receive the resources necessary to support robust Mission in-country travel.

Question. How do you intend to improve the ability of U.S. diplomats to better access all local populations?

Answer. If confirmed, I would encourage and support in-country travel with adequate security resources and mentor employees on thinking-outside-the-box on how to reach local populations. As an island nation with sometimes difficult inter-island travel, I will promote different sections within the embassy helping each other's engagement when traveling. On a regular basis, I would ensure that our employees are maintaining contacts with regional leaders at all levels and meeting with them in their areas and when they come to the capital. This also means ensuring that employees are using representational events and funds to cultivate contacts and promote mission goals. I would support cross-cultural learning from our Locally Employed Staff and U.S. employees as well as learning of local languages.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO JENNIFER M. ADAMS BY SENATOR MARCO RUBIO

Question. In May 2022, Secretary Blinken said that the People's Republic of China is the "only country with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do it." The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) clearly holds the reins of power in the People's Republic of China and has used this power to commit genocide in Xinjiang, flood our communities with fentanyl, and emit, by far the largest quantity of greenhouse gases in the world today. With their absolute control of Chinese society and industry, the CCP could stop all of these destructive actions tomorrow if they so choose. Is the Chinese Communist Party a threat to the United States?

Answer. Earlier this year, the Director of National Intelligence testified that "the CCP represents both the leading and most consequential threat to U.S. national security and leadership globally." Under President Xi, the CCP has become more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad, seeking to undercut U.S. influence and alliances. If confirmed, I will advance U.S. national security interests and push back against People's Republic of China (PRC) efforts to expand its problematic influence, through robust and forthright diplomatic engagements, public diplomacy, and commercial advocacy to bolster U.S.-Cabo Verdean ties.

Question. Does the Chinese Communist Party undertake any activities that are beneficial to U.S. interests?

Answer. The Administration assesses the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) activities in the context of the fact that, as Secretary Blinken has said, the CCP has become more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad. According to the Office of the Director of National Intelligence's 2023 Annual Threat Assessment, the CCP is seeking to "undercut U.S. influence, drive wedges between Washington and its partners, and foster some norms that favor its authoritarian system."

Question. Do you believe that there are any areas within which the Chinese Communist Party would constructively work with the United States in good faith?

Answer. As the United States competes vigorously with the PRC, the United States manages this competition responsibly so that competition does not veer into conflict. The United States will work with the PRC to address transnational challenges, such as climate change, when it is in our interest to do so—as Secretary Blinken has said, not as a favor to us or anyone else, and never in exchange for walking away from our principles, but because it is what the world expects. If confirmed, I will work with the Department of State's new Office of China Coordination to advance U.S. objectives and counter harmful behavior by the PRC.

Question. If confirmed, will you approve any joint activity with organizations or representatives from the People's Republic of China in the country in which you will work?

Answer. If confirmed, my priority will be advancing U.S. national security interests in Cabo Verde and countering efforts by our strategic and regional competitors to undermine those interests. The Administration has been clear that the PRC is the most consequential geopolitical challenge facing the United States, and that the United States is committed to working to strengthen our partners in the region. If confirmed, I will work closely with Department of State and interagency colleagues and Congress to address the PRC's efforts to expand its influence in Cabo Verde and the region.

Question. The U.S. and Cabo Verde enjoy historical ties due to its significant strategic geographic location on the west coast of Africa. Relations have focused cooperation upon counternarcotics, military training, Millennium Challenge Corporation projects, and Open Skies commercial aviation agreements upon others. Cabo Verde enjoys trade opportunities and preferences from the U.S. and European partners, with the U.S. Trade and Development Agency aiding its air links and airport capacity in the recent past. What is your assessment of the current state of U.S.-Cabo Verde relations?

Answer. U.S.-Cabo Verde bilateral relations are as strong as they have ever been, with Cabo Verde's leaders eager to partner on U.S.-led international and regional initiatives. Cabo Verde is a strategically located maritime security partner—the only non-NATO-aligned island group in the mid-Atlantic—and a regional model of democracy, political stability, respect for human rights, and good governance. Large Cabo Verdean diaspora communities in the United States have fortified relations for over two centuries. If confirmed, I will commit to continue to expand bilateral trade agreements, strengthen security cooperation, and increase engagement on climate resilience while promoting inclusive development.

Question. How is U.S. security enhanced by taxpayer investment in Cabo Verde?

Answer. I understand that the security cooperation between Cabo Verde and the United States continues to be strengthened by U.S. assistance in military opportunities for instruction through International Military Education and Training (IMET), our long-term relationship-building program. Recent support for Cabo Verde focuses largely on maritime security and coordinated efforts to disseminate border security threat information. This mutually beneficial collaboration has allowed for the sharing of biometric, passenger, maritime and cargo data. If confirmed, I would continue to deepen the security partnership to enhance both Cabo Verdean and U.S. security.

Question. In your view, what would happen if the U.S. did not provide security or counternarcotics assistance to Cabo Verde?

Answer. I understand that Cabo Verde lacks the capability to sufficiently monitor its vast maritime domain for transnational criminal activity, narcotrafficking, and illegal, unregulated, and unreported fishing. Without U.S. assistance in maritime security, law enforcement, governance and operational capacity, Cabo Verde would be more vulnerable to economic fragility, maritime and border insecurity and various actors who seek to take advantage of the country for malicious gain. I believe that the Government of Cabo Verde realizes this as well. In March, Cabo Verde hosted the first African Maritime Leaders' Summit together with AFRICOM and U.S. Naval Forces Africa Command, focused on maritime security and good governance.

Question. If confirmed, which aid programs will you focus on to promote continued and improved economic growth with U.S. business partners in Cabo Verde?

Answer. If confirmed, I will encourage U.S. firms to take advantage of Cabo Verde's stable political environment, low levels of corruption, and potential as a gateway to Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) economies, which cumulatively represent a market of 300 million consumers.

If confirmed, I will utilize Prosper Africa to connect U.S. and African companies with U.S. Government tools to advance trade and investment deals. While USAID does not have a presence in Cabo Verde, I would utilize the West African Trade and Investment Hub and USAID's Power Africa program to support economic growth and U.S. business partners in Cabo Verde.

Question. Cabo Verde and China have been cultivating closer ties since the 1990s, with Cabo Verde recognizing China since the 1970s. China has significantly increased aid to the islands to assist with grain and cereal price stability, and other infrastructure projects to gain influence over the country. There have also been reports that China is interested in establishing a military base in the country. What is your characterization of the existing relationship between Cabo Verde and China?

Answer. I understand that the current relationship between Cabo Verde and the PRC is conspicuous in such areas as government infrastructure and healthcare, as in many African nations. PRC entities have a ubiquitous presence in the country's ICT sector. Beijing funded a blueprint for a maritime special exclusive economic zone on the island of Sao Vicente.

Question. Are you concerned with their existing relationship? Please explain.

Answer. Cabo Verde has made it clear that the United States is its preferred partner. Compared to other African nations, Cabo Verde owes minimal debt to PRC. However, the relationship is a cause for concern. If confirmed, I will continue to monitor the PRC's influence on Cabo Verde and promote strategies that will further advance the United States-Cabo Verde bilateral economic and security partnerships.

Question. If confirmed, what will you do to ensure that the United States remains the partner of choice in Cabo Verde?

Answer. Cabo Verde expresses a preference to work with the United States in many areas, none more so than security cooperation. Cabo Verdean officials rarely pass up an opportunity to stress their view of the United States as Cabo Verde's "security partner of choice." If confirmed as Ambassador, I hope to respond with support for continued growth for our security and economic partnership.

Question. Do you have any indication that China is planning to establish either a formal military base or a dual-use facility in Cabo Verde?

Answer. I have seen reports that the PRC is interested in increasing its security partnership with Cabo Verde. If confirmed, I will actively monitor any plans for new PRC investment in Cabo Verde and underscore with our partners in the government the risks associated with allowing the PRC to develop a base in Cabo Verde.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO HEATHER ROACH VARIAVA BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

Trafficking in Persons

In the State Department's 2022 Trafficking in Persons Report, Laos was ranked as Tier 2 for its ongoing efforts to meet the minimum standards to eliminate trafficking.

Question. If confirmed, what concrete steps could you take to help Laos operationalize the prioritized recommendations contained in the TIP report?

Answer. If confirmed, I will work with the Government of Laos and civil society to advance anti-trafficking efforts, including by sharing best practices on data collection, law enforcement training, and victim identification. There is also scope for discussions regarding forced criminality in the growing problem of cyber scam operations.

Laos has taken some steps to combat human trafficking, including through investigating suspected traffickers, repatriating Lao and foreign national victims, training law enforcement, enacting anti-trafficking laws, conducting awareness-raising activities for the public, and implementing oversight measures within special economic zones, where workers may be more vulnerable. My role will be to recognize positive achievements and press for further progress.

Religious Freedom

In the State Department's 2022 International Religious Freedom report, Laos was noted as lacking respect for religious freedom, particularly in overly cumbersome regulations for religious groups.

Question. What is your assessment of this particular issue and if confirmed, how will you work with the Ambassador At Large for International Religious Freedom to bolster religious freedom in-country?

Answer. Laos severely restricts freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, association, and religion or belief. Government restrictions on minority religious groups remain disproportionately high in certain provinces and rural areas, and there are reports that local officials harass non-Buddhist and non-animist religious groups through arrests, forced renunciations, and displacement. If confirmed, I will work closely with the Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom, his office, and with relevant civil society organizations to advance respect for freedom of religious and belief for all in Laos. I will also advocate with the Government of the

Lao People's Democratic Republic on matters related to international religious freedom.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to personally engaging with civil society on this issue?

Answer. Yes. If confirmed, I hope to forge strong personal and institutional relationships with religious groups and civil society organizations to advance respect for freedom of religion or belief.

Question. If confirmed, what concrete steps can you take to help Laos increase their societal and governmental respect for religious freedom?

Answer. Lao authorities restrict religious freedom through a decree that defines the Government as the final arbiter of permissible religious activities and imposes onerous requirements on religious groups. If confirmed, I will encourage Lao authorities to revise the decree to improve religious freedom, especially for members of marginalized or unrecognized groups. I will also look to identify other concrete steps to help increase respect for religious freedom in Laos.

Human Rights

In the State Department's 2022 Human Rights Report, Laos was noted as having several significant human rights abuses, including restrictions on freedom of expression, censorship, lack of internet freedom, and more.

Question. How will you direct your Embassy to work with civil society organizations to improve the human rights situation on the ground?

Answer. If confirmed, promoting and protecting human rights will be one of my top priorities. I will communicate to Lao leadership that supporting an inclusive civil society and ensuring the human rights and fundamental freedoms of people in Laos are key to successful bilateral relations. I also commit to pressing the Lao Government to allow for greater press freedom and will continue to support independent voices, local efforts to build journalistic capacity, and combat mis- and disinformation.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO HEATHER ROACH VARIAVA BY SENATOR MARCO RUBIO

Question. In May 2022, Secretary Blinken said that the People's Republic of China is the "only country with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do it." The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) clearly holds the reins of power in the People's Republic of China and has used this power to commit genocide in Xinjiang, flood our communities with fentanyl, and emit, by far the largest quantity of greenhouse gases in the world today. With their absolute control of Chinese society and industry, the CCP could stop all of these destructive actions tomorrow if they so choose. Is the Chinese Communist Party a threat to the United States?

Answer. Under President Xi, the Chinese Communist Party has become more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad. We will defend U.S. national security and advance our values and prosperity; defend international law, agreements, principles, and institutions that maintain peace and security; protect the rights of individuals and sovereign nations; and make it possible for all countries to coexist and cooperate. If confirmed, I will continue our work with the Lao People's Democratic Republic to strengthen democratic values and reiterate the U.S. commitment to a rules-based international order.

Question. Does the Chinese Communist Party undertake any activities that are beneficial to U.S. interests?

Answer. While the United States and the People's Republic of China (PRC) are strategic competitors, it may be possible for the PRC to make constructive contributions toward solving transnational challenges. Any PRC contributions must be scrutinized, however, to ensure they are neither springboards for narrow PRC economic interests nor platforms to create more permissive conditions for its own authoritarian model.

Question. Do you believe that there are any areas within which the Chinese Communist Party would constructively work with the United States in good faith?

Answer. While the United States competes vigorously with the PRC where we differ, the United States manages this competition responsibly. This includes main-

taining openness to potential cooperation with Beijing when it is in our interests to do so and where our cooperation can advance solutions to transnational challenges, including possibly climate change, counter-narcotics, pandemic threats, non-proliferation, food security, and macroeconomics.

Question. If confirmed, will you approve any joint activity with organizations or representatives from the People's Republic of China in the country in which you will work?

Answer. In line with the Administration's approach on competition and cooperation with the People's Republic of China, if confirmed, I would maintain openness to U.S. involvement in cooperative efforts that involve PRC entities in the Lao People's Democratic Republic, and third countries or international organizations in areas where our collective interests align. That said, I would scrutinize and encourage third parties to scrutinize any such arrangements to ensure they follow international norms, feature transparency, and delineate steps to verify regularly that all parties are working in good faith.

Question. Laos is heavily dependent upon aid and foreign investment in its infrastructure, mainly from China and through the Belt and Road Initiative. Along with the aid, Laos has borrowed significant amounts to fund infrastructure investments, and its debt reached 88 percent of GDP in 2021. In addition to influence from China, Laos is heavily influenced by neighbor Vietnam. What is your characterization of the existing relationship between Laos and China?

Answer. In recent years, we have observed the PRC's growing influence in Laos. The PRC holds a significant percentage of Laos's sizeable debt, and some Special Economic Zones run by PRC investors have become home to illegal activity, most notably money laundering, human trafficking, wildlife trafficking, and drug trafficking.

In contrast, the United States can be a positive and helpful partner to Laos. Our engagement with Laos and other countries in the region promotes an affirmative, positive vision, with the United States as a trustworthy and dependable partner. If confirmed, I would seek to counter PRC influence by supporting programs that bolster Lao independence and sovereignty. Building capacity within the Lao Government, and especially among the people of Laos, will strengthen their ability to contribute positively in the region, in ASEAN, and beyond.

Question. Are you concerned with the existing Laos-PRC relationship?

Answer. We are concerned about the PRC's increasing influence in Laos. The PRC holds a significant percentage of Laos' sizeable debt, and PRC actors operate some Special Economic Zones, which frequently are centers of illegal activity, most notably money laundering, human trafficking, wildlife trafficking, and drug trafficking.

In contrast, the United States is a positive and helpful partner to Laos. Our engagement with Laos and other countries in the region is not about countering any one country but about advancing an affirmative, positive vision.

In addition to countering PRC influence in Laos, we should work with allies and partners to ensure the United States is one of Laos's partners of choice, offering alternatives to dependence on the PRC. U.S. programs in Laos seek to improve Lao capacity to address challenges; giving the Lao people tools to solve problems and develop their own abilities contributes to Lao sovereignty and independence.

If confirmed, I would work with our team to deepen our longstanding cooperation, pursue new avenues of dialogue, and drive inclusive prosperity in this critical region.

Question. How would you describe Laos' relation to Vietnam?

Answer. Laos and Vietnam enjoy a long-standing and close political partnership, and both countries seek to further advance their bilateral relationship, particularly in the areas of economic development and investment.

Our Embassies in Vientiane and Hanoi are examining ways to develop possible trilateral initiatives that leverage the close political partnership between Laos and Vietnam.

Infrastructure development, cross-border electricity trade, unexploded ordinance clearance operations, and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, as well as U.S.-funded or organized training for both Laos and Vietnamese officials, are some areas of possible trilateral coordination. If confirmed, I would ensure that any trilateral coordination would be undertaken in areas where our interests and policies align. I would continue to advocate bilaterally where needed on key issues of concern to the United States.

Question. Is the debt load currently maintained by Laos sustainable?

Answer. The International Monetary Fund and World Bank work with low-income countries including Laos to conduct debt sustainability analyses (DSAs); the latest publicly available DSA for Laos is dated August 2019, when Laos was rated as being at high risk of debt distress, with an estimated debt-to-GDP ratio of 57 percent as of 2018. According to the World Bank's May 2023 Lao Economic Monitor, Laos's publicly held debt is now estimated to have surpassed 110 percent of its GDP, and the PRC is its largest creditor.

If confirmed, I will work with Laos to provide additional options, tools, and opportunities to help Laos manage its debt. Existing U.S. programs aim to promote trade, reduce corruption, improve regulations, and support prudent fiscal management. My goals would be to help ensure that Laos's economic development is sustainable and to lay the groundwork for a long-term economic partnership between the United States and Laos.

Question. How can the United States assist Laos in moving away from predatory loans provided to it by China?

Answer. The United States can assist Laos by empowering the Lao Government to become a more effective negotiator and providing it with the tools it needs to grow its economy on its own terms. If confirmed, I will work with Laos to facilitate opportunities for growth in trade and investment, including through anti-corruption, regulatory, and fiscal management tools that work for Laos's situation.

Laos has demonstrated it values sovereignty. I would work to strengthen Laos's agency and partnership with the United States to encourage more U.S. companies to become active in the country, thereby lessening the need for reliance on the PRC. If confirmed, I pledge to support Laos as it implements its economic diversification strategy while simultaneously assisting U.S. businesses seeking to invest in Laos. I also would work with allies and partners to provide Laos with coordinated development assistance and to encourage investment. By ensuring Laos has diverse options, can negotiate effectively, and regards the United States as a dependable partner, we can help Laos become a stronger, more prosperous, and better-governed country that is fully integrated into and maintains an independent voice within ASEAN.

Question. Laos, perhaps out of all the countries in Southeast Asia, is most dependent on the Mekong River for food and for power generation. This makes it acutely dependent on moves by China, where the Mekong River originates, to limit the flow of water to downstream countries. The U.S.-Mekong Partnership regularly monitors the water flowing to downstream countries and there is a relationship between decreases in this flow at times when downstream countries, like Laos, are considering a decision that impacts China. This "dam diplomacy" is part of the Communist playbook for maintaining influence over Southeast Asia. Are you concerned with "dam diplomacy" by the Chinese and its impact on Laos' food security and energy security?

Answer. We share your concern about the PRC's increasing influence in Lao PDR, including through "dam diplomacy." The Mekong River Commission (MRC) is the sole treaty-based organization with a mandate to support the transboundary governance of the Mekong River.

The Government of Laos relies on hydropower to supply electricity both for domestic use and for export, which has put pressure on the Mekong River, reducing fish populations and impacting the livelihoods of communities living along the river and its tributaries. Dam construction, excessive groundwater extraction, fast-moving urban and infrastructure development, deforestation, mining, and climate change have caused major environmental disruption and threaten the lives and livelihoods of millions of people in the Mekong River Basin. If confirmed, I will work to find ways to mitigate the environmental impact of these hydropower projects.

Question. If confirmed, what will you do to help Laos resist Chinese attempts to influence Laos through "dam diplomacy"?

Answer. If confirmed, I will work to find ways to mitigate the environmental impact of these hydropower projects. The United States is committed to offering options for Mekong countries to help them get the best value for their economic development and to help build institutions, workforces, and economic independence. The Mekong River can be an engine for economic growth that binds the entire region together. Realizing the region's full potential, while building resilience to environmental threats, will take transparent, collaborative management of this shared resource. This is why the Mekong U.S. Partnership (MUSP) continues to support the Mekong River Commission, the only treaty-based organization in the sub-region with a mandate to address transboundary river management.

Question. If confirmed, are there Development Finance Corporation or other aid programs you would review to compete with Chinese aid in Laos?

Answer. DFC provides high quality investments to support private sector driven economic growth, and I understand the DFC is considering several possible projects in Laos. If confirmed, I would work closely with the DFC to identify the most effective areas for investment; I would also engage with Lao businesses and investors to demonstrate DFC's effectiveness and identify additional opportunities for DFC engagement.

If confirmed, I also look forward to working closely with U.S. Trade and Development Agency (USTDA) colleagues to support USTDA activities, including feasibility studies on potential projects to encourage U.S. investment in Laos.

In addition, I would seek to coordinate and amplify our development assistance through USAID and other State programs with likeminded aid agencies, including the Japan International Cooperation Agency and the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. I would also look to expand our cooperation with U.S. non-profit organizations to strengthen civil society, public health, and other development programs. Finally, I would work with international financial institutions like the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank to support projects that provide sustainable infrastructure and improve Laos' investment environment.

Question. Which other programs will you support which will deepen U.S. investment in and with Laos to counter Chinese initiatives?

Answer. If confirmed, I will work to capitalize on U.S. programming to deepen U.S. investment in Laos and counter PRC initiatives. I see this approach as three-fold.

First, I would work with USAID and State's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) to increase development assistance and programming that targets corruption and builds Lao Government capacity to investigate and prosecute money laundering and bribes, a key factor in the ability of the PRC to conduct its influence operations. This programming aims to address U.S. industry concerns regarding opaque regulatory regimes and corruption and aims to foster a more hospitable environment for U.S. businesses in Laos.

Second, I would work with our interagency to develop economic programming that provides fiscal technical assistance, offers alternative sources of financing, and encourages U.S. investment. This includes tapping into the resources of the U.S. Trade and Development Agency and the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation, among others.

Third, I would work with U.S. industry directly, encouraging trade delegations from the U.S.-ASEAN Business Council and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. I would ensure my economic team, which includes our Foreign Commercial Service colleagues, is ready to assist U.S. companies seeking investment opportunities and is ready to address potential investment roadblocks in Laos.

Question. As Ambassador, how would you leverage the U.S.-Mekong Partnership to advance U.S. interests and business opportunities in both Laos and regional cooperation aspects?

Answer. The Mekong-U.S. Partnership (MUSP) builds upon more than ten years of sustained engagement in the region on economic, non-traditional security, governance, and environmental cooperation. The Lao People's Democratic Republic has served as the MUSP co-chair with the United States since January 2022. In February 2023, we were pleased to co-chair with the Lao Government our first-ever in-person MUSP events since the start of the pandemic. The MUSP is well-positioned to address transboundary issues affecting the people of the Mekong and to encourage innovative thinking about and collaboration on top issues affecting the sub-region. These include improving regional responses to environmental emergencies as well as transnational crime, and promoting sustainable economic development across the water food, energy, and environmental nexus.

If confirmed, I would bolster efforts to ensure that the MUSP maintains a whole-of-government approach, which takes into account the views and expertise of U.S. Government partners that deliver for the citizens of the Mekong sub-region in furtherance of regional and U.S. interests.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO JULIE TURNER BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

Question. If confirmed, please provide your plan to better promote accountability for those who have committed and continue to commit human rights abuses in North Korea.

Answer. If confirmed, I will work closely with my colleagues in the Department of State and with our international partners to strengthen the mandate and capacity of the U.N. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Seoul to advance U.N. accountability efforts. I will also seek opportunities to further promote accountability for human rights violations and abuses committed by the DPRK Government. I will also continue our efforts to highlight DPRK human rights issues at the U.N. Security Council and return these issues to the UNSC's formal agenda.

Question. How can you provide insight into the Commission of Inquiry (COI) into human rights abuses in North Korea?

Answer. North Korean human rights issues remain as pressing now as they were when the U.N. Commission of Inquiry (COI) began its work 10 years ago. The 2014 final report of the COI provided important documentation on the human rights situation in North Korea, which represents one of the most protracted human rights crises in the world. The COI report led to important initiatives, including the establishment of the U.N. Office of the High Commissioner Office in Seoul, and prompting the U.N. Security Council to place the human rights situation in the DPRK on its agenda in 2014, 2015, 2016, and 2017. If confirmed, I will work with partners and allies to reinvigorate these efforts that carried forward the COI recommendations and to press for further action to advance accountability for the DPRK's egregious human rights violations.

Question. If confirmed, how will you revitalize multilateral efforts to promote accountability for human rights abuses in North Korea?

Answer. If confirmed, I will work with allies and partners to advance accountability efforts and call for action to improve the DPRK's human rights record in the U.N. General Assembly, Human Rights Council, and other relevant U.N. bodies. I will seek opportunities to host side events to amplify defector and refugee voices, whose harrowing stories reveal the violations and abuses committed inside the closed country. I will also continue our efforts to highlight DPRK human rights issues at the U.N. Security Council and return these issues to the UNSC's formal agenda.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO JULIE TURNER BY SENATOR MARCO RUBIO

Question. In May 2022, Secretary Blinken said that the People's Republic of China is the "only country with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do it." The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) clearly holds the reins of power in the People's Republic of China and has used this power to commit genocide in Xinjiang, flood our communities with fentanyl, and emit, by far the largest quantity of greenhouse gases in the world today. With their absolute control of Chinese society and industry, the CCP could stop all of these destructive actions tomorrow if they so choose. Is the Chinese Communist Party a threat to the United States?

Answer. Under President Xi, the Chinese Communist Party has become more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad. If confirmed, I will continue our work with allies and partners to strengthen democratic institutions, promote human rights, and protect the rules-based international order.

Question. Does the Chinese Communist Party undertake any activities that are beneficial to U.S. interests?

Answer. While the United States and the People's Republic of China (PRC) are strategic competitors, it may be possible for the PRC to make constructive contributions toward solving challenges, including regarding the DPRK, that we and other countries face in common. Any PRC contributions must be scrutinized, however, to ensure they are not springboards for narrow PRC economic and security interests.

