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NOMINATIONS OF THE 118th CONGRESS, SECOND SESSION, PART II

HEARINGS

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS UNITED STATES SENATE

ONE HUNDRED EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

January 3, 2024 to January 3, 2025

Part II

Printed for the use of the Committee on Foreign Relations

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NOMINATIONS

THURSDAY, MAY 9, 2024

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

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:04 a.m., in room SD–419, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Benjamin L. Cardin presiding.

Present: Senators Cardin [presiding], Shaheen, Kaine, Schatz, Van Hollen, Ricketts, Young, and Barrasso.

Also present: Senator Reed.

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

The CHAIRMAN. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee will come to order.

Our hearing today is to hear from five of President Biden's nominees in dealing with career positions and ambassadorships.

And it is wonderful to have you all here, and we thank you all for being here.

Thank you to Senator Ricketts for being here to lead the Republican side of this hearing. It is not always easy to find members that are willing to adjust their schedules in order to accommodate these hearings. And I thank Senator Ricketts for always being available to this committee to carry out our important work.

I am going to have some opening comments. Senator Ricketts is going to have some opening comments. But first, I want to recognize Senator Reed and allow him to make an introduction, and thank him for being here in the committee. We sometimes have a friendly rivalry between Armed Services and Foreign Relations, but since the National Defense Authorization Bills will be up soon, and I am going to need his help, he goes first.

[Laughter.]

STATEMENT OF HON. JACK REED, U.S. SENATOR FROM RHODE ISLAND

Senator REED. Thank you very much, Chairman Cardin, Senator Ricketts, Senator Kaine.

It is my pleasure to introduce Kristen J. Sarri, the President's nominee to be Assistant Secretary of State for Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs.

Anyone who has had the pleasure of working with Kris knows a couple of things. Number one, she is only partisan about one issue, University of Michigan football.

[Laughter.]

Senator REED. Number two, if you want to get something done, then you want to work with Kris. Time and again, over her career, Kris has worked across the partisan divide to reach consensus on difficult issues. She is smart, she does the hard work to be well informed, and she does the harder work to understand the views and goals of other people.

She also has the integrity to follow through on her commitments. As a Senate staffer and as a senior advisor at the Department of Commerce, and the Office of Management and Budget, and the Department of Interior, Kris has earned a reputation as a problem solver and a coalition builder. Among other things, her work to permanently fund the Land and Water Conservation Fund laid the foundation for the Great American Outdoors Act.

Most recently, Kris served as the president and CEO of the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation, where she transformed the organization into a leading voice for conserving and restoring U.S. waters, primarily by engaging local communities and businesses in stewardship.

If confirmed as Assistant Secretary of State for Oceans, Kris will bring her knowledge, her experience, her commitment, and her skills in coalition building to advance global cooperation in science and the environment.

Mr. Chairman, as you know, it is vitally important to have the best talent to effectively move our nation's interests forward. In my view, there is no one more prepared and well qualified for this post than Kris Sarri. I urge the committee's support for her nomination. And for Kris, I would say Go Wolverines. For me, I would say Go Army. Thank you.

[Laughter.]

Ms. SARRI. Thank you, Senator.

The CHAIRMAN. Once again, we have a little bit of controversy. It is Go Navy, and it is Go Maryland, but other than that, you were fine. Thank you, Senator Reed. You are certainly excused. We appreciate your input, and thank you very much for being with us.

I am going to shortly introduce the other four nominees, but before I do that, let me just welcome our nominees and their families, and thank you all for your willingness to serve in these public positions. These are extremely challenging times to be in any position of Foreign Service. So, we thank you for your willingness to come forward. And we also thank your families because we know you cannot do this without a supportive family.

So, strengthening global health security by applying the lessons learned from the Covid pandemic and implementing science based approach in reducing spread of infectious diseases. That is very much on our agenda today.

Advocating for international human rights standards, accountability for past atrocities, and good governance in Sri Lanka as we support its economic recovery and stabilization of its financial system. Very much on our minds.

Building consensus to protect marine environments from illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing, deep seabed mining, and trafficking of endangered species, or banned toxic substances, on our minds. A lot of issues we want to talk about.

Protecting Moldova from Russia's aggression as it strengthens its democracy, implements anti-corruption reforms, and negotiates secessions with the European Union, very much on the agenda today. Staffing the reopening of the U.S. Embassy in Seychelles with a full time diplomatic presence to promote maritime security, combat drug trafficking, and protect the environment.

For each of these missions, and including the mission in regards to the Oceans and International Environment and Scientific Affairs, I am particularly interested in that because Maryland has one of the most recent new marine sanctuaries at Mallows Bay.

So, it is wonderful to welcome you all here. The subject matters that you are going to be responsible for are ones that are critically important to our country.

And let me yield to Senator Ricketts for his opening comments and before I introduce our nominees.

STATEMENT OF HON. PETE RICKETTS,
U.S. SENATOR FROM NEBRASKA

Senator RICKETTS. Great. Thank you very, very much, Mr. Chairman. And I would add my thanks to all of you for your willingness to serve our country, and for your families, for the sacrifices you go through. As Governor, I did numerous trade missions around the world, and I really appreciate all the Foreign Service people who helped us on those, and the sacrifices you make to be able to represent our country. So, thank you very much.

As the Chairman said, you know, these are not easy jobs, especially as we think about the time that is so critical for the United States to advance our interests and the security of the American people around the globe. Today, we are considering nominees for five important positions, all of which require you to contend with some of the greatest challenges facing the U.S. in foreign policy and national security than we have seen maybe in our history.

Ms. Adams-Smith, this is a critical year for Moldova. This fall, Moldova will hold both a presidential election and a referendum on EU aspirations. Moldova continues to face Russian hybrid warfare as Putin stops at nothing to replace the pro-western leadership with new government bought and paid for by the Kremlin. We cannot let Putin play puppeteer with the future of Moldova, and we must do all we can to support western nations.

However, Moldova's future is also dependent on the success of Ukraine on the battlefield. The only thing standing between Moldova and the Russian attack is the Ukraine army, which again, one of the reasons why it is important we continue to support Ukraine.

Ambassador Fitrell, while the Seychelles might be Africa's smallest country in terms of population, our 27-year absence in Victoria has created a vacuum the PRC has been more than happy to fill, and so the Seychelles has a significant geopolitical significance.

If confirmed, you will face a difficult task of reestablishing an embassy basically from scratch. That is not going to be easy. We cannot waste any more time. But appreciate your willingness to do this. This is vital that we get it done right, and your efforts will send a clear signal to the Seychelles that we are back and here to stay.

Ms. Horst, for you, Sri Lanka has been a poster child for the dangers of the debt trap diplomacy of the PRC. Nothing illustrates us more than the Port of Hambantota—did I get that pronounced right? Good enough, which was eventually forfeited to the PRC under that 99-year lease. Reckless spending fueled by loans from the PRC and others has created an economic crisis in Sri Lanka, and it is struggling to dig itself out of that.

What happens in Sri Lanka illustrates why the United States must provide viable alternatives to the PRC, and I am encouraged by DFC's recent efforts to finance a shipping container terminal in the Port of Colombo. It is these types of strategic investments that were envisioned when the DFC was set up as a way to effectively push back on the PRC's Belt and Road Initiative.

Ms. Sarri, OES has a broad portfolio, so I will not have enough time to cover everything you would oversee. However, one area I did want to touch upon is the science and technology agreements, and in particular, our science and technology agreement with the PRC.

For years, we have seen the PRC exploit research cooperation with the United States to steal technology and support its domestic civil-military fusion objectives. The Biden administration is currently renegotiating SDA with the PRC. Simply put, I, and of course, others, have significant concerns. That is why I have introduced common sense legislation that would ensure Congress is able to provide necessary oversight over any deal that is reached.

I hope you would agree with me that when it comes time for something that is important, the Administration should show its work force. This legislation passed unanimously out of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, and Mr. Chairman, I hope the committee will do the same.

And then Dr. Nkengasong—OK, how close was I on that? The position you were nominated for was created with the intent to help us get ahead of the next pandemic. I would note that when Covid first began to spread from the PRC, it was high income countries that were hit first and hardest. It is in these countries we need to lead with diplomatic engagement, not development assistance.

And in the PRC at the WHO, we need strong diplomats capable of negotiating access for investigators. If confirmed, I hope that you can apply lessons learned and much needed diplomatic leadership so that we can properly prepare for whenever the next pandemic virus occurs.

And again, thank you all very much for your willingness to serve. I look forward to hearing your testimony and the questions.

And Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Ricketts.

There is a common theme among all five of you; you all have an incredible experience on foreign policy, and your commitment to foreign policy. Three of you are career. The other two have extensive experience in the foreign policy agenda. So, you all have made a career out of foreign policy, and we thank you for that commitment.

I will introduce you in the order in which you will be speaking. Dr. John Nkengasong, who was confirmed by U.S. Senate as the U.S. Global AIDS Coordinator on May 5, 2022. He also leads the

State Department's Bureau of Global Health Security and Diplomacy. That bureau serves as the department's coordinating body for work when strengthening global health security to prevent, detect, and respond to infectious diseases, including HIV AIDS, as well as elevates and integrates global health security as a core component of the U.S. national security and foreign policy.

Elizabeth Horst is the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary and Deputy Assistant Secretary responsible for Pakistan. She came from the U.S. Embassy in Berlin, where she was a Minister-Counselor for Public Diplomacy for Mission Germany. She is a member of the Senior Foreign Service. Previously, she served as SCA's Director of Security, Transnational Affairs and Assistance Office. As Charge d'Affaires and Deputy Chief of Mission of U.S. Embassy in Estonia, she focused on transatlantic security on NATO's Eastern Flank.

Next, we have Troy Fitrell, a career member of the Senior Foreign Service, Class of Counselor. Most recently, held the position of Director of the Office of West African Affairs at the Department of State. He serves as the Deputy Chief of Mission at the U.S. Embassy in Ethiopia, as Deputy Director of the department's Office of Southern African Affairs, and Deputy Director of the Office of International Security Cooperation in the Bureau of Political Military Affairs.

He was senior advisor to the United States Special Envoy for the Great Lakes of Africa, coordinating U.S. policy on the cross-border security, political, and economic issues in the Great Lakes region.

Welcome.

Kelly Ann-Smith is the Deputy Chief of Mission at the U.S. Mission to the European Union. She arrived in Brussels in July 2021. Ms. Adams-Smith is a career diplomat in the U.S. Senior Foreign Service with the rank of minister-counselor. Before arriving at Brussels, Ms. Adams-Smith served as Senior Coordinator for National Security Affairs in the office of Vice President Kamala Harris. Previously she served as Charge d'Affaires and Deputy Chief of Mission at the U.S. Embassy in Prague.

Welcome.

And Sarri, you already have been introduced by Senator Reed, but we welcome you here, and we thank you very much for your willingness to serve.

So, with that, let us start with Dr. Nkengasong. Your testimonies will be made part of our record. You may proceed as you wish. We ask that you try to summarize your comments, and it is to leave time for us to be able to ask you questions.

STATEMENT OF HON. JOHN N. NKENGASONG, OF GEORGIA, NOMINATED TO BE AMBASSADOR-AT-LARGE FOR GLOBAL HEALTH SECURITY AND DIPLOMACY

Mr. NKENGASONG. Chairman Cardin, Ranking Member Risch, and members of the committee, I come before you today at a pivotal time as one of the greatest threats to our national security is the potential for a next pandemic.

The COVID–19 pandemic taught us that we are more connected and vulnerable than we ever thought. More than 1 million Americans lost their lives, and the U.S. economy suffered over $14 tril-

lion in damage. Climate crisis, rapid movement of people, misinformation, disinformation, are all making our jobs harder. U.S. leadership matters now more than ever.

Last year, Secretary Blinken, in close collaboration with Congress, established the Bureau of Global Health Security and Diplomacy. This bureau is organized around four core missions. One, to lead diplomatic engagement on global health security. Two, to leverage and help to coordinate U.S. foreign assistance while promoting international cooperation for health threats. Three, to elevate global health security as a top national security and foreign policy priority for our country.

We have already made tremendous progress. Let me highlight three examples. First, we continue to make progress in the fight against HIV AIDS. Congress's bipartisan support for PEPFAR has enabled us to save over 25 million lives.

The Bureau has demonstrated success in leveraging the PEPFAR platform to address health security threats such as Ebola, Marburg, and mpox. I look forward to working with this committee in a bipartisan fashion to pass a clean 5 years PEPFAR reauthorization in 2025.

Second, I recently chaired the Pandemic Fund Strategic Committee, which will launch the 5-year strategy later this month. And last, the bureau launched the Foreign Ministry Channel for Global Health Security in March, which will work to coordinate corporate, collaborate, and communicate effectively with other like-minded countries to fight infectious disease threats.

It is not a question of if a new health threat will emerge. It is a matter of when. The Bureau stands by to lead diplomatic efforts to support these goals.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Nkengasong follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF JOHN N. NKENGASONG

Chairman Cardin, Ranking Member Ricketts, and Members of the Committee, it is an honor to be with you today as the first nominee to serve as Ambassador-At-Large for Global Health Security and Diplomacy at the Department of State.

I come before you today at a pivotal time in our country's and the world's security. As we navigate the current crises in Ukraine, the Middle East, and the ever-evolving challenges with China, one of the greatest threats to our national and global security is the next potential global pandemic.

The COVID–19 pandemic taught us that we are more connected and more vulnerable than we ever thought. In fact, within just a few weeks, the COVID–19 virus had spread to 165 countries. More than 1 million Americans have tragically lost their lives, and the U.S. economy has suffered over 14 trillion dollars in damages from COVID–19 alone, which is more than twice the amount of our annual Federal budget.

We also know that health threats are becoming more frequent and more severe. The number of disease outbreaks from zoonotic spillover—that means animal to human disease transmission like Ebola, mpox, and Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza—is increasing roughly 5 percent every year. One million people are estimated to have died due to anti-microbial resistance in 2019, and these deaths are predicted to overtake the deaths due to cancer globally by 2050.

The growing climate crisis, ongoing rapid movement of people, and increasing risks of misinformation and disinformation are all creating the conditions for a more challenging response to future disease threats at home and abroad.

U.S. leadership matters now more than ever. Our ability to collaborate, coordinate, cooperate, and communicate with other countries, including those with whom we often disagree, will be what protects us when the next global health security threat emerges.

And as the world's leading global health donor through our annual investment of more than 10 billion dollars per year in lifesaving programs, including the PEPFAR program, we have a unique role in using a combination of our diplomacy and foreign assistance to ensure the world is better prepared to respond to health threats.

Two decades ago, under President Bush and with the support of Congress, the State Department assumed leadership of PEPFAR to address the HIV AIDS pandemic. In August 2023, Secretary Blinken, in close collaboration with Congress, established the Bureau for Global Health Security and Diplomacy.

This Bureau brings together our collective global health security assets across the State Department organized around the core mission of:

(1) One, leading diplomatic engagement on global health security,

(2) Two, leveraging and helping to coordinate U.S. foreign assistance while promoting international cooperation on health threats, and

(3) Three, elevating global health security as a top national security and foreign policy priority across our missions in 195 countries around the world.

Since the Bureau's August 2023 launch, we have already made tremendous progress. We continue to sustain the progress in the fight against HIV AIDS and accelerate the response to one of the world's most significant health security threats across 55 countries. Congress's bipartisan reauthorization of PEPFAR has enabled us to save up to 25 million lives and reaching a record 20.47 million people on lifesaving HIV treatment, with a plan to reach 23 million by the end of 2025.

The Bureau has demonstrated success in leveraging the PEPFAR platform to address other health security threats including outbreaks of Ebola, Marburg, and the ongoing mpox outbreak in Central Africa.

The Bureau is also able to tap into the full power of our diplomatic teams across the State Department to elevate HIV AIDS as a political priority and sustain our gains—I look forward to working with this committee—in continued strong bipartisan fashion—to pass a clean 5-year PEPFAR reauthorization in 2025.

As part of our diplomatic leadership on global health security issues, last year I assumed the role as primary U.S. representative to the Pandemic Fund designed to strengthen pandemic preparedness capacities of the most vulnerable countries around the world. I recently chaired the Pandemic Fund's strategy committee, and the strategy will be launched later this month, aimed at addressing critical gaps in pandemic preparedness capacity globally.

To embed health security in our foreign policy, the Bureau launched the Foreign Ministry Channel for Global Health Security in March. This group of 18 countries has committed to working together on establishing strong early warning systems, countering mis- and disinformation, and enabling access to critical medical countermeasures during health emergencies.

I conclude by reminding this committee of one central truth: It is not a question of "if" a new health threat will emerge—it is a matter of "when." U.S. leadership is critical, and the Bureau stands ready to lead diplomatic efforts in support of these goals. Thank you, Chairman Cardin, and Ranking Member Ricketts, and I look forward to your questions.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much for your comments.

Ms. Horst.

STATEMENT OF ELIZABETH K. HORST, 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 DEMOCRATIC SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF SRI LANKA

Ms. HORST. Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Ricketts, and distinguished members of the committee, thank you for holding this hearing. I am honored to be here today as the President's nominee for U.S. Ambassador to Sri Lanka.

I started my diplomatic career in South Asia more than 20 years ago and have long championed fundamental U.S. principles, including respect for human rights and economic freedoms. If confirmed,

I look forward to working with Congress to advance U.S. interest in Sri Lanka.

I would like to thank a few special people, most importantly, my husband, Colonel J. P. Gresh. He is my anchor and my joy, and we have built our lives around a shared love for public service and adventure. Five countries, four dogs, 15 years and counting. We are joined by my sister Sarah Horst and my nieces Bailey Evans and Kate Evans. And I hope that being in the Senate today inspires them on their own path of public service.

I also want to thank my parents, my father, Dr. Jim Horst, who taught me empathy. And my mother, Reverend Dr. Judith Stone, who taught me generosity, qualities that have served me as a diplomat and a leader.

Sri Lanka has been a vital partner to the United States in the Indo-Pacific region for over 76 years, and if confirmed, I would focus on three main pillars of U.S. interests: Broadening economic cooperation, bolstering security interests, and deepening ties with people across the entire country.

Sri Lanka has shown resilience and continues to make steady progress on economic growth. As the country regains its economic footing, we will continue to support Sri Lanka's people. Sri Lanka's strategic significance in the Indian Ocean calls for cooperation to address security challenges and competitors. If confirmed, I will reiterate our shared commitment to a stable, free, and open Indo-Pacific region, and the rules based international order.

Sri Lanka has a vibrant civil society, and I look forward to expanding our people to people ties, including with the dynamic Sri Lankan American community. I will support members of marginalized populations, accountability, truth and reconciliation, and transparency and justice.

Let me close by noting a fourth pillar, the true source of diplomatic success: The people at U.S. Embassy in Colombo. If confirmed, I will empower our inter-agency team and local staff to make a difference in our bilateral relationship and practice a foreign policy that benefits the American people.

I look forward to working with Congress on these priorities.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Horst follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF ELIZABETH K. HORST

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Ricketts, and distinguished Members of the committee, thank you for holding this hearing. I am honored to be here today as the President's nominee for U.S. Ambassador to Sri Lanka. I am grateful to be considered for this trusted and special responsibility. Senators, thank you for considering my nomination.

I started my diplomatic career in South Asia more than 20 years ago and have long a been a champion of fundamental U.S. principles, including respect for human rights and economic freedom. Our American ability to prosper and grow while still protecting the democratic values enshrined in our Constitution is what sets us apart and makes us an example to follow. If confirmed, I look forward to working with Congress to support and advance U.S. interests.

Before I get into more detail about our relationship with Sri Lanka, I'd like to acknowledge and thank a few of the people who helped me reach this hearing today. Most importantly, my husband Army COL JP Gresh. He is my anchor and my joy. Our home embodies civ-mil cooperation, and together, we've built our lives around a shared love for public service and adventure: five countries, four dogs, fifteen years and counting.

We are joined today by my sister, Sarah Horst, who never fails to make me laugh or provide the honest, incisive, feedback that only a sister can give. My two nieces,

Bailey Evans and Kate Evans, are here as well, and I hope that being in the Senate today inspires them on their own path of public service. I also want to thank my parents: my father, Dr. Jim Horst, who taught me empathy, and my mother Reverend Dr. Judith Stone, who taught me generosity. These qualities have served me well as a diplomat and leader in the U.S. Foreign Service.

Sri Lanka is a vital partner to the United States in the Indo-Pacific region, and it has been for over 76 years. If confirmed, I would focus on three main pillars of the U.S.-Sri Lanka relationship: broadening our economic cooperation, bolstering our security interests, and deepening our ties with Sri Lanka's diverse and vibrant population.

Sri Lanka's economy has great potential. Strengthening trade relations, encouraging private sector-led growth, and promoting inclusive innovation and entrepreneurship are key aspects of my vision for enhancing our economic ties.

Sri Lanka is a resilient country. While still healing from a civil war that ended in 2009 and from the political and economic crises of 2022, Sri Lanka continues to make steady progress in the face of remarkable internal and external challenges. During the crisis of 2022, the United States provided immediate food aid and chemical fertilizers to check hunger and ensure a good harvest. Today, the United States continues to provide food for school children across the country. As Sri Lanka regains its economic footing and confidence, we will continue to be a strong partner to support the Sri Lankan people.

Sri Lanka's strategic significance in the Indian Ocean and proximity to global maritime lanes calls for close collaboration in promoting a secure Indo-Pacific region. Our partnership is critical to addressing new security challenges and competitors, including countering transnational crime, enhancing maritime security, and responding to natural disasters. If confirmed, I will reiterate our shared commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific region, collaborative maritime security, the rules-based international order, and stability throughout the Indian Ocean.

Sri Lanka has a vibrant civil society, and if confirmed, I look forward to expanding our people-to-people ties, including with the dynamic Sri Lankan American community. I will support members of marginalized populations, accountability, truth and reconciliation, and transparency and justice in Sri Lanka.

Let me close by noting a fourth pillar, the true source of diplomatic success: the people at U.S. Embassy Colombo. If confirmed, I look forward to leading, developing, and empowering our interagency team and local staff to make a difference in our bilateral relationship, and practice a foreign policy that benefits the American people. I look forward to working with Congress to build our important relations with Sri Lanka. Thank you and I look forward to your questions.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much.

We will next hear from Mr. Fitrell.

STATEMENT OF HON. TROY FITRELL, 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 THE SEYCHELLES

Mr. FITRELL. Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Ricketts, members of the committee, I am deeply honored to appear before you today, and grateful to President Biden and Secretary Blinken for the confidence they placed in me as their nominee. I am proud to have my family here today with my wife Catherine, a fellow Foreign Service officer, and my children, Madeline and Sam, who have spent their lives immersed in the Foreign Service as well, including visits to the Seychelles. Sam graduates from Virginia Commonwealth University tomorrow morning. So, this is a pretty special week for us.

We recently reopened an embassy in the Seychelles after shuttering it in 1996. If confirmed, I would be the first Ambassador in residence in Victoria in 28 years. The role having been performed since then by the person credentialed to Mauritius. I previously had the honor to be that person in Mauritius.

And while we had significant success in our bilateral relationship, both sides were keenly aware that the absence of a resident Ambassador was an opportunity cost. If confirmed, it would be the honor of my career to reestablish that position.

Seychelles holds an important place in the Indian Ocean. It strides some of the world's busiest shipping lanes, and the bilateral relationship between our two nations is built on a foundation of shared values and mutual respect.

If confirmed, my top priority would be the safety and security of American citizens that make their way to the Seychelles. But I would also act energetically to promote our other national interests. I would support the democratic process and our partnership in international fora. I would promote economic development, including advocacy for U.S. exports, and further develop our robust security partnership.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Ricketts, and members of the committee for the opportunity to be here. My wife and I are both former Hill staffers, and so I would also like to thank your staffs. I know how hard they work for you and your constituents, and how well they represent you every day.

If confirmed, I look forward to working with you and representing the interests of the American people in the Seychelles, and I hope very much to welcome you there on a visit someday soon. I would be happy to answer any questions you have. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Fitrell follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF TROY FITRELL

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and Members of the Committee, I am deeply honored to appear before you today, and grateful to President Biden and Secretary Blinken for the confidence they have placed in me as their nominee for Ambassador to the Republic of Seychelles. I am proud to have my family here today, with my wife Kathryn, a fellow Foreign Service Officer, and my children Madeleine and Sam, who have spent their lives immersed in the Foreign Service as well, including visits to the Seychelles.

In June of last year, 2023, we reopened an embassy in Seychelles after shuttering it in 1996. If confirmed, I would be the first Ambassador-in-residence in Victoria in 28 years, the role having been performed in the interim by the person credentialed to and residing in Mauritius. I previously had the honor to be that person in Mauritius. While we had significant successes in our bilateral relationship at that time, both sides were keenly aware that the absence of a resident Ambassador in the Seychelles was an opportunity cost for what we could achieve together. If confirmed, it would be the honor of my career to reestablish the position.

Seychelles holds an important place in the Indian Ocean, astride some of the world's busiest shipping lanes, and the bilateral relationship between our two nations is built on a foundation of shared values, mutual respect, and a commitment to fostering peace, stability, and prosperity. If confirmed, my top priority would be the safety and security of the American citizens that make their way to the Seychelles, but I would also act energetically to promote our other national interests.

In 2020, Seychelles held free and fair elections and power peacefully transitioned to an opposition party for the first time since independence 46 years ago. This showed the world that the Seychellois are fiercely committed to democracy, and if confirmed, I would work tirelessly with them to solidify their democratic institutions.

The United States and the Seychelles have a longstanding and significant security relationship. Whether countering piracy off the Horn of Africa or fighting the scourge of illicit narcotics trafficking that plagues the region, Seychelles understands the stakes and has joined its resources and efforts to ours. By continuing to work together with the international community, we are actively contributing to the stability and security of the Indian Ocean region.

I would also work to enhance economic ties between our nations, exploring opportunities for trade and investment that will benefit both Seychelles and the United States. During my previous experience accredited to the Seychelles, I recognized that we had no formal bilateral links in the economic sphere, so I negotiated, and on behalf of the United States, signed an Investment Incentive Agreement between our countries. This remains the guiding document for our economic and commercial engagement, and I look forward to using it to encourage American private sector activity in the Indian Ocean. Despite its relatively high per capita income, Seychelles needs support to strengthen its financial system, both to foster reliable economic growth and to push back on those that might wish to exploit the system for illegal purposes. The United States is well-placed to help in these areas, to our mutual benefit.

I would prioritize cooperation on environmental issues, particularly in the areas of marine conservation and the sustainable development of Seychelles' blue economy. Seychelles has been a leader among small island states in sounding the existential threat posed by rising sea levels and an increased frequency of extreme weather events. Our joint efforts can serve as a model for global cooperation in addressing these pressing challenges.

If confirmed as the next U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Seychelles, I will support and encourage the democratic process and our partnership in international political and security fora. I would promote economic development, including advocacy for U.S. exports, support for U.S. investors, and diversification of the Seychellois economy. And I would facilitate educational and cultural interactions between our nations, fostering greater understanding and appreciation for our respective histories, traditions, and values.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, for the opportunity to address you today. My wife and I are both former Hill staffers, and so I would also like to thank your staffs for all they do to support you and your constituents every day. If confirmed, I look forward to working with you in representing the interests of the American people in the Seychelles, and I hope very much to welcome you there on a visit 1 day soon. I am happy to answer any questions.

The CHAIRMAN. I know the staff, though this committee, appreciates that reference to staff, so there is a future after being a staff person here.

[Laughter.]

The CHAIRMAN. I know they appreciate that.

Ms. Adams-Smith.

STATEMENT OF KELLY ADAMS-SMITH, OF NEW JERSEY, 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 MOLDOVA

Ms. ADAMS-SMITH. Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Ricketts, and members of the committee, it is an honor to appear before you today as President Biden's nominee to be the U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Moldova. I am grateful to the President and Secretary Blinken for putting their trust in me, and if confirmed, I pledge to work with this committee to advance the U.S. interests in Moldova.

I would like to thank my husband, Steve, a career Foreign Service officer, and our children, Sophie and Ben, for their support and dedication to public service. I am also grateful to my parents, Ed and Carol, my late mother, Anna, my brother Ed, and my sister, Deborah, who is here today.

Finally, I want to recognize my in-laws, Ginny, and Terry Purvis-Smith. Terry joined the Foreign Service after a full career as a Presbyterian minister. He passed away earlier this week, but I know he would have been so proud if he were here today.

I have dedicated the last 29 years to advancing U.S. interest in Europe with a focus on central and eastern Europe. Support for the western integration of countries in this region is fundamental to U.S. security. This is especially true for Moldova, which faces a moment in history that is filled with great opportunity and tremendous risk. If confirmed, I will be a responsible steward of U.S. resources and will prioritize the security of U.S. citizens in Moldova.

The government of Moldova faces a window of opportunity to secure the country's western orientation. Russia's aggression in Ukraine has forced Moldova to confront significant security, humanitarian, and energy impacts. With U.S. and European assistance, Moldova has managed these threats and embarked on an ambitious reform agenda. Its success has made it even more of a target for Russian malign influence.

If confirmed, I will mobilize our personnel and resources to support Moldova's efforts to protect its democracy and enhance its security. I will also support U.S. efforts to strengthen the capacity of Moldovan institutions to combat corruption, and I will use the knowledge, experience, and contacts gained from five tours in EU member states to ensure our actions and assistance support Moldova's accession path, making it a stronger partner for the United States.

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Adams-Smith follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF KELLY ADAMS-SMITH

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Ricketts, and distinguished Members of the Committee, it is an honor to appear before you today as President Biden's nominee to be the U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Moldova. I am immensely grateful to President Biden and Secretary Blinken for putting their trust in me at this critical time. If confirmed, I pledge to work closely with this Committee to advance U.S. interests and strengthen our strategic partnership with Moldova.

I would not be here today without the love and support of my family, friends, and colleagues. In particular, I would like to thank my husband Steve, who is also a career Foreign Service Officer, and our two children, Sophie and Ben. Their dedication to public service and the support they have given me through multiple Foreign Service tours has been inspirational. I am also grateful to my parents Edward and Carol Adams, my sister and brother Debra and Ed, and my late mother Anna Cramer. They always championed my education and career in service and never stopped believing in the American dream that allowed this Jersey girl with working class origins to represent the United States abroad. Finally, I also want to recognize my mother-in-law Ginny Purvis-Smith and my late father-in-law Terry Purvis-Smith, who passed away this week. Terry also served in the Foreign Service and would have loved to attend today.

I have dedicated 29 years in government service to advancing and protecting U.S. interests in Europe, with a focus on Central and Eastern Europe. I am convinced that support for the freedom, independence, and western integration of countries in this region is fundamental to U.S. security. This is especially true for a country like Moldova, which faces a moment in history that is filled with great opportunity and tremendous risk. If confirmed, I look forward to leading the talented team at Embassy Chisinau, who work tirelessly to advance the U.S.-Moldova relationship. I pledge to be a responsible steward of U.S. resources, and I will prioritize the safety and security of those in Embassy Chisinau and of U.S. citizens in Moldova.

The Government of Moldova faces a historic geopolitical window of opportunity to secure the country's democracy, security, and western orientation. Russia's war of aggression in Moldova's neighbor, Ukraine, has forced Moldova to confront significant security, humanitarian, and energy impacts. With U.S. and European assistance, Moldova has managed these threats and welcomed refugees while pushing forward on an ambitious reform agenda designed to lead to western integration. At the

same time, Moldova's success in the face of these challenges has made it even more of a target for Russian malign influence.

Since Russia's further invasion of Ukraine, the United States has significantly expanded its support for Moldova's resilience. I want to thank the Committee for its strong bipartisan leadership and support for this essential assistance. If confirmed, I will mobilize our personnel, resources, and partnerships to continue to support Moldova's efforts to protect its democracy, increase its prosperity, and enhance its security in the face of Russian destabilization attempts.

The western-oriented, democratic future Moldova seeks will not be possible without continued, significant progress in advancing rule of law and countering corruption. Understanding that corruption within Moldova's institutions has undermined political stability and economic growth in the past, the current government has made justice sector reform a top priority. If I am confirmed, I will support U.S. efforts to strengthen the capacity of Moldovan government institutions to investigate and prosecute crimes of corruption.

Moldova has made more progress on its EU accession path in the past 2 years than it has in all its post-Soviet history. Having served in five EU member states and from my current assignment as Deputy Chief of Mission at the U.S. Mission to the European Union, I am convinced that there is no more efficient way for a country like Moldova to achieve the future it seeks than to go through the rigorous process of EU accession. If I am confirmed, I will use my EU knowledge, experience, and contacts to ensure our actions and assistance support Moldova's accession path, making it a stronger partner for the United States. Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to your questions.

The CHAIRMAN. And thank you for your comments.

Ms. Sarri.

STATEMENT OF KRISTEN SARRI, OF MARYLAND, NOMINATED TO BE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF STATE FOR OCEANS AND INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL AND SCIENTIFIC AFFAIRS

Ms. SARRI. Thank you, Chairman Cardin, Ranking Member Ricketts, Senator Kaine for welcoming me today. And Senator Cardin, thank you so much for your leadership on Mallows Bay.

It is a privilege to be considered as the President's nominee for Assistant Secretary of State for Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs. I want to thank my family and Senator Reed for their continued support of me and my career, and members of the committee and their staff for taking time to meet with me.

Many of the environmental challenges we face are global, and they require strong partnerships and alliances to address. If confirmed, my focus will be on working on issues where OES leadership can have a strong impact for the American people, our allies and partners, and the planet.

I would like to address three priority areas. First, pollution of all types harms human health, the environment, and economic growth. One pressing global issue is plastics pollution. If confirmed, I would work with Federal agencies, Congress, stakeholders, and other countries on a strong, legally binding agreement to address the global plastic threat, and to work to strengthen implementation of existing agreements and partnerships to address plastic and other types of pollution.

Second, nature provides critical resources that nourish us and improve our quality of life. Loss of marine and terrestrial habitat and species increase the risk of conflict and instability. If confirmed, I will prioritize working with the committee, Congress, and other Federal agencies to advance policies that address nature

crimes, protect environmental defenders, and help protect and restore natural ecosystems.

Third, space activities are essential to our way of life, from enhancing economic opportunity, to helping us find our way home. If confirmed, I would like to work to promote peaceful cooperation in space and its sustainable use in the future.

OES's work is integral in achieving the U.S. environmental, economic, and national security objectives. If confirmed, I commit to maintaining strong lines of communications and cooperation between OES, this committee, and Congress.

Thank you for considering my nomination, and I look forward to answering your questions.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Sarri follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF KRISTEN SARRI

Thank you, Chairman Cardin, Ranking Member Ricketts, and Members of the Committee for welcoming me today. It is a privilege to be considered by this Committee as the President's nominee for Assistant Secretary of State for Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs, or OES for short.

I am grateful to President Biden for nominating me, and for the trust he and Secretary Blinken place in me. And I am thrilled to have the chance to serve my country, if confirmed.

I want to thank Senator Reed for his support of my nomination and his encouragement throughout my career. His dedication to service, his commitment to improving the lives of others, and his work ethic serve as the model for me.

I am grateful to my family—Drew, Cathy, Antulio, Gabriela, and Alex—who are a constant source of support and inspiration for me. And to my mom and dad who instilled in me the value of public service and ignited my interest in protecting the environment, for both people and nature.

Finally, I want to thank Members of the Committee and their staffs for taking the time to meet with me. If I am confirmed, I look forward to continuing our conversations and strengthening the vital relationship between OES and this Committee.

Throughout my professional life, I have sought opportunities to promote community development, environmental stewardship, and job creation by building partnerships and working to strengthen the effectiveness of government. In each of my professional roles, I was fortunate to work with Members of Congress, their staffs, and public officials who focused on how government should work best to serve the American people and support our economy and environment. I learned from them the value of strong bipartisan cooperation, developing practical solutions to problems, and gaining other perspectives when working to shape policy. It is these lessons and experiences that I carry with me and that shape my work.

Now is a critical time for international cooperation on environmental and scientific issues. Many of the challenges we face are global and require strong partnerships and alliances to address. If confirmed, my focus will be working on issues where OES leadership can have a strong impact for the American people, our allies and partners, and the planet. I would like to address three priority areas.

Pollution, of all types, harms human health, the environment, and economic growth. OES plays a vital role in developing foreign policy to protect our air, water, and land from pollution. One pressing global issue is plastics. The international community is coming together to negotiate a new global agreement on combating plastic pollution. If confirmed, I would work with our Federal domestic agencies, private and non-profit stakeholders, and other countries on a strong agreement to address the global threat of plastic pollution to people and the environment, and work to strengthen implementation of existing agreements and partnerships to prevent this and other types of pollution.

Nature provides critical resources that nourish us, improve our quality of life, and fuel community development. One million species could disappear in the next decade unless we act to conserve, protect, and restore ecosystems critical to human well-being. It is in our own interests, and OES has a huge role to play.

Further, the ties between conservation and security are become increasingly clear. Loss of habitats and species increase the risk of conflict and instability. Nature crimes, such as illegal logging, mining, and wildlife trade, and illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing, undermine the rule of law, and hinder our efforts to con-

serve species and their habitats and to protect human rights and public health. If confirmed, I will prioritize working with this Committee, Congress, and other Federal agencies to advance policies that address nature crimes, protect environmental defenders, and help protect and restore natural ecosystems.

OES's work extends into the Earth's atmosphere and beyond. Space activities are essential to our way of life—from enhancing economic opportunity to helping us find our way home. Last year, Secretary Blinken released the first-ever Strategic Framework for Space Diplomacy to advance space cooperation. If confirmed, I would work to strengthen U.S. leadership in space to promote peaceful cooperation and its sustainable use in the future.

OES's strength is its people. They are experts in their fields and leaders on international efforts to conserve and restore the environment, build resilience to global challenges, and advance cooperation in science and space. The bureau's work is integral in achieving the United States' environmental, economic, and national security objectives. If confirmed, I would work with staff to continue this strong tradition, and I commit to maintaining strong lines of communication and cooperation between the OES, this Committee, and Congress.

Again, thank you for considering my nomination. I look forward to answering your questions.

The CHAIRMAN. Let me thank all five of you for your appearance here today and your comments.

I have standard questions that are asked to all nominees for positions. We would appreciate going down the line, answering it either yes or no.

The first question is, do you agree to appear before this committee and make officials from your office available to the committee and designated staff when invited?

Mr. NKENGASONG. Yes.

Ms. HORST. Yes.

Mr. FITRELL. Yes.

Ms. ADAMS-SMITH. Yes.

Ms. SARRI. Yes.

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

Mr. NKENGASONG. Yes.

Ms. HORST. Yes.

Mr. FITRELL. Yes.

Ms. ADAMS-SMITH. Yes.

Ms. SARRI. Yes.

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

Mr. NKENGASONG. Yes.

Ms. HORST. Yes.

Mr. FITRELL. Yes.

Ms. ADAMS-SMITH. Yes.

Ms. SARRI. Yes.

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

Mr. NKENGASONG. Yes.

Ms. HORST. Yes.

Mr. FITRELL. Yes.

Ms. ADAMS-SMITH. Yes.

Ms. SARRI. Yes.

The CHAIRMAN. You are all off to a really good start.

[Laughter.]

The CHAIRMAN. I will recognize Senator Kaine for questioning.

Senator KAINE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and congratulations to all the nominees.

And Mr. Fitrell, VCU is my hometown school, and I congratulate you on your son's graduation tomorrow.

Just sticking with you for a second. You know, it is interesting, the history of the U.S. not having an embassy in the Seychelles. It was a cost savings move. Seychelles is a pretty important country. They are classified as free in the Freedom in the World 2023 index of governance conditions.

Seychelles has enjoyed significant economic success. It has long had the highest per capita GDP in Africa, classed by the World Bank as a high income country. I sometimes think in the U.S., we tend to focus a lot of attention on problems without rewarding success. And that we might be better at magnifying success if we work with the successful, and shine a spotlight on their success, and then use that to create a desire in the region to be as successful as this country.

And so, the fact that the Seychelles's embassy was closed in the 1990s just as a cost savings move, and then served from Mauritius, is kind of a bit of evidence that, I think, fits into a pattern that we have of not paying attention to successful countries.

I am so glad that the Biden administration decided that this was a relationship that was worthy of the U.S. reestablishing and having managed the responsibility from Mauritius earlier in your career. I mean, you are the perfect person to have the opportunity to reopen this, and I understand that this has also been very well received by the Seychelles, that the U.S. is upgrading the relationship in this way. Am I correct about that?

Mr. FITRELL. Yes. Thank you for the question, Senator. I could not agree more.

Yes, the host government is extremely pleased that we have finally returned to the Seychelles. When I was credentialed there and representing the United States on my visits, I never had a meeting when it was not mentioned, "Why do you not have an embassy here?"

I have spent a good part of the last 15 years advocating for this. And understand, that that predates the return to a true constitutional democracy with the change of power between parties. But it just simply became even more important since then, as you said, to recognize success, to be part of that, to encourage it, and yes, to find ways to reward that. We have national interests there, and it is important to be there in order to exercise those interests.

Senator KAINE. I generally think that we do much better in trying to encourage success if we are not lecturing others on how to be successful if there are examples in their region of success that they can look at and draw lessons from. And I am excited that you will be in this position with this upgraded responsibility.

Ms. Sarri, I want to come to you now in your position on an oceans question. I am the chair of the Americas Subcommittee here on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. And I am really worried about the illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing, primarily by China, primarily in the Pacific.

Talk a little bit about from the State Department perspective, what you might do to prioritize dealing with that challenge.

Ms. SARRI. Senator, thank you very much for that question.

As you pointed out, IUU fishing impacts ocean health. It is one of the largest causes of overfishing. And so, it means it is a food security threat to a number of countries. It is an economic threat to our fishermen, and it is a national security and human rights threat because of forced labor and human rights abuses that take place.

And first of all, I want to say thank you to Congress for the Maritime SAFE Act. We need a whole of government approach, and that starts from when the fish gets on a boat all the way to when it ends up on a consumer's plate here in the U.S.

And so, there is a lot of work to do through the interagency process to elevate illegal, or IUU fishing. It would be a priority of mine. I would look forward to working with this committee and Congress to see if there are even more tools that we could use to address IUU.

Senator KAINE. We would love to work with you on that.

One last question that I was not intending to ask, but you mentioned space in your opening testimony. And obviously, a concern about international cooperation and space is with more and more satellites, more and more platforms up in space, the risks of collisions that would damage investments, but also create debris that could cause all kinds of other challenges. It is the classic kind of a problem for which there has to be some global norms, and rules, and solutions to keep everybody's investments safe.

Other parts of the U.S. Government are involved in this, but what role would your office have in trying to find the right rules of the road for space?

Ms. SARRI. OES works with the Department of Defense, NASA, FCC, on issues around potential marine debris. OES's specific role is around the peaceful use of space. It is about trying to do best practices in order to avoid collisions. If orbital debris does take place, you know, working with the country if it is our debris, or if it is their debris as well. So, it is really around space diplomacy efforts.

Senator KAINE. OK. Thank you.

I yield back, Mr. Chair.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Senator Ricketts.

Senator RICKETTS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Dr. Nkengasong, the University of Nebraska Medical Center has one of three biocontainment facilities in the country and the only federally funded quarantine space. If this is not a commitment I am asking you to make, I am just saying that if you are confirmed, I would recommend visiting.

They were instrumental in taking some of Ebola patients from Africa, Americans who have been infected with Ebola and treating them here in the United States, as well as some of the first Covid patients as well. So, certainly, worth your time, if you are confirmed, to make a visit. Not asking you to make a commitment, but keep in mind.

Ms. Sarri, so within OES, the Office of Science and Technology Cooperation overseas, our STAs, as I was talking about before, the U.S. has 60 of these with countries like Canada and Japan. However, I am sure you agree that the STA with the People's Republic of China is different. And in my opinion, frankly, China's been playing us for a fool for three decades now.

It is an adversary. They practice civil-military fusion to leverage their civilian and commercial resource for military and defense purposes. And the evidence suggests they are going to continue to look for opportunities to exploit partnerships organized under the STA to advance their military objectives.

In February, the Biden administration and Beijing agreed to extend their STA for another 6 months to continue negotiations. So, I want to ask you a few simple questions that I hope we can agree on. Do you believe that Congress should be able to provide the necessary oversight on an STA with the PRC?

Ms. SARRI. Senator, thank you very much for your questions and expressing the concerns you have with STA with PRC. I appreciate that. I am aware that there is a notification requirement in the Appropriations Bill, and yes, I do think that Congress should be consulted as we look through a new renewal of the STA with PRC.

Senator RICKETTS. Right. If the Administration were to finalize negotiations on a new STA with the PRC, do you believe Congress should receive detailed justification on what was agreed to and why it is in our national security interest before the agreement goes into effect?

Ms. SARRI. Senator, if confirmed, I would be happy to make sure that we are fully briefing your staff and other interested staff in the STA.

Senator RICKETTS. Great, thank you.

Do you believe that any specific text of any negotiated agreement should have clear, defined guardrails on what are permissible research areas for collaboration and what are not, and would you agree that we want to make clear that areas of dual use concerns should be made off limits?

Ms. SARRI. Senator, if confirmed, I would want to talk to the State Department and their lawyers about what can go into an STA. I do not know if there are restrictions like that. I am used to it, kind of, putting guardrails on how China and the U.S. would work together versus specifically saying what each could or could not do. So, if confirmed, I would be happy to get back to you specifically on an STA, including types of research that could or could not take place.

Senator RICKETTS. Great. Thank you.

I am going to switch gears on you just a little bit here. The U.S. Office of Ocean and Polar Affairs is responsible for formulating and implementing U.S. policy on international issues concerning the ocean, the Arctic, and the Antarctic.

As you know, prior to Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine, the U.S. collaborated with Russia on Arctic climate research. However, soon after the invasion, that collaboration, rightfully, stopped. Since that time, Putin's war has continued to rage on. Tens of thousands of innocent Ukrainians have been killed. Thousands of Ukrainian children have been abducted. Millions of Ukrainians

have become refugees, and countless Ukrainians have endured brutal human rights abuses.

Do you believe that it should remain our policy that the United States will not collaborate with Russia on any research in the Arctic until Putin ends his war in Ukraine?

Ms. SARRI. Senator, I agree with that. Yes.

Senator RICKETTS. Great. Thank you.

Russia, obviously, is not the only adversary we have to worry about in the Arctic. The PRC has a self-proclaimed near Arctic state—this is crazy. It has expanded its presence there as well.

For decades, Russia has actively excluded the PRC in other non-Arctic countries from playing a role in its backyard. However, since Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine and Putin's "no limits partnership" with Xi, Russia has been forced to embrace and increase PRC role in the Arctic.

Last year, we saw the PRC begin to send personnel to research stations located in a Norway svalbard and in Iceland, after a lengthy hiatus we saw Russian Coast Guard sign an Arctic cooperation agreement with the China Coast Guard, and we saw the PRCS Polar Research Institute make startling announcement that it plans to deploy listening devices on a large scale in the Arctic Ocean.

In your view, how should the United States respond to the PRCS growing research and other activities in the Arctic? And how should U.S. policy on this question take into account increased cooperation between Russia and the People's Republic of China?

Ms. SARRI. Senator, thanks for that question. I appreciate it.

First of all, about the near Arctic nation, I agree with you. I do not know what a near-Arctic nation is. The government——

Senator RICKETTS. They made that term up, did not they?

Ms. SARRI. Yes. I believe that is the case. You know, Arctic governance should be with the Arctic nations. The U.S. is a very important Arctic nation. There is the Arctic Council which has been the preeminent area for looking at how we manage the Arctic. With Russia's illegal invasion of the Ukraine, the U.S. and other countries paused participation. There are efforts now to continue to do work and not engage in anything that the Russians are taking part in.

I think one of the very significant things that the U.S. recently did was extend its continental shelf. That gave us much more territory actually in the Arctic, which means we have much more control over who can do scientific research, what can actually take place in that.

I think through the Arctic Council and other work with Arctic states that do not include Russia, we have to have a unified front about how we are going to approach the research that is taking place and the threats that it poses to the other Arctic nations.

Senator RICKETTS. Great. Thank you very much, Ms. Sarri.

Ms. SARRI. Thank you.

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

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Dr. Nkengasong, first thank you for mentioning the need for the 5-year reauthorization of the PEPFAR Program. That is something that this committee is very much interested in pursuing. We are

disappointed we have a short term extension. We do believe we need the 5 years, so I am glad to hear you mention that.

The position that you have been nominated to, the Ambassador At Large For Global Health Security and Diplomacy, there will be an interesting relationship that I would like to get your views on. There is a turf issue between the State Department and USAID on health issues. Your responsibility is to the State Department directly. We had the USAID that is engaged also in healthcare issues, and there have been some concern about the mission creep between the two divisions, the full division and USAID.

Can you just tell me how you plan to work with USAID so that the turf differences do not at all impact on our ability to be effective in dealing with global health issues?

Mr. NKENGASONG. Thank you. Thank you, Senator.

I want to assure you that it is very clear once the bureau was launched that what our role will be—we will be leading in three key areas. First of all, is to, as I said earlier, lead with diplomatic engagement with all global health security related issues. Second, to elevate global health security as part of our foreign policy. And last, to coordinate our foreign assistance so that it can help advance our international health cooperation and global health security.

If you look at the recently launched global health security strategy that the White House just released, on page 32 of that document, it clearly defines the roles and responsibilities of silver agencies. A beautiful document, great strategy, and in there outlines 13 functions of what the State Department should be doing in the overall space of global health security.

So, it is very clear that through the interagency collaboration, constantly engaging with USAID, CDC, HHS, and NIH, we will be able to leverage more effectively and coordinate our global health security functions.

The CHAIRMAN. Of course, one of the areas that will help is burden sharing, to have our allies step up and do more than they currently are doing in this global area. The United States is by far the leader on resources. Senator Coons, who chairs the subcommittee on Appropriations to deal with foreign aid will tell you that he does not have enough money. So, if we only have limited dollars available, the competition between money that is going into direct programs at USAID, are going into your agency, are going to be in discussion. How do you assure us that that discussion will be positive and that it will not deter from the working relationship between you and USAID?

Mr. NKENGASONG. Absolutely. Within the new bureau, the Bureau of Global Health Securities and Diplomacy, there is a program side of it, which is the PEPFAR, which you alluded to, and that has existed for the past 21 years with clarity of roles and responsibilities.

The global health security side of that, the new bureau, is mainly around policy coordination and leading with diplomacy. I will give you a good example to substantiate that. Last year in February, if you recall, there was a Marburg outbreak in Equatorial Guinea in Central Africa. None of our agencies were present in that country. The only presence we had was our Ambassador, and he played a

critical role of engaging with the political leadership of that country to enable us to deploy assets to respond to that threat, which includes CDC deployment, USAID deployment, and WHO.

When discussions were tense, where the government of that country said, we do not want any further cooperation, our mission and Ambassador was the only person in country that brokered the relationship. So that is the kind of coordination and leveraging that we hope the new bureau will enable us be more effective in our global health security response.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Ms. Horst, since the Civil War in 2009 in Sri Lanka, there is still been an issue of reconciliation and accountability. There is concern about corruption in the country. There is concern in regards to the human rights. The draconian Online Safety Act is looked at as trying to stifle any dissent in the country. So human rights are going to be front and center in our expectation of our Mission in Sri Lanka.

Can you assure us that that is going to be a key priority of the Mission, and that the U.S. Mission will be there to speak out on behalf of those individuals whose voices are being difficult to be heard in the country today?

Ms. HORST. Senator thank you very much for your question, and I share your concern and your commitment to human rights. And if I am confirmed, I will put accountability, governance, anti-corruption efforts at the forefront of what our Mission will be doing, including working with partners in civil society across Sri Lanka.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Senator Barrasso.

Senator BARRASSO. Thanks so much, Mr. Chairman.

Senator Shaheen, you have just come in? If you would like to go first, that is fine.

Senator SHAHEEN. Feel free.

Senator BARRASSO. OK, thanks.

I would like to talk about the World Health Organization, if we could. The Biden administration has vowed to reform the World Health Organization, but it threw away its leverage early on, in my opinion. The Administration, against the advice of many, rejoined the World Health Organization, gave it $200 million without insisting on a single reform.

In a few weeks, the Administration is expected to commit the United States to two international agreements that would expand the World Health Organization's authority during a global pandemic. Last week, I joined my Republican colleagues in calling on President Biden to reject these agreements, which I believe are harmful.

Yesterday, the UK announced that they will refuse to sign the World Health Organization's Pandemic Accord, saying that they will only support the adoption if it is firmly in the UK's national interest and respects national sovereignty.

December 13 last year, during a hearing held by the Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Pandemic, you said, "This Administration is firmly committed to ensuring that the World Health Organization implements a comprehensive set of organizational reforms, particularly to strengthen its governance, its budgetary and

financial management processes, and to improve oversight to strengthen the organization's efficiency and effectiveness."

You know, instead of focusing on reforming the World Health Organization, the Administration is choosing to hand over U.S. sovereignty to them. We are the United States, not the United Nations. So, the question is, do you commit to ensuring that U.S. sovereignty is not infringed upon?

Mr. NKENGASONG. Senator, let me respond in the affirmative. Absolutely. The sovereignty and security of the United States will not be undermined in this negotiation process. We have been very insistent that there are two articles in the Pandemic Accord discussion that I would like to just reiterate.

Article 3 states clearly that WHO has no authority over sovereign states. Absolutely not. Article 24 of that same negotiation further expands, and it states clearly that the neither the Secretariat of WHO nor the Director General has any authority over any sovereign state in the areas of dictating, telling them what to do in terms of mandate, use of any tools, including vaccines, lockdown, et cetera. I think it is absolutely very clear in Article 24. We will oppose any, any attempts or any perception of that accord that seeks to undermine or is perceived as going to undermine the sovereignty of the United States.

I would just end Senator by saying that the sole purpose for us in the discussion is to protect our national security interests. And there are three things that we are seeking to achieve in this negotiation. One is to ensure that we have capacity globally that can allow us to easily detect, prevent, and control, and respond to disease outbreaks as we know it. A disease outbreak anywhere in the world becomes a threat right here. One million Americans died because of COVID–19.

Second, is to ensure that we have access in a timely fashion to biologic materials, including specimens, data that will allow us to develop vaccines, therapeutics, and diagnostics that will protect us. And last, the ability to distribute those resources in an equitable manner.

Senator BARRASSO. So, following the UK's announcement just yesterday about their refusal to sign, is the UK alone able to block the passage of the Accord? If not, how many other member countries would need to oppose it in order for the Accord to fail?

Mr. NKENGASONG. The Accord, Senator, is being discussed, including as of this morning about several issues, especially areas related to intellectual property, or technology transfer, pathogen access, and sharing, as I indicated.

This accord has been going on the discussions for about 2 years. So, we remain hopeful that countries that are discussing receive value in our collective security, and learn the lessons, as Chairman said, of what Covid taught us about our common vulnerability. So, we just do not exactly know who is going to oppose it or not, but we have to show our leadership. As I said in my introduction, this is the moment for us to show the leadership. We have been a global [unclear] leader over the years, and this is not the moment for us to relent on our leadership.

Senator BARRASSO. Mr. Chairman, can I have one quick last question, and it is to Ms. Kelly Adams-Smith. Moldova's recent, al-

most exclusively reliant on Russian energy. Tuesday, Norway and Moldova signed an agreement to tighten cooperation in their energy sector. Can you tell me the current status of the Moldova's energy grid?

Ms. ADAMS-SMITH. Thank you very much for the question, Senator.

It is true that Moldova was 100 percent dependent on Russia for its energy sources. After the Russian reinvasion of Ukraine, it became clear that that was no longer possible. And the Moldovan government with assistance from the United States and European allies has made some successes in becoming less dependent.

The energy grid, the electricity grid of Moldova is now hooked up to the European grid. USAID is funding an electrical line between Romania and Moldova. And Moldova is now also buying for the first time non-Russian gas, which is an incredibly positive development.

Senator BARRASSO. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. CHAIRMAN. Senator Shaheen.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and good morning.

Congratulations to each of you on your nominations.

Ms. Adams-Smith, I want to begin with you because I had the opportunity to travel to Moldova for the first time back in February, and I was very impressed with the commitment of the Moldovans we talked to about joining the EU and looking West, and concern about what is happening in the war in Ukraine and what Russia is doing.

Also met with President Sandu, Chisinau, and she shared her focus on judicial reforms and how important she thinks that is ahead of the upcoming presidential elections. So, and I think rightfully so, that without a reformed judiciary, it will be very hard for Moldova to continue the reforms that they need to make.

So, can you talk about what more we can do, what more you would do if confirmed to help support Moldova as they are looking at these particularly the judicial reforms?

Ms. ADAMS-SMITH. Senator, thank you very much for the question.

Our assistance has focused on helping the Moldovan government improve its rule of law and fight anti-corruption, especially in terms of increasing the independence of the judicial sector. We have assisted the Moldovan government in creating a system for pre-vetting of prosecutors and judges, and created a model court system.

And if I am confirmed, we will continue these efforts, but also focus on working with creating space for free and independent media, and working with civil society, because those are absolutely essential in holding the government to account on its anti-corruption path.

Senator SHAHEEN. The other thing we heard concerns about is the amount of Russian disinformation that is being spread throughout Moldova. Just this week there was a *Politico* article that pointed out that Russia is responsible for circulating deep fake videos of President Sandu to try and undermine her reelection campaign.

So, is there more that we should be doing to help the Moldovans protect themselves from this kind of disinformation?

Ms. ADAMS-SMITH. Thank you, Senator, for the question.

Russian malign influence takes many forms. In Moldova there is this disinformation and propaganda. There is also energy coercion, hybrid and cyber attacks. There is also conventional threats.

Our assistance is focused on helping the government increase its resilience toward this disinformation. I think they are learning a lot. They learned a lot from last year's regional or local elections. And is there more that we can do? Absolutely. I believe that we should use all the tools in our toolkit. If there is evidence of election tampering, or use of propaganda, or deep fakes that interfere with the running of free and fair elections, we should consider using sanctions and visa bans and to send a powerful signal that this cannot happen in Moldova.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you. I really appreciate that. And hopefully, the Global Engagement Center can help us as we are thinking about how we can help other countries.

Ms. Horst, the People's Republic of China has considerable economic leverage over Sri Lanka because of its infrastructure, investments, and loans. Now, I was pleased to see a recent U.S. investment in Sri Lanka's port capabilities, but it is really a drop in the bucket compared to existing Chinese capital in the country.

So, can you talk about what the implications are of China's ability to leverage infrastructure investments and other energy, other issues in the country, and what more we should be thinking about as we are trying to provide a counterbalance to what China's doing?

Ms. HORST. Senator, thank you very much for that question. And it gets to the heart of the Indo-Pacific strategy. And Sri Lanka is an incredibly important member, or an incredibly important part of that, not only because of the geography, but also because it is a democracy with an open economy.

And so, the investment by DFC that you named is a great example of how we are using tools that the U.S. Government has to invest and show a different model of investment that is different than what the PRC might offer. This is a half a billion-dollar investment in what we see as Sri Lanka's future. It is transparent, it will promote good governance. And this is exactly the kind of alternative that we feel will just demonstrate to Sri Lankans that they have a choice, and we think that our model is better.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you. I am out of time, but I just returned from a trip to the Indo-Pacific about a month ago. And one of the things we heard in the countries that we visited where China has tried to make those kinds of investments, is that they would rather do business with the United States because for all the reasons you just gave.

But unfortunately, we have not always come to the table in ways that can provide the support that those countries need. So, thank you. I appreciate your comments, and I do not know if you want to respond to that before I am out of time.

Ms. HORST. Senator, if I am confirmed, I will find ways to bring all of the resources that United States, and our friends and allies have to help continue along these efforts.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you very much.

Thank you all.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Van Hollen.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And let me start by congratulating all of you on your nominations.

And I just want to second what Senator Shaheen said with respect to Moldova and others. We look forward to working with you, Ms. Adams-Smith, if you are confirmed.

I do want to pick up on the Sri Lanka question. I have a long term affinity to Sri Lanka, and I visited Sri Lanka last year on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of U.S.-Sri Lankan relations. And I believe Ambassador Julie Chung has been doing a great job, and I know you will as well, if you are confirmed, Ms. Horst. I was pleased to see the DFC commitment.

Could you speak a little bit about how Sri Lanka's progressing with respect to the IMF reform package? As you know, this was a long time in coming. There have been serious economic issues. How do you gauge progress with respect to the IMF reform package?

Ms. HORST. Senator Van Hollen, thank you. And thank you. I know you do have a very special relationship to South Asia and to Sri Lanka, so I appreciate very much your interest.

The IMF is working closely with partners and with the Sri Lankan government to make sure that Sri Lanka can get back on better economic footing. We are making sure that any debt negotiations treat all partners fairly, and that are transparent. And there is an element of the IMF program that also looks at governance to make sure that any IMF programs that come in also take care of the most vulnerable and are spread fairly.