Question. Do you believe that there are any areas within which the Chinese Communist Party would constructively work with the United States in good faith?

Answer. If confirmed, I will urge the PRC Government to work constructively with the United States and our allies and partners to provide durable solutions for DPRK refugees, asylum seekers, trafficking victims, and other seeking protection from the DPRK regime. In addition, I will press the PRC to act in good faith to uphold its commitments under U.N. Security Council resolutions requiring governments to repatriate, consistent with national and international human rights and refugee law, North Korean workers.

Question. If confirmed, will you approve any joint activity with organizations or representatives from the People's Republic of China in the country in which you will work?

Answer. If confirmed, I would maintain openness to U.S. involvement in cooperative efforts that advance durable solutions for North Korean refugees, asylum seekers, trafficking victims, and others seeking protection from the DPRK regime. That said, I would scrutinize and encourage third parties to scrutinize any such arrangements to ensure they are consistent with international law, feature transparency, and delineate steps to verify regularly that all parties are working in good faith.

Question. Ten years have passed since the creation of the United Nations Commission of Inquiry on human rights in North Korea, with little improvement in the human rights situation there. With growing Chinese influence at the U.N., it is imperative that the United States continues to ensure the U.N. remains focused on true human rights tragedies, like North Korea and the ongoing genocide in Xinjiang, instead of listening to those that would prefer the U.N. look at Israel or even the United States. What is your view on public calls made by the North Korean Human Rights community to update and strengthen the U.N.'s accountability work for North Korea?

Answer. I fully support efforts to elevate multilateral attention to North Korean human rights issues, which remain as pressing now as they were when the U.N. Commission of Inquiry began its work.

If confirmed, I will support calls for accountability and improvements in the DPRK's human rights record in the U.N. General Assembly, Human Rights Council, and other relevant U.N. bodies. I will also continue our efforts to highlight DPRK human rights issues at the U.N. Security Council and return these issues to the UNSC's formal agenda.

Question. What is the feasibility of pushing the U.N. to establish an accountability mechanism for North Korea to collect evidence against and prepare criminal persecution for officials of the Kim regime, similar to what has been created for Syria in 2016 and Burma in 2018?

Answer. If confirmed, I will work closely with my colleagues in the Department of State and with our foreign partners to support the mandate and capacity of the U.N. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Seoul to advance U.N. accountability efforts. I will also seek opportunities to further promote accountability for human rights violations and abuses committed by the DPRK Government.

Question. In the past 10 years, North Korea has arrested and detained dozens of American, South Korean and Japanese citizens, notably American student Otto Warmbier. This is a familiar pattern of authoritarian regimes using hostages to extract concessions from the United States. Diplomacy by the Trump Administration successfully secured the release of the last three remaining Americans detained in North Korea. However, at least four South Koreans—Kim Jung Wook, Kim Kook Ki, Choi Chun kil, and Ko Hyon Choi—remain detained in North Korea. In April, during President Yoon's visit, the United States and South Korea pledged to "strengthen cooperation to promote human rights in the DPRK as well as to resolve the issues of abductions, detainees, and unrepatriated prisoners of war." If confirmed, how will you implement the human rights provisions in the Washington Declaration agreed between South Korea and the United States?

Answer. If confirmed, I will prioritize efforts to urge the DPRK to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms and provide for the needs of its people. I will support the Republic of Korea, including its Ambassador-at-Large on North Korean Human Rights, in advocating for the release of these and other unjustly held detainees, whose cases the State Department continues to highlight through the annual Human Rights Report and other public statements. While the Washington Declaration does not directly address human rights, it does reflect the U.S.-ROK shared commitment to pursue the complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula in a peaceful, diplomatic manner—a message I do and will always strive to uphold.

Question. How do you plan to support the diplomatic efforts of our ally, South Korea, to secure the release of its citizens detained in North Korea before they meet the tragic fate of Otto Warmbier?

Answer. If confirmed, I will support the Republic of Korea, including its Ambassador-at-Large on North Korean Human Rights, in advocating for the immediate release of its unjustly detained citizens, whose cases the State Department has highlighted through the annual Human Rights Report and other public statements.

Question. The U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy highlights 'build[ing] regional resilience to transnational threats' as one of its five objectives while also highlighting the Chinese Communist Party's undermining of human rights and international law. As we speak, the CCP continues to provide a critical source of financing to the Kim regime that enables its human rights abuses against the Korean people. The CCP also continues to turn a blind eye to Chinese companies that participate in North Korea's forced labor schemes and continues to catch North Korean escapees and return them to the country. If confirmed, how will you ensure that the issue of North Koreans in PRC is included in this strategy and what measures can the U.S. take in protecting the human rights and safe movement of North Korean refugees?

Answer. The U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy highlights the need to address human rights violations and other abuses related to DPRK citizens, which includes other countries' involvement in such violations and abuses. If confirmed, I will work to ensure that we continue to highlight such cases with the PRC and make clear that we expect the PRC and other countries to uphold their respective non-refoulement obligations, including with regard to North Korean refugees.

Question. According to the U.N. Special Rapporteur on North Korean human rights, Elizabeth Salmón, as many as 2,000 North Korean escapees are currently detained in China and are at risk of being repatriated to their country once the border reopens. Senator Kaine and I introduced a bill this past March that would authorize sanctions on Chinese officials responsible for refouling North Korean escapees back to the North. If confirmed, will you push the administration to impose sanctions on Chinese Government officials, if China carries out such a mass deportation of North Korean refugees?

Answer. If confirmed, I will focus on the protection of North Korean refugees, including by pressing the PRC and other governments to uphold their respective nonrefoulement obligations, working with governments to facilitate UNHCR access to North Korean asylum seekers, and working to ensure North Koreans continue to have access to U.S. resettlement programs. I will continue to raise individual cases with the People's Republic of China and will consider all available tools in the event the PRC carries out a mass deportation.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO MATTHEW D. MURRAY BY SENATOR MARCO RUBIO

Question. In May 2022, Secretary Blinken said that the People's Republic of China is the "only country with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do it." The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) clearly holds the reins of power in the People's Republic of China and has used this power to commit genocide in Xinjiang, flood our communities with fentanyl, and emit, by far the largest quantity of greenhouse gases in the world today. With their absolute control of Chinese society and industry, the CCP could stop all of these destructive actions tomorrow if they so choose. Is the Chinese Communist Party a threat to the United States?

Answer. Under President Xi, the Chinese Communist Party has become more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad. We will defend U.S. national security and advance our values and prosperity. We will also defend international law; bolster institutions that maintain peace and security; protect the rights of individuals and sovereign nations; and make it possible for all countries to coexist and cooperate.

Question. Does the Chinese Communist Party undertake any activities that are beneficial to U.S. interests?

Answer. While the United States and the People's Republic of China (PRC) are strategic competitors, it may be possible for the PRC to make constructive contributions toward solving shared transnational challenges. Any PRC contributions must be scrutinized, however, to ensure they are neither springboards for advancing nar-

row PRC strategic interests nor platforms that could help create more permissive conditions for its own authoritarian model.

Question. Do you believe that there are any areas within which the Chinese Communist Party would constructively work with the United States in good faith?

Answer. While the United States competes vigorously with the PRC where we differ, the United States manages this competition responsibly. This includes maintaining openness to cooperation with Beijing where our interests may overlap and where our cooperation can advance solutions to transnational challenges, including possibly climate change, counter-narcotics, pandemic threats, non-proliferation, food security, and macroeconomics.

Question. If confirmed, will you approve any joint activity with organizations or representatives from the People's Republic of China in the country in which you will work?

Answer. In line with the Administration's approach on competition and cooperation with the People's Republic of China, if confirmed, I would continue to maintain openness to U.S. involvement in cooperative efforts that involve PRC entities in APEC in areas where our collective interests align. That said, I would scrutinize any such arrangements to ensure they are clear, transparent, consistent with core U.S. values, and structured to ensure all parties are working in good faith.

Question. Sanctioned Hong Kong Chief Executive John Lee made clear that he does not intend to enforce U.S. sanctions against foreign actors entering Hong Kong after he allowed Russian oligarch Alexei Mordashov to dock his yacht in Hong Kong. As such, he would require a waiver to attend the APEC summit in San Francisco because he is in blatant violation of U.S. sanctions. Does the U.S. plan to grant a waiver to Chief Executive John Lee to attend the APEC Summit in San Francisco in November?

Answer. The United States remains deeply concerned about the deterioration of protected rights and freedoms and the grave restrictions on Hong Kong's autonomy under the National Security Law. As host of APEC in 2023, the United States has committed to work towards participation of delegations from the 21 member economies in APEC events but has made clear this participation must be in accordance with U.S. laws and regulations, including with respect to sanctions. I defer to the White House regarding invitations to the APEC Economic Leaders' Week program in November.

Question. Both Taiwan and China are members of APEC, but Taiwan is listed only as "Chinese Taipei" in a concession to Beijing. Unlike other APEC members, Taiwan's head of state is not invited to APEC Summits. This may have made sense using the logic of the post-Cold War neoliberal consensus, but it doesn't reflect reality. Taiwan is the United States' ninth largest trading partner, with our annual trading reaching \$90 billion in 2020. Taiwan is a critical source of advanced semi-conductors needed for everything from cars to smartphones, to advanced manufacturing equipment. Finally, Taiwan is a model of how democracy and smartly managed free markets can bring prosperity to the Indo-Pacific, in contrast to the Chinese Communist Party's vision of authoritarianism and central planning. If confirmed, will you support inviting Taiwan's President Tsai Ing Wen to attend the APEC summit in the United States?

Answer. Taiwan, which participates in APEC under the name "Chinese Taipei," is a full member of APEC and a strong supporter of U.S. priorities during our ongoing APEC host year. For 30 years, the Taiwan President has appointed a "Leader's Representative" to attend the APEC Economic Leaders' Week events on his or her behalf. I defer to the White House regarding invitations to the APEC Economic Leaders' Week program in November.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO JENNIFER L. JOHNSON BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

Trafficking in Persons

In the State Department's 2022 Trafficking in Persons Report, Micronesia remained on Tier 2 for its overall increasing efforts to meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking.

Question. If confirmed, what concrete steps could you take to help Micronesia operationalize the prioritized recommendations contained in the TIP report?

Answer. In the 2022 TIP Report, the Department of State recognized steps the Government of the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) took to combat human trafficking, including identifying more trafficking victims, conducting trafficking awareness activities for the public, and allocating funding for its third trafficking victim shelter.

If confirmed, I will work with the Government of the FSM to encourage it to implement and train front-line officials on victim identification and referral SOPs; increase its efforts to proactively investigate traffickers, including victims' family members who facilitate or directly benefit from trafficking; and increase resources for protection services for trafficking victims, including increasing services for victims identified in Chuuk, Kosrae, Yap, and outer islands. I will also encourage the Government to administer anti-trafficking training for its judicial officials and provide information on safe migration and human trafficking indicators to FSM nationals leaving to work in other countries.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to reporting the reality of the trafficking situation in Micronesia as accurately as possible?

Answer. Yes. If confirmed, I commit to reporting the reality of the trafficking situation in Micronesia as accurately as possible. I will work closely with the State Department's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons to report accurate information about the trafficking situation in Micronesia in the annual Trafficking in Persons Report.

Religious Freedom

In the State Department's 2022 International Religious Freedom report, Micronesia was noted as having no significant issues with regards to religious freedom but there was room for better respect for religious minorities.

Question. What is your assessment of this particular issue and if confirmed, how will you work with the Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom to bolster religious freedom in-country?

Answer. In the 2022 International Religious Freedom Report, religious groups reported the reopening of their community centers and the resumption of missionary activity post-COVID-19. If confirmed, I will advocate for religious freedom and work with the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom and his office to encourage government authorities to work closely with civil society, including members of religious groups, to ensure respect for freedom of religion or belief.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to personally engaging with civil society on this issue?

Answer. Yes. If confirmed, I will forge strong personal and institutional relationships with religious groups and civil society organizations to further promote respect for freedom of religion or belief.

Question. If confirmed, what concrete steps can you take to help Micronesia increase their societal and governmental respect for religious freedom?

Answer. If confirmed, I will work with the Government of the Federated States of Micronesia, civil society, and private sector partners to support and empower human rights defenders and civil society organizations and to promote respect for freedom of religion or belief. I also will forge strong personal and institutional relationships with religious institutions and civil society organizations to assess how to advance the U.S. Government's priorities around respect for freedom of religion or belief.

Human Rights

In the State Department's 2022 Human Rights Report, Micronesia did not have any significant human rights abuses, but there is always room to better promote internationally-recognized human rights.

Question. How will you direct your embassy to work with civil society organizations to improve the human rights situation on the ground?

Answer. If confirmed, I will work closely with the Government and civil society to advance the human rights of marginalized communities and reduce discrimination and violence. It's also imperative to engage with the many active women's groups in the Federated States of Micronesia with the goal of preventing and responding to gender-based violence. Another priority will be to assist with building the capacity of the government, civil society, and media to highlight and counter corruption as we strengthen our diplomatic efforts in the Pacific.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO JENNIFER L. JOHNSON BY SENATOR MARCO RUBIO

Question. In May 2022, Secretary Blinken said that the People's Republic of China is the "only country with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do it." The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) clearly holds the reins of power in the People's Republic of China and has used this power to commit genocide in Xinjiang, flood our communities with fentanyl, and emit, by far the largest quantity of greenhouse gases in the world today. With their absolute control of Chinese society and industry, the CCP could stop all of these destructive actions tomorrow if they so choose. Is the Chinese Communist Party a threat to the United States?

Answer. Yes. Under President Xi, the Chinese Communist Party has become more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad. We will defend U.S. national security and advance our values and prosperity; defend international law, agreements, principles, and institutions that maintain peace and security; protect the rights of individuals and sovereign nations; and make it possible for all countries to coexist and cooperate. If confirmed, I will continue our work with the Federated States of Micronesia to strengthen democratic values and reiterate the U.S. commitment to a rules-based international order.

Question. Does the Chinese Communist Party undertake any activities that are beneficial to U.S. interests?

Answer. While the United States and the People's Republic of China (PRC) are strategic competitors, it may be possible for the PRC to make constructive contributions toward solving transnational challenges. Any PRC contributions must be scrutinized, however, to ensure they are neither springboards for narrow PRC economic interests nor platforms to create more permissive conditions for its own authoritarian model.

Question. Do you believe that there are any areas within which the Chinese Communist Party would constructively work with the United States in good faith?

Answer. While the United States competes vigorously with the PRC where we differ, the United States manages this competition responsibly. This includes maintaining openness to potential cooperation with Beijing when it is in our interests to do so and where our cooperation can advance solutions to transnational challenges, including possibly climate change, counter-narcotics, pandemic threats, non-proliferation, food security, and macroeconomics.

Question. If confirmed, will you approve any joint activity with organizations or representatives from the People's Republic of China in the country in which you will work?

Answer. In line with the Administration's approach on competition and cooperation with the People's Republic of China (PRC), if confirmed, I will maintain openness to U.S. involvement in cooperative efforts that involve PRC entities, the Federated States of Micronesia, and third countries or international organizations only in areas that are clearly in our collective interests. If confirmed, I will scrutinize and encourage third parties to scrutinize any such arrangements to ensure they follow international norms, feature transparency, and delineate steps to verify regularly that all parties are working in good faith.

Question. Last spring, the Chinese Communist Party signed a security agreement with the Solomon Islands. While the details of that agreement remain secret, if past agreements between China and Belt and Road Initiative Members are any indication, that agreement gives China the right to use Solomon Islands facilities as potential military bases. The agreement also highlighted a years, if not decades, long neglect by the United States of islands in the Pacific, making them ripe targets for Chinese influence. The Compacts of Free Association (COFA), which the United States maintains with Palau, the Marshall Islands and Micronesia, are a critical bulwark against this influence. What can you tell me of the state of COFA renegotiation between the United States and Micronesia?

Answer. As of May 17, 2023, negotiations of COFA-related agreements are practically complete, and signing of the agreements is imminent. The COFA team plans to submit a legislative package to Congress and provide briefings in the coming weeks.

Question. If confirmed, what will you do to keep China out of Micronesia?

Answer. The United States and the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) have a special and longstanding partnership, and we cooperate on a range of issues in-

cluding supporting good governance, the judiciary, and law enforcement. If confirmed, I will look for opportunities to partner with the Federated States of Micronesia and align with our allies to expand diplomatic, development, and people-to-people ties that will strengthen Micronesia's resilience and ability to avoid predatory economic practices. If confirmed, I will work swiftly to operationalize new Compact funding and support good governance, transparency, and anti-corruption efforts. I will also work with Congress to advance U.S. interests in the region and sustain the progress achieved through this partnership.

Question. In March, the outgoing President of Micronesia, David Panuelo, sent a letter to his legislature declaring that China is waging "political warfare" in the country, via bribes, harassment, and direct threats against Micronesian officials. These are among the most direct and serious charges to date from a foreign leader against the CCP's overseas influence operations. What is your assessment of President Panuelo's claims of Chinese corrosive influence in Micronesia?

Answer. We have seen a range of the PRC's increasingly problematic behavior in the Indo-Pacific region, including its assertion of unlawful maritime claims and the ongoing militarization of disputed features in the South China Sea, predatory economic activities, illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, and investments that undermine good governance and promote corruption. Considering these examples of PRC actions in the region, the allegations in the letter were not surprising.

Question. If confirmed, what will you do to support Micronesian institutions against this level of Chinese influence?

Answer. If confirmed, I will look for opportunities to partner with civil society and the Government of the Federated States of Micronesia to build their resilience as we work together to support good governance, transparency, and anti-corruption efforts.

As Secretary Blinken said, "We know that corruption makes even more difficult and exacerbates virtually every global challenge that we have to work on—from war and conflict to figuring out how to end pandemics to disaster response. We also know and see that in our efforts to strengthen democracy around the world, nothing is more corrosive, nothing does more to undermine citizens' trust in their democracy, than corruption."

If confirmed, I would scrutinize and encourage other parties to scrutinize cooperative efforts and arrangements to ensure they follow international norms, feature transparency, and delineate steps to verify regularly that all parties are working in good faith.

NOMINATIONS

TUESDAY, JUNE 13, 2023

U.S. SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS,
Washington, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:06 p.m., in Room SD-419, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Chris Van Hollen presiding.

Present: Senators Menendez, Kaine, Van Hollen [presiding], Duckworth, Romney, Ricketts, and Hagerty.

Also Present: Senator Mark Warner.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. CHRIS VAN HOLLEN, U.S. SENATOR FROM MARYLAND

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Good afternoon, everybody. The nominations hearing of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee will come to order.

Congratulations to each of you on your nominations and for your ongoing service to our country and commitment to our country. I also want to thank the family members who have joined you today and feel free to also introduce them when you provide your testimony.

I grew up in a Foreign Service family. I am aware that this is a family endeavor, and we are grateful to all of your loved ones for traveling across the globe with you in many instances.

In the interest of giving all of you, our nominations, more time to answer questions Senator Romney and I have agreed that we are going to forego any opening statements. That said, I think you have been told if you could keep your opening statements to three minutes it would be much appreciated, given the current congressional schedule.

I do want to say at the outset that I know a lot of chiefs of mission are here in Washington right now and I have been hearing from them about how much they value the work done by Foreign Service nationals in our Embassy and consulates abroad and how they could not do their good work and you could not do your good work without their support. I raise that because these individuals put themselves at great risk.

We had a number of members of our Foreign Service family killed in the line of duty in Nigeria not that long ago. We have a commitment to them that after a long—period of long and faithful service they can emigrate to the United States with their families.

But right now even after they serve 20 years there is a 17-year waiting period, which is why Senator Tillis and I have introduced

bipartisan legislation called the GRATEFUL Act that I hope will pass through this Senate as quickly as possible.

With that, let me also welcome Senator Ricketts, Senator Hagerty, and now I am going to – unless you have any opening remarks?

**STATEMENT OF HON. MITT ROMNEY,
U.S. SENATOR FROM UTAH**

Senator ROMNEY. No opening comments other than what you are doing is more important than it has been in a long, long time.

When I was a young man we were competing with the Soviet Union and the members of our various foreign delegations, our ambassadors and so forth, were playing a very active role, a key role, in promoting our interests, and today we are competing with authoritarians generally and authoritarianism is on the rise, according to a number of people who follow that, and the work that you are doing takes on a special significance at this time, and I appreciate your willingness to step forward and that of your families.

And with that, Mr. Chairman, please introduce our panelists.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Well, thank you. Thank you, Senator Romney.

And we have a number of member Senators who want to introduce a number of you and so in the interests of their convenience I am going to start with them unless, Senator Hagerty, you would like me to introduce some of those others first.

It is up to you. I know you are here to introduce one of our nominees.

**STATEMENT OF HON. BILL HAGERTY,
U.S. SENATOR FROM TENNESSEE**

Senator HAGERTY. Well, Chair Van Hollen, I would very much appreciate it if it is okay to go ahead and make an introduction of somebody who I had the great pleasure of working with when I served as U.S. Ambassador to Japan.

Joel Ehrendreich was my consular general to Okinawa and did a fantastic job. He is now here before us today to be, hopefully, our next U.S. Ambassador to Palau. So it is my great honor to introduce him and thank you for giving me the opportunity to do so.

Throughout Joel's impressive 20-year career he has held significant positions in Tokyo, New Delhi, Singapore, Manila, and Sydney, and he has been the foreign policy adviser to someone whom we both admire greatly, General Neller, who was commandant of the Marine Corps and I had the great pleasure to work with in a prior life.

All of this experience, I believe, has imbued Joel with a deep understanding of the regional dynamics of the Indo-Pacific and I feel certain that Joel is going to do a tremendous job if he is confirmed.

As I mentioned, I had the pleasure of working with Joel when I served as U.S. Ambassador to Japan and he served as consular general to Okinawa. In working together Joel and I handled a number of highly sensitive diplomatic issues related to our military presence in Okinawa related to the strategic positioning of Okinawa and, frankly, relative to the CCP's pressure on Okinawa.

In each case Joel demonstrated himself, as he has throughout his career, to be adept both at protecting and advancing America's national security interests abroad.

In fact, Joel was the first person to suggest that my family and I attend the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Ceremony. It is a very important statement that we made as America and I appreciate Joel's sensitivity to that issue and him bringing it to my attention.

Most recently as the director of the State Department's Office of Japanese Affairs within the Bureau of East Asia and Pacific Affairs Joel is involved in negotiating—in negotiations that are aimed at strengthening and modernizing the alliance as Japan's government pursues new national security strategies and an increased investment in defense.

During the course of his career Joel has received numerous prestigious awards including the Rivkin Award for constructive dissent. Joel has also demonstrated a special knack for baseball diplomacy. I have seen this in action.

Notably, he organized the first ever Embassy Diet baseball game, forming a team with U.S. generals in Okinawa. He established a Little League team in India and even served as an umpire for the Little League Asia Pacific qualifying tournament in Manila during 2013 and 2014.

I know that Joel loves the Milwaukee Brewers and Joel was quite pleased to inform me that the Brewers' AAA team is our very own Nashville Sounds in Nashville, Tennessee, my home state.

Joel's passion for baseball is also evident in his sons' names, Cooper and Calvin, who are respectively named for Cooperstown and Cal Ripken with each of their middle names paying tribute to the legendary Jackie Robinson.

I hope today that the committee will come to know Joel as I do, as someone who brings solid and relevant experience, as someone with a track record of achieving results for our country and as someone—someone who will lead on the field if he is confirmed to serve as America's ambassador to Palau.

Palau's location in the Western Pacific Ocean holds significant strategic importance given the CCP's aggressive moves in the region. It is situated at the crossroads of major maritime routes. Palau serves as a critical gateway between Asia and the Americas.

I know Joel will diligently work to deepen U.S.-Palau defense and economic cooperation under the Compact of Free Association, especially at this critical time for U.S. national security in the Indo-Pacific, and from my personal experience I believe Joel will make an outstanding ambassador.

So I urge you all in joining me to support his confirmation today. Thank you.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you, Senator Hagerty. Welcome, Mr. Ehrendreich.

And now I am going to introduce some of our other nominees who are here today until our other colleagues arrive.

And, Cynthia Kierscht, congratulations on being nominated as Ambassador to the Republic of Djibouti. Ms. Kierscht is a career member of the Senior Foreign Service. She serves as ambassador to the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, and Ambassador Kierscht was previously deputy assistant secretary in the State Depart-

ment's Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs and the director of the bureau's Office of Canadian Affairs.

She has served across Africa in embassies from Rabat to Cairo and the newly established U.S. interest section in Tripoli. Her career has also taken her to Bogota in Colombia where she held positions—such positions as deputy management counselor, cultural affairs officer, and coordinator for the Summit of the Americas.

Welcome, Ambassador Kierscht, and we look forward to your testimony once all the introductions are complete.

Next, let me introduce Mark Libby. Mark Libby has been nominated to be our American Ambassador to Azerbaijan. He is a career member of the Senior Foreign Service.

He serves as a State Department faculty advisor at the National War College in Washington. Previously, he was deputy chief of mission and charges d'affaires at the U.S. mission to the European Union in Brussels.

He has also served as a political counselor at our embassies in Warsaw, Nassau, Nicosia, and Baghdad. Here in Washington he has served as a watch stander and later deputy director for crisis management in the State Department Operations Center. I had an opportunity to visit it briefly just last week.

He has also served as director of the Office—the deputy director in the Office of Central European Affairs, director of the Office of Southern European Affairs, director of orientation at the Foreign Service Institute, as well as spending time on the State Department secretariat staff. Welcome, Mr. Libby.

Now, since we do not have our other members here yet they are going to be free to say a few words when they arrive but I am going to go ahead and introduce the other members who are here.

Let me begin with you, Nisha Desai Biswal, who was nominated—has been nominated by the President to serve as deputy CEO of the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation.

She has over 30 years of foreign policy and international development experience, having served in roles across the executive branch, Congress, and the private sector.

She currently serves as the senior vice president for international strategy and global initiatives at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce where she oversees the U.S.-India Business Council and U.S.-Bangladesh Business Council.

She served—previously served as assistant secretary for South Asia and Central Asian Affairs at the State Department from 2013 to 2017, and during her tenure as assistant secretary she initiated the C5+1 Dialogue with Central Asia and the U.S.-Bangladesh Partnership Dialogue. Welcome, Ms. Biswal.

Next, we have Mr. Edgard Kagan, who is nominated to serve as our Ambassador to Malaysia. He is a career member of the Senior Foreign Service class of minister-counselor. He currently serves as special assistant to the President and senior director for East Asia and Oceania at the National Security Council.

His career has taken him to U.S. embassies in New Delhi and Kuala Lumpur where he served as deputy chief of mission. He has also served overseas in Australia, China, Israel, Hungary, and Cote d'Ivoire.

Prior to his deputy chief of mission roles he served as deputy assistant secretary for Australia, New Zealand, and the Pacific in the State Department's Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, and as counsel general at the U.S. Consulate General in Mumbai, India.

He was also deputy director of the Washington office of the U.S. mission to the United Nations and director of Korean affairs and acting deputy assistant secretary for Japan and Korea in the Bureau of East Asia and Pacific Affairs.

So welcome to all of you. I think I have—everyone has been introduced now. So why do I not turn it over to all of you for your testimony, beginning with Ambassador Kierscht?

STATEMENT OF HON. CYNTHIA KIERSCHT, OF MINNESOTA, A CAREER MEMBER OF THE SENIOR FOREIGN SERVICE, CLASS OF MINISTER-COUNSELOR, NOMINATED TO BE AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE REPUBLIC OF DJIBOUTI

Ms. KIERSCHT. Chairman Van Hollen, Ranking Member Romney, distinguished Members of the Committee, I am honored to appear before you as President Biden's nominee to serve as the U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Djibouti.

I am grateful to the President and the Secretary of State for the confidence they have placed in me with this nomination.

If confirmed, I look forward to working closely with this committee and with the Congress more broadly to advance American interests in Djibouti.

Mr. Chairman, I would first like to express my gratitude for the love and support of my family, friends, and colleagues throughout my career.

In particular, I would like to recognize my mother, Dr. Marcia Kierscht, here with me today, who has been an excellent role model, best friend, and who has visited me at every post, and my late grandmother, Cynthia Selland, who was a North Dakota public school teacher for 45 years, taught geography, from whom I no doubt got much inspiration for this journey.

I am also grateful for the love and support of my brother, Matthew, and his family, Brenda and Kennedy, and to the great team at U.S. Embassy Nouakchott who are streaming this live at the Embassy. My deepest thanks for your support.

It has been my honor and privilege for more than 32 years of public service to represent the American people, protect American citizens, and promote American interests overseas as a career member of the Foreign Service.

If confirmed, I will proudly lead our interagency team in Djibouti on behalf of the United States, leveraging my experience in North Africa and the Sahel in Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, and most recently as U.S. Ambassador to Mauritania.

Djibouti holds significant strategic importance for the United States. Its location at the mouth of the Red Sea makes it the trade and humanitarian gateway for the Horn of Africa.

Djibouti has been a key partner in U.S. efforts to improve security and stability in the region, including hosting Camp Lemonnier, the U.S. military's only enduring presence on the African continent.

Our military presence in Djibouti is particularly critical to ensuring the safety of our missions in Africa as recently illustrated by the successful evacuation of U.S. Embassy staff from Sudan.

Djibouti has been a strong partner to the United States in upholding the rules-based international order at the United Nations and in other multilateral fora and, as host of the Intergovernmental Authority for Development, Djibouti plays a leading role in the region.

Djibouti is also a key location for the United States to work with strategic partners in Africa and the Western Indian Ocean to counter efforts by other nations, such as the People's Republic of China, to undermine the rules-based order.

If confirmed, I will work hand in hand with the full spectrum of the U.S. government to protect American national security interests in Djibouti.

Over the past several years Djibouti has faced economic headwinds from the pandemic, the disruption to global shipping, the conflict in northern Ethiopia, and the resulting reduction in trade through Djibouti's ports and the historic drought affecting millions in the region.

The Djiboutian people have shown remarkable resilience in the face of these multiple crises, and in spite of these challenges the economy is showing potential, driven by the Djiboutian government's strategy to diversify and engage private sector-led growth.

If confirmed, I am committed to working with the U.S. private sector and government colleagues to support Djibouti's sustainable development and provide U.S. alternatives to investment by our strategic competitors.

Mr. Chairman, protecting U.S. national security and advancing our interests in the region requires a secure, prosperous, and democratic Djibouti.

If confirmed, I am committed to working with the U.S. agencies and likeminded allies to promote the ideals of good governance, including in advance of its 2026 presidential elections.

The United States has enjoyed a strong relationship with the republic of Djibouti for decades and I see potential for even stronger ties as we work together towards a more secure, prosperous, and democratic future for all.

If confirmed, I will work with the Embassy team to build on their efforts to partner with the Djiboutians to advance regional peace and security, support sustainable economic development, strengthen democratic institutions and promote good governance, while ensuring critical access and influence for our broader regional security efforts.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and Members of the Committee, thank you for considering my nomination. I welcome your questions.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Kierscht follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. CYNTHIA KIERSCHT

Chairman Van Hollen, Ranking Member Romney, distinguished Members of the Committee, I am honored to appear before you as President Biden's nominee to serve as the U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Djibouti. I am grateful to the President and the Secretary of State for the confidence they have shown in me with this nomination. If confirmed, I look forward to working closely with this committee, and with the Congress more broadly, to advance American interests in Djibouti.

Mr. Chairman, I would first like to express my gratitude for the love and support of my family, friends, and colleagues throughout my career. In particular, I would like to recognize my mother, Dr. Marcia Kierscht, who has been an excellent role model and who has visited me at every post, and my late grandmother, Cynthia Selland, who, as a North Dakota public school teacher for 45 years, taught geography and from whom, no doubt, I got much inspiration for this journey. I am also grateful for the love and support of my brother, Matthew, and his family.

It has been my honor and privilege for more than 32 years of public service to represent the American people, protect American citizens, and promote American interests overseas. If confirmed, I will proudly lead our interagency team in Djibouti to do the same, leveraging my experience in North Africa and the Sahel—in Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco and most recently as U.S. Ambassador to Mauritania.

Djibouti holds significant strategic importance for the United States. Its location at the mouth of the Red Sea, through which 12 percent of all global trade passes, makes it the trade and humanitarian gateway for the Horn of Africa. Djibouti has been a key partner in U.S. efforts to improve security and stability in the region, including hosting Camp Lemonnier, the U.S. military's only enduring presence on the African continent. Our military presence in Djibouti is particularly critical to ensuring the safety of our missions in Africa, as recently illustrated by the successful evacuation of U.S. Embassy staff from Sudan. Djibouti has been a strong partner to the United States in upholding the rules-based international order at the United Nations and in other multilateral fora. As host of the Intergovernmental Authority for Development, Djibouti plays a leading role in the region.

Djibouti is also a key location for the United States to work with strategic partners in Africa and the western Indian Ocean to counter efforts by some other nations, such as the People's Republic of China, to undermine the rules-based order. If confirmed, I will work hand-in-hand with the full spectrum of U.S. Government partners to protect American national security interests in Djibouti.

Over the past several years, Djibouti has faced economic headwinds from the COVID-19 pandemic, the consequent disruption to global shipping, the conflict in northern Ethiopia and the resulting reduction in trade through Djibouti's ports, and the historic drought affecting millions in the region. The Djiboutian people have shown remarkable resilience in the face of multiple crises, and despite these challenges, the economy continues to show potential, driven by the Djiboutian Government's strategy to diversify and engage private sector-led growth. Djibouti is already a key international telecommunications hub as a landing point for numerous under-sea cables, hosts the best port infrastructure in the region, and has significant and untapped renewable energy potential. If confirmed, I am committed to working with the U.S. private sector and government colleagues to support Djibouti's sustainable development and provide U.S. alternatives to investment by our strategic competitors.

Protecting U.S. national security and advancing our interests in the region requires a secure, prosperous, and democratic Djibouti. If confirmed, I am committed to working with the U.S. agencies and like-minded allies to promote the ideals of good governance and political freedom in Djibouti, including in advance of its 2026 presidential elections. Djibouti is also a major transit point for migrants. If confirmed, I will work with Djiboutian officials to seek ways to assist and protect vulnerable migrants, especially to combat trafficking in persons.

The United States has enjoyed a strong relationship with the Republic of Djibouti for decades and I see potential for even stronger ties, as we work together towards a more secure, prosperous, and democratic future for all. If confirmed, I will work with the Embassy country team to build on their efforts to partner with the Djiboutians to advance regional peace and security, support sustainable economic development, strengthen democratic institutions, and promote good governance, while ensuring critical access and influence for our broader regional security efforts.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and Members of the committee, thank you for considering my nomination. I welcome your questions.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you for your statement.

Mr. Ehrendreich?

STATEMENT OF JOEL EHRENDREICH, OF NEW YORK, A CAREER MEMBER OF THE SENIOR FOREIGN SERVICE, CLASS OF COUNSELOR, NOMINATED TO BE AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE REPUBLIC OF PALAU

Mr. EHRENDREICH. Chairman Van Hollen, Ranking Member Romney, Members of the Committee, good afternoon. I am honored to appear before you today and grateful for the confidence shown by the President and Secretary Blinken in nominating me to be Ambassador to the Republic of Palau.

I want to give a special thank you to Senator Hagerty, someone who I greatly admired as ambassador and whose mentorship I am grateful for. You honored me, Senator, Ambassador, with that introduction.

I would also like to take a moment to thank my loved ones who are here today, my sons Cooper and Calvin, both of whom I am so proud of and who have brought me joy every day of their lives, and happy birthday, Calvin; my daughter-in-law Nada, who has been a wonderful addition to the family, and our newest wonderful addition, our grandson, Zayn; and, of course, Rachel, my wife of 33 years, my love, my soul mate, the person who makes me a better person.

I also want to thank my brother, Josh, my in-laws, Jackie and Scott Alter, my mother-in-law, Janice McClelland. I am truly blessed to have so many wonderful people in my life.

And here I am also compelled to try to right a wrong in my official nomination bio. It mentioned where I was born—Omaha, Nebraska—but it left out where I grew up and the place that I still consider home to this day, Milwaukee, Wisconsin. So a shout out to the town I love and to all of my friends there.

And if I could add just one special request from my fellow Whitefish Bay High School alum, Milwaukee Brewers manager Craig Counsell, if you could sprinkle just a little extra of that magic on the Brewers this season I would love it just one time before I die to know what it feels like to cheer for the World Series champion.

[Laughter.]

Senator VAN HOLLEN. All right.

Mr. EHRENDREICH. Senators, a couple weeks ago when we concluded the 2023 Compact Review Agreement with Palau, Palau's President Surangel Whipps said on his Facebook page, "God bless Palau, God bless the United States of America, God bless us all."

I share President Whipps' enthusiasm for our partnership and potential for our future. I believe the United States and Palau have a real convergence of interests at this time, and if confirmed, I am eager to continue to advance our special relationship.

To do so, I would first turn to our National Security Strategy and Indo-Pacific strategy. These documents describe in no uncertain terms that the United States faces unprecedented challenges from the People's Republic of China.

We have seen that while the PRC's provocative actions span the globe, they are most acute in the Indo-Pacific. The strategies highlight the importance of enhancing our relationships with allies and

partners to include a specific focus on deepening ties with Pacific Island countries.

Regarding the 2023 Compact Review Agreement, I urge Congress to quickly take up the relevant implementing legislation, appropriate funds, and allow for the entry into force of the agreement.

If confirmed, I would work to ensure both sides live up to the obligations made in the new agreement, which will enhance our relationship for the next 20 years and beyond.

I would also point to our Embassy's integrated country strategy, which cites the need to address Palau's top priority, the existential threat from rising sea levels and increasing natural disasters.

The people of Palau are counting on their partner, the United States, and the international community to unite with them in confronting this challenge.

If confirmed, I would continue to work closely with the government of Palau and others to support disaster preparedness and response.

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Ranking Member, Members of the Committee, thank you again for your consideration and the opportunity to appear before you today. I look forward to your questions and comments.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Ehrendreich follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF JOEL EHRENDREICH

Chairman Van Hollen, Ranking Member Romney, Members of the Committee, good afternoon. I am honored to appear before you as President Biden's nominee for Ambassador to the Republic of Palau.

I want to give a special thank you to Senator Hagerty, someone whom I greatly admired as Ambassador and whose mentorship I am grateful for. You honor me, Senator, by providing that introduction.

I am grateful for the confidence shown by the President and Secretary Blinken in nominating me. I have spent the bulk of my nearly 30-year career in the Indo-Pacific region, and, if confirmed, I look forward to working with Congress to advance U.S. interests in this region that I and so many others believe is fundamental to America's future.

I would like to take a moment to thank my loved ones who have contributed to me ending up here today. My sons, Cooper and Calvin, both of whom I'm so proud of and who have brought me joy every day of their lives. My daughter-in-law Nada, who has been a wonderful addition to the family, and our newest wonderful addition, our grandson Zayn, born just a few weeks ago. And of course, Rachel, my wife of 33 years, my love, my soul mate, the person who makes me a better person. I also want to thank my brother, Josh, in-laws Jackie and Scott Alter, and mother-in-law Janice McClelland. I am truly blessed to have so many marvelous people in my life.

And here I'm compelled to also try and right a wrong. My official nomination bio mentioned where I was born, Omaha, but left out where I grew up and the place that still feels like home to this day: Milwaukee, Wisconsin. So a shout-out to the town I love and all my friends there, and if I could just add one request for my fellow Whitefish Bay High School alum, Milwaukee Brewers manager Craig Counsell: If you could sprinkle just a little extra of your magic on the Brewers this season, I would love it, just once before I die, to know what it feels like to cheer for the World Series champion.

Senators, a couple weeks ago, when we concluded the 2023 Compact Review Agreement, Palau's president, Surangel Whipps, Jr., posted on his Facebook page "God bless Palau! God bless the United States of America. God bless us all!"

I share President Whipps' enthusiasm for our partnership and potential for the future. I believe the United States and Palau have a real convergence of interests at this time. If confirmed, I am eager to continue to build on our special, unique relationship, and would look forward to advancing win-win opportunities for our two countries.

To do so, I would first turn to our National Security Strategy, Indo-Pacific Strategy, and Pacific Partnership Strategy. These documents describe in no uncertain terms that the United States faces unprecedented challenges from the People's Republic of China. We have seen that while the PRC's provocative actions span the globe, they are most acute in the Indo-Pacific. The strategies highlight the importance of enhancing our relationships with allies and partners, to include a specific focus on deepening ties with Pacific Island Countries.

Regarding the 2023 Compact Review Agreement, I urge Congress to quickly take up the relevant implementing legislation, appropriate funds, and allow for the entry into force of the agreement. If confirmed, and once the agreement enters into force, I would work to ensure both sides live up to the obligations made in the new agreement. The new agreement addresses investment and economic prosperity, oversight, and numerous other areas that will enhance our relationship for the next twenty years and beyond.

I would also point to our Embassy's Integrated Country Strategy, which cites the need to address Palau's top priority: the existential threat from rising sea levels and increasing natural disasters. The people of Palau are counting on the international community to unite with them in confronting this challenge. If confirmed, I would continue to work closely with the Government of Palau and other partners to support disaster preparedness and response.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and Members of the Committee, thank you again for your consideration and the opportunity to appear before you today. I look forward to your comments and questions.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you, Mr. Ehrendreich. And while you have something in your prayers can you put a plug in for the Orioles, too?

[Laughter.]

Senator VAN HOLLEN. All right. Mr. Libby?

STATEMENT OF MARK W. LIBBY, OF MASSACHUSETTS, A CAREER MEMBER OF THE SENIOR FOREIGN SERVICE, CLASS OF MINISTER-COUNSELOR, NOMINATED TO BE AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN

Mr. LIBBY. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Romney, distinguished Members of the Committee, I appreciate the confidence President Biden and Secretary Blinken have placed in me by nominating me to be the next U.S. Ambassador to Azerbaijan and it is a great privilege to appear before you today.

If I am confirmed I pledge to work closely with this committee and with all members of Congress to advance U.S. interests in and with Azerbaijan.

I first would like to introduce my wife, Dinousha, who joins me as we celebrate our 26th wedding anniversary this summer. Polish by birth, a naturalized U.S. citizen, Dinousha is an American by choice.

She inspires me with her patriotism through decades of behind the scenes public service, training U.S. diplomats in some of the world's most strategically important foreign languages.

She is a wonderful mother to our wonderful son, Andrew, who is also here today together with his partner, Sophie Prager.

Missing today are my father, Pete, who died 12 years ago, my sister Diane, brother Steven and mom, Marjorie. Their love has sustained me throughout my life.

I would also like to acknowledge the teams at Georgetown University Hospital here in Washington and the Dana Farber Cancer

Institute in Boston. They have cured me of disease repeatedly since I was 20 years old and I literally owe them my life. Thanks to them I am able to be here today and I have been able to serve my country for so many years.

All U.S. diplomats have a core duty to protect American citizens and if I am confirmed that will be my top priority. In my three decades of public service I have seen the persistence of and sacrifices made by U.S. Foreign Service, civil service, military, and other interagency partners and by our locally engaged staff.

As you pointed out, Mr. Chairman, these dedicated colleagues often face danger and hardship to safeguard their fellow Americans and to pursue U.S. national interests.

If I am confirmed it will be the honor of a lifetime to lead the team at Embassy Baku in pursuit of those same goals. If confirmed I will also support U.S. efforts to facilitate a just and sustainable peace agreement between Azerbaijan and Armenia.

This tragic conflict has produced a bitter legacy of pain and mistrust. I know many members of this committee have concerns about Azerbaijan. I share and understand them.

Solving issues of territorial integrity, sovereignty, and the rights and securities of everyone in the region, including those residing in Nagorno-Karabakh, is vital to any durable and dignified peace.

There is no military solution to this conflict and the U.S. must continue to condemn violence or threats of violence. But with the help of the United States and of our European partners the parties are closer than ever to reaching an agreement and if I am confirmed I commit to help to get them there through active and persistent engagement in Baku.

But signing a peace deal is only the first step. If I am confirmed I will lead Embassy Baku's interagency team to support the implementation of an eventual settlement. Successful implementation of a peace agreement would pave the way for deeper ties between the U.S. and Azerbaijan that will stabilize the region and thwart hostile competitors who seek to expand their malign influence by capitalizing on conflict.

A peace deal would allow us to take to the next level much of what already works well in our relationship with Azerbaijan. Cooperation in counterterrorism, border security, energy security, and maritime security serves the U.S. national interest in security.

If confirmed, I will redouble our efforts in these areas. I will seek to foster further economic development and create more numerous and diverse opportunities for U.S. companies to compete and generate jobs at home.

Democracy and human rights are core to U.S. foreign policy not just because they reflect our values but because they have proven to be the best foundation for peace and prosperity.

If confirmed, I pledge to engage in a respectful but very frank dialogue with a wide range of Azerbaijani leaders and citizens and to advocate persistently for those values, rights, and freedoms in Azerbaijan and in the wider region.

If confirmed, I will work in full and open consultation with this committee, which has shown such leadership advancing our values and interests in this complex region.

I commit to cooperation with you to advance our goals of a stable, democratic, peaceful, and prosperous Azerbaijan that is a strategic partner to the United States.

Thank you for your time and I look forward to your questions.
[The prepared statement of Mr. Libby follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF MARK W. LIBBY

Chairman Van Hollen, Ranking Member Romney, distinguished Members of the Committee: It is a great privilege to testify as the President's nominee to be the next U.S. Ambassador to Azerbaijan. I appreciate the confidence President Biden and Secretary Blinken have placed in me with this nomination. If confirmed, I pledge to work closely with this Committee and all Members of Congress to advance U.S. interests in and with Azerbaijan.

I first would like to introduce my wife, Danusia, who joins me as we celebrate our 26th wedding anniversary this summer. Polish by birth; as a naturalized U.S. citizen, Danusia is American by choice. She inspires me with her patriotism through decades of behind-the-scenes public service, training U.S. diplomats in some of the world's most strategically important foreign languages. She is a wonderful mother to our wonderful son Andrew, who is also here today with his partner, Sophie Prager.

Missing today are my father, Pete, who died 12 years ago, my sister Diane, brother Stephen, and mom Marjorie. Their love has sustained me throughout my life. I'd also like to acknowledge the teams at Georgetown University Hospital in Washington and the Dana Farber Cancer Institute in Boston. They have cured me of disease repeatedly since I was 20. I literally owe them my life; thanks to them, I have been able to serve my country for so many years and can be here today.

All U.S. diplomats have a core duty to protect American citizens—and if I am confirmed, this will be my most important task. In my three decades of public service, I have seen the persistence and sacrifices made by U.S. Foreign Service, civil service, military and other interagency partners, and by our locally engaged staff. These dedicated colleagues often face danger and hardship to safeguard their fellow Americans and pursue U.S. interests. If confirmed, it will be the honor of a lifetime to lead the team at Embassy Baku in pursuit of these same goals.

If confirmed, I will also support U.S. efforts to facilitate a just and sustainable peace agreement between Azerbaijan and Armenia. This tragic conflict has produced a bitter legacy of pain and mistrust. I know many Members of this Committee have concerns about Azerbaijan—and I share them. Solving issues of territorial integrity, sovereignty, and the rights and security of everyone in the region—including those in Nagorno-Karabakh—is vital to any durable and dignified peace. There is no military solution to this conflict and the U.S. condemns violence or threats of violence. But with the help of the United States and of our European Union partners, the parties are closer than ever to reaching agreement. If confirmed, I commit to help them get there through active and persistent engagement in Baku.

But signing a peace deal is only the first step. If confirmed, I will lead Embassy Baku's interagency team to support the implementation of an eventual settlement. Successful implementation of a peace agreement would open new horizons for trade and investment that will lead to greater prosperity throughout the South Caucasus and beyond. It also would pave the way for deeper ties between the United States and Azerbaijan that will stabilize the region and thwart hostile competitors seeking to expand their malign influence by capitalizing on the conflict.

A peace deal would allow us to take to the next level much of what already works well in our relationship with Azerbaijan. Cooperation with Azerbaijan in counterterrorism and border, energy, and maritime security is noteworthy and serves the U.S. national interest. If confirmed, I will redouble our efforts in these areas.

Energy is of particular importance. Cooperation with Azerbaijan has brought more energy to market, helping our European partners diversify sources and routes away from Russia and stabilizing global supply. If confirmed, I will seek to foster further economic development and create even more numerous and diverse opportunities for U.S. companies to compete and generate jobs at home.

Democracy and human rights are core to U.S. foreign policy - not just because they reflect our values, but because they are the best foundation for peace and prosperity. They also are integral to international commitments and obligations that both we and Azerbaijan have undertaken. If confirmed, I will advocate for democracy, responsive governance, and the rights and freedoms necessary to realize the full potential of all of Azerbaijan's people. I pledge to engage in respectful, but frank

dialogue with a wide range of Azerbaijani leaders and citizens to advocate for these values, rights and freedoms in Azerbaijan and in the wider region. If confirmed, I will work in full and open consultation with this committee, which has shown such leadership advancing our values and interests in this complex region. I commit to cooperation with you to advance our goal of a stable, democratic, peaceful, and prosperous Azerbaijan that is a strategic partner to the United States.

Thank you for considering my nomination, and I look forward to your questions.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you, Mr. Libby. I see we have been joined by Senator Warner and Senator Kaine, who is a member of the committee.

Senator Warner is here to say a few words on behalf of Ms. Desai Biswal and, Senator, we have gone through the bios of all of our nominees and so we understand their credentials.

But we would love to have some personal testimony as why you think this nominee is important to the country.

**STATEMENT OF HON. MARK R. WARNER,
U.S. SENATOR FROM VIRGINIA**

Senator WARNER. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I apologize. Senator Kaine and I were away on another issue that you care very deeply about as well and we were standing up for your interests.

And I would not, though, have been if I had realized, I have to tell you that—Senator Romney on this subcommittee was actually ranking member—I would have never been late. That matter would have been put aside.

So we have got a very distinguished group of nominees here. Nisha I have known literally for years. I have known her when she worked in the Obama administration and had the expertise to deal with all of the issues around South Asia, her prior time at AID and American Red Cross.