So, if I am confirmed, I will continue to work and follow in the mighty footsteps of Ambassador Chung to make sure that we continue to work with the IMF to help Sri Lanka on economic footing.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Well, thank you. And you know, while I was there, one of the programs that we have got that I think was appreciated was greater transparency in the budgeting process. And look forward to continuing our conversation on that piece as well, which is important to the United States, important to the IMF, and important to others.

And I do want to also—I know Senator Cardin raised the issues of human rights. I had a number of conversations about progress toward transitional justice. And so, I do look forward to continuing that conversation as well.

Ms. Sarri, it is great to have a Marylander as part of the group. Congratulations. As you well know, as we seek to make a transition toward cleaner energy, critical minerals are critical part of this. The United States really got caught, you know, decades behind China in terms of sourcing of minerals, the developing of the batteries. But one of the sources of some of these minerals are these undersea nodules. So maybe that is an opportunity, but clearly there are also environmental risks.

So, my question to you is, how do you think about that and especially in light of the fact that the United States is not part of the Law of the Seas Convention. Does that put us at a disadvantage as part in this conversation?

Ms. SARRI. Senator, thank you so much for the question.

The U.S. not being part of the Law of the Seas does put us at a disadvantage. There is an International Seabed Authority that is responsible for this type of deep sea mining. The U.S. is able to be an observer on it, and the U.S. has worked very hard to make sure if deep sea mining does go forward, that it is done in a precautionary manner with strong protections for the environment.

But because we can only be an observer, we do not have as much influence. And it is the PRC that is moving most quickly forward with development. And I can tell you that whenever we try to exert something under the Law of the Sea, because we are not a member, the PRC does not feel that it needs to follow our advice.

So if confirmed, I would be working very hard on this issue. OES works on the recycling aspects, and tries to make sure that any type of critical mineral mining is done in an environmentally sustainable manner.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. I appreciate that. I have long believed it was a mistake for us not to be part of the Law of Sea Convention. I hope, you know, Congress will get with it, given the disadvantages we face.

Ambassador Nkengasong, it is wonderful to see you again. I think the last time we were in person may have been in South Africa on the 20th anniversary of PEPFAR. So thank you for your leadership there. And as you know, many of us believe that the success of PEPFAR can be built on in terms of creating a preventive health and health infrastructure. Could you talk a little bit about how we might leverage the success of PEPFAR into other areas of health?

Mr. NKENGASONG. Thank you, Senator. Good to see you again, and thank you all for the support in securing the 1-year reauthorization of PEPFAR to next March, which as the Chairman said, we look forward to working with you to reauthorizing it for a full, clean 5 years.

Senator, over the past 21 years, PEPFAR has been extremely successful and impactful in saving more than 25 million lives, preventing 5.5 million children born free from HIV infection. But in addition to that, it has built a large platform that is currently being used when needs arise in responding to other disease threats like cholera outbreaks, like Ebola outbreaks, Marburg, mpox currently going on in DRC. So we should be very, very proud of that. I mean, those are not taken away resources from PEPFAR but leveraging those systems and institutions that we already have in country.

And that is what I believe PEPFAR should continue to do. That is, stay focused on its mission to bring HIV AIDS to an end as a public health threat by the year 2030, which means bringing down the rates of new infections down to below 90 percent compared to 2010. But with that platform, given the current context of rapidly emerging diseases, partner countries continue to use that to get that goal of bringing HIV AIDS to an end as a public health threat.

As all of us discussed when we are in South Africa, we need to look at the priority populations that we need to invest in more and be very laser focused in adolescent girls and young women, and bring down the rates of infections among those, in children, and in key populations. Put our resources there so that we maintain the

gains that we have achieved over the years and accelerate so that we can absolutely effectively get to 2030.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you. Thank you for all your good work.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Schatz.

Senator SCHATZ. Thank you, Chairman, and thank you to all of the nominees for your willingness to serve.

Ms. Sarri, good to see you again. I want to talk to you first about IUU. I just want to understand how you envision working to implement some of the tasks recommended by the IUU Working Group, between agencies, between NOAA, between State. There is a kind of cross-agency coordination that is necessary, and I am wondering how you intend to prioritize your tasks.

Ms. SARRI. Senator, thank you very much for the question. I know you have been a long time leader trying to combat IUU fishing, so I appreciate your leadership on that.

I think, first of all, the Maritime SAFE Act by creating an interagency group, which OES is the current chair of, has been incredibly important.

I think sometimes people hear about, you know, illegal unregulated fisheries, and they think, oh, it is just an environmental issue. And it is not. It touches on everything. It is a human rights issue. It is a food security issue. It is also an environmental security issue.

So, we really need to, through this interagency partnership, have everybody have very concrete responsibilities, measurable outcomes, and take action even within the Department of State. We need to work very closely with INL, with DRL, and then also with EAP, where most of, you know, IUU is either taking place or the countries that are involved in IUU fishing as well.

Senator SCHATZ. And I would just add to that, there is a line of effort that is purely at the diplomatic level. In other words, even if we did not care about the kind of conservation and ecological impacts here, even if there were no economic aspect that mattered to us, it is important to our friends and allies in the Pacific, in particular.

And you know, we just had a good meeting with a number of Ambassadors from Pacific Island nations, and IUU always comes up. So, I am wondering if there are some kind of small bore ways we can start to provide assistance, because I am—look, you gave a really smart and cogent answer. The problem is that if I am meeting with the Ambassador from Palau, or Fiji, or the Federated States of Micronesia, they are not sure how quickly any of that is going to happen. That is a lot of three and four letter agency——

Ms. SARRI. Yes.

Senator SCHATZ [continuing]. Names.

Ms. SARRI. Agreed.

Senator SCHATZ. And they are kind of going, "So is help on the way or not?" So, what can we do in the short run?

Ms. SARRI. I think there is the Shiprider Program that is taking place in the Pacific Islands. I think it has been very effective. And that is where local law enforcement rides aboard with Coast Guard and can go and enforce with areas. State is also working very close-

ly with USAID on technical assistance. And if confirmed, I would be very happy to work with you and your staff, and work with the Pacific Islands to figure out what more kind of technical assistance we have.

Good governance is also going to be important. I actually think, Senator, one of the things we also need to do, diplomacy is important. I do not think Americans want to have illegal caught fish on their plate. So, we need to actively figure out working with the other partners, too, about how we are going to stop those chains, and have the countries of origins of where fish can take place be part of that dialogue as we think about a whole of government approach.

Senator SCHATZ. Would just add that I think, and I am satisfied right now, that people are monitoring technological developments. But I just do think that there could be a moment at which we sort of move from a—we have to have people, we have to have ships, we have to be underway totally to—a lot of this is about monitoring. A lot of this is about people knowing that we have eyes on them because there are extremely rare situations where this would get kinetic.

And so, I think there may be cheaper ways to have eyes and presence throughout the Pacific. I know that the Navy is thinking along these lines as well, but drone technology, satellite technology has come a very, very long way. And the bureaucracy, which is, I think, moving in the right direction, understandably, is implementing a plan that was many, many years in the making.

And so, I just want you to be receptive to a disruptive technology and how you would integrate that into a kind of the machinery that is already on its way.

Ms. SARRI. Senator, I would be very interested in that. I would be happy to work with your office, if confirmed. What happens aboard these illegal fishing boats is awful. They have tremendous human rights violation. Anything that we can do to stop it as soon as possible, I think, is something we should explore.

Senator SCHATZ. Thank you very much.

The CHAIRMAN. Let me follow up on Senator Schatz's point and others that have raised this illegal fishing issue. It is well beyond the Pacific nations or the Asian Pacific. I was in Ecuador, and the PRC vessels there are outrageous in some of the richest fishing areas in the world. And you are absolutely right. It is not only an environmental disaster and abuse of rights, but it is also a human rights violation on the way they use motherships and have forced labor for lengthy periods of time.

And we do need a strategy that will work in the short term as well as the long term. The technology is there to be able to track these vessels. They have to communicate. We can track the communications. They are violating laws. We need international enforcement, and that is not going to happen without U.S. leadership.

So, I just really want to underscore, as you have heard from so many members on this committee, that that has to be a top priority. And we are looking forward to your suggestions as to how we can put a spotlight on this so more Americans understand what is going on because ultimately as consumers, we can put a lot of pressure on this globally. So we need to do that.

I also want to mention the area that you mentioned in your comments about plastics and the negotiations in regards to International Treaty, the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee, and you will play a major role in that. There is a lot of interest in trying to have an aggressive policy led by the United States, and this treaty might give us an opportunity to do that on dealing with the plastics issues in our order, so.

There are two areas that are a very high priority to our committee.

I want to ask one additional question in regards to human rights, whether it is Moldova, which needs to move toward the EU, needs to protect itself from Russia's aggression. We have the Transnistria issue that ultimately has to be resolved, and we have a weakness in their judicial system and prosecutorial system in which the EU and U.S. can help.

So, Ms. Adams-Smith, I just really want to get your commitment that we need to work with Moldova to try to strengthen their internal institutions so they can transition closer to EU sessions and to the West.

Ms. ADAMS-SMITH. Senator, thank you very, very much for that question. I absolutely commit to working with this committee and working as hard as I can to ensure that Moldova is resilient enough to take the steps that it needs to take to take the reforms and become an EU member after a very rigorous succession process.

I firmly believe that it is going through this process that will enable the country to reach the future that it wants. It is not going to be easy, it is not going to be short, and they are going to need the United States and European allies working together to make sure that the country is able to take all the steps along the way to become an EU member state.

The CHAIRMAN. And there is a strong diaspora community that can help in this transition. So, it is another area that we might want to try to develop that could help Moldova along this path.

Ms. ADAMS-SMITH. Thank you very much for that comment, Senator. Absolutely true. The Moldovan diaspora in the United States, more than 50,000 people who are a great resource for the Moldovan government.

If I am confirmed, I intend to work with allies and partners across Europe as well to ensure that we are activating the diaspora in those countries as well, to give as much as assistance, and advice, and support to the Moldovan government which needs the human capacity to enact all of these reforms. And as you said, the Moldovan diaspora can be an important source of strength for them.

The CHAIRMAN. Ms. Horst, just to follow up on our questionings on the human rights in Sri Lanka. I want your commitment to keep us informed as to the progress you are making in dealing with the accountability issues, to deal with the ability to express dissent of government with this recent law that was passed, and what our Mission is doing to advance the basic freedoms for the people of Sri Lanka.

Ms. HORST. Senator Cardin, if I am confirmed, you have my commitment to work with your committee and Congress to make sure

that we are holding everyone accountable for the international standards that we want them to adhere to.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Ricketts.

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

Ms. Horst, I wanted to follow up on just the conversations we had about the PRC. The Indian Ocean, obviously, is critical to the PRC strategic and economic interests, as well as geopolitical rivalry with India. Increasingly, PRC research vessels with ties to the PLA Navy have conducted sweeping surveys of the undersea floor in the Indian Ocean. These types of ocean surveys are carried out by vessels that have research applications for energy resources and marine environments.

However, the data can also be used for military purposes, including how to maneuver and obscure submarines during a conflict. According to CSIS, the 13 PRC vessels undertaking the bulk of the survey and research activity in the Indian Ocean since 2020, all have links to the PLA, and all displayed suspicious behavior, including docking at PLA military ports or temporary, turning off their tracking devices.

In January, Sri Lanka declared a year long moratorium on PRC research vessels entering the waters. Do you believe the presence of the PRC research vessels in the Indian Ocean poses a threat to the national security interest of the United States and our partner allies in the region?

Ms. HORST. Senator, thank you very much. And we share your concern about what PRC research vessels could be doing in the Indian Ocean, which is why cooperation with Sri Lanka on maritime domain awareness is a key part of our security assistance. It allows the Sri Lankans to have the tech capability and the technology to be able to patrol their own waters, and help defend their sovereignty.

And if I am confirmed, we will continue to work with the Sri Lankans to build their own capabilities.

Senator RICKETTS. OK. So, if confirmed, will you commit to work then to ensure the moratorium is maintained in place as well?

Ms. HORST. So, we are working very closely to make sure that there is fair access to ports for all ships.

Senator RICKETTS. So, you do not want to keep the moratorium on the PRC vessels out?

Ms. HORST. We would want to make sure that we are working with them. We have huge concerns about PRC vessels, and we have asked for that moratorium. We think it is in Sri Lanka's best interests.

Senator RICKETTS. OK. Great. And then, I just finally wrap up by saying Ms. Adams-Smith, Steve King, former Ambassador of the Czech Republic, you were his Deputy Chief of Mission, had nothing but high praise for you and gave you his highest recommendation.

Ms. HORST. Mr. Senator, that is so nice to hear. Thank you very much.

[Laughter.]

Senator RICKETTS. My pleasure. My pleasure. Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. The record of the committee will remain open to close the business tomorrow for members who may be asking questions for the record. For any questions for the record directed to

any one of you, we appreciate you try to respond to that as thoroughly and quickly as possible so that we can complete our work in the committee in an expeditious way.

Again, with our thanks, our hearing will be adjourned. Thank you.

[Whereupon, at 11:20 a.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

Additional Material Submitted for the Record

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO JOHN N. NKENGASONG BY SENATOR BENJAMIN L. CARDIN

Question. How does the Global Fund add value to the work of PEPFAR on HIV AIDS, and how will the Bureau of Global Health Security and Diplomacy work with the Global Fund on its beneficial impact on global health security?

Answer. The Global Fund is a critical partner for PEPFAR, helping to amplify our HIV AIDS efforts globally. Our contributions help the Global Fund meet its 3-year replenishment goals. The Global Fund and PEPFAR both strengthen health systems as part of their work to combat HIV AIDS. These investments, including in areas like laboratory and surveillance systems, are critical to both sustaining gains and accelerating progress toward ending HIV AIDS as a public health threat by 2030 as well as to improving global health security.

Question. How is this distinct from the role of USAID's Bureau of Global Health?

Answer. The Secretary of State formally launched the GHSD Bureau on August 1, 2023 with a focus on three key areas: leading U.S. diplomatic engagement in global health and supporting programmatic efficiency to strengthen the global health security architecture; leveraging U.S. foreign assistance and promoting international cooperation to better protect the United States from health threats; and elevating and integrating global health security as a core component of U.S. national security and foreign policy. The U.S. Global Health Security Strategy, released in April 2024, outlines roles and responsibilities of the State Department and USAID to implement the strategy. If confirmed, I will represent the U.S. on the Global Fund Board and with the team in Geneva that actively supports USG engagement with Global Fund and coordination of programs in country.

Question. In coordinating bilateral assistance, is the Bureau responsible for approving any of the activities associated with money appropriated to USAID?

Answer. The GHSD Bureau continues to approve funding appropriated to USAID for HIV AIDS assistance, consistent with the longstanding authorities of the U.S. Global AIDS Coordinator. The GHSD bureau is not responsible for approving other activities with funds appropriated to USAID or other departments and agencies.

Question. Do you commit, if confirmed, to putting in place institutional guardrails to prevent that from happening in future administrations?

Answer. I am committed to collaborating with USAID and the broader interagency and to following applicable requirements concerning administration of U.S. foreign assistance resources. If confirmed, I am committed to engaging my counterparts in USAID and the broader interagency to maximize impact of U.S. programming while respecting the authorities of each department and agency. I am further committed to providing GHSD Bureau staff the tools they need to fulfill this objective, including training, guidance, and promotion of interagency collaboration.

Question. Ambassador Nkengasong, you have been serving as Global AIDS Coordinator for close to 3 years. Please describe how the position of Global AIDS Coordinator is distinct and complementary to your proposed new role as the Ambassador-at-Large for Global Health Security and Diplomacy.

Answer. As the Global AIDS Coordinator, I am responsible for the oversight and coordination of all U.S. global HIV activities and funding across multiple U.S. implementing agencies and departments. The role of Ambassador-at-Large for Global Health Security has a broader focus on global health security efforts to address infectious disease threats, including but not limited to HIV AIDS. These roles are mutually reinforcing, and if confirmed, I will promote U.S. leadership and coordination

to achieve synergies while finishing the fight against HIV AIDS and addressing other infectious diseases that pose a threat to U.S. and global health security.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO JOHN N. NKENGASONG BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

Of the $900 million requested by the President for Global Health Security in fiscal year 2025, only $250 million is requested for the Department of State, all of which is attributed to a planned contribution to the Pandemic Fund, housed at the World Bank. The Global Health Security and Pandemic Prevention, Preparedness, and Response Act, enacted as part of the fiscal year National Defense Authorization Act, envisioned a significantly different scenario. Specifically, the Act intended for the Coordinator for Global Health Security and Diplomacy at the Department of State to serve as the strategy and assistance coordinator for the U.S. global health security programs implemented by the U.S. Agency for International Development, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and others, similar to the role played by the U.S. Global AIDS Coordinator for AIDS Relief under the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief. If confirmed, you will serve concurrently in both positions but will only have resources for one: PEPFAR.

Question. How do you propose to coordinate and align the activities of USAID, CDC, and other implementing agencies to advance the President's Global Health Security and Diplomacy Strategy absent budget authority?

Answer. If confirmed, I am committed to ensuring that the full diplomatic expertise of the Department of State, particularly within the Bureau, complements the ongoing health security and technical efforts of USAID, CDC, HHS, and other U.S. Government agencies. The GHSD Bureau coordinates efforts across the State Department with its strategic focus on three key areas: (1) Leading U.S. diplomatic engagement in global health and supporting programmatic efficiency to strengthen the global health security architecture and better prevent, detect, control, and respond to infectious diseases, including HIV AIDS; (2) Leveraging U.S. foreign assistance and promoting international cooperation to better protect the United States and the world from health threats; (3) Elevating and integrating global health security as a core component of U.S. national security and foreign policy.

These efforts are well-aligned with the three goals outlined in the Global Health Security Strategy (GHSS) and are reflected in the roles and responsibilities outlined for the Department in that strategy. I communicate regularly with my counterparts across the interagency to share information and coordinate actions that advance U.S. global health security policy, as well as with the U.S. Coordinator for Global Health Security at the National Security Council. This close and productive coordination is similarly carried out by staff across the GHSD bureau.

Question. What assurances can you provide to the Committee that PEPFAR resources will not be "raided" in order to advance other global health security priorities?

Answer. The continued success of PEPFAR remains my top priority and focus. I am committed to following applicable requirements for administration of U.S. foreign assistance funding and staff resources. I am further committed to providing GHSD Bureau staff the tools they need to fulfill this objective, including training, guidance, and promotion of interagency collaboration.

Question. Is hypertension a global health security and pandemic prevention and preparedness priority?

Answer. The GHSD Bureau focuses on addressing an array of human health threats. Low-cost tools and technical assistance shared with other countries—for example, diagnosing and managing hypertension during routine HIV services as people living with HIV (PLHIV) have a two times higher risk of cardiovascular disease—will help decrease mortality for PLHIV and preserve the gains made through PEPFAR's program that supports more 20 million people on life-saving HIV treatment and will enable countries to dedicate health system resources to prepare for, respond to, and prevent outbreaks of other infectious diseases.

Question. If confirmed, what role will you play in advancing a reform agenda at the WHO?

Answer. If confirmed, I will leverage the WHO's strengths and push the organization to address institutional weaknesses, including shortcomings in transparency,

accountability, efficiency, and in some cases, effectiveness. The COVID–19 pandemic revealed significant institutional gaps at WHO. The United States and likeminded partners have been actively engaging in WHO reform efforts to correct those gaps and ensure it is fit for purpose.

Question. What reforms would you prioritize?

Answer. I am clear-eyed on the strengths and weaknesses of the WHO. If confirmed, I would continue to engage the WHO and international community to achieve an institution that effectively strengthens health and health security. There are important reforms WHO should make, including on transparency and accountability. Thanks to vocal U.S. leadership, WHO Member States approved in May 2023 a plan detailing necessary institutional reforms, including:

- strengthened Member State oversight of WHO's budget and its prioritization;
- improvements in WHO's actions to prevent and respond to all types of sexual misconduct; and
- full implementation of long-delayed reform to WHO's internal oversight functions.

WHO has made progress addressing many of these reforms proposed by Member States, and the U.S. Government continues to push for implementation of all other necessary reforms.

Question. What role, if any, should the WHO play in the governance structure of a pandemic accord?

Answer. The U.S. position maintains that for a Pandemic Accord to be successful, WHO will need to work effectively within its current mandate with governments, stakeholders, and other relevant international organizations and global health actors. We have proposed language in the draft text to promote sustained engagement by these entities. We have supported WHO functioning as the Secretariat for the Accord in order to reduce costs and maximize efficiencies and synergies across pandemic-relevant workstreams in which WHO is already assisting Member States.

The WHO's powers are delineated in a legally binding international constitution that confines its authority to undertaking international health work. The WHO Director-General and staff cannot enforce decisions, such as imposing a lockdown, mandating vaccination, or dictating the opening or closing of borders. Such decisions remain within the sovereign domain of each country.

Question. Should the WHO serve as the global supply chain and logistics manager for vaccines and other countermeasures during a pandemic, or manage a global stockpile of vaccines and other countermeasures, as it has proposed during the pandemic accord negotiations? If so, why, and how?

Answer. I do not support proposals that would assign additional managing functions to WHO related to medical countermeasures beyond its current functions.

Question. If confirmed, you will represent the United States at the Pandemic Fund. What is your assessment of the Fund's performance to date?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed, I will continue to represent the United States at the Pandemic Fund Governing Board and continue to work closely with my Treasury Department counterpart, who serves as Alternate Board Member. The Pandemic Fund successfully allocated $338 million across 37 countries and will be allocating an additional $500 million shortly for early warning surveillance, laboratory, and workforce capacity building. Early U.S. pledges leveraged a total of $2 billion for the nascent fund. The key to impact and leveraging additional funding is U.S. leadership and a solid strategy. That is why I led the development of a strategic plan that clarifies the Pandemic Fund's unique value add, programmatic priorities, allocation approach, and coordination with other actors over the next 5 years.

Building on this momentum, the Pandemic Fund Governing Board is launching a resource mobilization effort with a two-track approach: a near term pledging event on the margins of the G20 this fall and an innovative financing track to operationalize in the medium term. This is an important opportunity for the Pandemic Fund to leverage additional money from donors.

Question. Is it appropriately focused on preventing and preparing for pandemics, versus responding to outbreaks?

Answer. The Pandemic Fund remains committed to preventing and preparing for pandemics. Under U.S. leadership, the Pandemic Fund is launching a 5-year strategic plan at the World Health Assembly this May. The Pandemic Fund will focus on three programmatic priorities: laboratory strengthening, surveillance, and workforce. These three programmatic priorities will be institutionalized via National

Public Health Institutes (or relevant public health institution) and global regional networks, organizations, and hubs. The strategic plan is a clear articulation of the Pandemic Fund's objective to improve the worlds' collective ability to prevent, detect, and respond to disease threats and stop them from becoming deadly and costly pandemics.

Question. Do you have concerns about overlap and duplication of efforts between the Pandemic Fund and the Global Fund for AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria? If so, how can they be resolved?

Answer. I do not have concerns about overlap and duplication at this time. The number of countries that are both Global Fund and Pandemic Fund recipients is limited. The goal is to ensure the Pandemic Fund fills gaps in pandemic preparedness that are beyond the scope of Global Fund's work. In the few places where they both operate; our vision is to ensure investments complement one another and extend the reach of interventions. As members of both boards, we work hard to ensure that taxpayer dollars are spent in the most efficient, effective ways.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO JOHN N. NKENGASONG 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 PRC and has used this power to commit genocide in Xinjiang, flood our communities with fentanyl, and emit 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 to do so. Is the CCP a threat to the United States?

Answer. If confirmed, my priority will be advancing U.S. national and global health security interests and countering efforts by our strategic and regional competitors to undermine those interests. Last 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." As Secretary Blinken has said, under President Xi, the CCP has become more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad. Through diplomatic engagements, public diplomacy, and commercial advocacy, I will work to advance our national and global health security interests in the U.S.-PRC relationship.

Question. Does the CCP undertake any activities that are beneficial to U.S. interests? If so, please explain.

Answer. The PRC has undertaken many actions that undermine U.S. and global health security interests. The PRC has also taken some steps that have the potential to provide public health benefit to foreign populations, such as constructing new health facilities or providing access to medical supplies. Unfortunately, the PRC has often taken a coercive approach, making inappropriate demands of those receiving health assistance for their net benefit. If confirmed, I will work with colleagues across the U.S. Government to highlight the unhelpful and coercive actions of the PRC and emphasize the United States as a trustworthy and transparent partner of choice for global health. I will also work to encourage the PRC to adopt a more productive role in achieving improved global health security.

Question. Do you believe that there are any areas within which the CCP that would constructively work with the United States in good faith, knowing that at any moment Chinese interlocuters with U.S. representatives could be disappeared at a moment's notice? If so, please explain.

Answer. If confirmed, I will work with my colleagues across the U.S. interagency and Congress to advance U.S. objectives and counter harmful behavior by the PRC. I will collaborate with U.S. Government colleagues to encourage the PRC to adopt a more productive role in achieving improved global health security, including in addressing transnational challenges like the climate crisis, while also addressing the human rights abuses committed by the PRC.

Question. If confirmed, will you approve any joint activity with organizations or representatives from the PRC in the countries or areas in which you will work?

Answer. If confirmed, my priority will be advancing U.S. national and global health security interests and countering efforts by our strategic and regional com-

petitors to undermine those interests. I will follow applicable policies on engaging the PRC to cease malign influence and adopt a more productive role in achieving global health security.

Question. As you may be aware, a group of Federal employees penned an open letter to President Biden criticizing U.S. support for Israel in the aftermath of Hamas' brutal terrorist attack on October 7, 2023. In addition, on January 16, 2024, employees from nearly two dozen agencies staged a walkout in protest of the administration's Israel policy. Efforts like these directly undermine the duty of our diplomats to advance the policies of the President of the United States. Yes or no, did you sign the letter to the President expressing opposition to the President's Israel policy?

Answer. No, I did not sign the open letter to the President.

Question. Yes or no, did you participate in the January 16, 2024, walkout?

Answer. No, I did not participate.

Question. If confirmed, would you define one of the employees or contractors operating under your supervision signing an open letter criticizing you, or policies you undertake at the instruction of the President, as insubordination as defined by the Government Accountability Office?

Answer. If confirmed, I would seek to address employee concerns personally by creating an open, trusting, and harassment-free work environment. I am mindful of and value Department employees' right to free speech under the First Amendment. Moreover, I understand the expression of disagreement does not in and of itself constitute insubordination. If confirmed, I would work with the Department's Office of the Legal Adviser to determine the proper course of action should such a matter arise.

Question. In your view, are the actions these Federal employees took, by anonymously signing a letter to the President of the United States, covered as "whistleblowing"?

Answer. I believe these employees were expressing a dissenting view to their leadership. I would hope that employees would feel confident to directly raise their concerns with their supervisors and management rather than signing an anonymous letter. If confirmed, I would work with the Department's Office of the Legal Adviser to determine the proper course of action should such a matter arise.

Question. If confirmed, how will you address discipline issues, such as insubordination, that do not take established dissent channels?

Answer. If confirmed, I will make sure that all employees know that there are several avenues available to express policy disagreements. I would encourage employees to use established channels to express their views.

Question. Have you ever expressed support for an Israeli cease fire in Gaza?

Answer. No, I have not expressed support for an Israeli cease fire in Gaza.

Question. Do you agree that Hamas is an antisemitic entity?

Answer. Yes, Hamas is a terrorist group and an antisemitic entity. This foreign terrorist organization seeks to eliminate the state of Israel; its founding charter calls for the killing of Jewish people.

Question. Would a cease fire allow these groups to reconstitute and attack Israel, and Americans, in the future?

Answer. It is my understanding that the Administration supports humanitarian pauses to allow for an influx of aid into Gaza and the safe exit of hostages and other vulnerable people.

Question. Do you agree that calling for a cease fire in Gaza means calling for Israel to stop its pursuit of Hamas, a designated foreign terrorist organization, that orchestrated the October 7 attacks and still refuses to release all Israeli and American hostages?

Answer. It is my understanding that the Administration's stated policy is to support temporary humanitarian pauses to enable a sustained flow of aid and to allow the voluntary movement of civilians seeking safer locations. The U.S. Government supports Israel's right to protect itself from Hamas' terrorism, consistent with international law.

Question. Do you believe that Israel, in its operation against Hamas, which is known to use civilians as human shields, is taking all necessary steps to minimize civilian casualties?

Answer. The U.S. Government supports Israel's right to protect itself, consistent with international law. The Administration has urged Israel to differentiate between civilians and Hamas terrorists and to avoid civilian casualties. Hamas's use of civilians as human shields, a blatant violation of international law, does not lessen Israel's obligations under international humanitarian law.

Question. Global Health Security (GHS) funding has seen significant increases in the past 10 years to confront infectious disease outbreaks and associated recovery efforts. There have been calls in the Senate for transparency on how GHS is using bilateral funds, as well as requests for clarity in regards to which agency is receiving funds authorized by the Global Health Security Act which authorizes funds for Pandemic Prevention, Preparedness, and Responses.If confirmed, will you commit to respond, in a timely manner, to oversight requests regarding GHS funding uses and which activities are supported by State and USAID for pandemic prevention, preparedness, and responses?

Answer. Yes, I am absolutely committed to responding to oversight requests in a timely manner.

Question. Regarding the ongoing reorganization at State, which established the Bureau you are nominated to lead, how will you effectively administer and manage oversight of your PEPFAR responsibilities, while also addressing competing Bureau duties and significant staffing vacancies?

Answer. The establishment of the Bureau of Global Health Security and Diplomacy (GHSD) elevates our health security diplomatic work and allows the State Department to bring the full strength of U.S. diplomacy to bear on addressing global health threats, including HIV AIDS. As part of the bureau, PEPFAR's efforts remain focused on our goal of ending AIDS as a public health threat by 2030.

Under my leadership, we have filled a significant number of vacancies since the launch of the bureau in August 2023. Much progress has been made and this has been supported by having an Executive Office with human resource capacity, and continued efforts to ensure adequate staffing to achieve the mission of the bureau.

Question. The President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) announced a commitment to use its procurement power to drive localization of manufacturing in Africa. PEPFAR stated it would spend at least $20 million to purchase at least 15 million rapid diagnostic tests and that by 2030, purchase at least 2 million antiretroviral treatments. What guardrails are in place to ensure PEPFAR's procurement drive on localization doesn't inadvertently use U.S. taxpayer money to subsidize Chinese companies to invest in the manufacturing sector in Africa?

Answer. If confirmed, my priority will be advancing U.S. national and global health security interests and countering efforts by our strategic and regional competitors to undermine those interests. Our efforts to support local and regional medical countermeasure manufacturing efforts will not compromise U.S. national security, commercial, and economic priorities, particularly those related to PRC. The United States has the opportunity to significantly increase efficiency, reduce supply insecurity, build pandemic preparedness, promote U.S. industry, and protect U.S. national and economic security through strategic support of regional manufacturing.

Building on existing capabilities and an analysis of future expansion potential, PEPFAR aims to procure 15 million HIV tests produced by African manufacturers in 2025. For antiretroviral treatments, PEPFAR aims to work alongside other partners and buyers to shift at least two million clients on first-line ARV treatments to use African-made products by 2030. PEPFAR procurements will continue to follow applicable requirements for US government procurement of products and services.

Question. Do you believe PEPFAR has appropriate guardrails in place to ensure no funding is used by implementing partners or grantees to promote abortion? How can these be strengthened or clarified given concerns PEPFAR, or implementing partners, may support abortions?

Answer. PEPFAR does not fund or promote abortion. The same restrictions on using U.S. foreign assistance funds for abortion-related activities have existed since PEPFAR's inception and continue to guide its implementation. PEPFAR staff also conduct routine annual compliance training for both U.S. Government staff and implementing partner staff on legal and policy requirements. Through PEPFAR, over 5.5 million babies have been born free of HIV, and we look forward to continuing bipartisan support for this lifesaving program.

Question. During COVID, China established technology transfer deals in Africa for rapid COVID testing. Are there policies currently in place to ensure no PEPFAR

dollars, or implementing partners, will be used to procure commodities that are just Chinese technology transferred to Africa?

Answer. Delayed access to COVID–19 diagnostics globally contributed to difficulties controlling the spread of COVID–19 and led to some countries partnering with coercive actors like the PRC to meet health needs. PEPFAR procurements will continue to follow applicable requirements for U.S. Government procurement of products and services. If confirmed, I will work closely with U.S. Government colleagues to advance U.S. national security interests and address the PRC's efforts to expand its influence. I will encourage efforts to stimulate regional and local manufacturing of medical supplies to support resilient supply chains and lessen malign influence of strategic competitors.

Question. What will you do to ensure U.S. tax dollars won't be used to purchase any products that stem from Chinese companies or are produced with the use of forced labor?

Answer. I will continue efforts to ensure that PEPFAR procurements of critical HIV commodities such as antiretrovirals and HIV diagnostics follow applicable requirements for U.S. government procurement of products.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO JOHN N. NKENGASONG BY SENATOR JOHN BARRASSO

Question. What strategies would you propose to enhance international collaboration and coordination in the fight against TB?

Answer. Tuberculosis (TB) continues to be the leading cause of death amongst people living with HIV (PLHIV), and it is a continuing priority for PEPFAR to support programs to prevent and treat TB for this population. There are several strategies to highlight in this regard:

- PEPFAR aligns its TB/HIV approach with WHO's End TB strategy and works collaboratively with USAID and the Global Fund (GF) to ensure that TB/HIV investments are synergistic. As an example, PEPFAR teams have regular information exchange calls with GF and WHO on the new PEPFAR TB Initiative to Reduce TB-related mortality and find missing TB cases among PLHIV.
- GHSD continues to align priorities, targets, and strategies across the USG interagency on global initiatives such as the STOP TB Partnership.
- The U.S. Government continues to advance targets and commitments from the 2023 U.N. General Assembly High Level Meeting Political Declaration on TB.
- The U.S. Government also continues to support and strengthen collaboration on laboratory diagnosis by actively participating in forums such as the Integrated Diagnostic Consortium (IDC) and by working with global organizations, such as the Foundation for Innovative New Diagnostics (FIND) and national ministries of health, to implement joint activities, such as Diagnostic Network Assessments.
- GHSD continues to harmonize PEPFAR data with national and WHO data bases.
- GHSD promotes multi-country research projects to develop new treatment vaccines and diagnostic tools by actively engaging with research platforms, such as FAST-TB.

Question. What are the obstacles for ensuring children are diagnosed and receive treatment?

Answer. Despite improved coverage of prevention of mother-to-child transmission programs, there were still an estimated 133,000 children who were infected with HIV in 2022. Diagnosing infants with HIV requires a specialized approach called Early Infant Diagnosis (EID). Access to this type of facility-based testing—which must occur several times over the child's first year of life to determine their final HIV status—can be a barrier. Additionally, access to point-of-care EID testing may be limited, which means a long turnaround time for results which can result in a gap in delivery of the diagnosis and enrollment in care.

Some children who acquire HIV during pregnancy and birth and many children who acquire HIV during the breastfeeding period (about 40 percent of new pediatric infections) have a much slower disease progression. Thus, it is important that efforts to find older children living with HIV (CLHIV) and adolescents living with HIV are uniformly implemented. All children (<15 years of age) of adults living with HIV should be tested for HIV; however, country-level policies, human resources for

health (HRH) and supply chain shortages, or lack of accessibility of appropriate testing services can prevent children and adolescents from being tested for HIV.

Enrolling and retaining children in HIV treatment requires additional flexibility (due to school and parent schedules) and differentiated service delivery models of care to ensure children and their families have the tools they need to achieve viral load suppression. Better and more palatable pediatric formulations (of medicines), better antiretroviral medications, and better adherence strategies are also important.

Question. Please describe your approach to supporting low- and middle-income countries in strengthening their TB healthcare systems and infrastructure.

Answer. Through PEPFAR implementing agencies, PEPFAR supports several TB health systems strengthening interventions at national (above-site) and at site levels. Above-site activities include:

(1) Technical assistance and capacity building: Funding Senior Technical Advisor positions for TB/HIV to support the national TB and HIV Programs in making strategic decisions on new policies, resource allocation, and implementation. Funding of supervision visits, annual reviews, and various training.

(2) Health Information System Support: Funding the development and maintenance of Electronic Medical Records (EMR) and Electronic Drug Surveillance Systems.

Site-Level activities include:

(1) TB case finding activities:

- Procurement of digital X-ray machines and ensuring their use in TB screening.
- Procurement and installation of AI software for digital X-ray machines.
- Sensitization of health workers on the use and interpretation of digital X-rays and calibrating computer-aided detection (CAD).
- Supporting introduction and operationalization of lateral flow urine lipoarabinomannan (TB LF LAM) assays for diagnosis of TB, especially in patients with advanced HIV disease.

(2) TB prevention activities:

- Procurement and distribution of shorter TB prevention therapy (TPT) regimens.
- TB preventive therapy (TPT) coverage gap analysis for PEPFAR supported sites.

(3) Infection prevention and control activities:

- Reducing the risk of TB infection through administrative, environmental, and personal measures, by reinforcing infection control committees/ focal person(s).
- Instituting measures to ensure well-ventilated consultation rooms and waiting areas, availability of necessary supplies, and educating patients and staff on proper cough hygiene and mask use.

Finally, collaboration with the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria (Global Fund), which is the largest donor for TB, is critical to ensure grants and national resources at country level have the greatest impact.

Question. From May 27 to June 1, the World Health Assembly (WHA) will be meeting and expected to vote on the final text of a new international "pandemic agreement." Article 55 of the International Health Regulations (IHR) requires member states receive the text of any IHR amendment 4 months before they are to be considered at the WHA. As of May 10, negotiators failed to agree on a final draft agreement.

If confirmed, would you advocate for any new international pandemic agreement to be handled as a treaty requiring U.S. Senate advice and consent?

Answer. We remain committed to maintaining an open dialogue with Congress on these negotiations. The Agreement's form and content are still being negotiated.

Question. In your opinion, should the IHR amendment still be considered during the upcoming WHA?

Answer. The United States seeks to enhance U.S. national security through the IHR amendment process. Consideration of these amendments at the upcoming WHA would be consistent with precedent, and WHO Member States' previous consensus vote to advance negotiations to amend the IHR (2005). My understanding is the temporal requirements in Article 55 have been met. Since the first set of proposed

amendments were published, the WHO Secretariat and the IHR Bureau have routinely provided Member States with updated versions of the draft IHR amendment text during and after, each round of negotiations and/or intersessional meetings.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO ELIZABETH K. HORST BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

Trafficking in Persons

In the State Department's 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report, Sri Lanka remained on Tier 2 for failing to fully meet 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 Sri Lanka operationalize the prioritized recommendations contained in the TIP report?

Answer. If confirmed, I will continue to engage with the government of Sri Lanka and with civil society to enhance Sri Lanka's capacity to operationalize prioritized recommendations in the Trafficking in Persons Report. Specifically, I will work with Sri Lankan authorities on increasing prosecutions and accountability for suspected traffickers and increasing victim identification and protection efforts through technical assistance, including through programs that support to the International Organization of Migration and the Department of Justice's International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program.

Question. If confirmed, how will you approach addressing the credible reports of Sri Lankan official complicity in impeding the government's effort to carry out anti-trafficking law enforcement efforts?

Answer. The Department of State continues to press the Government of Sri Lanka to increase its efforts to combat human trafficking. If confirmed, I will continue to raise these concerns with the Government of Sri Lanka and emphasize the importance of Sri Lanka's commitment to increasing its efforts to combat and prevent human trafficking, including by holding officials allegedly complicit in this crime accountable.

Religious Freedom

Question. What is your assessment of religious freedom in Sri Lanka 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 guaranteed under Sri Lanka's constitution, and citizens are generally free to practice their beliefs. I am concerned about reports of discrimination, intimidation, and harassment of members of religious minority groups practicing their faith traditions. If confirmed, I will highlight how such practices are inconsistent with Sri Lanka's constitution and promote respect for freedom of religion or belief, including as it relates to members of minority communities. If confirmed, I also commit to working with our Office of International Religious Freedom and Ambassador at Large and to engage with Sri Lanka's minority religious communities and leaders of all faiths.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to personally engaging with civil society on this issue?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed, I commit to personally engaging with civil society, including about freedom of religion or belief for all. If confirm, I also commit to engaging with Sri Lanka's minority religious communities and leaders of all faiths.

Question. If confirmed, what concrete steps can you take to help Sri Lanka increase their societal and governmental respect for religious freedom?

Answer. If confirmed, I will support civil society in Sri Lanka and engage with the government to increase societal and government respect for freedom of religion or belief so that people of all religious and belief backgrounds in Sri Lanka are free to practice their beliefs.

Human Rights

In the State Department's 2023 Human Rights Report, the Sri Lanka was noted to have taken minimal steps to identify and punish officials who may have committed human rights abuses.

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 urge the Sri Lankan government to credibly address longstanding human rights abuses, by holding abusers to account and addressing root causes of ethnic and religious tensions in Sri Lanka. I will use all available U.S. tools to promote accountability and address impunity. Additionally, I will continue U.S. efforts to advocate to replace the Prevention of Terrorism Act with legislation that aligns with international human rights law. If confirmed, I will also continue dialogue with civil society organizations on how the U.S. can better support civic spaces and human rights progress in Sri Lanka.

U.N. Peacekeeping

According to the UN's data base of allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse, Sri Lanka has an allegation involving three military contingent members serving in MINUSCA.

Question. If confirmed, how will you work with the Sri Lankan government to ensure proper investigation into these allegations?

Answer. If confirmed, I will urge the Sri Lankan government to credibly address allegations against its U.N. peacekeeping forces, including by completing investigations in a timely manner, transparently reporting back to the U.N. on the outcome of investigations and any actions taken and holding perpetrators of substantiated allegations accountable. Additionally, if confirmed I will use all available U.S. tools to promote accountability.

State Management and Oversight

Many U.S. missions have been under enormous stress over the last several years.

Question. What is your understanding of morale throughout Mission Sri Lanka?

Answer. I understand that despite challenges from COVID–19 and the 2022 economic and political crises in Sri Lanka, U.S. Embassy Colombo has positive morale overall. The people who serve in U.S. Embassy Colombo, including our locally employed staff, do so because they believe in the mission and the Department's commitment to them. In April 2022, Acting Under Secretary John Bass approved Embassy Colombo's request to denominate locally employed staff's compensation in U.S. dollars for 6 months due to the rapid devaluation of the Sri Lankan rupee, which helped alleviate some economic hardship for our local staff. If confirmed, I will pay close attention to mission morale and take the steps needed to ensure our team has the guidance, resources and support to do their work.

Question. How do you intend to improve morale at Mission Sri Lanka?

Answer. If confirmed, I will focus on creating a cohesive, inclusive team environment for all Embassy community members, including our locally employed staff and family members. I will ensure that my DCM and I communicate clearly and regularly our mission goals and priorities, and listen to the concerns of our team. We will be accessible through regular meetings with the locally employed staff committee, all-staff town halls, and team-building events for the embassy, as well as for the greater community. I will encourage every member of Embassy staff to share their ideas and concerns in order to improve our team environment throughout my tenure.

Question. How do you intend to create a unified mission and vision at Mission Sri Lanka? Management is a key responsibility for chiefs of mission.

Answer. I believe the true source of diplomatic power is the people at U.S. Embassy Colombo. Our success starts with a common mission and vision, and an environment which encourages communication, creativity and new ideas, as well as opportunity and development for all. If confirmed, I will empower our interagency team and locally employed staff to make a difference in our bilateral relationship and practice a foreign policy that benefits the American people. If confirmed, I look forward to working with Congress on these priorities.

Question. How would you describe your management style?

Answer. I have an inclusive and empathetic management style. I care deeply about the morale and professional development of my staff, and having a personal connection that elicits real communication and discussion—even dissent. I encourage every team member to participate in policy discussions and present their ideas. Often the best opportunities to move the needle forward on goals come from ideas on the ground, and I want to make sure all staff have the opportunity to make a difference and contribute to achieving our objectives.

Question. Do you believe it is ever acceptable or constructive to berate subordinates, either in public or private?

Answer. It is never acceptable to berate subordinates. I am committed to enforcing the Department's new anti-bullying policy, creating and maintaining an environment free from bullying and ensuring everyone is treated with respect, civility, and professionalism. If confirmed, I will promote these values and take prompt action to address behavior such as bullying. I will hold my senior country team and mid-level managers accountable for the same.

Question. How do you envision your relationship with the deputy chief of mission?

Answer. The best front offices are where the DCM and Ambassador are in constant communication and lock step about the day's events and the mission's larger priorities. As a former Deputy Chief of Mission, I know how critical this relationship is for the success of our embassies around the globe. In Colombo, if confirmed, I envision a strong, open, communicative and trusting relationship with my DCM. I very much look forward to working closely with the DCM to create a unified leadership team for Embassy Colombo.

Question. If confirmed, what leadership responsibilities do you intend to entrust to your deputy chief of mission?

Answer. If confirmed, I envision a unified leadership team in the Embassy Colombo Front Office. We must be almost interchangeable, so that if the Ambassador is called away, the DCM can step in at a moment's notice. On a daily basis, the DCM manages most of the internal coordination and operations for the Embassy, and the Chief of Mission is the public face of the United States to both the government and public, as well as the strategic guidance for mission priorities and decisions. It is also essential that the Chief of Mission also know about internal operations and morale within the mission. If confirmed, I will work with my DCM to maximize their strengths and identify the most effective areas where they can help me to lead the Mission team.

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. Yes, I believe it is important to provide employees with accurate annual employee evaluation reports. Throughout my Foreign Service career, I have met with each of my direct reports regularly to provide feedback on their ongoing tasks and set aside several times a year to review their overall progress. I also met at least twice a year with employees supervised by my direct reports. Finally, I was always available for additional feedback if requested by the employee. I believe the best way to develop the next generation of Foreign Service professionals is through direct and regular feedback. I intend to continue this practice if confirmed.

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 will require and expect each supervisor at Embassy Colombo to meet regularly with their employees to provide positive and constructive feedback on performance. I will also encourage all employees to draft meaningful award nominations for any deserving colleague or subordinate.

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 accomplish fully their missions?

Answer. Our diplomatic works depends on the depth of our contact lists, and I expect every employee to have their key contacts on speed dial. It has always been my experience that our diplomats and locally employed staff make every effort to get out as much as possible. Ambassador Chung and her team interact with a wide range of people in Sri Lanka to accomplish U.S. foreign policy objectives and advance our interests. If confirmed, I will expect that Embassy Colombo staff invest in their external relationships at every level and in every portfolio.

Question. How do you intend to improve the ability of U.S. diplomats to better access all local populations?

Answer. Advancing our priorities requires a whole-of-mission effort. If confirmed, I will prioritize outreach by all sections of Embassy Colombo to engage with a wide range of government officials, civil society members, journalists, academics, and young people to advance and promote U.S. policy priorities. My team will travel across Sri Lanka to get the perspectives of people beyond the capital.

Congressional Delegations (CODELs) and Staff Delegations (STAFFDELs) serve a critical oversight mission.

Question. Do you pledge to support fully CODELs and STAFFDELs that seek to travel to post?

Answer. If confirmed, yes, I pledge to fully support CODELs and STAFFDELs that seek to travel to post. We welcome and appreciate your visits.

Question. Do you agree to support fully any CODEL or STAFFDEL, with the only exceptions for simultaneous or overlapping visits by the President or First Lady of the United States, the Vice President, or the Secretaries of State or Defense?

Answer. If confirmed, yes, I commit to supporting to the fullest extent possible any CODEL or STAFFDEL.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO ELIZABETH K. HORST 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 PRC and has used this power to commit genocide in Xinjiang, flood our communities with fentanyl, and emit 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 to do so. Is the CCP a threat to the United States?

Answer. As Secretary Blinken has said, the United States will continue to use diplomacy to make progress in both areas of difference and areas of cooperation that matter to the American people and the world as part of responsibly managing competition with the PRC. If confirmed, I will use diplomatic engagements, public diplomacy, and commercial advocacy to bolster U.S.-Sri Lanka ties to advance U.S. national security interests and counter efforts by the People's Republic of China (PRC) to expand its malign influence and use of coercion.

Question. Does the CCP undertake any activities that are beneficial to U.S. interests? If so, please explain.

Answer. 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 CCP that would constructively work with the United States in good faith, knowing that at any moment Chinese interlocuters with U.S. representatives could be disappeared at a moment's notice? If so, please explain.

Answer. Even as we seek to deepen cooperation where our interests align, the United States is very clear-eyed about the challenges posed by the PRC and about our competing visions for the future. If confirmed, I will work with my colleagues across the U.S. interagency and Congress to counter behavior by the PRC that is against U.S. interests.

Question. If confirmed, will you approve any joint activity with organizations or representatives from the PRC in the countries or areas in which you will work?

Answer. If confirmed, my priority will be advancing U.S. national security interests in Sri Lanka 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 Sri Lanka and the region.

Question. As you may be aware, a group of Federal employees penned an open letter to President Biden criticizing U.S. support for Israel in the aftermath of Hamas' brutal terrorist attack on October 7, 2023. In addition, on January 16, 2024, employees from nearly two dozen agencies staged a walkout in protest of the Administration's Israel policy. Efforts like these directly undermine the duty of our diplomats to advance the policies of the President of the United States. Yes or no, did you sign the letter to the President expressing opposition to the President's Israel policy?

Answer. No, I did not sign the open letter to the President.

Question. Yes or no, did you participate in the January 16, 2024 walkout?

Answer. No, I did not participate.

Question. If confirmed, would you define an employee or contractor, operating under your supervision, that signs an open letter criticizing you, or policies you undertake at the instruction of the President, as insubordination as defined by the Government Accountability Office?

Answer. If confirmed, I would seek to address employee concerns personally by creating an open, trusting, and harassment-free work environment. I am mindful of and value Department employees' right to free speech under the First Amendment. Moreover, I understand the expression of disagreement does not in and of itself constitute insubordination. If confirmed, I would work with the Department's Office of the Legal Adviser to determine the proper course of action should such a matter arise.

Question. In your view, are the actions these Federal employees took, by anonymously signing a letter to the President of the United States, covered as "whistleblowing"?

Answer. I believe these employees were expressing a dissenting view to their leadership. I would hope that employees would feel confident to directly raise their concerns with their supervisors and management rather than signing an anonymous letter. "Whistleblowing" is a term and activity covered by legislation and regulations; I defer to the Department's Office of the Legal Adviser to determine whether the referenced actions are considered protected whistleblowing activity.

Question. If confirmed, how will you address discipline issues, such as insubordination, that do not take established dissent channels?

Answer. If confirmed, I will make sure that U.S. employees at Embassy Colombo know that there are several avenues available to express disagreements. I would encourage employees to use established channels to express their views.

According to Department regulations, insubordination is a disciplinary matter related to conduct on the job and may result in counseling and a penalty commensurate with the scale of the offense. If confirmed, I would address discipline issues, including insubordination, in consultation with the Department's human resources and legal professionals.

Question. Have you ever expressed support for an Israeli cease fire in Gaza?

Answer. No, I have not expressed support for an Israeli cease fire in Gaza.

Question. Do you agree that Hamas is an antisemitic entity?

Answer. Yes, Hamas is a terrorist group and antisemitic entity. This foreign terrorist organization seeks to eliminate the state of Israel, and its founding charter calls for the killing of Jewish people.

Question. Would a cease fire allow these groups to reconstitute and attack Israel, and Americans, in the future?

Answer. The United States remains committed to reaching a deal for an immediate cease fire that secures the release of hostages and allows us to surge and sustain humanitarian aid and bolster the protection of civilians. The Administration's hope is that a more enduring peace could be built upon that. Working with partners, the U.S. Government is attempting to secure the release of all hostages held by Hamas. The U.S. Government supports Israel's right to protect itself from Hamas' terrorism consistent with international law.

Question. Do you agree that calling for a cease fire in Gaza means calling for Israel to stop its pursuit of Hamas, a designated foreign terrorist organization, that

orchestrated the October 7 attacks and still refuses to release all Israeli and American hostages?

Answer. The United States remains committed to reaching a deal for an immediate cease fire that secures the release of hostages and allows us to surge and sustain humanitarian aid and bolster the protection of civilians. The Administration's hope is that a more enduring peace could be built upon that. Working with partners, the U.S. Government is attempting to secure the release of all hostages held by Hamas. The U.S. Government supports Israel's right to protect itself from Hamas' terrorism consistent with international law.

Question. Do you believe that Israel, in its operation against Hamas, which is known to use civilians as human shields, is taking all necessary steps to minimize civilian casualties?

Answer. The U.S. Government supports Israel's right to protect itself consistent with international law. The Administration has urged Israel to differentiate between civilians and Hamas terrorists and to avoid civilian casualties. Hamas' use of civilians as human shields, a blatant violation of international law, does not lessen Israel's obligations under international humanitarian law.

Question. Since 1979, the U.S. has been Sri Lanka's largest goods export market. While historically friendly, Sri Lanka has increased large-scale infrastructure projects, such as the port of Hambantota, with China. Even with debt restructuring with China and the U.S., Sri Lanka's ability to address its financial shortfalls continue. If confirmed, how will you ensure that these debt loads don't cause Sri Lanka to form closer bonds with China?

Answer. As part of the parameters of its IMF program, Sri Lanka is currently negotiating a restructuring to reduce its external debt. The United States is working with the Government of Sri Lanka to return the country to debt sustainability, thereby reducing the PRC's opportunity to take advantage of the situation. If confirmed, I will continue to work alongside our partners in the Paris Club and on Sri Lanka's Official Creditor Committee to achieve a debt deal where all of Sri Lanka's creditors, including China, implement restructurings on comparable and transparent terms. The Government of Sri Lanka has affirmed its commitment to treat all creditors on a comparable and transparent basis.

Question. How would you describe Sri Lanka's current relationship with China?

Answer. We have spoken openly about our concerns regarding the PRC's pattern of accumulating economic leverage over Sri Lanka from unsustainable loans and debt, including non-concessional loans for large infrastructure projects. Partnerships between countries should be open, transparent, and mutually beneficial. That is the basis for the U.S. relationship with Sri Lanka. If confirmed, I will strive to establish the United States as a partner of choice for Sri Lanka by supporting infrastructure projects that meet Sri Lanka's development needs, invest in the local community, and respect local financial conditions.

Question. How does increased PRC presence in Sri Lanka and the Indian Ocean impact U.S. strategic interests?

Answer. Our security partnership with Sri Lanka is essential to protecting our interests in the Indo-Pacific. If the United States is not reliably present, we leave a vacuum our adversaries will seek to fill. In response to the PRC's challenges to the rules-based international order, we are investing domestically, we are aligning with allies and partners like Sri Lanka, and we are competing with the PRC. As a responsible power, we keep channels of communication with the PRC open, so that our competition does not veer into conflict.

Question. What is your understanding of the PRC's role at the port of Hambantota?

Answer. The Office of the Director of National Intelligence assesses that the People's Liberation Army will continue to pursue the establishment of overseas military installations and access agreements to project power and protect China's interests abroad. Beijing reportedly is considering pursuing military facilities in multiple locations, including Sri Lanka. If confirmed, I will support Sri Lanka through our ongoing efforts in security cooperation and capacity building for the Sri Lanka Ports Authority (SLPA) to help manage the nation's ports, including Hambantota, in a transparent, rules-based manner and in line with international standards.

Question. How do you see Sri Lanka's role in the region currently and in the years ahead?

Answer. The United States and Sri Lanka share a vision of an Indo-Pacific region that is free and open, connected, prosperous, secure, and resilient.

Due to its strategic location at the maritime cross-roads of the region, economic engagement opportunities are numerous in Sri Lanka, including in ports and logistics. In November 2023, the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation (DFC) announced that it will invest $553 million to support the development of a deepwater shipping container terminal in the Port of Colombo. This terminal will provide critical infrastructure for the South Asian region and reflects the United States' enduring commitment to Sri Lanka's economic growth and regional economic integration.

Sri Lanka also has an increasingly important regional leadership role. As the current chair of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), Sri Lanka is demonstrating its capacity to lead a multilateral platform in addressing cross-cutting and strategic issues across the region.

Question. What are the U.S.' strategic interests in Sri Lanka?

Answer. Current U.S policy in Sri Lanka aims to support Sri Lanka's democratic institutions, encourage its economic development, counter terrorism, and build maritime security to promote a free, open, and prosperous Indo-Pacific region. Both governments intend to promote further economic cooperation and exchanges in maritime security and safety, and desire to pursue joint initiatives to enhance security, stability, transparency, and economic opportunity for mutual benefit.

Question. If confirmed, what will your top priorities be in our relationship with Sri Lanka?

Answer. If confirmed, I will prioritize taking care of and leading the people at U.S. Embassy Colombo, as well as our policy to promote Sri Lanka's role in maintaining a free, open, and secure Indo-Pacific region. This includes supporting Sri Lanka's democratic and economic reforms and support for human rights and good governance.

Question. Beyond economic, what other options can the U.S. utilize to facilitate a greater partnership with Sri Lanka?

Answer. Our security assistance and cooperation are tailored to build capacity and strengthen professionalization of Sri Lankan security forces—military and law enforcement—while promoting rule of law and respect for human rights, to enable them to defend against security threats affecting Sri Lanka and U.S. national interests, particularly in the maritime domain.

Question. If confirmed, are there specific DFC projects you would like to see proposed for Sri Lanka?

Answer. In November 2023, the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation (DFC) announced that it will invest $553 million to support the development of a deepwater shipping container terminal in the Port of Colombo. This terminal will provide critical infrastructure for the South Asian region and reflects the United States' enduring commitment to Sri Lanka's economic growth and regional economic integration. DFC has also provided hundreds of millions in financing for women-owned businesses, healthcare education, and value-added agricultural exports. We are eager to find other projects that meet DFC's objectives, including in renewable energy.

Question. Sri Lanka and India have a long-standing history and have seen themselves as having common strategic interests in the past. This relationship has been strained given the visit of a Chinese military vessel to Hambantota Port in August 2022, despite Indian and U.S. concerns over the visit, as well as subsequent Chinese port calls. The current Sri Lankan President, Ranil Wickremesinghe, has signaled he is aligning Sri Lanka's path with India in the region and recently thanked India for its economic support, however, concerns remain given a territorial dispute surrounding fishing rights on a small Sri Lankan territorial island. How can the U.S. assist in facilitating closer and continual relations between Colombo and New Delhi?

Answer. The United States and India are pursuing an ambitious agenda to expand our strategic partnership and promote a more free, open, and secure Indo-Pacific region, including for Sri Lanka. The United States and India share an interest in supporting Sri Lanka's sovereignty, economic development, and democracy. For instance, the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation (DFC) and the Adani Group are supporting the development of the Port of Colombo. If confirmed, I will work with both Sri Lanka and India to advance our shared interests.

Question. How do you asses the current relationship between Sri Lanka and India?

Answer. Both Sri Lanka and India are vital partners to promoting a prosperous, free, and open Indo-Pacific region. If confirmed, I will work with both Sri Lanka and India to advance our shared interests.

RESPONSE TO AN ADDITIONAL QUESTION FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO ELIZABETH K. HORST BY SENATOR TODD YOUNG

Question. Sea routes across the Indian Ocean have become sanctions evading highways, particularly for Iran and Russia. We need to prioritize calling out illegal activities and continue building cooperative partnerships across these waters, even when it is partners that are potentially at fault for facilitating sanctions evasion. Please give us a preview of your engagement strategies with your would-be host nations in this respect.

Answer. Our security partnership with Sri Lanka is essential to protecting our interests in the Indo-Pacific. If the United States is not reliably present and not making targeted investments with Sri Lanka, we leave a vacuum our adversaries will seek to fill. Our security assistance and cooperation are tailored to build capacity and strengthen professionalization of Sri Lankan security forces—military and law enforcement—while promoting rule of law and respect for human rights, to enable them to defend against security threats affecting Sri Lanka and U.S. national interests, including in sanctions enforcement.

We have seen first-hand the benefit—for the United States and the region—of investing in Sri Lanka's maritime security and maritime domain awareness capabilities. For example, over the last few years, Sri Lankan authorities have seized hundreds of kilos worth of illicit drugs, including drugs originating from Iran, transiting regional waters. We are proud that some of the vessels used in these missions were transferred to the Sri Lankan maritime forces by the United States as Excess Defense Articles (EDA) from the U.S. Coast Guard. As another sign of the positive influence of our investments and engagements, Sri Lanka contributed one of these EDA vessels for a patrol to counter Houthi Rebels in the Arabian Sea. If confirmed, I will continue this commitment to U.S.-Sri Lanka security cooperation to promote free, transparent, and open waterways in the Indian Ocean region.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO TROY FITRELL BY SENATOR BENJAMIN L. CARDIN

Question. What is your current assessment of the risk climate change poses to the country?