She brings a distinguished governmental career but she also brings enormous activities. Probably where I got to know her the most was when she went over on the business side and worked for USIBC.

Matter of fact, Senator Cornyn and I, we were still the co-chairs of the India Caucus, the largest single country caucus in the Senate, 42 members, bipartisan.

Nisha did a great, great job at USIBC and so I can recommend her without reservation and particularly because I think the position she is nominated for as being—helping our friend, Scott Nathan, over at DFC.

DFC, I think, is one of the real assets we have, particularly as we compete against China on issues like Belt and Road and others.

We cannot simply do it with military and other supports. We have to have a strong active international finance organization that can go toe to toe with—against Belt and Road and against other initiatives.

We all know our country on a per capita basis does much, much smaller than most other first world nations and Nisha will bring that combination of both business side, AID side. She started her career at the American Red Cross. She served in the administration.

No one is better situated for this position. I just met with the senior leadership of DFC last week as we look at some of this tech-

nology competition. There are a host of deals and areas that they are trying to pursue that Nisha would add value day one.

So I hope—not only do I recommend her but I hope the committee will act with great speed in moving her through and I know she will have—I have talked to a number of folks who have dealt with her as well in the past—broad bipartisan support.

With that I will defer to my colleague, Senator Kaine, who is here for somebody else but he was going to put a—you are going to put a good word in for Nisha as well, are you not, Tim?

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you, Senator Warner.

Senator Kaine.

**STATEMENT OF HON. TIM KAINE,
U.S. SENATOR FROM VIRGINIA**

Senator KAINE. Well, I guess I better put in a good word for Nisha. No, we have worked together very well and I am strongly supportive. Echo what Senator Warner said.

I was asked to say a few words about another proud Virginian, Edgard Kagan, who is nominated to be the Ambassador to Malaysia, and, Mr. Chair, mindful of the notion that you have already gone through the bio, just really quickly, I mean, this is a tremendously talented public servant who has already served once in Malaysia as DCM, as well as DCM in India.

He currently is the senior director for East Asia and Oceania at the National Security Council at the White House and he is the kind of person that makes me feel like a complete underachiever in life because he is a recipient of a presidential meritorious award, speaks French, Mandarin Chinese, Hungarian, Spanish—not the easiest languages to master.

But he has—the challenges of trying to deal with China in the region are very, very significant and Malaysia can be very critical in helping us deal with those challenges and that is what he has been doing already. So he is eminently qualified for the post and I am glad to say a word on his behalf.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you. Thank you, Senator Kaine. I do want the record to show what deference this Maryland senator showed to my colleagues from the other side of the Potomac River.

With that, Mr. Kagan?

**STATEMENT OF EDGARD D. KAGAN, OF VIRGINIA, A CAREER
MEMBER OF THE SENIOR FOREIGN SERVICE, CLASS OF MIN-
ISTER-COUNSELOR, NOMINATED TO BE AMBASSADOR EX-
TRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY OF THE UNITED
STATES OF AMERICA TO MALAYSIA**

Mr. KAGAN. Certainly.

Chairman Van Hollen, Ranking Member Romney, distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you so much for the opportunity to appear before you today.

It is an honor to do so as President Biden's nominee for the position of United States Ambassador to Malaysia, and I am grateful to the President and to Secretary Blinken for their confidence.

I am also grateful to State Department colleagues past and present who have given me a lifelong education in diplomacy and public service.

I have spent 32 years in the Foreign Service, 14 of which were representing the United States in the Indo-Pacific. But across the six administrations in which I have served I have seen the critical role of cooperation and alignment with Congress.

If confirmed, I commit to working with you and the Congress as a whole to advance U.S. strategic interests in Malaysia, ASEAN, and the Indo-Pacific.

I am so happy to be accompanied today by my family. My mother, Peggy Kagan is here, joined by my sister, Dr. Isabelle Kagan, both visiting from Lexington, Kentucky. Also here are my wife, Cynthia Gire, and my children, Marshall, Anne-Sophie, and Daniel.

They have shared the challenges, pleasures, and opportunities of living in six cities in five countries on three continents. For our children that has meant attending nine schools. I am far luckier than I deserve and could not be here today without their love, support, and forbearance.

Sadly, my father, Jacques Kagan, passed away last year. He would have been so proud to have seen this day.

I became familiar with Malaysia when I served there as deputy chief of mission from 2014 to 2017. If confirmed, I would look forward to building on our strong relationship in several key areas.

First, we are one of Malaysia's largest foreign investors and our bilateral trade last year supported an estimated 58,000 U.S. jobs. If confirmed, I would prioritize further strengthening our economic ties.

Second, the United States and Malaysia work together to combat terrorism and transnational crime and to promote maritime security. I will continue to support these shared priorities, if confirmed.

Third, standing for our values is at the heart of America's global role. If confirmed, I will work to strengthen the rule of law, transparency, good governance, and respect for human rights in Malaysia.

I am particularly concerned about human trafficking, including forced labor and migrant labor—migrant worker rights. I will work with Malaysia on these issues, if confirmed.

None of this, however, can be accomplished without the amazing U.S. Embassy team in Kuala Lumpur. I will make their safety and that of U.S. citizens my highest priority, if confirmed.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, Members of the Committee, the U.S.-Malaysia partnership is strong. I believe it can grow even stronger. If confirmed, working closely with Congress, I will do all I can to strengthen this relationship.

Thank you, and I welcome your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Kagan follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF EDGARD D. KAGAN

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and distinguished Members of the Committee, Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. It is an honor to do so as President Biden's nominee for the position of United States Ambassador to Malaysia. I'm grateful to the President and to Secretary Blinken for their confidence.

I'm also grateful to State Department colleagues, past and present, who have given me a lifelong education in diplomacy and public service. I have spent 32 years in the Foreign Service, 14 of which were representing the United States in the Indo-Pacific. Each post, from New Delhi to Canberra; Beijing to Kuala Lumpur, held its own lessons. But across the six Administrations in which I have served, I have seen the critical role of cooperation and alignment with Congress. If confirmed, I commit

to working with you to advance U.S. strategic interests in Malaysia, ASEAN, and the broader Indo-Pacific region.

I am grateful to be accompanied today by my family. My mother, Peggy Kagan, is here, joined by my sister, Isabelle Kagan, both visiting from Lexington, Kentucky. Also here are my wife Cynthia Gire, and children Marshall, Anne-Sophie and Daniel. They have shared the challenges, pleasures, and opportunities of living together in six cities in five countries on three continents. For our children, that meant attending nine schools. I am far luckier than I deserve and could not be here today without their love, support, and forbearance. I particularly want to highlight Anne-Sophie, who is graduating from high school this week. I am so proud of you and so grateful you are here today.

I became familiar with Malaysia, its vibrant multicultural society, dynamic economy, beautiful landscapes, and exceptional people—while serving there as Deputy Chief of Mission from 2014 to 2017. Since its independence in 1957, Malaysia and the United States have forged an enduring partnership based on shared interests and mutual respect. We see the breadth and depth of our relationship in the Comprehensive Partnership between our countries. We see it, too, in our extensive trade and investment relationship, broad security cooperation, and people-to-people ties. If confirmed, I would look forward to building on this foundation in several key areas.

First, we are one of Malaysia's largest foreign investors, and our \$79.4 billion of bilateral trade in goods and services last year supported an estimated 58,000 U.S. jobs. Critical to supply chains, especially in semiconductors, Malaysia accounts for 24 percent of U.S. semiconductor trade. Last year, in my capacity as National Security Council Senior Director for East Asia and Oceania, I was proud to work to bring Malaysia on as a founding partner of the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework. If confirmed, I will prioritize further strengthening our economic ties and promoting inclusive and sustainable growth, including in new industries.

Second, our security and law enforcement cooperation with Malaysia has grown. We work together to combat terrorism and transnational crimes, and to promote maritime security. We have also increased our cooperation on cybersecurity. Our countries hold regular military exercises to improve our ability to work together and build capacity. I will continue to support these shared priority areas, if confirmed.

Third, standing up for our values is at the heart of America's global role. If confirmed, I will work to further strengthen the rule of law, transparency, good governance, democracy, and respect for human rights in Malaysia. I am particularly concerned about human trafficking, including forced labor, and migrant worker rights. Following Malaysia's downgrade to Tier 3 in the 2021 Trafficking in Persons Report, we have encouraged Malaysia to significantly increase its efforts to protect victims and hold traffickers and complicit officials accountable. If confirmed, I will work with Malaysia to improve investigations and prosecutions of trafficking allegations, including forced labor, and to increase victim identification and support. I will also work with the Malaysian Government, UNHCR, and civil society to support the nearly 186,000 refugees and asylum-seekers in Malaysia.

None of this, however, can be accomplished without the amazing U.S. Embassy team in Kuala Lumpur. I will make their safety and that of U.S. citizens my highest priority if confirmed.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, Members of this Committee—the U.S.-Malaysia partnership is strong; I believe that it holds potential to grow still stronger. Mounting challenges in the region demand no less. If confirmed, in partnership with Congress, I will do all I can to realize it. Thank you, and I welcome your questions.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you, Mr. Kagan.
Ms. Biswal?

**STATEMENT OF HON. NISHA DESAI BISWAL, OF VIRGINIA,
NOMINATED TO BE DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER OF
THE UNITED STATES INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT FI-
NANCE CORPORATION**

Ms. BISWAL. Chairman Van Hollen, Ranking Member Romney, Members of the Committee, thank you so much for this opportunity to appear before you today as the nominee for Deputy CEO of the United States International Development Finance Corporation.

I am deeply honored and humbled by the nomination and grateful for the trust placed in me by the President for this important role.

I particularly want to thank Senator Warner for his friendship and support. Having grown up in Virginia, I consider it my home state and we are blessed to have exceptional leadership in Senator Warner and Senator Kaine.

I am here today with my husband, Subrat—he is my rock and my North Star—our two daughters, Safya and Kaya, who are the light of my life, and my father, Kanu. It is their unflagging belief in me and that of my mother and my in-laws and my extended family that makes all things possible and I am ever grateful for their love.

Our extended family and friends are watching online, and I also want to thank my colleagues at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, both in the room and online, from whom I have learned so much.

I am grateful for the opportunity to return to public service, if confirmed. I learned the importance of service at a very early age from my grandparents, who took part in India's fight for independence and who served time in British jails.

My grandparents saw public service as the highest of callings, an investment in country and community, and they instilled those values in me.

In Congress, at USAID, in the State Department, and most recently with the Chamber of Commerce, my own career in public service has allowed me to work at the nexus of foreign policy, development, and economic interests.

DFC represents the amalgamation of all those experiences and an opportunity to apply the lessons I have learned.

Mr. Chairman, I first want to commend this body and your colleagues in the House for passing the BUILD Act. In establishing DFC Congress sought to create a best-in-class development finance agency that will both advance U.S. strategic interests and create positive development impact in the countries in which it operates.

We have seen how the lack of access to adequate financing has led many developing nations to lean too heavily on state capital from authoritarian nations, often at unsustainable and predatory rates that yield poor development outcomes and undermine their sovereignty.

The BUILD Act has enabled the United States to offer a more compelling finance alternative, one that is consistent with our values and catalyzes private investment.

If confirmed, I will work with our outstanding CEO, Scott Nathan, and the DFC staff to advance three key pillars: enhancing our strategic focus, advancing impact-driven investments, and focusing on collaboration and partnership.

And, Mr. Chairman, if confirmed as Deputy CEO of DFC, I am committed to working collaboratively with Congress and other key stakeholders to fulfill the mission of DFC.

I am ready to serve the American people in this critical role and I thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Hon. Nisha Desai Biswal follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF NISHA DESAI BISWAL

Chairman Van Hollen, Ranking Member Romney, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today as the nominee for Deputy CEO of the United States International Development Finance Corporation (DFC). I am deeply honored and humbled by the nomination and grateful for the trust placed in me by the President for this important role.

I am here with my husband Subrat and our two daughters Safya and Kaya. It is their unflagging belief in me that makes all things possible, and I am ever grateful for their love. Our extended family and friends are watching on-line and I want to thank them for their love and support that carried us through some challenging times.

I am grateful for the opportunity to return to public service, if confirmed. I learned the importance of sacrifice and service at a very early age as I listened to my grandparents talk of their activism in support of India's independence and the time spent in British jails for participating in civil disobedience. They saw public service as the highest of callings an investment in country and community.

For me, it has been a privilege to have spent most of my career working alongside talented and dedicated colleagues in both parties.

In Congress, at USAID, in the State Department and most recently with the Chamber of Commerce, my own career in public service has allowed me to work at the nexus of our foreign policy, development, and economic interests. DFC represents the amalgamation of all those experiences and an opportunity to apply the lessons learned.

I believe that DFC plays a crucial role in catalyzing private sector investments, fostering new and existing partnerships, and driving positive change in emerging markets. If confirmed, I will bring my passion, experience, and leadership skills to bear on the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

But let me start by commending this body and your colleagues in the House for passing the BUILD Act. In establishing DFC, Congress sought to create a best-in-class development finance agency that will both advance US strategic interests and create a positive development impact in the countries in which it operates.

We have seen that lack of access to adequate financing has led many developing nations to lean too heavily on state capital from our strategic competitors, often at unsustainable and predatory rates that yield poor development outcomes and undermine their sovereignty. The BUILD Act has enabled the United States to offer a more compelling financing alternative, one that is consistent with our values, and catalyzes private investment.

DFC has a dual mandate to focus on making positive development impact in the poorest countries of the world, and, at the same time, advance the strategic interests of the United States. DFC mobilizes private capital to build infrastructure that connects local producers to markets, to enable companies to expand their production and hire new staff, and to deliver essential services like telecommunications, energy, water, and sanitation.

If confirmed, I will work with CEO Scott Nathan and DFC staff to advance three key pillars: strategic focus, impact-driven investments, and collaboration.

I recognize that DFC is a critical tool in advancing our national security interests, and as such, must maintain a strategic focus aligned with U.S. foreign policy priorities. By focusing on key sectors and regions where our investments can have the greatest impact, we can maximize our contribution to sustainable development, economic growth, and poverty alleviation. I intend to work with DFC staff and with our interagency colleagues to ensure that our investment decisions align with U.S. strategic interests and development goals.

Second, DFC must prioritize investments that create tangible, measurable, and sustainable outcomes for local communities. By promoting transparency, accountability, and responsible business practices, we can ensure that our investments deliver not only financial returns but also positive development impacts.

Lastly, I strongly believe in the power of collaboration. If confirmed, I will actively engage with international organizations, governments, civil society, and the private sector to forge strategic alliances, leverage resources, and amplify the impact of our investments. And drawing upon my experience at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, I will engage new private sector partners, building upon DFC's existing partnerships and adding new avenues for cooperation, both domestically and internationally.

I am deeply passionate about international development, private sector engagement, and sustainable economic growth. If confirmed as Deputy CEO of DFC, I am committed to working collaboratively with Congress and other stakeholders to fulfill the mission of DFC.

I am ready to serve the American people in this critical role. Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to your questions.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you, Ms. Biswal, and thank all of you for your testimony here and now we will start a period of questioning.

And, Mr. Kagan, if I could start with you. Malaysia is home to the largest rare earths processing facility outside of the PRC and recent reports show that Malaysia is also home to deposits of strategic and criminal—excuse me, critical minerals, including tin.

As we look to our ongoing efforts to both friendshore and develop more stable supply chains of critical minerals and rare earth minerals what role can you play if you are confirmed as our ambassador to Malaysia?

Mr. KAGAN. Thank you very much for your question, Mr. Chairman.

I think the question of rare earths and, more broadly, critical minerals is one that is a very high priority to this country and I think that you have seen that the administration has done a considerable amount of work on this.

I think that the importance of working on these arrangements with countries where we have good relationships and trying to develop new sources so that we can have reliable supply chains and diversified supply chains is absolutely critical and I think that we have real potential to do that in countries like Malaysia.

So, if confirmed, I would want to work closely with the American private sector, with different parts of the U.S. government, and with the Malaysian government to ensure that we are able to continue expanding the areas of cooperation in this, support development of resources, and above all make sure that we do this in partnership with Malaysia in ways that are sustainable and that promote our values.

Thank you, sir.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. No, I appreciate that. I was recently on a trip with Senator Merkley and we stopped in Indonesia, where this is also, as you know, a very important issue.

Ms. Biswal, let me turn to you. The DFC, as you described well, is a critical agency to our efforts to invest overseas in a way that also strengthens our supply chains, serves American interests and those of our partners overseas.

Scott Nathan and, I think, you would make a great team. Let me—let me ask you about an issue that is a little bit of inside baseball but very important, which is the issue of how we currently—we, the Congress, and our budget agencies score the DFC. I am sure you are familiar with this issue.

We are having a debate here in Congress right now. Senator Coons has introduced a bill—I am a co-sponsor—to try to make sure that we get all the—all the punch that we can out of the DFC. Could you—could you talk a little bit about that issue and the importance of resolving it?

Ms. BISWAL. Sure. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I believe you are referring to, in particular, the scoring with respect to equity financing at DFC. Congress and the BUILD Act provided DFC with authority to do equity investment in order to ensure that we could—that DFC could invest in countries where per-

haps debt financing was not as much of an option, and I believe that in so doing created an opportunity for DFC to create more compelling investments in perhaps sometimes riskier regions.

However, the lack of scoring or the inability to score DFC's equity financing in ways that allow it to advance that I think has held up how much equity financing DFC is able to do.

Congress can look at the scoring issue in a number of different ways. For example, the President's budget, I believe, has requested a revolving fund of \$2 billion to be able to put towards equity financing—\$2 billion in mandatory spending—or changing the scoring to be consistent with how, for example, other development finance institutions score equity would enable DFC to be more forward leaning in this area.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. I appreciate that, and I hope that this committee and our colleagues will get this done as quickly as possible because I think it hinders DFC from being able to maximize its resources.

There is a vote on now so I am going to turn it over to Senator Ricketts for questioning. I am going to turn the gavel over to Senator Kaine or Senator Menendez, whoever wants to have it—Senator Kaine.

Senator RICKETTS. Great. Thank you very much.

First of all, to all of our folks here I want to say thank you for your service to our country and especially our career Foreign Service people.

I know that you all have sacrificed to be able to serve our great nation. It involves a lot. You have put your families through a lot. I just want to say thank you very much. As a governor who went on a lot of trade missions I very much appreciate all the help I got when I was at the Embassy. So just have nothing but the highest respect for you.

What I would like to talk about is Djibouti. In 2017 Djibouti became the first country to host a People's Republic of China military base outside, obviously, the People's Republic itself; and earlier this year it was announced that Djibouti had reached an agreement with the People's Republic of China for a billion dollars to have a spaceport in that country, and this is obviously a part of the PRC's larger effort to commercialize space but also to extend its Belt and Road Initiative.

And, of course, there is two concerning things about this. One, Djibouti is already heavily in debt to the People's Republic of China to the tune of about a billion dollars—it represents about 43 percent of its GDP—and puts them at risk to be a part of what we have seen consistently around the world from the People's Republic of China, this debt trap.

But perhaps more concerning, at least for the United States—I am going to read to you from the DNI's 2023 threat assessment—it said that China is steadily progressing towards its goal of becoming a world-class space leader with the intent to match or surpass the United States by the year 2045.

It continues—counter space operations will be integral to potential PLA military campaigns and China has counter space weapons capabilities intended to target the U.S. and our allies.

One of the fears with this spaceport outside of the People's Republic of China is they will use that to sidestep or outright reject international space rules with regard to how we do this and, of course, this matter is incredibly important to all of us. From using ATMs to harvesting our food we all rely on satellite technology.

In my home state of Nebraska, for example, we rely heavily on satellite technology to run our harvesting machines, the tractors and so forth. In fact, one farmer told one of my staff members that if it was not for satellite technology he was worried that his equipment would be useless.

So, Ambassador Kierscht, let us talk about do you believe that the space launch facility will this push Djibouti more into this debt trap that the PRC has?

Ms. KIERSCHT. Thank you for that—raising that important issue, Senator.

You are absolutely correct that there was a base established—their first military base was established in 2017 and there has been a deal on the table for this \$1 billion spaceport that you reference.

As Secretary Blinken has said, China represents the most consequential geopolitical challenge of our time, and as diplomats we are going to be facing this around the globe.

In terms of the spaceport, it is clear that Africans, including the Djiboutians, have an aspiration to develop further in the space field as well as the advanced technology field.

As recognized during the Africa Leaders Summit this past December the U.S. recognized that interest and held the first U.S. Africa space forum to meet together to discuss these very issues that you are raising and, if confirmed, I would certainly work closely with the Djiboutians to make sure that we identify ways for them to act responsibly in this field here on Earth so that we can make sure that our space is free and remains that way.

Senator RICKETTS. What can we do to incentivize Djibouti from staying away from these risky debt deals? What can the United States—what more can we do?

Ms. KIERSCHT. Well, I think one of the best ways we can incentivize them away from delving into these areas is to engage our own private sector and that is something, if confirmed, I would be very much interested in doing and I am happy to be sitting here with my co-panelist who may be placed at the DFC because I think that is one of the good tools that we are able to use to leverage our U.S. businesses overseas.

We have other U.S. government agency tools also that we can be using, including the EXIM and USTDA. But, really, I think we need to look at engaging our private sector to give them opportunities to compete.

Senator RICKETTS. Why do you think the PRC selected Djibouti for the spaceport facility?

Ms. KIERSCHT. Well, it is an interesting question. I think if you actually look at some of the specifics of it, it does not actually give the Chinese much of an advantage in terms of where it is and compared to what they have within their own country.

It is—as you identified, the Djiboutians are heavily debt reliant on China. They—and this is something that we will keep a very close eye on.

Senator RICKETTS. What can we do to encourage Djibouti to ratify space law treaty so that this cannot be used as a loophole by the People's Republic of China?

Ms. KIERSCHT. Well, that is something, if confirmed, I would be talking to them on a regular basis about. That is something that we would have to have regular conversations about.

Senator RICKETTS. Great. Thank you, Ambassador. I appreciate it. Mr. Chairman?

Senator KAINE [presiding]. Chairman Menendez?

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and to Senator Van Hollen for presiding over these nominations. It is an important task that we ask all of our members on both sides of the aisle to engage in. So I appreciate your willingness to do it.

Let me congratulate all the nominees before us today. We want to thank you and your families for your commitment to service to our country because it really truly is a family affair and so we appreciate your willingness to serve the nation.

These are critical posts that we need to carry out U.S. foreign policy abroad and I hope we will be able to work through your nominations both at the committee and on the floor in a reasonable time so we can get you to the post.

Let me go to just a couple of questions.

Mr. Libby, one of the most challenging issues on the ongoing peace talks between Armenia and Azerbaijan is the rights and security for the people of Nagorno-Karabakh. I have deep concerns that without robust international guarantees the people of Nagorno-Karabakh will be extremely vulnerable.

What do you see as the different possible outcomes for the people of Nagorno-Karabakh and do you share my concerns about their physical safety as well as their protection for their cultural rights?

Mr. LIBBY. Mr. Chairman, thanks for the question.

I do share your concerns about the future of that region, including the people in Nagorno-Karabakh. That is why I think Secretary Blinken has really put his shoulder to the wheel to try and come up with and facilitate a settlement.

And the good news is that for the moment at least all of the parties seem to be engaging and engaging seriously. It is not going to be easy but a settlement that we want to reach and we want to help them reach is one that addresses issues of sovereignty, rights and security for all the people in the region, and territorial integrity.

With regard to the situation of Nagorno-Karabakh I do not necessarily want to prejudice what that looks like. That is a matter for the parties to decide. But a situation in which their rights and securities have not been considered or not factored in and taken care of in some fashion strikes me as something that would not be durable.

The CHAIRMAN. It is for the parties to decide but we, clearly, have a role in trying to advocate the process forward. I am deeply concerned by the ongoing blockade of Nagorno-Karabakh, which severely limits the basic goods and aid entering the region.

Azerbaijan's more than 180-day blockade has threatened famine for the local Armenian population, causing rationing resulting in pharmacies running out of medicine. Will you publicly condemn the blockade today and unequivocally urge Aliyev to open the Lachin corridor to normal traffic?

Mr. LIBBY. Sir, the U.S. position on this has been it really consists of sort of three elements. The U.S. has criticized any unilateral action that hurts trusts, raises risks, or damages people's safety and security.

The way to approach this is really three elements. First, over the short term, that is to monitor the situation and continue our calls and pressure for the restoration of civilian and commercial traffic into and out of the territory.

In the medium term we are looking at questions of assistance. We do not have access to the territory at the moment but my understanding is that the U.S. government has already put forward \$21 million of food assistance, medicine, medivac, and family reunification assistance. That is a medium term solution or a medium term tool to address it.

But the long-term really is going to be in the context of a settlement and agreement between all the parties that stipulates how the rights and securities of everyone in the region are—

The CHAIRMAN. Well, let me just say—let me just say we can monitor it while people die. That is not satisfactory to me.

Mr. LIBBY. If people are dying that is a big problem and we need to—

The CHAIRMAN. Well, people are dying.

Mr. LIBBY. Yeah. This is why—

The CHAIRMAN. So I urge you to engage with the department in a more forceful forthright response because having a corridor closed to humanitarian assistance—even our humanitarian assistance is having difficulty getting in. That is because of Aliyev.

And so you are going to be nominated—you are nominated—you are going to be going, if confirmed, to a challenging post. But the fact that it is challenging does not mean that the United States should not be speaking out for the basic human rights principles that we observe globally.

And I hope you will be a vigorous force in that regard. I am going to send you some follow-up questions I would like to see your answers to.

Mr. LIBBY. For sure, Senator.

The CHAIRMAN. Ms. Biswal, in the President's fiscal year '24 budget request there is a proposal for \$2 billion to create a new revolving fund for equity investments at the DFC.

While I agree that the DFC's ability to deploy equity is an effective yet underutilized tool for us to compete with China around the world many of my colleagues have expressed concerns with pursuing this revolving fund through mandatory spending and outside the normal discretionary appropriations process.

Now, I recognize you are not at the DFC yet but how important is this mandatory spending proposal to the DFC's strategic plans?

Ms. BISWAL. Mr. Chairman, thank you for that question.

I think there are many different ways in which Congress may choose to address the issue of equity financing at DFC, whether it

is through a change to the scoring, whether it is through creating the revolving fund as is in the President's budget request, or the total amount of exposure allowed to DFC to be able to lean in more to equity financing.

I, if confirmed, would be willing to work with Congress to determine the most appropriate measure that Congress would feel comfortable with in order to enable DFC.

The CHAIRMAN. What happens, whether it is the mandatory funding that I understand the administration is seeking or some other process that you suggest, if we are not able to get DFC's equity tools off the ground?

Ms. BISWAL. Mr. Chairman, I believe DFC will continue to advance financing to the best of its abilities with the tools that it does possess.

I believe if we find a way around the equity challenges, it will allow DFC to lean in much more, particularly in more high-risk environments, which are unable to take on additional debt financing, which I think is commensurate with the intent of DFC that the BUILD Act had.

The CHAIRMAN. Well, I do not want to overstay my welcome here. I am going to follow up. I know—can I?

Senator KAINE. Yes.

The CHAIRMAN. Oh, okay. All right. Because my dear and distinguished colleague often comes to these hearings and does not get to ask this question in a timely fashion. So I do not want to impinge upon him. Can I have another minute?

Thank you. Development finance is an important tool to realize U.S. foreign policy objectives and they can be especially effective in countering the malign influence of China and other adverse nations.

Most developing countries would prefer to work with the U.S. and our private sector partners as opposed to the PRC's predatory development financial institutions.

The DFC's strategic foreign policy objectives and focus on advancing development are mutually reinforcing and part of your role, if confirmed, to evaluate and articulate how the DFC is selecting deals that achieve both outcomes.

So this is why we are getting into how we are going to fund the DFC because in part that will speak to what we are going to be able to do. How will you work within DFC's balanced development and strategic outcomes to its investments?

Ms. BISWAL. Mr. Chairman, I believe the dual mandate that Congress imbued DFC with to both advance our strategic goals and objectives and to ensure development impact are very important and mutually reinforcing.

If confirmed, I would work, drawing upon my own experience working both within the State Department and at USAID, to help identify ways in which we can advance development impact in ways that are aligned with our very important strategic goals and objectives, particularly as we seek to provide a more compelling alternative to the capital provided by some of our strategic competitors, which does not often advance the interests of the countries which it is financing, unlike our program.

The CHAIRMAN. A final question for the moment. How do you believe DFC's proposed reorganization will achieve that dual mandate?

Ms. BISWAL. Mr. Chairman, if confirmed, I would work with DFC to help align the organization around the mandates that have been conferred upon it by Congress.

As we have seen DFC transition from OPIC to the Development Finance Corporation increase in both its budget and its staff, I believe there is an effort underway to look at what kind of realignment internally will help it better achieve its mission and mandate and, if confirmed, I look forward to working to further that process.

The CHAIRMAN. We need DFC to be—play a bigger role if we are going to compete with China.

I have questions for both you, Mr. Libby, as well as the other nominees. As I always say at our hearings when I preside over them, I would urge you to answer them expeditiously when you get them, and fully because if not what will happen is a member will come back and say you really did not give me an answer.

So up front I want you to know that when you get questions you should answer it fully and expeditiously because then we can consider you at a business meeting.

Thank you, and thank you, Senator Romney, for your courtesy.

Senator KAINE. Senator Romney?

Senator ROMNEY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I want to pursue the discussion which Chairman Menendez began with regards to the DFC.

I have watched, if you will, through business lens, economic lens, as China has carried out what many would consider a brilliant strategy of investing in critical minerals and materials that are essential for the technologies of today and tomorrow, and their Belt and Road has not been randomly carried out providing opportunities for development but instead has been focused on securing those resources such as buying mines, then putting in place rail lines that take the materials from that mine to the—to a port, then buying the port to make sure that they can have access to take those materials to China.

It is a—it is a series of actions which would probably be illegal for a corporation to take under U.S. law but they are not subject to U.S. law.

And we look to DFC to counter this, although with a fraction of the resources that China has already employed, and also historically with less focus on our strategic objectives and more on simply development and helping lift people out of poverty, a noble goal in and of itself.

But I wonder if you could expand on the extent to which you believe it is an important role for DFC to pursue America's economic interests and strategic interests in securing for us many of the minerals and resources that are necessary to be competitive.

Ms. BISWAL. Thank you, Senator.

I do believe that not only is it critically important for the United States but it is important for the global community that there not be monopolistic reliance on any single actor for critical minerals, critical and essential supply chains, and I think, if confirmed, I would want to work with DFC to continue to support the diver-

sification of important supply chains to invest in projects that build capacity on critical minerals and build the ability of nations to carry out trade in those minerals in multiple different directions.

I believe that DFC is already doing some important work in that respect, not only in Africa, but also a nickel mine in Brazil that DFC is working with in parts of Asia, et cetera, and, if confirmed, Senator, I would want to continue to lean into that direction as well.

Senator ROMNEY. I would hope that as you consider various alternatives—and I am sure the list of projects that you might invest in is enormously long—that in carrying out those evaluations and the selection of various projects that in each write-up there is an element that deals with the strategic either military or economic or political interests of the United States of America. Do you agree with that?

Ms. BISWAL. I do, Senator, and I do think that as we are advancing those strategic objectives, they are very much aligned with the development impact of the projects that we are financing, and I would want to showcase that as well.

Senator ROMNEY. Mr. Kagan, with regards to Malaysia—thank you for those responses. With regards to Malaysia what is their feeling right now? I know we in this country take great pride in the fact that we have lots of friends and our foes around the world do not have a lot of friends.

But I would submit that one of the reasons we have so many friends is because we have been the superpower—the sole superpower—and when there become alternatives and, in fact, in a region where we might not even be the strongest that friendship ends up being strained.

What is your sense now of the Malaysian people as well as its government in terms of their sentiment with regards to the U.S. and with regards to the PRC?

Mr. KAGAN. Thank you very much for that question, Senator.

I think you have put your finger on what is our broader challenge across the region and I think, certainly, in Malaysia and that is that there is a great reservoir of goodwill towards the United States. At least when I served there from 2014 to 2017 I was constantly struck at the web of connections and web of ties that we have between our peoples and how powerful they are.

And the U.S. has been a very important investor and a very important trading partner in Malaysia and I think the quality of U.S. investment in Malaysia has had a particular impact, in particular the amount of training, the amount of investment that American companies have made in developing their staff and you see that in the number of companies that have been started by people who used to work at U.S. companies.

But at the same time there is no question that they are looking to see what we can do now and I think that they—my experience has been that they are eager to do more with the United States but at the same time that they are looking to other opportunities in the region and they are open to the significant inflows of investment and trade with China.

That creates a challenge for us. I think that we can meet that challenge by being engaged and, if confirmed, I would want to help lead that from the position of U.S. Ambassador to Malaysia.

But, look, we are going to be—we are going to be working very hard at this for a long time to come. I think that we are going to need to be flexible, we are going to need to be engaged, and we are going to need to work with our allies and partners to strengthen our hand as we try and meet these challenges. Thank you, sir.

Senator ROMNEY. Thank you. Mr. Chairman?

Senator VAN HOLLEN. [Presiding.] Thank you, Senator Romney. And Senator Kaine, thank you for (1 02 41 spelling?) me in the chair for a little while.

Senator KAINE. Absolutely. Thank you, Senator Van Hollen, and to all of the nominees, congratulations. You are well suited for your positions.

Mr. Libby, let me start with you. I just want to follow up a little bit on Senator Menendez with respect to Nagorno-Karabakh and the Lachin corridor being closed.

You talked about the peace process, the path forward as having a short-, medium-, and long-term component, which we completely get.

My worry, though, is the closure of the corridor should definitely be on the short-term, not for resolution of the long-term issues because it strands 120,000 ethnic Armenians without access to medical care, gasoline, food.

The U.S. has been pretty full throated in condemning the closure. Administrator Power with USAID, other U.S. officials, UNICEF, U.N. agencies have called for it to be open and I just would want your commitment that you will continue that clear U.S. message that however it takes to get us to a medium- and long-term solution the closure of this Lachin corridor by the Azerbaijani activists, likely with the backing of the Azerbaijan government, is a clear and present challenge to those citizens and we should be doing all we can to expeditiously seek its reopening.

Do you agree with me on that?

Mr. LIBBY. Yes, Senator, I do, and thank you for that question.

That has been a strong point by the administration, as you noted, by Administrator Power, and I share that sense of urgency. We have got to solve that problem and get traffic flowing again. I absolutely agree with that, sir.

Senator KAINE. Thank you very much.

Mr. Kagan, I want to ask you a question dealing with an issue that is important in Malaysia but also very important in Virginia and it deals with the Chinese treatment of Uyghurs.

The Malaysian Prime Minister Ibrahim has refrained from publicly criticizing China on the Uyghur genocide. But Malaysia has been a rare Muslim majority country that has been granting safe passage to Uyghurs and refusing to extradite them back to China.

Virginia is home of one of the largest Uyghur-American communities in the U.S. and many of those families have family members in the Uyghur area of China who are being persecuted.

We have been working with a number of Virginia families because their relatives have been unjustly imprisoned by the Chinese Communist Party simply for being Uyghur.

The—those—the CCP's widely documented genocide against Uyghurs and other ethnic and religious minority groups in Xinjiang remains a clear affront to human rights. You have been in Kuala Lumpur in the past. You know well Malaysia does appear more willing than most Muslim countries to offer support to Uyghurs escaping persecution from the CCP.

What do you attribute that to and what more can we do to support the Malaysian government in those humanitarian efforts?

Mr. KAGAN. Thank you very much for your question, Senator, and I want to start off by just saying I was remiss in not thanking you earlier for your very kind introduction, which I appreciate very much.

I think that there is a couple of things that you have put your fingers on. I think one is that Malaysia has a long history of tolerance and support for victims of political violence and for refugees.

I am going back to the large numbers of Vietnamese boat people who were harbored in Malaysia and many of whom then came on to the United States from there.

I think that there is also no question that Malaysians are very sensitive to the dynamics of oppression of Muslims around the world and I think that they are aware of the genocide and the repression and human rights abuses against Uyghurs.

So I think that this is an area where, if confirmed, I would want to do a couple of things. One is work with the Malaysian government. But I think that in this it is also very important to work with Malaysian civil society to promote greater awareness and understanding of what is happening, and I think that we are lucky that in Malaysia there is a partner that is not turning a blind eye to the terrible things are happening in Xinjiang.

Thank you, Senator.

Senator KAINE. I think you are right. We are lucky to have a partner that recognizes that there is an awful lot of backsliding in the world against protection of those who are persecuted for human rights reasons and there is also, if not backsliding often a coldly business calculation that we could stand up for values but it might cost us in other ways and so people are not willing to stand up for values. Governments are not willing to stand up.

And so since Malaysia has a history of doing this that needs to not only be encouraged but even spot lit so that nations around the world understand the value that they are providing.

The last thing I will just say, Ms. Biswal, the OIG issued a report in fiscal year 2023 with sort of four top management challenges for your agency, and they are not really management challenges in the sense of big problems—I think morale was pretty high—but a new agency getting off the ground that is grappling with making the structure really work.

And I just would like your commitment. I think that OIG report was a solid one and I would just like your commitment that you would take that very seriously in working with this new agency to help it be all it can be.

Ms. BISWAL. Yes, Senator, you absolutely have that commitment and I, if confirmed, intend to focus quite a bit on the management aspects of the job.

Senator KAINE. Great. Thank you so much. Thanks to all the witnesses. I yield back.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you, Senator Kaine.

Senator Romney?

Senator ROMNEY. Mr. Libby, I am interested in your perspective of the people of Azerbaijan and how in the region there is a reaction to Russia's invasion in Ukraine, whether that has changed public opinion, whether that has changed political sentiment there, perspective of the government, and what you see in terms of that dynamic.

Mr. LIBBY. Thanks, Senator. That is one of the things that makes this region so fascinating and so critically important.

Azerbaijan is, to my knowledge, the only country that borders both Russia and Iran and so it sits right smack in the middle of a strategic region and its role in the former Soviet space is, obviously, very important.

Azerbaijan has had an interesting balancing act to play but they have been quite helpful with regard to supporting Ukraine, fuel, food assistance, and even after this dam was destroyed last week sending in new packages of aid. They voted for the U.N. General Assembly resolution condemning the invasion and reaffirming Ukraine's territorial integrity.

This is an interesting and fairly forward leaning place for a country in the former Soviet space. If I am confirmed I think part of my job is going to be to try and get Azerbaijan further down that track.

Obviously, there is ties of kinship and ties of trade and so forth. But Azerbaijan has its own potential role as a conduit, as an energy source, and as a counterbalance to Russian influence in the region and that is one of the reasons that makes it so important.

Senator ROMNEY. Thank you, Mr. Libby.

Mr. Ehrendreich, help me understand what it means to be engaged in a free association with the United States for Palau. What does that mean to us, what does that mean to them, and are they broadly satisfied with that relationship at this point or is there some sentiment of concern?

Mr. EHRENDREICH. Thank you, Senator Romney, for the question.

The Secretary—I would refer to what Secretary Blinken said a couple weeks ago when he was in Port Moresby. The Compact of Free Association that we have with all three FAS states is the bedrock of our engagement in the Pacific, and I think in the Palau context that could not be more true.

Like I said in my opening statement, when we signed the agreement—the review agreement just a few weeks ago, President Whipps said, “God bless Palau, God bless the United States of America, God bless us all.”

This is the—not only is it the framework for our relations for the next 20 years and beyond, it is also a powerful symbol of the strength of the relationship for the United States—people of the United States and Palau and for any adversaries in the region who want to question how strong our relations are.

Senator ROMNEY. Thank you.

Ambassador Kierscht, my understanding is that Djibouti has recently agreed to allow China to build a enormous facility in the

port to accommodate an aircraft carrier or substantial military resources that China might have. Clearly, the PRC is making a play to have greater and greater influence in Djibouti.

What should we be doing? And I know there is only so much an ambassador can do and you want to have relationships with the people there and you want to interact with them.

But do we need to making far more private sector investments? Do we need to have more of an industrial policy where we are investing in projects in that country ourselves to be more competitive?

What actions do we need to take to make sure that this key player at the gateway to the Red Sea remains a friendly nation?

Ms. KIERSCHT. Thank you, Senator Romney, for raising that very critical question.

I would like to identify several things that in my current role as ambassador to Mauritania we are working on because I think we do need to look at ways that we can push back against China.

For example, in Mauritania we have just launched a new project to help the Mauritians combat illegal, unregulated, and unreported fishing done by the PRC in their offshore waters, which robs Mauritania, really, of one of their prime natural resources.

If confirmed, I would seek to do similar—pursue similar avenues. But I think the U.S. has a really good story to tell about what we bring to the table, our transparency, our values, working with civil society, listening and learning from our partners in Djibouti.

In particular, we are working together with them to achieve their, as stated, economic development goals, which seek to develop their human capital and create jobs.

We have—through our USAID colleagues there right now we are working on several large programs in order to do just that. We are helping them do job creation as well as youth employment through workforce development programs, energy, education, and health programming.

We are also providing them with very robust security assistance in addition to our base. They have the only bilateral FMF allocation on the continent of Africa and we provide them with other state and DOD security assistance as well.

But, again, as you noted, we should probably also lean into engaging our private sector, using the tools that we have such as the development finance corporation, EXIM, USTDA, to really bring our private sector into that market as well. And, if confirmed, I would seek to leverage all of those tools.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you.

Senator Duckworth?

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to start by thanking all of our nominees for your lifelong dedication to public service and for making yourself available today. I am going to start with Ms. Biswal.

I have long argued that in order to meet the strategic challenge of the People's Republic of China we need to address the needs of our partners and allies around the world.

As the development financing arm of the United States the DFC plays a critical role in this effort. Nowhere is this more true than in Southeast Asia and, in particular, mainland Southeast Asia

where the Belt and Road Initiative has financed billions of dollars for railroads, ports, and industrial projects.

On my regular visits to the region I repeatedly hear about a desire for more U.S. engagement and for alternatives to PRC's financing for major infrastructure projects.

How do you assess the initial success of the DFC and engaging in this area and what are your priorities in ensuring that the United States is competitive with the PRC in the infrastructure space in Southeast Asia?

Ms. BISWAL. Senator Duckworth, thank you so much for that question.

I agree wholeheartedly with you that this region is extraordinarily important and a priority for DFC. I believe to date DFC has projects nearly \$6 billion in financing in the Indo-Pacific region.

If confirmed, I would look to see how we can further scale up our programs, our project financing, particularly with respect to Southeast Asia and the nations of mainland Southeast Asia.

I do believe that there are many opportunities with a robust private sector to be able to address core priorities, including in energy security, in telecommunications, in building private enterprise, and I look forward to working with you, if confirmed, in understanding your priorities on these in this region as well.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you. Well, following—the Blue Dot network—the Blue Dot network is a joint project with the United States, Japan, and Australia that supports investment in high-quality infrastructure projects around the world.

I think that is a great example for our regional—how our regional partners can increase our regional infrastructure area. It does not have to be all United States. I think our partners are important as well.

Is there more that the DFC can do to leverage our ability to convene allies to advance our goals globally and in the Indo-Pacific specifically? And I am looking to Japan and South Korea, for example.

Ms. BISWAL. Senator, I know that DFC has already created trilateral frameworks and agreements to work with Japan and Australia. They have a Quad framework through which they are working with Australia, Japan, and India in the region, and I know that there is a desire to be able to do additional programming with, for example, Taiwan.

And, if confirmed, I would look to see how we can further enhance our partnership and collaboration, including with South Korea, with multilateral institutions as well and leverage the investments of partners and allies to advance financing in the region.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you. Thank you.

I want to return to Malaysia a little bit. I know we have talked a little bit already but, Mr. Kagan, as you well know economic and trade issues and climate change are major concerns for many of our Indo-Pacific partners.

According to the 2023 ASEAN survey carried out by Singapore's ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute Malaysian respondents cited the economy and climate change as their top two concerns.

Moreover, 60 percent expressed concerns about the growing economic influence of the PRC. But at the same time when those same respondents were asked whether the administration's premier economic initiative of the Indo-Pacific Economic Forum, the IPEF, would be beneficial to Malaysia 60 percent of respondents answered either unsure or no.

Mr. Kagan, how do you assess current U.S. efforts to engage Southeast Asia and Malaysia, in particular, in the economic realm? What economic initiatives would you prioritize, if confirmed?

Mr. KAGAN. Thank you very much, Senator Duckworth, and I think it is an excellent question and it is one that is a major challenge for the administration but one that we have put considerable effort into trying to address.

I mean, one element—and we see this here with Nisha—is DFC. DFC is a very, very important tool and one that I think we can use more in the region as we expand the capacities that it has.

I think another one, obviously, is Indo-Pacific Economic Framework—the IPEF—which you referred to. I totally take the point that many—that a significant percentage of folks in Malaysia were either unaware of it or did not think it would be positive.

I think part of that is because it is very new and I think that the effort that we are trying to do with IPEF is to address challenges that traditional trade approaches have not always addressed, the kinds of challenges that we saw come to the fore during the pandemic where we realized over dependence on supply chains that run through one area have their own problems completely separate from whatever political issues are involved.

And so I think that IPEF is trying to address in four key areas things which we think really are important to the region and, clearly, it is not yet well known and often I think the jury is out in Malaysia in terms of the impact.

On the other hand, Malaysia was one of the partners that did sign on to pillar two, the supply chain pillar which was brought to conclusion in Detroit several weeks ago, and I think that is a sign that Malaysia recognizes there are different opportunities.

So, if confirmed, I would want to keep using the tools that we have that has strengthened DFC, IPEF engagement by other U.S. government agencies, EXIM, USAID, though they do not do things directly in Malaysia but I think their efforts in the region are of value to the region and to ASEAN, of which Malaysia is a member.

And I think we would want, if confirmed, to keep pushing forward in those areas to—so that the region better understands the value of economic engagement with the United States and understands that we are seeking an affirmative agenda on economic engagement that tries to address the region and their concerns in ways that are valuable for them.

Senator DUCKWORTH. I think your mentioning of ASEAN is really important because so many of the powerful players within ASEAN have signed on to IPEF and I think that is a good way forward.

Thank you. I yield back, Mr. Chairman. I am over time.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you. Thank you, Senator Duckworth.

As I went over to vote my team kept me posted on different questions that had been asked. So let me just say to you, Mr. Libby, I associate myself with the questions of Senator Menendez.

So I was going to ask you about the Lachin corridor and how you can help resolve that pretty desperate situation as part of the broader effort you said with respect to Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Senator Romney and others touched on the Djibouti issue. Obviously, we have an important presence there but so does the PRC and, obviously, trying to reconcile those in a way that serves our interest is a priority.

I do have one last question for Mr. Ehrendreich and before I ask it—Senator Romney has to leave. I do want to—I do want to thank your wife, Rachel, who you introduced, who was in Consular Affairs, as you know, but just so others know and who was pivotal in helping an 89-year-old constituent of mine from Maryland get out of Sudan during the violence. So let me thank you for your efforts there.

So here is the question regarding Palau and I just—I should say that I just I gathered with a couple of my colleagues, some from this committee and others, at a meeting that was convened by the ambassadors of Australia and New Zealand together with Senator Schatz and others, convened with a lot of the Pacific Island country ambassadors, and some had representatives that serve in the United States and the United Nations.

And it was a great turnout and we had a great meeting, and I think that the Biden administration is doing a good job in signaling the United States wants to engage much, much more with the Pacific Island countries.

And you are going to, of course, play an important role in that effort if confirmed as the ambassador to Palau. My colleagues have covered the issue of the Compact.

But one of the issues that comes up constantly with some of the Pacific Island countries has to do with encroachment on their EEZs and their fishing rights and the fact that many in the region, including the PRC, do not respect their sovereignty, whereas the United States stands for a free and open Pacific Ocean and respect for sovereignty.

Could you comment a little bit on what we can do to help Palau in particular defend their fisheries against incursions from others? These are countries that do not have a lot of resources, and to what extent is that part of our effort under the compact?

Mr. EHRENDREICH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the question.

Let me first say, I am very proud of my wife. She has been a wonderful consular officer for about 15 years now and not only has she helped your constituents, I know she has helped hundreds if not thousands of people get out of Sudan and Ethiopia and Afghanistan and other places. Very, very proud of her.

In terms of Palau and PRC incursions and all, Palau is no stranger to PRC's aggressive and coercive activities in addition to the illegal incursions into their Exclusive Economic Zones, as you mentioned, and the IUU fishing.

Palau has been the victim of economic coercion with China turning off all tourism, I think, to Palau, and Chinese economic activi-

ties in Palau have brought allegations of cybercrime, drug, and human trafficking and corruption and money laundering.

What we can do to help Palau in terms of the EEZ and IUU issues is, one, to help Palau build its own capacity and we have Coast Guard programs in place both to help with maritime domain awareness and the shiprider program in place.

USAID has active programs to help with IUU fishing more on the coastal fisheries management side. We also need to work with partners in the region—Japan, Republic of Korea, Australia. They are all interested in contributing to this—to solving this issue.

And then there is also the international effort, the Port States Measures Agreement, where the United States is trying to help countries like Palau become members and become active, and that is an international effort to end IUU fishing.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you.

I thank all of you for your testimony today. The record will be open until the close of business tomorrow, June 14th.

And this hearing is now adjourned. Thank you all.

[Whereupon, at 3:29 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

Additional Material Submitted for the Record

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO HON. CYNTHIA KIERSCHT BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

Question. In your view, what are the top three priorities for the U.S. bilateral relationship with Djibouti that you will advance or maintain as U.S. Ambassador, if confirmed?

Answer. Djibouti is a key strategic partner in accomplishing shared foreign policy and security goals in the region. The United States is committed to maintaining this long-term strategic partnership to counter regional instability and terrorism and thereby assure our enhanced security here at home. As such, our top priorities in Djibouti are maintaining strong support for the U.S. military presence, strengthening Djibouti's own capacity to contribute to regional security, supporting private sector-led economic growth, and reinforcing good governance. If confirmed, I will work with the Embassy country team and U.S. Government partners to pursue these priorities by strengthening civil society and government institutions, leveraging our development tools to support education, health, workforce development, and working to attract private sector investment.