Answer. Climate change poses substantial and multifaceted risks to Seychelles. According to the World Bank, climate change poses long-term sustainability risks for the country: ocean acidification and coral bleaching affects both tourism and fishing, Seychelles' two biggest industries; rises in ocean levels threaten many of Seychelles' low-lying atoll islands; and increases in storms and storm surges threaten greater economic losses from flooding and landslides.

Question. How can the U.S. and international partners further safeguard the Seychelles key economic industries as events like rising sea-levels and flooding threaten people's lives and livelihoods, and what steps can you take if confirmed to assist with those efforts?

Answer. The United States and the international community are working together to provide technical expertise to Seychellois partners to improve governance and enhance capacity there to respond to climate-based threats. For instance, I understand that the U.S. Government has previously placed a science fellow with the Ministry of Environment to help develop a robust "blue carbon" policy framework. If confirmed, I would work to strengthen our engagement through mechanisms like the Ocean Conservation Pledge, which Seychelles was one of the first countries to endorse, and to promote coordination with U.S. universities and private sector actors to maximize the impact of our interventions.

Question. How significant a threat is piracy to Seychelles?

Answer. Piracy off the Horn of Africa dropped significantly beginning around 2011 thanks to international anti-piracy measures. However, since late 2023 and into 2024, there have been several attacks in the region. Seychellois authorities have ex-

pressed concern that piracy could affect fishing and other vessels within its exclusive economic zone, particularly near its small northern islands.

Question. What protections are needed to counter rising piracy in the region?

Answer. Maritime domain awareness and regional coordination are key to countries in the Western Indian Ocean being able to protect their territorial waters. They struggle to accomplish this due to large exclusive economic zones and small coast guard fleets. Countries also need justice sector and law enforcement reform and capacity to sufficiently bring pirates to justice.

Question. What will you do to better support the Seychelles against this threat if confirmed?

Answer. If confirmed, I would encourage expansion of our long-standing anti-piracy activities in the Seychelles, including law enforcement and maritime security capacity-building assistance, increased information-sharing, and justice sector support to increase the Seychelles ability to effectively prosecute and adjudicate piracy cases. This would be strengthened by increased regional and multilateral cooperation on anti-piracy efforts and maritime security, including having convicted Somali pirates serve sentences at United Nations-funded prisons in Somalia. I applaud Seychelles' efforts in supporting a legal finish for recent piracy cases in the region.

Question. If confirmed, how do you intend to center anti-corruption and good governance activities within the U.S.'s relationship with the Seychelles?

Answer. Since emerging from many years of single-party rule and related graft, Seychelles has made progress on efforts to combat corruption and strengthen its democratic institutions. At the forefront of that advance is the Anti-Corruption Commission Seychelles (ACCS), which the Department of State publicly recognized in December 2023 by giving its Anti-Corruption Champion award to its Commissioner May de Silva. Additionally, the U.S. is pleased that Seychelles has been an active member in the Open Government Partnership (OGP) since joining in 2018. If confirmed, I will continue to encourage the country's open government work as a vehicle to advance anti-corruption, transparency, accountability, and civil society participation. If confirmed, I would continue to highlight to the region and the world the valuable work of the ACCS and key bilateral partners, while seeking to facilitate continued U.S. interagency support for Seychelles' government institutions.

Question. What steps will you take—if confirmed—to support democracy in Seychelles? What do you hope to accomplish through these actions? What are the potential impediments to addressing the specific obstacles you have identified?

Answer. President Ramkalawan's election in 2020 marked the first peaceful, democratic transition since the country's independence in 1976. As Seychelles seeks to solidify its nascent democracy, it confronts significant government resource limitations, historic corruption, and pervasive illegal narcotics and high addiction rates, among a host of other challenges. By reopening our embassy in 2023 and returning to a full-time presence, the United States is better placed to support Seychelles' democratic trajectory. If confirmed, I would provide support to Seychelles' governing institutions; support civil society; coordinate the embassy's efforts to monitor the national elections set to take place in 2025, in conjunction with other international partners; and hold up Seychelles' progress as an example for the rest of the region.

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 investment and governance, and what will you prioritize in processes to administer such assistance?

Answer. If confirmed, I would prioritize projects that contribute to inclusive economic growth, education, and improvements in the justice sector. I would also work with Prosper Africa, which is coordinated through USAID, to conclude deals in Seychelles and look for opportunities to provide technical assistance that promotes inclusive economic growth.

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 NGO's, and other members of civil society in Seychelles? What steps will you take to pro-actively address any efforts to restrict or penalize NGO's and civil society via legal or regulatory measures should they occur?

Answer. If confirmed, I would engage civil society organizations to support efforts to improve the overall human rights situation and defend the advances won in recent years. I see discussions with civil society as a fundamentally important part of my role and a valuable opportunity to learn from those leading positive change.

Local human rights NGO's offer valuable perspectives on the issues they focus on, and their partner NGO's in the United States are helpful in building the capacity of local partners, creating platforms for their work, and making connections to U.S. policymaking processes. I plan on demonstrating my support for these NGO's and the critical role they play in any democracy.

Question. Will you and your embassy team actively engage with Seychelles 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 Seychelles?

Answer. If confirmed, I will be eager to meet regularly with the press and to share honest views with host government counterparts about the importance to democracy of a free and open press.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO TROY FITRELL BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

Question. How should the U.S. plan to counterbalance Chinese influence in Seychelles while avoiding regional tensions?

Answer. Seychelles has been appreciative of and receptive to our offers of support in maritime security, economic governance, and academic and professional exchanges, and it wants to partner with the United States as an alternative to the People's Republic of China (PRC). Our re-opened Embassy will only increase our ability to expand our bilateral engagement with Seychelles and ensure we are its partner of choice. If confirmed, I will continue to expand our strong diplomatic, economic, and security partnerships with Seychelles.

Question. What steps should the U.S. take to ensure our military engagement respects the sovereignty and interests of the host nation while building a deeper and more active partnership in the Indian Ocean?

Answer. Most directly through an active presence in the Seychelles and the responsibility to coordinate across and within our interagency representation, as well as with strategic partner nations. AFRICOM, CENTCOM, and INDOPACOM all have equities in the region, so ensuring that our engagement and activities are known to and supported by our Seychellois partners would be a priority.

Question. If confirmed, how will you help steer U.S. policy to address maritime security and illegal fishing issues in Seychelles?

Answer. In Guinea, our efforts to improve maritime domain awareness have proved effective, particularly to help the Government of Guinea counter illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing. If confirmed, I would use similar approaches in the Seychelles, including using open-source satellite imagery and the domain awareness and analysis capabilities of the United States government to assist the Government of the Seychelles to enforce their laws in their territorial waters.

Question. What measures do you plan to take to strengthen U.S.-Seychelles security cooperation and enhance Seychelles' defense capabilities, if confirmed?

Answer. If confirmed, I would look to expand and enhance cooperative and capacity-building activities, particularly related to the AFRICOM and CENTCOM areas of responsibility. Particular areas of cooperation would include maritime and aerial domain awareness, remotely piloted vehicle operations, and data analysis, amongst other areas, designed in cooperation with Seychellois authorities. I will also support continued strong participation from the Seychelles Defense Forces in IMET-funded programs. These opportunities have allowed us to support the professional development of many members of the country's security forces who are now in senior positions.

Question. How should U.S. policy aim to mitigate the economic vulnerabilities of island nations like Seychelles, which are reliant on tourism and fishing, significantly post-COVID–19?

Answer. The United States should encourage and support science-based sustainable fisheries management in Seychellois fisheries as well as the development of aquaculture resources where appropriate and the possibility of expanded value-added processing and exports.

Question. What specific strategies will you use, if confirmed, to promote U.S. investment in non-tourism sectors and strengthen bilateral trade ties?

Answer. If confirmed, I would look to support the growing financial services sector in the Seychelles, through engagement and capacity-building efforts, both to advance that sector and for it to be a catalyst to other economic growth sectors. In addition, although Seychelles represents a small commercial market, there is a significant high-end consumer base that could be a fruitful target for expanded marketing of U.S. luxury products.

Question. How can the U.S. better leverage Seychelles' economic success to enhance U.S. interests?

Answer. Greater economic success in the Seychelles would help institutionalize transparent and reliable economic policies, continuing and deepening Seychelles' actions in partnership with the United States in international fora. Moreover, the United States' private sector is well-positioned to seize opportunities in the energy sector, including natural gas, solar, and electricity generation, information technologies, and financial services.

Question. If confirmed, how do you plan to increase U.S. participation in vital subregional economic and trade initiatives and entities like the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission?

Answer. If confirmed, I would use our resident diplomatic representation to build significant relationships with such entities and initiatives to advance United States interests.

Question. How is U.S. policy supporting the consolidation of democratic governance in Seychelles, and what specific support will you push for from the U.S. if confirmed?

Answer. Continued direct engagement across the political spectrum would help consolidate the democratic gains the people of the Seychelles have achieved in recent years. If confirmed, I would continue efforts to improve capacities in the justice, education, and economic sectors to help demonstrate that democratic advances mean tangible advances to the population. We will continue our work with the interagency on capacity-building measures for good governance in Seychelles, for example by supporting Department of Justice staffing of a liaison to work on anti-money laundering issues.

Question. What strategies will you use, if confirmed, to promote human rights, freedom of expression, and fair elections in Seychelles?

Answer. If confirmed, I would support continued capacity-building engagement with the justice sector, which would strengthen efforts toward supporting fundamental freedoms, free and fair elections, and continuing to combat trafficking in persons and other crimes. I would also pay particular attention to media activities and popular participation in electoral efforts, working with USAID and the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor to support elections planning. Further, I would engage with civil society to discuss their concerns and urge the government to address those concerns.

Question. If confirmed, how do you plan to support the Seychelles Human Rights Commission and other institutions in their efforts to maintain independence and effectiveness?

Answer. If confirmed, I would continue a career-long dedication to supporting human rights defenders and their efforts to provide an independent voice in support of the fundamental freedoms of the people. As noted, continued efforts in the justice sector would help safeguard these freedoms and I would maintain an ongoing relationship with the Human Rights Commission and its leadership and staff.

Question. How will you direct your Embassy to work with civil society organizations to improve the human rights situation?

Answer. If confirmed, I would engage civil society organizations to support efforts to improve the overall human rights situation and defend the advances won in recent years. I see discussions with civil society as a fundamentally important part of my role and a valuable opportunity to learn from those leading positive change. Local human rights NGO's offer valuable perspectives on the issues they focus on, and their partner NGO's in the United States are helpful in building the capacity of local partners, creating platforms for their work, and making connections to U.S. policymaking processes. I plan on demonstrating my support for these NGO's and the critical role they play in any democracy.

Question. If confirmed, what actions will you propose to ensure transparency and fairness in governance, including addressing government corruption and enhancing the effectiveness of the Anti-Corruption Commission?

Answer. If confirmed, I would energetically support transparency and fairness in governance, including enhancing the effectiveness of the Anti-Corruption Commission. I would seek opportunities to direct capacity building support to the Commission and to related governmental and non-governmental institutions.

Question. If confirmed, what role will you have the U.S. play in promoting freedom of the press and ensuring media operations without undue influence in Seychelles?

Answer. Civil society organizations report that the Constitutional provisions protecting the media are robust, and self-censorship has gone down since the 1990's. Following the decriminalization of defamation in 2021, journalists in the Seychelles are rarely targeted for critical reporting. The few attacks against journalists mainly occur online, which is something I will monitor, particularly because of the prevalence of women journalists in Seychelles and the fact that, around the world, online attacks against women journalists are more often gendered and sexualized than threats against their male counterparts. Like in many countries, print media struggles to maintain viable business models, especially due to distribution costs between islands, which narrows the media landscape and can take a particularly heavy toll on independent journalists.

Question. If confirmed, what concrete steps could you take to help Seychelles operationalize the prioritized recommendations contained in the TIP report?

Answer. If confirmed, I will continue to engage the Government of Seychelles on the issue of trafficking in persons. As noted in the 2023 TIP Report, the government has made progress in both prosecution and protection efforts. This includes prosecuting and convicting more traffickers, increasing funding for victim services, and opening and operationalizing the country's first anti-trafficking shelter. If confirmed, I will encourage the government to address the 2023 TIP Report recommendations, including increasing the capacity of labor inspectors to identify trafficking cases, particularly in the Seychelles International Trade Zone; holding fraudulent labor recruiters accountable; and increasing funding and resources for victim services.

Question. What is your assessment of religious freedom in the Seychelles 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, and the Department continues to monitor religious freedom in the Seychelles. Seychelles' legal framework protects religious freedom, including the right of individuals to change religion or belief. If confirmed, I commit to working with the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom to address the importance of religious freedom and further strengthen mutual respect for and among religious and non-religious communities in Seychelles.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to personally engaging with civil society on this issue?

Answer. Yes. If confirmed, I will engage regularly with diverse religious groups and civil society organizations to advance respect for freedom of religion or belief and explore ways to strengthen civil society's inclusion in discussions and decision-making on related topics. I will use the convening power of the USG to advance inter-religious dialogue, which helps to increase social support for religious freedom.

Question. If confirmed, what concrete steps can you take to help Seychelles increase their societal and governmental respect for freedom of religion or belief?

Answer. If confirmed, I will work with the Government of Seychelles, 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.

Question. During your interaction with my staff, they discussed my Embassy in a Box Act with you, which I introduced in April. Given the startup nature of the Embassy in Seychelles and, if confirmed, the challenges and work you would face in standing up the embassy operations? Please provide your perspective on this legislation and its potential impact on your work and future Ambassadors in a similar situation.

Answer. I'm aware of the bill and appreciate your support and interest in the implementation of the micro missions (aka "embassy in a box"). I understand Depart-

ment experts are doing a thorough review of the legislation with an intent to return with substantive thoughts.

Reopening an embassy will be a challenge, although I believe, if confirmed, I will be uniquely suited to take on this challenge as I was previously credentialed to the Seychelles. Re-establishing management and operations will be critical, as well as strengthening our relationships with civil society and the Seychellois government to ensure smooth operations in country. If confirmed, I welcome you and your staff to visit to see our progress firsthand.

Question. What is your understanding of morale throughout Mission Seychelles?

Answer. Although the mission is currently quite small, our one American officer and two locally employed staff are extremely motivated and glad to be part of this example of expeditionary diplomacy.

Question. How do you intend to improve morale at Mission Seychelles?

Answer. If confirmed, I intend to maintain positive morale by providing opportunities for meaningful work and professional development and ensuring open lines of communication.

Question. How do you intend to create a unified mission and vision at Mission Seychelles?

Answer. To become and remain united, the members of the Mission must understand the organization's priorities and strategic goals. If confirmed, I intend to consistently articulate these priorities, and to provide good constructive feedback to the team on our shared progress. In addition, I would model strong personal ethics and set clear expectations for behavior.

Question. How would you describe your management style?

Answer. A fundamental tenet of my management style is to consider each staff member the key mission member on that person's professional portfolio. In that sense, each member has leadership and policy responsibilities and provides counsel to the overall mission leadership. I consider it my responsibility to provide opportunities to my staff, but also coaching or encouragement in the manner that the staff member needs. I believe in situationally appropriate and individually appropriate engagement.

Question. Do you believe it is ever acceptable or constructive to berate subordinates, either in public or private?

Answer. Never.

Question. How do you envision your relationship with the deputy chief of mission?

Answer. I consider the Chief of Mission and Deputy Chief of Mission to be two parts of a unified mission leadership. While I seek complementary skills and experiences when recruiting a Deputy Chief of Mission and seek alternative opinions in our private discussions, we speak publicly with one voice. It is my responsibility to ensure my Deputy Chief of Mission is both effective and happy.

Question. If confirmed, what leadership responsibilities do you intend to entrust to your deputy chief of mission?

Answer. In the particular structure of our nascent mission in the Seychelles, the Deputy Chief of Mission would take primary responsibility for the management operations of the embassy and be the first-line supervisor of the other staff, but we would be each other's primary backup and I would expect and encourage the Deputy to have a range of senior relationships and policy responsibilities as well.

Question. Do you believe it is important to provide employees with accurate, constructive feedback on their performances to encourage improvement and reward those who most succeeded in their roles?

Answer. I take the responsibility for accurate employee evaluation reports very seriously. As U.S. Ambassador to Guinea and in my two stints as a Deputy Chief of Mission, I provide an annual training seminar on this subject that I make mandatory for everyone in my mission that rates another officer. If confirmed, I would continue this practice in the Seychelles.

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.

Question. In your experience, do U.S. diplomats get outside of our embassy walls enough to accomplish fully their missions?

Answer. I believe this is an issue that requires continuous attention. I remind my staff of this regularly and believe they respond well to the encouragement to do so.

Question. How do you intend to improve the ability of U.S. diplomats to better access all local populations?

Answer. I believe our diplomats must always seek opportunities to meet people in their communities. As the head of a similarly sized mission, I had a rule that all direct-hire American staff had to engage in public speaking and community outreach. While some resisted at first, they came to see it as an enjoyable exercise and an important professional development opportunity, while advancing our outreach goals. If confirmed, I intend to continue that policy in the Seychelles.

Question. Do you pledge to support fully CODELs and STAFFDELs that seek to travel to post?

Answer. Yes.

Question. Do you agree to support fully any CODEL or STAFFDEL, with the only exceptions for simultaneous or overlapping visits by the President or First Lady of the United States, the Vice President, or the Secretaries of State or Defense?

Answer. Yes.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO TROY FITRELL 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 PRC and has used this power to commit genocide in Xinjiang, flood our communities with fentanyl, and emit 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 to do so. Is the CCP a threat to the United States?

Answer. Last 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." As Secretary Blinken has said, under President Xi, the CCP has become more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad. If confirmed, I will advance U.S. national security interests and counter the People's Republic of China (PRC) efforts to expand its problematic influence and use of coercion, through diplomatic engagements, public diplomacy, and commercial advocacy to bolster U.S.-Seychelles ties.

Question. Does the CCP undertake any activities that are beneficial to U.S. interests? If so, please explain.

Answer. 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 2024 Annual Threat Assessment, the CCP is seeking to "preempt challenges to its reputation and legitimacy, undercutting U.S. influence, driving wedges between Washington and its partners, and fostering global norms that favor its authoritarian system."

Question. Do you believe that there are any areas within which the CCP that would constructively work with the United States in good faith, knowing that at any moment Chinese interlocuters with U.S. representatives could be disappeared at a moment's notice? If so, please explain.

Answer. The United States will work with the PRC to address transnational challenges when it is in the U.S. interest to do so. If confirmed, I will work with my colleagues across the U.S. interagency and Congress 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 PRC in the countries or areas in which you will work?

Answer. If confirmed, my priority will be advancing U.S. national security interests in Seychelles 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 Seychelles and the region.

Question. As you may be aware, a group of Federal employees penned an open letter to President Biden criticizing U.S. support for Israel in the aftermath of Hamas' brutal terrorist attack on October 7, 2023. In addition, on January 16, 2024, employees from nearly two dozen agencies staged a walkout in protest of the administration's Israel policy. Efforts like these directly undermine the duty of our diplomats to advance the policies of the President of the United States. Yes or no, did you sign the letter to the President expressing opposition to the President's Israel policy?

Answer. No.

Question. Yes or no, did you participate in the January 16, 2024 walkout?

Answer. No.

Question. If confirmed, would you define an employee or contractor, operating under your supervision, that signs an open letter criticizing you, or policies you undertake at the instruction of the President, as insubordination as defined by the Government Accountability Office?

Answer. If confirmed, I would plan to create a trusting atmosphere where employees felt free to air concerns. I place a high value on Department employees' free speech rights. I understand that expression of disagreement does not in and of itself constitute insubordination. If confirmed, I would work with the Department's Office of the Legal Adviser to determine the proper course of action should such a matter arise.

Question. In your view, are the actions these Federal employees took, by anonymously signing a letter to the President of the United States, covered as "whistleblowing"?

Answer. I support employees' right to express their views and hope that employees working under my leadership would feel comfortable directly raising their concerns with me or their direct supervisors. I believe those employees were expressing a dissenting view to their leadership. "Whistleblowing" is a term and activity covered by legislation and regulations; I defer to the Department's Office of the Legal Adviser to determine whether the referenced actions are considered protected whistleblowing activity.

Question. If confirmed, how will you address discipline issues, such as insubordination, that do not take established dissent channels?

Answer. If confirmed, I would address misconduct, including insubordination, through documentation and direct counseling with an opportunity to improve. Continued violations could result in disciplinary measures as spelled out in our personnel policies.

Question. Have you ever expressed support for an Israeli cease fire in Gaza?

Answer. No. I understand the Administration has expressed support for limited cease fires in order to secure the release of hostages and surge the delivery of humanitarian aid to those in need.

Question. Do you agree that Hamas is an antisemitic entity?

Answer. Yes, Hamas espouses antisemitism. Hamas, which is designated by the United States as a foreign terrorist organization, seeks to eliminate the state of Israel, and its founding charter calls for the killing of Jews.

Question. Would a cease fire allow these groups to reconstitute and attack Israel, and Americans, in the future?

Answer. The United States remains committed to reaching a deal for an immediate cease fire that secures the release of hostages and allows us to surge and sustain humanitarian aid and bolster the protection of civilians. The Administration's hope is that a more enduring peace could be built upon that. Working with partners, the U.S. Government is attempting to secure the release of all hostages held by Hamas. The U.S. Government supports Israel's right to protect itself from Hamas' terrorism consistent with international law.

Question. Do you agree that calling for a cease fire in Gaza means calling for Israel to stop its pursuit of Hamas, a designated foreign terrorist organization, that orchestrated the October 7 attacks and still refuses to release all Israeli and American hostages?

Answer. The United States remains committed to reaching a deal for an immediate cease fire that secures the release of hostages and allows us to surge and sustain humanitarian aid and bolster the protection of civilians. The Administration's hope is that a more enduring peace could be built upon that. Working with partners, the U.S. Government is attempting to secure the release of all hostages held by Hamas. The U.S. Government supports Israel's right to protect itself from Hamas' terrorism consistent with international law.

Question. Do you believe that Israel, in its operation against Hamas, which is known to use civilians as human shields, is taking all necessary steps to minimize civilian casualties?

Answer. It's very difficult in the heat of war to make a definitive assessment about any individual incident but what the National Security Memorandum–20 report states is that the IDF has undertaken steps to implement IHL obligations for the protection of civilians in the current conflict, including the requirements related to distinction, proportionality, and precautions in offensive operations. Israel's own concern about such incidents is reflected in the fact it has a number of internal investigations underway.

Question. For 27 years, the U.S. managed its relationship with the Seychelles remotely from Mauritius. During that time period, China increased partnerships with the Seychelles, constructed infrastructure, and built goodwill with the population. The U.S. reopened our embassy in mid–2023 in the Seychelles. If confirmed, how will you ensure that U.S. partnership is increased, given the great power competition we are currently engaged in with China and the U.S.' absence the past 27 years?

Answer. The first and most important step was to return. If confirmed, I would use our presence to promote our interests and the conviction that the Seychelles' future is best assured through participation in a rules-based, transparent international order. I would look to implement U.S. Government tools to advance capacity-building and cooperative endeavors and encourage the U.S. private sector to consider opportunities in the Seychelles.

Question. How can the U.S. compete with China in the Seychelles if we cannot use the tools at our disposal due to misguided policies, such as environmental concerns?

Answer. If confirmed, I would use the tools at our disposal to their fullest extent. In my previous stint as Charge d'Affaires covering the Seychelles, I led two significant endeavors to allow for U.S. Government engagement. For the first, I negotiated and, on behalf of the U.S. Government, signed an Investment Incentive Agreement that would allow U.S. Government financing for investment opportunities in the Seychelles, including then-OPIC (now the Development Finance Corporation). For the second, I persuaded the Seychelles to join the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative to help the Seychelles prepare to exploit potential natural gas deposits in a responsible way, particularly not to endanger the tourism or fishing industries. I would use both of these tools and consider others to ensure that we engage the Seychelles in a holistic way, advancing our mutual goals.

Question. If confirmed, what other mechanisms do you envision using to increase U.S.-Seychelles partnerships?

Answer. In addition to the economic tools described above, if confirmed I would look to advance maritime security efforts to protect some of the busiest sea lanes in the world and the Seychellois fishing operations. I would look to systematize the process of sharing information but also to provide the analytical tools to develop further the Seychellois capacities to police and defend their own waters. Information is vastly more available than the last time I served with the Seychellois and our engagement needs to reflect that.

RESPONSE TO AN ADDITIONAL QUESTION FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO TROY FITRELL BY SENATOR TODD YOUNG

Question. Sea routes across the Indian Ocean have become sanctions evading highways, particularly for Iran and Russia. We need to prioritize calling out illegal activities and continue building cooperative partnerships across these waters, even when it is partners that are potentially at fault for facilitating sanctions evasion. Please give us a preview of your engagement strategies with your would-be host nations in this respect.

Answer. If confirmed, I would engage and coordinate between the various U.S. Government entities, including defense and law enforcement, to advance information-sharing activities with the Government of the Seychelles. I would look to expand capacity-building activities with my host government partners and provide opportunities for those partners to coordinate and amplify our efforts in international fora. I would look to provide the analytical and physical tools to help the Seychelles enforce their own laws and international best practices across the massive ocean space that are territorial waters.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO KELLY ADAMS-SMITH BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

Democratic Reforms

Question. If confirmed, how will you support democratic, anti-corruption, and rule of law reforms in Moldova? Please be specific.

Answer. If confirmed, I will continue to support Moldova as it increases the capacity of its democratic institutions, advances judicial and broader rule of law reform, promotes prevention and accountability, and supports an inclusive society that respects human rights. The United States has supported integrity vetting of judges and prosecutors to root out entrenched corruption. Moldova's participation in the Global Forum on Asset Recovery (GFAR), with U.S. assistance, has been a positive step in terms of accountability.

Question. If confirmed, how will you support Moldova's integration into the transatlantic community and European Union? Please be specific.

Answer. If confirmed, I will support the Moldovan government on its path to EU accession and in its pursuit of reforms to strengthen democratic institutions, combat corruption, diversify the Moldovan economy, and support human rights. The Moldovan government has remained steadfast and vocal in its commitment to EU accession, and U.S. assistance plays a major role in helping Moldova to modernize and increase the capacity of Moldovan law enforcement and the Moldovan army and support essential reforms in the justice sector.

Question. How will you engage with both ends of the political spectrum while continuing to promote reforms that help Moldova develop its defenses against foreign influence?

Answer. It is in the United States national security interest to support a whole, secure Moldova that can resist Russian malign influence and address other transnational threats. We provide a range of targeted security assistance to Moldova to advance these U.S. goals. U.S. assistance also contributes to Moldova's development of sustainable, professional defense capabilities that enhance Moldova's security and ability to contribute to U.N. and other international peacekeeping operations. If confirmed, I will work with leaders across the political spectrum to ensure this assistance continues.

Question. If confirmed, what actions will you take to help Moldova increase the stability and security of its economy as well as decrease foreign leverage over its economy? Please be specific.

Answer. Despite the challenges posed by the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Moldova is making strides in building a strong, diverse, and export-oriented economy. If confirmed I will channel U.S. assistance to help develop Moldova's two largest export sectors, high-value agriculture and information technology as well as explore new export potential. Development in these sectors will continue to move Moldova's economic focus toward the West and away from Russia.

Question. If confirmed, what action will you take to support Moldova's energy security, diversify its regional energy connections and reduce its dependence on Russia? Please be specific.

Answer. Through unprecedented U.S. and international efforts, Moldova relies significantly less on consumption of Gazprom gas. If confirmed, I would focus on supporting Moldova's energy security and diversification by further leveraging U.S. technical assistance, promoting renewable energy, and encouraging greater reform and infrastructure build out to better link Moldova to European energy markets.

Question. How will you work with your Ambassadorial counterparts in the neighboring countries and across the region to advance regional cooperation and integration in the mutual interest of the United States and Moldova?

Answer. If confirmed, I will work closely with regional Ambassadorial counterparts to advance our shared policy goals through regular communication and engagement with each other as well as with Washington. I would also encourage Embassy Chisinau employees to establish relationships with their counterparts in other missions to promote information sharing and cross-team collaboration to achieve common goals.

Question. How do you propose to engage the government of Moldova, as well as its population, on the importance of maintaining solidarity in support of Ukraine, which will be a difficult task as Russia continues to pressure Moldova to withdraw its support?

Answer. Moldova has maintained a clear and courageous stand in support of its neighbor, Ukraine, and welcomed more than one million refugees from Ukraine, of whom about 118,000 remain. The approximately $774 million in U.S. assistance committed since February 2022—including $118 million in U.S. humanitarian aid delivered through U.N. agencies to support refugees in Moldova—plays a crucial role in implementing reforms and increasing resilience to malign influence. If confirmed, I will work to ensure U.S. assistance to Moldova is used to build resistance to Russia's pressure.

Question. In which areas do you believe that the United States can help move Moldova closer toward its stated goal of joining the European Union? Why do you believe that the U.S. should focus on those particular issues or sectors rather than others?

Answer. The United States supports Moldova's chosen path toward transatlantic integration. If confirmed, I will commit to providing U.S. support for the Moldovan government as it pursues reforms to strengthen democratic institutions, combat corruption, strengthen its economy, and promote an inclusive society that respects human rights. I will work with our missions in Brussels and throughout the EU to support Moldova's accession process. I will also work closely with civil society which plays an important role in promoting accountability for elected leaders and in driving reforms.

Question. To what extent do you believe that Moldova should be included in any future EU or U.S. projects to rebuild Ukraine?

Answer. Moldova offers a viable staging ground for Ukraine's economic recovery. With a shared wide-gauge rail network and multiple road border crossings, Ukraine bound containerized or bulk shipments arriving in Moldova via the EU rail network can be safely transferred for direct shipment to Ukrainian endpoints. Moldova's large local population of Russian language speakers with cultural ties to Ukraine, as well as the Ukrainian refugee population themselves, provides an advantage in coordinating efforts with Ukraine.

Trafficking in Persons

In the State Department's 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report, Moldova received a Tier 2 ranking for failing to fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking.

Question. If confirmed, what concrete steps could you take to help Moldova operationalize the prioritized recommendations contained in the TIP report?

Answer. U.S. support in the fight against human trafficking in Moldova has included prevention, protection, and prosecution programs. Combating corruption in law enforcement and the judiciary, particularly among officials complicit in trafficking crimes, as well as building capacity within Moldovan law enforcement, will improve Moldova's ability to prosecute and prevent trafficking crimes. If confirmed, I will encourage the Moldovan government to increase efforts to convict more traffickers, proactively identify victims, and ensure all identified victims receive state-funded assistance.

Religious Freedom

In the State Department's 2022 International Religious Freedom report, Moldova was noted for its constitution's protections of the rights of individuals to practice their religion.

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. If confirmed, I will ensure our engagement with all religious groups reflects our core values, including respect for religious freedom. I will engage all religious communities and inform the Department's understanding of religious freedom.

I will speak out about upholding the fundamental freedom of religion or belief. I will work with Moldova's new Special Envoy for Countering Antisemitism and Preservation of the Holocaust Memory to advance efforts to provide a measure of justice to Holocaust victims and their heirs.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to personally engaging with civil society on this issue?

Answer. Yes, U.S. engagement with Moldovan civil society is key to advancing our international religious freedom priorities, and if confirmed, I commit to regular engagement with civil society on this issue.

Question. If confirmed, what concrete steps can you take to help Moldova increase their societal and governmental respect for religious freedom?

Answer. If confirmed, I would lead the Embassy in identifying critical touchpoints throughout the year and host engagements with Moldovan religious leaders, and also leverage public diplomacy tools to work with educational institutions and CSOs to support freedom of religion or belief. I will also seek opportunities to coordinate with the Ambassador-at-Large to speak out against attempts by malign actors to instrumentalize religion to advance pro-Kremlin policies and spread disinformation that undermines Moldova's democracy and stands contrary to U.S. values.

Human Rights

The State Department's 2023 Human Rights Report noted that there were no significant changes in the human rights situation over the year. Significant human rights issues included reports of torture or cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment.

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 civil society organizations to help us assess human rights issues, develop programs, and advocate for stronger policies and necessary reforms. Civil society plays an important role in promoting accountability of elected leaders, driving meaningful reform, supporting the rights of members of minorities and marginalized groups, increasing access to justice for vulnerable communities, and strengthening independent media.

State Management and Oversight

Many U.S. missions have been under enormous stress over the last several years.

Question. What is your understanding of morale throughout Mission Moldova?

Answer. I understand that Mission Moldova's morale is quite high under Ambassador Logsdon's leadership, and if confirmed, I commit to ensuring this continues. The morale of Embassy Chisinau employees as well as their families will be a top priority for me.

Question. How do you intend to improve morale at Mission Moldova?

Answer. If confirmed, I will work with my Deputy Chief of Mission to ensure that we create an atmosphere in which our staff knows that they can bring serious issues to us and know that they are being heard at the highest level. I will ensure that everyone in the mission understands that my highest priority is the safety and security of the team. If confirmed, I will promote training and professional development, and ensure that all staff members are aware of the employee and family support resources that the Department offers to assist employees.

Question. How do you intend to create a unified mission and vision at Mission Moldova?

Answer. If confirmed, I plan to establish a strong team with a clear understanding of our goals and objectives, maintain open and transparent communications throughout the mission by sharing information, and seek ways to support and ensure the safety and community of the mission the community—both American and local staff. I will also work to advance the process of establishing a New Embassy Compound for our Mission to address the longstanding challenge posed by our limited physical spaces.

Management is a key responsibility for chiefs of mission.

Question. How would you describe your management style?

Answer. I have a collaborative management style. I believe in sharing information and empowering my team, being open to ideas and suggestions from throughout the mission, and providing clear guidance and decisions as needed to lead.

Question. Do you believe it is ever acceptable or constructive to berate subordinates, either in public or private?

Answer. I do not believe it is ever acceptable or constructive to berate subordinates, either in public or private, and if confirmed will expect my team to conduct themselves in a professional manner.

Question. How do you envision your relationship with the deputy chief of mission?

Answer. I have been a Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM) twice—at the U.S. Embassy in Prague, Czech Republic, and currently at the U.S. Mission to the European Union. To be successful, a DCM must be the Chief of Mission's alter ego, confidante, and partner in managing and leading the mission. If confirmed, I fully expect to have that kind of positive relationship with my DCM in Chisinau.

Question. If confirmed, what leadership responsibilities do you intend to entrust to your deputy chief of mission?

Answer. If confirmed, I anticipate entrusting my Deputy Chief of Mission to manage the day-to-day operations of the mission, and to be fully engaged on and informed about all aspects of policy and mission management should the deputy need to step in to lead.

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. Yes, I believe it is critical to provide employees with accurate, constructive feedback on their performances in order to encourage improvement and reward those who most succeeded in their roles. I will hold accountable those who have performance or conduct issues. This is what I have done throughout my career.

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 will support and encourage clear, accurate, and direct feedback to employees in order to improve performance and reward high achievers. I will hold accountable those who have performance or conduct issues.

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 accomplish fully their missions?

Answer. In my experience, U.S. diplomats have gotten outside of our embassy walls sufficiently to accomplish our mission, and if confirmed I would stress the importance of getting outside of our Embassy by example. Access to and engagement with local contacts and populations is the foundation of our work overseas. Throughout my career, I have created mission-wide public outreach programs and participated in public outreach to all parts of society, from students to non-governmental organizations to the media, and will continue to do so.

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 embassy staff to spend time engaging with local populations, including from marginalized groups, and developing contacts. I will also lead by example to demonstrate to my team that it is important to engage with our local counterparts and to participate in public outreach to provide information about our goals in a country and to learn from our hosts about local conditions.

Congressional Delegations (CODELs) and Staff Delegations (STAFFDELs) serve a critical oversight mission.

Question. Do you pledge to support fully CODELs and STAFFDELs that seek to travel to post?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed, I pledge that Embassy Chisinau, under my leadership, will fully support and welcome CODELs and STAFFDELs that seek to travel to post.

Question. Do you agree to support fully any CODEL or STAFFDEL, with the only exceptions for simultaneous or overlapping visits by the President or First Lady of the United States, the Vice President, or the Secretaries of State or Defense?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed, I pledge that Embassy Chisinau, under my leadership, will fully support and welcome CODELs and STAFFDELs with exceptions for simultaneous or overlapping visits by the President or First Lady of the United States, the Vice President, or the Secretaries of State or Defense.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO KELLY ADAMS-SMITH 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 (PRC) 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 CCP a threat to the United States?

Answer. Last 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." As Secretary Blinken has said, under President Xi, the CCP has become more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad. If confirmed, I will advance U.S. national security interests and counter the People's Republic of China (PRC) efforts to expand its problematic influence and use of coercion, through diplomatic engagements, public diplomacy, and commercial advocacy to bolster U.S.-Moldova ties.

Question. Does the CCP undertake any activities that are beneficial to U.S. interests? If so, please explain.

Answer. 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 2024 Annual Threat Assessment, the CCP is seeking to "preempt challenges to its reputation and legitimacy, undercutting U.S. influence, driving wedges between Washington and its partners, and fostering global norms that favor its authoritarian system."

Question. Do you believe that there are any areas within which the CCP that would constructively work with the United States in good faith, knowing that at any moment Chinese interlocuters with U.S. representatives could be disappeared at a moment's notice? If so, please explain.

Answer. The United States will work with the PRC to address transnational challenges, such as climate change, when it is in the U.S. interest to do so. If confirmed, I will work with my colleagues across the U.S. interagency and Congress 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 PRC in the countries or areas in which you will work?

Answer. If confirmed, my priority will be advancing U.S. national security interests in Moldova 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 Moldova and the region.

Question. As you may be aware, a group of Federal employees penned an open letter to President Biden criticizing U.S. support for Israel in the aftermath of Hamas' brutal terrorist attack on October 7, 2023. In addition, on January 16, 2024, employees from nearly two dozen agencies staged a walkout in protest of the administration's Israel policy. Efforts like these directly undermine the duty of our diplomats to advance the policies of the President of the United States. Yes or no, did you sign the letter to the President expressing opposition to the President's Israel policy?

Answer. No, I did not sign the open letter to the President.

Question. Yes or no, did you participate in the January 16, 2024, walkout?

Answer. No, I did not participate.

Question. If confirmed, would you define an employee or contractor, operating under your supervision, that signs an open letter criticizing you, or policies you undertake at the instruction of the President, as insubordination as defined by the Government Accountability Office?

Answer. If confirmed, I would seek to address employee concerns personally by creating an open, trusting, and harassment-free work environment. I am mindful of and value Department employees' right to free speech under the First Amendment. Moreover, I understand the expression of disagreement does not in and of itself constitute insubordination. If confirmed, I would work with the Department's Office of the Legal Adviser to determine the proper course of action should such a matter arise.

Question. In your view, are the actions these Federal employees took, by anonymously signing a letter to the President of the United States, covered as "whistleblowing"?

Answer. I believe these employees were expressing a dissenting view to their leadership. I support employees' rights to express their views and hope that employees feel confident to directly raise their concerns with their supervisors and management. "Whistleblowing" is a term and activity covered by legislation and regulations; I defer to the Department's Office of the Legal Adviser to determine whether the referenced actions are considered protected whistleblowing activity.

Question. If confirmed, how will you address discipline issues, such as insubordination, that do not take established dissent channels?

Answer. According to Department regulations, job-related insubordination is a conduct matter and may result in counseling and/or discipline, including a penalty commensurate with the scale of the offense. If confirmed, I would address conduct issues, including insubordination, in consultation with the Department's human resources and legal professionals.

Question. Have you ever expressed support for an Israeli cease fire in Gaza?

Answer. No, I have not expressed support for an Israeli cease fire in Gaza. I understand the Administration has expressed support for limited cease fires in order to secure the release of hostages and surge the delivery of humanitarian aid to those in need.

Question. Do you agree that Hamas is an antisemitic entity?

Answer. Yes, Hamas espouses antisemitism. Hamas, which is designated by the United States as a foreign terrorist organization, seeks to eliminate the state of Israel, and its founding charter calls for the killing of Jews.

Question. Would a cease fire allow these groups to reconstitute and attack Israel, and Americans, in the future?

Answer. The United States remains committed to reaching a deal for an immediate cease fire that secures the release of hostages and allows us to surge and sustain humanitarian aid and bolster the protection of civilians. The Administration's hope is that a more enduring peace could be built upon that. Working with partners, the U.S. Government is attempting to secure the release of all hostages held by Hamas. The U.S. Government supports Israel's right to protect itself from Hamas' terrorism consistent with international law.

Question. Do you agree that calling for a cease fire in Gaza means calling for Israel to stop its pursuit of Hamas, a designated foreign terrorist organization, that orchestrated the October 7 attacks and still refuses to release all Israeli and American hostages?

Answer. The United States remains committed to reaching a deal for an immediate cease fire that secures the release of hostages and allows us to surge and sustain humanitarian aid and bolster the protection of civilians. The Administrations' hope is that a more enduring peace could be built upon that. Working with partners, the U.S. Government is attempting to secure the release of all hostages held by Hamas. The U.S. Government supports Israel's right to protect itself from Hamas' terrorism and its military objective on an enduring defeat of Hamas, consistent with international law.

Question. Do you believe that Israel, in its operation against Hamas, which is known to use civilians as human shields, is taking all necessary steps to minimize civilian casualties?

Answer. It's very difficult in the heat of war to make a definitive assessment about any individual incident but what the National Security Memorandum–20 report states is that the IDF has undertaken steps to implement IHL obligations for the protection of civilians in the current conflict, including the requirements related to distinction, proportionality, and precautions in offensive operations. Israel's own concern about such incidents is reflected in the fact it has a number of internal investigations underway.

Question. After gaining independence in 1991, Russia has backed and stationed military forces in the Moldovan area of Transnistria. Transnistrian officials state the region's residents hold Russian citizenship, while Moldova counters the area's residents are Moldovan. A resolution to the conflict had been underway but has been inactive since Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine. Do you believe there will be a peaceful reintegration of Transnistria into Moldova?

Answer. The United States remains actively engaged in Chisinau, Tiraspol, and Vienna to encourage the continuation of OSCE-facilitated 1+1 meetings between the Sides, and to support the OSCE-led 5+2 process. The 5+2 process seeks to achieve a comprehensive, peaceful, and sustainable settlement of the conflict based on the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Moldova with a special status for Transnistria within Moldova's internationally recognized borders.

Question. Has Russia's war in Ukraine increased or decreased Russia's influence in Transnistria?

Answer. Russia maintains a military presence in Transnistria without Moldova's consent, and the Kremlin promotes malign actors' engagement in Moldova's domestic politics, involvement in the Moldovan media space, and influence in the energy sector. These activities threaten to undermine Moldova's democratic reforms and pro-Western trajectory through disinformation, cyber and hybrid attacks. At the same time, Ukraine's closure of its border with Moldova that is adjacent to the Transnistria region has furthered Transnistria's economic integration into Europe on Chisinau's terms.

Question. If confirmed, how do you intend to continue promoting a resolution to the conflict?

Answer. If confirmed, I would continue to support a results-oriented OSCE-led 5+2 process to resolve the Transnistrian conflict and uphold Moldova's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO KRISTEN SARRI 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 PRC and has used this power to commit genocide in Xinjiang, flood our communities with fentanyl, and emit 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 to do so. Is the CCP a threat to the United States?

Answer. Last 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." As Secretary Blinken said, under President Xi, the CCP has become more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad. If confirmed, I will advance U.S. national security interests and counter the People's Republic of China (PRC) efforts to expand its problematic influence and use of coercion, through diplomatic engagements, public diplomacy, and commercial advocacy around the world.

Question. Does the CCP undertake any activities that are beneficial to U.S. interests? If so, please explain.

Answer. 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 Na-

tional Intelligence's 2024 Annual Threat Assessment, the CCP is seeking to "preempt challenges to its reputation and legitimacy, undercutting U.S. influence, driving wedges between Washington and its partners, and fostering global norms that favor its authoritarian system."

Question. Do you believe that there are any areas with which the CCP that would constructively work with the United States in good faith, knowing that at any moment Chinese interlocuters with U.S. representatives could disappear at a moment's notice? If so, please explain.

Answer. I understand that the United States will work with the People's Republic of China (PRC) to address transnational challenges when it is in the U.S. interest to do so. If confirmed, I will work with my colleagues across the U.S. interagency and Congress 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 PRC in the countries or areas in which you will work?

Answer. On behalf of the Department of State, the Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs (OES) is responsibility for coordination and oversight to all major science or science and technology agreements and activities between the United States and foreign countries, international organizations, or commissions of which the United States and one or more foreign countries are members. I am fully aware of, and concerned about, the People's Republic of China's (PRC) national strategies related to science and technology, as well as its domestic legal landscape. If confirmed, I will only support cooperative activities with the PRC that advance U.S. interests in science and technology and align with U.S. values of transparency, reciprocity, and openness.

Question. As you may be aware, a group of Federal employees penned an open letter to President Biden criticizing U.S. support for Israel in the aftermath of Hamas' brutal terrorist attack on October 7, 2023. In addition, on January 16, 2024, employees from nearly two dozen agencies staged a walkout in protest of the administration's Israel policy. Efforts like these directly undermine the duty of our diplomats to advance the policies of the President of the United States. Yes or no, did you sign the letter to the President expressing opposition to the President's Israel policy?

Answer. No, I did not sign the letter to the President.

Question. Yes or no, did you participate in the January 16, 2024, walkout?

Answer. No, I did not participate in the walkout.

Question. If confirmed, would you define an employee or contractor, operating under your supervision, that signs an open letter criticizing you, or policies you undertake at the instruction of the President, as insubordination as defined by the Government Accountability Office?

Answer. If confirmed, I will seek to address employee concerns personally by creating a work environment that is open, trusting, and harassment free. I recognize Department employees' right to freedom of expression under the First Amendment and understand that expression of disagreement does not in and of itself constitute insubordination. If confirmed, I will work with the Department of State's Office of the Legal Adviser to determine the proper course of action should a matter arise.

Question. In your view, are the actions these Federal employees took, by anonymously signing a letter to the President of the United States, covered as "whistleblowing"?

Answer. I understand the Department of State follows the statutory definition of a whistleblower as an employee who reports information they reasonably believe is a violation of any law, rule, or regulation; gross mismanagement with substantial risk of significant adverse impact on mission; a gross waste of funds (more than a debatable expenditure); abuse of authority, an arbitrary decision for personal gain and/or to injure others; or a substantial and specific danger to public health or safety.

Question. If confirmed, how will you address discipline issues, such as insubordination, that do not take established dissent channels?

Answer. If confirmed, I will ensure that Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs' employees understand that there are several avenues available, such the Secretary's Dissent Channel, Open Forum, and Policy Ideas Channel, to express policy disagreements and would encourage employees to use established channels to express their views.

Question. Have you ever expressed support for an Israeli cease fire in Gaza?

Answer. No. I have not expressed support for a unilateral Israeli cease fire against Hamas. I believe that Israel has a right to defend itself against Hamas.

Question. Do you agree that Hamas is an antisemitic entity?

Answer. Yes, Hamas espouses antisemitism. Hamas, which is designated by the United States as a foreign terrorist organization, seeks to eliminate the state of Israel, and its founding charter calls for the killing of Jews.

Question. Would a cease fire allow these groups to reconstitute and attack Israel, and Americans, in the future?

Answer. The Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs (OES), for which I am nominated, is not engaged on Middle East security, and my expertise is in natural resource and science policy. I would defer to the Bureau on Near Eastern Affairs. Based on news reports and Administration press conferences, I understand that the United States is committed to reaching a deal for an immediate cease fire that secures the release of hostages and allows us to surge and sustain humanitarian aid and bolster the protection of civilians.

Question. Do you agree that calling for a cease fire in Gaza means calling for Israel to stop its pursuit of Hamas, a designated foreign terrorist organization, that orchestrated the October 7 attacks and still refuses to release all Israeli and American hostages?

Answer. The Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs (OES), for which I am nominated, is not engaged on Middle East security, and my expertise is in natural resource and science policy. I would defer to the Bureau on Near Eastern Affairs. Based on news reports and Administration press conferences, I understand that the United States supports Israel's right to protect itself from Hamas' terrorism and its military objective on an enduring defeat of Hamas, consistent with international law.

Question. Do you believe that Israel, in its operation against Hamas, which is known to use civilians as human shields, is taking all necessary steps to minimize civilian casualties?

Answer. The Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs (OES), for which I am nominated, is not engaged on Middle East security, and my expertise is in natural resource and science policy. I would defer to the Bureau on Near Eastern Affairs. My understanding is that Israel must take all possible precautions to avoid civilian harm during operations and must also investigate credible allegations of law of war violations when they arise, and that the United States is in communication with the Israeli government.

Question. At the Our Ocean Conference held in April 2024, the Department announced more than $508 million to protect the oceans by advancing marine protected areas, sustainable fisheries, and solutions to the climate crisis. One such initiative the Department announced was $13.4 million to protect coral reef habitat and fisheries in Tanzania. How does this help promote the stated mission of the State Department of promoting American prosperity and national security?

Answer. Our Ocean Conference announcements reflect initiatives from across the Federal interagency. My understanding is this announcement refers to a U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) initiative to establish an enabling environment and science-driven framework for sustainable marine protected area and wild-caught fishery co-management by government, communities, and the private sector in Tanzania.

Question. Shouldn't this type of funding for coral reefs and fisheries be used on domestic efforts with extensive coastlines instead of a foreign country?

Answer. The United States remains at the forefront of coral reef conservation and is committed to advancing efforts to protect and restore coral reefs. Coral reefs are essential habitats globally that support food security and livelihoods for millions. Activities and programs to conserve and restore key coral reef ecosystems at home, such as NOAA's Coral Reef Conservation Program, and abroad are a valuable tool in building relationships and supporting U.S. interests across the globe and promoting national security, stability, and prosperity.

Question. Would you agree American prosperity and national security is better served by conserving U.S. coral reefs and fisheries?

Answer. Scaling up work to enhance the resilience of coral reef ecosystems at home, and supporting other countries in doing the same helps reduce the risk of fu-

ture global instability and helps protect coral reefs which are amongst the most biologically productive and diverse ecosystems in the world.

Internationally, the United States is a leader in efforts to conserve and manage highly migratory species that require attention throughout their range, including intersections with U.S. waters and fisheries, and to ensure that international fisheries supplying the U.S. market are both sustainable and meeting the conservation standards that U.S. fishers must meet.

Question. There is ongoing debate in Congress regarding how to remediate orbital debris. Just last month, it was confirmed that a piece of this space garbage crashed through a roof in my home State of Florida, thankfully not harming the occupants. Not all of this garbage, or debris, belongs to the U.S. and the amount in orbit is increasing. How should the Department negotiate with other countries regarding responsibility for, and cooperation on, this debris?

Answer. According to U.S. Space Command, three countries generate approximately 96 percent of orbital debris: Russia (33 percent), the United States (32 percent), and the People's Republic of China (31 percent).

The Department of State, as the representative of the United States at several multilateral fora on space, is committed to preventing, mitigating, and addressing orbital debris by promoting U.S. standards and best practices at the international level. The Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs (OES), as Head of Delegation to the U.N. Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (UNCOPUOS), negotiated the Space Debris Mitigation Guidelines adopted in 2007 and the Guidelines for the Long-Term Sustainability of Outer Space Activities adopted in 2019.

These guidelines identify best practices to maintain the sustainability of space and safety of space operations. If confirmed, I would promote these guidelines and encourage other UNCOPUOS members to implement them.

Question. For example, should the U.S. be the sole country cleaning up the various pieces of debris placed in orbit by the Chinese, Russians, or Iranians?

Answer. No, the United States should not be the sole country cleaning up debris in space, as countries are internationally responsible for their own and their nationals' activities in space. If confirmed, I am committed to promoting U.S. standards and best practices for orbital debris prevention, mitigation, and remediation at the international level, and practical implementation of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (UNCOPUOS) Guidelines for the Long-Term Sustainability of Outer Space and the Space Debris Mitigation Guidelines.

Question. Do you have recommendations on who should be held liable or responsible should future pieces of debris damage property or endanger human life?

Answer. If confirmed, I would work with the Department of State's Office of the Legal Adviser and interagency partners to assess claims for damage. Depending on the situation, the Convention on International Liability for Damage Caused by Space Objects of 1972, a treaty that provides for launching state liability under international law, may be applicable in addition to domestic law.

Question. How well do others, such as Iran, China, Russia, and North Korea, coordinate with State and other interagency partners to ensure the items they launch into orbit, and associated debris, do not negatively impact manned and unmanned orbital platforms of the U.S. and its allies?

Answer. I am concerned about the People's Republic of China and Russia's ambivalence to spaceflight safety hazards caused by debris. I understand that the Bureau of Oceans and International Environment and Scientific Affairs (OES), in partnership with the Bureau of Arms Control, Deterrence, and Stability, has raised concerns at every available fora, including through the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (UNCOPUOS). Within UNCOPUOS, OES leads U.S. engagement in the Long-Term Sustainability (LTS) of Outer Space Working Group, and if confirmed, I would advocate for the implementation of the LTS Guidelines adopted by UNCOPUOS in 2019.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO KRISTEN SARRI BY SENATOR TODD YOUNG

Question. What does America gain by being at the table as a party to binding treaties? Does the United States accrue any benefit by sitting outside the decision-making fora those specific treaties create?

Answer. The Bureau on Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs leads U.S. efforts in over 400 international agreements and international organizations. Only as a party to international instruments can we fully represent the United States, promote U.S. policies and positions, counter other powers, and secure key U.S. interests.

For example, the United States is not a party to the Law of the Sea Convention and only can participate as an observer to the International Seabed Authority, which severely limits the U.S. ability to influence decisions of the body.

Question. Whether to explore mineral or energy resources in, or to designate for protection the newly mapped section of our extended continental shelf (ECS) in the Arctic is an inherently sovereign decision of the United States. With Russia officially stating that it will not recognize our ECS claims without the U.S. first ratifying the Law of the Sea treaty (UNCLOS)—and other Arctic nations conceding that position informally—would you recommend the Senate provide UNCLOS advice and consent?

Answer. Yes. I believe that U.S. interests are best served by joining the Law of the Sea Convention. Past Democratic and Republican administrations, the civilian and military leadership of the U.S. Armed Forces, as well as leading industry and non-governmental organizations have all strongly supported the United States' joining the Convention. While the United States has rights under customary international law to conserve and manage the resources of its Extended Continental Shelf (ECS), joining the Convention would enable the United States to maximize legal certainty and international recognition of our sovereign rights over the U.S. ECS, including by dismantling unjustified objections to our ECS by the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO KRISTEN SARRI BY SENATOR JOHN BARRASSO

Question. Are you committed to eliminating duplication and redundancies at the Department of State?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed, I am committed to eliminating duplication and redundancies at the Department of State.

Question. What percentage of the work of the Bureau of Oceans and International Environment and Scientific Affairs deals with international climate change? In fiscal year 2023, what percentage of the Bureau's funding was spent on international climate change programs?

Answer. The Bureau of Oceans, International Environmental and Scientific Affairs (OES), advances U.S. diplomatic and foreign policy priorities across a wide range of oceans, environmental, and international scientific issues. In terms of foreign assistance programs in fiscal year 2023, I understand OES was allocated $166.5 million in Economic Support Funds for adaptation, clean energy, and sustainable landscapes programming, 71 percent of total fiscal year 2023 OES foreign assistance programming.

Question. Please provide examples of specific projects funded by the Bureau for adaptation, clean energy, and sustainable landscapes in fiscal year 2023. What were the tangible results and impacts of the funding?

Answer. Using fiscal year 2023 funds, I understand Bureau of Oceans, International Environmental and Scientific Affairs (OES) adaptation programming is expanding climate information services and mobilizing public and private finance for resilient infrastructure enhancements; OES's energy programming is deploying cleaner, more reliable, and secure energy sources; and OES sustainable landscapes programming is bringing in new sources of private finance for conserving and restoring forests, as well as leveraging U.S. technical expertise to build capacity in countries for monitoring, measuring, and reporting forest and terrestrial carbon.

My understanding is the OES's fiscal year 2023 funded programs will be obligated, and the Bureau will begin expending funds by September 30, 2024, subject to congressional notification.

Question. How does the Office of Climate Change in this bureau interact with the Office of the Special Presidential Envoy for Climate? In what areas is there overlap in responsibilities and duties? Please identify and delineate the lines of authority and responsibilities between the two.

Answer. The Bureau of Oceans, International Environmental and Scientific Affairs' (OES) Office of Global Change (EGC) has been the Department's long-running

permanent program office for climate issues. My understanding is that OES coordinates on climate-related issues between EGC and the Special Presidential Envoy for Climate (SPEC). If confirmed, I would continue the close collaboration between OES and SPEC. I understand the work SPEC has been leading throughout this Administration continues to be a top priority for both the President and the Secretary.

Question. Please describe the current staffing, resources, and responsibilities of the Office of Climate Change. In addition, please describe when the Office was created and under what statutory authority.

Answer. To my knowledge, the Office of Global Change (EGC) was established under the authority of the Secretary of State to administer the Department, including under the Department's Basic Authorities Act. I understand EGC has been the Department's long-running permanent program office for climate issues. It is responsible for representing the United States in negotiations under the Paris Agreement and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and in other international fora and manages the obligation, monitoring, and evaluation of adaptation, clean energy, and sustainable landscapes foreign assistance funding.

Question. Please describe the current staffing, resources, and responsibilities of the Office of the Special Presidential Envoy for Climate. In addition, please describe when the Office was created and under what statutory authority.

Answer. I understand that the President created the position of the Special Presidential Envoy for Climate pursuant to Executive Order (E.O.) 14008, and that the Department of State established the Office of the Special Presidential Envoy for Climate in 2021 following congressional notification consistent with applicable requirements. I do not have no knowledge of the current staffing and resources of the Office of the Special Presidential Envoy for Climate.

Question. China is the world's second largest economy and the largest emitter of carbon dioxide, yet it is not listed among the countries in Annex I of the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change. Should China be considered a developed country instead of a developing country for the purpose of this treaty?

Answer. I understand that the 2015 Paris Agreement, which does not contain annexes or define the terms "developed country" or "developing country," is now the primary international agreement under which states are taking climate action. I also understand that the United States was instrumental in ensuring that the Paris Agreement did not refer to the Convention's annexes, and that the Agreement's key mitigation commitments apply to all Parties, including the People's Republic of China, regardless of their development status.

Question. China is the world's second largest economy and the largest emitter of carbon dioxide, yet it is not listed among the countries in Annex I of the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change. If confirmed, will you work to get China listed in Annex I with the other developed countries?

Answer. My understanding is that the United States succeeded in ensuring that the primary international agreement under which states are now taking climate action, the 2015 Paris Agreement, does not refer to the Convention's annexes. The Agreement's key mitigation commitments apply to all Parties, including the People's Republic of China (PRC), regardless of their development status. I understand that the United States continues to be focused on securing actions by PRC that are consistent with its high capability to act.

Question. Please describe your relevant experience and background regarding negotiating an international treaty or agreement.

Answer. In my professional career in the Senate and in the executive branch, I was responsible for negotiating legislation and building interagency consensus on policy issues. The experiences gave me valuable skills in listening to different perspectives, looking for mutual interests, building coalitions, and defining bottom lines. These skills and experiences are all applicate to negotiating international treaties and agreements.

Question. The United Nations is in talks to develop a legally binding treaty to address plastic pollution. What are the national security implications of this treaty?

Answer. The global agreement is still being negotiated, and therefore, it is too early to determine any potential national security considerations or implications that may need to be addressed. I understand that at the Third Session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee the United States inserted a placeholder in the draft text to consider such issues at a later stage in the negotiations once substantive provisions have been further elaborated. The Office of Environment Quality

within the Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs is leading the negotiations for the U.S. Government. If confirmed, I would work closely with OES staff and the negotiating team to represent U.S. interests.

Question. Under your leadership, would you ensure this treaty is submitted to Congress for its advice and consent to ratification?

Answer. The substantive provisions of the plastics agreement are still being negotiated. It is my understanding that it is too early to determine the appropriate domestic form of a future agreement, and that the executive branch would review to this issue after the negotiations conclude.

Question. What is the Biden administration's current position regarding the plastic treaty?

Answer. I understand that the Administration seeks a strong and inclusive global agreement on plastic pollution that every country, including major producers and consumers of plastic like the United States, would be in a position to join. I also know that the Administration continues to be committed to engaging closely with stakeholders, including from Congress, sub-national governments, the private sector, civil society, and scientists, throughout the negotiations, and to consider their views.

NOMINATIONS

THURSDAY, JUNE 13, 2024

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

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:04 a.m., in room SD–419, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Christopher Murphy presiding.

Present: Senators Cardin, Murphy [presiding], Booker, Ricketts, Young, and Cruz.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. CHRISTOPHER MURPHY, U.S. SENATOR FROM CONNECTICUT

Senator MURPHY. Good morning. I'm going to call this hearing of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to order.