Question. As you know, the U.S.' only enduring military installation in Africa is Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti. China also opened its first overseas base in Djibouti in 2017. As U.S. Ambassador to Djibouti, if confirmed, how will you balance the pursuit of U.S. bilateral interests in Djibouti with the U.S.' regional security interests and great power competition with China?

Answer. The United States is focused on building an enduring strategic partnership with Djibouti. Our African partners can help advance our global foreign policy priorities, including our priority to build lasting peace and security in the region. At the same time, we recognize the serious challenges the PRC presents in Africa. We will continue to counter the PRC's problematic efforts to build up its security infrastructure to project military power from Africa. If confirmed, my priority will be advancing U.S. national security interests in Djibouti and leveraging all available USG tools to counter efforts by our strategic and regional competitors to undermine those interests.

Question. What is your view of the role of a U.S. Ambassador in supporting democratic institutions and democratic governance?

Answer. Supporting democratic institutions and democratic governance is at the core of U.S. foreign policy and will be among my highest priorities. If confirmed, I will engage local interlocutors from all elements of society to advance these goals. I have prioritized these issues throughout my career, including in my current posi-

tion as U.S. Ambassador to the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, and will continue to do so in Djibouti if I am confirmed.

Question. In your view, how can the United States better support the democratic aspirations of the people of Djibouti?

Answer. Advancement of democracy and human rights in Djibouti is a key component of our bilateral relationship. Our Embassy and high-level U.S. Government officials regularly promote democracy and good governance with Djiboutian officials, including discussions about electoral reforms advocated by the multilateral organizations like the African Union, and maintain dialogue with the opposition and Djibouti's nascent civil society to ensure that we remain in contact with all elements of Djiboutian society.

To promote better governance, our Embassy works to increase civil society participation in public service delivery. We also support programs to combat gender-based violence, protect victims of human trafficking, promote women's empowerment, and promote press freedom by building the capacity of Djiboutian journalists. If confirmed, I will continue to prioritize this important work.

Question. How would you practice commercial diplomacy on behalf of U.S. investments in Djibouti?

Answer. In Djibouti, we are promoting a vision for private sector-led economic development based on democratic governance, respect for human rights, and transparency. Our focus is on strengthening local capacity, creating jobs, and working with our partners and allies on economic development that is beneficial, sustainable, and inclusive over the long term. The Embassy Deal Team has engaged in advocacy on behalf of several U.S. investments and I commit to continuing to prioritize this work.

If confirmed, I would focus on working with interagency colleagues to explore how we can better support U.S. private sector engagement in Djibouti as an alternative to PRC investment. This could include exploring how to better leverage such USG agencies as DFC, EXIM, and USTDA, which support U.S. businesses overseas.

Question. What is your assessment of Djibouti's greatest barriers to increased two-way trade and investment with the United States?

Answer. Expanding our economic partnership with Djibouti is a key priority for both the U.S. and Djiboutian Governments. Djibouti receives trade benefits under the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), though bilateral trade and investment are relatively low due to the size of the Djiboutian economy and its limited manufacturing base. If confirmed I would work with the Djiboutian Government to ensure it interfaces effectively with the U.S. Government and private sector, U.S. agencies including DFC, EXIM, USTDA, and Prosper Africa, and the U.S. private sector to identify ways to grow trade and investment, particularly in sectors like the digital space, energy, and agriculture.

Question. What is your understanding of the tools at your disposal—including through Prosper Africa - as U.S. Ambassador to Djibouti, if confirmed, to support addressing barriers to trade and investment in the enabling environment, including the need for economic and political reforms?

Answer. The U.S. Government has a number of tools available to improve bilateral trade and investment, including Prosper Africa, DFC, EXIM, and USTDA, as well as AGOA. If confirmed, I will work with the host government and the country team to identify the most significant barriers to trade and investment in the enabling environment and the best tools to remedy them, including economic and political reforms. I would also underscore the importance of economic and political transparency in attracting private sector investment and work with private sector partners to advocate for needed reforms.

Question. How will you work with Prosper Africa leadership to ensure that Djibouti can benefit from Prosper Africa resources, tools and expertise?

Answer. Embassy Djibouti, as part of the Prosper Africa initiative, has an Embassy Deal Team that is very active in promoting U.S. economic opportunities in Djibouti. The Deal Team is engaged with the Prosper Africa Secretariat in Washington and Prosper Africa representatives in Johannesburg to share trade and investment leads and to solicit assistance from Prosper Africa, something I will continue if confirmed. We will continue advocacy work on behalf of U.S. companies investing in Djibouti, examples of which include Creative Energy Systems, a U.S. company which is building a waste to energy plant, and DJIBAH, a seafood processing plant. If confirmed, I commit to continue pursuing these and other opportunities.

Question. As U.S. Ambassador to Djibouti, if confirmed, how will you engage with President Guelleh on his role as the leader of this regional institution at a time of multiple acute crises with significant regional spillover effects, namely in Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia and South Sudan.

Answer. Djibouti is a key strategic partner in accomplishing shared foreign policy and security goals in the region. As the host of the IGAD Secretariat and now as the chair of the organization, Djibouti will continue to play a central role in IGAD's efforts to support peace and security in the region. IGAD has played a significant role in supporting regional peace processes, including as an observer to the AU-led cessation of hostilities talks for Ethiopia. IGAD has also proactively offered support for peace efforts in Sudan and does essential work in the countering violent extremism space through its Center for Excellence in Countering and Preventing Violence Extremism.

If confirmed, I would engage President Guelleh and the IGAD Secretariat to understand their strategic vision and priorities to identify areas for further cooperation in support of U.S. objectives in the region.

Question. As U.S. Ambassador to Djibouti, if confirmed, how will you coordinate with U.S. Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa Hammer and other U.S. diplomats engaged on the multiple crises in the Horn of Africa?

Answer. I look forward to working closely with the Special Envoy and other stakeholders to promote peace and security in the region if I am confirmed. Djibouti is an essential partner on these issues as the host, and currently chair, of IGAD and has played an important role in past conflict resolution efforts in the region. I would welcome the Special Envoy to continue engaging regularly in Djibouti and to collaborate to identify new ways to advance U.S. peace and security goals.

Question. If confirmed, what concrete steps could you take to help Djibouti operationalize the prioritized recommendations contained in the TIP report?

Answer. If confirmed, I will vigorously engage the Government of Djibouti to meet minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking. In particular, I will highlight the recommendations in the 2023 TIP Report, including the need to increase efforts to investigate and prosecute trafficking crimes, improve victim identification and protection, and increase awareness of human trafficking among officials and the public. I will also work closely with the State Department's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons and other sources on programmatic opportunities to assist in promoting proactive action on this key issue.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to portraying the reality of the trafficking situation in Djibouti in the annual country report as accurately as possible?

Answer. Yes, I commit to coordinating closely with the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons to ensure accurate and objective reporting on trafficking in the annual TIP Report.

Question. What is your assessment of this particular issue and if confirmed, how will you work with the Ambassador At Large for International Religious Freedom to bolster religious freedom in-country?

Answer. Djibouti's constitution mandates equality for people of all faiths and Djibouti's diverse population openly and freely practices a wide range of religions. If confirmed, I would welcome collaboration with the Ambassador At Large for International Religious Freedom and look for ways to leverage the expertise of IRF to capitalize on Djibouti's freedom of religion as a springboard for broader conversations. In my current role as U.S. Ambassador to the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, I have hosted two visits from the Ambassador At Large for International Religious Freedom.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to personally engaging with civil society on this issue?

Answer. Yes, I commit to engaging personally with civil society, including religious and human rights groups, to advance religious freedom and other human rights concerns. This has been a standard practice of mine throughout my career.

Question. If confirmed, what concrete steps can you take to help Djibouti increase their societal and governmental respect for religious freedom?

Answer. I would encourage the Embassy team to engage with all faith communities in Djibouti to understand their perspectives and concerns and coordinate with the host government and civil society leaders to promote and protect freedom of religion or belief, including to foster collaboration across faith communities. If con-

firmed, I would also commit to reporting accurate information for the annual International Religious Freedom report.

Question. How will you direct your Embassy to work with civil society organizations to improve the human rights situation on the ground?

Answer. If confirmed, I will ensure my Embassy staff meets with a wide range of civil society leaders on a regular basis to remain informed of the latest human rights issues, any changes to the overall situation, and to inform our policy and programmatic ideas on how to best improve the human rights situation in Djibouti. We will also seek appropriate programmatic opportunities to support civil society organizations to improve the human rights situation.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to personally engaging with civil society on this issue?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to personally engaging with civil society on a regular basis about issues related to human rights, including religious freedom, and other issues of concern. This has been a standard practice of mine throughout my career.

Question. If confirmed, please describe how you can work with USUN and IO colleagues to find, recruit, and retain qualified Americans in the U.N. system.

Answer. The Bureau of African Affairs works closely with IO and USUN on shared priorities and on all campaigns and hiring initiatives involving qualified American candidates for the U.N. system. If confirmed, I will continue to elevate these efforts in multilateral fora and with our African partners.

Question. If confirmed, please describe how you can work with USUN and IO colleagues to promote American or likeminded initiatives within the U.N. system, including on technical matters at specialized bodies.

Answer. If confirmed, I will work closely with USUN and IO to appropriately promote American or likeminded initiatives within the U.N. system, including on technical matters at specialized bodies, and to advance the candidacies of Americans by engaging with the Djiboutian Government, as appropriate. Djibouti often supports U.S. candidates for important multilateral posts and I would advocate for our initiatives and candidates with the government and earn its continued support by communicating how we can advance our shared goals together within the U.N. system.

Question. How do you intend to work with senior leadership at the State Department to address acute staffing challenges at Mission Djibouti?

Answer. Ensuring our embassies are appropriately staffed is vital to fulfilling our mission to advance the interests of the American people. Limited infrastructure, health care challenges, and the post's remoteness are inherent impediments to recruitment. If confirmed, I will work with the management team at post and colleagues in Washington to identify and capitalize on opportunities to improve the community and recruit well qualified personnel to fill staffing gaps.

Question. What is your understanding of morale throughout Mission Djibouti?

Answer. I understand morale at post to be good. I acknowledge and appreciate the sacrifices the team makes every day as part of their service in Djibouti. If confirmed, I commit to listening to my team and doing all I can to support and improve morale.

Question. How do you intend to improve morale at Mission Djibouti?

Answer. If confirmed, I will do all I can to improve morale by empowering the diverse talent within the Embassy team, providing strategic direction, rewarding them appropriately, heeding work-life balance, and supporting them by improving access to training and resources to enable their success.

Question. How do you intend to create a unified mission and vision at Mission Djibouti?

Answer. If confirmed, I look forward to working with the diverse team at Embassy Djibouti. I will lead the country team to build on prior successes and chart a path forward to strengthen our partnership with Djibouti based on our shared foreign policy priorities and on the principles articulated in the U.S. Strategy for Sub-Saharan Africa and the AU's Agenda 2063.

Question. How would you describe your management style?

Answer. My management style is to be as transparent and collaborative as possible. I believe it is my job to ensure employees who work for me have the right resources and training and are empowered to do their job. I stand ready to provide

appropriate coaching and consulting along the way. I also strive to ensure work-life balance, reward employees for excellent work, and set a positive tone and example for the Embassy.

Question. Do you believe it is ever acceptable or constructive to berate subordinates, either in public or in private?

Answer. No, it is never appropriate or acceptable to berate subordinates under any circumstances.

Question. How do you envision your relationship with the deputy chief of mission?

Answer. The deputy chief of mission is an essential partner and important advisor in successfully managing an Embassy. If confirmed, I would look to my DCM to provide honest counsel on issues ranging from policy to personnel issues, to lead and mentor the country team (especially first- and second-tour officers), to proactively identify and solve all but the most challenging management issues, and to promptly engage me on any concerns that require my intervention.

Question. If confirmed, what leadership responsibilities do you intend to entrust to your deputy chief of mission?

Answer. I intend to entrust my DCM with serving as the first line of executive leadership at the mission, including supervising and mentoring our diverse inter-agency team, developing the talent of our first- and second-tour officers, and proactively leading our management platform to meet the needs of the mission.

Question. Do you believe that it is important to provide employees with accurate, constructive feedback on their performance in order to encourage improvement and reward those who most succeed in their roles?

Answer. Yes, I think providing accurate, constructive, and timely feedback is at the core of effective mentorship and leadership. I equally believe it important to acknowledge and reward good performance.

Question. If confirmed, would you support and encourage clear, accurate, and direct feedback to employees in order to improve performance and reward high achievers?

Answer. Yes, I believe providing clear, accurate, direct, and timely feedback to employees is essential to maintaining good morale, building skills and cultivating talent within the Department. I would also commit to rewarding high achievers as a positive acknowledgement of their performance.

Question. In your experience, do U.S. diplomats get outside of our Embassy walls enough to fully accomplish their missions?

Answer. Engaging with the local population and key contacts and decisionmakers is at the core of diplomacy. As a leader I take seriously the need to balance this imperative with taking appropriate safety precautions to protect the lives and health of our employees.

Question. How do you intend to improve the ability of U.S. diplomats to better access all local populations?

Answer. If confirmed, I will work with the Embassy regional security officer and other security professionals to develop and regularly assess Embassy security guidelines to ensure our diplomats are able to do their work while remaining safe. While Djibouti is not a high threat, high risk post, Diplomatic Security approved 94 percent of movement requests in high threat high risk posts to engage local governments and populations so I'm confident our teams will have the ability to continue engaging our local partners.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED
TO HON. CYNTHIA KIERSCHT BY SENATOR MARCO RUBIO

Question. With their absolute control of Chinese society and industry, the CCP could stop all of these destructive actions tomorrow if they so choose. Is the Chinese Communist Party a threat to the United States?

Answer. Earlier this year, the Director of National Intelligence testified that "the CCP represents both the leading and most consequential threat to U.S. national security and leadership globally." Under President Xi, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has become more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad, seeking to undercut U.S. influence and alliances. If confirmed, I will advance U.S. national se-

curity interests and push back against PRC efforts to expand its problematic influence, through robust and forthright diplomatic engagements, public diplomacy, and commercial advocacy to bolster U.S.-Djibouti ties.

Question. Does the Chinese Communist Party undertake any activities that are beneficial to U.S. interests?

Answer. The Administration assesses the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) activities in the context of the fact that, as Secretary Blinken has said, the CCP has become more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad. According to the Office of the Director of National Intelligence's 2023 Annual Threat Assessment, the CCP is seeking to "undercut U.S. influence, drive wedges between Washington and its partners, and foster some norms that favor its authoritarian system."

Question. Do you believe that there are any areas within which the Chinese Communist Party would constructively work with the United States in good faith?

Answer. As the United States competes vigorously with the PRC, the United States manages this competition responsibly so that competition does not veer into conflict. The United States will work with the PRC to address transnational challenges, such as climate change, when it is in our interest to do so—as Secretary Blinken has said, not as a favor to us or anyone else, and never in exchange for walking away from our principles, but because it is what the world expects. If confirmed, I will work with the Department of State's new Office of China Coordination to advance U.S. objectives and counter harmful behavior by the PRC and other actors in Africa.

Question. If confirmed, will you approve any joint activity with organizations or representatives from the People's Republic of China in the country in which you will work?

Answer. If confirmed, my priority will be advancing U.S. national security interests in Djibouti and countering efforts by our strategic and regional competitors to undermine those interests. The Administration has been clear that the PRC is the most consequential geopolitical challenge facing the United States, and that the United States is committed to working to strengthen our partners in the region.

If confirmed, I will work closely with Department of State and interagency colleagues and Congress to address China's efforts to expand its influence in Djibouti and the region.

Question. What is your characterization of the existing relationship between the China and Djibouti?

Answer. The PRC-Djibouti relationship is a pragmatic one centered on the PRC's financial support for infrastructure development, trade, security assistance, and the PLA base. The sustainability of Djibouti's debt to the PRC is of particular concern. Across the continent, we have seen that many PRC-backed loans are not transparent and invested in projects designed to extract resources and short-term profits for PRC benefit. According to the World Bank and IMF, Djibouti is currently in debt distress and the PRC or PRC-related entities hold the majority of that external debt.

Question. China is developing port facilities, infrastructure, railway, airports, and a pipeline for Djibouti. If confirmed, how would you counter CCP influence in Djibouti?

Answer. U.S. policy is not to ask our partners to choose between the United States and the PRC, but rather to offer alternatives. In Djibouti, we are promoting a vision for economic development based on democratic governance, market principles, respect for human rights, and transparency. In response to Djibouti's stated economic development goals, we are focusing on strengthening local capacity, creating jobs, and working with our partners and allies on economic development that is beneficial, sustainable, and inclusive over the long term.

Question. What is the significance of the CCP pier which can accommodate larger ships, such as aircraft carriers or submarines?

Answer. The PLA military base established in Djibouti in 2017 enhances the PRC's capability to project power outside the PRC's borders and immediate periphery to advance its foreign policy and secure its interests. In the case of Djibouti, this means extending its influence in the western Indian Ocean and Red Sea region, although at the current time the base primarily provides logistical functions, like fueling and provisioning. The PRC's rapid and opaque military buildup in Africa, including ambitions to establish more bases, is a major concern.

Question. Are there opportunities for the Development Finance Corporation in Djibouti to compete with the CCP?

Answer. The Development Finance Corporation (DFC) is one of several tools available to the U.S. Government to provide debt financing, equity investments, and technical assistance to African countries, such as Djibouti, and provide them alternatives to PRC investment and loans. In Djibouti, there are several pending infrastructure and development projects that may be candidates for DFC support.

Question. Besides security assistance and hosting military forces, how is Djibouti making choices about its preferred strategic partner?

Answer. Our Embassy in Djibouti is focused on ensuring that the United States remains a key partner to Djibouti. It helps guide U.S. investment centered around Djiboutians, thereby offering a different development model than PRC's investment and lending. The Embassy invests millions of dollars of assistance in programs that build economic opportunity, give Djiboutian youth job skills, support women's economic empowerment, and save lives.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED
TO JOEL EHRENDREICH BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

Trafficking in Persons

In the State Department's 2022 Trafficking in Persons Report, Palau was listed as Tier 2 Watch List for some minor improvements but overall still does not meet the minimum standards to eliminate trafficking.

Question. If confirmed, what concrete steps could you take to help Palau operationalize the prioritized recommendations contained in the TIP report?

Answer. The Embassy has worked closely with the Ministry of Justice and other stakeholders to encourage and increase the Government's anti-trafficking efforts. The 2023 TIP Report will be released on June 15, just two days from now, and that report will show the results of our close cooperation during the reporting period.

In his State of the Republic Address in April 2023, President Whipples cited encouraging steps his government made to address recommendations from the 2022 TIP Report, including a national action plan, interagency task force, and amendments to anti-trafficking laws.

If confirmed, I would look forward to working with the Government of Palau as partners in our effort to end modern day slavery. I will continue working in close partnership with the Ministry of Justice and other stakeholders to further improve Palau's anti-trafficking efforts, consistent with the prioritized recommendations in future TIP Reports. For example, if the 2023 TIP Report recommends training officials on victim identification, then I would work with the Ministry of Justice and other stakeholders to encourage and monitor the implementation of such training.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to portraying the reality of the trafficking situation in Palau for the annual country reports as accurately as possible?

Answer. Yes, an accurate TIP Report is imperative to identifying the drivers of trafficking and prescribing actionable recommendations that will lead to the structural change necessary to end human trafficking. If confirmed, I commit to portraying the reality of the trafficking situation in Palau in the annual country narrative and to working with Congress, the Government of Palau, and the interagency to encourage the Government to increase trafficking investigations and prosecutions and to proactively identify and protect victims.

Religious Freedom

In the State Department's 2022 International Religious Freedom report, Palau was noted as having general societal respect for religious freedom with no noted events in 2022.

Question. What is your assessment of this particular issue and if confirmed, how will you work with the Ambassador At Large for International Religious Freedom to bolster religious freedom in-country?

Answer. I appreciate the longstanding Congressional support on freedom of religion. As Secretary Blinken has stated, the United States maintains its unwavering support to promote respect for and protect freedom of religion or belief for all. Freedom of religion is an ideal which the United States and Palau share, and Palau has demonstrated societal and government respect for religious freedom. If confirmed, I will work together with the Ambassador At Large to explore additional ways to promote religious freedom and interfaith dialogue.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to personally engaging with civil society on this issue?

Answer. Yes.

Question. If confirmed, what concrete steps can you take to help Palau increase their societal and governmental respect for religious freedom?

Answer. Embassy Koror, with the assistance of U.S. military chaplains, has conducted a broad range of engagements with the Palauan Government and with a variety of religious groups. If confirmed, I will continue to support these important engagements, which promote religious freedom and interfaith cooperation. I will encourage the Government of Palau to become party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to strengthen its support of freedom of religion or belief.

Human Rights

In the State Department's 2022 Human Rights Report, Palau was noted as having significant government corruption.

Question. How will you direct your Embassy to work with civil society organizations to improve the human rights situation on the ground?

Answer. As our Human Rights Report describes, corruption among officials in Palau was reported as a problem, although it's worth noting that the Government took steps to investigate and prosecute officials allegedly engaged in human rights abuses or corruption. We also welcomed Palau's participation in the last Summit for Democracy, where Palau endorsed the Declaration of the Summit for Democracy, thereby making political commitments to counter corruption and to protect human rights and media freedom.

The United States places great importance on civil society and, if confirmed, I will continue our strong advocacy in support of civil society in Palau's anti-corruption efforts and the promotion of human rights.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to personally engaging with civil society on this issue?

Answer. Yes. If confirmed, I will personally engage with civil society on human rights and anti-corruption efforts. I firmly believe that the promotion of human rights and the reduction of corruption are in the interests of the people of Palau. If confirmed, in addition to engaging civil society, human rights advocates, and other non-governmental organizations on human rights issues, I look forward to meeting regularly with Palauan Government officials to affirm U.S. support for human rights and countering corruption. I will also use public diplomacy to highlight U.S. Government actions around the world, and I will describe the stark contrast of our commitment to countering corruption vis-a-vis the actions of authoritarian regimes in the region who use corruption as a tactic to interfere in the internal affairs of other countries.

International Organizations

Question. If confirmed, please describe how you can work with USUN and IO colleagues to find, recruit, and retain qualified Americans in the U.N. system.

Answer. The Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs works closely with IO and USUN on shared priorities and on all campaigns and hiring initiatives involving qualified American candidates for the U.N. system. If confirmed, I will continue to elevate these efforts in multilateral fora and with our partners in the region and in my engagements with U.S. citizens.

Question. If confirmed, please describe how you can work with USUN and IO colleagues to promote American or likeminded initiatives within the U.N. system, including on technical matters at specialized bodies.

Answer. I have immediate experience over the past year working with USUN and IO—as well as the Government of Japan as a partner—to successfully advance several American candidates. If confirmed, I will continue to work with USUN and IO colleagues to advance the United States' affirmative agenda for the U.N. and strengthen partnerships with traditional and non-traditional partners, including in U.N. specialized agencies. U.S. re-engagement at the U.N. system is critical to re-asserting U.S. leadership, including by working with our partners and allies to promote initiatives that advance shared priorities on technical matters.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO JOEL EHRENDREICH BY SENATOR MARCO RUBIO

In May 2022, Secretary Blinken said that the People's Republic of China is the "only country with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do it." The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) clearly holds the reins of power in the People's Republic of China and has used this power to commit genocide in Xinjiang, flood our communities with fentanyl, and emit, by far the largest quantity of greenhouse gases in the world today.

Question. With their absolute control of Chinese society and industry, the CCP could stop all of these destructive actions tomorrow if they so choose. Is the Chinese Communist Party a threat to the United States?

Answer. Yes. Earlier this year, the Director of National Intelligence testified that "the CCP represents both the leading and most consequential threat to U.S. national security and leadership globally." Under President Xi, the CCP has become more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad, seeking to undercut U.S. influence and alliances. If confirmed, I will advance U.S. national security interests and push back against PRC efforts to expand its problematic influence, through robust and forthright diplomatic engagements, public diplomacy, and commercial advocacy to bolster U.S.-Palau ties.

Question. Does the Chinese Communist Party undertake any activities that are beneficial to U.S. interests?

Answer. The Administration assesses the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) activities in the context of the fact that, as Secretary Blinken has said, the CCP has become more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad. According to the Office of the Director of National Intelligence's 2023 Annual Threat Assessment, the CCP is seeking to "undercut U.S. influence, drive wedges between Washington and its partners, and foster some norms that favor its authoritarian system."

Question. Do you believe that there are any areas within which the Chinese Communist Party would constructively work with the United States in good faith?

Answer. Yes, as the United States competes vigorously with the PRC, the United States manages this competition responsibly so that competition does not veer into conflict. The United States will work with the PRC to address transnational challenges, such as rising sea levels and increased frequency of natural disasters, when it is in our interest to do so—as Secretary Blinken has said, not as a favor to us or anyone else, and never in exchange for walking away from our principles, but because it is what the world expects. If confirmed, I will work with the Department of State's new Office of China Coordination to advance U.S. objectives and counter harmful behavior by the PRC and other actors in the region.