I am glad to be here with my ranking member, Senator Young, and the chairman of the committee, Senator Cardin.

Today we are meeting to consider the nominations of United States Ambassadors to Libya, Algeria, Senegal and Guinea-Bissau, the Dominican Republic, and Iraq.

Welcome to our nominees and to your families. Thank you all for being here today. We are going to make brief opening remarks and then we will turn it over to you for short opening comments and then we will engage in a series of questions.

Ms. Gavito, if confirmed you will potentially be presiding over the return of U.S. diplomats to Libya for the first time since 2014. I believe it has been a mistake for the United States to go this long without physical presence inside Libya.

Our friends and adversaries are there. It is a country of deep historic and current importance to the United States. We need to be there. We should have been there yesterday.

I am looking forward to talking with you about the path forward in reestablishing our embassy, our presence, in Tripoli.

Mr. Harris, Algeria matters to the United States for a host of reasons, but when we have a strong, stable Algeria, Europe is healthier. Algeria is vital to Europe, and so we are helping ourselves, but we are also helping our European allies when we are engaging in helping Algeria diversify away from declining oil production as the driver of their economy.

Algeria is also the second biggest military in Africa, a fact that surprises many of our colleagues, and so we need to pay attention to the increasingly close ties between Algeria and Russia and China.

Mr. Lord, it has been a difficult, difficult last few years in the Sahel—armed conflict, poverty, climate change, food insecurity, political instability, malign Russian influence.

But amidst this truly awful set of circumstances, Senegal's democracy has survived and recently saw a peaceful transition of power to a new president. So too in Guinea-Bissau, which also had recent elections in which losing incumbents peacefully accepted the results and stepped down.

Our task is to work together to keep these and other countries in the region on a path toward development and democracy.

Mr. Iturregui, there has not been a Senate confirmed ambassador in Santo Domingo since 2021, hindering our ability for bilateral relations to reach their full potential.

The cultural and economic links between America and the Dominican Republic are vital, and we need to get you on the ground as a key link between our strong Dominican-American community and their homeland.

And finally, Ambassador Jacobson, good to see you again. I think we last saw each other in your post in Kosovo. Thanks for being willing to take on this really difficult and critical assignment.

The U.S. invasion of Iraq is really the original sin of the last quarter-century of American foreign policy. But there is no going back, and there is certainly a positive story to tell about Iraq where the Iraqi people joined together with the United States and other members of the counter-ISIS coalition to defeat one of the most brutal terrorist organizations the world has ever seen.

President Biden has had a tough job to reestablish U.S. influence in Baghdad after President Trump effectively gutted our presence there. But there is critical work to do.

Iran's influence and the influence of paramilitary organizations are growing every day in Iraq, and we have some tough decisions to make there.

So we thank you all for being here today. We thank you for the sacrifice that you are all making on behalf of this country. We thank your families for the sacrifices that they have and are continuing to make.

And with that, I will turn it over to our ranking member, Senator Young, for opening comments.

STATEMENT OF HON. TODD YOUNG,
U.S. SENATOR FROM INDIANA

Senator YOUNG. Thank you, Chairman.

Today's hearing provides us the opportunity to both examine the records of the nominees before us and the realities in the countries to which they have been nominated to serve.

The year 2024 has been widely covered as the year of democracy in which more people will head to the polls around the world than in any year in history. The results, both this year and in recent years have been interesting and signal opportunities but also challenges for U.S. foreign policy into the future, including in the countries today's panel have been nominated to serve in.

I am grateful that we will have the opportunity to hear from all of today's nominees on the record about some of their past experiences and future goals. I want to congratulate them and their fami-

lies on their nominations and say I look forward to today's exchange.

The geopolitical realities we face are as complicated as they have ever been. Yet, even that is an understatement for the Middle East and North Africa region. Iraq has dominated the foreign policy thinking of an entire generation.

The domestic, political, and economic situations in Algeria and Libya are in some ways a study in contrasts but equally complex, particularly in the face of continuing terrorism and migration challenges. And as these challenges literally migrate westward Senegal will have little time to celebrate its successful democratic transition.

On the other side of the Atlantic the Dominican Republic is a country with long, complex ties with America and whose relative stability on both the land mass it shares with Haiti and in a geopolitically complicated Caribbean cannot be underestimated.

I do fear, however, that for this panel in particular the current Administration risks sending them out to fail. Migration, democratic stability, and lack of commercial and economic opportunities have strained each of these countries in varying ways.

The recent wave of coups in failed states with a Chinese and Russian entourage riding in behind them reminds us that neither hard or soft power alone will suffice, nor is there any corner of the world that we can ignore, but our attention must be carefully planned.

To cite one example, the U.S. has remained engaged after the devastating floods in Libya when the Derna dams failed, delivering more humanitarian aid than anyone. Yet, it has been Chinese construction firms benefiting from a rebuild and Russia's oil laundering war machine, grateful for a purposeful level of political dysfunction.

I am hopeful that we will receive honest assessments from today's nominees about whether they will have the available tools to help bring or maintain a U.S. favorable bilateral relationship to their respective host countries.

Mr. Chairman.

Senator MURPHY. Thank you very much, Senator Young.

I am going to provide some brief introductions, and then I will suggest that you make your opening remarks in the order of the introductions.

Ms. Jennifer Gavito has served as Deputy Assistant Secretary for Iraq and Iran. She has spent the majority of her career working in and around the Middle East including posts in Jerusalem and Beirut and as director for Syria and Lebanon at the National Security Council.

Mr. Josh Harris is the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia. Previously, Mr. Harris worked on Middle East issues at the National Security Council and served in Libya.

Mr. Lord is the Deputy Assistant Secretary for East Africa, Sudan, and South Sudan. Prior to this assignment he served in important posts in Africa, including Namibia, Ethiopia and Malawi as well as tours in Syria, Iraq, and the United Kingdom.

At this point I would like to thank Congressman Espaillat, the first Dominican-American to serve in the U.S. Congress, for joining us this morning.

Congressman Espaillat has asked for unanimous consent to enter a statement of support for Mr. Iturregui, our nominee for U.S. Ambassador to the Dominican Republic, into the record and without objection we will enter that statement into the record.

[EDITOR'S NOTE.—The information referred to above can be found in the "Additional Material Submitted for the Record" section at the end of this hearing.]

Senator MURPHY. Mr. Juan Carlos Iturregui is a managing partner at Milan Americas, a consulting firm specializing in business, regulatory, and public policy issues. He is also currently a vice chair of the board of the U.S. Inter-American Foundation.

And finally, Ambassador Tracey Ann Jacobson most recently served as Chargé ad interim at the U.S. mission in Ethiopia. She has previously served as an ambassador three times so this will be number four—Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Kosovo.

I would also ask unanimous consent for a letter of support for Ambassador Jacobson from the president of #AfghanEvac, an organization dedicated to the relocation and resettlement of Afghan allies, to be entered into the record, and without objection, so ordered.

[EDITOR'S NOTE.—The information referred to above can be found in the "Additional Material Submitted for the Record" section at the end of this hearing.]

Senator MURPHY. Welcome to all of you. I look forward to your testimony and engaging with you over the course of this hearing.

Ms. Gavito, I will turn it over to you for your opening statement.

STATEMENT OF JENNIFER D. GAVITO, OF COLORADO, 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 THE STATE OF LIBYA

Ms. GAVITO. Thank you.

Senator Murphy, Senator Young, Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, it is an honor to appear before you as President Biden's nominee to serve as the U.S. Ambassador to the state of Libya.

If confirmed, I look forward to working with you to advance America's critical national security interests there. I have spent the majority of my 26 years in the Foreign Service working in and on the Middle East.

My husband Tony and our sons Dominic and Ali have been an integral part of that journey, weathering this unpredictable and nomadic lifestyle with resiliency and a healthy dose of humor. I am honored to have them with me today.

Libya is interwoven in the history and lore of the United States. As the wife of a former U.S. Marine, the line from the Marine Corps hymn "To the Shores of Tripoli" is part of our own family's vernacular.

Regrettably, Libya, with its legacy of terrorism and instability, has become synonymous with tragedy, and its people have been de-

nied the prosperity the resource abundant country should afford them.

From Qaddafi's terrorism that culminated in the downing of Pan Am Flight 103 to instability in the Sahel that threatens NATO's southern flank, real U.S. interests have been and remain at stake in Libya.

Libya today is fertile ground as PRC and Russia seek to extend their influence and reach. If confirmed, I would prioritize pushing back against these destabilizing influences, advocate for U.S. industry solutions, and seek to preserve hard fought counterterrorism gains.

Libya's selection under the Global Fragility Act is recognition that addressing Libya's instability requires all diplomatic and development tools at our disposal.

If confirmed, I would leverage American innovation to help secure Libya's contributions to a stable energy market and support transparency so revenues are a source of unity rather than division.

If confirmed, I would also work with U.N. and international partners to find a political compromise among Libyan stakeholders that sets Libya on a path to unification and elections.

In closing, for America to effectively lead we must be present. If confirmed, I commit to working closely with Congress to accelerate our resumption of operations in Tripoli in a manner that prioritizes the safety and security of our outstanding team and all Americans.

Senators, thank you again. I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Gavito follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF JENNIFER D. GAVITO

Senator Murphy, Senator Young, distinguished Members of the Committee, it is an honor to appear before you as President Biden's nominee to serve as the U.S. Ambassador to the state of Libya. I'm grateful for the confidence he and Secretary Blinken have placed in me. If confirmed, I look forward to working with Members of this Committee to advance America's critical national security interests in Libya.

I fulfilled my dream of serving the U.S. overseas when I joined the Foreign Service almost 26 years ago. I have spent the majority of my career working in and on the Middle East, including in Beirut, Jerusalem, and Dubai. My husband Tony and our teenage sons, Dominic and Ali, have been an integral part of that journey and I am honored to have them with me today. We are deeply proud of our boys, who have weathered the near-constant uncertainty and upheaval with resiliency and a healthy dose of humor.

Libya is interwoven in the history and lore of the United States itself. As the wife of a former U.S. Marine, the famous line from the Marine Corps hymn "to the shores of Tripoli," is part of the vernacular of our family and others across the country. Regrettably, Libya has become synonymous with tragedy and its people have been denied the prosperity their resource-abundant country should afford them. From Gaddafi's State sponsorship of terrorism that culminated in the downing of Pan Am Flight 103, to the struggle to unseat the Islamic State from its stronghold in the Libyan city of Sirte, to the growing instability in the Sahel that threatens NATO's southern flank, history has time and again proven real U.S. interests are at stake in Libya. If confirmed I would prioritize addressing these critical national security priorities.

First, Libya is fertile ground for global powers seeking to extend their influence and reach. PRC-linked firms have made deep inroads into Libya's information and communications technology sector. If confirmed, I would advocate for U.S. industry solutions and underscore the vulnerabilities Libya faces in relying on untrustworthy vendors for its national security and critical infrastructure.

Russia, meanwhile, has subsumed Kremlin-backed Wagner forces and seeks a more open and formal defense relationship with Libyan actors as a low-cost tool to destabilize NATO's southern flank. If confirmed, I would work with Libyans in the

east and west to promote military integration that safeguards the country's borders and sovereignty. I would also seek, if confirmed, to preserve hard-won counterterrorism gains to deny any opportunity for extremists to threaten U.S. interests. The selection of Libya as a priority country under the Global Fragility Act is recognition that addressing Libya's instability requires a long-term strategic investment using all the diplomatic and development tools at our disposal.

Second, Libya is blessed with Africa's largest and the world's ninth largest proven oil reserves, as well as significant gas reserves. Libya's economic stability and global energy markets are vulnerable to domestic upheaval and external—particularly Russian—manipulation. If confirmed, I would leverage American innovation and influence to help secure Libya's contributions to stable energy markets by supporting transparent, accountable management of the revenues to ensure Libya's resources are a source of unity rather than division.

Finally, the political impasse that has endured since Libya's failure to hold elections in December 2021 has been deeply disappointing, particularly for the Libyan people who embraced elections by registering to vote in massive numbers when last given the chance. Libyans from all parts of the country seek American leadership and support for their aspirations for unified, effective governance that respects the rights of all its people and allows civil society to operate freely and safely. Significant obstacles to that remain, but, if confirmed, I would work with the U.N. and international partners to find a political compromise among Libyan stakeholders that sets Libya on a path to elections that unify the country.

In closing, for America to effectively lead, we must be present. While the Department has increased the pace and frequency of travel into Libya, our lack of a permanent diplomatic presence cedes space to our strategic rivals who are active on the ground. If confirmed, I commit to sustaining our critical travel while working closely with Congress to accelerate our resumption of embassy operations in Tripoli, in a manner that prioritizes the safety and security of our personnel and all Americans. This commitment is deeply personal. Chris Stevens was a friend. I had dinner with him the week before he, Sean Smith, Tyrone Woods, and Glen Doherty were murdered. We shared a love for the Libyan people and for the country's vast potential. It would be an honor, if confirmed, to carry this legacy forward.

Senators Murphy and Young, thank you again for the opportunity to be here today. I look forward to your questions.

Senator MURPHY. Thank you.

Mr. Harris.

STATEMENT OF JOSHUA M. HARRIS, OF MARYLAND, 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 PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF ALGERIA

Mr. HARRIS. Chairman Murphy, Ranking Member Young, Chairman Cardin, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today as the President's nominee to serve as the U.S. Ambassador to the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria.

If confirmed, I will work with Congress to advance U.S. priorities in Algeria reflecting our interests and our values, and to enable the American and local staff at U.S. Embassy Algiers to build the next chapter in this historic and dynamic partnership.

I am incredibly proud to share this day with my family. I above all thank my wife Cheryl, a Foreign Service officer, for her love and partnership. We are joined today by our sons Toby and Gabriel, who with curiosity to engage the world and resilience in navigating the upheavals of Foreign Service life are our loving inspiration.

For 229 years the U.S.-Algeria partnership, anchored in the 1795 Treaty of Peace and Amity, has been continually adapting to shared challenges.

Today, Algeria has a crucial voice in diplomacy following the October 7 attack that aims to secure the release of all hostages, to

surge humanitarian aid and protect civilians, and to promote the conditions for enduring peace and security for Israelis and Palestinians.

Our governments are coordinating intensively during Algeria's tenure on the U.N. Security Council, including to call upon Hamas to accept the proposal detailed by President Biden on May 31 and to urge its full implementation.

If confirmed, I will prioritize further deepening U.S.-Algeria cooperation to advance regional peace, including through our cooperation on the Security Council.

As Algeria contributes to stable energy markets, our economic and commercial ties continue to expand. A trade and investment framework agreement is cultivating constructive dialogue as Algeria undertakes reforms to increase transparency and liberalize the investment climate.

If confirmed, I will advocate for expanding U.S.-Algeria trade and investment to deliver tangible benefits for the American people.

If confirmed, I will also continue the U.S. Government's important dialogue with Algerian counterparts about reforms to foster inclusion, to promote freedom of expression, and to empower civil society.

My highest priority will be the safety of U.S. citizens in Algeria and the colleagues at U.S. Embassy Algiers that I would be honored to lead. I will strive to faithfully represent the United States to the Algerian people.

Thank you for the opportunity to address this committee. I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Harris follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF JOSHUA M. HARRIS

Chairman Murphy, Ranking Member Young, distinguished Committee Members, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you as the President's nominee to serve as the U.S. Ambassador to the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria. If confirmed, I will work with Congress to advance U.S. priorities in Algeria reflecting our interests and values and to enable the American and local staff at U.S. Embassy Algiers to build the next chapter in this historic and dynamic partnership.

I am proud to share this day with my family. I above all thank my wife, Cheryl—a Foreign Service Officer—for her love and partnership. We are joined by our sons, Toby and Gabriel, who, with curiosity to engage the world and resilience in navigating the upheavals of Foreign Service life, are our loving inspiration.

I joined the Foreign Service in the dark shadow of September 11, embarking upon a career of public service amid the horrors of that attack and striving to advance U.S. national security so that such violence must never reoccur.

Over the past two decades, I have sought to empower Libyans to restore their sovereignty, to partner with Iraqis as they build a democratic future free of outside manipulation, to support Tunisians in fostering economic stability and political inclusion, and to leverage our multifaceted relationship with Egypt to help put Israelis and Palestinians alike on the path to more durable peace and security. If confirmed, I will be guided by these experiences to promote U.S. priorities in Algeria.

For 229 years, the U.S.-Algeria partnership—anchored in the 1795 Treaty of Peace and Amity—has been rooted in history and continually adapting to shared challenges.

Today, Algeria has a crucial voice in diplomacy that aims to realize a lasting ceasefire in Gaza and the return of all hostages, to surge humanitarian aid and protect civilians, and to promote the conditions for enduring peace and security for Israelis and Palestinians. Our governments are coordinating intensively during Algeria's tenure on the U.N. Security Council, including to call upon Hamas to accept the ceasefire proposal detailed by President Biden on May 31 and urge its full implementation. The United States and Algeria also have a productive dialogue on ending the fighting in Sudan, preventing Libya's enmeshment in regional conflict,

and improving security and governance across the Sahel as malign actors probe across the region for vulnerabilities.

Algeria's role in fostering regional peace is underpinned by its success in uprooting terrorism and sustaining hard-won gains for internal stability. If confirmed, I will prioritize further deepening U.S.-Algeria cooperation to advance regional peace, including through our cooperation on the U.N. Security Council.

Economic and commercial ties between our countries continue to expand. Our trade has quadrupled in the past 4 years, and the United States is the leading source of foreign direct investment in Algeria—nearly triple the volume of its next largest partner. More than 100 U.S. companies operate in Algeria, the largest country in Africa.

And while contributing to stable energy markets, Algeria is advancing an ambitious agenda for the transition to renewables. A Trade and Investment Framework Agreement is cultivating constructive dialogue as Algeria undertakes reforms to increase transparency, liberalize the investment climate, and enable growth in a commercial partnership already underwriting thousands of U.S. jobs. If confirmed, I will advocate for expanding U.S.-Algeria trade and investment to deliver tangible benefits for the American people.

Algerians are forging their own path, informed by the country's struggle both for independence and against violent extremism. This history continues to guide efforts on the critical issues of promoting the rule of law, building effective institutions, and bolstering respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. If confirmed, I will continue the U.S. government's important dialogue with Algerian counterparts about reforms to foster inclusion, to promote freedom of expression, and to empower the vital contributions of civil society.

My highest priority will be the safety of U.S. citizens in Algeria, and the colleagues at U.S. Embassy Algiers that I will be honored to lead. I will strive to support the professionals of our diplomatic mission and faithfully represent the United States to the Algerian people.

Thank you for the opportunity to address this Committee. I look forward to your questions.

Senator MURPHY. Thank you very much.

Mr. Lord.

STATEMENT OF PETER W. LORD, OF FLORIDA, 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 SENEGAL, AND TO SERVE CONCURRENTLY AND WITHOUT ADDITIONAL COMPENSATION AS AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE REPUBLIC OF GUINEA-BISSAU

Mr. LORD. Chairman Murphy, Ranking Member Young, Chairman Cardin, it is an honor to appear before you as the President's nominee to serve as the next U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Senegal and to the Republic of Guinea-Bissau.

Please allow me to begin by thanking my family, in particular, my wife Leah and our two daughters. I would also like to thank and offer my appreciation to our parents, Richard and Debbie Lord and Ken and Kathy Zimmerman.

Serving our nation overseas is a multi-generational privilege, joy, and sacrifice, and I am truly grateful for their support.

As a career member of the Foreign Service I have sought to serve with integrity, lead with vision and by example, and advance the interests and values of the United States.

If confirmed, I believe my background will be valuable in leading our mission, advancing our bilateral goals with Senegal and Guinea-Bissau, and furthering our objectives in West Africa.

To do this we must first protect the security of the United States and our citizens by cooperating to combat transnational threats and promote regional stability.

Second, we must expand prosperity through economic growth, mutually beneficial trade, and job creation, particularly for Senegal and Guinea-Bissau's young populations.

Third, we must invest in accountable governance and respect for human rights for Senegal and Guinea-Bissau to achieve the full potential of democracy and ensure that all citizens accrue the benefits of development.

If confirmed, I will make protecting the many U.S. citizens in Senegal and Guinea-Bissau my highest priority. Within the mission I will prioritize fostering a workplace with high morale and a team oriented ethos.

I also commit to working closely with you and other Members of Congress, including to fully support congressional travel and engagement.

I look forward to your questions. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Lord follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF PETER W. LORD

Chairman Murphy, Ranking Member Young, 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 Senegal and to the Republic of Guinea-Bissau.

Please allow me to begin by thanking my family, in particular my wife, Leah, and our two daughters. I would also like to offer my appreciation to our parents—Richard & Debbie Lord and Ken & Kathy Zimmerman. Serving our nation overseas is a multi-generational privilege, joy, and sacrifice, and I am truly grateful for their support.

As a career member of the Foreign Service, I have been honored to represent the United States in assignments across Africa, Europe, and the Middle East as well as in Washington and at the United Nations. In each assignment, I have sought to serve with integrity, lead with vision and by example, and advance the interests and values of the United States. If confirmed, I believe this background will be valuable in leading our Mission, advancing bilateral goals with Senegal and Guinea-Bissau, and furthering our objectives in West Africa.

Our long-term partnership with Senegal has advanced important U.S. interests, including in supporting public health, expanding energy solutions, bolstering regional peace and security, investing in economic growth, and deepening democracy. The recent elections in Senegal—particularly the period before the polls—highlighted the importance of our continued partnership and engagement on democracy, human rights, and governance in Senegal. Now is a crucial time to expand our engagement to demonstrate a democratic dividend and our partnership with the new government.

In Guinea-Bissau, our relationship has been deepening in recent years, with a focus on agricultural production, food security, economic growth, and public outreach. Our engagement in Guinea-Bissau comes against a backdrop of our continued work to underscore the importance of democratic principles and collective action against transnational threats.

If confirmed, I will work steadfastly to advance U.S. interests and values—for democracy and good governance as well as for our security and prosperity. This includes countering false narratives and the corrupt and unfair practices of our adversaries. We do this best when we listen, partner, and collaborate on shared interests and challenges—not dictate choices and undermine host country laws and interests, as our adversaries so often do.

To advance our interest and values, we must first protect the security of the United States and our citizens. This includes cooperating to fight transnational threats, promote regional stability, and counter violent extremism. It also encompasses addressing trafficking in persons as well engaging on health threats and food security.

Second, we must expand prosperity through economic growth, mutually beneficial trade, and job creation, particularly for Senegal and Guinea-Bissau's young popu-

lations. U.S. assistance has a catalytic effect, but long-term economic growth will only be sustained by working with these governments to foster a business-friendly environment and through creation of private sector connections that enable trade. If confirmed, I will seek to promote U.S. businesses and create economic opportunities.

Third, accountable governance, rule of law, and respect for human and labor rights are essential for Senegal and Guinea-Bissau to achieve the full potential of democracy as well as attract investment, enable stability, and ensure that all citizens accrue the benefits of development. U.S. engagement has helped to build the capacity of public institutions to deliver these results. If confirmed, supporting effective democratic governance will be a top priority.

If confirmed, I will make protecting the many U.S. citizens living in and traveling to Senegal and Guinea-Bissau my highest priority. I will also dedicate my attention to leading the team at the U.S. mission to foster a workplace with high morale and a team-oriented ethos. I will focus on accountability of resources and effectiveness of interagency collaboration to ensure our partnerships deliver with excellence. I also commit to working closely with you and other Members of Congress, including to fully support congressional travel and engagements.

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

Senator MURPHY. Thank you very much.

Mr. Iturregui.

STATEMENT OF HON. JUAN CARLOS ITURREGUI, OF MARYLAND, NOMINATED TO BE AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

Mr. ITURREGUI. Good morning.

Chairman Murphy, Ranking Member Young, Chairman Cardin, it is an honor to appear before you today as the President's nominee for U.S. Ambassador to the Dominican Republic.

First, I would like to recognize and thank my wife Maud and our son Tomas and daughter Emma along with my sister Giselle. I am blessed that they can accompany me on this important day for all of us.

I am deeply grateful to President Biden and Secretary Blinken for their confidence in me and allowing me this incredible opportunity to serve our country.

I want to discuss the opportunities for engagement in the Dominican Republic that I would pursue if given the opportunity to serve.

The U.S. and the DR already enjoy a strong, growing, and very close relationship. We share democratic values and the desire for our countries and our region to be prosperous and safe. Our governments are working together on a wide variety of priorities.

I am convinced these shared perspectives and democratic values present the chance to further strengthen our ties. We must continue our efforts to advocate for democracy and human rights in our hemisphere, combat corruption, promote long term economic growth, and enhance citizen security as we tackle the challenges of our times.

Recently reelected president of the Dominican Republic Luis Abinader has made clear that he listens to the Dominican people who are tired of corruption and want their government to do better for them. The U.S. supports his efforts.

If confirmed, I am eager to collaborate with the Dominican government on good governance initiatives, security, investment, human rights, energy transition, and improving the lives of all peoples in Dominican Republic.

I have spent much of my career working in business on regulatory and public policy issues. I know the importance of good governance and to foster and promote resilient development.

In conclusion, honorable committee members, if confirmed I will promote U.S. values and U.S. interests in the Dominican Republic.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to this committee and its members and staff for your support, for your continued engagement with the Dominican Republic, and for your consideration of my nomination.

I look forward to answering any questions you may have. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Iturregui follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. JUAN CARLOS ITURREGUI

Good morning. Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, distinguished Members of the committee, it is an honor to appear before you today as the President's nominee for U.S. Ambassador to the Dominican Republic.

I would like to recognize my wife Maud and our son Tomas and daughter Emma, along with my sister Giselle, I'm blessed that they can accompany me on this important day for all of us. I am deeply grateful to President Biden and Secretary Blinken for their confidence in me and allowing me this incredible opportunity to serve our country.

I want to discuss the opportunities for engagement in the Dominican Republic that I would pursue, if given the opportunity to serve. The United States and the Dominican Republic already enjoy a strong, growing, and close relationship, with over two million Americans of Dominican heritage residing across the United States, over four million U.S. tourists visiting the Dominican Republic every year, and more than 30 billion dollars in annual trade between our countries. We share democratic values and the desire for our countries and our region to be prosperous and safe. Our governments share and cooperate on a wide variety of priorities.

I am convinced these shared perspectives and democratic values present the chance to further strengthen our ties with the Dominican Republic, which is already a trusted partner and close ally. We must continue our efforts to advocate for democracy and human rights in our hemisphere, combat corruption, promote long-term economic growth, and enhance citizen security as we tackle the challenges of our time.

I am a firm believer in the transformative power of democracy. It enables ordinary citizens to play an active role in their government. It provides a voice and power to the people as well as the opportunity to create change. Recently re-elected President of the Dominican Republic Luis Abinader has made it clear that he listens to the Dominican people, who are tired of corruption and want their government to do better for them. The United States supports President Abinader's efforts to fight corruption and make the government work for the people. If confirmed, I look forward to supporting our joint anti-corruption goals and strengthening the rule of law in the Dominican Republic. I am eager to collaborate with the Dominican government on good governance initiatives, security, investment and near-shoring initiatives, human rights, energy, and improving the lives of all people in the Dominican Republic.

I have spent much of my career working on business, regulatory, and public policy issues while specializing in infrastructure and renewable energy in the Caribbean and Latin America. I know how important good governance is to fostering investment and promoting development that positively impact people's lives. Hence, it is crucial to broaden our economic partnership and solidify our connections with like-minded partners, and I will do this if I am confirmed. Through my last 9 years on the board of the U.S. Inter-American Foundation—a small yet very effective Federal agency that Congress generously funds—I have witnessed first-hand the enduring impacts of investing in grassroots development and empowering local communities to support themselves and obviate the need to migrate.

In conclusion, honorable committee Members, if confirmed, I will promote U.S. values and U.S. interests in the Dominican Republic.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to this committee and its members for your support for continued U.S. engagement with the Dominican Republic and for your consideration of my nomination. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Mem-

ber, and Members of the Committee for the opportunity to be here with you today. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.

Senator MURPHY. Thank you, Mr. Iturregui.

Ambassador Jacobson.

STATEMENT OF HON. TRACEY ANN JACOBSON, 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 IRAQ

Ms. JACOBSON. Good morning, Chairman Murphy, Ranking Member Young, Chairman Cardin. It is an honor to appear before you today.

I would like to acknowledge my husband David Baugh, who is celebrating in style his first anniversary as an American citizen.

I would like to thank my friends from the State Department, Diana from the Hill, and especially my A–100 classmates. Today we are celebrating our 36th anniversary of joining the Foreign Service on June 13, 1988.

If confirmed as Ambassador to Iraq, I will safeguard U.S. interests by protecting American citizens and advancing Iraq's stability, security, and sovereignty. Ten years after our troops returned to Iraq at the government's invitation to fight ISIS, it is time for our military to evolve to a new role.

If confirmed, I will ensure any transition from Operation Inherent Resolve to a bilateral security arrangement is geared toward the defeat of ISIS and Iraq's security.

Iran remains a malign actor and a destabilizing influence in the region. The Iran aligned militias in Iraq receive weapons, training, and other support from Iran, and use their arms and cash to ensure Iran's influence.

If confirmed, I will use the full range of U.S. policy tools to stem this influence including by promoting Iraq's energy independence. Fostering Iraq's economic growth is a critical part of our bilateral relationship.

If confirmed, I will support U.S. business, promote investment, and press for improvements in the business climate including reducing corruption and increasing transparency.

Bolstering Iraq's democracy is another priority. If confirmed, I will work to strengthen Iraq's democratic governance, promote human rights, and build durable solutions for Iraq's displaced and minority populations including Christians, Yazidis, and those at Al Hol in Syria.

Our partnership with the Iraq Kurdistan region remains a cornerstone of our broader relationship, and if confirmed, I look forward to strengthening it.

Iraq is one of our largest missions and leadership is important. This includes serving as an effective steward of the taxpayers' trust, creating an atmosphere of open collaboration, including with the Hill, and maintaining a culture of respect for our team members who volunteer for these challenging assignments.

If confirmed, it will be my honor to serve with them.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Jacobson follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. TRACEY ANN JACOBSON

Chairman Murphy, Ranking Member Young, Members of the Committee:

I am honored to appear before you today as President Biden's nominee to be the next U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Iraq. I would like to express my gratitude to the President and the Secretary of State for their confidence. If confirmed, I will work closely with the members of this committee to advance U.S. interests in Iraq.

During more than 30 years in the State Department, I have had the privilege of serving as U.S. Ambassador to Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Kosovo, as well as Chargé d'Affaires at the U.S. Embassy in Ethiopia, where my teams and I worked successfully to promote U.S. interests and shared goals. If confirmed as Ambassador to Iraq, my highest priorities will be the protection of American citizens and the advancement of our bilateral partnership to support our strategic interests.

If confirmed, I will safeguard U.S. security interests by advancing Iraq's stability, security, and sovereignty, which are critical to the region. ISIS remains a threat in Iraq. Our military provides vital support in an advise, assist, and enable role to the Iraqi security forces and the Peshmerga in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region. Ten years after our troops returned to Iraq at the government's invitation to fight ISIS—and 5 years after ISIS's territorial defeat—it is time for our military to transition to a new role. If confirmed, I will ensure any transition from Operation Inherent Resolve to a bilateral security arrangement will be geared toward the defeat of ISIS and Iraq's security.

It is important for Iraq to strengthen its relations with many of its neighbors and Prime Minister Sudani has taken positive steps in that direction. Iran, however, remains a malign actor and a destabilizing influence in the region that threatens to undo all of Iraq's achievements. We recognize that the primary threat to Iraq's stability and sovereignty are the Iran-aligned militias. These groups receive weapons, training, and other support from Iran, and use their arms and cash to promote Iran's influence over Iraq. If confirmed, I will use the full range of U.S. policy tools to counter these malign groups and stem Iran's influence. I will promote Iraq's energy independence so Iran cannot use energy as a weapon against Iraq. I will support Treasury's important work to modernize Iraq's financial sector and connect it to the international financial system, eroding Iran's ability to take advantage of Iraqi banks.

Fostering Iraq's economic growth is a critical part of the U.S.-Iraq 360-degree bilateral relationship. The Iraqi government aims to provide basic services to its people and expand opportunities for investment. If confirmed, I will promote U.S. investment and work with the Iraqi government to implement reforms to improve the investment climate for the private sector, including by reducing corruption and increasing transparency. I will strengthen the commercial ties that already exist between Iraq and U.S. companies and develop new opportunities.

Bolstering Iraq's democracy and good governance is another U.S. priority. Iraq needs to improve its protection of the rights and freedoms of its citizens, including its ethnic and religious minorities. Since 2018, the United States has provided over $500 million in assistance to these minorities. If confirmed, I will prioritize U.S. policies and programs that strengthen Iraq's democratic governance and build durable solutions for Iraq's displaced and minority populations, including Christians and Yezidis and those at al-Hol in Syria.

Our partnership with the Iraqi Kurdistan Region remains a cornerstone of our broader relationship with Iraq. Stabilizing the Baghdad-Erbil relationship will bring benefits to all Iraqis. If confirmed, I look forward to strengthening our partnership with the Iraqi Kurdistan Region in the context of our overall relationship with federal Iraq.

Mission Iraq is one of our largest and most complex diplomatic platforms, and leadership is important. For me, this means serving as an effective steward of taxpayer trust. It means creating an atmosphere of open collaboration, including with colleagues on the Hill. And it means building a culture of respect for our team members who volunteer for these challenging assignments. If confirmed, it will be my honor to serve with the women and men of Mission Iraq.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear here today, and I look forward to your questions.

Senator MURPHY. Great. Thank you all for your testimony here today.

We have a busy morning in the Senate, and so many of our colleagues may submit questions for the record, may join us, many of them watching from their offices.

Let me start with you, Ambassador Jacobson. Obviously, this is a very difficult assignment. I talked about my distaste for the drawdown of diplomatic presence in Baghdad at the end of the Trump administration.

I think it is important that we have a robust diplomatic and economic engagement with our Iraqi partners, but I do worry about the middling number of American military forces in the region.

We have got about 2,500 troops, about 6,000 contractors. Our presence is really not enough to shift the balance of power, but what it is too often is an easy, sometimes unprotected target for anti-American militias.

There is an argument to be made that our presence on balance is starting to become more of a liability than a net benefit. I am talking about our military presence.

David Schenker, who was the previous Administration's Assistant Secretary of State for the region, who I have a lot of respect for, recently argued that it is time for the United States to start thinking about how to best downsize the U.S. military footprint in Iraq. Outside of the Kurdistan contingent there is less and less utility in the ongoing U.S. military deployment.

I am not going to ask you to take a position on our force numbers, but as you are preparing for this assignment what is your understanding of the comparable efficacy between our diplomatic presence and our military presence, and can you speak at all about how our military contingent—some contingent there—sometimes complicates relations with the Iraqi government, for instance, when we have to take retaliatory strikes against the militias inside Iraq as a means to protect our military contingent inside Iraq?

Ms. JACOBSON. Thank you for the question, Senator.

As you know from the time we spent together in Kosovo, I have always approached our engagement as the United States as a three-legged stool. We have to have diplomacy, we have to have development, and we have to have our defense structures together.

As you know, last year the U.S. and Iraq announced a Higher Military Coordinating Commission, which is looking at how our military component of Operation Inherent Resolve eventually evolves into a bilateral security arrangement, and that is informed by a series of important factors, including operational and environmental concerns, the threat that has continued to be posed by ISIS, and the capabilities of the Iraqi Security Forces. So I think this engagement remains very important.

With regards to the diplomatic platform, as you know we have several of our agencies present in Iraq, and if confirmed I would want to play the appropriate role of an ambassador in a whole of government approach, which gets to our national interests in the region, and I would look at security, economic development, democratic development, and the relationship with the Iraq Kurdistan region as all parts of a broad 360 degree relationship, which is not only important for Iraq's investment advancement but also stands as a way to bolster the Iraqi government and the Iraqi people against the Iranian influence.

Senator MURPHY. Yes. I, obviously, do not expect for you to have an opinion today but I look forward to consulting with you once you have boots on the ground to really understand what the com-

parable efficacy is of a relatively small military deployment there which too often ends up being sitting ducks for the folks who are trying to provoke our forces and interests in the region.

Mr. Iturregui, I want to talk to you about gun violence in the Caribbean. It is amongst the highest in the world. Customs data indicates that it is U.S. weapons that are almost always the ones being recovered in crime scenes in the Dominican Republic. Ninety-seven percent of firearms recovered in the DR and submitted to the ATF for tracing were manufactured or imported from the United States.

There is a Caribbean firearms roadmap that has been developed to try to cut down on gun trafficking, largely, coming from the United States into the region. Obviously, this matters a lot because of the instability in Haiti today.

Can you just say a word about what you understand about this roadmap and what kind of contributions our embassy and an ambassador on the ground can make to trying to interrupt the flow of weapons into the region and specifically into the DR, many of which end up getting—moving very quickly into the conflict in Haiti?

Mr. ITURREGUI. Thank you, Senator.

Indeed, it is a very serious problem. From what I read—I have not had the opportunity to be fully briefed—but I know that we have a robust presence in Embassy Santo Domingo of U.S. law enforcement agencies, and they are working very closely with the Dominican government in tackling this challenge.

The Administration, as you know, also has with your support in motion the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative, and I understand that those efforts are being ramped up, and we are not only coordinating with Dominican authorities but with other governments in the Caribbean Basin.

Thank you.

Senator MURPHY. I have got more questions. I will save them for a second round, and I will turn it over now to Senator Young.

Senator YOUNG. Thank you, Chairman.

Mr. Iturregui, what a complex environment. As I prepared for this hearing I am just struck by the enormous challenges there are going to be going forward to restore democratic rule in Haiti, which is relevant in light of its proximity to the Dominican Republic.

Descent into lawlessness in the country has been amplified. There are dire problems with organized crime, the U.S. Embassy in Haiti now evacuated of nonessential personnel. Our embassy in the Dominican Republic will be all the more important.

How do you plan to work with the Dominican government to ensure there is no spillover of conflict from Haiti?

Mr. ITURREGUI. Senator, as you know being a U.S. Naval Academy graduate, we have got to have boots on the ground and the diplomatic front—I am going to borrow from Ambassador Jacobson—we need to approach the three-legged stool in tandem—security, economic development, and diplomacy.

I am comforted that we finally have a U.S. Ambassador on the ground in Port-au-Prince. It is a very complex situation. I have been to Haiti. I can give you my personal observation from 30 years monitoring Caribbean affairs.

What we hopefully should not do is implement the same strategy expecting a different outcome.

Senator YOUNG. Do you feel like there is a coordinated response across country, certainly, across within our Government but working with other governments as well regionally?

I will just throw out a bit of the fact pattern here. So the Dominican Republic has sealed the island's shared border and airspace. The Bahamas has launched a naval blockade to keep Haitians from fleeing the crisis by boat.

The U.K. has sent a warship to ward off anyone seeking refuge in Turks and Caicos. Florida has increased marine and aviation patrols, and then even with all of this drug and gun smuggling continue to be widely reported issues in Haiti.

So seems to me this cannot be dealt with singlehandedly by one Ambassador, so is there a broader effort that you think is coming together?

Mr. ITURREGUI. I believe there is a broader effort, and I am personally hopeful that you all can make the appropriate decisions regarding the potential security—multinational security force on the ground.

I can tell you Port-au-Prince at night goes dark. They do not have any power. This is before the crisis. So, for example, we need to sort of peel the onion little by little and figure out how to bring security.

Because I feel for the Haitian people. They just want to live and breathe, right. So most of the Haitian people are, unfortunately, hostages to transnational crime organizations and gangs, and I believe it is in our national security interest to be there and play a very constructive and proactive role.

Senator YOUNG. Would your counsel be to this committee that we should be focusing more assets in the region to combat illicit drug and arms trafficking?

Mr. ITURREGUI. Short answer yes, but let me go back 25 years ago, because you may have benefited from training or otherwise visiting Roosevelt Roads Naval Station in Puerto Rico.

Ever since we closed that base the Caribbean has open borders. That is the U.S.-Caribbean border, including U.S. Virgin Islands and DR, for that effect. Ever since we closed the base the Caribbean became our very exposed third border.

Senator YOUNG. And that is the naval, not Coast Guard stations?

Mr. ITURREGUI. It used to be the largest Navy base outside the continental U.S. globally.

Senator YOUNG. How do you think the U.S. Coast Guard, just to stick with that smaller but highly relevant and important service—how should the Coast Guard be increasing cooperation with Dominican counterparts to prevent increased drug and arms trafficking?

Mr. ITURREGUI. They are ramping up the efforts, and they have the results to show both on illegal drug interdiction and illegal immigration, but we need to do it also on the other side, which is the Haitian navy has no ships. We recently gave them an old Coast Guard cutter.

In the Dominican navy I understand from what I read—again, I have not been fully briefed, but I understand that we have a very robust and growing cooperation and collaboration dynamic there.

Senator YOUNG. Thank you, sir.

Chairman.

Senator MURPHY. Thank you.

Chairman Cardin.

The CHAIRMAN. First, thank you, Senator Murphy and Senator Young, both of you. I appreciate you taking responsibilities for this hearing.

Senator Murphy mentioned the fact that these are extremely challenging times on our schedule, and I want to thank Senator Risch and the Republican staff for clearing the nominees for hearings today.

We are all doing a lot of different things, and with the cooperation we were able to get this hearing scheduled. We need to find two people to take responsibility for it, and believe me, it is not easy with a markup in the Armed Services on the National Defense Authorization Act, challenges around the world, domestic issues that we are taking up on the floor today.

So, Senator Murphy, thank you for your willingness to chair this hearing, and Senator Young, and Senator Ricketts. They are the two I will call on all the time on the Republican side. They are so committed to this committee and the work of this committee that I thank you so much for your willingness to be here today.

I want to first thank all of you for your willingness to continue in public service. Many of you have devoted your entire careers to Foreign Service and to public service, and we thank you very much for your willingness to continue to do this.

Many members of your family and friends are here with you today, and we thank them, because it really is a family sacrifice, and as Senator Murphy said, we need to have confirmed ambassadors.

When we do not have a confirmed ambassador, there is a void, and that void is going to be filled, and it is filled by countries that do not share our values and in many cases are our adversaries.

So it is critically important we get these nominations moving forward, and we get confirmed ambassadors in these five challenging missions.

Every one of these missions are difficult, and so thank you for willingness to do that.

I have required questions. I am going to ask you all to answer yes or no. I hope you will find these questions easy to answer, and we will just go right on down the line.

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.]

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

[All witnesses answer in the affirmative.]

The CHAIRMAN. 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.]

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

[All witnesses answer in the affirmative.]

The CHAIRMAN. Well, you are off to a good start with me, so thank you all very much. I appreciate that.

In each of the countries I will be following up and asking you to keep us informed. You just committed to do that.

In Iraq we recognize that Iran has tremendous challenges in our containing Iran's influence. You already mentioned the issues concerning energy. We are going to want to know the strategies for the region.

We have ISIS. We have so many areas in regard to our needs for a strong voice. We have the Middle East process. We have concerns now about what is happening in Lebanon, and Iraq plays a critical role in these decisionmakings.

So we are going to be asking you for your strategies as to how we can leverage our mission to accomplish our objectives.

In Libya we are very concerned about China's influence as well as Russia's influence, and it is a challenging situation, but we need to be actively engaged in order to prevent the influence of two countries that do not share our values.

In the DR I am concerned about not just what is happening with Haiti but their commitment to fight corruption. They have challenges in that country, and it is not just going after the opposition; it is having a strategy in that country to really combat corruption.

So, we will be looking to you as to carrying out a law that was passed in the last National Defense Authorization Act in regards to our missions, having strategies to counter corruption throughout the world.

Algeria—again, this is a country where Russia is trying to fill a much larger role. We have to be aggressive there.

In Senegal I was very concerned about the efforts to postpone the elections. I know the Constitutional Council pulled that back. But we do see trends that might be moving against democratic values that we thought the country was pretty well committed to.

So there is a lot of issues that we are going to be following up with you. I just really wanted to put you on notice about that. Thank you for your willingness. We hope that we will be able to move your nominations promptly and get you to work.

Thank you.

Senator MURPHY. Senator Ricketts.

Senator RICKETTS. Great. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and I want to add my thanks to Senator Cardin as well.

As Governor I had a chance to take a number of trade missions around the world and meet with our embassies, and I just cannot say enough about the Foreign Service people who sacrifice time away from your friends and family here in the United States to represent our country overseas, and I really appreciate the efforts that you all make to do that.

I want to talk a little about Libya. Russia's tentacles continue to expand there in Libya. In September Putin met with Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar to discuss a defense accord that would expand Mos-

cow's military presence there and could eventually even lead to a naval base there.

This year, despite the war in Ukraine raging on, Moscow has sent Russian special forces and thousands of mercenaries from the battlefield to Libya, and additionally, we have seen Russian vessels unloading thousands of tons of military equipment in Tobruk, effectively turning eastern Libya into a Russian way station for places like Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso.

And so far our diplomatic strategy has been to engage Haftar, but he has repeatedly denied our request to cooperate with the U.N. on forming a unified government and holding nationwide elections. And then, of course, he just keeps increasingly moving into the Russian orbit.

So, Ms. Gavito, tell me a little bit—what is your take on Russia's expanding presence in eastern Libya. How concerned are you with that?

What do you think the potential for establishing a naval base for Moscow is? I mean, that, obviously, would give Putin a foothold in the Mediterranean.

Share with me what is your take on this.

Ms. GAVITO. Thank you very much, Senator.

You have touched on what I think is the biggest challenge facing Libya.

Certainly, the lack of a unified government is also a great challenge, but it is exacerbated by Russia's deeply destabilizing impact there.

As you note, in a variety of different ways Russia has made no secret of its intent to deepen its foothold in Libya through its arms trafficking through and to Libya. It is setting itself up to further destabilize the Sahel region as well as NATO's southern flank, and so it is deeply concerning.

With regard to plans to push back on that, a couple of thoughts. First of all, the sanctions both on the Wagner Group as a transnational criminal—excuse me, transnational criminal organization in 2023 and yesterday's sanctions on Goznak for having printed a billion dollars in counterfeit payment, counterfeit bills—Libyan bills—to further destabilize the economy are two examples of ways that we can push back from here.

Ultimately, though, Senator, it is critical that the United States be on the ground, that we have an opportunity to engage Libyans across the political spectrum regardless of where they are on two things: First of all, the dangers of allowing themselves to be further enmeshed in regional conflict, and second, on the opportunities that come from fulfilling their own Libyan based goals of being in a position to reaffirm their sovereignty.

Without taking too much time, Senator, I think that in order for the United States to effectively support and advance the U.N.'s goals of unification of government the reality is that we have to engage all political actors across the political spectrum as they are all going to have to buy into a future unified government that puts itself in position to reassert Libyan sovereignty.

Senator RICKETTS. So I would like you to also just address what do you think the likelihood of a Russian naval base in Libya is?

Ms. GAVITO. Senator, as you are aware, at this stage of the process I am not in a position to see classified information.

That being said, certainly those plans are consistent with what the United States has seen from Russia with regard to deployment of military personnel and their stated desires to deepen the foothold.

You mentioned Haftar's visit to Moscow. Also notable that the deputy defense minister of Russia has visited Libya four times in the last year.

So, certainly, Senator, I would take those reports very seriously.

Senator RICKETTS. Yes. So you mentioned we have to engage with all the political parties. I assume that you mean Haftar as well.

Again, if he is getting additional aid from Russia, Russia is clearly going to be trying to destabilize and foil our attempts to have a unified government. Is that fair?

Ms. GAVITO. I think that is probably fair.

Senator RICKETTS. Yes. So what is it that we can offer Haftar, or what are the things we can do to have leverage to get Haftar to the negotiating table to try and get to a unified government and get to elections?

Ms. GAVITO. Sure. There is no question that this is an extraordinarily difficult undertaking, and recognizing that, I would point back to the 2020 cease-fire agreement in which the Libyans themselves called for the expulsion of all foreign fighters and mercenary forces from Libya.

Libyans themselves have in the past registered in record numbers for elections to be able to vote. Ultimately, Haftar needs to be responsive to his own people.

We need to, as the United States, lay out a framework that demonstrates the benefits that the Libyan people, frankly, have already put forward about the benefits of that reassertion of sovereignty, being able to protect their own borders, and more importantly, the economic benefits to all of them from a stable, secure, more free Libya that is able to respond to the needs of its people.

So, Senator, it is an extraordinarily difficult undertaking, certainly; the status quo has benefited a number of Libyan actors. But I believe that the United States has a different vision that the Libyan people themselves have bought into.

Senator RICKETTS. Ms. Gavito, I am going to take a difference with what you said there, that Haftar has to be responsive to the Libyan people. Dictators do not. They do not think like we do. They do not have to be responsive to their people.

If he can get enough arms from Russia he can just establish himself as a military dictator, and it is not like it is the first time that would happen in Libya, right?

So we are going to have to, obviously, have some of you confirmed. We are going to have to have, I think, a deeper strategy about how we offset that malign Russian influence in Libya.

Ms. GAVITO. I look forward to working with the committee. I could not agree with you more. It is a complicated situation that is going to take all of our efforts.

Senator RICKETTS. Great. Thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator MURPHY. Thanks, Senator Ricketts.

Senator Young and I are going to start a second round of questions.

Mr. Harris, Algeria has historically supported the Polisario Front, whose main goal is the independence of Western Sahara from Moroccan control. They regularly deliver arms, training, financial aid.

The Biden administration has sought to revive the U.N. process on the final status of the Western Sahara, but at the same time they have not rescinded the Trump administration's policy of recognizing Morocco's claim of sovereignty over the territory.

Do you perceive these two policies to be at odds, and what kind of progress do you think that we can make on trying to move forward concessions or actions that we would need from Algeria to resolve this longstanding crisis?

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

I think that we have spoken very clearly to the importance of enabling a U.N. political process on Western Sahara to move forward negotiations leading to a lasting and enduring resolution to this extremely difficult challenge developing over many years without further delay.

I have had the good occasion to work very closely with the personal envoy of the Secretary General, Mr. de Mistura, as he works to intensify these consultations, and also to consult privately with partners, including Algeria, about how all players could lend their influence to the success of that U.N. political process.

I believe there is a recognition about the fundamental challenges at play, and also the importance of ensuring that that political process is successful.

Algeria certainly has a very important role to play in that conversation, and if confirmed a central element of my efforts with the Algerian government will be to further intensify that dialogue so that that U.N. process could finally gain some traction.

Senator MURPHY. Great. Thank you for that.

Mr. Lord, talk to us a little bit about U.S.-Senegal security cooperation. Senegal is really critical to U.S. security efforts in West Africa. It has probably got the most competent security forces in the Sahel.

Given the myriad problems facing Senegal's neighbors what can we do to expand Senegal's positive security influence in the region? What are going to be the first, second, and third steps you are going to take and ask Congress to support on this mission?

Mr. LORD. Thank you, Senator, for the question.

Indeed, we have a long history of cooperation with Senegal on security arrangements and assistance, which has included professionalization of the forces so that they can engage in global stability operations.

Senegal is on a security and diplomatic level engaged on the difficult problems in the Sahel both through the West Africa subregional organization ECOWAS and through the United Nations.

I think one of the key things that we can do is listen to the new government's ideas about how to approach this situation. They have intense interest in seeing a resolution.

Many of our interests overlap with them, and so working together with them on a diplomatic plan as well as providing additional support to their security forces.

If confirmed, this will be a top priority in working with the new government on how to move this forward in West Africa because we have very serious concerns but also shared interests with Senegal.

Senator MURPHY. Well, I also sit on both the Defense Appropriation Subcommittee and the Foreign Relations Subcommittee so I look forward to your recommendations on how we can continue to support that cooperative relationship.

Ms. Gavito, let us talk about the embassy. So we have got a request to establish a diplomatic travel support operation facility, a DTSOF. Tell me a little bit about how we make sure that that does not become the sort of new permanent normal.

How do we stay on track to get an embassy back up and established? And while we are in this interregnum period where we have got this sort of temporary facility, how do we manage our risk tolerance to make sure that we are actually getting our diplomats who may be temporarily housed there out into the field to talk to people instead of just sitting in this facility and monitoring from inside high walls?

Ms. GAVITO. Thank you very much, Senator.

I think that this is an extraordinarily important step forward, and I was remiss in responding to Senator Ricketts with the same.

So much of what we do requires us to be present on the ground. With so much at stake with Russia, with China, having a persistent presence there, it is absolutely key to having the flexibility, the agility, to engage Libyans on all of these range of issues on a consistent basis.

This decision to move forward with a persistent presence, affectionately called the DTSOF, came after two, two and a half years of an increased tempo of short visits into Libya.

Throughout that process the Department of State has reviewed at every juncture the security to ensure that everything that is being done is done with an eye toward ensuring that our personnel on the ground are able to stay safe.

Of course, that requires constant evaluation, and I think that that is fundamentally the answer to your question. There is no automaticity to any part of this process.

At every juncture I commit to this committee that we will continue—that I personally will continue to review the security on the ground, which remains complicated despite the fact that the 2020 cease-fire has, largely held, to make sure that everything that we are doing to advance our mission there is, again, done with the prioritization of the security of our personnel.

I would like to, if I may, add that this commitment is extremely personal to me. Chris Stevens was a friend. I had dinner with him the week before he was murdered. It is never far from my mind, and as I said, I can only commit to you that as we move forward with engaging in Libya on a more sustained basis—and you are right, we cannot sit behind walls.

The Russian ambassador in Libya is using as a talking point, we are here, and the United States is not. It is all over the media. So we have to get out. We have to engage.

Senator MURPHY. Listen, his death and that tragedy is never far from our mind as well. But the reality is that tragedy did fundamentally alter our risk tolerance and calculation throughout the Foreign Service in a way that I think has not always accrued to the benefit of the projection of U.S. influence.

And so I say this to all of you. I think Senator Risch and I have had a particular interest in trying to reorder the way in which we do reviews of incidents in the field so as to not be overly punitive of our leadership that often has to make tough decisions to put people in harm's way in order to represent the United States.

I am going to use my prerogative to ask Ambassador Jacobson one last question, which is sort of a step back question.

So, you are a rare breed, having served three times as ambassador. You have served at a very difficult time in the Foreign Service, a moment when American foreign policy changes very quickly from Administration to Administration.

It is just an absolute marvel to me the quality and commitment of the people who work in our embassies despite the fact that they may be running one mission before an election and asked to do something fundamentally different thereafter.

Talk to me about how you try to make sure that we continue to boost and maintain morale amongst the people that work for you. We teach flexibility and agility to our work force even in a moment when from election to election the mission becomes very, very different.

Give us a little advice as to what you have learned during this difficult time as a leader of men and women at three different embassies.

Ms. JACOBSON. Senator, thank you so much for this question. This is really very near and dear to my heart, and when you are someone as long in the tooth as I am, there is no greater privilege or pleasure than supporting the teammates who are rising up through the ranks.

So, the focus on morale and professional development has really been a hallmark of my career including during 3 years in a leadership role at the Foreign Service Institute.

It is true that we often serve in difficult conditions—war, postwar, illnesses, our families may or may not be with us—and you have to think what motivates people to join the Foreign Service in the first place, and that is a sense of service.

I come to this naturally from a military family. Both of my grandparents—my maternal grandparents—served in the British Army during World War II. My sister was married to a Navy pilot. Service is in our blood.

I think all of my classmates, all of my colleagues here, have a similar story. So keeping morale up means keeping focused on why we joined in the first place, the privilege of representing the American people overseas, and also what are the missions that we are striving to achieve.

I think one of the most important things that an ambassador does as a facilitator of the team's work is to keep that vision of the overarching goals first and foremost in everybody's mind.

If we know what we are about, if we know what we are trying to achieve, if we have organized ourselves as an interagency team, including in collaboration with Congress to keep our eye on those overarching goals and bring all the different skills and experiences and authorities and resources to achieve those goals, and we make a little bit of progress, that is what motivates people to keep doing the job even when conditions are tough. I could go on but I will stop there.

Senator MURPHY. Thank you, Ambassador.

Senator Young.

Senator YOUNG. I am almost encouraged. I want to encourage you to go on. I feel like playing some John Philip Sousa music right now.

I am such a big fan of our diplomatic corps and these interagency teams that I encounter when I travel, and I just thank all of you again for your service and your families as well. I know you make some sacrifices, and I appreciate it.

Ambassador Jacobson, our relationship with Iraq has grown stronger in recent years thanks to increased cooperation with the government. However, there is much work that still needs to be done.

Iraq still relies heavily on Iranian energy. Iranian backed militia groups are still given virtually free rein to attack U.S. service members and diplomats, and they continue to have a long way to go in terms of strong governance.

When we met you described that countering Iranian influence will require a whole of government approach within the Iraqi government. If confirmed, how will you lead a similar whole of mission approach to this challenge?

Ms. JACOBSON. Thank you for the question, Senator, and you are correct in that it requires a whole of government approach because it is an extremely complex issue.

With regards to stemming the Iranian pernicious influence in Iraq, we need to bring all of the tools to bear. With regards to the energy—energy independence—critical.

When Prime Minister Sudani was here in April he committed to having achieved energy independence from Iran by 2030, which is an ambitious goal. They do have a plan. I understand our colleague Assistant Secretary Jeff Pyatt was recently in Iraq including both Baghdad and Erbil to work on further developing that plan and there has been progress made on that plan.

I could go into details on some deals, but I will just note that this is also an opportunity for the U.S. private sector particularly to bring their innovation in reducing gas flaring, developing fields. It is really important.

I would also note on the economic front the important work being done by Treasury to modernize the banking sector in Iraq and getting it connected to the international banking system to reduce the influence that Iran can have on Iraq through the banking.

With regards to the security situation——

Senator YOUNG. Could I just interject real quickly?

Ms. JACOBSON. Yes.

Senator YOUNG. With respect to the oil and gas, our private sector partners, are they already quite active in assisting with that flaring mitigation effort that you referenced?

Ms. JACOBSON. They are already doing it, and we also hope—there was this $27 billion deal with Total, a French firm, last year to develop Iraq's capacity, and we are hoping to see some significant American content in that eventual project as well, which we did support.

Senator YOUNG. Ambassador Jacobson, in light of your extensive experience I am going to ask you sort of a different question here. We were reminded this week that ISIS remains a threat not just in Iraq and Syria, but also here as we saw the arrest of eight ISIS affiliate Tajiks in America.

Given your background in Tajikistan with Afghanistan and across the region, what perspective will you bring to the coalition to defeat ISIS, or perhaps in how you sell this effort to the Iraqis?

Ms. JACOBSON. The defeat of terrorism in general also requires a whole of government multi-prong approach. I did follow the Tajikistan story having served there.

I think when we think about Iraq in particular we have to think about what attracts people to these terrorist organizations in the first place: The need for economic development, the need for a government that has sufficient ability to provide services to its people, so that it reduces the draw of terrorism and also reduces the influence, for example, of the Iran aligned militia groups, which are active in politics and economics as well as taking shots at us.

I should have said—I got distracted on the gas and oil—but absolutely, if confirmed I will continue the policy of using all the tools against those militia groups including the financial ones and the military ones when appropriate.

I think closing—getting to an eventual closure of the Al Hol Camp in Syria is important in this regard. It can be a recruiting ground for terrorism. There are still 19,000 Iraqis at that camp, and we will need—if I am confirmed, I will work on this, as well—both to provide better situation for those in the camp but also to bring them at a more rapid pace into Iraq for rehabilitation and reintegration.

Senator YOUNG. Ms. Gavito, Libya's political instability continues to be an albatross around the necks of European partners but a boon to human smugglers and illicit financiers.

It is a country with an enormous energy potential, as you have indicated, that is being siphoned off by elites that are likely not keen to see an East-West reunification.

You mentioned innovation. It was a point of emphasis in your opening remarks. The energy is supporting wars by our adversaries. How might you apply innovation or other efforts to seek to change that?

Ms. GAVITO. Thank you, Senator.

Libyans have been very open with U.S. interlocutors that they desire greater presence by U.S. companies, so I do think that there is great opportunity, whether it is in the areas of energy or security or infrastructure, for U.S. companies, business, with the strong cor-

porate governance cultures that they bring with them to make a positive impact on the Libyan economy.

We have also seen greater presence by U.S. companies as the security situation in Libya has stabilized—$291 million in U.S. exports to Libya last year with much more opportunity on the horizon.

And so if confirmed, whether as a counter to the efforts by Russia to enmesh Libya in greater regional conflict or by the PRC, which currently dominates the 4G network with companies like Huawei and ZTE, we do have American businesses that can play a positive role.

Senator YOUNG. Thank you.

Chairman.

Senator MURPHY. Senator Ricketts, a second round?

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

Ambassador Jacobson, obviously, the United States has invested a lot of blood and treasure in Iraq. Thirty-four hundred Americans died during the Iraq war.

Since 2003 we have invested $2 trillion. We have prevented the collapse of the Iraqi government from ISIS, and obviously, we have got continuing challenges there.