Question. If confirmed, will you approve any joint activity with organizations or representatives from the People's Republic of China in the country in which you will work?

Answer. If confirmed, my priority will be advancing U.S. national security interests in Palau and countering efforts by our strategic and regional competitors to undermine those interests. The Administration has been clear that the PRC is the most consequential geopolitical challenge facing the United States, and that the United States is committed to working to strengthen our partners in the region. If confirmed, I will work closely with Department of State and interagency colleagues and Congress to address China's efforts to expand its influence in Palau and the region.

The Biden Administration signed a Compact of Free Association with Palau in late May, and it now awaits Congressional approval. As we have seen, the CCP aims to disrupt the international rules-based order and has made inroads in the Indo-Pacific to challenge the U.S. position. This has been while this administration has been prioritizing advancing extreme social policy. Signing the compact is an important first step to our allies and partners in the region, as well as those considering partnerships with the CCP. However, in order for the U.S. to maintain its dominant position and security presence in the region, the U.S. needs to focus on tangible national security objectives and the advancing American interests:

Question. If confirmed, what are your priorities regarding countering the CCP in Palau and the larger region?

Answer. My priorities stem from our National Security Strategy, Indo-Pacific Strategy, and Pacific Partnership Strategy, which describe in no uncertain terms that the United States faces unprecedented challenges from the People's Republic of China. The strategies highlight the importance of enhancing our relationships with allies and partners, to include a specific focus on deepening ties with Pacific Island Countries.

If confirmed, I would work with interagency partners including the Department of Defense, USAID, Department of Interior, and others on furthering our activities related to the Compact of Free Association. More generally, I would also work with interagency partners, such as Coast Guard and FBI, on other areas of cooperation, such as building Palau's capacity in maritime domain awareness and maritime law enforcement capabilities. I would also work with our close partners in the country—Japan, Australia, and Taiwan have representatives—to promote our shared interest in a free and open Indo-Pacific region.

Question. Do you have concerns regarding the current compact not going far enough in some areas regarding our partnership to counter CCP influence?

Answer. I see the Compact and its current related agreements as the blueprint for our relationship, and they have robust defense, security and economic provisions which serve as not just powerful symbols, but also strong tools for dealing with CCP's attempts to gain influence. The Compact also may be regarded by other Pacific Island Countries as a public indicator of U.S. commitment to the region.

As I said during my hearing, I believe the strength of our partnership was confirmed by President Whipps at the signing of the 2023 Compact Review Agreement by saying "God bless Palau! God bless the United States of America! God bless us all!"

I would add that our partnership with Palau ties together with our regional diplomacy. Our launch of the Partners of the Blue Pacific, our role as dialogue partner in the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), our leaders-level engagements with Pacific Island Countries, our enhanced diplomatic engagement in the region to include new embassies and our first-ever special envoy to the PIF, and other initiatives all enhance our position in the region and our ability to counter our adversaries.

Question. If confirmed, what would you do to keep China out of Palau?

Answer. Under the Compact of Free Association, we maintain responsibility and authority for all defense and security matters in or relating to Palau, and access to Palau by any third parties' militaries is foreclosed, subject to the terms of the Compact. DoD has access to facilities in Palau and regularly conducts training and exercises in Palau's territory. DoD also maintains active communication with the Government of Palau on defense and security-related matters. The United States also has established defense sites in Palau, including the Tactical Multi-Mission Over-the-Horizon Radar site (TACMOR).

If confirmed, I will look for opportunities to partner with Palau and align with our allies and partners to expand diplomatic, development, and people-to-people ties that will strengthen Palau's resilience and ability to avoid predatory economic practices. If confirmed, I will work swiftly to support good governance, transparency, and anti-corruption efforts. I will also work with Congress to advance U.S. interests in the region and sustain the progress achieved through this partnership.

Question. Do you believe an aggressive left social policy should supplant national security objectives or American prosperity in our work with Palau?

Answer. I believe that Palau—like most of the world—looks to the United States as the beacon of light for the values people around the world cherish: democracy, freedom, equality, respect for human rights, and respect for the rule of law. We have a rich and deep history with Palau, and Palauans know the United States very well. For just one example, approximately 500 Palauans are currently serving in the U.S. Armed Forces—a per capita rate higher than any U.S. state.

I am confident that as our two countries' societies continue to evolve, as societies always do, our relationship with Palau will continue to advance U.S. national interests including improving our national security and prosperity. If confirmed, my efforts in Palau will seek to further deepen and expand this close relationship to ensure the advancement of our national interests.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO MARK W. LIBBY BY SENATOR ROBERT MENENDEZ

Question. Do you believe that if Azerbaijan were to exert full territorial control over Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) the ethnic Armenians living there would be safe? Do you commit to fully advocating for the protection and security of all people living in Nagorno-Karabakh?

Answer. I am deeply concerned about the rights and security of ethnic Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh (NK). Following the closure of the Lachin corridor roadway and in light of the worsening humanitarian situation in NK, we should press for the immediate restoration of food and humanitarian deliveries even as we redouble our diplomatic efforts to bring peace to the region. This means strenuously pressing Azerbaijan to allow the immediate delivery of food and other vital humanitarian supplies into NK—and pressing for transparency via an international implementing partner to monitor the rights and security of ethnic Armenians living there once a settlement has been agreed. If confirmed, I commit to advocating fully and energetically for the rights and security for the ethnic Armenian residents of Nagorno-Karabakh both immediately and as part of a just and durable peace agreement. That is, and in my view must remain, a central focus of U.S. diplomatic efforts.

Question. Will you commit to strongly condemning Azerbaijani efforts to block humanitarian access to Nagorno-Karabakh?

Answer. Yes. I strongly condemn Azerbaijani actions which have resulted in the blocking of humanitarian access to NK and will continue to do so if confirmed.

Question. President Aliyev has publicly threatened the lives and security of ethnic Armenians. Will you unequivocally condemn this kind of incendiary rhetoric and take steps to stop it?

Answer. Yes. I condemn any sort of threatening and incendiary rhetoric. If confirmed, I will use my position in Baku to press the Government of Azerbaijan, publicly and privately, to negotiate seriously without resorting to threats or inflammatory rhetoric.

Question. As the United States continues to facilitate talks between Armenia and Azerbaijan will you commit to prioritizing and ensuring the durable safety and security of all people, including ethnic Armenians in Karabakh?

Answer. Yes. A durable and dignified negotiated peace agreement must provide for the safety and security of all persons in the region, including the ethnic Armenians of NK. If confirmed, I will consistently advocate for the human rights of all persons in the region while doing all I can to encourage such a settlement.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO MARK W. LIBBY BY SENATOR ROBERT MENENDEZ

Lachin Corridor

I am deeply concerned by Azerbaijan's more than 180-day blockade of Nagorno Karabakh.

Question. If confirmed, would you commit to keeping sanctions on the table as a tool to pressure Azerbaijan to end its cruel blockade?

Answer. Yes. I do not rule out the use of any of the tools at our disposal to achieve the U.S. goals of: promoting a just and durable peace agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan; prioritizing the rights and security for the residents of Nagorno-Karabakh; and restoring free and open transit for civilian and commercial traffic through the Lachin corridor. If confirmed, I will forcefully and directly advocate with the Azerbaijani government for: unhindered civilian and commercial traffic through the Lachin corridor; transparency into the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh; the rights and security of all the people who live there; and a just and durable peace agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijani Ties with Russia

During a recent summit in Moscow, the Azerbaijani leader claimed that Russia supported his plan for a corridor to Nakhchivan, a declaration that surprised the Armenian Prime Minister. Moreover, Azerbaijan began importing Russian gas in November to meet its domestic needs as it increases exports to the European Union. While Russia ignores the security guarantees that it gave to Armenia, Azerbaijan appears to be getting closer to Russia.

Question. How do you assess the state of Azerbaijan's relationship with Russia?

Answer. Azerbaijan occupies a difficult, strategically important geographic space between Russia and Iran. Russia pursues its own geostrategic interests in the South Caucasus and benefits from regional destabilization that creates the conditions for its continued military presence in neighboring countries. I strongly support U.S. policy that every country has a sovereign right to determine its international relations. Azerbaijan, like every other country—former Soviet state or not—has the right to pursue its foreign relations as it chooses, in the furtherance of its own interests, and in accordance with international law. The Department has made this clear publicly, at the highest levels in private discussions with regional partners, and with Russia, which should not attempt to undermine this right. Azerbaijan has demonstrated its willingness to resist Russian pressure by refusing to join the Eurasian Economic Union or rejoin the Collective Security Treaty Organization. Azerbaijan voted in favor of U.N. General Assembly Resolution 68/262, which affirmed Ukraine's territorial integrity and condemned Russia's occupation of Crimea. It has offered humanitarian and energy support to Ukraine following Russia's further invasion. If confirmed, I will do all I can to encourage Azerbaijan to continue such policies.

Question. How can we prevent Azerbaijan from financing Putin's war in Ukraine to enable its deals with the European Union?

Answer. Azerbaijan's energy resources and long-term interest in integration with the West bolster its ability and willingness to maintain independence from Russia. Azerbaijan and the United States have worked closely in developing the 16 billion cubic meter per year (bcma) Southern Gas Corridor project, which brings natural gas from Azerbaijan's Shah Deniz field to Europe. Azerbaijan signed a deal with the European Union to double its natural gas exports to the EU by 2027, which the United States strongly supports. If confirmed, I will seek to prioritize the importance of Azerbaijan's continuing efforts to support European energy security following Russia's further invasion of Ukraine.

907 Waiver

I have long called for ending all security assistance to Azerbaijan, including through efforts to end the 907 waiver all together.

Question. Do you think the United States should be providing any form of security assistance or International Military Education & Training (IMET) to a country that attacked its neighbor in September, began a war that killed over 6,500 people in 2020, and is currently blockading a vulnerable population?

Answer. I am firmly committed to implementing the letter and spirit of the FREEDOM Support Act, as well as the recommendations of the 2022 GAO report, and all other statutory requirements including "Leahy" provisions for vetting foreign security assistance. If confirmed, I will recommend to the Administration only those policies and programs that best serve the interests and goals of the United States in Azerbaijan and in the region—and that have no negative effect on efforts to find a peaceful settlement in the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia. The United States carefully reviews assistance for Azerbaijan to ensure it fulfills these criteria. If confirmed, I will faithfully and scrupulously work to ensure that U.S. assistance to Azerbaijan continues to meet those conditions. U.S. security assistance to Azerbaijan promotes U.S. national security interests including counterterrorism, combating the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, securing critical energy infrastructure, and combating narcotics trafficking and human trafficking. Through E-IMET, professional military education exposes Azerbaijani military servicemembers to U.S. and NATO precepts, including civilian control of the military, human rights, and adherence to the law of war.

Armenian Genocide

I am very proud that the Senate took the important step four years ago in recognizing the Armenian Genocide with the passage of my bipartisan resolution. Not only does recognition of the past give some solace to the victims and their descendants, but being honest about this ultimate crime helps us to ensure that the crimes of the past are not repeated.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to putting out an annual statement on Armenian Genocide Remembrance Day reaffirming this ultimate crime?

Answer. Yes, I do. Your leadership on this issue has underscored the importance of recognizing the Armenian genocide. The President's last three annual statements have mourned the one and a half million Armenians who lost their lives in the Armenian genocide during the final years of the Ottoman Empire. Acknowledging and reckoning with painful periods in history, such as the Armenian genocide, is a crit-

ical step towards building a foundation for a more just and tolerant future. In this year's statement, the President asked us to recommit "to speaking out against hate, standing up for human rights, and preventing atrocities." If confirmed, I pledge to amplify this message and subsequent annual statements from the President on Armenian Remembrance Day.

Question. Do you believe that if Azerbaijan were to exert full territorial control over Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) the ethnic Armenians living there would be safe? Do you commit to fully advocating for the protection and security of all people living in Nagorno-Karabakh?

Answer. I am deeply concerned about the rights and security of ethnic Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh (NK). Following the closure of the Lachin corridor roadway and in light of the worsening humanitarian situation in NK, we should press for the immediate restoration of food and humanitarian deliveries even as we redouble our diplomatic efforts to bring peace to the region. This means strenuously pressing Azerbaijan to allow the immediate delivery of food and other vital humanitarian supplies into NK—and pressing for transparency via an international implementing partner to monitor the rights and security of ethnic Armenians living there once a settlement has been agreed. If confirmed, I commit to advocating fully and energetically for the rights and security for the ethnic Armenian residents of Nagorno-Karabakh both immediately and as part of a just and durable peace agreement. That is, and in my view must remain, a central focus of U.S. diplomatic efforts.

Question. Will you commit to strongly condemning Azerbaijani efforts to block humanitarian access to Nagorno-Karabakh?

Answer. Yes. I strongly condemn Azerbaijani actions which have resulted in the blocking of humanitarian access to NK and will continue to do so if confirmed.

Question. President Aliyev has publicly threatened the lives and security of ethnic Armenians. Will you unequivocally condemn this kind of incendiary rhetoric and take steps to stop it?

Answer. Yes. I condemn any sort of threatening and incendiary rhetoric. If confirmed, I will use my position in Baku to press the Government of Azerbaijan, publicly and privately, to negotiate seriously without resorting to threats or inflammatory rhetoric.

Question. As the United States continues to facilitate talks between Armenia and Azerbaijan will you commit to prioritizing and ensuring the durable safety and security of all people, including ethnic Armenians in Karabakh?

Answer. Yes. A durable and dignified negotiated peace agreement must provide for the safety and security of all persons in the region, including the ethnic Armenians of NK. If confirmed, I will consistently advocate for the human rights of all persons in the region while doing all I can to encourage such a settlement.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO MARK W. LIBBY BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

Trafficking in Persons

In the State Department's 2022 Trafficking in Persons Report, Azerbaijan was upgraded to Tier 2 or continued efforts to meet the minimum standards to eliminate trafficking, but more work remains to improve the trafficking situation in country.

Question. If confirmed, what concrete steps could you take to help Azerbaijan operationalize the prioritized recommendations contained in the TIP report?

Answer. I support the Administration's strong commitment to combatting trafficking in persons and, if confirmed, I will pursue this goal vigorously in Azerbaijan. The United States has already implemented programs in Azerbaijan to improve the capacity of government and civil society actors to assist victims of trafficking.

The Department of State and the Embassy in Baku have welcomed the cooperation Azerbaijan has shown on trafficking issues, and if confirmed I would capitalize on this willingness to work together to tackle the challenges that remain. Although the Government of Azerbaijan has increased some of its efforts, I commit to advocating for stronger victim protection, including proactively identifying labor and internal trafficking victims, child trafficking victims, and implementing victim-centered approaches. If confirmed, I will continue promoting opportunities for U.S. capacity-building assistance to support victims.

I will also redouble our political outreach to ensure that Azerbaijan stays the course on our recommendations, to include investigating and prosecuting perpetrators of trafficking, providing adequate penalties for those convicted, and increasing proactive identification efforts for trafficking victims.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to portraying the reality of the trafficking situation in Azerbaijan in the annual country report as accurately as possible?

Answer. Yes. As with all Congressionally mandated reports, I pledge to guide our Embassy team in Baku to report on the trafficking situation in Azerbaijan accurately and completely. I will personally emphasize the importance of this issue in my political engagement with the Azerbaijani government.

Religious Freedom

In the State Department's 2022 International Religious Freedom report, Azerbaijan was listed as having a lack of governmental and societal respect for religious freedom with noted government instances of intimidation or abuse.

Question. What is your assessment of this particular issue and if confirmed, how will you work with the Ambassador At Large for International Religious Freedom to bolster religious freedom in-country?

Answer. Azerbaijan is a Shi'a Muslim majority country with a history of religious tolerance. Followers of many different religions are able to practice their faith in Azerbaijan. Nevertheless, as you noted, the Department's annual International Religious Freedom Report on Azerbaijan documented the difficulties some religious groups face in registering their organizations and official harassment some experience in trying to practice their faith, among other issues.

If confirmed, I will work closely and directly with the Ambassador at Large and his team to improve religious freedom in Azerbaijan. I understand that the Ambassador at Large sent a team to visit Baku in March, and that they were able to press the government on these very important issues. If confirmed, I look forward to following up on their findings and engaging the government publicly and privately to uphold its international commitments regarding freedom of religion or belief.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to personally engaging with civil society on this issue?

Answer. Yes. If confirmed, I will ensure the team at Embassy Baku continues to monitor the status of religious freedom in Azerbaijan through regular meetings—including by me personally—with civil society representatives, including those of religious organizations, and human rights activists.

Question. If confirmed, what concrete steps can you take to help Azerbaijan increase their societal and governmental respect for religious freedom?

Answer. If confirmed, I will urge the Azerbaijani Government to improve societal and governmental respect for religious freedom. Specifically, I will forcefully advocate for improvements in areas of concern identified in State Department reports, including facilitating the registration of all religious groups, allowing members of religious groups to choose their own leaders, and protecting the rights of members of all groups, as outlined in Azerbaijan's constitution. I will engage regularly with civil society, including with people from faith groups across the spectrum, to amplify our messaging to the Azerbaijani government and underscore U.S. support for this important issue.

Human Rights

In the State Department's 2022 Human Rights Report, Azerbaijan was listed as having a long list of significant human rights abuses, including political prisoners, limits on freedom of expression and the media, corruption, and much more.

Question. How will you direct your Embassy to work with civil society organizations to improve the human rights situation on the ground?

Answer. Human rights are at the heart of this Administration's foreign policy, and they are a key part of U.S. bilateral engagement with Azerbaijan. I believe the United States should use all the tools in its diplomatic toolbox to promote respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in order to create a stronger foundation for Azerbaijan's long-term security and stability. If confirmed, I will urge the Azerbaijani government at the highest levels to create an environment in which NGOs, the media, political parties, religious groups, and the private sector can operate freely. I will work to ensure U.S. foreign assistance continues to promote free and open exchange of information, democracy and human rights.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to personally engaging with civil society on this issue?

Answer. Yes. If confirmed, such meetings will be among my top priorities—both upon arriving in Azerbaijan and throughout my tenure in Baku. I will continue the Embassy’s current commitment to meeting with a full range of non-governmental and civil society figures, including human rights defenders, NGO representatives, and independent journalists, to demonstrate our support for pluralism and fundamental freedoms. If confirmed, I will express publicly and privately U.S. concerns about the shrinking space for civil society and restrictions on fundamental freedoms. Azerbaijani progress in this area would help to deepen its bilateral relationship with the United States and enhance the country’s long-term security.

International Organizations

Question. If confirmed, please describe how you can work with USUN and IO colleagues to find, recruit, and retain qualified Americans in the U.N. system.

Answer. I believe that it is vitally important to U.S. national security that the United States and our like-minded allies and partners do not cede influence in the U.N. system to those who do not share our values and are not committed to the foundational principles of the U.N. If confirmed, I will work closely with the International Organizations Bureau, the government of Azerbaijan, diplomats from allies and partner countries, and other stakeholders to augment the number of Americans in the U.N. system, while encouraging citizens of likeminded nations to work throughout the U.N. system.

Question. If confirmed, please describe how you can work with USUN and IO colleagues to promote American or likeminded initiatives within the U.N. system, including on technical matters at specialized bodies.

Answer. Although Azerbaijan has not always been as aligned with the United States in the U.N. as we might hope, if confirmed, I commit to working regularly with the Government in Baku to advance U.S. interests in U.N. institutions. My team and I will maintain regular contact with Azerbaijan counterparts—and with colleagues in USUN and IO—to ensure maximum coordination on upcoming votes and other actions in the U.N. and other multilateral bodies, including actions to stand with Ukraine. My team and I will continue to seek opportunities for further cooperation with Azerbaijan on these important issues.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO MARK W. LIBBY BY SENATOR MARCO RUBIO

Question. In May 2022, Secretary Blinken said that the People’s Republic of China is the “only country with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do it.” The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) clearly holds the reins of power in the People’s Republic of China and has used this power to commit genocide in Xinjiang, flood our communities with fentanyl, and emit, by far the largest quantity of greenhouse gases in the world today. With their absolute control of Chinese society and industry, the CCP could stop all of these destructive actions tomorrow if they so choose. Is the Chinese Communist Party a threat to the United States?

Answer. Earlier this year, the Director of National Intelligence testified that “the CCP represents both the leading and most consequential threat to U.S. national security and leadership globally.” Under President Xi, the CCP has become more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad, seeking to undercut U.S. influence and alliances. If confirmed, I will advance U.S. national security interests and push back against PRC efforts to expand its problematic influence, through robust and forthright diplomatic engagements, public diplomacy, and commercial advocacy to bolster U.S.-Azerbaijan ties.

Question. Does the Chinese Communist Party undertake any activities that are beneficial to U.S. interests?

Answer. The Administration assesses the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) activities in the context of the fact that, as Secretary Blinken has said, the CCP has become more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad. According to the Office of the Director of National Intelligence’s 2023 Annual Threat Assessment, the CCP is seeking to “undercut U.S. influence, drive wedges between Washington and its partners, and foster some norms that favor its authoritarian system.”

Question. Do you believe that there are any areas within which the Chinese Communist Party would constructively work with the United States in good faith?

Answer. As the United States competes vigorously with the PRC, the United States manages this competition responsibly so that competition does not veer into conflict. The United States will work with the PRC to address transnational challenges, such as climate change, when it is in our interest to do so—as Secretary Blinken has said, not as a favor to us or anyone else, and never in exchange for walking away from our principles, but because it is what the world expects. If confirmed, I will work with the Department of State's new Office of China Coordination to advance U.S. objectives and counter harmful behavior by the PRC and other actors in the region.

Question. If confirmed, will you approve any joint activity with organizations or representatives from the People's Republic of China in the country in which you will work?

Answer. If confirmed, my priority will be advancing U.S. national security interests in Azerbaijan and countering efforts by our strategic and regional competitors to undermine those interests. The Administration has been clear that the PRC is the most consequential geopolitical challenge facing the United States, and that the United States is committed to working to strengthen our partners in the region. If confirmed, I will work closely with Department of State, interagency colleagues, and Congress to address China's efforts to expand its influence in Azerbaijan and the region.

Question. Over several administrations, a peaceful resolution to the Azerbaijan-Armenia conflict has been sought regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh territory. U.S. assistance aimed to mitigate the impacts of the conflict and parity with regards to Foreign Military Financing assistance to both sides. Since 2001, the annual presidential waiver to Section 907 of the FREEDOM Support Act has taken place and enabled U.S. military aid and other foreign assistance to Azerbaijan. If confirmed, how would you work on resolving continued Nagorno-Karabakh territorial disputes and access?

Answer. The United States supports direct engagement between Azerbaijan and Armenia to work toward a peaceful resolution of the conflict, which has lasted more than 30 years. Senior U.S. officials have been very engaged in this process, including Secretary Blinken, who has hosted two rounds of peace talks in Washington and spoken directly to the leaders multiple times over the last year. A durable and dignified peace must be one that emanates from the region—we cannot impose a solution on Armenia and Azerbaijan. Armenia has publicly acknowledged that an arrangement between the population of Nagorno-Karabakh and the Azerbaijani government is essential for securing the rights and security of those belonging to the ethnic Armenian residents of Nagorno-Karabakh. In this regard, transparency for the international community is critical. The State Department prioritizes the rights and security for the residents of Nagorno-Karabakh at every level of engagement with the Azerbaijan government—including with President Aliyev. If confirmed, I will advocate forcefully with Azerbaijan for transparency into the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh and for the rights and security of all the people who live there.

Question. If confirmed, would you advocate for a presidential waiver to Section 907, despite the well documented human rights abuses committed by Azeri security forces against Armenian civilians?

Answer. U.S. assistance to Azerbaijan promotes U.S. national security interests, which is why every Administration has waived section 907 of the FREEDOM Support Act every year since 2002. The most recent waiver went into effect June 22, 2022. The United States does not approve any security assistance or military sales that could undermine efforts to find a peaceful settlement of the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia. I am firmly committed to implementing both the letter and spirit of the FREEDOM Support Act—as well as the recommendations of the 2022 GAO report and all applicable “Leahy” legislative requirements for vetting foreign security assistance. If confirmed, I will recommend to the Administration the policies and programs that best serve the interests and goals of the United States in Azerbaijan and in the region and that will have no negative effect on the peace process.

Question. How would a long-term peace deal between Azerbaijan and Armenia impact Russian influence in the region?

Answer. The Russia-negotiated trilateral arrangement paused the fighting in 2020, but was written in a way that set up Russia as the chief arbiter and allowed each side to interpret it as it sees fit. While Russia has, at times, played a role in

convening the parties, Russia also pursues its own geostrategic interests in the Caucasus and benefits from regional destabilization that creates the conditions for its continued military presence in neighboring countries. Direct engagement between the sides leading to a durable and dignified peace agreement offers the clearest path forward to resolving the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict. It provides the best opportunity for the sides to demonstrate their sovereignty and independence and reduce Russian influence.

Question. How realistic is a peace deal to occur between Azerbaijan and Armenia while Russia is consumed by its war in Ukraine?