Now we have got Iran backed militias that are continuing to attack U.S. troops and diplomatic facilities close to 200 times across the region since October 7, and obviously, we had the drone strike on Tower 22 in Jordan that killed three Americans there.

It seems like these attacks have subsided since the peak earlier this winter, but of course, that threat could always pick back up again. Obviously, we expect—the American people expect—that Iraq is going to protect our U.S. troops, advisers, convoys, diplomatic facilities.

If confirmed, what specific actions can you take to ensure that the government of Iraq understands its obligation to keep our people safe?

You mentioned, for example, closing the camp in Syria. Can you give me some other specific things that if you are a confirmed ambassador you can do to help keep our folks safe?

Ms. JACOBSON. Thank you for that question.

In my previous assignments as ambassador and in this one as well, if confirmed, there is nothing more important to me than the protection of American lives.

With regards to the Iran aligned militia groups which you correctly note have attacked our U.S. interests more than 170 times between the middle of October and the beginning of February and another sort of short round at the end of April, we need to bring all the tools that we have to bear on that.

I will say that Prime Minister Sudani has repeatedly condemned these attacks and has recognized publicly the commitment of the government of Iraq to protect U.S. interests including the mission, from these attacks.

But the U.S. Government also has to be prepared to respond itself, and I think it is, including by increasing sanctions, by diplomatic efforts to have other partners engage in sanctions, and to take military strikes when necessary including to degrade infra-

structure and on some occasions to actually take out the individuals who have been plotting those attacks against our interests.

If confirmed by the Senate, I would certainly engage in all the tools, the diplomatic with the government of Iraq but also with surrounding countries, allies, and partners, the financial including sanctions, ensuring that those sanctions are actually implemented and effective, and supporting the military options when required.

Senator RICKETTS. And then how can we make sure that Iraq is taking steps against the Iranian backed militia groups that are attacking Israel right now? Because that is a threat as well from Iraq.

Ms. JACOBSON. That is absolutely correct, Senator, and we most recently saw this on April 13. Not only did we see an amazing U.S. military response to those attacks, but we also saw efforts from the State Department, the Administration, and others to engage the international community to also join in additional financial pressure following that attack, and I would continue to do that kind of work if I were confirmed.

Senator RICKETTS. Great. Thanks.

I want to switch gears on you just a little bit and talk more about energy again. How Iraq that is rich in energy resources has to be dependent on Iran is just puzzling, and I know that is one of the key parts of our policy is to get them off of Iranian energy, because that is just giving money to Iran to continue to fuel the attacks on us and Israel and terrorism around the world.

And I note that in March Iraq actually extended its gas import deal with Iran for another 5 years. But in your testimony you mentioned that you will promote Iran's energy independent—Iraq's energy independence so that Iran cannot use this as a thing.

Talk to me a little bit about how this is playing with China, because Chinese firms recently won a lion's share of the licenses for oil and gas exploration in Iran.

Seems like that is kind of a double edged sword there as well. Can you just talk to me about how you think about the specific actions you can take to help get Iraq off of Iran energy, and then touch upon the Chinese firms that are winning these, and what are the pros and cons of that? What kind of threats does that provide?

Ms. JACOBSON. Thank you for that question.

There is a lot to say here so I will try to limit myself. But many of the steps that have been taken by the U.S. Government in the past are helping Iraq to achieve greater energy independence all the time.

In the recent years they have moved from 35 percent to 25 percent of their energy imported from Iran. They have increasing energy needs because their economy and their population is growing, so we all need to get ahead of that curve.

Some of the specific examples are increased connectivity with neighbors other than Iran, including the fact that by the end of the year Iraq will be the first non-GCC country connected to the GCC grid.

Its connection with Jordan went live earlier this year—its connection with Saudi. The U.S. Government is also funding a project on reforms to the electricity grid to make it more efficient, to reduce the losses.

You may know that the electricity grid is pretty much a GE project, and of course, the investment and development that American firms are doing, and we hope they will be able to do even more of.

I have always been a big proponent of promoting American business when I have been posted overseas including in Turkmenistan in the gas and oil sector and U.S. exports, for example; everywhere I have served.

With regards to China, I have also had a chance to see how China works in my previous assignments. In Tajikistan, in Ethiopia, in particular, you can see that Chinese companies come in, and they do a project.

They assign a value to that project that the country then has to pay back over time. It is really not transparent. They use mostly their own labor.

They are not doing technology or knowledge transfer to the local government, and a few years later you can see that this infrastructure is starting to crumble.

And if I were confirmed I would certainly—recognizing the investments that China is making in gas and oil but also telecoms, work with the government to help them understand the value proposition offered by American private sector ingenuity versus the debt trap diplomacy offered by the PRC.

Senator RICKETTS. Yes.

Ambassador, I think, again, you have got great experience there to be able to share with the people of Iraq based upon your previous experience about how the Chinese come in and do business that, hopefully, they will be able to benefit from your wisdom there to the benefit of their country when they are dealing with China.

So, thank you very much, Ambassador.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator MURPHY. Thank you.

Senator Cruz.

Senator CRUZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ambassador Jacobson, you previously served in Tajikistan?

Ms. JACOBSON. Yes, sir.

Senator CRUZ. For what period of time?

Ms. JACOBSON. I was there from 2006 to 2009.

Senator CRUZ. I am sure you have seen the news that broke this week about eight Tajiks who came to this country illegally over the southern border, were apprehended by the Biden administration.

Ms. JACOBSON. Yes, sir.

Senator CRUZ. Were, quote/unquote, "vetted" and then were released, and they have been arrested this week because of their affiliations with ISIS-K and over concerns that they were plotting a major terror attack in the United States. In your experience how dangerous is ISIS-K?

Ms. JACOBSON. ISIS-K remains a threat both in the region to which I have been nominated and to the world and also to our homeland, and I, if confirmed, would sort of welcome the opportunity to further discuss how we can combat this sort of terrorist threat.

I am a little bit out of the loop on Tajikistan in particular, having left there 15 years ago. But of course, I still do follow it.

Senator CRUZ. How concerned should Americans be that this Administration released eight illegal aliens who are Tajiks with connections to ISIS-K?

Ms. JACOBSON. I am not privy to the intelligence or the law enforcement activity or really any of that. I have mostly read about this in the news.

But I, certainly, think it is incumbent on all of us, all the agencies of the U.S. Government, to protect our homeland, and I see——

Senator CRUZ. This is the same terrorist group that murdered 145 people in Moscow at the opera house. Came in with automatic weapons and mowed down civilians. Is that right?

Ms. JACOBSON. It is my understanding that, yes, there were Tajiks involved in that operation in Moscow.

Senator CRUZ. Well, I will say I can tell you Texans are deeply concerned that the Administration keeps releasing illegal immigrants with ties to terrorists, and we are living on borrowed time.

I believe there is a higher likelihood today of a major terrorist attack in the United States than there has been any time since September 11, and this Administration's open border with 11 million illegal immigrants coming across it is an invitation for terrorists—for Hamas, for Hezbollah, for Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and for ISIS-K—to come and murder Americans, and it is utterly indefensible.

And yet, today the Biden administration is releasing yet more illegal immigrants into this country. They do it day after day after day, and we are going to see a lot more dead bodies as a result of it.

All right. Let us shift topics. A few weeks ago Secretary Blinken appeared before this committee, and I questioned him about policy decisions made by the Biden administration which have allowed $100 billion to flow to Iran including access to a $10 billion pot of money involving Iraqi electricity in euros and dinars.

This money enabled the Ayatollah to fund Hamas and Hezbollah. This money funded the October 7 terrorist attack, the single worst 1 day massacre of Jews since the Holocaust.

It is right now funding Hezbollah's push to trigger a regional Middle East war all the way through this morning.

Ms. Gavito, you served for 2 years as deputy assistant secretary for Iran, Iraq, and public diplomacy. Then you became the acting principal deputy assistant secretary for Near Eastern affairs. What was your role in issuing the waivers giving Iran access to that pot of money?

Ms. GAVITO. Thank you very much, Senator.

With regard to the $6 billion in question that——

Senator CRUZ. The $10 billion, not the $6 billion.

Ms. GAVITO. I am sorry.

Senator CRUZ. Not the $6 billion in ransom. That is another problematic decision.

Ms. GAVITO. Apologies. Apologies.

With regard to the electricity waivers, I as deputy assistant secretary did not have a direct role in that particular decision. That being said, certainly was part of those discussions.

As Ambassador Jacobson has noted, the intent behind those waivers was to incentivize the Iraqi government.

Senator CRUZ. I am not asking about the intent. Did you support those waivers?

Ms. GAVITO. I was not in a decisionmaking capacity.

Senator CRUZ. Did you agree with the decision?

Ms. GAVITO. I would have to review, Senator.

Yes, I believe that incentivizing Iraq to divest itself of Iranian oil is positive.

Senator CRUZ. OK.

Ambassador Jacobson, these waivers will have to be renewed this summer, or they expire. If confirmed, would you support reissuing those waivers?

Ms. JACOBSON. So I note that those waivers have spanned at least two Administrations and been renewed 21 times since 2018, if I am not mistaken.

I take heart from the commitment of the government of Iraq to achieve energy independence by 2030.

Senator CRUZ. That is not an answer to the question. Would you support reissuing those waivers?

Ms. JACOBSON. Well, I do not think it would be up to me, and I would be more than interested in serving as part of the conversation.

Senator CRUZ. There is a consistent pattern in this Administration of giving money to theocratic lunatics who want to murder us. A hundred billion dollars to the Ayatollah Khamenei is the single most catastrophic foreign policy decision of this Administration and today this Administration continues to refuse to enforce the oil sanctions enriching the Ayatollah, funding Hamas, funding Hezbollah, funding those who are murdering Israelis and trying to murder Americans.

How does it makes sense to give billions and billions of dollars to theocratic lunatics who want to kill us?

Ms. JACOBSON. Thank you for that question, Senator.

I personally am very clear eyed about the Iranian threat. I think I shared with you, and I will share with others, that I have been myself on the receiving end of Iranian death threat information including during my time in Ashgabat when President Niyazov used to remind me that the Iranians had a missile pointed at my bedroom.

With regards to the funds that are kept in restricted accounts that are overseen by the Treasury Department, that are the subject of an extensive system of safeguards, these funds will never reach the government of Iran.

These funds have to stay overseas, and they have to be used for humanitarian purposes. You could ask, "Does that not mean that it frees up money for their massive terrorism campaigns?" which, of course, are heinous, and I would argue that Iran, unfortunately, is always going to focus on destabilizing activity over supporting the humanitarian needs of its own people.

With regards to the sanctions, the Administration has not lifted any sanctions, and as far as I know it has implemented another 700 sanctions——

Senator CRUZ. But it refuses to enforce them.

My time has expired. But the results are indisputable, and Iran has gone from selling 300,000 barrels a day of oil to selling 2 million barrels of oil a day, and that is funding this war of terror against us.

Senator MURPHY. Thank you very much, Senator Cruz.

Thank you all for your testimony today. We really appreciate your—oh, Senator Booker.

Senator BOOKER. It has been a painful rivalry between Connecticut and New Jersey for a very long time.

[Laughter.]

Senator MURPHY. You are not—I swear you are not invisible to me, Senator Booker.

[Laughter.]

Senator BOOKER. We do not abut each other, but we are the tri-State area.

I appreciate the recognition, Mr. Chairman, and I just want to say to everybody assembled here the fact you are even sitting here before us reflects this commitment to country and service that should be applauded.

All of you have careers that evidence, to me, the deepest symbol of patriotism, which is the willingness to make sacrifices for your nation for the greater good.

And I add to that the fact that you are lovers of humanity, and each of you have shown a commitment to wanting to make this world a better place and recognize America's extraordinary role in it.

If I may, I want to really focus in on questions for Peter Lord, and I am fascinated about Senegal right now with the election of a very young leader. It seems to belie what is going on in that region with Burkina Faso and Mali and Niger.

This election, this sort of transfer of power and democracy, is a really hopeful sign, and it was talked about. In fact, when I was in Chad I was talking about it with their autocratic leader as an example of new young leadership coming up, and I am wondering in general how has Senegal sort of avoided this trend in the Sahel region.

What can we learn from their experiences, and how can we reinforce, really, some of the promises of this new leader and promising development elsewhere in the region?

Mr. LORD. Thank you, Senator, for that question.

Indeed, it is a hopeful sign for the West African region, which, as you noted, has experienced a number of coups.

I would say most of those coups and a lot of the instability is related to weak governance and that has not been the case in Senegal. Since its independence in 1960 its national budget spend has been focused on education and health.

We as the U.S. Government have partnered in that, and so they have had a deep tradition of focusing on citizen responsive governance. And I think what we are seeing today through democratic elections that went well and institutions that reinforced those democratic values of the Senegali people is because of those long term investments over time.

We have been a partner in that, and if confirmed, those are partnerships that I look to continue so that we can work to show that

democracy does deliver a dividend and attract other states in the region to it, as well as work with Senegal on security and diplomacy through the regional organizations to, hopefully, restore democratic governance in those countries.

Senator BOOKER. I love how you put that, right. I mean, I was just talking about this in regards to Kenya with all the democratic backsliding countries that are showing a greater commitment to democratic ideals and principles.

There should be a dividend. We should step up in some way. Senegal has maintained relationships with Israel, even though I know they are straining. It is a Muslim majority country. They are one of our significant partners. We already have the MCC there, investments from, obviously, on health initiatives and more.

I am just wondering what are ways, and I know the President is actually recommending a greater investment in the country, but I am wondering if you could for this committee, which does have some people overlapping with Appropriations as well, what are some things that we should be thinking about in terms of showing in a very strong way investments that can show and reward them for continuing to do what I believe is the right—to have the right trends?

Mr. LORD. Thank you again for your support and for that question.

I think we need to continue to invest in democracy and the country's initiatives in democracy, so increasing our spend there to reinforce the institutions but also to demonstrate that local governance—local governments deliver governments that are the closest to the people and their needs, continuing with our education and health support.

And I understand that the Millennium Challenge Corporation is in development of a regional compact that focuses on blue economy, and so working on blue economy and employment particularly for the extremely large youth population in Senegal will be—those are priorities for the new administration and I think those are investments worth our energy, our time, and our dollars in order to yield the sorts of development——

Senator BOOKER. What is the new concerns? I really want to try to get in a question for Ms. Gavito. Really quickly, just their relationships with Russia, their relationships with China—are these red flags in general? What is your strategy there?

Mr. LORD. They have diplomatic relations with both, with China is engaged very heavily economically. But fundamentally we continue to have the comparative advantage because both the United States and Senegal believe in democratic values, and that will continue to trump all the way in terms of our relationship and our comparative advantage in engaging.

Most of the new administration's policies are very much in line with things that we want to see—transparency, job creation, focusing on people's basic needs. Those are all democratic pieces.

We will, of course, have to continue to be very innovative in using our economic tools to support increased U.S. investment such as through the DFC.

I would also say as a cover—it would cover, if confirmed, Guinea-Bissau as well, that we need a larger presence there. That Russia

and China are engaging more and have presences there, and that it is important for us to increase our engagement and presence there.

Senator BOOKER. I hope to be supportive in that and in future visits.

With the indulgence of the chair, I am going over. Not as much as Ted Cruz but——

[Laughter.]

Senator MURPHY. You have not finished yet.

Senator BOOKER. That is true. This is going to be real quick. I am about to jump into the region. I will be in Greece, but one of the things I am going to be looking at is just the migration crisis in the region.

Could you just give me a really quick perspective, help educate a Senator from New Jersey about the migration issues relating from Libya and what we could be doing to help what is a crisis globally—we are seeing it at our borders—of global migration?

Ms. GAVITO. The weaponization of human migration and suffering is horrific in Libya, which currently houses approximately 700,000 asylum seekers, refugees, and other migrants.

Because of the disunification of the government and the lack of structures in place to protect the human rights of these individuals the situation is exacerbated. State and nonstate actors are responsible for much of what we see.

Additionally, we are working with the international community, the international organizations like IOM, to try to provide the Libyans with the tools that they need to better, A, secure their borders and reassert their sovereignty, but also to be in a better position to hold accountable individuals for protection of the human rights of these people.

The migration flows, as you note, are increasing; 700,000, as I understand it, across the Mediterranean last year. The situation is not getting better.

This speaks, again, across the Sahel to the importance of accountable governance, justice, and providing countries that the United States works with like Libya with the tools that they need to protect their citizens, protect migrants onsite, so that people do not take those horrifically dangerous jobs.

Senator BOOKER. I appreciate it. I am now in Cruz territory.

So I look forward to continuing this conversation. I just want to do a question for the record because there is two staffers behind one of these future ambassadors that look very young.

I just want to say for the record I am against child labor, and when I find out who those two very young looking staffers are working for I will reconsider my affirmative vote.

So thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Senator MURPHY. Thank you very much, Senator Booker.

You have five very impressive performances but the two most impressive performances are the two young men sitting behind you, Mr. Harris.

So, thank you all. A reminder of how this is a family commitment serving the United States of America, and we thank you all for your deep commitment and love for this country. We thank you for what your family and friend networks will do.

Ambassador Jacobson, thanks for inspiring us and reminding us that we owe a deep debt of gratitude to everybody who serves regardless of whether they ever sit in these seats and appear before this committee.

We are going to keep the record open until the close of business tomorrow, so we will ask you to respond to any questions that get submitted by 5 o'clock tomorrow.

And with thanks to the committee, this hearing is now adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:29 a.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

Additional Material Submitted for the Record

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO JENNIFER D. GAVITO BY SENATOR ROBERT MENENDEZ

Question. How has your recent role of Deputy Assistant Secretary for Iraq and Iran prepared you for Ambassadorship to the state of Libya?

Answer. The role of Deputy Assistant Secretary for Iraq and Iran uniquely prepared me for the role of Ambassador to Libya. Through it, I have experience promoting United States' national security interests in challenging security environments that can limit the breadth of our diplomatic engagement and which require special and sustained focus on the safety and security of U.S. personnel while undertaking our work. I have worked extensively with governments, like Iraq, that face significant pressure from malign actors. If confirmed, this background will help prepare me to counter Russia's attempts to deepen its foothold in Libya.

Finally, I have spent most of my 26 years in the Foreign Service, working in and on the Middle East (including as the State Department's Deputy Director for North Africa and before that as senior Libya desk officer). From that, I have a deep understanding of the regional and local dynamics that can both complicate our work and also afford us important opportunities to advance core national security interests.

Question. Based on your commitments toward our diplomatic mission to Tripoli, how will you work to strengthen U.S. presence and national security in the region while combatting the influence of U.S. foreign adversaries? I would welcome the opportunity to learn more about your posture of "long-term strategic investment" in Libya.

Answer. Libya's fragility does not impact Libya alone—it has significant consequences across the Sahel and for Europe, given Libya's strategic location on NATO's southern flank. Russia is seeking to exploit the fragmentation of Libya, which also provides opportunities for terrorist and trafficking networks. Addressing these challenges requires long-term investments leveraging the diplomatic, development, and defense tools at our disposal, including those envisioned by the Global Fragility Act (GFA). If confirmed, I would seek to increase our engagement and oversee effective implementation of our GFA strategy.

Question. The obstinance of rival governments and other key players in Libya is exacerbating the country's political impasse and obstructs plans to hold elections this year. How will you work with Libyan stakeholders and U.N. and international partners to set Libya on a path to free and fair elections?

Answer. The political impasse that has endured since Libya's failure to hold elections in December 2021 has been deeply disappointing, particularly for the Libyan people who embraced elections by registering to vote in massive numbers when last given the chance. Libyans from all parts of the country seek American leadership and support for their aspirations for more unified, effective governance. If confirmed, I would firmly support UN-led efforts both to broker a political compromise among key Libyan leaders and engage political parties and civil society throughout the country on a path toward a unified government and national elections.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO JENNIFER D. GAVITO BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

Question. Please outline your policy priorities and objectives as the United States Ambassador to Libya.

Answer. History has proven time and again that there are real U.S. national security interests at stake in Libya. These include countering Russia's use of Libya as a platform to destabilize the Sahel and NATO's southern flank by helping Libyans reassert their sovereignty; promoting global energy security by working to stabilize Libya's economy and pressing for transparent management of oil revenues; advocating for U.S. industry solutions as a secure alternative to untrustworthy, PRC-linked vendors; preserving hard-fought counterterrorism gains to deny any opportunity for extremists to threaten U.S. citizens or interests; and reinforcing UN-led efforts to put Libya on a path to unified governance and national elections.

Question. If confirmed, how would your role as Ambassador to Libya differ from or overlap with that of the Special Envoy?

Answer. I defer to the Department for details on personnel matters or any personnel announcements. However, Ambassador Norland's work as Special Envoy has been critical to advancing our diplomatic engagement with both Libyan interlocutors and key international stakeholders. Ambassador Norland would be glad to brief you directly regarding his plans.

Question. Russia has used private military contractor personnel in Libya to increase its influence in the region. LNA leader Khalifa Haftar has also visited Moscow and met with Vladimir Putin. Media reports have also suggested Haftar is considering granting the Russian military access to bases and ports in eastern Libya. What is your assessment of the impact conflicts in Ukraine and Israel have had on foreign mercenaries' involvement in Libya?

Answer. Russia has made no secret of its ambition to deepen its foothold in Libya and use it as a base from which to further destabilize the Sahel, as well as NATO's southern flank. In doing so it shows a flagrant disregard for Libya's sovereignty and that of its neighbors. Moscow has clear interest in establishing permanent infrastructure in the region. Russia's destabilizing and cynical actions in Libya and the region exacerbate turmoil and sow chaos.

Following Prigozhin's death, the Russian Ministry of Defense has sought to subsume Wagner operations under more direct control and to formalize and expand its presence. The Russian deputy minister of defense has visited Libya five times since August 2023, and we have seen reports of Russian naval vessels delivering artillery and other military equipment to Libya. The Russian ambassador to Libya has publicly acknowledged the presence of Russian forces in Libya. Press reports indicate that there are roughly 1,800 Kremlin-backed forces currently present in Libya.

Question. What impact would a Foreign Terrorist Organization designation on the Wagner Group, or successor organizations such as the Africa Corps, have on Russia's influence in Libya? What impact would it have on stability in Libya?

Answer. The Department of State does not discuss deliberations or potential deliberations regarding designations. However, I understand that the Treasury Department already designated the Wagner Group under Executive Orders 13660 and 14024. If confirmed, I look forward to coordinating closely with Congress to ensure we promote accountability for the malign activities of the Wagner Group and other toxic foreign elements in Libya.

Question. What impact would designating Russia as a state sponsor of terrorism have on Russia's influence in Libya? What impact would it have on stability in Libya?

Answer. I understand President Biden and Secretary Blinken have determined that SST designation is not the most effective nor strongest path forward to hold Russia accountable, as it would undercut the unprecedented multilateral coordination that has made our sanctions so effective; be very challenging to reverse even in the case of peace negotiations or an end to the war; and could interfere with efforts to have Russia pay for the damage it has done, as Russian assets could be tied up in U.S. litigation. If confirmed, I look forward to working closely with Congress to leverage all available tools to hold Russia accountable for its malign activities in Libya.

Question. Given Haftar is a United States citizen, how would you use your role as Ambassador to pressure him to comply with U.S. law, if confirmed?

Answer. I understand the United States—like the U.N. and other international partners—is engaging with all key Libyan actors, including Khalifa Haftar, because of the significant roles they play in the Libyan political process. If confirmed, I would continue this broad engagement, in close coordination with UNSMIL. I would urge Khalifa Haftar, and all key Libyan political actors, to work constructively with UNSMIL to reach a political compromise to enable a peaceful transition to unified governance institutions and a viable path to elections.

If your question is related to specific law enforcement issues, I refer you to the Department of Justice.

Question. Turkish support for the GNU often relies on militias and mercenaries. Would you characterize Turkey's involvement in Libya as consistent with U.S. policy goals?

Answer. The United States coordinates closely with Türkiye and other key regional and international partners to bolster the UN-led political process. The Turkish military intervened in Libya in support of the then-Government of National Accord in 2020, helping bring to a halt the Libyan National Army's Wagner-supported offensive on Tripoli. The Turkish parliament has continued to renew mandates for Turkish military deployments, including most recently for a 2-year period starting from January 2. The United States supports Libyan efforts to fully implement the October 2020 cease-fire agreement, which made clear Libyans' desire for the departure of all foreign forces, foreign fighters, and mercenaries.

Question. Political progress in Libya is stagnant, as the Government of National Unity based in Tripoli and the Libyan National Army in eastern Libya compete for political influence, resulting in a de facto east-west divide. Please outline your priorities for addressing governance and political unification in Libya.

Answer. The political impasse that has endured since Libya's failure to hold elections in December 2021 has been deeply disappointing, particularly for the Libyan people who embraced elections by registering to vote in massive numbers when last given the chance. Libyans from all parts of the country seek American leadership and support for their aspirations for unified, effective governance. If confirmed, I would firmly support UN-led efforts to broker a political compromise between key Libyan leaders and set the country on a path toward a unified government and national elections.

Question. What levers exist to spur political progress and elections?

Answer. The United States supports the overwhelming demands of the Libyan people to choose their own leaders through free and fair elections. This will not be easy, but it is clear that broad engagement with all major political players is crucial to bring about a unified, legitimate government that can effectively reaffirm the country's sovereignty.

The respective asset freezes and travel bans on former Qadhafi officials, family members, and Libyan actors who have impeded the political process toward elections, and other designated individuals and entities, demonstrate the international community's resolve to promote accountability for individuals and entities who threaten Libya's peace, security, and stability. If confirmed, I look forward to working closely with Congress, the U.S. interagency, and international partners to use all appropriate tools to hold those who subvert democracy accountable.

Question. How will you work to advance U.S. economic interests and lower existing barriers to U.S. investments without a structured government in Libya?

Answer. If confirmed, I would advance U.S. economic interests in Libya by supporting Libya's contributions to stable global energy markets, urging Libyan decisionmakers to adopt sound macroeconomic policies and increase transparency and accountability, and promoting the interests of U.S. businesses and workers. Libyan businesses and consumers are eager to expand their partnerships with U.S. companies and purchase U.S. goods. Libya's business climate presents many challenges, including delayed payments for U.S. firms and the difficulty of securing required letters of credit. If confirmed, I would advocate with Libyan authorities to resolve such problems to enable Libyan businesses and consumers to benefit from American innovation and to increase U.S. exports to the Libyan market.

Question. Turkey's support for the GNU resulted in a Memorandum of Understanding on oil development in the Mediterranean, many of which overlap with other nations' claims. Do you view this MOU as legitimate? How will you work to bridge the divide between Turkish expectations and the expectations of Greece, the US, and other regional partners?

Answer. The United States continues to urge all States to resolve maritime delimitation issues peacefully through dialogue and in accordance with international law. In general, we remain supportive of energy projects that would physically interconnect vital energy markets such as the Eastern Mediterranean and North Africa to Europe, particularly electricity interconnections that help prepare for the clean energy transition that enhances energy security and sustainability. Our longstanding belief is that resource development in the Eastern Mediterranean should promote cooperation and provide a foundation for durable energy security and economic prosperity throughout the region.

Question. The GFA of 2019 established a long-term commitment to stabilize conflict-affected areas like Libya. However, there have been efforts to restrict GFA funding for Libya, particularly from the Prevention and Stabilization Fund (PSF). What is your assessment on the progress of the administration's 10-year GFA plan for Libya? If confirmed, what next steps would you prioritize as Ambassador?

Answer. If confirmed, I would coordinate closely, and in an ongoing manner, with Congress to ensure effective implementation of the 10-year Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability (SPCPS) in Libya. Our interagency Libya policy team has put the principles of the Global Fragility Act (GFA) at the heart of our work: 1) ensuring alignment across "3D" diplomatic, development, and defense lines of effort; 2) prioritizing partnership with Libyan actors and fellow donors; and 3) rigorously aligning all bilateral and Prevention and Stabilization Fund (PSF) budget lines with our SPCPS. Libya's fragility does not impact Libya alone—it has significant consequences across the Sahel and for Europe, given Libya's strategic location on NATO's southern flank. The fragmentation of Libya has also created vulnerabilities that Russia and other malign actors can exploit. Addressing these challenges requires long-term investments and reliable levels of both bilateral and PSF resourcing. The flexibility that the Global Fragility Act (GFA) built into PSF makes it an especially important tool for the Libyan context, particularly when combined with consistent bilateral programming aligned with the Libya SPCPS.

Question. How, if confirmed, will you go about promoting the integration of southern Libya with the northern regions, pursuant to the Biden administration's plan for Libya?

Answer. The Administration's strategy under the Global Fragility Act focuses on Libya's long-marginalized south, where malign actors take advantage of fragile local governance systems to seek safe havens for terrorist and illicit activities. This is especially crucial considering Libya's presence on NATO's southern flank and increasing instability in the Sahel. This strategy to empower civil society, strengthen governance, increase economic opportunity, and support local reconciliation in southern Libya complements U.S. efforts, alongside the U.N. and international partners, to forge a national political compromise that sets Libya on a path to free and fair elections and unified governance.

Question. In the wake of the 2012 Benghazi Attacks and the wave of conflict and violence in 2014, the Obama Administration shuttered the U.S. embassy in Tripoli. Since 2014, the U.S. has not had a full-time diplomatic presence in Libya. What security and stability conditions in Libya do you consider sufficient for U.S. diplomats to return safely on a full-time basis?

Answer. While we continue to see sporadic violence among Tripoli armed groups, the security environment has improved, and the October 2020 cease-fire has largely held. As a result, many foreign missions, including those of our strategic adversaries, have resumed their diplomatic activities in Tripoli. The U.S. decision to return to Tripoli was preceded by more than two and a half years of increasing the frequency and duration of travel into Libya to ensure that diplomatic operations are undertaken prudently and safely. There is no automaticity in this decision; if confirmed, I commit to regularly reevaluate the security situation, and consult closely with Congress at every step, to ensure our resumption of diplomatic operations in Tripoli occurs in a manner that prioritizes the safety and security of our personnel and all Americans.

Question. With a heightened global threat environment, do you have concerns about the resources available for the security needs to re-open the U.S. embassy in Tripoli?

Answer. The President's fiscal year budget request for Libya includes the funding necessary to provide sufficient security for our interim diplomatic facility. While we continue to see sporadic violence among Tripoli armed groups, the security environment has improved, and the October 2020 cease-fire has largely held. As a result, many foreign missions, including those of our strategic adversaries, have resumed

their diplomatic activities in Tripoli. The U.S. decision to return to Tripoli was preceded by more than two and a half years of increasing the frequency and duration of travel into Libya to ensure that diplomatic operations are undertaken prudently and safely. There is no automaticity in this decision; if confirmed, I commit to regularly reevaluate the security situation, and consult closely with Congress at every step, to ensure our resumption of diplomatic operations in Tripoli occurs in a manner that prioritizes the safety and security of our personnel and all Americans.

Question. In the State Department's 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report, Libya was labeled a Special Case for the 8th consecutive year because the government did not effectively govern large swaths of the Libyan territory. If confirmed, what concrete steps could you take to help Libya operationalize the prioritized recommendations contained in the TIP report?

Answer. The weaponization of human suffering that we have seen in Libya is truly horrific. The Department and the international community have routinely expressed outrage at ongoing accounts of sex and labor trafficking as well as the arbitrary detention and abuse of migrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers in Libya.

If confirmed, I would emphasize the need to implement policies and procedures to combat human trafficking, support international efforts to disrupt trafficking and smuggling networks, and improve state enforcement capacity. I would commit to working with foreign partners, international humanitarian organizations, and Libyan authorities and international humanitarian organizations to hold traffickers criminally accountable, to help prevent human rights abuses, to end arbitrary detention, and provide assistance to vulnerable populations.

Question. What is your assessment of religious freedom in Libya and if confirmed, how will you work with the Ambassador At Large for International Religious Freedom to bolster religious freedom in-country?

Answer. The United States closely monitors freedom of religion or belief in Libya and around the world through the Office of International Religious Freedom. In response to reports of a restrictive social environment for religious freedom, the State Department has also supported programs in Libya designed to promote inclusivity and tolerance, and to counter hate speech. If confirmed, I would work closely with colleagues throughout the Department—including the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom—to encourage respect for human rights, including the freedoms of religion or belief, association, and expression.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to personally engaging with civil society on this issue?

Answer. Yes. A strong and independent civil society is an essential part of a healthy democratic state, and civil society will play a key role in the success of national elections and transitional justice efforts in Libya. If confirmed, I commit to continuing to engage with civil society actors on the full range of human rights issues in Libya, including religious freedom. If confirmed, I would also maintain the current policy of raising human rights issues, including underscoring U.S. support for Libyan civil society actors, in meetings with senior officials.

Question. If confirmed, what concrete steps can you take to help Libya increase their societal and governmental respect for religious freedom?

Answer. The United States closely monitors freedom of religion or belief in Libya and around the world, and the State Department has also supported programs in Libya designed to promote inclusivity and tolerance, and to counter hate speech. If confirmed, I would continue the policy of advocating for respect for fair trial guarantees and the rule of law, as the United States does in countries around the world. I would also commit, if confirmed, to raise these issues at the highest levels with Libyan interlocutors.

Question. The State Department's 2023 Human Rights Report notes that U.N. Fact Finding Mission find reasonable grounds to believe state and nonstate actors committed crimes against humanity in Libya. How will you direct your embassy to work with civil society organizations to improve the human rights situation on the ground?

Answer. As the Department has noted before, the U.N. Fact Finding Mission found reasonable grounds to believe state and nonstate actors committed crimes against humanity in Libya. If confirmed, I commit to raise these issues at the highest levels as I engage with Libyan interlocutors. The team at the Libya External Office has intensified their engagement with the civil society organizations that are working to improve the dire human rights situation on the ground. If confirmed, I would continue to support and facilitate this important work, while constantly re-

viewing security conditions to ensure the safety of U.S. personnel traveling into and around Libya.

Question. Management is a key responsibility for chiefs of mission. How do you intend to create a unified mission and vision at post?

Answer. Leading the outstanding interagency team, including American and Locally Employed staff, from the Libya External Office would be the greatest privilege of my career. The unique work conditions, including the presence of some local staff inside Libya, require a unique focus on developing and maintaining a cohesive vision. If confirmed, I would use strategic planning tools such as the Integrated Country Strategy as the basis for ongoing dialogue and review among all staff and agencies to ensure the most effective advancement of U.S. national security priorities.

Question. How would you describe your management style?

Answer. My management style is predicated on the belief that high morale work environments deliver the best results for both individual employees and for the United States' national security interests. To achieve that, I strive to lead in a way that rewards bold thinking and empowers employees to take ownership of their work, that provides regular and constructive feedback so they can continue to expand and improve their skills, and that ensures all of this is done with a clear understanding of the national security imperatives that drive our activities.

Question. How do you intend to improve morale at post?

Answer. If confirmed, my goal as Chief of Mission will be to maintain the high morale that currently exists in the Libya External Office. To do so, I will ensure a cohesive interagency team that operates with a shared understanding of the priorities of our mission. I will work in partnership with the Deputy Chief of Mission to ensure consistent and regular dialogue with all staff members, American and locally employed, about those priorities through regular meetings, town halls, and team building events. I will encourage every staff member to communicate their ideas and concerns, including those which impact their families and other members of the community, in order to improve our team environment.

Question. Do you believe it is ever acceptable or constructive to berate subordinates, either in public or private?

Answer. It is never acceptable to berate subordinates. It is also entirely inconsistent with my own leadership style that focuses on strong morale delivering the best possible outcomes for the individual and for the United States.

Question. How do you envision your relationship with the deputy chief of mission?

Answer. There is no more important relationship in an Embassy than that between the Ambassador and the Deputy Chief of Mission. If confirmed, I would seek to build a seamless partnership and fully empower the DCM to act on my behalf and that of the mission whenever needed. I would rely upon the DCM to provide me with open and honest counsel and commit to doing the same. My vision of the partnership is one in which the DCM and I speak with a single, coordinated voice whether engaging external audiences or in supporting the Libya External Office team.

Question. If confirmed, what leadership responsibilities do you intend to entrust to your deputy chief of mission?

Answer. If confirmed, I envision a unified leadership team in the Libya External Office front office that speaks with one voice in promoting U.S. national security interests in Libya. While the DCM would be empowered to manage most of the internal coordination and operations, s/he also needs to participate in and be fully briefed on external engagement activities to be able to step into the role of Chargé d'affaires in the absence of the Ambassador. If confirmed, I will work with my DCM to maximize their strengths and identify the most effective areas where they can help me to lead the mission team in pursuit of U.S. national security objectives.

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 performances in order to encourage improvement and reward those who most succeeded in their roles?

Answer. Yes, I have throughout my career prioritized providing employees with constructive feedback throughout the annual review cycle and ensured that the feedback is reflected in accurate annual employee evaluation reports. I have also throughout my career held regular meetings with both direct reports and those employees reporting to my direct reports in order to provide feedback and also to solicit

their feedback for me. If confirmed, I will continue to prioritize performance management as a key part of my responsibilities.

Question. If confirmed, would you support and encourage clear, accurate, and direct feedback to employees in order to improve performance and acknowledge high achievers?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed, I would make clear to all staff my expectation that supervisors meet regularly with their employees to provide both positive and constructive feedback on performance, as well as to solicit feedback from their employees. I will also encourage all employees to draft meaningful award nominations for deserving colleagues and subordinates.

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 accomplish fully their missions?

Answer. I have spent much of my career working at or on posts with significant security challenges. In each instance, it has been my experience that both American and local staff make every effort, within security allowances, to get out as much as possible. If confirmed, I would work closely and continuously with U.S. and host nation security to ensure our colleagues undertake as much external engagement as possible in line with the oft-changing security environment. To effectively advance U.S. interests, our diplomats throughout the mission need to engage local audiences to execute, for example, commercial advocacy, support of U.S. citizens, assistance oversight, and strategic communications.

Question. How do you intend to improve the ability of U.S. diplomats to better access all local populations?

Answer. The decision to establish an interim facility in Tripoli, notified to Congress on March 12, was preceded by more than two and a half years of increasing the frequency and duration of travel into Libya to ensure diplomatic operations are undertaken safely. The Department has expanded the duration of travel from single-day to multi-day trips, to weeks-long visits on the full range of U.S. diplomatic, consular, and commercial interests. This month, for example, the Department sent consular officers to Benghazi to provide in-person American Citizen Services for the first time in over 50 years. Members of the Libya External Office team have in recent months traveled to Tripoli, Benghazi, and Misrata, and we have conducted necessary preparatory work to enable a future visit to Sabha, the provincial capital of a major province in the long-marginalized south. If confirmed, I would work closely with Congress to sustain and, where possible, increase the breadth and scope of our travel and accelerate our resumption of embassy operations in Tripoli, in a manner that prioritizes the safety and security of our personnel and all Americans.

Question. Congressional travel, including by members (CODELS) or staff (STAFFDELS) serve a critical oversight role. Do you pledge to support fully CODELS and STAFFDELS that seek to travel to post, including on weekends as well as local and Federal holidays?

Answer. Yes. Congressional travel is a critical tool in advancing U.S. interests overseas and I look forward, if confirmed, to supporting it whenever and wherever it can happen.

Question. Do you commit to supporting fully any CODEL or STAFFDEL, with the only exceptions for simultaneous or overlapping visits by the President or First Lady of the United States, the Vice President, or the Secretaries of State or Defense?

Answer. If confirmed, yes, I commit to supporting to the fullest extent possible any CODEL or STAFFDEL. Such visits are a critical tool in advancing U.S. national security priorities.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO JENNIFER D. GAVITO BY SENATOR CHRIS VAN HOLLEN

Question. When the Libyan Government of National Accord (GNA) signed an MOU with Türkiye "on delimitation of their maritime jurisdiction areas in the Mediterranean" in 2019, the State Department called it "provocative and unhelpful." That MOU and a subsequent 2022 MOU signed with an eye toward joint offshore energy exploration could spark conflict in the region—with Greece in particular.

How will you confront the tensions among countries in the region concerning eastern Mediterranean gas reserves?

Answer. The United States continues to urge all States to resolve maritime delimitation issues peacefully through dialogue and in accordance with international law. In general, and if confirmed, I will remain supportive of energy projects that would physically interconnect vital energy markets such as the Eastern Mediterranean and North Africa to Europe, particularly electricity interconnections that help prepare for the clean energy transition that enhances energy security and sustainability.

Question. Will you press the GNA to abandon cooperating in Türkiye's provocations concerning these resources?

Answer. If confirmed, I will continue to urge all States to resolve maritime delimitation issues peacefully through dialogue and in accordance with international law. Our longstanding belief is that resource development in the Eastern Mediterranean should promote cooperation and provide a foundation for durable energy security and economic prosperity throughout the region.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO JENNIFER D. GAVITO 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 (PRC) 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 CCP a threat to the United States?

Answer. Yes. In fact, in 2023, 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." As Secretary Blinken has said, under President Xi, the CCP has become more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad. If confirmed, I will advance U.S. national security interests by countering PRC efforts to expand its problematic influence and use of coercion, through diplomatic engagements, public diplomacy, and commercial advocacy to bolster U.S.-Libya ties.

Question. Does the CCP undertake any activities that are beneficial to U.S. interests? If so, please explain.

Answer. 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 2024 Annual Threat Assessment, the CCP is seeking to "preempt challenges to its reputation and legitimacy, undercutting U.S. influence, driving wedges between Washington and its partners, and fostering global norms that favor its authoritarian system."

Question. Do you believe that there are any areas within which the CCP that would constructively work with the United States in good faith, knowing that at any moment Chinese interlocuters with U.S. representatives could be disappeared at a moment's notice? If so, please explain.

Answer. The United States will work with the PRC to address transnational challenges, such as climate change, when it is in the U.S. interest to do so. If confirmed, I will work with my colleagues across the U.S. interagency and Congress 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 PRC in the countries or areas in which you will work?

Answer. If confirmed, my priority will be advancing U.S. national security interests in Libya 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 interagency colleagues and Congress to address the PRC's efforts to expand its influence in Libya and the region.

Question. As you may be aware, a group of Federal employees penned an open letter to President Biden criticizing U.S. support for Israel in the aftermath of Hamas' brutal terrorist attack on October 7, 2023. In addition, on January 16, 2024, employees from nearly two dozen agencies staged a walkout in protest of the administration's Israel policy. Efforts like these directly undermine the duty of our diplomats to advance the policies of the President of the United States. Yes or no, did you sign the letter to the President expressing opposition to the President's Israel policy?

Answer. No, I did not sign the open letter to the President.

Question. Yes or no, did you participate in the January 16, 2024, walkout?

Answer. No, I did not participate.

Question. If confirmed, would you define one of the employees or contractors operating under your supervision signing an open letter criticizing you, or policies you undertake at the instruction of the President, as insubordination as defined by the Government Accountability Office?

Answer. If confirmed, I would seek to address employee concerns personally by creating an open work environment, free of harassment, discrimination, or reprisal. I will let employees know they can feel comfortable sharing constructive criticism with me directly. I am mindful of whistleblower protections, and I value Department employees' right to free speech under the First Amendment. Moreover, I understand the expression of disagreement does not in and of itself constitute insubordination. If confirmed, I would work with the Department's Office of the Legal Adviser to determine the proper course of action should such a matter arise.

Question. In your view, are the actions these Federal employees took, by anonymously signing a letter to the President of the United States, covered as "whistleblowing"?

Answer. I am not familiar with the letter in question, but I support employees' right to express their views and strive to create a workplace environment in which employees feel comfortable raising any concerns with their supervisors and management. "Whistleblowing" is a term and activity covered by legislation and regulations; I defer to the Department's Office of the Legal Adviser to determine whether the referenced actions are considered protected whistleblowing activity.

Question. If confirmed, how will you address discipline issues, such as insubordination, that do not take established dissent channels?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to ensuring employees are aware of their chain of command and the standards of conduct required of them as Department employees.

According to Department policy, job-related insubordination is a conduct matter and may result in counseling and/or discipline, including a penalty commensurate with the scale of the offense. If confirmed, I would address conduct issues, including insubordination, in consultation with the Department's human resources and legal professionals.

Question. Have you ever expressed support for an Israeli cease-fire in Gaza?

Answer. No, I have never expressed any view on an Israeli cease-fire in Gaza or taken any other policy position on the conflict as it is not within the scope of my current work.

Question. Do you agree that Hamas is an antisemitic entity?

Answer. Yes, Hamas espouses antisemitism and was founded on an antisemitic platform. Hamas, which is designated by the United States as a foreign terrorist organization, seeks to eliminate the state of Israel, and its founding charter calls for the killing of Jews.

Question. Would a cease-fire allow these groups to reconstitute and attack Israel, and Americans, in the future?

Answer. While I do not work on this issue, I understand the United States remains committed to reaching an immediate cease-fire that secures the release of hostages and allows us to surge and sustain humanitarian aid and bolster the protection of civilians. The Administration's hope is that a more enduring peace could be built upon that. Working with partners, the U.S. Government is attempting to secure the release of all hostages held by Hamas. The United States supports Israel's right to protect itself from Hamas' terrorism consistent with international law.

Question. Do you agree that calling for a cease-fire in Gaza means calling for Israel to stop its pursuit of Hamas, a designated foreign terrorist organization, that orchestrated the October 7 attacks and still refuses to release all Israeli and American hostages?

Answer. While I do not work on this issue, I understand the United States remains committed to reaching an immediate cease-fire that secures the release of hostages and allows us to surge and sustain humanitarian aid and bolster the protection of civilians. The Administration's hope is that a more enduring peace could be built upon that. Working with partners, the U.S. Government is attempting to secure the release of all hostages held by Hamas. The U.S. Government supports Israel's right to protect itself from Hamas' terrorism consistent with international law.

Question. Do you believe that Israel, in its operation against Hamas, which is known to use civilians as human shields, is taking all necessary steps to minimize civilian casualties?

Answer. While I do not work on this issue, I understand the Administration has noted it's difficult in the heat of war to make a definitive assessment about any individual incident. However, the National Security Memorandum–20 report States the IDF has undertaken steps to implement IHL obligations for the protection of civilians in the current conflict, including the requirements related to distinction, proportionality, and precautions in attack. Israel's own concern is reflected in the fact it has a number of internal investigations underway.

Question. More than a decade has passed since the Qadhafi regime in Libya was overthrown by popular protests and subsequent NATO intervention. Since that time, Libya has become more fractured, lacks a consensus over its government or constitution, and rival security factions continue to dominate the landscape. On September 11, 2012, militants conducted a coordinated attack against two American facilities in Benghazi, Libya that resulted in the death of the U.S. Ambassador to Libya and another foreign service employee. Against this backdrop, the administration requested funding in fiscal year to support the return of a full-time U.S. diplomatic presence, but has yet to provide any related plans, security needs, costs, or alternatives. Press reporting indicates forces in eastern Libya may have had Russian assistance in shooting down a U.S. UAV and were considering granting Russian military access to air bases and ports in the east in exchange for training and assistance. In your view, what are the core U.S. national security interests in Libya?

Answer. Core U.S. national security interests in Libya include:

• Countering Russia's use of Libya as a platform to destabilize the Sahel and NATO's southern flank by helping Libyans reassert their sovereignty.

• Advocating for U.S. industry solutions and underscoring the vulnerabilities Libya faces in relying on untrustworthy PRC-linked vendors for its national security and critical infrastructure.

• Promoting global energy security (Libya possesses the world's ninth largest oil reserves and significant gas reserves) by working to stabilize Libya's economy.

• Preserving hard-fought counterterrorism gains—which include significantly degrading ISIS and al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb—to deny any opportunity for extremists to threaten U.S. citizens or interests; and

• Reinforcing UN-led efforts to put Libya on a path to unified governance and national elections.

Question. How much influence could the U.S. leverage over Libyan factions, regardless of the operating platform being in Tunis or in Libya?

Answer. Many Libyans from all parts of the country seek American leadership and support for their aspirations for unified, effective governance that respects the rights of all its people and allows civil society to operate freely and safely. Libyan businesses and consumers are eager to expand their partnerships with U.S. companies and purchase U.S. goods. While significant obstacles remain, U.S. leadership, alongside the U.N. and international partners, is key to finding a political compromise that sets Libya on a path to free and fair elections and unified governance.

Question. To your knowledge, have the Libyan factions supported or agreed that it is in their vital interest for the U.S. to return to Libya?

Answer. As I understand it, many Libyans see the United States as a neutral external actor and seek U.S. leadership and support for their aspirations for unified, effective governance that respects the rights of all its people and allows civil society to operate freely and safely. Many Libyan officials from all parts of the country, as

well as ordinary Libyan citizens, have emphasized their eagerness for the United States to restore a persistent diplomatic presence in Libya.

Question. Have the decision points which led to the departure of diplomats in Libya gone away? If so, what specific analysis or conditions show the security concerns which caused the departure no longer exist?

Answer. U.S. Embassy Tripoli operations were suspended in July 2014 following the outbreak of civil war in Libya. While we have seen sporadic violence among Tripoli armed groups, the security environment has improved, and the October 2020 cease-fire has largely held. As a result, many foreign missions, including those of some our strategic adversaries, have resumed their diplomatic activities in Tripoli. As I understand it, the U.S. decision to return to Tripoli was preceded by more than two and a half years of increasing the frequency and duration of travel into Libya to ensure that diplomatic operations are undertaken prudently and safely.

Question. If confirmed, would you promote Libya-Israel normalization?

Answer. Normalization of relations with Israel, including through the Abraham Accords, has led to greater peace and security in the region and expanded opportunities for signatories' economic growth. The Department of State has made clear its commitment to the goal of expanding and deepening opportunities for integration represented by the Accords. If confirmed, I would reflect this commitment with Libyan interlocutors and highlight the benefits of improved regional cooperation and integration.

Question. What are Libyan actors providing, in terms of fuel, arms and support, with regard to the conflict in Sudan?

Answer. Russia, the Kremlin-backed Wagner Group, and other emerging paramilitary groups like "Africa Corps" have operated with impunity, seeking to use Libya as a platform to destabilize Sudan and other countries in sub-Saharan Africa. According to press reports, Russian actors used Libyan territory as a platform to provide military equipment, including surface-to-air missiles, to Sudan's Rapid Support Forces, helping drive the civil war. Russia is among the most toxic foreign elements in Libya and has clear interest in establishing permanent infrastructure in the region.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO JENNIFER D. GAVITO BY SENATOR JOHN BARRASSO

Question. After the deadly evacuation of U.S. diplomats in 2012 under the Obama-Biden Administration, the embassy in Libya closed. There are reports that President Biden wants the new Ambassador to Libya to return to a full-time diplomatic presence. What is the status of U.S. efforts to return U.S. diplomatic personnel to Libya on a full-time basis?

Answer. U.S. Embassy Tripoli operations were suspended in July 2014 following the outbreak of civil war, which ended after the October 2020 cease-fire. The United States is one of the only major powers without a persistent diplomatic presence. The decision to establish an interim facility in Tripoli, notified to Congress on March 12, was preceded by more than two and a half years of increasing the frequency and duration of travel into Libya to ensure diplomatic operations are undertaken safely. As I understand it , the facility, when opened, will serve as a temporary base from which to operate for longer and more frequent trips.

Question. What issues must be addressed to restore a full-time U.S. diplomatic presence in Libya?

Answer. As I understand it, the funding requested for Diplomatic Security and the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs in the President's fiscal year budget would be essential for establishing a sustained diplomatic presence in Tripoli. The Department has identified property and set aside money to fund construction of an interim facility. Fully equipping and securing the interim facility, however, will require additional diplomatic security personnel on the ground, which is contingent on fiscal year appropriations.

Question. What impact has the lack of a full-time presence in Libya had on the ability of the United States to meaningfully engage with the Libyans and understand what is happening on the ground?

Answer. Our lack of a persistent diplomatic presence risks ceding space to our strategic rivals who are based full-time in Tripoli. Russia is among the more than

40 countries currently with diplomatic missions in Tripoli, and the Russian ambassador has implemented a robust public diplomacy strategy that frequently references the absence of the United States. While the Department has increased the frequency and duration of travel into Libya, for America to understand events on the ground and advance our national security interests, our diplomats must be present on a persistent basis in order to safely and effectively fulfill our diplomatic mission.

Question. How would you characterize current U.S. relations with Libya?

Answer. The United States supports Libya's stability, independence, territorial integrity and national unity, including in the face of external interference. The United States works with the U.N. and international partners to advance a process for elections and unified governance that will enable Libya to reaffirm its sovereignty and meet the economic and humanitarian needs of the Libyan people. Many Libyans are eager for U.S. leadership, see the United States as a neutral external actor, and want greater connections to U.S. cultural and educational institutions and the private sector.

Question. Reports indicate that Russia has rapidly expanded its military presence in Libya. What is Russia's current policy objectives in Libya?

Answer. Russia has made no secret of its ambition to deepen its foothold in Libya and use it as a base from which to further destabilize the Sahel, as well as NATO's southern flank. In doing so it shows a flagrant disregard for Libya's sovereignty and that of its neighbors. Moscow has clear interest in establishing permanent infrastructure in the region. Russia's destabilizing and cynical actions in Libya and the region exacerbate turmoil and sow chaos.

Question. What is the extent of Russia's security presence in Libya?

Answer. Following Prigozhin's death, the Russian Ministry of Defense has sought to subsume Wagner operations under more direct control and to formalize and expand its presence. The Russian deputy minister of defense has visited Libya five times since August 2023, and we have seen reports of Russian naval vessels delivering artillery and other military equipment to Libya. The Russian ambassador to Libya has publicly acknowledged the presence of Russian forces in Libya. Press reports indicate that there are roughly 1,800 Kremlin-backed forces currently present in Libya.

Question. What specific role does the Wagner Group play in Libya, and what is their level of influence?

Answer. Kremlin-backed paramilitary organizations, from the Wagner Group, a transnational criminal organization, to the newer "Africa Corps," remain among the most toxic foreign elements in Libya. The Russian Ministry of Defense announced its intention to subsume the Wagner Group's operations and seeks to exploit Libya's internal divisions in pursuit of a more formal defense relationship with Libyan actors as a low-cost tool to destabilize the Sahel and NATO's southern flank. Press reports indicate that there are roughly 1,800 Kremlin-backed forces currently present in Libya.

Question. What would be your strategy to counter the growing influence of Russia in Libya?

Answer. If confirmed, I would take every opportunity to hold Russia accountable and underscore to Libyan leaders the profound risks of allowing Russia to undermine Libya's sovereignty and enmesh Libya in regional turmoil. The June 12 sanctions on Russian state-owned Goznak, which has printed more than $1 billion worth of counterfeit Libyan currency, represent an important step in countering Russia's malign influence. Greater engagement in support of Libyan efforts to unify political, security, and economic institutions is also essential to address the underlying vulnerabilities in Libya that Russia's destabilizing behavior is seeking to exploit.

Question. How do Russian military operations in Libya affect U.S. counterterrorism efforts in the region?

Answer. Russia's destabilizing activities in Libya are perpetuating divisions and thus make it easier for terrorists to operate by undermining efforts to unify the country's counterterrorism capabilities. The United States remains committed to preserving hard-won counterterrorism gains in Libya, which include significantly degrading ISIS and al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb. Libya does not provide safe haven to terrorist organizations to carry out terrorist activities from Libyan territory; however, it continues to require assistance in ensuring that its territory is not

used for terrorist activities, particularly along Libya's southern border. Libyan security actors are willing U.S. counterterrorism partners, albeit with limited capacity.

Question. Libyan Prime Minister Abdul Hamid Dbeibah said in a China Media Group interview that "China has been objective and impartial in providing support, favoring no particular faction. It is for these positive reasons that we are here, hoping to deepen Libya's relationship with China and that of the Arab states with China." How would you characterize the current economic and political cooperation between China and Libya?

Answer. PRC-linked firms have made deep inroads into Libya's information and communications technology sector. Huawei and ZTE dominate the Libyan 4G space. PRC-linked firms in other sectors in Libya, however, have not returned to their pre-2011 levels. If confirmed, I would advocate for U.S. industry solutions and underscore the vulnerabilities Libya faces in relying on untrustworthy vendors for its national security and critical infrastructure.

Question. How has China's Belt and Road Initiative impacted Libya, and what are the long-term implications for Libyan sovereignty?

Answer. While political turmoil has made it difficult to implement the BRI in Libya, PRC-linked firms dominate Libya's 4G networks, and the PRC government is encouraging its companies to invest more heavily in Libya. The Administration has been clear that the PRC is the most consequential geopolitical challenge facing the United States. 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 Libya and the region.

Question. If confirmed, what would be your strategy to deter Chinese influence in Libya?

Answer. If confirmed, I would seek to stand up against the PRC's unfair economic practices and position U.S. companies to be front and center. I would underscore that relying on untrustworthy vendors risks undermining Libya's national security and critical infrastructure. I would work closely with the interagency and Congress to advance U.S. national security interests and counter PRC efforts to expand its problematic influence and use of coercion, through diplomatic engagements, public diplomacy, and commercial advocacy to bolster U.S.-Libya ties.

Question. How do you assess the effectiveness of current U.S. policies in addressing Chinese influence in Libya?

Answer. If confirmed, my priority will be advancing U.S. national security interests in Libya 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. To effectively do that, however, it is important that the United States is present on the ground.

Question. What impact has Chinese influence had on Libya's government?

Answer. The PRC has made significant inroads in Libya's ICT and infrastructure sectors, and PRC-based Huawei and ZTE dominate the Libyan 4G space. While China has not invested in Libya at the same levels seen before the 2011 conflict, there have recently been indications of its interest in its companies expanding their presence there.

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 2024 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. The United Nations estimates that over 500,000 people in Libya require some form of humanitarian aid. In September 2023, two dams, near the city of Derna, collapsed due to storms causing catastrophic mass flooding and destroyed a majority of the city. What is the status of recovery efforts in areas affected by flooding? What support has been provided by the U.S.?

Answer. With successful interventions, U.N. estimates of those who need assistance in Libya had been decreasing when Storm Daniel struck. The United States was the single largest donor to the U.N. flash appeal for humanitarian assistance to the people of Libya affected by devastating flooding in the northeastern part of the country. The United States, in coordination with international partners, has advocated for a unified, coordinated Libyan national mechanism to deliver humani-

tarian assistance and address reconstruction in Derna and throughout eastern Libya in a transparent and accountable manner.

Question. Given the endemic corruption and militias' influence over the government, what measures are put in place to ensure that U.S. funding is not being misdirected or misused?

Answer. The Department and USAID use a variety of monitoring and evaluation tools, which may include third-party monitoring systems like local monitors on the ground to bolster oversight of programming in Libya and ensure that we receive independent, unbiased information regarding implementation of foreign assistance programs. Over the last few years, we have significantly increased the frequency of travel by U.S. officials to Libya. We have also pressed key Libyan actors to negotiate enhanced transparency and accountability procedures for all government expenditures. Resuming our embassy operations in Tripoli will further enhance our ability to conduct monitoring and evaluation of foreign assistance programs.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO JOSHUA M. HARRIS BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

Question. Please outline your policy priorities and objectives if confirmed as the United States Ambassador to Algeria.

Answer. If confirmed, I will prioritize further deepening U.S.-Algeria cooperation to advance regional peace, including through our coordination on the U.N. Security Council; advocate for expanding U.S.-Algeria trade and investment to deliver tangible benefits for the American people, while reinforcing Algeria's contributions to stable energy markets; and continue the U.S. government's dialogue with Algerian counterparts about reforms to foster inclusion, to promote freedom of expression, and to empower the vital contributions of civil society.

Question. Algeria continues a policy of "non-alignment" and maintains diplomatic, military, and economic relationships with Russia, the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Islamic Republic of Iran. Algeria continues to purchase Russian arms exports. Do you believe Algeria is eligible for sanctions under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA)? Describe the implications of imposing sanctions for U.S.-Algerian relations.

Answer. The Department of State has consistently engaged the Algerian government, as we do all U.S. partners and allies, on the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA), which is an important tool to address Russia's destabilizing activities globally. While Algeria has historically been a top destination for Russian arms exports, it has pursued a policy of diversification in recent years and increased purchases from non-Russian suppliers. If confirmed, I will continue to urge Algeria to avoid transactions with Russia's defense sector, which risk the imposition of sanctions, and to diversify away from Russian-origin military equipment as rapidly as possible.

Question. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has made Algeria and others reconsider their reliance on Moscow for defense needs. How can the U.S. serve as a competitive alternative to Algeria's current partners, especially given Algerian resistance to oversight of U.S. defense articles?

Answer. Algerian authorities have stated that they are committed to diversification of their defense equipment and have increased their purchases from non-Russian suppliers since CAATSA was enacted. As Deputy Assistant Secretary, I have consistently engaged Algerian officials on this topic. In 2023, the United States and Algeria held a Joint Military Dialogue that explored how the United States might contribute to meeting Algeria's defense needs and included a defense industry roundtable with commercial vendors. As Algeria continues to diversify its defense procurement, I believe the U.S. value proposition is compelling, and if confirmed, I will promote stronger trade and investment ties between the United States and Algeria, deepen diplomatic cooperation to advocate that the United States be Algeria's partner of choice, and explore how the United States can contribute to Algeria's efforts to diversify its military equipment suppliers.

Question. Please provide your assessment of Algeria-China relations and the threat they pose to U.S. economic and political interests in the region.

Answer. The PRC is currently Algeria's largest bilateral source of imports, as is the case with many African countries. PRC companies and workers have a sizable presence in Algeria and have played notable roles in the infrastructure, resource ex-

traction, and telecommunications sectors. While Algeria has economic ties with the PRC, Algeria has nonetheless also prioritized diversification of its relationships. The Administration has been clear that the PRC is the most consequential geopolitical challenge facing the United States. If confirmed, I will push back against PRC efforts to expand its problematic influence, including through robust diplomatic engagement, strong public diplomacy, and persistent commercial advocacy.

Question. To what extent do Algeria's relationships with Tehran, Moscow, and Beijing pose a threat to European security?

Answer. I take the threat Iran, the PRC, and Russia pose to U.S. interests, those of our European Allies and partners, and global security very seriously. While Algeria maintains ties with a broad range of countries, including Iran, the PRC, and Russia, Algeria has also prioritized diversification of its relationships and sought to avoid becoming overly reliant on any one partner. As Algeria makes its sovereign choices in this regard, I believe the U.S. value proposition is compelling, and if confirmed, I will promote stronger trade and investment ties between the United States and Algeria, deepen diplomatic cooperation to advocate that the United States be Algeria's partner of choice, and explore how the United States could contribute to Algeria's efforts to diversify its suppliers of military equipment.

Question. While Algeria remains protective of its economic independence, the United States is a critical economic partner. Additionally, Algeria is an important energy exporter to Europe. How will you engage with the Algerian government to lower existing barriers to U.S. investments and facilitate further trade between Washington and Algiers?

Answer. I agree that Algeria is an important commercial partner for the United States; more than 100 U.S. companies operate in Algeria, supporting U.S. jobs and economic growth across a variety of sectors. Algeria is also critical to Europe's energy security and a significant exporter of oil and gas regionally and globally, contributing to stable energy markets and increasing its oil and gas exports to Europe since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Algeria's energy sector offers significant opportunities for U.S. firms, with Chevron, Exxon, and Occidental Petroleum all signing deals for energy exploration and exportation in the past several years. If confirmed, I will work to further deepen trade and economic ties, consult with Algerian counterparts on reforms to strengthen the investment climate, advocate for U.S. businesses and commercial options, and press for the United States to occupy a leading role among Algeria's economic partners.

Question. Compared to neighboring countries, Algeria has strong border security and counterterrorism programs, which it maintains with one of the largest defense budgets in Africa. In 2023, President Tebboune more than doubled Algeria's defense budget. How can the United States work with Algeria to monitor trans-Sahara routes for drug, weapon, and human trafficking to limit illicit activity?

Answer. The Algerian government has signaled its interest in deepening counterterrorism and law enforcement cooperation with the United States to monitor and combat transnational criminal networks, particularly amid risks emanating from the Sahel. Algeria offers an important perspective and significant capabilities in responding to these trans-national threats. If confirmed, I will consult with Algerian counterparts on efforts to expand law enforcement cooperation and intensify cooperation to improve governance and security in the Sahel.

Question. What opportunities and challenges exist to engage Algeria in trilateral or multilateral constructs to strengthen border security in other countries?

Answer. Algeria has expressed strong concerns about instability and insecurity in the Sahel and interest in consulting with the United States in response to these challenges, including by seeking to improve governance in the Sahel as external actors probe for vulnerabilities. Promoting alignment with Algeria during its tenure as a non-permanent member of the U.N. Security Council through the end of 2025 is an important U.S. objective and basis for further cooperation. If confirmed, I will work closely with colleagues across the U.S. Government to deepen our partnership with Algeria to address crucial border security issues in the region.

Question. Algeria has been a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) since January 2024, a position it is set to retain through 2025. Since then, it has proposed resolutions which the U.S. has vetoed, most notably related to the Israel-Hamas conflict. If confirmed, how will you use your role as Ambassador to engage Algeria on unhelpful activity in the Security Council?

Answer. If confirmed, I will seek to continue the U.S. government's important dialogue with Algerian counterparts on regional security, including by advocating for

U.S. priorities on the U.N. Security Council during Algeria's tenure as a non-permanent member. As Deputy Assistant Secretary, I have personally engaged Algerian officials to seek closer alignment between U.S. and Algerian positions on the Security Council, including with respect to ending the fighting in Sudan and preventing Libya's enmeshment in regional conflict. On June 10, Algeria supported a U.S.-drafted U.N. Security Council resolution calling on Hamas to accept the proposal outlined by the President on May 31 and to urge its full implementation.

Question. How do Algerian and American interests overlap in the Security Council?

Answer. Algeria has an important voice at the U.N. Security Council in promoting regional de-escalation, including by supporting efforts to end fighting in Sudan, to prevent Libya's enmeshment in regional conflict, to improve security and governance in the Sahel, and to create the conditions for greater peace and security for Israelis and Palestinians alike. The United States and Algeria also seek to further expand our counterterrorism partnership as Algeria serves as the 2024–25 chair of the UNSC Counterterrorism Committee. If confirmed, I will prioritize robust diplomatic engagement with Algerian counterparts to seek further alignment on U.S. priorities at the U.N. Security Council.

Question. In the State Department's 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report, Algeria was downgraded to Tier 3 for failing to meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking and is not making a significant effort to do so. If confirmed, what concrete steps could you take to help Algeria operationalize the prioritized recommendations contained in the TIP report?

Answer. I take the challenge of countering trafficking in persons very seriously and, as Deputy Assistant Secretary, have personally engaged Algerian counterparts to urge implementation of the recommendations in the 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report. Algeria passed a new, comprehensive anti-trafficking law in May 2023 and has also increased investigations and prosecutions of alleged traffickers. If confirmed, I will continue to work U.S. interagency partners to urge that the Algerian government further improve its anti-trafficking efforts, including by proactively identifying and assisting trafficking victims.

Question. In particular how would you work with the government to improve processes to deter the trafficking of Cuban medical professionals, Chinese nationals, and North Korean workers?

Answer. If confirmed, I will work with the Algerian government and interagency partners, including DHS, CBP, FBI, and the Intelligence Community, to build Algerian capacity to screen for trafficking and forced labor indicators for these populations. I will also, if confirmed, work with U.S. interagency colleagues to urge that such individuals found to be the victim of trafficking are referred by Algerian authorities for appropriate services, including in a manner consistent with obligations under U.N. Security Council resolution 2397 in the case of North Korean workers.

Question. In the State Department's 2022 International Religious Freedom report noted that non-Muslim minority religious groups faced difficulty in registering as associations, importing religious materials and obtaining visas. 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. Restrictions on religious freedom continue to be a significant human rights concern in Algeria, as the Secretary has made clear by designating Algeria since 2021 as a Special Watch List country for engaging in or tolerating severe violations of religious freedom. The Department of State has been clear regarding the inability of religious associations to register with the government, which has resulted in the closure of dozens of churches under the Protestant Church of Algeria (EPA) and the denial of their efforts to register and reopen. As Deputy Assistant Secretary, I have personally engaged the Algerian government to stress the importance of respect and equal treatment for members of all religious groups and the equal and transparent enforcement of laws governing religious organizations. If confirmed, I will continue working closely with the U.S. Ambassador-At-Large and interagency colleagues to urge that the Algerian government address the concerns identified in the annual International Religious Freedom report.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to personally engaging with civil society on this issue?

Answer. Yes. If confirmed, I will personally engage with Algerian civil society and a diverse array of religious actors on the importance of religious freedom. I will also,

if confirmed, maintain the frank dialogue that U.S. Embassy Algiers has had with Algerian government counterparts about the importance of promoting religious freedom.

Question. If confirmed, what concrete steps can you take to help Algeria increase their societal and governmental respect for religious freedom?

Answer. The Administration has repeatedly stressed the importance of religious coexistence and the equal and transparent application of laws governing religious organizations. If confirmed, I will build upon existing dialogues between U.S. Embassy Algiers and a diverse group of religious actors and civil society organizations to align our efforts toward promoting religious freedom. If confirmed, I will also maintain frank conversations with the Algerian government on the importance of respect and equal treatment for members of all religious groups.

Question. The State Department's 2023 Human Rights Report notes that the human rights situation in Algeria deteriorated during the year due to an increased repression, notably of the freedoms of expression, press, assembly, and association. How will you direct your embassy to work with civil society organizations to improve the human rights situation on the ground?

Answer. U.S. partnerships around the world are strongest when there is respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including in Algeria. If confirmed, I will continue the U.S. government's important dialogue with Algerian counterparts about reforms to foster inclusion, to promote freedom of expression, and to empower the vital contributions of civil society. I will also, if confirmed, ensure that employees at U.S. Embassy Algiers continue to meet regularly with civil society representatives and nongovernmental organizations to consult on efforts to promote respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Question. Management is a key responsibility for chiefs of mission. How do you intend to create a unified mission and vision at post?

Answer. I am deeply committed to supporting the American and local professional staff at U.S. Embassy Algiers, if confirmed, in forging a unified and capable mission postured to promote vital U.S. interests in Algeria. If confirmed, I would seek to offer a clear vision for U.S. goals, promote open communication, and advocate persistently in collaboration with U.S. Government partners for our agenda. In my experience, recognizing the impact of colleagues' work and ensuring professional accountability are vital to fostering a unified, high-morale mission, and if confirmed, I would strive to reflect these values in Algiers.

Question. How would you describe your management style?

Answer. As a manager, I have strived to empower subordinates to accomplish their work effectively, including by ensuring the flow of information whenever possible and supporting the professional development of my colleagues. I believe successful managers are able to build cohesive, mission-centric, and motivated interagency teams able to harness U.S. power effectively. If confirmed, I would seek to apply these management principles and experiences over the course of my 20-year career to service at U.S. Embassy Algiers.

Question. How do you intend to improve morale at post?

Answer. The dedicated professionals, American and local, at U.S. Embassy Algiers already represent a high-morale and effective team advancing U.S. priorities in Algeria. If confirmed, I would seek to continue this trajectory by showcasing the crucial impact of the team's work, fostering open and collaborative communication within the mission, and advocating within the U.S. Government for the resources necessarily to fulfill our mission.

Question. Do you believe it is ever acceptable or constructive to berate subordinates, either in public or private?

Answer. No. I strongly support a collegial and harassment-free work environment in which employees are able to advance U.S. priorities, develop their skills and tradecraft, and provide different perspectives without fear of reprisal.

Question. How do you envision your relationship with the deputy chief of mission?

Answer. Having previously served as Deputy Chief of Mission at the U.S. Libya External Office Tunis, I consider a collaborative partnership between the Chief of Mission and Deputy Chief of Mission to be fundamental for a successful embassy. This relationship should be characterized by mutual respect, open communication, and seamless collaboration on both internal management and external engagement. If confirmed, I will seek to reinforce the Deputy Chief of Mission's important responsibilities in the success of the U.S. Mission and prioritize that individual's profes-

sional development such that that individual is prepared for future service as a Chief of Mission.

Question. If confirmed, what leadership responsibilities do you intend to entrust to your deputy chief of mission?

Answer. If confirmed, I will seek to empower the Deputy Chief to be a full and collaborative partner in both internal management of the mission and external engagements. I will aim to learn about the Deputy Chief of Mission's experiences and priorities in collaboratively developing that individual's portfolio.

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 performances in order to encourage improvement and reward those who most succeeded in their roles?

Answer. Yes. I strongly believe that employees should be provided timely and constructive feedback in order to further refine their skills and motivate future performance. I also believe employees should be held accountable in accordance with relevant regulations.

Question. If confirmed, would you support and encourage clear, accurate, and direct feedback to employees in order to improve performance and acknowledge high achievers?

Answer. Yes. If confirmed, I will strongly support and encourage clear and direct feedback to employees at U.S. Embassy Algiers to support their professional development, improve performance where needed, and recognize their contributions.

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 accomplish fully their missions?

Answer. In my experience, the professionals of the Department of State do remarkable work each day, often in complex security environments, to promote U.S. national security, expand commercial ties, promote the well-being of U.S. citizens abroad, and ensure management excellence for our diplomatic operations. Diplomacy cannot be accomplished solely within the mission walls. If confirmed, I will encourage colleagues at U.S. Embassy Algiers to continue working creatively, collaboratively, and energetically to get outside the embassy walls to fulfill our mission.

Question. How do you intend to improve the ability of U.S. diplomats to better access all local populations?

Answer. During my career, I have consistently seen the skill and creativity with which U.S. diplomats engage local populations, learn about local conditions, and provide thoughtful and well-considered information to policymakers. If confirmed, I will encourage colleagues at U.S. Embassy Algiers to engage a broad range of contacts—in government, the private sector, academia, and the non-governmental community—and avail themselves of language learning opportunities to communicate where practicable with counterparts in Arabic and French.

Question. Congressional travel, including by members (CODELS) or staff (STAFFDELS) serve a critical oversight role. Do you pledge to support fully CODELS and STAFFDELS that seek to travel to post, including on weekends as well as local and Federal holidays?

Answer. Yes. I strongly support the vital contributions of CODELs and STAFFDELs and, if confirmed, will ensure that U.S. Embassy Algiers continues to provide full support for these crucial visits.

Question. Do you commit to supporting fully any CODEL or STAFFDEL, with the only exceptions for simultaneous or overlapping visits by the President or First Lady of the United States, the Vice President, or the Secretaries of State or Defense?

Answer. Yes. If confirmed, I will fully support the crucial contributions of CODELs and STAFFDELs and commit to fully supporting all such travel to Algeria.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO JOSHUA M. HARRIS 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 PRC 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 its absolute control of Chinese society and industry, the CCP could stop all of these destructive actions tomorrow if it so chooses. Is the CCP an economic, diplomatic, military, and technological threat to the United States?

Answer. Yes. The Director of National Intelligence has testified that "the CCP represents both the leading and most consequential threat to U.S. national security and leadership globally." As the CCP becomes both more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad, it is seeking to undercut U.S. influence, alliances, and partnerships. If confirmed, I will prioritize advancing U.S. national security interests and pushing back against these deeply troubling PRC efforts, including by forging closer U.S.-Algeria cooperation to advance regional peace and security, promoting expanded trade and investment between the United States and Algeria, and strengthening public diplomacy.

Question. Does the CCP undertake any activities that are beneficial to U.S. interests? If so, please explain.

Answer. Secretary Blinken has said that the CCP has become more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad, seeking to undercut U.S. influence, alliances, and partnerships. According to the Office of the Director of National Intelligence's 2024 Annual Threat Assessment, the CCP is seeking to "preempt challenges to its reputation and legitimacy, undercutting U.S. influence, driving wedge between Washington and its partners, and fostering global norms that favor its authoritarian system."

Question. Do you believe that there are any areas in which the CCP would constructively work with the United States in good faith, knowing that at any moment Chinese interlocuters with U.S. representatives could be disappeared? If so, please explain.

Answer. As the United States competes vigorously with the PRC, the United States may at times need to work with the PRC to address transnational challenges when it is in our interests to do so, as Secretary Blinken has made clear. If confirmed, I will work with the Department of State's Office of China Coordination to advance U.S. objectives with respect to Algeria and to counter harmful behavior by the PRC.

Question. If confirmed, will you approve any joint activity with organizations or representatives from the PRC in the countries or areas in which you will work?

Answer. If confirmed, my priority will be advancing U.S. interests in Algeria and countering efforts by our competitors that seek to undermine those interests. The Administration has been clear that the PRC is the most consequential geopolitical challenge facing the United States. Guided by this assessment, I will, if confirmed, work closely with Department of State and interagency colleagues and Congress to address the PRC's efforts to expand its influence in Algeria and regionally.

Question. As you may be aware, a group of Federal employees penned an open letter to President Biden criticizing U.S. support for Israel in the aftermath of Hamas' brutal terrorist attack on October 7, 2023. In addition, employees from nearly two dozen agencies have staged walkouts in protest of the administration's Israel policy. Efforts like these directly undermine the duty of our diplomats to advance the policies of the President of the United States. Yes or no, did you sign the letter to the President expressing opposition to the President's Israel policy?

Answer. No.

Question. Yes or no, did you participate in the January 16, 2024 walkout?

Answer. No.

Question. If confirmed, would you define one of the employees or contractors operating under your supervision signing an open letter criticizing you, or policies you undertake at the instruction of the President, as insubordination as defined by the Government Accountability Office?

Answer. It is Department of State policy that all employees be able to express dissenting or alternative views on substantive issues of policy, in a manner which ensures serious, high-level review and response. While I do not consider signing an open letter criticizing U.S. policies to be a productive method to bring forward alternative views, I recognize the importance of and have sought over my career to promote a collegial and harassment-free work environment in which employees are able

to express disagreement and provide different perspectives without fear of reprisal. I understand the expression of disagreement does not in and of itself constitute insubordination. If confirmed, I will work with the Department's Office of the Legal Adviser to determine the proper course of action should such a matter arise.

Question. In your view, are the actions these Federal employees took, by anonymously signing a letter to the President of the United States, covered as "whistleblowing"?

Answer. While I do not consider anonymously signing a letter criticizing U.S. policies to be a constructive method to express dissent or bring forward alternative views, I strongly support a collegial and harassment-free work environment in which employees are able to express disagreement, provide different perspectives, and raise their concerns with their supervisors and management without fear of reprisal. I understand that "whistleblowing" is a specific activity covered by legislation and regulation, and I would defer to the Department's Office of the Legal Adviser for a determination on whether the referenced actions would be defined as "whistleblowing."

Question. If confirmed, how will you address discipline issues, such as insubordination, that do not take established dissent channels?

Answer. If confirmed, I will ensure employees at U.S. Embassy Algiers are aware of their chain of command and the standards of conduct required of all Department employees. I will also seek to foster a collegial and open environment in which employees are able to express disagreement and provide alternative views to their supervisors and management without fear of reprisal, and ensure relevant employees are aware of the formal dissent mechanism afforded to them. "Insubordination" is specifically defined by Department regulations as a disciplinary offense related to conduct on the job that may result in counseling or discipline, including a penalty commensurate with the scale of the offense. If confirmed, I will address any conduct issues that may arise, including insubordination, in consultation with the Department's human resources and legal professionals.

Question. Have you ever expressed support for an Israeli cease-fire in Gaza?

Answer. As Deputy Assistant Secretary responsible for North Africa, I have followed and supported U.S. policy as set by the President and the Secretary of State on such matters. That has meant that I sought to leverage U.S. partnerships in the region following the horrific Hamas attack on October 7 to secure the release of all hostages, to bring U.S. citizens and their families to safety via Egypt, to surge humanitarian assistance through all available means, to prevent the conflict from spreading, and to promote the conditions for enduring peace and security for Israelis and Palestinians alike. Following the proposal accepted by Israel and detailed by President Biden on May 31 laying out a formula for a cease-fire that would bring hostage home and ensure Israel's security, while permitting a substantial increase in humanitarian aid into Gaza, the Administration has urged regional partners to call upon Hamas to accept the deal and to urge its full implementation.

Question. Do you agree that Hamas is an antisemitic entity?

Answer. Yes. Hamas is designated by the United States as a foreign terrorist organization, seeks to eliminate the state of Israel, and is rooted in a founding charter calling for the killing of Jews.

Question. Would a cease-fire allow these groups to reconstitute and attack Israel, and Americans, in the future?

Answer. The Department of State has made clear that the unconscionable Hamas terrorist attack against Israel on October 7, 2023, cannot be repeated, that Hamas and its affiliates should not be allowed to reconstitute and threaten Israelis, Americans, or anyone else in the future, and that Israel has the right to defend itself consistent with international law. The United States is committed to reaching an immediate cease-fire that secures the release of hostages and allows for a surge in humanitarian aid and the protection of civilians. The Administration's aim is to build a more enduring cease-fire upon that, leading to enduring peace and security for Israelis and Palestinians alike.

Question. Do you agree that calling for a cease-fire in Gaza means calling for Israel to stop its pursuit of Hamas, a designated foreign terrorist organization, that orchestrated the October 7 attacks and still refuses to release all Israeli and American hostages?

Answer. The Administration has made clear that Israel has the right to defend itself consistent with international law. The President on May 31 laid out a pro-

posal, accepted by Israel, for "bring[ing] all the hostages home, ensur[ing] Israel's security, creat[ing] a better 'day after' in Gaza without Hamas in power, and set[ting] the stage for a political settlement that provides a better future for Israelis and Palestinians alike." Algeria has a crucial voice in diplomacy following the October 7 attack that aims to secure the release of all hostages, to surge humanitarian aid and protect civilians, and to promote the conditions for enduring peace and security for Israelis and Palestinians. If confirmed, I will prioritize further deepening this cooperation, including following the U.N. Security Council's call for Hamas to accept the proposal detailed by President Biden and urge its full implementation.

Question. Do you believe that Israel, in its operation against Hamas, which is known to use civilians as human shields, is taking all necessary steps to minimize civilian casualties?

Answer. While I do not directly work on these issues and thus do not have access to all information, I understand the Administration has made clear this is a very complex and complicated battlefield, and that Hamas has a clear history of co-locating itself with civilians and civilian infrastructure. The National Security Memorandum–20 report States that the Israeli Defense Forces have undertaken steps to implement international humanitarian law obligations for the protection of civilians in the current conflict, including the requirements related to distinction, proportionality, and precautions in attack. I understand that a number of internal Israeli investigations remain ongoing, reflecting that reported incidents of IHL violations are taken seriously.

Question. Algeria enjoys warm relations with Russia and China, rejects normalization with Israel, has diplomatic ties with Iran and Syria, and petitioned to join the BRICS. Algeria is one of Russia's top arms export clients and signed a strategic partnership with Putin in June 2023. In 2022, I called on Secretary Blinken to impose sanctions on Algeria for these purchases of Russian weapons. These sanctions have not been imposed. Algeria has also agreed to a strategic partnership with China, which includes cooperation in nuclear energy, aerospace, and petrochemicals. Algeria has agreed to infrastructure projects through China's Belt and Road Initiative and has hosted a significant number of Chinese workers in the past. What are the main opportunities to strengthen bilateral ties?

Answer. I take the threat the PRC and Russia pose to U.S. interests and global stability very seriously. While Algeria has political, economic, and security ties with a broad range of countries, Algeria has also prioritized diversification of its relationships and sought to avoid becoming overly reliant on any one partner, including the PRC and Russia. As Algeria makes its sovereign choices in this regard, I believe the U.S. value proposition is compelling, and if confirmed, I will promote stronger trade and investment ties between the United States and Algeria, deepen diplomatic cooperation to advocate that the United States be Algeria's partner of choice, and explore how the United States could contribute to Algeria's efforts to diversify its suppliers of military equipment.

Question. In your view, what are the main U.S. national security interests in Algeria, besides allowing energy resources to flow to Europe?

Answer. The United States has important national security interests that continue to guide diplomacy toward Algeria. Algeria has an important voice in seeking regional peace and improving security and governance across the Sahel as malign actors probe across the region for vulnerabilities. Encouraging greater Algerian alignment with U.S. priorities in the U.N. Security Council is also a U.S. interest given Algeria's role as the Arab voice in the council through the end of 2025. Algeria is a capable and important counterterrorism partner and the largest country in Africa with a population of almost 45 million, representing an important market for U.S. trade and investment. And as noted, Algeria continues to contribute to stable energy markets, including through its cooperation with European Allies. If confirmed, I will continue engaging with Algerian counterparts on these national security priorities and strive to further deepen cooperation and alignment between the United States and Algeria to the benefit of the American people.

Question. How would you describe Algeria's current relationship with China?

Answer. The PRC is currently Algeria's largest bilateral source of imports, as with many African countries. PRC companies and workers have a sizable presence in Algeria and play notable roles in the infrastructure, resource extraction, and telecommunications sectors. While Algeria has ties with a broad range of countries, including the PRC, Algeria has nonetheless also prioritized diversification of its relationships and sought to avoid becoming overly reliant on any one partner. If confirmed, I will push back against PRC efforts to expand its problematic influence, in-

cluding through robust diplomatic engagement, strong public diplomacy, and persistent commercial advocacy.

Question. How would you describe Algeria's current relationship with Russia?

Answer. Algeria's relationship with Russia dates to the Soviet era, particularly in terms of military cooperation. While Algeria has historically been a top destination for Russian arms exports, Algeria has pursued a policy of diversification in recent years and increased purchases from non-Russian partners; in 2023, the United States and Algeria held a Joint Military Dialogue that explored how the United States might contribute to meeting Algeria's defense needs in this context. Amid Russia's war against Ukraine, Algeria has consistently voiced support for the principles of the U.N. Charter, including respect for national sovereignty and territorial integrity, while contributing to stable energy supplies to Europe. If confirmed, I will work to counter Russia's malign influence by deepening bilateral U.S.-Algeria ties and promoting alignment between the United States and Algeria on regional security priorities.

Question. If confirmed, how will you handle Algeria's continued procurement of Russian arms?

Answer. The Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) is an important tool to address Russia's destabilizing activities globally. The Department of State has consistently engaged the Algerian government on this legislation, as we do with all U.S. partners and allies as appropriate. If confirmed, I will continue this important dialogue to urge that Algeria avoid transactions with Russia's defense sector, which risk the potential imposition of sanctions, and to support Algerian efforts to diversify defense suppliers, including advocating for U.S. options as appropriate.

Question. If confirmed, would you support sanctions against Algeria under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act given its continued significant purchases of Russian weapons?

Answer. I am committed to the full implementation of the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA), which is a crucial tool to contest Russia's destabilizing activities globally. The Department of State has consistently engaged the Algerian government on this legislation, as we do with all U.S. partners and allies as appropriate. If confirmed, I will continue to work with Department of State and interagency colleagues to closely monitor Russia's global defense trade, continue to engage Algeria on any potential transactions of concern, and support Algerian efforts to diversify defense supplies, including advocating for U.S. options as appropriate.

Question. If confirmed, how will you seek to promote religious freedom in Algeria?

Answer. As Deputy Assistant Secretary, I have personally engaged the Algerian government to stress the importance of respect and equal treatment for members of all religious groups and the equal and transparent enforcement of laws governing religious organizations. U.S. Embassy Algiers also maintains an active dialogue with the Algerian government on religious freedom and is in regular contact with a diverse group of religious leaders in Algeria. If confirmed, I will continue a frank dialogue with Algerian counterparts about the importance of promoting religious freedom and addressing the concerns identified in the annual International Religious Freedom report.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO PETER W. LORD BY SENATOR BENJAMIN L. CARDIN

Question. Ensuring that we support democracy and governance in Senegal after the tense Presidential election period is critical.

A. Is U.S. support for the International Foundation for Electoral Systems' program in Senegal scheduled to end in November? Will it be renewed? Are we allocating sufficient resources to support democracy, good governance and human rights in Senegal?

B. When are parliamentary elections in Senegal slated to take place? What steps does Senegal need to take to ensure these elections happen on time and in a permissive electoral environment? If confirmed, what role will you play in supporting credible elections?

C. What role will you play if confirmed in advancing democracy and governance within Senegal's institutions and civil society?

Answer A. USAID's election support program, which incorporates IFES, is scheduled to end in November 2024. I understand that there currently are no plans or funding to renew this award, but I will continue to support democracy, good governance, and human rights in Senegal through other programs and across the interagency. If confirmed, I will advocate for additional resources invested in these efforts in Senegal to help solidify the democratic transition and support the newly elected government to deliver results that match Senegalese people expectations.

Answer B. Under Senegal's parliamentary system, the Executive can initiate a process for new legislative elections when certain conditions, listed in the Constitution, have been met. I understand that new legislative elections are possible as early as September of this year, but prioritization of the fall budget process may cause a delay until early 2025.

The U.S. government's election support program has sought to build the capacity of Senegal's democratic institutions, support logistical and training requirements, and increase capabilities for domestic observation.

If confirmed, I will advocate publicly and privately for free and fair elections in Senegal and will urge continued U.S. Government support to electoral systems.

Answer C. If confirmed, I will work with the Senegal government, independent government institutions, civil society, political parties, and other key actors on strengthening democracy and governance, including but not limited issues related to electoral reforms, combatting misinformation, judicial reform, citizen-responsive government spending, and accountability. If confirmed, I will use the United States' voice and relationship, structure U.S.-funded programs and engagement, and arrange technical assistance to achieve these aims.

Question. Guinea-Bissau has had a troubling history with democracy, with what the government described as an attempted coup in December last year—the second attempt in less than a 2-year period.

A. How would you asses stability in Guinea-Bissau?

B. What specific actions will you take if confirmed to build the capacity of civil society operating in the democracy and human rights space in Guinea-Bissau? What will you do if confirmed to press for increased respect for adherence to human rights standards and principles?

Answer A. Guinea-Bissau has suffered from weak government institutions, a poor economy, and corruption related primarily to the illicit narcotics trade all of which undermine Guinea-Bissau's stability. Its constitution can also position the presidency against the governing administration, which led to the President dismissing the legislature in December 2023, only 6 months after elections. Following the events of December 2023 and with the end of the president's term approaching, upcoming elections will be crucial to ensure future stability and development.

If confirmed, I will use all tools at the U.S. government's disposal to support stronger government institutions, counter corruption, and address transnational crime to support stability.

Answer B. If confirmed, I would use my position to advance respect for human rights in Guinea-Bissau. It will be my priority to increase U.S. engagement with Guinea-Bissau through our Liaison Office, managed out of Dakar and staffed by dedicated local employees in Bissau. This office permits the Embassy to maintain real-time awareness of developments and opportunities for engagement. If confirmed, I would travel to Guinea-Bissau frequently to engage with civil society leaders and government officials, promote U.S. values and principles, and oversee key U.S. programs that further respect for human rights and democratic governance.

Question. September will mark 1 year since the adoption of the Declaration on Atlantic Cooperation.

A. What is your understanding of the areas of actions that we have collaborated on with Senegal and Guinea Bissau to date under this partnership?

B. If confirmed, what areas of collaboration will you emphasize in each country through the partnership?

Answer A. The United States is working through the Partnership for Atlantic Cooperation to advance marine spatial planning, scientific capacity building and exchange, and sustainable blue economy, including ocean-based food security with 39 coastal Atlantic States around the Atlantic. Senegal and Guinea-Bissau have been active partners in the Atlantic Partnership since their adoption of the Declaration on Atlantic Cooperation in September 2023, attending nearly all Senior Official-level

meetings and engaging with Ambassador Lapenn at the ministerial level. Senegal and Guinea-Bissau, along with the United States, are members of the Atlantic Partnership's Food Security Steering Committee, collaborating with countries on both sides of the Atlantic to develop the scope and shape of an event in late 2024 to help expand sustainable aquaculture as a key step to elevating foods from the ocean in our shared global commitments to deliver tangible outcomes on food system transformation.

Answer B. If confirmed, I would collaborate with Senegal and Guinea-Bissau on their overlapping areas of shared interests being elevated by the Partnership for Atlantic Cooperation, including developing the blue economy, expanding scientific capacity building and exchange, with a focus on ocean observation, deepening cooperation via the Atlantic Partnership's Marine Spatial Planning Working Group, and the Food Security Steering Committee to host an Atlantic-wide event on expanding sustainable aquaculture as a key step to elevate foods from the ocean in our shared global commitments to deliver tangible outcomes on food system transformation.

Democracy and Human Rights

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 NGO's, and other members of civil society in Senegal and Guinea-Bissau? What steps will you take to pro-actively address any efforts to restrict or penalize NGO's and civil society via legal or regulatory measures should they occur?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed, I will engage with a broad range of civil society, human rights, and other nongovernment organizations and actors in order to advance our work to promote respect for democratic principles, media freedom, freedoms of peaceful assembly and expression, and government transparency and accountability. Such institutions are essential to a well-functioning democratic society. If confirmed, I will advocate in diplomatic channels, use the voice of the U.S. Government, and deploy specialized programs and assistance through the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor and in collaboration with the U.S. Agency for International Development, as appropriate, to proactively address any efforts to restrict or penalize NGO's and civil society via legal or regulatory measures should they occur.

Question. Will you and your embassy team actively engage with Senegal and Guinea-Bissau 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 Senegal & Guinea-Bissau?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed, I will regularly meet and engage with local and independent press. I will encourage my team to do the same. I will also raise with the government any efforts to control or undermine press freedom.

Question. If confirmed, 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 investment and governance, and what will you prioritize in processes to administer such assistance?

Answer. If confirmed, a high priority will be programs and engagement that strengthen democratic institutions so that they are resilient and effective in meeting the needs of Senegal's citizens. A key focus will also be improving the business climate so that U.S. programs and institutions such as Prosper Africa, AGOA, and the Development Finance Corporation have a strong base from which to work and that U.S. businesses are naturally attracted to and confident in Senegal as a destination for investment. When structured and implemented effectively, such investment yields dividends on both inclusive economic growth and good governance.

Question. What are the potential impediments you foresee in advancing democracy in Senegal and Guinea-Bissau and how do you intend to resolve them?

Answer. In Senegal, President Bassirou Diomaye Faye's election in March 2024 marked the first time in the country's history that an opposition figure was elected in the first round of voting. The Faye Administration is outlining an ambitious reform agenda to advance democracy, but a preference for political consensus and entrenched interests may impede implementation of the reform agenda. If confirmed, I will work with the Senegalese government, civil society, and other key actors on strengthening democracy, including but not limited issues related to electoral reforms, combatting misinformation, judicial reform, citizen-responsive government spending, and accountability.

In Guinea-Bissau, government capacity is the single greatest impediment to advancing democracy. If confirmed, I will seek an increase to U.S. Government engagement, presence, and programming to support democracy as well as to enhance the government's will and capacity to respond effectively to drug trafficking, trafficking in persons, infectious diseases, and violent extremism at its frontiers or internally.

If confirmed, I will use the United States' voice and relationship, structure U.S.-funded programs and engagement, and arrange technical assistance to achieve support democratic advancement in Senegal and Guinea-Bissau.

Management & Accountability

Question. Given the importance of representing the United States' diversity abroad, if confirmed, how will you ensure that our mission's staff and programmatic plans reflect this diversity?

Answer. If confirmed, I am committed to recruiting and supporting a workforce that reflects our nation's diversity and leverages the creativity of diverse, talented groups to advance America's foreign policy priorities in Senegal and Guinea-Bissau. If confirmed, I will do this by recruiting broadly for service at post and mentoring and supporting staff at all levels and from all backgrounds. Regarding programming, if confirmed, I will integrate these practices into Mission programmatic plans to support diversity in the types of programs, the recipients of U.S. Government funds, the beneficiaries of programming, the invitees to events, and the locations of travel.

Question. As a career member of the Foreign Service, please share how your experience in various posts has prepared you to advance the agency's mission of fostering inclusive diplomacy/foreign assistance?

Answer. On the management front, I worked with a group of employees who developed a suite of bureau-wide practices, a vision statement, and new standard operating procedures for recruitment and candidate selection. On the policy front, we created a toolkit that offered posts practical ways to engage on governance, justice, and economic development issues with host governments and in collaboration with like-minded institutions. If confirmed, I will be attentive to this issue in Senegal and Guinea-Bissau pursuant to and in line with Department policies.

Question. Will you commit to using your position, if confirmed, to promote the human rights and dignity of all people in Senegal & Guinea-Bissau, no matter their race or ethnicity, religion, nationality, disability, sexual orientation or gender identity? What specifically will you do to prioritize and to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in Senegal & Guinea-Bissau if confirmed?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed, I commit to using my position to promote respect for the human rights and dignity of all people in Senegal and Guinea-Bissau, no matter the race or ethnicity, religion, nationality, disability, sexual orientation or gender identity. If confirmed, I will support the work of Post's DEIA Council, initiatives by individual officers, and inclusion of relevant best practices in the Mission's policy, programs, and initiatives pursuant to and in line with Department policies.

Question. What challenges do LGBTQI+ people face in Senegal & Guinea-Bissau? What specifically will you commit to do to help LGBTQI+ people in Senegal & Guinea-Bissau if confirmed?

Answer. The situation for Senegal's LGBTQI+ community is dire, as members of the community are subject to pervasive prejudice; instances of violence, robbery, blackmail, and rape; and laws criminalizing consensual same-sex activity. While the government prohibits LGBTQI+ organizations from legally registering or meeting, if confirmed, I commit to regularly meeting with LGBTQI+ activists and with civil society organizations that support victims of abuse and marginalization to ensure the mission promotes rights and protections to the greatest possible extent while also ensuring we do no harm through our interventions.

The situation in Guinea-Bissau for LGBTQI+ persons is much more tolerant. Some members of the LGBTQI+ community are able to live openly, but challenges remain, such as LGBTQI+ persons confronting discrimination when seeking employment and housing. If confirmed, I will work with our Embassy team, as well as LGBTQI+ community members and organizations, to advocate respect for the human rights of all, including LGBTQI+ persons in Guinea-Bissau, while again ensuring that our actions do no harm.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO PETER W. LORD BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

U.S. Engagement and Strategic Interests

As the U.S. Ambassador to Senegal and Guinea-Bissau, your role, if confirmed, is pivotal in fostering robust bilateral relations that underscore democratic values and strategic partnerships. Understanding your approach to enhancing U.S. engagement and advancing our strategic interests in these countries is vital.

Question. What are the U.S. strategic interests in Senegal?

Answer. It is in the United States' strategic interest that Senegal is a secure, stable democracy in a volatile region and a partner that exports security and our shared values to the region. If confirmed, I will advance our partnership with Senegal to respond to transnational threats and secure its borders. It is in U.S. interests to work with Senegal to improve its democratic institutions and governance and have a business environment that is open to U.S. private sector investment and that can foster inclusive economic growth.

Question. What are the U.S. strategic interests in Guinea-Bissau?

Answer. A more stable, prosperous, and democratic Guinea-Bissau is in the U.S. national interest. If confirmed, I would use the tools at the U.S. government's disposal to support stronger government institutions, expand people-to-people ties, counter corruption, and address transnational crime to support stability. If confirmed, I would use my position and personal engagements to advance the strong partnerships that U.S. law enforcement agencies have developed with local police and judicial officials to disrupt traffickers' abilities to move narcotics through Guinea-Bissau.

Question. How do you plan to enhance our engagement with Senegal and Guinea-Bissau to demonstrate a democratic dividend and partnership with their governments?

Answer. If confirmed, I will work to build on our longstanding cooperation to advance shared security and economic objectives and further strengthen democratic governance so that Senegal is a stable and capable partner in a volatile region. I will do the same in Guinea-Bissau with the understanding that it faces significant challenges. If confirmed, I will endeavor to build on our small but invaluable democracy programming and expand our outreach and advocacy to increase commercial ties. If confirmed, it will be a priority to increase U.S. engagement with and explore increased presence in Guinea-Bissau in order to find opportunity to support stability and further our partnership while deepening the capacity of democratic institutions.

Question. Considering the rising influence of Russia and China in the region, how will you promote U.S. strategic interests while balancing Senegal and Guinea-Bissau's efforts to diversify its international partnerships?

Answer. If confirmed, I will be fully committed to advancing U.S. strategic interests in both countries, including raising instances in which other external partnerships are not in U.S. interests. In Senegal, we have a robust interagency country team, with a full range of programming to advance our shared priorities across a variety of sectors, including development assistance, security cooperation, and economic development. On Guinea-Bissau, in addition to our very capable country team for Senegal, we are fortunate to have excellent local staff in Bissau, as well as a team of three Americans based in Dakar dedicated to covering Guinea-Bissau, which allows embassy leadership to maintain real-time awareness of developments and opportunities in both countries simultaneously. If confirmed, I will travel to Guinea-Bissau frequently to engage with senior leaders, oversee key U.S. programs, lead our public engagement, and use all Embassy resources to counter our competitors' influence and engagement to undermine democracy and U.S. interests.

Question. How do you plan to support and enhance Senegal's contributions to regional stability and peacekeeping efforts, particularly in addressing transnational threats?

Answer. Senegal's long-standing tradition of exporting security through U.N. and multilateral peacekeeping missions underscores the value of continued investment in our security partnership. This includes not only the direct military-to-military cooperation that enhances the Senegalese Armed Forces' capacity and professionalism, but also programming from the INL bureau and others that equips and trains police and gendarmerie units as they prepare for peacekeeping abroad. If confirmed, I will work to ensure these avenues of cooperation are fruitful. As with peacekeeping, Sen-

egal is clear-eyed about its role in addressing the transnational threats that plague the region. We enjoy robust collaboration on issues ranging from countering violent extremism and transnational criminal organizations to breaking up drug and human trafficking networks. If confirmed, I will direct the diverse team of U.S. agencies represented at the embassy to be responsive to Senegal's assistance requests, encourage deeper cooperation on our shared national security concerns, and address any accountability issues related to behavior in multilateral deployments as they arise.

Economic Growth and Business Environment

Economic prosperity and a conducive business environment are critical for sustainable development in Senegal and Guinea-Bissau. Your insights into promoting U.S. businesses and fostering inclusive economic growth in these nations are of paramount interest.

Question. What measures will you take to promote U.S. businesses and create economic opportunities in Senegal and Guinea-Bissau?

Answer. If confirmed, I will focus on improvement of Senegal's investment climate to promote U.S. investment and strengthen bilateral trade ties. Engaging on issues related to cumbersome and unpredictable tax administration, bureaucratic hurdles, opaque public procurement, inadequate access to financing, and a rigid labor market as obstacles will attract greater U.S. investment. If confirmed, I will also prioritize anti-corruption initiatives, a shared interest of Senegal's new administration. If confirmed, I will also animate the work of post's "Deal Team" to identify, track, and conclude trade and investment opportunities for U.S. companies and leverage mission-level and Washington-based support, using tools such as DFC, U.S. EXIM, and U.S. Trade and Development Agency (USTDA) financing. In Guinea-Bissau, if confirmed, I will engage with the government on business environment related issues, such as political instability, corruption, and protection of intellectual capital, to attract U.S. investment.

Question. What initiatives will you support to improve the business climate in Senegal, making it more attractive for U.S. investors and benefiting local entrepreneurs and the broader economy?

Answer. If confirmed, I will focus on improving the business climate so that U.S. programs and institutions such as Prosper Africa and the Development Finance Corporation have a strong base from which to work and that U.S. businesses are naturally attracted to and confident in Senegal as a destination for investment. USAID's portfolio also includes a strong focus on supporting local entrepreneurs, including the agricultural sector, to create jobs and increase agricultural productivity. When structured and implemented effectively, such investment yields dividends on both inclusive economic growth and good governance. If confirmed, I would also support the continued implementation of the Millenium Challenge Corporation power sector compact, which can spur economic growth and reduce poverty, and the development of Senegal's third compact focused on the 'Blue Economy,' which will enable the sustainable development of Senegal's oceans, coasts and freshwater resources to create broad economic growth potential and opportunities for women, young people, and other vulnerable populations in the region.

Question. Considering Senegal's economic challenges and the potential benefits of oil and gas production, what role do you see for U.S. companies in supporting sustainable and inclusive economic growth in Senegal?

Answer. With Senegal's first oil production now on-line, there are increasing opportunities for U.S. firms to engage in this sector. If confirmed, I will encourage U.S. companies to support economic development in ways that support sustainable and inclusive economic growth by supporting their full understanding of the development picture in Senegal and the government's priorities for the economic growth, including noting public-private partnership opportunities as appropriate and allowable. If confirmed, I would also encourage U.S. firms to apply for Department of Commerce's advocacy services to enjoy the full backing of the United States when competing for their bids.

Question. What efforts will you pursue as Ambassador, if confirmed, to help crack down on transnational crime and corruption in Guinea-Bissau, two significant factors impacting the investment climate in the country?

Answer. Large volumes of narcotics are moved through Guinea-Bissau because of the country's limited capacity to combat trafficking. However, we have developed a strong partnership with police and judicial officials, and President Embalo has sought to deepen bilateral cooperation in this area. If confirmed, I would use my

position and personal engagements to advance the strong partnerships that U.S. law enforcement agencies have developed with local police and judicial officials to strengthen law enforcement capacity to disrupt traffickers' abilities to move narcotics through Guinea-Bissau. If confirmed, I would also continue to work with the highest levels of government, who have displayed the willingness to tackle this difficult issue head on.

Political Landscape and Governance

Navigating the political landscapes of Senegal and Guinea-Bissau requires a nuanced understanding of local dynamics and governance structures. It is vital to understand how you plan to support democratic reforms and address political challenges in these countries.

Question. Given the recent election of President Bassirou Diomaye Faye, how do you plan to navigate the new political landscape in Senegal, particularly in light of his populist and anti-establishment rhetoric?

Answer. The United States and Senegal have built a strong relationship over the last 60 years based on shared democratic principles and pragmatic cooperation focused on governance, security, and economic prosperity. While President Faye came to office promising change for the Senegalese people, there remains a strong desire to pursue respectful, responsive, and mutually beneficial international partnerships. These are the same characteristics that have defined our relationship for decades. If confirmed, I will emphasize to President Faye how continued investment in our bilateral relationship aligns with his vision for Senegal as well as that of the people of Senegal. If confirmed, I would also look to explore ways in which our strategic cooperation can evolve to intersect with emergent priorities of the Faye administration, including a welcomed focus on anti-corruption and government accountability, as well as continue to make the case for U.S. priorities should the Faye administration head in a different direction.

Question. USAID is shifting its focus in Senegal from electoral assistance to local governance and post-election initiatives. Do you support this strategy, or do you believe USAID should continue to invest in the electoral aspects of Senegal's democracy, recognizing that elections are part of an ongoing cycle?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to reviewing USAID programming to assess the advisability of any proposed changes.

Question. Given recent political turbulence, how do you plan to support Senegal's efforts to reform State institutions and promote national reconciliation?

Answer. Senegal is a young democracy—President Faye is only Senegal's fifth since independence—and while Senegal's institutions exhibited an impressive degree of resilience and discipline during recent political turbulence, there is room for continued maturation and reform. If confirmed, I will look to leverage our own experiences and expertise through people-to-people, institutional, and technical exchanges to support Senegal's governance reforms.

Question. In light of recent political unrest and security force abuses, how would you evaluate the current State of Senegal's democracy and stability, and what steps will you take to support democratic governance?

Answer. While instances of unrest prior to the election were troubling, Senegal ultimately demonstrated the strength of its democracy when civil society and the Constitutional Council helped prevent a lengthy postponement of the election, voters turned out peacefully and in large numbers, and the country witnessed another peaceful transfer of power. Senegalese citizens' belief in democracy underpins Senegal's stability. If confirmed, I would advocate for continuing or expanding our programming to strengthen democratic institutions and continuing or expanding our programs that strengthen the capacity of police and gendarmes to maintain the peace while respecting human rights.

Question. What are the critical vulnerabilities in Guinea-Bissau's fragile democracy, and how would you address them if confirmed?

Answer. Guinea-Bissau has long suffered from weak government institutions, a poor economy, and corruption related primarily to the illicit narcotics trade all of which undermine Guinea-Bissau's stability. Its constitution can also position the presidency against the governing administration, which led to the President dismissing the legislature in December 2023, only 6 months after free and fair elections. Following the events of December 2023, and with the end of the president's term approaching, upcoming elections will be crucial to ensure future stability and development. If confirmed, I will use all tools at the United States government's dis-

posal to support democratic governance and stronger government institutions and counter corruption and narco-trafficking to reinforce stability for this partner.

Security and Counterterrorism

Ensuring the security and stability of Senegal and Guinea-Bissau, particularly in the face of terrorist threats, is a top priority. It is crucial to understand your plans to bolster security cooperation and address transnational threats in these regions, if confirmed.

Question. How vulnerable do you perceive Senegal to be to terrorist attacks, and what measures will you implement to bolster security cooperation against Islamist insurgent threats from neighboring regions?

Answer. Decades of cooperation with the United States have built Senegal's security forces capable to respond to the threat of terrorism. Social cohesion, including Senegal's tradition of religious pluralism and interfaith cooperation, is an important resilience factor to violent extremism. I understand the potential for violent extremism in Senegal—particularly along the porous eastern border with Mali—remains a concern. If confirmed, I will assess the viability of a twofold approach to counterterrorism. First, continuing to partner with Senegal's security forces in detecting, deterring, and responding to potential terrorist attacks. Second, expanding our partnership with Senegalese authorities, the private sector, and civil society to prevent violent extremist organizations operating in the region from using Senegal as territory for recruitment, financing, and logistical support. If confirmed, respect for human rights will be paramount in any counter-terrorism support.

Question. What is your assessment of the current status of the Casamance conflict, and how do you anticipate President Diomaye Faye will address this issue alongside U.S. security collaboration?

Answer. Following significant breakthroughs coming out of U.S.-facilitated dialogues between the government and rebel groups, the crisis in the Casamance is far less active than it was in the past. Only a few insurgent groups remain, and violence is increasingly rare. The Casamance region is likely to be a focus of the Faye administration, and the prospect of potential new negotiations resulting in a durable peace appears to have risen due in part to Prime Minister Ousmane Sonko's connection to the region. Over the past 2 years, the USG has supported the Government of Senegal to help reintegrate ex-combatants into the surrounding communities, establishing an important model of how peace can be solidified in the Casamance. If confirmed, I will seek to harness civil-military cooperation, reintegration programs, and conflict-sensitive development to support shared U.S.-Senegal objectives for peace, stability, and economic renewal in this region.

Question. How can we further strengthen our counterterrorism cooperation with Senegal?

Answer. As counterterrorism is a threat across the Sahel and West African region, consulting with Senegal on U.S. Government efforts across the region will have a catalytic effect, ideally enlisting of like-minded nations in the region and regional organizations. If confirmed, I will assess the viability of a twofold approach to our bilateral cooperation on counter-terrorism. First, continuing to partner with Senegal's security forces in detecting, deterring, and responding to potential terrorist attacks. Second, expanding our partnership with Senegalese authorities, the private sector, and civil society to prevent violent extremist organizations operating in the region from using Senegal as territory for recruitment, financing, and logistical support. If confirmed, respect for human rights will be paramount in any counter-terrorism support.

U.S. Diplomatic Goals and Challenges

Question. How will you balance the need to protect U.S. citizens in Senegal and Guinea-Bissau while advancing our broader diplomatic goals?

Answer. Protecting U.S. citizens in Senegal and Guinea-Bissau will be my top priority. We have a robust program of American Citizen Services for U.S. citizens in both Senegal and Guinea-Bissau, and I will continue to prioritize regular outreach to American citizens in both countries, if confirmed, through regular town halls and other engagements while also working with the agencies on the country team to achieve our other policy objectives.

Question. How do you plan to enhance interagency collaboration to ensure the effectiveness of our partnerships in these countries?

Answer. The country team for Senegal and Guinea-Bissau represents strong interagency partners all of which have deep engagement with Senegal, and for some

agencies with Guinea-Bissau. If confirmed, I will ensure that the work of our interagency is complementary and aligned with U.S. interests, as necessary seeking engagement from agencies not represented at post, including through thematic working groups to tackle cross-cutting issues. For Guinea-Bissau, if confirmed, I will seek to deepen cooperation with the host government through interagency partners and programs that best meet our shared interests.

Question. What specific risks and opportunities do you see arising from Senegal's Presidential transition for U.S. interests in the region, and how do you plan to address them?

Answer. The Faye Administration's stated priority of enhancing transparency, good governance, and anti-corruption align closely with U.S. interests. Should reform take root, we could expect an improved business climate open to deeper U.S. commercial cooperation and greater efficiency for our development programming. The new administration's desire to promote African integration also presents an opportunity to leverage Senegal's role in the region to revitalize ECOWAS and promote multilateral approaches to regional security challenges. While the implications of the new government's desire for greater sovereignty remains unclear and required a clear-eyed assessment, an approach that results in renegotiating contracts or otherwise undermining the business environment could stymie U.S. business interests in Senegal and impede much-needed economic growth. If confirmed, I would advocate for U.S. interests with the Faye Administration and highlight the opportunity to advance shared objectives through deeper partnership.

Managing Relations with Guinea-Bissau

Given the unique challenges posed by the lack of a permanent U.S. diplomatic presence in Guinea-Bissau, effective engagement with local authorities is critical, particularly strategies for promoting U.S. interests and supporting democratic principles in Guinea-Bissau.

Question. What is your assessment of governance and stability in Guinea-Bissau under President Embaló, and how do you plan to engage with local authorities to support democratic principles?

Answer. President Embalo accepted his political opposition's victory at the polls in June 2023, a major milestone for Guinea-Bissau. However, following the events of December 2023, and with the end of the president's term approaching, upcoming elections will be crucial to ensure future stability and development. If confirmed, supporting free and fair elections and addressing international narcotics trafficking through Guinea-Bissau will be high priorities, as curtailing the illegal drug trade and reducing associated corruption will assist in advancing democratic principles in Guinea-Bissau. President Embalo has sought to further deepen bilateral cooperation to combat trafficking, which would build on the United States' strong partnership with police and judicial officials. If confirmed, I would also engage with sub-national authorities in order to underscore the importance of democratic principles and citizen-responsive governance.

Question. How do you intend to manage your mission in Guinea-Bissau, given the lack of a permanent U.S. diplomatic presence, to effectively promote U.S. interests?

Answer. If confirmed, I will be fully committed to advancing U.S. interests in both Guinea-Bissau and Senegal. In addition to our very capable country team for Senegal, we are fortunate to have excellent local staff in Bissau, as well as a team of three Americans based in Dakar dedicated to covering only Guinea-Bissau, which allows embassy leadership to maintain real-time awareness of developments and opportunities. If confirmed, I will also travel to Guinea-Bissau frequently to engage with senior leaders, oversee key U.S. programs, and lead our public engagement.

As Deputy Assistant Secretary, I formulated and coordinated policies in the Washington interagency, briefed and consulted with Congress on key initiatives, built coalitions among international partners to strengthen our influence, and worked with African governments and institutions to advance U.S. priorities. Specifically relevant to Guinea-Bissau, I led our work to first increase our presence and then open an embassy in Victoria, Seychelles. If confirmed, I will use this experience and background as we might consider increasing our engagement and presence in Guinea-Bissau.

Addressing MDM, Malign Interests, and Strategic Competition

Question. Countering false narratives and strategic competition is crucial for positive U.S. engagement in Senegal and Guinea-Bissau. How will you address misinformation and promote accurate narratives about U.S. involvement if confirmed?

Answer. If confirmed, I would continue to collaborate with local and U.S.-based partners to provide training for journalists and media outlets in Senegal and Guinea-Bissau on topics like journalistic ethics, investigative reporting, the role of media in a democracy, and financial sustainability for media in the 21st century. If confirmed, I would continue the robust public outreach the Embassy manages through traditional and social media channels to inform the Senegalese and Bissau-Guinean public accurately about the impact of U.S. partnership in both Senegal and Guinea-Bissau as well as to find and work with trusted local voices on key messaging priorities.

Question. What strategies will you employ, if confirmed, to counter false narratives and unfair practices by adversaries in both Senegal and Guinea-Bissau?

Answer. In general, the United States is viewed quite positively in Senegal—more so than in many countries in the region, and much more so than in countries where foreign malign influence has tampered more thoroughly with the information environment. Nevertheless, more and more Senegalese are getting their information from online news outlets, which are less likely to be staffed or edited by professionally trained journalists, and ripe for disinformation. One of the largest sources of pressure facing traditional media outlets is financial, at a time when other foreign actors are happy to pay for positive reporting on their programs in the region. If confirmed, I would promote the work of U.S. agencies working in the information/disinformation space to promote professionalism of journalism, greater sophistication of audiences in discerning the information they learn, and use of trusted local voices as vectors for priority U.S. messages.

Question. What U.S. interests in Senegal and Guinea-Bissau do you view as vulnerable to malign actors such as Russia and China, and how would you work to strengthen our resilience if confirmed?

Answer. As the United States competes vigorously with the PRC and Russia, the United States manages this competition responsibly so that it does not veer into conflict. In Senegal, we maintain a strong, broad and mutually respectful partnership with the government and Senegalese people with whom we share democratic principles that contrast with other external partners. In Guinea-Bissau, Russia and the PRC have a more transactional relationship with the government as the country seeks to meet its acute needs, and both countries exploit our lack of a permanent presence, and possibly counter our messaging with Bissau-Guinean leadership as well as the public. If confirmed, I will work with my colleagues across the U.S. interagency and Congress to advance U.S. objectives and counter harmful behavior by the PRC and Russia, making the United States the partner of choice because of the respect, quality, and responsiveness inherent to the partnership we offer.

Question. Beyond existing U.S. maritime efforts, how should the United States engage with Senegal and Guinea-Bissau on security, illegal fishing, and transnational crime?

Answer. Under the Maritime Security and Fisheries Enforcement (Maritime SAFE) Act, the Interagency Working Group identified the Gulf of Guinea region as a Tier 1 priority for combating illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing. Additionally, Senegal is one of five priority flag states named by the Interagency Working Group. This status makes the region a key area for U.S. interagency coordination and programming, including for further increasing our reporting and understanding of the scope of the problem in the region. If confirmed, I will target new programming and trainings to increase capacity to address IUU fishing.

Trafficking in Persons

In the State Department's 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report, Senegal was upgraded to Tier 2 for increasing its efforts to combat human trafficking.

Question. If confirmed, what concrete steps could you take to help Senegal operationalize the prioritized recommendations contained in the TIP report?

Answer. Senegal's increased efforts to meet the standards for an upgrade to Tier 2 resulted from respectful, pragmatic U.S. engagement on the issue, including through the annual Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report. If confirmed as Ambassador, I would continue in the tenor of that cooperation and stress in all my engagements with officials that combatting human trafficking requires sustained effort. I am aware the Government of Senegal made revisions to its institutional structure to elevate the office overseeing anti-trafficking coordination, and, if confirmed, I would look to support that office with high-level engagement. Where possible, I would look to partner with Senegal on outreach and public media campaigns to in-

crease awareness of trafficking and leverage U.S. justice sector expertise to enhance the capacity of judges, prosecutors, and law enforcement to identify and respond to trafficking crimes.

Question. In the State Department's 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report, Guinea-Bissau remained on to Tier 3 for not fully meeting the minimum requirements and not making significant efforts to do so.

If confirmed, what concrete steps could you take to help Guinea-Bissau operationalize the prioritized recommendations contained in the TIP report?

Answer. If confirmed, I will engage the highest levels of the Bissau-Guinean government to implement the recommendations detailed in the report. If confirmed, I would lead the work of the Embassy's Guinea-Bissau Liaison Office to channel resources and engagement for the benefit of Bissau-Guinean authorities. Additionally, if confirmed, I would work with my staff to increase reporting about trafficking in Guinea-Bissau to deepen the Department's understanding of the situation in the country and encourage additional ideas and resources. If confirmed, I would also warn Bissau-Guinean authorities of the potential consequences, e.g., restriction of certain U.S. assistance, if they fail to make significant efforts to meet the minimum standards.

Religious Freedom

Question. What is your assessment of religious freedom in Senegal and if confirmed, how will you work with the Ambassador At Large for International Religious Freedom to bolster religious freedom in-country?

Answer. Senegal is a country with a long history of religious tolerance. If confirmed, I would welcome cooperation and counsel form the Ambassador-At-Large for International Religious Freedom to work with Senegalese religious and non-religious leaders, clergy, and civil society to continue to prioritize the importance of promoting and protecting rights to freedom of religion or belief.

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 Senegal increase their societal and governmental respect for religious freedom?

Answer. If confirmed, I would meet regularly with governmental and societal leaders to gain a firsthand understanding of Senegal's strong tradition of religious tolerance. I would look to leverage religious holidays to honor all faiths. In my previous postings abroad, Ambassadors under whom I have served have often held Iftar dinners during Ramadan at which they have invited leaders of other faiths. Although Thanksgiving is a non-denominational holiday, it is a quintessential American holiday that promotes values of friendship, sharing, kindness, and family that are deeply rooted in and upheld by all religious traditions. If confirmed, I would look to occasions such as these to bring together religious actors, civil society, and government leaders at the Chief of Mission Residence to share a meal, in some cases a turkey dinner, to build community and deepen understanding among one another.

Question. What is your assessment of religious freedom in Guinea-Bissau and if confirmed, how will you work with the Ambassador At Large for International Religious Freedom to bolster religious freedom in-country?

Answer. Guinea-Bissau has a long history of religious tolerance, and, if confirmed, I would work to strengthen that legacy by meeting with religious leaders while in the country, engaging with civil society, and promoting through public events the values of friendship, sharing, kindness and family that are deeply rooted in and upheld by all religious traditions.

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 Guinea-Bissau increase their societal and governmental respect for religious freedom?