Answer. The United States supports direct engagement between Azerbaijan and Armenia to work toward a peaceful resolution of the conflict. Senior U.S. officials have been very engaged in this process, including Secretary Blinken, who has hosted two rounds of talks in Washington and spoken directly to the leaders multiple times over the last year. The parties have publicly committed to this peace process and the United States is supporting them as a facilitator. I share the Administration's belief that a durable and dignified peace must be one that emanates from the parties, and the United States and partners such as the European Union are working hard to support the parties in their talks. As Secretary Blinken said following talks he hosted in May, "there is an agreement within sight, within reach. And achieving that agreement would be, I think, not only historic, but would be profoundly in the interests of the people of Azerbaijan and Armenia, and would have very positive effects even beyond their two countries." Reaching a durable and dignified peace agreement offers the best opportunity for each of the sides to demonstrate their sovereignty and independence and reduce Russian malign influence in the region. If confirmed, I will advocate vigorously and directly with the government of Azerbaijan to take the steps necessary to reach such an agreement.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO EDGARD D. KAGAN BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

Trafficking in Persons

In the State Department's 2022 Trafficking in Persons Report, Malaysia was listed as Tier 3 for continued failure to meet the minimum standards to eliminate trafficking.

Question. If confirmed, what concrete steps could you take to help Malaysia operationalize the prioritized recommendations contained in the TIP report?

Answer. Working with the interagency team at U.S. Embassy Kuala Lumpur, and in close partnership with the State Department's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons (J/TIP) and other elements of the U.S. Government, I will seek to advance our anti-trafficking goals. If confirmed, I will push publicly and privately for Malaysia to take meaningful action to combat trafficking. I will urge the Malaysian Government to increase the capacity of local law enforcement to investigate, prosecute, and convict traffickers—especially labor traffickers. The Malaysian Government publicly stated its desire to continue improving its anti-trafficking efforts after Malaysia was upgraded to Tier 2 Watch List in the State Department's 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report. If confirmed, I plan to work closely with the Malaysian Government to achieve our shared goals of protecting victims and bringing traffickers to justice.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to portraying the reality of the trafficking situation in Malaysia in the annual country report as accurately as possible?

Answer. An accurate Trafficking in Persons Report is vital to publicly identify the drivers of trafficking and prescribe actionable recommendations that will lead to the structural change necessary to end trafficking as well as maintain U.S. credibility. If confirmed, I commit to portraying the reality of the trafficking situation in Malaysia in the annual country report and to working with Congress and U.S. Government agencies to push for additional action by the Malaysian Government to increase trafficking investigations, prosecutions and convictions of traffickers, and to increase victim identification and protection.

Religious Freedom

In the State Department's 2022 International Religious Freedom report, Malaysia was listed as lacking governmental and societal respect for religious freedom but that the U.S. Embassy had stressed the importance of tolerance and community understanding.

Question. What is your assessment of this particular issue and if confirmed, how will you work with the Ambassador At Large for International Religious Freedom to bolster religious freedom in-country?

Answer. As Secretary Blinken has stated, the United States maintains its unwavering support to promote respect for and protection of freedom of religion or belief for all. I understand that Embassy Kuala Lumpur has conducted a broad range of engagement with the Malaysian Government and with civil society to highlight the importance of religious freedom. If confirmed, I would ensure that we continue these important engagements, and I would work with the Ambassador at Large for Religious Freedom to explore ways to bolster religious freedom in Malaysia. I appreciate the longstanding Congressional support on freedom of religion or belief and, if confirmed, look forward to working with Congress to continue to preserve and protect this human right.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to personally engaging with civil society on this issue?

Answer. Promoting respect for human rights, including freedom of religion or belief, and the rule of law, is fundamental to U.S. values and interests. If confirmed, I commit to personally engaging with civil society and the Malaysian Government on these issues and other human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Question. If confirmed, what concrete steps can you take to help Malaysia increase their societal and governmental respect for religious freedom?

Answer. There are limits on freedom of religion or belief in Malaysia, including through federal and state laws against blasphemy and apostasy, and there are also restrictions on all non-Sunni forms of Islam. If confirmed, I will urge the Government of Malaysia to encourage Malaysian authorities to increase respect for members of religious minority groups and resolve longstanding cases of enforced disappearances of religious figures. I will also work with civil society to promote religious tolerance for members of all religious groups.

Human Rights

In the State Department's 2022 Human Rights Report, Malaysia was listed as having a litany of human rights abuses, including reports of arbitrary killings, torture, censorship, limits on freedom of assembly and expression, among many others.

Question. How will you direct your Embassy to work with civil society organizations to improve the human rights situation on the ground?

Answer. The United States places great importance on civil society and NGOs because they serve as the critical links between government and the public, and I have worked extensively with civil society organizations throughout my career. If confirmed, I will continue our strong advocacy both publicly and privately in support of the critical role played by civil society in Malaysia's democratic development and promotion of human rights. If confirmed, I would work to advance democratic values and respect for human rights in my engagements at all levels of the Malaysian Government and with all parts of Malaysian society.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to personally engaging with civil society on this issue?

Answer. Yes. If confirmed, I will personally engage with civil society on human rights and fundamental freedoms. I firmly believe that the promotion of human rights is in the interest of all people in the United States and Malaysia and will work in support of that goal. If confirmed, in addition to engaging civil society, human rights advocates, and other non-governmental organizations on human rights issues, I look forward to meeting regularly with Malaysian Government officials to affirm U.S. support for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

International Organizations

Question. If confirmed, please describe how you can work with USUN and IO colleagues to find, recruit, and retain qualified Americans in the U.N. system.

Answer. The Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs works closely with IO and USUN on shared priorities and on all campaigns and hiring initiatives involving qualified American candidates for the U.N. system. If confirmed, I will continue to engage the Malaysian Government to gain support for U.S. citizens seeking to work in the U.N. system and other multilateral organizations.

Question. If confirmed, please describe how you can work with USUN and IO colleagues to promote American or likeminded initiatives within the U.N. system, including on technical matters at specialized bodies.

Answer. If confirmed, I will work with USUN and IO colleagues to advance the United States' affirmative agenda for the U.N. and strengthen partnerships with traditional and non-traditional partners, including in specialized and technical agencies. U.S. re-engagement at the U.N. system is critical to reasserting U.S. leadership, including by working with our partners and allies to promote initiatives that advance shared priorities on technical matters.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO EDGARD D. KAGAN BY SENATOR MARCO RUBIO

In May 2022, Secretary Blinken said that the People's Republic of China is the "only country with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do it." The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) clearly holds the reins of power in the People's Republic of China and has used this power to commit genocide in Xinjiang, flood our communities with fentanyl, and emit, by far the largest quantity of greenhouse gases in the world today. With their absolute control of Chinese society and industry, the CCP could stop all of these destructive actions tomorrow if they so choose.

Question. Is the Chinese Communist Party a threat to the United States?

Answer. Earlier this year, the Director of National Intelligence testified that "the CCP represents both the leading and most consequential threat to U.S. national security and leadership globally." Under President Xi, the CCP has become more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad, seeking to undercut U.S. influence and alliances. If confirmed, I will advance U.S. national security interests and push back against PRC efforts to expand its malign influence, through robust and forthright diplomatic engagements, public diplomacy, and commercial advocacy to bolster U.S.-Malaysia ties.

Question. Does the Chinese Communist Party undertake any activities that are beneficial to U.S. interests?

Answer. The Administration assesses the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) activities in the context of the fact that, as Secretary Blinken has said, the CCP has become more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad. According to the Office of the Director of National Intelligence's 2023 Annual Threat Assessment, the CCP is seeking to "undercut U.S. influence, drive wedges between Washington and its partners, and foster some norms that favor its authoritarian system."

Question. Do you believe that there are any areas within which the Chinese Communist Party would constructively work with the United States in good faith?

Answer. As the United States competes vigorously with the PRC, we seek to manage this competition responsibly so that competition does not veer into conflict. The United States will work with the PRC to address transnational challenges, such as climate change, counternarcotics, and public health, when it is in our interest to do so—as Secretary Blinken has said, not as a favor to us or anyone else, and never in exchange for walking away from our principles, but because it is what the world expects. If confirmed, I will work with departments and agencies across the U.S. Government as well as with Congress to advance U.S. objectives and counter harmful behavior by the PRC and other actors in the Indo-Pacific.

Question. If confirmed, will you approve any joint activity with organizations or representatives from the People's Republic of China in the country in which you will work?

Answer. If confirmed, my priority will be to advance U.S. interests in Malaysia and countering efforts by our strategic and regional competitors to undermine those interests. The Administration has been clear that the PRC is the most consequential geopolitical challenge facing the United States, and that the United States is committed to working to strengthen our partnerships in the region. If confirmed, I will work closely with Department of State and interagency colleagues, as well as Congress to address the PRC's efforts to expand its influence in Malaysia and the region.

Since the late 1990s, the U.S. enjoyed a deepening of bilateral ties with Malaysia. However, recent developments in both countries have led to uncertainties regarding the strength of these ties now, and into the future. Friction between the U.S. and Malaysia have included human rights concerns, U.S. military interventions in the Middle East, and U.S. support for Israel. Even with the backdrop, U.S.-Malaysia military security cooperation has been active in countering terrorism activities in Southeast Asia and includes naval cooperation near the Malacca Strait.

Question. What is your characterization of the existing relationship between the U.S. and Malaysia?

Answer. The United States and Malaysia enjoy a strong partnership based on robust economic, security, and people-to-people ties, and rooted in our shared national interests. We cooperate on security matters, including counterterrorism, cybersecurity, maritime security, and efforts to promote regional stability. Our economic relationship continues to expand with bilateral trade reaching nearly \$80 billion and supporting an estimated 58,000 U.S. jobs. Bilateral military cooperation, in particular, is continually expanding, supporting regional security needs of both Malaysia and the United States. Additionally, Malaysia's recent interest in accelerating its clean energy transition and becoming a Carbon Capture, Utilization and Storage leader in Southeast Asia offers substantial U.S.-Malaysia energy cooperation. Malaysia has prospered during decades of stability in Southeast Asia underpinned by the United States' diplomacy and presence. If confirmed, I will work with Departments and Agencies across the U.S. Government and with Congress to further strengthen relations with Malaysia.

Question. Are you concerned with the existing relationship? Please explain.

Answer. Since becoming Prime Minister in November 2022, Anwar Ibrahim has fostered an environment for greater collaboration and cooperation between our two countries on issues of mutual interest including human rights, economic development, and South China Sea issues.

If confirmed, I would engage with the highest levels of the Malaysian Government to further strengthen our partnership and would work closely with Congress as well as empower my staff to further expand relationships central to U.S. strategic goals.

Question. If confirmed, are there opportunities or projects you would advocate for as Ambassador to utilize the Development Finance Corporation in Malaysia?

Answer. An important energy producer, Malaysia is the world's fourth-largest exporter of Liquefied Natural Gas. Prime Minister Anwar's Administration has signaled one of its priorities is the clean energy transition and becoming the Carbon Capture, Utilization and Storage regional leader in Southeast Asia. As Ambassador, if confirmed, I would encourage the Development Finance Corporation, in partnership with the State Department's Clean EDGE Asia program, other U.S. agencies, the private sector, and the Malaysian Government and Congress to identify opportunities that would support and accelerate Malaysia's clean energy transition.

Question. How would you advance U.S. support for Israel in Malaysia if confirmed?

Answer. Having served in Israel for three years, I know well the value of its international engagement. If confirmed as Ambassador to Malaysia, I would work to ensure awareness of the significant changes in the Middle East following the Abraham Accords, including the growing normalization of relations between key Arab nations and Israel. I would work with the Government of Malaysia and civil society to identify potential areas of opportunity to improve Israel-Malaysia relations. I would also highlight the tangible benefits of normalization, as demonstrated by the Abraham Accords, other normalization agreements, and the Negev Forum.

Malaysia takes careful steps when balancing strategies with the U.S. and China in its relations. Malaysia has typically taken a low-key approach regarding confronting tensions with China in the South China Sea, it prioritizes negotiating a code of conduct between ASEAN and China to govern behavior. Malaysia has also entered into CCP Belt and Road Initiative projects including port, rail, and manufacturing investments.

Question. What is your characterization of the existing relationship between China and Malaysia?

Answer. Malaysia has a significant economic relationship with the People's Republic of China (PRC) which Malaysian leaders see as key to achieving the country's development goals. The PRC has been Malaysia's largest trading partner since 2009 and was the country's largest investor in 2022.

Malaysia does not recognize the PRC's so-called "nine-dash line" or its other expansive and unlawful South China Sea (SCS) maritime claims, which overlap with Malaysia's exclusive economic zone (EEZ) and continental shelf. Malaysia has publicly stated the PRC's SCS claims, persistent patrols in Malaysia's EEZ, and air incursions into Malaysian-managed air space pose a threat to Malaysia. Despite the PRC presence and intrusions, Malaysia is actively engaged in oil and gas exploration and recovery on its continental shelf notwithstanding the PRC's expansive and unlawful overlapping maritime claims.

If confirmed, I would work with Malaysia, with U.S. Government departments and agencies, and with Congress to increase U.S. economic engagement while strengthening our security partnership and our people-to-people ties.

Question. Are you concerned with their existing relationship? Please explain.

Answer. PM Anwar's public statements have emphasized the need for Malaysia to maintain "strategic balance" between the United States and the PRC. If confirmed, I will work with U.S. Government departments and agencies, Congress, and the private sector to strengthen existing areas of cooperation with Malaysia, expand our partnership to new areas and identify alternatives to PRC financing.

Question. Do you believe an ASEAN Code of Conduct will ever be agreed to between the PRC and ASEAN? If so, when?

Answer. The United States supports ASEAN efforts to negotiate a meaningful and effective Code of Conduct (COC) on the SCS with the PRC that is fully consistent with international law as reflected in the 1982 Law of the Sea Convention and protects the rights and interests of third parties.

We also support ASEAN countries to continue their progress in negotiating maritime boundary agreements to resolve their overlapping lawful maritime entitlements to support the international law of the sea and to strengthen their collective voice during the COC negotiations. Although it is unclear if or when negotiations might conclude, if confirmed as Ambassador, I will work with Malaysia, including by continuing our existing legal engagement, to strengthen ASEAN's collective voice and support efforts to ensure any COC protects U.S. interests.

Question. Do you believe the CCP would honor an ASEAN Code of Conduct?

Answer. I believe a strong and unified ASEAN that negotiates a meaningful and effective Code of Conduct that protects the rights and interests of third parties is the best way to ensure the People's Republic of China honors its commitments.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED
TO HON. NISHA DESAI BISWAL BY SENATOR JOHN BARRASSO

Question. What specific criteria is used by the International Development Finance Corporation (DFC) to decide whether the United States should make an equity investment?

Answer. It is my understanding that DFC's objectives and criteria for equity investments are specified in the BUILD Act (22 USC Sec. 9621c(3)). DFC takes into account whether support for the project would: substantially reduce or overcome the effect of an identified market failure in the country; would not proceed or would be substantially delayed without support; contribute to transforming local conditions to promote development of markets; be aligned with commercial partner incentives; have significant developmental impact and contribute to sustainability; and furthers U.S. policy. Equity is clearly an important tool for DFC to pursue its dual strategic and developmental mission. DFC also looks at the investment's growth prospects and the ability of the Corporation to exit the investment in the future. This is done by establishing a management approval process requiring a thorough evaluation of how each proposed investment satisfies these objectives.

Question. With the increased risks and exposure of equity investments, what requirements are being put in place to ensure adequate oversight and risk management?

Answer. In addition to DFC's Board of Directors' oversight, it is my understanding that DFC's Chief Risk Officer and an enterprise risk management program help the Corporation navigate the risks and opportunities associated with its proposed investments. I also understand that specific processes for origination and oversight of equity investments have been put in place to help control risks associated with equity investments.

Question. Do you support the DFC providing equity investments in a foreign state-owned enterprise? If yes, under what circumstances?

Answer. The BUILD Act requires DFC to mobilize private sector capital to the markets where it can work, many of which feature state owned enterprises (SOEs). Generally, DFC has understood this mandate to mean that DFC should not invest in SOEs, but there could be cases where an investment through an SOE does in fact mobilize private capital.

Question. Do you support the DFC providing equity or investment financing to upper-middle income countries like Brazil, China, Mexico, Russia, and Turkey? If yes, under what circumstances?

Answer. If confirmed, I am committed to ensuring that DFC follows applicable law related to country eligibility. I understand that DFC is prohibited by law from supporting investment in Russia and I can affirm that DFC does not intend to make any investments in China. However, I understand that under the BUILD Act, DFC is able to support projects in other upper middle-income countries subject to obtaining Presidential certification that the investment is in the national economic or foreign policy interests of the United States; and that such support is designed to produce significant developmental outcomes or provide developmental benefits to the poorest population of that country.

Question. Please explain the DFC's net zero carbon plan.

Answer. I understand DFC announced a commitment to reach net zero emissions through its investment portfolio by 2040. Under this plan, DFC will retain the ability to support other technologies or energy sources on a case-by-case basis when there are strong developmental or geostrategic benefits.

Question. How does DFC's net-zero carbon plan align with U.S. efforts to support other U.S. goals, such as the 30,000-megawatt goal under Power Africa?

Answer. I believe DFC's priorities to support investment in affordable, reliable energy are closely aligned with the objectives of Power Africa. Significant investment in a wide array of technologies and sources of energy to reduce energy poverty in Africa. If confirmed, I look forward to working with Power Africa.

Question. Do you believe developing nations should be exempt from the net-zero carbon target?

Answer. I believe access to reliable, sustainable sources of energy are critical to economic activity in developing nations. If confirmed, I will work to increase energy as a key focus of DFC. I understand that DFC's portfolio target does not prevent it from supporting strategic projects in the gas sector if certain conditions are met or other industries that help deliver strong developmental impacts or contribute to key geostrategic goals.

No modern economy can run on variable renewable power alone. Developing countries will need reliable base load energy to run a manufacturing plant, data center, or a hospital. The DFC's new CO2 emissions cap limits the US to financing only 8 more natural gas power plants globally and forever.

Question. What is your view on this policy and the impact on the developing world?

Answer. I believe that DFC should look to support solutions that provide affordable, reliable power supply. There are many options for countries to achieve that goal. If confirmed, I look forward to working with the team at DFC to explore ways to increase energy access.

Question. How important is providing reliable baseload energy when assisting countries with economic growth, job creation and poverty reduction?

Answer. Supplying businesses and households with reliable energy is essential to economic growth, job creation, and poverty reduction.

On October 24, 2021, the President of Uganda wrote an opinion editorial in the Wall Street Journal titled, "Solar and Wind Force Poverty on Africa." He stated, "Africa can't sacrifice its future prosperity for Western climate goals." The President of Uganda explained, "This stands to forestall Africa's attempts to rise out of poverty, which require reliable energy. African manufacturing will struggle to attract investment and therefore to create jobs without consistent energy sources."

Question. Given the extensive expertise of the United States in these areas, why isn't the DFC financing more projects with coal, oil, and natural gas to developing nations?

Answer. My understanding is that DFC is responsive to the demands of the private market for investment support. The companies that seek DFC support conduct their own analysis and determine what type of energy is most suitable for the local market. DFC considers energy projects on a case-by-case basis. If confirmed, I am committed to ensuring that advancing energy security remains a key focus of DFC investments.

Question. Do you support the DFC financing coal, oil and natural gas projects?

Answer. I understand that DFC considers energy projects on a case-by-case basis. DFC can support strategic projects in the gas sector if certain conditions are met or other industries that help deliver strong developmental impacts or contribute to key geostrategic goals. If confirmed, I will support DFC's policy.

Question. Would you pursue an all-of-the-above energy strategy at the DFC?

Answer. My understanding is that DFC has not imposed restrictions on specific technologies or energy sources for power projects. If confirmed, I will support DFC's policy of advancing market driven investments that advance energy security through a wide array of technologies.

Question. What restrictions are currently in place on the financing of energy projects, including coal, oil and natural gas, at the DFC?

Answer. My understanding is that DFC has not imposed restrictions on specific technologies for power projects. If confirmed, I would continue this practice.

Question. Please outline the DFC's priorities in revising its environmental and social policies and procedures.

Answer. I understand that the last major update to DFC's Environmental and Social Policy and procedures (ESPP) occurred in 2016 when it was still operating as the Overseas Private Investment Corporation under different statutory authority. I have been briefed that DFC is updating its ESPP to keep up with evolving best practices and the standards of its peer development finance institutions and to clarify provisions that have led to confusion in practice. If confirmed, I look forward to learning more about these policies and the procedures.

In April, it was announced that the Export-Import Bank of the United States and the DFC may lend up to \$4 billion for the development of small modular nuclear reactors in Poland.

Question. Do you support the DFC financing more nuclear energy projects?

Answer. Yes.

Question. If confirmed, what steps would you take to promote nuclear energy projects?

Answer. I understand that DFC has been engaged in discussions with various stakeholders including discussions regarding potential support for projects that deploy small, modular nuclear reactor (SMR) technology. If confirmed, I would look forward to advancing these efforts.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO HON. NISH DESAI BISWAL BY SENATOR MARCO RUBIO

Question. In May 2022, Secretary Blinken said that the People's Republic of China is the "only country with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do it." The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) clearly holds the reins of power in the People's Republic of China and has used this power to commit genocide in Xinjiang, flood our communities with fentanyl, and emit, by far the largest quantity of greenhouse gases in the world today. With their absolute control of Chinese society and industry, the CCP could stop all of these destructive actions tomorrow if they so choose. Is the Chinese Communist Party a threat to the United States?

Answer. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP), has, and continues to, pursue policies that are more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad. The United States and the CCP are strategic competitors. If confirmed, I will advance the stra-

tegic foreign policy and development goals of the United States as called for under the BUILD Act.

Question. Does the Chinese Communist Party undertake any activities that are beneficial to U.S. interests?

Answer. International investment activities directed by the Chinese Communist Party come with significant risk of dependence, environmental degradation, and harm to local communities. None of these potential outcomes are in the U.S. interest.

Question. Do you believe that there are any areas within which the Chinese Communist Party would constructively work with the United States in good faith?

Answer. While the United States and the People's Republic of China (PRC) are strategic competitors, it may be possible for the PRC to make constructive contributions in areas of mutual interest, including in disaster response. If the U.S. pursues cooperation, we must remain clear-eyed about the challenges that the PRC poses and continue to best position ourselves to compete economically. Any PRC contributions must be scrutinized, however, to ensure they are not springboards for PRC economic and security interests.

Question. If confirmed, will you approve any joint activity with organizations or representatives from the People's Republic of China in the organization in which you will work?

Answer. It would not be appropriate for DFC to work with government entities or institutions of the People's Republic of China, or entities that are otherwise controlled by the CCP.

Question. In May 2022, I sent a letter to the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation's (DFC) CEO Scott Nathan regarding the use of taxpayer funds that bankroll international projects focused on climate change and gender equity instead of facilitating advancement of national security policy goals and advancing American prosperity. DFC has continued to prioritize climate-change and an extreme social agenda, while the CCP continues to expand its control over foreign critical infrastructure projects that matter to the economies of the U.S., allies, Africa, Latin America, the Indo-Pacific, and beyond. How does the DFC weigh its funding priorities with respect to its development and foreign policy objectives?

Answer. It is my understanding that DFC funding is allocated to projects that advance development and foreign policy priorities. Transactions that do not fit within DFC's statutory mandate under the BUILD Act are not supported. If confirmed, I would work to ensure that DFC remains faithful to its strategic and developmental mandates.

Question. When was the last time the DFC invested in a project whose primary objective was not to advance a gender equity or climate priority?

Answer. It is my understanding that pursuant to the BUILD Act, DFC invests in projects that advance development and foreign policy objectives. For example, DFC's Board of Directors approved last month a \$150 million loan for the expansion, renovation, and operation of the Freetown International Airport in Sierra Leone. This came on the heels of the approval of a \$150 million investment to expand and modernize a port in Ecuador, among other infrastructure and critical technology projects.

Question. When was the last time the DFC declined a strategically important investment opportunity because it did not believe it sufficiently advanced a gender equity or climate priority?

Answer. It is my understanding that DFC does not decline investments because of insufficient contributions to gender equity or climate goals.

Question. What is the average timeline for DFC to receive a project proposal to it being authorized/approved?

Answer. I understand that DFC project approval timelines vary depending on the complexity of the project, with some taking as short as six months and others over a year.

Question. What would it take to shorten that timeline?

Answer. I understand that DFC is working to shorten timelines by building its overall capacity and improving processes to meet demand. If confirmed, I look forward to advancing these efforts and identifying additional ways that DFC can optimize its processes.

Question. Last week, media reports indicated that the DFC would be re-organized to focus on five key sectors: Infrastructure and minerals, energy, health and agriculture, small business support, and funds. The reorganization has already received criticism across the DFC who are concerned that the process is rushed. Have you been briefed on the reorganization of the DFC?

Answer. I am aware of the broad strokes of DFC's potential re-alignment based on sector strategies. If confirmed, I look forward to learning more about the process.

Question. If confirmed, how would you ensure that the reorganization helps DFC achieve the core objective of the BUILD Act, to provide nations an alternative to Chinese Belt and Road Initiative projects?

Answer. I understand that DFC's potential realignment efforts are closely guided by DFC's BUILD Act mandates to advance development and strategic interests of the United States. If confirmed, I expect to be closely involved in DFC's organizational efforts to ensure it meets these objectives.