Answer. If confirmed, I would meet regularly with governmental and societal leaders to gain a firsthand understanding of religious dynamics in Guinea-Bissau. If confirmed, I would look to leverage certain religious holidays to honor all faiths and promote the shared values of mutual respect and respect for rights to freedom of religion or belief. In addition, if confirmed, I would use the convening power of the

USG to advance inter-religious dialogue, which helps to increase social support for religious freedom.

Human Rights

Question. In the State Department's 2023 Human Rights Report, Senegal was noted to continue to have significant human rights abuses.

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 would direct the Embassy's Political Section and USAID to continue and increase up engagement with local human rights organizations and increase reporting to shape Department understanding on this priority. Furthermore, if confirmed, I would welcome the opportunity to work with the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, to leverage their expertise and work with my staff to obtain Department funding designed to support human rights organizations in Senegal. If confirmed, I would also require the integration of human rights into all training for security sector professionals and raise accountability issues with the government, including of security forces deployed to multilateral missions.

Question. In the State Department's 2023 Human Rights Report, Guinea-Bissau was noted to continue to have significant human rights abuses and the government did not take credible steps to identify and punish officials who may have committed human rights abuses.

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 would direct the Embassy's Guinea-Bissau Liaison Office to ramp up its engagement with local human rights organizations and increase reporting to shape Department understanding on this priority. Furthermore, if confirmed, I would welcome the opportunity to work with the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, to leverage their expertise and work with my staff to obtain Department funding designed to support human rights organizations in Guinea-Bissau. If confirmed, I would also require the integration of human rights into all training for security sector professionals.

U.N. Peacekeeping

Question. According to the United Nations, Senegal has 40 cases of allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse by their U.N. Peacekeepers dating back to 2015.

If confirmed, how will you engage with the Senegalese government to ensure that these 40 allegations are properly investigated and addressed?

Answer. The allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse are a stain on Senegal's otherwise honorable history of service and sacrifice during peacekeeping missions abroad. If confirmed, I would advocate with senior government officials for a thorough investigation into these allegations and appropriate accountability.

State Management and Oversight

Question. Management is a key responsibility for chiefs of mission. How do you intend to create a unified mission and vision at post?

Answer. If confirmed, I would be leading a U.S. Government team comprised of personnel from multiple agencies. Creating a unified mission and vision will require ensuring all agencies and offices understand the Mission's goals and objectives, which I plan to develop in a collaborative fashion, and discussing together operational plans and tradeoffs as necessary to ensure that work is complimentary and mutually reinforcing. Continual communication across all levels of the Mission is essential, including through weekly Country Team meetings, weekly meetings with agency leaders that include the Deputy Chief of Mission to discuss programs and events, and mission-wide participation in the Integrated Country Strategy and Mission Resource Request planning cycles, and thematic working groups. If confirmed, under my leadership, Mission Dakar would review our goals and achievements as we update our Integrated Country Strategy, which is useful tool to keep all agency activity in-line with our mission goals.

Question. How would you describe your management style?

Answer. As a manager, I want people to love their work and will do everything in my power to support that aim. If confirmed, I would lead and manage Mission Dakar in way that empowers employees at all levels, offers professional development opportunities, supports innovation and engagement generated at all levels, and ensures the efficiency and effectiveness of U.S. Government resources. If confirmed, I would meet regularly with employees of all levels, developing personal relationships to facilitate these aims. If confirmed, I would prioritize an interagency,

team-oriented approach through formal structures, like Country Team, and through ad hoc and informal groupings, such as thematic working groups. If confirmed, the Deputy Chief of Mission and I would be attentive to workplace issues and seek to create an environment free from bullying, harassment, and discrimination.

Question. How do you intend to improve morale at post?

Answer. If confirmed, I plan to focus on morale in the workplace and in the community. In the workplace, I want all staff—Americans and Locally Employed Staff—to have direction and the necessary resources to do their work, to feel empowered and supported, to understand how their work fits into the embassy's mission and achievement of Department goals, and to benefit from professional development. In the community, if confirmed, I will be attentive to the needs of the Eligible Family Members, supporting employment, quality education, and activities that bring the community together as well as addressing concerns about specific issues or situations as they arise.

Question. Do you believe it is ever acceptable or constructive to berate subordinates, either in public or private?

Answer. Never.

Question. How do you envision your relationship with the deputy chief of mission?

Answer. Having twice served as a Deputy Chief of Mission, I think the Ambassador and Deputy Chief of Mission should be a unified leadership and a management team of the Mission. If confirmed, I would prioritize developing a relationship with the DCM that is characterized by two-way open and frank communication, mutual respect, division of labor as appropriate, and empowerment. I want my Deputy Chief of Mission to be effective, happy in this key Mission role, and ready to serve at the next level upon departure.

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 a challenging and rewarding role and arguably one of the most difficult positions at post. If confirmed, as I lead the mission, I plan to fully partner with the DCM on development and execution of strategies, policies, programs, and processes to ensure that the Mission is delivering on objectives, ensuring oversight and accountability of resources, and providing for the development needs of staff and the morale of the community. If confirmed, I will include the DCM in all key meetings and activities with foreign government officials, internal to the Mission, and with Washington. In addition to the internal management oversight and mentoring responsibilities formally designated to the DCM, I would discuss with the DCM policies and programs of personal interest to ensure significant external opportunities for professional development and satisfaction. If confirmed, I would want the DCM to enjoy the role as much as possible and to grow as a professional to succeed at the next level.

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 performances in order to encourage improvement and reward those who most succeeded in their roles?

Answer. Yes. I take the responsibility to provide employees with accurate, constructive feedback on their performances very seriously. I want employees to develop professionally and have throughout my career provided feedback on areas of improvement to this end. I want employees to be rewarded for their achievements and have throughout my career nominated those deserving for awards. If confirmed, I will continue these practices and encourage all managers who work for me to do the same.

Question. If confirmed, would you support and encourage clear, accurate, and direct feedback to employees in order to improve performance and acknowledge high achievers?

Answer. Yes.

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 accomplish fully their missions?

Answer. I agree that it is imperative that U.S. diplomats get outside of our embassy walls to accomplish fully our mission overseas. If confirmed, I will support and encourage all staff to engage broadly with a broad range of actors in Senegal and Guinea-Bissau.

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 and mentor employees on developing innovative ways to engage frequently and broadly at levels of society in Senegal and Guinea-Bissau. To do so, if confirmed, I will prioritize making the necessary resources available—including for security and representation—to do the best of my ability so that staff are able to cultivate contacts, engage broadly, and promote mission goals.

Question. Congressional travel, including by members (CODELS) or staff (STAFFDELS) serve a critical oversight role.

Do you pledge to support fully CODELS and STAFFDELS that seek to travel to post, including on weekends as well as local and Federal holidays?

Answer. Yes.

Question. Do you commit to supporting fully any CODEL or STAFFDEL, with the only exceptions for simultaneous or overlapping visits by the President or First Lady of the United States, the Vice President, or the Secretaries of State or Defense?

Answer. Yes.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO PETER W. LORD BY SENATOR ROBERT MENENDEZ

Question. How has your recent role of Deputy Assistant Secretary for East Africa, Sudan, and South Sudan prepared you for Ambassadorship to the Republic of Senegal and the Republic of Guinea-Bissau, respectively?

Answer. As Deputy Assistant Secretary, I formulated and coordinated policies in the Washington interagency, briefed and consulted with Congress on key initiatives, built coalitions among international partners to strengthen our influence, and worked with African governments and institutions to advance U.S. priorities and values, all of which will be essential to achieve our goals in Senegal, Guinea-Bissau, and West Africa. Specifically relevant to Guinea-Bissau, I led our work to first increase our presence and then open an embassy in Victoria, Seychelles. If confirmed, I will use this experience and background as we might consider increasing our engagement and presence in Guinea-Bissau. Specifically relevant to Senegal and the Sahel, I was extensively involved in our work with East African governments and institutions, which resulted in an end to the conflict in northern Ethiopia. If confirmed, I will bring important lessons learned to our work in West Africa to use the full range of diplomatic, information, security, and assistance tools to address democratic backsliding, promote stability, and counter terrorism.

Question. Based on your commitment to the realization of good governance and the promotion of human rights and democracy in Senegal, how will you build upon the work of your predecessor to reach such efforts?

Answer. As witnessed in the most recent Presidential elections, the Senegalese people are deeply proud of their strong democratic tradition and generally committed to tolerance; respect for human rights; and an open, inclusive society. Related, U.S. development programs are helping address some of Senegal's greatest socioeconomic challenges by improving social services, stimulating growth, and fostering job creation. Our security cooperation is building police and gendarme capacity and helping Senegal bolster its border security, a critical objective given instability and violent extremism in the Sahel. The new Senegalese administration has indicated a strong commitment to accountability and transparency, values that align with our own and could provide opportunity for deeper partnership. If confirmed, I will seek to leverage Senegal's own democratic values and traditions; use U.S. assistance for good governance, human rights, and democracy; meet regularly with civil society organizations; and lend the support and voice of the United States to further strengthen transparent and accountable governance that respects human rights.

Question. In your testimony, you expressed your commitment to deepening U.S.-Guinea-Bissau collaboration on national security issues. I would welcome the oppor-

tunity to learn more about your view of U.S.-Guinea-Bissau engagement predicated on "the importance of democratic principles and collective action against transnational threats." What does this phrase mean and look like to you, in more detail?

Answer. The illicit shipment of narcotics passing through Guinea-Bissau is a key transnational threat. Large volumes of narcotics continue to move through Guinea-Bissau because of the country's limited capacity to combat trafficking. However, we have developed a strong partnership with police and judicial officials, and President Embalo has sought to deepen bilateral cooperation in this area. Narcotics trafficking remains an enormous challenge, but there appears to be political will to address it, giving us an opportunity to make a meaningful impact through increased partnership. Bissau-Guinean leaders have consistently told us that they want greater U.S. partnership, and the country is in the process of opening an embassy in Washington, DC, anticipated in 2024.

If confirmed, I would use my standing as the U.S. Ambassador to Guinea-Bissau to advance and solidify democratic principles, including by encouraging further free and fair elections. I will look to expand on recent positive cooperation we have had with Guinea-Bissau in multilateral institutions. If confirmed, I will prioritize engagement with Guinea-Bissau through our Liaison Office, managed out of Dakar and staffed by dedicated local employees in Bissau, which enables the Embassy to maintain real-time awareness of developments and opportunities for engagement. If confirmed, I would also travel to Guinea-Bissau frequently to engage with senior leaders, oversee key U.S. programs, promote our bilateral cooperation, and lead our public engagement.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO PETER W. LORD 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 PRC 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 its absolute control of Chinese society and industry, the CCP could stop all of these destructive actions tomorrow if it so chooses. Is the CCP an economic, diplomatic, military, and technological threat to the United States?

Answer. Last 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." As Secretary Blinken has said, 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 efforts of the People's Republic of China (PRC) to expand its problematic influence, through robust and forthright diplomatic engagements, public diplomacy, and commercial advocacy to bolster U.S.-Senegal and U.S.-Guinea-Bissau ties.

Question. Does the CCP undertake any activities that are beneficial to U.S. interests? If so, please explain.

Answer. As Secretary Blinken has said, under President Xi, the CCP has become more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad. According to the Office of the Director of National Intelligence's 2024 Annual Threat Assessment, the CCP is seeking to "preempt challenges to its reputation and legitimacy, undercutting U.S. influence, driving wedges between Washington and its partners, and fostering global norms that favor its authoritarian system."

Question. Do you believe that there are any areas in which the CCP would constructively work with the United States in good faith, knowing that at any moment Chinese interlocuters with U.S. representatives could be disappeared? If so, please explain.

Answer. As the United States competes vigorously with the PRC, the United States manages this competition responsibly so that it does not veer into conflict. If confirmed, I will work with my colleagues across the U.S. interagency and Congress 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 PRC in the countries or areas in which you will work?

Answer. If confirmed, my priority will be advancing U.S. national security interests in Senegal and Guinea-Bissau 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 Senegal, Guinea-Bissau, and the region.

Question. As you may be aware, a group of Federal employees penned an open letter to President Biden criticizing U.S. support for Israel in the aftermath of Hamas' brutal terrorist attack on October 7, 2023. In addition, employees from nearly two dozen agencies have staged walkouts in protest of the administration's Israel policy. Efforts like these directly undermine the duty of our diplomats to advance the policies of the President of the United States. Yes or no, did you sign the letter to the President expressing opposition to the President's Israel policy?

Answer. No.

Question. Yes or no, did you participate in the January 16, 2024 walkout?

Answer. No.

Question. If confirmed, would you define one of the employees or contractors operating under your supervision signing an open letter criticizing you, or policies you undertake at the instruction of the President, as insubordination as defined by the Government Accountability Office?

Answer. If confirmed, I plan to create an environment of trust in which personnel are able to express opinions and to use dissent channels and understand the importance of constructive dissent. Should such a matter arise, I would work with the Department's Office of the Legal Adviser and Bureau of Global Talent Management, as appropriate, to determine the proper course of action.

Question. In your view, are the actions these Federal employees took, by anonymously signing a letter to the President of the United States, covered as "whistleblowing"?

Answer. I believe these employees were expressing a dissenting view to their leadership. I support employees' right to express their views and hope that employees feel confident to directly raise their concerns with their supervisors and management without fear of reprisal. "Whistleblowing" is a term and activity covered by Federal legislation and regulations; I defer to the Department's Office of the Legal Adviser to determine whether the referenced actions are considered protected whistleblowing activity.

Question. If confirmed, how will you address discipline issues, such as insubordination, that do not take established dissent channels?

Answer. If confirmed, I would address discipline issues, including insubordination, in accordance with Department procedures and by seeking guidance, including from the Management Support Unit. I would document the conduct and provide counseling to the employee, offering opportunity for improvement. If continued violations occur, disciplinary measures would be taken consistent with personnel policies.

Question. Have you ever expressed support for an Israeli cease-fire in Gaza?

Answer. No, I have not expressed support for an Israeli cease-fire in Gaza. I understand the Administration has expressed support for an immediate cease-fire to secure the release of hostages, surge the delivery of humanitarian aid to those in need, allow for the return of civilians to their homes, and ultimately bring a lasting calm.

Question. Do you agree that Hamas is an antisemitic entity?

Answer. Yes, Hamas espouses antisemitism. Hamas, which is designated by the United States as a foreign terrorist organization, seeks to eliminate the State of Israel, and its founding charter calls for the killing of Jews.

Question. Would a cease-fire allow these groups to reconstitute and attack Israel, and Americans, in the future?

Answer. The United States remains committed to reaching a deal for an immediate cease-fire that secures the release of hostages and allows us to surge and sustain humanitarian aid and bolster the protection of civilians. The Administration's hope is that a more enduring peace could be built upon that. Working with partners,

the U.S. Government is attempting to secure the release of all hostages held by Hamas. The U.S. Government supports Israel's right to protect itself from Hamas' terrorism consistent with international law.

Question. Do you agree that calling for a cease-fire in Gaza means calling for Israel to stop its pursuit of Hamas, a designated foreign terrorist organization, that orchestrated the October 7 attacks and still refuses to release all Israeli and American hostages?

Answer. The United States remains committed to reaching a deal for an immediate cease-fire that secures the release of hostages and allows us to surge and sustain humanitarian aid and bolster the protection of civilians. The Administration's hope is that a more enduring peace could be built upon that. Working with partners, the U.S. Government is attempting to secure the release of all hostages held by Hamas. The U.S. Government supports Israel's right to protect itself from Hamas' terrorism consistent with international law.

Question. Do you believe that Israel, in its operation against Hamas, which is known to use civilians as human shields, is taking all necessary steps to minimize civilian casualties?

Answer. It's very difficult in the heat of war to make a definitive assessment about any individual incident, but what the National Security Memorandum–20 report States is that the IDF has undertaken steps to implement international humanitarian law obligations for the protection of civilians in the current conflict, including the requirements related to distinction, proportionality, and precautions in offensive operations. Israel's own concern about such incidents is reflected in the fact it has a number of internal investigations underway.

Question. The U.S. and Senegal enjoy a close relationship in West Africa against the backdrop of recent regional coups, expulsion of U.S. military assets, French retreat, and the freedom of movement of militants in the Sahel. Senegal, however, faces emergent challenges related to regional security, development cooperation, commercial ties, and strategic competition. Although Senegal has good ties with the U.S. and Israel, how will you expand those ties if confirmed?

Answer. If confirmed, I will work to build on our longstanding cooperation to advance shared security and economic objectives and further strengthen democratic governance so that Senegal will continue to be a stable and capable partner in a volatile region. U.S. development programs are helping address some of Senegal's greatest socioeconomic challenges by improving social services, stimulating growth, and fostering job creation. Our security cooperation is building police and gendarme capacity and helping Senegal bolster its border security, a critical objective given instability and violent extremism in the Sahel. If confirmed, I will endeavor to build on the important progress we have made, sustain, or grow our small but invaluable democracy programming, and expand our outreach and advocacy to increase commercial ties. If confirmed, I will also advocate for ways to expand relations between Senegal and Israel.

Question. How do you assess the current relationship between Senegal and China, given they have agreed to a comprehensive strategic partnership and participate in the CCP's Belt and Road initiative?

Answer. The PRC has deployed its familiar suite of transactional economic, investment, and development tools in Senegal as it has elsewhere on the continent. In 2018, the PRC surpassed France as Senegal's top trading partner, and Senegal was the first West African country to join the PRC's Belt and Road Initiative. The PRC is engaged in various sectors, including infrastructure, ICT, fishing, and trade, and Huawei is the dominant supplier of certain ICT hardware for the government. The People's Liberation Army (PLA) has made efforts to grow its security partnership with Senegal, but much of their engagement is transactional and focused on equipment. As we witnessed in the most recent Presidential elections, the Senegalese people are also deeply proud of their strong democratic tradition and generally committed to tolerance; respect for human rights; and an open, inclusive society, which has the potential to reduce PRC political influence. If confirmed, I will use all tools at the U.S government's disposal to counter the PRC.

Question. Are you concerned about the possibility of PLA naval basing or access in Senegal?

Answer. While we can never lose sight of the PLA's aspirations for naval basing and access in this region, we do not currently assess that the PLA has viable possibilities for basing and naval access in Senegal. The PLA has increased its security cooperation efforts with Senegal, but much of it is transactional and focused on

equipment. Given Senegal's overall caution and strategic considerations with foreign basing, as well as the new administration's focus on ensuring Senegal's sovereignty, we assess it is unlikely Senegal would welcome PLA naval basing. If confirmed, I will remain attentive to this issue and actively counteract any PLA attempts to secure naval basing or access in Senegal.

Question. The U.S. is one of Senegal's top donors. If confirmed, how will you convey to Senegal that continued or expanded partnerships with China could negatively impact that aid?

Answer. If confirmed, I will engage in forthright dialogue with Senegalese leaders about the risks inherent in many types of cooperation with the PRC and with PRC-affiliated firms and will make clear the potential negative impact of such engagement to U.S. assistance.

Question. If confirmed, are there specific opportunities you would pursue related to the DFC and Senegal?

Answer. I understand that Embassy Dakar has a "Deal Team" approach: interagency teams focused on identifying and tracking commercial opportunities for U.S. companies and leveraging mission- and Washington-based support, using tools such as DFC, U.S. EXIM, and U.S. Trade and Development Agency financing. The U.S. Embassy in Dakar also has a DFC representative who is actively seeking opportunities. If confirmed, I would ensure this representative is fully integrated into the Embassy's economic and commercial engagement and would personally seek opportunity for greater U.S. commercial activity in Senegal.

Question. The U.S. Ambassador to Senegal also serves as Ambassador to Guinea-Bissau. Guinea-Bissau continues to experience coups and ramifications of a civil war and independence from Portugal. There are limited ties between the U.S. and Guinea-Bissau, as there is no permanent U.S. diplomatic presence. Poverty is widespread, and according to Congressional Research Services, more than 1/5 of the population lives on less than $2.15 per day. How do you assess Guinea-Bissau's relations with Russia and China?

Answer. If confirmed, it will be a priority to increase U.S. engagement with and explore increased presence in Guinea-Bissau, including to counter involvement by Russia and the PRC. Guinea-Bissau is currently covered by our Liaison Office, which is based at the U.S. Embassy in Dakar and is supported by dedicated local staff in Bissau. While Bissau-Guinean leaders have consistently told us that they want greater U.S. partnership, including through re-opening an embassy in Washington D.C. anticipated in 2024, the country has ties with Russia and the PRC, which are working to improve their relationship with Guinea-Bissau and are exploiting the void left by the lack of a permanent U.S. diplomatic presence. I assess that Guinea-Bissau is engaging Russia and the PRC in a transactional manner to try to address its many acute needs.

Question. If confirmed, how will you balance your responsibilities between Senegal and Guinea-Bissau?

Answer. If confirmed, I will be fully committed to advancing U.S. interests in both countries. In addition to our very capable country team for Senegal, we are fortunate to have excellent local staff in Bissau, as well as a team of three Americans based in Dakar dedicated to covering Guinea-Bissau, which allows embassy leadership to maintain real-time awareness of developments and opportunities in both countries simultaneously. If confirmed, I will also travel to Guinea-Bissau frequently to engage with senior leaders, oversee key U.S. programs, and lead our public engagement.

Question. In your opinion, how involved is Guinea-Bissau regarding international narcotics trafficking?

Answer. Large volumes of narcotics are moved through Guinea-Bissau because of the country's limited capacity to combat trafficking. However, we have developed a strong partnership with police and judicial officials, and President Embalo has sought to deepen bilateral cooperation in this area. Narcotics trafficking remains an enormous challenge, but there appears to be political will to address it, giving us an opportunity to make a meaningful impact through increased partnership. If confirmed, addressing international narcotics trafficking through Guinea-Bissau will be a high priority.

Question. If confirmed, how would you counter narcotics trafficking with Guinea-Bissau?

Answer. If confirmed, I would use my position and personal engagements to advance the strong partnerships that U.S. law enforcement agencies have developed with local police and judicial officials to disrupt traffickers' abilities to move narcotics through Guinea-Bissau. If confirmed, I would also continue to work with the highest levels of government, who have displayed the willingness to tackle this difficult issue head on.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO JUAN CARLOS ITURREGUI BY SENATOR ROBERT MENENDEZ

Question. How has your recent role of Managing Partner of Milan Americas prepared you for Ambassadorship to the Dominican Republic?

Answer. I have spent much of my career working on business, regulatory, and public policy issues while specializing in infrastructure and renewable energy in the Caribbean and Latin America. I know how important good governance is to foster investment and promoting development that positively impact people's lives. Hence, it is crucial to broaden our economic partnership and solidify our connections with like-minded partners. If confirmed, I will work to advance these priorities.

In addition, through my last 9 years on the board of the U.S. Inter-American Foundation—a small yet very effective Federal agency that Congress generously funds—I have witnessed first-hand the enduring impacts of investing in grassroots development and empowering local communities to support themselves and obviate the need to migrate.

Question. How will you work to support U.S.-Dominican Republic economic relations, the realignment of supply chains, and the ongoing efforts to improve ties between the private sectors of both countries?

Answer. If confirmed, I will focus on expanding the already robust trade and investment relationship with the Dominican Republic. The United States is already the Dominican Republic's largest trading partner, with two-way, bilateral trade in goods and services of over $30 billion per year. If confirmed, I will prioritize outreach and advocacy to improve the business climate for U.S. firms to ensure they operate on a level playing field with their competitors. This includes expanding our efforts to improve the regulatory environment and ensure fair and transparent procurement protocols.

If confirmed, I will continue to work with the Dominican government and support efforts to improve the investment climate and promote investment opportunities, including the country's integration into secure supply chains for critical and essential goods. In addition, if confirmed, I will continue to support the Dominican Republic's strong interest in expanding trade and seizing nearshoring opportunities through programming such as the Embassy's work with the Ministry of Industry and Commerce to increase participation of small and medium-sized enterprises, especially women-owned businesses, in global value chains.

I understand the U.S. Government also continues to work with the Dominican Republic through multilateral initiatives like the America's Partnership for Economic Prosperity (APEP) and the Alliance for Development in Democracy (ADD) to advance sustainable growth and create more resilient supply chains for our partners and the United States, and I will support these efforts, if confirmed.

Question. In light of increasing investments by the People's Republic of China in telecommunication networks and other critical infrastructure, how do you envision U.S. engagement with the Dominican Republic and other regional partners in addressing serious concerns over the security, human rights, and data privacy risks associated with such investments?

Answer. If confirmed, I will engage closely with Dominican authorities to highlight the importance of international trade and investments that are competitive, transparent, and follow international best practices. If confirmed, I will continue to echo the long-standing calls from Latin American capitals that all trade and investment, including from the People's Republic of China, respect local laws and interests, particularly regarding human rights for workers and protections for the environment.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO JUAN CARLOS ITURREGUI BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

Question. If confirmed, how will you communicate with the government of the Dominican Republic, the private sector, and the Dominican people about the risks of the People's Republic of China's (PRC) predatory economic practices and of untrustworthy technologies like Huawei to the Dominican Republic's sovereignty and national security?

Answer. If confirmed, I will engage closely with the Dominican Republic to highlight the importance of international trade and investments that are competitive, transparent, and follow international best practices. Also, I will continue to echo the long-standing calls from Latin American capitals that all trade and investments, including those from the PRC, must respect local laws and interests, transparency, particularly regarding human and civil rights for workers and protections for migrants, and for the environment. I am also committed to working closely with our allies and partners to combat the climate crisis; to face down foreign election interference and corruption; to strengthen our defenses in cybersecurity; and to produce and promote U.S. technologies of the future.

Question. If confirmed, will you prioritize efforts to persuade the Dominican Republic to strengthen its cybersecurity rules by excluding firms based in countries that do not endorse the Budapest Convention on cybercrime from participating in 5G network contracts? If so, how will you work with the Dominican Republic to offer alternatives to untrustworthy technologies?

Answer. If confirmed, I will prioritize efforts to strengthen Dominican cybersecurity and work with the Dominican Republic to prioritize engagement with trustworthy technologies and partners. I will also work with Washington to help find trusted technology solutions for the Dominican Republic. As far as the Budapest Cybercrime Convention, that is a law enforcement treaty that provides valuable tools to combat cybercrime. Budapest presently has 72 States parties, including the Dominican Republic and the United States. While we urge all countries that meet Budapest standards to request accession to this important treaty, we realize that some countries with whom we otherwise have excellent law enforcement cooperation may decide not to do so or may not yet have completed accession. While the United States could certainly consider Budapest membership as a plus factor, requiring that countries be Budapest members to participate in 5G contracts could exclude countries that are otherwise inclined toward U.S. approaches to cyber security.

Question. How will you work with the government of the Dominican Republic to strengthen cooperation on cybersecurity?

Answer. If confirmed, I will strengthen the existing cooperation with the Dominican Republic's National Cybersecurity Center, National 911 Emergency Response System, Government Office of ICT, Vice Ministry for Digital Agenda, law enforcement agencies, and military to implement the country's National Security Strategy. I will also work collaboratively with the interagency in Washington to come up with new ways to strengthen our collaboration with the Dominican Republic on cybersecurity as I understand it seeks to update its National Cybersecurity Strategy to counter new threats and attacks of increasing frequency and complexity. I will also continue to support the United States' longstanding cooperation with the Dominican Republic through the Organization of American States to advance security and stability in cyberspace throughout the Western Hemisphere.

Question. To your knowledge, how many individuals and entities in the Dominican Republic has the United States sanctioned for engaging in corrupt practices with the PRC?

Answer. Since I am not a government employee, I am not privy to this type of information, but, if confirmed, I would work to make sure corrupt individuals and entities are investigated and sanctioned.

International Organizations

Question. If confirmed, will you commit to using all the tools and authorities available to identify and recommend sanctions for individuals engaged in corrupt practices with the PRC or to the benefit of the PRC in the Dominican Republic?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed, I commit to working to identify and recommend sanctions for individuals engaged in corrupt practices.

Question. Is Haiti a failed state?

Answer. Haiti is experiencing a series of complex challenges but is not a failed state. Despite the deliberate attacks in March by criminal gangs seeking to over-

whelm Haiti, the country held together. I understand the Haitian National Police and other security forces held firm. Haiti now has a Transitional Presidential Council, a prime minister, and an inclusive cabinet. The government and Haitian National Police are taking steps toward stabilizing conditions in the country. Security conditions permitting, the transitional government is planning to hold elections in late 2025. If confirmed, I will coordinate with our embassy in Haiti and with the government of the Dominican Republic to support Haiti as it moves toward holding elections.

Question. How will you work with the Dominican Republic to support their efforts to secure their sovereign border with Haiti and to reduce illegal immigration?

Answer. If confirmed, I will encourage the government of the Dominican Republic to constructively engage the transitional government of Haiti to manage cross-border trade and movement and discourage irregular migration, including to the United States. I will advocate for the Dominican Republic to continue enhancing the professionalization of its police, military, and immigration authorities.

Question. How will you work with the Dominican Republic to support international efforts to strengthen the Haitian National Police and to reduce the spillover effects of gang violence in Haiti?

Answer. If confirmed, I will work with the Dominican Republic to ensure its police and immigration authorities are prepared to reduce the possibility of spillover of gang violence from Haiti. I would support any international efforts to strengthen the Haitian National Police to help stabilize Haiti and encourage the government of the Dominican Republic to work constructively with Haiti to secure their shared border.

Question. In your testimony, you stated that "hopefully what we should not do is implement the same strategy expecting a different outcome" in Haiti. Are you concerned that the proposed Multinational Security Support mission risks implementing the same strategy and expecting a different outcome as those missions that have come before it in Haiti?

Answer. I believe the MSS mission is a significantly different strategy than has been tried before. The mandate of the MSS mission is to work jointly with the Haitian National Police to stabilize security. I anticipate the outcome of the MSS mission deployment will be improved security in Haiti. A stabilized security environment in Haiti would allow for economic growth, delivery of basic services, and opportunities for development that will lead to better lives for the people of Haiti. A stable Haiti with a durable, functioning government that can make the most of development and investment is good for the Dominican Republic and, if confirmed, I will coordinate with Embassy Port-au-Prince and the Dominican government on anything that affects the Dominican Republic.

Question. What will be your priorities to strengthen the economic partnership between the United States and the Dominican Republic?

Answer. If confirmed, my priorities to strengthen the economic partnership between the United States and the Dominican Republic will be to help the Dominican government combat corruption and strengthen the rule of law, promote long-term, sustainable, and inclusive economic growth, and promote opportunities for nearshoring.

I would also continue to encourage Dominican Republic's active engagement in the Americas Partnership for Economic Prosperity and appreciate their leadership in the rule of law working group.

Question. How will you work with the Dominican Republic to support investments in strategic sectors in the Dominican Republic?

Answer. If confirmed, I will support investments in strategic sectors by working with the Dominican Republic to improve its business climate through fighting corruption, improving security, and strengthening the rule of law. These three things are critical to fostering investment in strategic sectors, as the private sector needs stability, transparency, and good governance to make those investments.

Question. How will you work to strengthen support to the Dominican Republic within the framework of the Alliance for Development in Democracy?

Answer. The Alliance for Development in Democracy is an important regional initiative in which the Dominican Republic, Panama, Costa Rica, and Ecuador work together on democratic strengthening and economic growth through the tightening of the countries' commercial, demographic, and cultural ties. I understand the United States actively supports these goals and the strong democracies of the four countries, as well as their work to strengthen democracy in Latin America. If con-

firmed, I will work to strengthen our cooperation with the Dominican Republic within the framework of the alliance, for example in the context of the 2022 memorandum of understanding to advance the U.S.-Alliance for Development in Democracy (ADD) Consultative Dialogue on Supply Chains and Economic Growth.

Question. What steps will you take to promote anti-money laundering practices in the Dominican Republic and to work with the government of the Dominican Republic to strengthen law enforcement cooperation on money laundering and counternarcotics?

Answer. Illicit narcotics and money laundering are intrinsically linked in criminal networks. If confirmed, I will work closely with the office of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, the Drug Enforcement Administration, and with all our U.S. law enforcement and military partners to strengthen cooperation with the Dominican Government to address both sides of the equation.

If confirmed, I would build on existing success in narcotics interdiction—through programs such as the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative—by continuing to increase the capacity of our partners to stop drug trafficking though the Dominican Republic and expand our support to Dominican law enforcement to better investigate and bring to justice the criminal networks responsible for illicit drug trafficking and money laundering.

Question. What steps will you take to strengthen military cooperation and military-to-military engagements between the United States and the Dominican Republic?

Answer. If confirmed, I will work closely with the Defense Attaché Office at Embassy Santo Domingo to strengthen military cooperation and military-to-military engagement, including on trainings, disaster preparation and response, donations, sales, and high-level visits. I understand that the working cooperation with SOUTHCOM is robust and proactive.

Question. If confirmed, what concrete steps could you take to help the Dominican Republic operationalize the prioritized recommendations contained in the TIP report?

Answer. The government of the Dominican Republic does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking but made significant efforts to do so. These efforts included convicting more traffickers, investigating two police officers for trafficking crimes, and increasing international law enforcement cooperation. The government also identified more victims and implemented new protections for vulnerable domestic workers. However, the government did not demonstrate overall increasing efforts compared with the previous reporting period and was downgraded to Tier 2 Watch List in 2023. If confirmed, I will engage with the government of the Dominican Republic and underscore the importance of ensuring a robust response to human trafficking, including through passing comprehensive legislation to combat trafficking, prosecuting the crime, protecting victims, and working to prevent human trafficking, following the recommendations in the Trafficking in Persons Report.

Question. What is your assessment of religious freedom in the Dominican Republic and if confirmed, how will you work with the Ambassador At Large for International Religious Freedom to bolster religious freedom in-country?

Answer. The government designates Roman Catholicism as the official State religion and extends to the Catholic Church special privileges not granted to other religious groups. I am aware that members of non-Catholic groups do not approve of the government's preference for the Catholic Church, the lack of explicit legal protection for non-Catholic groups beyond what the constitution provides, and the treatment of non-Catholic groups as nongovernmental organizations. If confirmed, I will work with the Ambassador at Large to ensure our engagement with all religious groups reflects our core values, including respect for religious freedom or belief.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to personally engaging with civil society on this issue?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed, I will engage with civil society on religious freedom in the Dominican Republic.

Question. If confirmed, what concrete steps can you take to help the Dominican Republic increase their societal and governmental respect for religious freedom?

Answer. If confirmed, I will ensure embassy officials meet regularly with religious and civil society representatives to inform the Department's understanding of reli-

gious freedom in the Dominican Republic. I will work with civil society, religious actors, and the government to increase respect for the religious freedom of all people. I will speak out in favor of the fundamental freedom of religion or belief.

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 with embassy officials and civil society organizations to understand certain challenges related to human rights and improve the human rights situation in the Dominican Republic. Working with the Dominican government is a critical part of this effort as well and, if confirmed, I will engage in regular dialogues with civil society groups and work closely with them and the Dominican government to improve.

Question. Management is a key responsibility for chiefs of mission. How do you intend to create a unified mission and vision at post?

Answer. If confirmed, I intend to continue the regular review of strategic goals and objectives on an ongoing basis to ensure that the team is working on the most important and current priorities to achieve U.S. policy objectives. I will convene the senior leadership team at least twice a year to review and measure our progress through specific indicators and ensure that all agencies and offices channel their efforts toward one shared vision. If confirmed, I will also use town halls, team off sites, and other methods of outlining Embassy objectives in both English and Spanish to ensure that every member of our Mission team understands and is committed to the success of our policy vision. If confirmed, I will work with the team to find the most effective tools to do this in the Dominican Republic, including updating objectives to match the continuously evolving country and regional context and to streamline our strategy.

Question. How would you describe your management style?

Answer. I have an inclusive and empathetic, hands-on management style. I encourage every team member to participate in policy discussions, highlight challenges and successes, and present innovative ideas. Sometimes the best opportunities to move the needle forward on goals come from ideas on the ground, from the people who have the best institutional knowledge and ensure continuity without disruptions. I want to make sure all embassy staff can utilize their best skills to make a positive difference and contribute to achieving our objectives in a professional, friendly, supportive, and inclusive way.

Question. How do you intend to improve morale at post?

Answer. If confirmed, my goal as Chief of Mission will be to promote and maintain high morale and focus on supporting a cohesive, inclusive team environment for all embassy personnel, including our incredibly valuable Locally Employed Staff. If confirmed, I will ensure that my DCM and I are accessible to all employees and, I intend to use a variety of tools to ensure that happens, such as regular meetings with the locally employed staff committee, town halls, and hosting staff at the Chief of Mission Residence for team building events. I will ensure that Management shares and visibly displays in public spaces within the embassy all relevant and most updated information related to equal opportunity employment opportunity rights and protections for all personnel to work in an accessible environment for everyone regardless of disabilities, and free from harassment and/or retaliation.

Question. Do you believe it is ever acceptable or constructive to berate subordinates, either in public or private?

Answer. No. It is never acceptable to berate anyone, and that includes work colleagues at every level, whether in public or in private. Constructive dialogue, starting with acknowledging people's values, skills, and contributions when that is that case, is always the correct and moral path to addressing challenges.

Question. How do you envision your relationship with the deputy chief of mission?

Answer. I know how critical this relationship is for the success of our missions around the globe. In Santo Domingo, if confirmed, I envision a strong, open, and trusting work relationship with the DCM, preparing them to take over charge of the mission during my travels. I very much look forward to working closely with the DCM, if confirmed, to create a unified leadership team for Embassy Santo Domingo.

Question. If confirmed, what leadership responsibilities do you intend to entrust to your deputy chief of mission?

Answer. If confirmed, I envision a unified leadership team in the Embassy Santo Domingo Front Office. I understand that the DCM typically manages most of the internal coordination and operations for the Embassy, and the Chief of Mission is

the face of the United States to both the government and public. The DCM also needs to be included regularly in external activities to be able to step into the role of Chargé d'Affaires in the absence of the Ambassador, as Chargé d'Affaires Aguilera has been doing very adeptly for nearly a year already. If confirmed, I will work with my DCM to maximize their strengths and identify the most effective areas where they can help me to lead the Mission team.

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. Yes, I believe it is important to provide employees with accurate annual employee evaluation reports. Throughout my career, I have met with each of my direct reports regularly to provide feedback on their ongoing tasks and set aside several times a year to review their overall progress.

Question. If confirmed, would you support and encourage clear, accurate, and direct feedback to employees in order to improve performance and acknowledge high achievers?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed, I will encourage each supervisor at Embassy Santo Domingo to meet regularly with their employees to provide both positive and constructive feedback on performance. If confirmed, I will also encourage all employees to draft meaningful award nominations for any deserving colleague or subordinate.

Question. In your experience, do U.S. diplomats get outside of our embassy walls enough to accomplish fully their missions?

Answer. While I have not worked at an embassy before, if confirmed, I will work with COM personnel to ensure that they make every effort, within security, financial, and resource allowances, to get outside the embassy walls and into remote communities as much as possible to ensure we share our vision, values, and goals with the people of the Dominican Republic.

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 that Embassy Santo Domingo takes full advantage of all opportunities to meet with Dominicans across the country. This would include outreach work to many varied locations in the Dominican Republic, as budgets allow, and ensuring more than one office sends representatives to these communities to talk about their work in the country as well as opportunities we promote. As budget allows, I would personally travel to these locations to engage with local populations. We will use modern technology to reach additional people, such as through virtual townhalls; interviews on the news, radio, and internet; and engagement through Instagram, X, Facebook, LinkedIn, and more.

Question. Do you pledge to support fully CODELS and STAFFDELS that seek to travel to post, including on weekends as well as local and Federal holidays?

Answer. If confirmed, yes, I pledge to fully support Congressional Delegations (CODELs) and Staff Delegations (STAFFDELs) that seek to travel to the Dominican Republic, including on weekends as well as local and Federal holidays.

Question. Do you commit to supporting fully any CODEL or STAFFDEL, with the only exceptions for simultaneous or overlapping visits by the President or First Lady of the United States, the Vice President, or the Secretaries of State or Defense?

Answer. If confirmed, yes, I commit to fully supporting any CODEL or STAFFDEL.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO JUAN CARLOS ITURREGUI 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 (PRC) 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 it so chooses.

Is the CCP an economic, diplomatic, military, and technological threat to the United States?

Answer. Last 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." As Secretary Blinken has said, under President Xi, the CCP has become more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad. If confirmed, I will advance U.S. national security interests and counter PRC efforts to expand its problematic influence and use of coercion, through diplomatic engagements, public diplomacy, and commercial advocacy to bolster U.S.-Dominican Republic ties.

Question. Does the CCP undertake any activities that are beneficial to U.S. interests? If so, please explain.

Answer. 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 2024 Annual Threat Assessment, the CCP "will attempt to preempt challenges to its reputation and legitimacy, undercutting U.S. influence, driving wedges between Washington and its partners, and fostering global norms that favor its authoritarian system."

Question. Do you believe that there are any areas within which the CCP would constructively work with the United States in good faith, knowing that at any moment Chinese interlocuters with U.S. representatives could be disappeared? If so, please explain.

Answer. The United States will work with the PRC to address transnational challenges, when it is in the U.S. interest to do so. If confirmed, I will work with my colleagues across the U.S. interagency and Congress 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 PRC in the countries or areas in which you will work?

Answer. If confirmed, my priority will be advancing U.S. national security interests in the Dominican Republic and countering efforts by our strategic and regional competitors to undermine those interests. The Administration has been clear 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 the Dominican Republic and the region.

Question. As you may be aware, a group of Federal employees penned an open letter to President Biden criticizing U.S. support for Israel in the aftermath of Hamas' brutal terrorist attack on October 7, 2023. In addition, employees from nearly two dozen agencies staged walkouts in protest of the administration's Israel policy. Efforts like these directly undermine the duty of our diplomats to advance the policies of the President of the United States. Yes or no, did you sign the letter to the President expressing opposition to the President's Israel policy?

Answer. No, I did not sign the open letter to the President.

Question. Yes or no, did you participate in the January 16, 2024 walkout?

Answer. No, I did not participate.

Question. If confirmed, would you define one of the employees or contractors operating under your supervision signing an open letter criticizing you, or policies you undertake at the instruction of the President, as insubordination as defined by the Government Accountability Office?

Answer. If confirmed, I would seek to address employee concerns personally by creating an open, trusting, and harassment-free work environment. I am mindful of and value Department employees' right to free speech under the First Amendment. Moreover, I understand the expression of disagreement does not in and of itself constitute insubordination. If confirmed, I would work with the Department's Office of the Legal Adviser to determine the proper course of action should such a matter arise.

Question. In your view, are the actions these Federal employees took, by anonymously signing a letter to the President of the United States, covered as "whistleblowing"?

Answer. I believe these employees were expressing a dissenting view to their leadership. I would hope that employees would feel confident to directly raise their con-

cerns with their supervisors and management rather than signing an anonymous letter.

Question. If confirmed, how will you address discipline issues, such as insubordination, that do not take established dissent channels?

Answer. If confirmed, I will make sure embassy employees know there are several avenues available to express policy disagreements. I would encourage employees to use established channels to express their views.

Question. Have you ever expressed support for an Israeli cease-fire in Gaza?

Answer. No, I have not expressed support for an Israeli cease-fire in Gaza. I understand the Administration has expressed support for an immediate cease-fire to secure the release of hostages and surge the delivery of humanitarian aid to those in need.

Question. Do you agree that Hamas is an antisemitic entity?

Answer. Yes, Hamas is a terrorist group and antisemitic entity. This foreign terrorist organization seeks to eliminate the state of Israel, and its founding charter calls for the killing of Jewish people.

Question. Would a cease-fire allow these groups to reconstitute and attack Israel, and Americans, in the future?

Answer. It is my understanding the United States remains committed to reaching a deal for an immediate cease-fire that secures the release of hostages and allows us to surge and sustain humanitarian aid and bolster the protection of civilians. I understand the Administration's hope is that a more enduring peace could be built upon that and the U.S. Government, working with partners, is attempting to secure the release of all hostages held by Hamas. I understand the U.S. Government supports Israel's right to protect itself from Hamas' terrorism consistent with international law.

Question. Do you agree that calling for a cease-fire in Gaza means calling for Israel to stop its pursuit of Hamas, a designated foreign terrorist organization, that orchestrated the October 7 attacks and still refuses to release all Israeli and American hostages?

Answer. It is my understanding the United States remains committed to reaching a deal for an immediate cease-fire that secures the release of hostages and allows us to surge and sustain humanitarian aid and bolster the protection of civilians. I understand the Administration's hope is that a more enduring peace could be built upon that, and that the U.S. Government is working with partners to attempt to secure the release of all hostages held by Hamas. The U.S. Government supports Israel's right to protect itself from Hamas' terrorism consistent with international law.

Question. Do you believe that Israel, in its operation against Hamas, which is known to use civilians as human shields, is taking all necessary steps to minimize civilian casualties?

Answer. The U.S. Government supports Israel's right to protect itself, consistent with international law. The Administration has urged Israel to differentiate between civilians and Hamas terrorists and to avoid civilian casualties. Hamas's use of civilians as human shields, a blatant violation of international law, does not lessen Israel's obligations under international humanitarian law.

Question. The Dominican Republic has been a stable and fast-growing economy in the Caribbean. The country held Presidential elections in May 2024 which resulted in President Abinader's re-election. The United States has a strong relation with the Dominican Republic (DR)—they both maintain commercial ties under the CAFTA-DR and cooperate on security issues under the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative. If confirmed, what would your top priorities be as U.S. Ambassador to the Dominican Republic?

Answer. If confirmed, my highest priority would be to ensure the safety and welfare of the approximately 300,000 U.S. citizen residents in the Dominican Republic as well as the millions of U.S. tourists that visit annually.

My additional priorities would be to promote U.S. values and U.S. interests in the Dominican Republic. To do this, if confirmed, I would support our joint goals to fight corruption and strengthen the rule of law in the Dominican Republic, and collaborate with the Dominican government on good governance, security, investment and near-shoring, human rights, energy, and climate issues.

Question. What's your assessment of the U.S.-DR relations under the Biden Administration?

Answer. The Dominican Republic is a critical partner of the United States, and both countries work closely together on anti-corruption, democracy in the region, rule of law, combating transnational crime, and promoting citizen health and security.

If confirmed, I will reaffirm our close partnership with the Dominican Republic and work to see its capacities strengthened—a strong ally with strong institutions will be an even better partner for the United States.

Question. In your view, what should the U.S. do to incentivize U.S. companies and allies to 'nearshore' to the DR?

Answer. The United States maintains a robust trade and investment relationship with the Dominican Republic and remains the Dominican Republic's largest trading partner, with two-way, bilateral trade in goods and services over $30 billion each year. If confirmed, I would prioritize outreach and advocacy to improve the business climate for U.S. firms to ensure they operate on a level playing field with their competitors.

If confirmed, I would continue to support the Dominican Republic's strong interest in expanding trade and seizing nearshoring opportunities through programming such as the Embassy's work with the Ministry of Industry and Commerce to increase participation of small and medium-sized enterprises, especially women-owned businesses, in global value chains.

I understand the U.S. Government also continues to work with the Dominican Republic through multilateral initiatives like the America's Partnership for Economic Prosperity (APEP) and the Alliance for Development in Democracy (ADD) to advance sustainable growth and create more resilient supply chains for our partners and the United States, and I would strongly support these efforts.

Question. How would you assess the current relations between the DR and Haiti?

Answer. The Dominican Republic and Haiti have a long and complicated history, but I believe their relationship is on a positive trajectory with Haiti's new interim government in place. Hopefully this progress will continue as security conditions in Haiti improve in the future. If confirmed, I would coordinate closely with the U.S. Embassy in Haiti and with Washington to promote a productive relationship among our three countries.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO TRACEY ANN JACOBSON BY SENATOR ROBERT MENENDEZ

Question. How have your recent senior roles, including Ambassadorships, prepare you for Ambassadorship to the Republic of Iraq?

Answer. Four successful tours as Chief of Mission, all in hardship posts, have prepared me for the management and leadership challenges of one of our most complex missions. I am prepared to lead via the establishment and implementation of clear policy goals; open collaboration at post, in Washington, and with Congress; effective stewardship of taxpayer resources; and appropriate attention to security, morale, and professional development. I have been grateful for the opportunity since October 2023 to have served as a Senior Advisor in the Near Eastern Affairs Bureau at State where I have supplemented my regional expertise.

Question. Based on your expressed commitments to the Mission of Iraq, how do you envision U.S.-Iraqi security collaboration to combat ISIS and improve regional security while mitigating the efforts of Iran-aligned militias and U.S. foreign adversaries?

Answer. If confirmed, my top priorities will be to safeguard American citizens and advance Iraq's security, stability, and sovereignty. Our military partnership with Iraq is essential and, in cooperation with Congress, I will strive to ensure that we remain Iraq's security partner of choice including in the fight against ISIS. I will also seek to bring all available policy tools to bear to meet our objectives, to include advancing Iraq's energy independence, strengthening democratic institutions, and promoting respect for human rights, which undergird Iraq's security.

Question. How will you work with Congress and regional stakeholders to improve the Baghdad-Erbil relationship?

Answer. The Kurdistan Regional Government is a key U.S. strategic partner within Federal Iraq. Fundamentally, the Administration believes that stabilizing the Baghdad-Erbil relationship will bring economic benefits to all Iraqis, strengthen Iraqi sovereignty, and promote stability and security for the Region. I understand the KRG and GOI are negotiating to resolve many of the challenges in that relationship. It will be a priority of mine to continue encouraging those discussions, and I will be happy to work with Congress toward that end.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO TRACEY ANN JACOBSON BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

Question. What are your priority lines of effort linked to U.S. national security interests?

Answer. If confirmed, my highest priority as Ambassador to Iraq will be the safety and security of all Americans in Iraq, including our military and diplomatic personnel. I will continue to work with our U.S. military, Iraqi, and Coalition partners to advance the enduring defeat of ISIS. I will prioritize pushing back against malign Iranian influence, including the role of Iran-backed militias in Iraqi politics, economics, and society. I will work to promote inclusive economic growth, democracy, and good governance. By advancing U.S. economic interests, supporting U.S. investment in Iraq, and promoting Iraqi energy independence, we can support both U.S. and Iraqi national interests.

Question. How might the United States best advance economic reforms and reduce barriers to entry in Iraq to support economic growth?

Answer. If confirmed, I will continue to work through the Strategic Framework Agreement and the Trade and Investment Framework Agreement to encourage Iraq's economic growth and reform agenda, including energy independence, anticorruption, and banking sector reforms. Comprehensive and structural economic reforms will be necessary to reduce barriers to entry for foreign investors over the long term.

Question. The Iraqi confessional system, or muhasasa, is crippled by corruption, cronyism and nepotism, provides an opening for Iranian influence, and remains a significant barrier to effective governance. What are the outlines of your strategy to address muhasasa and where would you prioritize reforms?

Answer. If confirmed I will promote effective governance, political participation, and civic activism among all of Iraq's diverse religious and ethnic groups. With national elections likely in late 2025, I will look for ways to strengthen the government's respect for human rights and its democratic institutions, while working to minimize malign Iranian influence. I will ensure our policy and programs support the fundamental freedoms of the Iraqi people so that they can elect and hold accountable leaders who are responsive to their needs.

Question. In your opinion, what steps can the United States take to improve our diplomats' ability to get outside the Embassy compound? How do you intend to improve the ability of U.S. diplomats to better access all local populations?

Answer. If confirmed, I will continue Ambassador Romanowski's efforts to travel outside of Baghdad, to include provincial capitals in the southern Shia provinces, in coordination with the Bureau of Diplomatic Security. I will work to continue our keystone security partnership with Iraq's security forces and take advantage of the relatively improved security conditions in the country to expand our face-to-face diplomacy.

Question. From October 2023–February 2024, Iranian aligned militia groups attacked United States forces in Iraq, Syria, and Jordan over 170 times. While Iraqi officials assured the United States they can restrain these militia groups, the attacks only stopped after a significant military operation from the United States following the tragic death of three U.S. service members.

If confirmed, how will you seek to disrupt Iranian support for militias in Iraq?

Answer. Iran is a destabilizing influence in the region and supports multiple terrorist groups that advance its interests. If confirmed, I will support the use of all available tools to counter this malign influence including sanctions, diplomatic engagement with allies and partners, and when necessary, military action. The Department has designated multiple Iran-aligned militia groups and their leaders as Specially Designated Global Terrorists and is continuing to work together with the rest of the U.S. Government as part of a whole-of-government approach to counter

Iran's destabilizing activities and dismantle the logistics and financial networks that support the militias.

Question. Has the Sudani government responded appropriately to Iranian-aligned militia activity? How do you incentivize or empower greater action against militias?

Answer. I understand that PM Sudani publicly condemned Iran-aligned militia group (IAMG) attacks on U.S. and Coalition personnel and made limited arrests of those involved in the attacks. That said, the Administration continues to press the Iraqi government to do more to rein in the militias and reinforce Iraq's sovereignty. A strong, sovereign, and prosperous Iraq that is well-integrated in the region is the best bulwark against Iranian influence. If confirmed, I will work with the Government of Iraq to continue strengthening the U.S. military partnership with Iraq's security forces to ensure they are capable of securing Iraq. If confirmed, I will also seek opportunities to promote Iraq's further economic and political integration with the region and strengthen our bilateral economic relationship, both of which contribute to Iraq's security and stability.

Question. Are there specific steps the U.S. can take to curb militias' influence in the country and limit their ability to act with impunity? If so, what are they?

Answer. If confirmed, I will continue to use all tools available to counter the corrosive influence of Iran-aligned militia groups (IAMGs), including through support for U.S. self-defense operations when necessary and through the imposition of relevant sanctions on individuals and entities. I will also encourage economic and financial sector reforms, support anticorruption initiatives, and promote U.S. investment in Iraq all of which will strengthen Iraq's institutions and contribute to its sovereignty and stability.

Question. How will you approach the militias integrated in Iraq's coordination framework that were involved in attacks on U.S. military and diplomatic facilities?

Answer. Armed actors that attack U.S. personnel must be held accountable, regardless of their affiliation. If confirmed, I will press the Government of Iraq to take the necessary and appropriate steps to detain and prosecute individuals and groups that conduct attacks and remove them from the security establishment, if they hold any official position. I will also seek to counter these groups using all available and appropriate tools, including through sanctions. The Administration has used sanctions designations to disrupt the logistics and constrain the activities of militias, curbing their ability to operate with impunity. This includes the most recent action on June 17, in which the Department designated Harakat Ansar Allah al-Awfiya (HAAA) and its leader as Specially Designated Global Terrorists for their role in the attack on Tower 22 in Jordan and the November 2023 designation of Kata'ib Sayyid al-Shuhada and its leader for their role in attacks on U.S. personnel in Iraq and Syria.

Question. Should the United States consider conditioning assistance to Iraq, including Foreign Military Financing (FMF), based on demonstrated progress disrupting and deterring Iranian militias?

Answer. U.S. security assistance in Iraq is a critical tool for achieving U.S. objectives, including the enduring defeat of ISIS, advancing Iraq's stability and sovereignty, and fostering deeper U.S.-Iraqi security cooperation. Specifically, U.S. security assistance supports the training and equipping of the Iraqi Security Forces to develop their capacity to further shared security goals and ensures that the United States remains Iraq's security partner of choice. Conditioning U.S. assistance, which is tied to U.S. national security interests, would hinder U.S. policy goals in Iraq and the region. If confirmed, I will continue to press the Iraqi government to take action to rein in the militias.

Question. Do proposed FMF budget cuts in the President's 2025 budget request undermine Iraqi security needs?

Answer. The requested reduction in security assistance for Iraq this year reflects the current availability of prior-year funding to meet the operational and capacity building needs of the Iraqi Security Forces. The United States and the Government of Iraq have initiated a series of engagements to review the U.S. and Coalition security presence in Iraq. These engagements will also address future U.S. security assistance requirements. Ultimately, fiscal constraints, competing FMF priorities globally, and Iraq's increasing oil revenues mean that the President's budget request of $90 million plus prior-year FMF pipeline are sufficient to support ongoing needs.

Question. Since 2003, Iraq policy has been viewed primarily through a military lens. Please provide your thoughts on expanding the Iraq relationship beyond the

military lens and transitioning Iraq away from CTEF to more routine forms of security assistance under the State Department.

Answer. The "360-partnership" between Iraq and the United States includes much more than security: education, health, energy, finance, human rights, climate, and other forms of cooperation define the relationship between the Iraqi and American people. Our assistance reflects this diverse partnership. U.S. security assistance bolsters Iraqi sovereignty and stability, pillars that support our broad relationship. I understand that the Administration has worked to prioritize Iraqi security assistance needs and looked at the range of assistance accounts available to support them. If confirmed, I will closely review U.S. security assistance to ensure alignment with strategic objectives and keep all safeguards in place to ensure the proper stewardship of taxpayer dollars.

Question. Successive administrations have issued Iran sanctions waivers for continued Iraqi purchases of Iranian electricity. Do you see these waivers as potential leverage to encourage the Iraqi government to move faster on energy initiatives or as leverage to reign in militias? Why or why not?

Answer. The Administration is continuing a multi-pronged strategy to help Iraq achieve energy independence by reducing its need for energy imports from Iran, including the building of regional interconnections and gas capture. In the last 2 years, the Government of Iraq has made significant progress toward energy self-sufficiency, but does not currently produce enough electricity to meet domestic needs. Unfortunately, Iraq will not wean itself off of Iranian energy imports overnight. For that reason, this waiver, which was introduced by a prior administration, continues to be necessary to provide the time for the Government of Iraq to develop its domestic energy production. Eliminating Iranian imports prematurely would leave a significant number of Iraqis without power, destabilizing Iraq and undermining U.S. interests in the region. If confirmed, I will continue to urge the Iraqi government to take concrete steps to improve its energy independence.

Question. What are your views on permanently freezing Iranian funds in jurisdictions abroad?

Answer. Iranian funds held in jurisdictions outside Iran remain subject to various restrictions, including rigorous oversight by the Department of the Treasury and trusted partners, and they will continue to be so. The Administration is committed to preventing these funds from being used by the regime to fund its destabilizing activities and will continue to use all the tools at its disposal to deny Iran the ability to use funds held abroad to support their malign activities in and outside Iran.

Question. Operation Inherent Resolve has united 87 countries to eliminate the threat posed by ISIS in Iraq and Syria. The Coalition has also played a major role stabilizing the region and deterring Iranian aggression. Nevertheless, there is still work to be done.

In your opinion, how should the United States engage in the Higher Military Commission (HMC) to review the role of the U.S. military in Iraq? What should we take into consideration for transitioning to a bilateral security relationship?

Answer. The United States and Iraq announced the start of a bilateral Higher Military Commission (HMC) process on January 24. Its purpose is to determine how the Coalition's military mission, Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR), will evolve on a timeline according to the following factors: 1) the threat from ISIS; 2) operational and environmental requirements; and 3) capability levels of the Iraqi Security Services. The United States and Iraq seek to deliberately and eventually transition to a bilateral security cooperation relationship across a full range of issues. As we undergo this transition, we will continue to work with the Iraqi security forces, including Kurdish Peshmerga forces, to build their capabilities to ensure the enduring defeat of ISIS and advance stability within Iraq and the region.

Question. How would you describe the current capabilities of ISIS in Iraq and Syria? What conditions are necessary to prevent the resurgence of ISIS?

Answer. ISIS remains a serious global threat. In Iraq and Syria, ISIS no longer controls territory, but it continues to conduct terror attacks targeting civilians and security forces. In order to counter this threat, the United States leads an 87-member international Coalition committed to the enduring defeat of ISIS and preventing its resurgence by disrupting the group's financing and economic infrastructure; preventing the flow of foreign terrorist fighters across borders; supporting stabilization and the restoration of essential public services to liberated areas; and countering the group's propaganda. The repatriation of displaced persons and detained fighters from northeast Syria remains critical to ensuring the enduring defeat of the terrorist group. If confirmed, I will work to ensure that any transition of the functions

of the Coalition to bilateral arrangements are geared toward the continuing defeat of ISIS as well as Iraq's security more broadly.

Question. If confirmed, what role would you play as Ambassador to continue the repatriation of Iraqis in detention and refugee camps in Syria?

Answer. Addressing the security and humanitarian crises in northeast Syria, including repatriating the Iraqis displaced in al-Hol and Roj, as well as the Iraqi foreign terrorist fighters in detention, must be part of our broader strategy to ensure the lasting defeat of ISIS. I understand Iraq has repatriated over 10,000 of its nationals from Syria, but with nearly 20,000 Iraqi nationals in detention facilities and displaced persons camps in northeast Syria, there's more work to be done. If confirmed, I will continue to press the Iraqi government at the highest levels to both continue repatriations from northeast Syria and to continue to increase the rate of such repatriations. I will also support directing U.S. foreign assistance in Iraq to support such efforts.

Question. If confirmed, how will you address the growing influence of Russia and China in Iraq? What threat do you believe they pose to U.S. national security interests?

Answer. The PRC has a significant presence in Iraq's energy sector and has made inroads in the telecommunications sector as well. I am also concerned by the strong ties between Iraq and Russia in the energy and security sectors. Yet, the Iraqi government has cooperated with U.S. sanctions toward Russia, and the support the United States offers Iraq makes us a partner of choice. If confirmed, I will continue to emphasize the value of our partnership and advocate for U.S. companies approved for commercial advocacy, including in Iraq's energy sector. I will also highlight the pitfalls of dealing with the PRC's debt-trap diplomacy and Russia's harmful role in the region in contrast to the benefits of a strong partnership with the United States.

Question. In the State Department's 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report, Iraq was downgraded to Tier 2 Watch List for failing to meet the minimum standards for the elimination of tracking but is making significant efforts to do so.

If confirmed, what concrete steps could you take to help Iraq operationalize the prioritized recommendations contained in the TIP report?

Answer. If confirmed, I will engage and encourage the relevant stakeholders in the Iraqi government and the Kurdistan Regional Government in their ongoing efforts to address victim protection concerns—including proactively identifying and screening vulnerable populations for trafficking indicators. Civil society engagement on trafficking is key in Iraq and I commit to coordinating closely with organizations working on the issue in-country to strengthen ongoing initiatives to address these concerns. In addition to protection concerns, I would, along with my embassy staff, urge the government to make tangible progress in line with the other recommendations outlined in the TIP Report.

Question. What is your assessment of religious freedom in Iraq and if confirmed, how will you work with the Ambassador At Large for International Religious Freedom to bolster religious freedom in-country?

Answer. Protection for ethnic and religious communities is a priority for the Department and has been a priority for me in my previous tours as Chief of Mission. The Administration supports a stable, prosperous, and democratic Iraq that serves all its citizens, including members of these communities. If confirmed, I will prioritize U.S. assistance programs that encourage durable solutions for members of Iraq's most vulnerable populations, and focus on promoting democratic, inclusive, and rights-respecting governance. I look forward to coordinating with Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom Rashad Hussain on this strategy and meeting with these communities and addressing their concerns if confirmed.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to personally engaging with civil society on this issue?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed, I commit to personally engaging with civil society on this issue. Such engagement has been a hallmark of my previous assignments as Chief of Mission.

Question. If confirmed, what concrete steps can you take to help increase their societal and governmental respect for religious freedom?

Answer. If confirmed, I would use meetings with national and regional government officials to urge increased protections and durable solutions for vulnerable ethnic and religious populations in Iraq in addition to promoting freedom of religion

and belief for all Iraqis. I would also prioritize U.S. assistance programs that protect Iraq's most vulnerable ethnic and religious populations, and focus on promoting a democratic, inclusive, and rights-respecting governance system.

Question. The State Department's 2023 Human Rights Report noted that the human rights situation in Iraq had worsened over the past year and the persistence of significant human rights abuses.

How will you direct your embassy to work with civil society organizations to improve the human rights situation on the ground?

Answer. Inclusion of civil society voices and perspectives is central to open and accountable governance. If confirmed, I would work closely with civil society to understand their perspectives and inform embassy engagement with the government, as I have done in previous assignments. Furthermore, I would urge the Government of Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government to uphold the commitments made during the Summits for Democracy and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms, including freedom of expression, and promote a strong, independent, inclusive, and diverse civil society.

Question. Management is a key responsibility for chiefs of mission. How do you intend to create a unified mission and vision at post?

Answer. To be effective, a Chief of Mission must establish and implement a shared vision and overarching goals, as well as break down bureaucratic stovepipes and encourage whole-of-government approaches. To accomplish this, if confirmed, I intend to lead the Country Team in regular reviews of the Integrated Country Strategy, updating as necessary in coordination with the Washington interagency. I would expect to participate with key members of my team in NSC-hosted interagency meetings whenever possible.

Question. How would you describe your management style?

Answer. I have an open, collaborative management style that encourages innovation, cross-functional collaboration, and organizational learning. I establish clear expectations and prioritize creating a culture of mutual respect.

Question. How do you intend to improve morale at post?

Answer. If confirmed, I would ensure that everyone at Mission Iraq understands the importance to national security of our Mission goals, and how their individual efforts advance these goals. I would seek to understand the motivations of my team members in volunteering for these challenging assignments and ask open-ended questions about how I can help them achieve their own goals. I would encourage healthy practices, including community building.

Question. Do you believe it is ever acceptable or constructive to berate subordinates, either in public or private?

Answer. Berating a subordinate is never acceptable.

Question. How do you envision your relationship with the deputy chief of mission?

Answer. I have worked with eight Deputy Chiefs of Mission (DCMs) while serving as a Chief of Mission, as well as having served as a DCM myself. I consider the DCM to be a fully empowered policy and management partner. My goal for my DCMs is always to boost their competence and confidence so that they are prepared to move forward in their careers.

Question. If confirmed, what leadership responsibilities do you intend to entrust to your deputy chief of mission?

Answer. I would entrust the DCM with day-to-day operational management of the mission under my supervision. I also think it is important to ensure that DCMs have the opportunity to engage in the full range of diplomatic functions of a Chief of Mission, to include engagement with the host country and the media, to ensure that they cannot only pick up in the absence of the Ambassador but are also fully prepared for advancement.

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 performances in order to encourage improvement and reward those who most succeeded in their roles?

Answer. I have always provided accurate, constructive, written feedback for everyone I rate, as well as everyone my immediate subordinates rate, at least three times

a year. I require my managers to do the same. I also ask for feedback on my own performance during these sessions.

Question. If confirmed, would you support and encourage clear, accurate, and direct feedback to employees in order to improve performance and acknowledge high achievers?

Answer. Yes.

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 accomplish fully their missions?

Answer. Across four tours as Chief of Mission, I have encouraged my teams not only to get out of the embassy, but also to get out of the capital. This can be challenging when there are security concerns, as there were in Ethiopia and as there are in Iraq. I believe it is critical to work with the embassy's security experts to mitigate risks so that embassy staff can accomplish their missions.

Question. How do you intend to improve the ability of U.S. diplomats to better access all local populations?

Answer. I will work with the Regional Security Office and the Bureau of Diplomatic Security to mitigate risks.

Question. Congressional travel, including by members (CODELS) or staff (STAFFDELS) serve a critical oversight role.

Do you pledge to support fully CODELS and STAFFDELS that seek to travel to post, including on weekends as well as local and Federal holidays?

Answer. With pleasure.

Question. Do you commit to supporting fully any CODEL or STAFFDEL, with the only exceptions for simultaneous or overlapping visits by the President or First Lady of the United States, the Vice President, or the Secretaries of State or Defense?

Answer. I will fully support a CODEL or STAFFDEL whenever it comes.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO TRACEY ANN JACOBSON 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 PRC 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 its absolute control of Chinese society and industry, the CCP could stop all of these destructive actions tomorrow if it so chooses. Is the CCP an economic, diplomatic, military, and technological threat to the United States?

Answer. Last 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." As Secretary Blinken has said, under President Xi, the CCP has become more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad. If confirmed, I will advance U.S. national security interests and counter the People's Republic of China efforts to expand its problematic influence and use of coercion, through diplomatic engagements, public diplomacy, and commercial advocacy to bolster U.S.-Iraqi ties.

Question. Does the CCP undertake any activities that are beneficial to U.S. interests? If so, please explain.

Answer. 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 2024 Annual Threat Assessment, the CCP is seeking to "preempt challenges to its reputation and legitimacy, undercutting U.S. influence, driving wedges between Washington and its partners, and fostering global norms that favor its authoritarian system."

Question. Do you believe that there are any areas in which the CCP would constructively work with the United States in good faith, knowing that at any moment

Chinese interlocuters with U.S. representatives could be disappeared? If so, please explain.

Answer. The United States will work with the PRC to address transnational challenges when it is in the U.S. interest to do so. If confirmed, I will work with my colleagues across the U.S. interagency and Congress 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 PRC in the countries or areas in which you will work?

Answer. If confirmed, my priority will be advancing U.S. national security interests in Iraq 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 Iraq and the region.

Question. As you may be aware, a group of Federal employees penned an open letter to President Biden criticizing U.S. support for Israel in the aftermath of Hamas' brutal terrorist attack on October 7, 2023. In addition, employees from nearly two dozen agencies have staged walkouts in protest of the administration's Israel policy. Efforts like these directly undermine the duty of our diplomats to advance the policies of the President of the United States. Yes or no, did you sign the letter to the President expressing opposition to the President's Israel policy?

Answer. No, I did not sign the open letter to the President.

Question. Yes or no, did you participate in the January 16, 2024 walkout?

Answer. No, I did not participate.

Question. If confirmed, would you define one of the employees or contractors operating under your supervision signing an open letter criticizing you, or policies you undertake at the instruction of the President, as insubordination as defined by the Government Accountability Office?

Answer. If confirmed, I would seek to address employee concerns personally by creating an open and trusting work environment, free of harassment, discrimination, or reprisal. I am mindful of whistleblower protections, and I value Department employees' right to free speech under the First Amendment. Moreover, I understand the expression of disagreement does not in and of itself constitute insubordination. If confirmed, I would work with human resources professionals and the Department's Office of the Legal Adviser to determine the proper course of action should such a matter arise.

Question. In your view, are the actions these Federal employees took, by anonymously signing a letter to the President of the United States, covered as "whistleblowing"?

Answer. I believe these employees were expressing a dissenting view to their leadership. I support employees' right to express their views and hope that employees feel confident to directly raise their concerns with their supervisors and management. "Whistleblowing" is a term and activity covered by legislation and regulations; I defer to the Department's Office of the Legal Adviser to determine whether the referenced actions are considered protected whistleblowing activity.

Question. If confirmed, how will you address discipline issues, such as insubordination, that do not take established dissent channels?

Answer. If confirmed, I will make sure employees are aware of their chain of command and the standards of conduct required of them as Department employees.

According to Department policy, job-related insubordination is a conduct matter and may result in counseling and/or discipline, including a penalty commensurate with the scale of the offense. If confirmed, I would address conduct issues, including insubordination, in accordance with the Foreign Affairs Manual and in consultation with the Department's human resources and legal professionals.

Question. Have you ever expressed support for an Israeli cease-fire in Gaza?

Answer. No, I have not expressed support for an Israeli cease-fire in Gaza. I understand the Administration has expressed support for an immediate cease-fire in order to secure the release of hostages and surge the delivery of humanitarian aid to those in need.

Question. Do you agree that Hamas is an antisemitic entity?

Answer. Yes, Hamas espouses antisemitism. Hamas, which is designated by the United States as a foreign terrorist organization, seeks to eliminate the State of Israel, and its founding charter calls for the killing of Jews.

Question. Would a cease-fire allow these groups to reconstitute and attack Israel, and Americans, in the future?

Answer. The United States remains committed to reaching a deal for an immediate cease-fire that secures the release of hostages and allows us to surge and sustain humanitarian aid and bolster the protection of civilians. The Administration's hope is that a more enduring peace could be built upon that. Working with partners, the U.S. Government is attempting to secure the release of all hostages held by Hamas. The U.S. Government supports Israel's right to protect itself from Hamas' terrorism consistent with international law.

Question. Do you agree that calling for a cease-fire in Gaza means calling for Israel to stop its pursuit of Hamas, a designated foreign terrorist organization, that orchestrated the October 7 attacks and still refuses to release all Israeli and American hostages?

Answer. The United States remains committed to reaching a deal for an immediate cease-fire that secures the release of hostages and allows us to surge and sustain humanitarian aid and bolster the protection of civilians. The Administrations' hope is that a more enduring peace could be built upon that. Working with partners, the U.S. Government is attempting to secure the release of all hostages held by Hamas. The U.S. Government supports Israel's right to protect itself from Hamas' terrorism consistent with international law.

Question. Do you believe that Israel, in its operation against Hamas, which is known to use civilians as human shields, is taking all necessary steps to minimize civilian casualties?

Answer. It's very difficult in the heat of war to make a definitive assessment about any individual incident but what the National Security Memorandum–20 report States is that the IDF has undertaken steps to implement IHL obligations for the protection of civilians in the current conflict, including the requirements related to distinction, proportionality, and precautions in military operations. Israel's own concern is reflected in the fact it has a number of internal investigations underway.

Question. The State Department Office of Inspector General's (OIG) review of the administration's withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2023 termed it as "disastrous." Specifically, the OIG report highlights significant concerns with the Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) process and Consular Affairs data bases that were not interoperable and hampered vetting the identity of locally employed Afghan staff and contractors since 2016. As the Director of the Afghanistan Task Force, you were ultimately responsible to correct this issue and the overall catastrophic departure of the U.S. from Afghanistan.

It is my understanding that State and DoD utilized a biometric system to vet and verify Afghan employees for operations in country. This system collates information from interagency U.S. partners, and terrorist data bases among others, and is used in other missions, such as Iraq, given security concerns. Did DoD or any other interagency partner approach you or your task force to establish biometrics vetting coordination with Consular Affairs in Washington, DC, for SIV applicants prior to the withdrawal from Afghanistan?

Answer. The task force I led between July 19 and August 15, 2021, was not involved in vetting or biometric coordination. We worked with a population that had been pre-cleared through the interagency.

Question. If so, did you decline this offer?

Answer. The Task Force I led between July 19 and August 15, 2021, was not involved in vetting policy.

Question. Why did you decline biometric vetting for Afghan SIV applicants?

Answer. The task force I led between July 19 and August 15, 2021, was not involved in vetting or biometric coordination. It is my understanding that biometric vetting is required for all SIV applicants to travel to the United States as a matter of law.

Question. To your knowledge, did Consular Affairs utilize the interagency biometric data base for vetting of SIVs or adjudication?

Answer. I understand that all visa applicants' biometrics are screened against both the Department of Homeland Security IDENT data base and the Federal Bureau of Investigation's NGI data base. Between these two data bases, all visa appli-

cants are screened against the most comprehensive biometrics data bases within the Federal Government to help determine their eligibility for a visa. SIV applicants are subject to the same interagency screening, including biometric screening, that all visa applicants worldwide undergo prior to the State Department issuing a visa.

Question. Do they currently utilize the biometric data base?

Answer. I understand that prior to being added to a manifest on a relocation flight with U.S. Government assistance, all Afghans in the U.S. immigration pipeline undergo pretravel vetting, including security checks and medical screening. Every Afghan traveler, regardless of whether they are processed as a refugee, SIV applicant, immigrant visa applicant, or parolee, undergoes rigorous interagency vetting before they are permitted to enter the United States. All Afghan SIV applicants aged 14 and above are subject to fingerprint screening against both the Department of Homeland Security IDENT data base and the Federal Bureau of Investigation's NGI data base.

Question. Did you ever reject or object to efforts by DoD to utilize biometrics on Afghan refugees they were transporting out of Afghanistan to regional allies or ultimately to the U.S.?

Answer. No. I was not involved in vetting or biometric policy and was not in the position to approve or reject any efforts in this regard.

Question. Were you ever informed that State had evacuated Afghan nationals that, once vetted by DoD via biometrics, were on the terror watch list or that their employment was terminated by DoD for malfeasance or criminal activity?

Answer. I am aware that some Afghan national evacuees had vetting issues that precluded their admission into the United States. As I was not involved in vetting, I have no knowledge of those specific issues. To reemphasize, all visa applicants undergo consistent and rigorous vetting, including both biometric and biographic screening against information from across the interagency, prior to being considered for a visa. Every Afghan visa applicant went through this screening. For evacuees who did not receive visas, I refer you to the Department of Homeland Security for their vetting procedures.

Question. Did you ever advocate for any Afghan national's entry into the U.S., or into an allied partner, that had derogatory information in the biometric data bases?

Answer. No.

Question. Why should this committee consider your nomination to Iraq given your past lack of judgment and overall mismanagement during the exit from Afghanistan?

Answer. The Afghanistan Coordination Task Force (ACTF) which I led from July 19 to August 15, 2021, made notable progress in re-energizing the SIV process, which was largely moribund in 2020. In less than a month the ACTF facilitated the arrival of nearly 2,000 Afghans, streamlined medical clearance procedures, and started work on a processing facility in Doha which is still in use today. I was not in charge of the Department's Afghanistan Task Force during the evacuation which began in mid-August 2021 and was not involved in planning or implementing the withdrawal from Afghanistan.

My qualifications for the position of U.S. Ambassador to Iraq include four successful tours as a Chief of Mission and substantial senior leadership experience in Washington.

Question. Since October 2023, Iran-backed proxies have repeatedly attacked U.S. uniformed personnel, including attacks in Iraq, Syria, and Jordan, resulting in the killing of three U.S. servicemembers and a contractor, and injuring dozens more. To date, President Biden has not held Iran accountable for those deaths, their continued destabilization acts in the region, nor has he fully enforced sanctions on Iran which fund their terror machine. As a Senior Advisor to the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, do you agree that Iran is the catalyst for chaos in Iraq and the region?

Answer. Yes, Iran continues to be a destabilizing factor in Iraq and throughout the region. To address Iran's destabilizing actions, the Administration continues to work to contain the threat, deter Iran from conducting destabilizing actions through robust force posture and foreign military arms sales, and defend allies and partners as it did for Israel the night of April 13. The interagency uses a variety of tools, including sanctions, diplomatic engagement with allies and partners, and military action.

Question. What actions is Iran taking or pursuing in Iraq?

Answer. Iran continues to meddle in Iraqi political, economic, and military affairs, providing support for militia groups that advance its interests and undermine Iraq's sovereignty. Iran has repeatedly interfered in Iraq's internal politics at the local and national level, including the repression of free expression. Iran regularly shuts off gas and electricity imports to pressure Iraqi leaders to fulfill its requests. This Administration is continuing a multi-pronged strategy to help Iraq achieve energy independence by reducing its need for energy imports from Iran, including the building of regional interconnections and gas capture.

Question. If confirmed, which specific policies would you undertake to assist Iraq's security regarding Iranian influence?

Answer. If confirmed, I will continue to use all tools available to counter Iran's malign influence, including through support for U.S. self-defense operations when necessary and through the imposition of relevant sanctions on individuals and entities. A strong, sovereign, and prosperous Iraq that is well-integrated in the region is the best bulwark against Iranian influence. If confirmed, I will work with the Government of Iraq to continue strengthening the U.S. military partnership with Iraq's security forces to ensure they are capable of securing Iraq. If confirmed, I will also seek opportunities to promote Iraq's further economic and political reform and integration with the region and strengthen our bilateral economic relationship, both of which contribute to Iraq's security and stability.

Question. In your view, how do Iraqis view engagement with Iran, Russia, and China versus with the West?

Answer. Iraq seeks positive relations with Iran, Russia, the PRC, and the West, but the benefits of a strong partnership with the United States make us the partner of choice. Many Iraqis want to push back on Iran's destabilizing activities, including its support for Iran-aligned militia groups, and meddling in Iraq's internal affairs. The PRC has a significant presence in Iraq's energy sector and has made inroads in the telecommunications sector while Russia has ties with Iraq's energy and security sectors, but they do not bring the same level of quality and expertise that U.S. companies can offer. If confirmed, I will continue to emphasize the value of our partnership and advocate for U.S. companies approved for commercial advocacy. I would also encourage continued cooperation with U.S. sanctions toward Russia and raise our concerns about Russia's harmful role in the region, the pitfalls of the PRC's debt-trap diplomacy, and Iran's destabilizing activity.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO TRACEY ANN JACOBSON BY SENATOR JOHN BARRASSO

Question. How long were you in charge of the Afghanistan Task Force?

Answer. I led the Afghanistan Coordination Task Force (ACTF) from July 19 to August 15, 2021. On August 15, the Department stood up a Crisis Task Force, and the components of the ACTF were repurposed to other functions.

Question. Please describe your role, duties, and involvement in the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan and in dealing with the fall out afterwards.

Answer. Between July 19 and August 15, 2021, I led an interagency team charged with developing and implementing a new process to bring SIV applicants who had completed all security vetting and only required medical clearances to the United States. We then further streamlined the process including by contracting for medical clearances to be completed in Kabul before travel. We also worked to set up a processing facility in Doha, Qatar, which was originally intended only for SIV applicants. During the brief operation of the ACTF we brought nearly 2,000 individuals to the United States. Afterwards, I worked on domestic arrangements for arriving Afghans from August 15–25, 2021, and as the Department's Liaison to the DHS-led Operation Allies Welcome from August 25, 2021, until February 1, 2022.

Question. How many individuals were eligible for SIVs at the time of the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan between February 2020 and August 2021?

Answer. I understand an Afghan's eligibility for an SIV cannot be assessed until the individual has completed all the steps in the process. The process begins with the submission of the required documentation for Chief of Mission (COM) review. Between February 2020 and August 2021, the Department of State's Afghanistan Special Immigrant Visa unit received 10,327 documentarily complete cases for COM review and issued decisions in 8,076 COM cases.

Question. How many individuals applied for SIVs at the time of the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan between February 2020 and August 2021?

Answer. I understand the existing pipeline of SIV applicants in February 2020 totaled approximately 18,000 principal applicants. Between February 2020 and August 2021, the Department created 14,615 new Afghan SIV cases.

Question. How many SIVs were issued between February 2020 and August 2021?

Answer. I understand the Department issued 11,217 SIVs to Afghan principal applicants and their family members between February 2020 and August 2021.

Question. How many SIVs were issued after August 2021?

Answer. I understand the Department issued 50,549 SIVs to Afghan principal applicants and their family members between September 1, 2021, and May 31, 2024.

Question. What measures were taken to evacuate American citizens and Afghan allies, and why were so many left behind?

Answer. As the military evacuation began, American citizens and Afghan allies who had passed through the COM approval process and completed security vetting were invited to come to the Kabul airport to board evacuation flights. The Department also undertook a massive effort involving tens of thousands of calls to U.S. citizens to determine their whereabouts, whether they wanted to leave Afghanistan, and to provide information on how to be evacuated. In collaboration with our military colleagues, the Department of State achieved one of the largest and most successful airlifts in history with nearly 124,000 individuals relocated from Afghanistan since August 2021. The Department is committed to the support of American citizens and to the continuing processing and relocation of SIV applicants. I was not involved in the processes at Kabul Airport and would refer you to the Bureau of Consular Affairs for further information.

Question. Please outline the communication strategy used to inform SIV applicants about their status and the evacuation procedures.

Answer. Our ACTF communications with SIV applicants were limited to logistical information regarding departures during the duration of the ACTF. These communications were by email and started July 21, 2021, with a message to 736 principal applicants outlining the streamlined process and asking about their interest in opting in to the program. Communication with SIV applicants on their application processing and status is managed by the Afghan SIV Unit in the Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs and the Bureau of Consular Affairs.

Question. How do you respond to concerns made by U.S. service members and Afghan allies who feel that the SIV process failed to protect those who were most at risk?

Answer. In the fall of 2021 and January 2022, I had many opportunities to engage with U.S. service members and NGO's founded by U.S. veterans working in support of Afghan Allies about the Department's commitment to continuing to relocate SIV applicants—work that continues in the Afghan SIV Unit and the Office of the Coordinator for Afghanistan Relocation Efforts. I am grateful for the letter of support that Shawn VanDiver, President of AfghanEvac, an umbrella organization for many of these veterans' groups, sent to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on my behalf.

Question. What measures are being taken to locate and assist SIV applicants who remain in Afghanistan or third countries?

Answer. The Office of the Coordinator for Afghan Relocation Efforts (CARE) leads the U.S. government's efforts under Operation Enduring Welcome to relocate Afghan allies to whom the United States has enduring commitments. CARE oversees the process of relocating eligible Afghans from Afghanistan to third-country platforms for immigration processing, ultimately resettling them in the United States. This involves coordination with various U.S. agencies, including the Bureau of Consular Affairs, the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services within the Department of Homeland Security. CARE evolved from the Afghanistan Task Force in the summer of 2021 and is now part of the Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs. It collaborates with other Department of State offices, external stakeholders, NGO's, and the White House to facilitate this comprehensive resettlement effort. U.S. embassies manage relationships with host governments, while CARE focuses on relocation and resettlement preparation. In third countries where the Department conducts Immigrant Visa processing, SIV applicants who are COM-approved can have their SIV case processed and interviewed.

Question. Do you believe the withdrawal was successful?

Answer. The Department undertook a massive effort involving tens of thousands of calls to U.S. citizens to determine their whereabouts, whether they wanted to leave Afghanistan, and to provide information on how to be evacuated. Afghans at risk, including many who were eligible for SIVs, were also evacuated. In collaboration with our military colleagues, the Department of State achieved one of the largest and most successful airlifts in history with nearly 124,000 individuals relocated from Afghanistan since August 2021. This work continues.

Question. Who at the Department of State has been held accountable for the strategic failures and disorganized plans?

Answer. Secretary Blinken called for an after-action review to learn important lessons from the war, fortify the Department's processes to respond to unexpected crises around the world, protect U.S. citizens abroad, and offer support to foreign nationals who work within and assist U.S. diplomatic missions.

As I understand, the Department has already taken more than 40 concrete actions and identified additional steps to guide itself in responding to future crises, some of which have been utilized in Sudan, Ukraine, and Ethiopia. The review was developed for the purpose of informing and improving future operations, and the Department has already begun implementing the lessons. I refer you to the Secretary's staff for additional insights.

Question. What interagency coordination efforts were put in place to process and evacuate SIV applicants during the withdrawal?

Answer. As I understand, interagency coordination occurred in the Afghanistan Task Force, and through interagency processes led by the National Security Council. I note that I was not in charge of the Afghanistan Task Force. SIV applicants who had completed the COM approval process were invited by email to come to the airport during the evacuation. Those who were successfully evacuated were processed at interagency platforms overseas and at interagency-staffed military bases in the United States. In collaboration with military colleagues, the Department of State achieved one of the largest and most successful airlifts in history with nearly 124,000 individuals relocated from Afghanistan since August 2021.

Question. What should have been done differently to ensure a smooth and safer withdrawal process?

Answer. I was not involved in the planning and implementation of the military withdrawal from Afghanistan, but I will note that an after-action review commissioned by the Secretary recognized key areas where improved communications, resources, and preparedness could better inform our response in times of crisis. The Department has already taken more than 40 concrete actions and identified additional steps to guide itself in responding to future crises, some of which have been utilized in Sudan, Ukraine, and Ethiopia. In terms of the efforts of my task force, not a day goes by that I don't wish we'd had more time to effect a smooth and safe withdrawal.

Question. Were there any contingency plans in place for the rapid deterioration of the security situation in Afghanistan? If so, why did they fail?

Answer. I was not involved in contingency or security planning for Afghanistan. I understand that the Embassy maintained an active Emergency Action Committee planning process that convened repeatedly in 2021 and coordinated actively with our DoD colleagues to assess the situation on the ground.

I also understand that by the summer of 2021, and within a few months of President Biden's commitment to the previous Administration's timeline outlined in the Doha Agreement, a taskforce was stood up to facilitate coordination of the evacuation.

State coordinated closely with military colleagues, as is standard practice with all non-combatant evacuation operations. Thanks to their courage and dedication, the U.S. achieved one of the largest and most successful airlifts in history. The U.S. Government relocated nearly 124,000 individuals out of Afghanistan following the collapse of the Afghan security forces.

Question. How do you address concerns that the vetting process for SIV applicants was compromised due to the rapid pace of the withdrawal?

Answer. I was not involved in the vetting process. Candidates for processing under the auspices of the task force I led before the withdrawal had already completed security processing. During and after the withdrawal, I understand that Consular officers, intelligence, law enforcement, and counterterrorism professionals con-

ducted screening and security vetting for all SIV applicants and other vulnerable Afghans in third countries before they were allowed to travel to the United States.

Question. What steps were taken to verify identities and eligibility of SIV applicants under the chaotic conditions of the withdrawal?

Answer. Between July 30 and August 14, 2021, Operation Allies Refuge relocated nearly 2,000 individuals who had completed their SIV background checks and received their SIVs or were pending a medical exam. Between August 14 and August 30, 2021, military airlifts relocated many more at-risk Afghans. Consular officers, intelligence, law enforcement, and counterterrorism professionals conducted screening and security vetting for all SIV applicants and other vulnerable Afghans in third countries before they were allowed to travel to the United States.

Question. What is your strategy to address the safety and security of American personnel in Iraq amidst ongoing regional tensions?

Answer. The safety and security of American personnel is my top priority. I will safeguard the welfare of American citizens and the American personnel under my charge. Iran remains a malign actor in the region, supporting multiple Iran-aligned militias in Iraq that receive weapons, training, and other support from Iran and have attacked U.S. personnel. If confirmed, I will use the full range of U.S. policy tools to stem Iran's influence and protect our personnel while advancing Iraq's security, stability, and sovereignty.

Question. What is the most effective deterrent to Iranian terrorism?

Answer. Iran is a malign influence in the region and supports multiple terrorist and militia groups that advance its interests. If confirmed I will advocate for the use all tools at Unites States' disposal to counter this malign influence including sanctions, diplomatic engagement with allies and partners, and when necessary, military action.

Submitted by Senator Christopher Murphy

ADRIANO ESPAILLAT
13TH DISTRICT, NEW YORK

RANKING MEMBER OF THE APPROPRIATIONS LEGISLATIVE BRANCH SUBCOMMITTEE

BUDGET COMMITTEE MEMBER

2332 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
(202) 225-4365

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

June 13, 2024

SENATE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS
WRITTEN TESTIMONY REGARDING CONFIRMATION OF JUAN CARLOS ITURREGUI, OF MARYLAND, TO BE AMBASSADOR TO THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC FROM THE HONORABLE ADRIANO ESPAILLAT, MEMBER OF CONGRESS REPRESENTING NEW YORK'S 13TH CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

The Honorable Ben Cardin
Chairman
423 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC, 20510

The Honorable James E. Risch
Ranking Member
423 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC, 20510

Dear Chairman Cardin and Ranking Member Risch:

I am writing to express my enthusiastic support for Juan Carlos Iturregui's confirmation as the United States Ambassador to the Dominican Republic. Mr. Iturregui's extensive background and unwavering commitment to strengthening the ties between our two nations make him an exemplary candidate for this important role.

Mr. Iturregui's distinguished career and his profound understanding of the region's socio-economic and political landscapes uniquely position him to advance U.S. interests and foster a robust partnership with the Dominican Republic. His biography reflects a deep dedication to international development and cooperation, as seen in his leadership roles at the Inter-American Foundation, where he has successfully spearheaded numerous initiatives aimed at promoting sustainable development across Latin America and the Caribbean.

The strategic partnership between the United States and the Dominican Republic is of paramount importance. The bipartisan House Resolution 98, which I introduced earlier this Congress, highlights the significance of this bilateral relationship, notes that "the United States and the Dominican Republic share a long history of close relations, including economic, cultural, and familial ties." This resolution underscores our shared commitment to democracy, security, and prosperity in the Western Hemisphere.

Furthermore, the joint readout from the White House on June 10, 2022, emphasizes the critical nature of our engagement with the Dominican Republic and the broader Caribbean region. President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris, in a meeting with leaders of the

Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the Dominican Republic, reaffirmed the administration's commitment to addressing shared challenges such as climate change, energy security, and economic development. The readout states, "The leaders underscored the importance of strong U.S.-Caribbean partnerships to advance a shared vision for a secure, democratic, and prosperous hemisphere."

The economic ties between the United States and the Dominican Republic are substantial and growing. In 2022, the two-way trade of goods between our nations was valued at $22.4 billion, with U.S. exports to the Dominican Republic totaling $12.9 billion and imports amounting to $9.5 billion. Additionally, U.S. foreign direct investment (FDI) in the Dominican Republic totaled $3.4 billion in 2022 and exceeded $4.0 billion in 2023. These statistics underscore the vital role that economic cooperation plays in the U.S.-Dominican Republic bilateral relationship and the importance of continued engagement between our countries to promote mutual prosperity.

Mr. Iturregui's appointment as Ambassador will further solidify this vision. His expertise in navigating complex international issues, coupled with his dedication to fostering inclusive growth and development, will prove invaluable to our bilateral relations. His leadership will undoubtedly help advance shared goals, including the promotion of democratic values, economic cooperation, and regional security for the future of our Hemisphere.

In conclusion, I strongly urge the Committee to confirm Juan Carlos Iturregui as the United States Ambassador to the Dominican Republic. His exceptional qualifications and proven track record make him the ideal representative to strengthen and expand the enduring relationship between our two nations.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Adriano Espaillat
Member of Congress

Submitted by Senator Christopher Murphy

#AFGHAN EVAC

@AfghanEvac | contact@afghanevac.org | afghanevac.org

EIN:87-3921693 | 501(c)3

6/10/2024

Dear Chairman Cardin and Ranking Member Risch,

I am writing to offer my wholehearted support for the nomination of Ambassador Tracey Jacobson to the position of U.S. Ambassador to Iraq. As President and Chairman of #AfghanEvac, an organization dedicated to the relocation and resettlement of Afghan allies, I have had the privilege of witnessing first hand Ambassador Jacobson's exceptional leadership and unwavering commitment to our mission.

In the critical month preceding the disastrous fall of Kabul, Ambassador Jacobson and her interagency team successfully brought nearly 2,000 Afghan allies and their families to the United States, despite decimated resettlement and refugee support systems. Her leadership was instrumental in beginning the streamlining of the Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) process and establishing a processing center in Doha, Qatar which continues to operate today. These and subsequent efforts have significantly accelerated the pace of SIV arrivals.

During her tenure as the State Department's representative to the DHS-led Operation Allies Welcome from September 2021 to January 2022, Ambassador Jacobson consistently drove innovation and fostered collaboration in an ever-evolving and chaotic situation. Her work with our NGO partners was marked by collegiality, creativity, and transparency, which were essential to our success in increasing the rate of SIV arrivals. It is noteworthy that in the last nine months of 2020, there were almost no SIV arrivals, a stark contrast to the progress achieved under her guidance.

Ambassador Jacobson's contributions to the Afghan relocation efforts have had a lasting and meaningful impact. I have known her to be an energetic, committed, and mission-oriented leader. Her strategic vision and ability to navigate complex interagency dynamics make her an ideal candidate for the role of U.S. Ambassador to Iraq.

I am confident that Ambassador Jacobson will bring the same level of dedication and excellence to her new role, and I fully support her nomination.

Thank you for considering this recommendation. If you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Shawn VanDiver
President
#AfghanEvac

NOMINATIONS

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 11, 2024

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

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:02 a.m., in room SD–419, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Benjamin L. Cardin, Chairman of the committee, presiding.

Present: Senators Cardin [presiding], Shaheen, Booker, Schatz, Van Hollen, Helmy, Risch, Ricketts, and Young.

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

The CHAIRMAN. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee will come to order.

I first want to welcome our nominees and thank them for their willingness to serve our Nation. You have made incredible sacrifices and we thank you for your continued interest in serving our country and we thank your families because we know you cannot do this without the support of your family.

This is our first committee hearing since the return from the August recess. A lot of us had a chance to travel during the August recess. I had a chance to meet with President Zelensky at the Ambrosetti conference in Italy along with Senator Wicker, and—excuse me, along with Senator Marshall and Senator Graham, and we had a chance to talk to him directly about the current challenges in Ukraine and I must tell you it is heartbreaking to see what Mr. Putin is doing in regards to the attacks against civilian populations and the infrastructure of Ukraine.

So I have issued a Statement today that says in light of the recent Russian actions the time has come to further loosen restrictions on the Ukrainians' use of American-provided weapons. Giving the Ukrainian Armed Forces greater flexibility against military targets will degrade Russia's ability to attack the Ukrainian people. I hope that the United States will give these permissions without delay.

It is time to allow Ukraine to be able to defend itself against these air attacks in a more effective way and the United States needs to be the leader in that regard.

I tell you we also had a chance to travel to Brussels to meet with our NATO Secretary General, who sends his best to Ambassador Smith. It was a great visit with Secretary General Stoltenberg.

He was very optimistic with the progress that we have made in unity among the NATO partners, particularly as it relates to support for Ukraine.

NATO is taking a larger and larger role in that regard and I think that is in large measure thanks to the work of Ambassador Smith. The Washington Summit was a great success, the unity there for Ukraine and a movement toward recognizing the threat of China.

So it was a good visit and we look forward to advancing the support for Ukraine and the strength of NATO. Today the world faces multiple, various serious [inaudible].

Before I do that, I see that Senator Helmy has joined us and I wanted to welcome him officially to our committee. Senator Helmy, you are fortunate not only to be in the U.S. Senate but to serve in this committee. We hope you feel that way during the next couple months, but we know that you are ready to get started.

You come with a great deal of experience being the former chief of staff for Governor Murphy of New Jersey. You are a product of New Jersey which is, I think, very valuable for our committee.

You served as a staff person for Senator Lautenberg. That gets you very high marks around here. And then you served on the staff of Senator Booker. We will see whether that gets you high marks or not as we go through this.

[Laughter.]

The CHAIRMAN. But we thank you for your willingness to serve and we look forward to working with you on this committee.

Today the world faces multiple various serious world crises. Some of these conflicts are in the headlines like the war in Ukraine or the war in Gaza. Others get less attention like Venezuela, Burma, and Sudan.

To advance American interests and values and confront these challenges we must fill one of our most important diplomatic posts, the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs.

Ambassador Smith, if confirmed you will lead the State Department's regional and bilateral policymaking across eight bureaus so I look forward to hearing from you about what you will do to advance a foreign policy agenda centered on American values.

How will you work to protect U.S. citizens and U.S. interests, defend human rights, fight corruption and strengthen democracies around the world?

This matters standing up to autocrats who mock our values, our interests, in the international community and our democratic processes and it matters to our allies.

As you know from our work at NATO, our best partners are the democracies of the world. If confirmed, you will play a key role leading our diplomatic efforts with our allies and partners not only to address the conflicts that touch millions of lives around the world but to seize opportunities to advance our interests and values globally.

Senator Shaheen will give a more—a full introduction to you prior to your testimony.

Ms. Hallett, if confirmed you will be our next Ambassador to Bahrain. As host to the Fifth Fleet and forward element of the

Navy's Central Command, Bahrain is on the forefront of our common defense against Iranian aggression.

Bahrain has been a stalwart partner in peace and in a region marred in challenges Bahrain continues to make progress in areas that reflect our shared interests like in the recent prisoners release.

Ms. Hallett, I hope you will speak about how you would continue to build on this important relationship, deepening our cooperation and progress across all of our shared interests including continuing to enhance respect for human rights and the rule of law.

Ms. Daschbach, if confirmed you will be taking over our mission in Togo as it faces a profound struggle with political freedoms. A constitutional change enacted earlier this year will allow Togo's current head of State to remain in power indefinitely.

This decline in democratic rights comes at the same time that the country faces attacks from militant groups in the Sahel. I hope you will discuss how the United States should best go about supporting counterterrorism efforts while at the same time continuing to push for respect for fundamental freedoms.

Mr. Heath, if confirmed you will be our Ambassador to Malawi, which is scheduled to hold Presidential elections next year. I look forward to hearing from you about how the United States can support a credible contest and how we plan to help the people of that country fight pervasive corruption.

Mr. Jones, I want to express appreciation for the critical role you played for more than a year to prepare for the NATO summit. I would like to hear how you think we can support Bosnia's fragile governing institutions in the face of efforts by bad actors inside and outside the country to impede progress if you are confirmed to be the Ambassador there.

It has been now 20 years and we are still working under the same Dayton Accords, which was a temporary structure for power in the country—sharing of power. How can we move forward with the constitutional reforms that are going to be necessary if Bosnia is truly going to be an independent effective country?

We should not allow Russian-backed media or politicians to undermine Bosnia's efforts to deepen ties and integrate with Europe.

Before turning to Senator Risch, let me acknowledge today marks the anniversary of the 9/11 attacks that forever changed our country. I still remember that day vividly, as I am sure many of you do as well.

While it has been more than two decades since that terrible morning, the pain of that day remains raw for many Americans. Around this time 23 years ago, the first World Trade Center tower collapsed and Flight 93 crashed into a field in Pennsylvania due to the heroism of those Americans.

Today and every day we should honor those Americans and the lives of those that were lost that day.

With that, let me turn it over to my distinguished partner, the ranking member Senator Risch.

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

Senator RISCH. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and I think all of us are mindful that today is 9/11 and we will be, I am sure. Our entire lives that day clearly changed America.

We realize that we do have vulnerabilities, and unlike a lot of countries that are on the front line of fighting the U.S. generally is not.

So when something like this happens it brings home to us very clearly some of the needs that we have to protect this country, and the country has changed since then and certainly we are much more aware of the vulnerabilities that we have.

Thank you to our nominees for being here today. I want to talk about each of them briefly, starting with the nominee to be Under Secretary for Political Affairs, Ambassador Smith.

I appreciate your service as the U.S. Ambassador to NATO, especially during this critical—this crucial time of Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine. There is no doubt that that has been and continues to be important. However, if confirmed, you will be responsible for the formulation and conduct of U.S. policy globally.

Beyond addressing Russia's war against Ukraine, the U.S.' number-one challenge is China. We cannot take our eyes off this strategic priority.

We must do more to combat China's efforts to dominate the Indo-Pacific and exert malign influence across the world including at international organizations and in Africa and even in our own hemisphere.

I fear and I feel as if the administration has had a policy of deescalation that has only weakened U.S. interest. I will be interested in hearing your thoughts on that.

Additionally, Iran and its proxies including Hamas continue to present a significant threat to Israel, the Middle East and beyond. If confirmed, you will be responsible for supervising the department and implementation of interagency policies abroad.

I expect and hope that you will maintain a strong working relationship with this committee and encourage department officials at all levels to be responsive to committee requests.

We have strong constitutional requirements in this regard and I hope you will work with us.

On the nominee to be Ambassador to Bahrain, I am pleased to see Stephanie Hallett nominated. Bahrain is a critical ally. It is the only Gulf participant in the maritime coalition against the Houthis and it has hosted the U.S. Navy since the Second World War.

This week marks 1 year since the comprehensive security integration and prosperity agreement between the U.S. and Bahrain. This agreement enhances bilateral ties and I want to hear how you will take this U.S.-Bahrain relationship further.

On the nominee to Bosnia and Herzegovina, that country faces some of the toughest political challenges since the creation of its current political system.

Despite various U.S. and EU-led reform efforts to increase European integration, Bosnia still faces serious risks posed by tough economic conditions, malign foreign influence, and the secessionist movement of Republika Srpska.

Bosnia's future is critical, particularly for stability across the Western Balkan regions and broader Europe. I look forward to hearing how you plan to support a productive U.S. policy in Bosnia.

Moving into the nomination for Ambassador to Malawi, Malawi currently faces severe economic challenges and has important general elections next year. The U.S. is committed to Malawi's ongoing democratic consolidation.

Following the unexpected departure of our last Ambassador, Mr. Heath's nomination is timely and critical to support U.S. interests in Malawi.

Finally, on the nomination of Ambassador to Togo, Togo is an important partner in efforts to build resilience against violent extremism and counter global actors in coastal west Africa.

The next Ambassador must work closely with the Togolese government which is increasingly vulnerable to security threats in neighboring Sahel States. We must also help open the Togolese political system to be more inclusive and democratic for the country's future stability. I look forward to hearing ideas on how to make this a reality.

Before I close I want to address the status of nominees in our committee and the allegations, untrue, that our side does not value having confirmed Ambassadors to compete with adversaries.

Nothing is further from the truth. I said over and over again—I was a Governor and I understand that to operate government you need to have people in place. I have always worked in good faith to move qualified career nominees.

Unfortunately, the State Department regularly disregards this good faith cooperation. This committee should not and cannot rubber stamp nominees while State continues to be unresponsive to oversight requests.

Our solemn constitutional duty demands and our oath of office demands that we take this job and take this job seriously.

I still have no response from the administration to my letters regarding basic questions about the suspension of Special Envoy Robert Malley's security clearance.

The Chairman has worked with me on this trying to get this information. He has not been able to get it either. This just is unacceptable.

This committee has constitutional duties of oversight. We are entitled to the information. I also have numerous other letters to the department that await answers.

Now USAID cites the Privacy Act to withhold information needed to review personnel files of people up for promotion. There is a severe lack of cooperation on important information requests. Cooperation is a two-way street but often the administration only wants it one way.

This blatant disregard for keeping the Senate informed extends to many of my colleagues whose only recourse is to hold nominees on the Senate floor. The Senate is charged with advice and consent but the administration disregards the advice part.

As a result, we are left with only the penalty of the consent part. These are not just words but are serious constitutional obligations.

We are bound to take every action necessary to do our job.

[Phone rings.]

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

We are bound to take every action necessary to do our job and so it shall be. Notwithstanding the whining to the contrary, we are going to continue to insist that we get this information and use the only penalty available to us, which should not be but is simply because of the lack of cooperation on the other side.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Risch.

And I believe we can do both. We can do our proper oversight and we need to make sure we confirm our Ambassadors or at least have the hearings and determine by the majority vote as to whether we should recommend the nominees to the full Senate.

But I agree with you, we also need to carry out our oversight responsibilities and I have always exercised my authority as chairman to assist you in that regard and will continue to do that.

But I do think we need to move our nominees, particularly our career nominees out of our committee.

Senator RISCH. Mr. Chairman, can I respond?

The CHAIRMAN. Certainly.

Senator RISCH. Briefly, first of all, I want to thank you for helping me with the Malley situation. I mean, this is unconscionable. You and I both hammered as hard as we could on the administration and they not only snubbed me, they snubbed you.

We are entitled to this information. This is the committee of oversight. For them to continually stiff arm us on this and the reasons they use are unconscionable. We have the same security clearances that they do, in some cases more, and they still will not give us the information.

It is not right. So what do you do? I mean, we can either fold our tent and go home and say, well, OK, you know, you can have your way.

The CHAIRMAN. And I agree with you on this issue but you are focusing, I think, on the wrong agency. It is not Department of State. It is the Department of Justice, and I would agree with you the Department of Justice, because of its traditional independent standing, has very rigid rules in regards to sharing information.

I do not necessarily agree with that and I have said that I do not agree with it, but it is not the Department of State and the leverage on Department of State is not going to change the Department of Justice.

Senator RISCH. Mr. Chairman, with all due respect, and I mean that sincerely, the State Department has the information. They admitted to you and I that they do have that information and they say they cannot release it because of—they are told not to by the Justice Department.

We are at least as good as the Department of State. If State can have it we can have it. We both have a joint obligation here.

So in any event, I guess it is what it is and I do not know—I do not know why they do not trust us with the information but we will have to do what we have to do and I guess they will do what they have to do.

The CHAIRMAN. And I hope our nominees are still willing to go forward with their positions.

[Laughter.]

The CHAIRMAN. With that, let me turn to Senator Shaheen.

STATEMENT OF HON. JEANNE SHAHEEN,
U.S. SENATOR FROM NEW HAMPSHIRE

Senator SHAHEEN. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to begin by congratulating all of our nominees this morning. Thank you for your willingness of you and your families to continue to serve this country, and welcome to the Foreign Relations Committee.

As you know, usually we get along pretty well on this committee and I think what you heard is a legitimate difference of opinion on an issue.

But this morning I am especially honored to be able to introduce Julie Smith, our current Ambassador to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and President Biden's nominee to be the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs.

I chair the Subcommittee on Europe and Regional Security Cooperation and I am co-chair of something called the Senate NATO Observer Group, and in those capacities, I have had the opportunity to work closely with Ambassador Smith over the past 3 years.

She has made it her priority to frequently brief Members of Congress on her efforts at NATO and I think that has really been important to ensuring bipartisan support for the alliance.

During her time at NATO she has deftly navigated some of the most consequential policy decisions for the alliance certainly in my lifetime. She coordinated our intelligence sharing ahead of Russia's invasion of Ukraine to ensure a swift and unified response.

She helped secure the enlargement of NATO to include Sweden and Finland, which has ultimately strengthened NATO's preparedness in light of new challenges, and alongside our NATO allies—our other allies—she helped launch NATO's Strategic Concept which serves as the blueprint for NATO's policy for the next decade as we address future challenges.

And I think something that is of particular concern to this committee and to the Senate is her efforts to increase defense spending among allies in NATO. Twenty-three allies are now meeting the defense spending target, up from six prior to Russia's invasion of Ukraine and, certainly, Ambassador Smith has been critical in making that happen. So thank you.

And she has not just strengthened NATO and galvanized the world in support of Ukraine. She has led efforts to broaden NATO's engagement toward the Indo-Pacific.

Ambassador Smith led the first ever trip of NATO Ambassadors to Japan and South Korea and she has consistently advocated among allies to ensure that NATO bolsters its partnerships with our Indo-Pacific partners as we address the multitude of security challenges that are posed by the People's Republic of China.

I believe this experience has prepared her well to undertake the role of Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs.

Her recent experience builds upon almost 30 years of working on security issues both in and out of government. She has worked at both the Pentagon and the White House and at some of America's most esteemed think tanks including the Center for Strategic and

International Studies, the German Marshall Fund, and the Center for New American Security.

And prior to her current role, and I think this is of particular interest to the committee, she spent 3 years researching Europe's evolving attitudes and vulnerabilities as they relate to China, which is a subject that is of great concern not just to this committee but to the entire Congress.

I want to acknowledge Ambassador Smith's husband David and (** 20:48 Senator Megan?) who are here this morning and, Ambassador Smith, I am sure that your late father would be very proud of your recent nomination.

I am delighted that we are here considering Ambassador Smith's nomination before this committee and I am sure that my colleagues will agree and appreciate her thoughtful answers to our questions.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Shaheen.

I will now introduce the four other nominees. They all have a lot in common. They have all devoted their careers to public service in the State Department and in foreign policy issues, and we thank them. They all bring a broad experience to the position that they have been nominated to.

Stephanie Hallett is a career member of the Senior Foreign Service. She currently serves as the deputy chief of mission at the U.S. embassy in Jerusalem and served as charge d'affaires from July to November 2023.

I particularly want to acknowledge her extraordinary work during the horrific October 7th attack. She was on the ground. She saw firsthand the brutality of Hamas and was our Ambassador there, literally to help explain what was happening and the U.S.' strong support for Israel. So we particularly appreciate that service.

Doug Jones assumed his responsibility as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs in September 2021. He oversees European security including NATO and OSCE and conventional arms control, northern Europe including the United Kingdom, Ireland and the Nordic and Baltic countries as well as Arctic security.

Most recently, Mr. Jones served as charge and deputy chief of mission at the U.S. mission at NATO. He served two other assignments as deputy chief of mission at U.S. embassies in Croatia and Montenegro.

Michael Heath is a career member of Senior Foreign Service with the rank of minister counselor, and is Deputy Assistant Secretary for West Africa in the Bureau of African Affairs.

He was previously Chargé and Deputy Chief of Mission in Bangkok, Thailand. He also served as the Acting Deputy Chief of Mission in Canberra, Australia.

Mary Daschbach is a career member of the Senior Foreign Service with the rank of counselor, and is currently deputy chief of mission in the Republic of Cameroon where she also serves as charge.

She was also the charge and Deputy Chief of Mission in the Republic of Congo and, again, she has a long list of service in her career positions.

We welcome all of you to the committee. Your full testimony will be included in our record. You may proceed as you wish. We ask that you try to summarize your comments in about 5 minutes, leaving time for questions from the members.

With that, we will start with Ambassador Smith.

STATEMENT OF HON. JULIE SMITH, OF MICHIGAN, NOMINATED TO BE AN UNDER SECRETARY OF STATE [POLITICAL AFFAIRS]

Ms. SMITH. Chairman Cardin, Ranking Member Risch, distinguished senators, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.

I am deeply grateful to President Biden and Secretary Blinken for nominating me to serve as the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs. If confirmed, it would be an honor to serve as the third woman in this role since it was created in 1959.

I want to start by thanking my husband David and our two sons, Liam and Dylan. I would not be here today without their love, support, and sacrifice. I also want to thank my mother and my stepfather who are watching from the beautiful woods of northern Michigan, and my sister who has joined us here today, for their guidance and encouragement.

As we all know, today marks 23 years since the September 11th terrorist attacks and I want to begin by honoring the nearly 3,000 innocent people who were killed on that tragic day.

We must never forget the victims of al-Qaeda's horrific attacks, their families and, of course, the first responders who risked their own lives to save others.

The 9/11 attacks profoundly changed American foreign policy, ushering in more than two decades of focus on the threat of violent extremism and dangerous nonState actors.

Today terrorism remains a major challenge and we must remain vigilant. But over my decades of work on national security I have seen the rise of other threats and challenges, from Russia's flagrant war of aggression in Ukraine and China's attempts to dismantle and rewrite the rules of the international system, to Iran and North Korea's malign and destabilizing actions.

The United States is tackling a complex set of national security challenges. This demands a strong, bipartisan, and innovative foreign policy that advances our interests, upholds our values, and protects our people.

Our alliances and partnerships around the world are the envy of our rivals. Our ability to mobilize like-minded countries in institutions like the United Nations, in alliances like NATO, or even in smaller coalitions is an extraordinary strategic advantage.

But that does not just happen on its own. If confirmed it will be one of my highest priorities to expand and sharpen this unique strategic edge.

As U.S. Ambassador to NATO, I have seen firsthand the value of U.S. leadership and the power of alliances. Today NATO is stronger, bigger, and more united than ever. Our allies are spending more on defense and they have stepped up to support Ukraine.

NATO has strengthened its toolkit on cybersecurity and protecting critical infrastructure and it has deepened its work with its

Indo-Pacific partners. If I earn your support I will bring principled and tough-minded U.S. leadership to the role of Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs.

I will invest deeply in key relationships with allies and partners to share the burden of our common security and to tackle pressing challenges together.

I have great admiration for all of my colleagues at the Department of State. I am so grateful for the commitment they have to public service and I would relish the opportunity to work closely with them to do even more for the American people.

And I commit to you that if confirmed, I will continue to consult, to cooperate, and work with Congress toward our common goals. Your support and partnership are central to our collective foreign policy success.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared Statement of Ms. Smith follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF JULIE SMITH

Chairman Cardin, Ranking Member Risch, distinguished Senators, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I am deeply grateful to President Biden and Secretary Blinken for nominating me to serve as the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs. If confirmed, it would be a high honor to serve as the third woman in this role since it was created in 1959.

I want to start by thanking my husband David and our two sons, Liam and Dylan. I would not be here today without their love, support, and sacrifice. I also want to thank my parents (who are watching from the beautiful woods of northern Michigan) and my sister (who is here today) for their guidance and encouragement.

As we all know, today marks 23 years since the September 11th terrorist attacks, and I want to begin by honoring the nearly 3,000 innocent people who were killed on that tragic day. We must never forget the victims of Al-Qaeda's horrific attacks, their families, and the first responders who risked their lives to save others. The 9/11 attacks profoundly changed American foreign policy, ushering in more than two decades of focus on the threat of violent extremism and dangerous non-state actors.

Today, terrorism remains a major national security challenge, and we must remain vigilant. But over my decades of work on national security, I have seen the rise of other threats and challenges.

From Russia's flagrant war of aggression in Ukraine to China's attempts to dismantle and rewrite the rules of the international system to Iran and North Korea's malign and destabilizing actions, the United States is tackling a complex set of national security challenges. That demands a strong, bipartisan, innovative, and deeply American foreign policy that advances our interests, upholds our values, and protects our people.

Our alliances and partnerships around the world are the envy of our rivals. Our ability to mobilize like-minded countries in institutions like the United Nations, in Alliances like NATO, or in smaller coalitions is an extraordinary strategic advantage. But that doesn't just happen on its own. If confirmed, it will be one of my highest priorities to expand and sharpen this unique strategic edge.

We are working tirelessly with our counterparts in the Middle East to swiftly reach a ceasefire to bring the hostages home and move to end the tragic Israel-Gaza conflict. We have underscored our ironclad commitment to Israel's security by helping ward off Iran's massive barrage in April and are working with partners to avoid an all-out regional war.

We are working with our partners and allies in the Indo-Pacific to deter PRC malign activity, resist bullying, improve maritime security, and promote global economic growth.

We are partnering with African nations to bring greater economic prosperity, stability, health security, and development to the region.

We are working by, with, and through our neighbors in the Western Hemisphere to stop irregular migration and enhance security and prosperity for all.

And we are working across the entire globe to combat climate change to ensure that our kids inherit a sustainable world.

As U.S. Ambassador to NATO, I have seen firsthand the value of U.S. leadership and the power of alliances. Today NATO is stronger, bigger, and more united than

ever. Our Allies are spending more on defense and have stepped up to support Ukraine, isolate Russia, and enhance deterrence on the Eastern Flank. NATO has strengthened its toolkit on cybersecurity, protecting critical infrastructure, and emerging and disruptive technology, and it has deepened its work with its four Indo-Pacific partners. In fact, I was proud to be the first U.S. Ambassador to take a delegation of NATO Ambassadors to Tokyo and Seoul last year.

If I earn your support, I will bring principled and tough-minded U.S. leadership to the role of Under Secretary for Political Affairs. I will invest deeply in key relationships with allies and partners to share the burden of our common security and to tackle the most pressing challenges we face around the world.

I have great admiration for my colleagues at the Department of State. I am grateful every day for their commitment to service, and I would relish the opportunity to work closely with them to do even more for the American people. If confirmed, I will continue the Department's work to draw on the full talents of the American people, including advancing diversity and inclusion across the Department. And I will join colleagues in the important task of modernizing the Department.

And I commit to you that if confirmed, I will continue to consult, cooperate, and work with Congress toward our common goals. Your support and partnership are central to our foreign policy success, and I will do my part to continue the bipartisan tradition of working together to advance American leadership.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much.

Ms. Hallett?

STATEMENT OF STEPHANIE L. HALLETT, OF FLORIDA, 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 KINGDOM OF BAHRAIN

Ms. HALLETT. Chairman Cardin, Ranking Member Risch, and distinguished members of the committee, I am honored to appear before you today as President Biden's nominee to serve as Ambassador to the Kingdom of Bahrain.

I am grateful for the confidence that the President and Secretary Blinken have placed in me. I am proud to share this day with my husband Bob Castro and our daughter Grace. I am beyond grateful for their love and commitment to service.

I am also very proud to be joined by my mom and Foreign Service colleague Kathy Hallett. I owe so much of who and where I am to her.

My late father Barry served as a U.S. Marine and combat veteran and would be beaming to see me sitting before you today. I am thankful for the love of my sister Kelley and stepmother Karen, and for the mighty support of colleagues and friends, especially Patty.

I first answered the call to public service by joining the State Department in the aftermath of September 11th and so it is especially poignant to be sitting before you here today.

Over the past two decades I have been proud to advance U.S. interests in the Middle East and to support greater stability, prosperity, and opportunity for the people of that region.

This month we commemorate the fourth anniversary of the signing of the Abraham Accords. From my perch in Jerusalem, I have seen firsthand the commitment that Bahrain and Israel share to their bilateral partnership.

If confirmed, I will seek ways to deepen and strengthen the ties between Jerusalem and Manama. Bahrain's hosting of NAVCENT

and the combined maritime forces is critically important in the face of growing threats to maritime security in the region.

Bahrain is committed to strengthening our partnership including through the U.S.-Bahrain Comprehensive Security Integration and Prosperity Agreement, C-SIPA for short.

If confirmed, I will continue to enhance this partnership to jointly address threats to regional stability.

Building upon the bedrock of our security and defense ties C-SIPA also seeks to deepen our bilateral economic and technological cooperation, presenting new opportunities for American businesses. If confirmed, I will ensure C-SIPA continues to yield value to the American people.

Since I first arrived in Manama a decade ago, Bahrain has made strides in advancing human rights but more progress can be made. If confirmed, I will support Bahrain's efforts to continue improving human rights and encourage an inclusive society and political dialog.

The United States overwhelmingly remains Bahrain's strategic partner of choice. If confirmed, I will work to ensure Bahrain's relations with Russia and China do not negatively impact U.S. interests.

Bahrain is clear eyed about its diplomatic engagement with Iran and we will continue working together to defend against Iran's aggression and plotting.

As always, if confirmed my highest priority will be the safety of American citizens including U.S. service members in Bahrain.

Thank you again for the honor to address this committee and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared Statement of Ms. Hallett follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF STEPHANIE L. HALLETT

Chairman Cardin, Ranking Member Risch, and distinguished Members of the committee, I am honored to appear before you today as President Biden's nominee to serve as Ambassador to the Kingdom of Bahrain. I am deeply grateful to the President and Secretary Blinken for their confidence in me and to the Committee for considering my appointment.

I am proud to share this day with my husband, Bob Castro, and our daughter Grace. My family's service to our country is a profound honor. But it is not without hardship and sacrifice, and for that I am beyond grateful for Bob and Grace's love and commitment. I am also very proud to be joined today by my mom—and Foreign Service colleague—Kathy Hallett. My mom is my rock, and I owe so much of who and where I am to her. My late father Barry also served our great nation as a U.S. Marine and combat veteran. He would be beaming to see me sitting before you today. I am also grateful for the love of my sister Kelley and stepmother Karen, and for the mighty support of my colleagues, mentors, and friends, especially Patty.

I first answered the call to public service by joining the State Department in the aftermath of September 11th, so it is especially poignant to sit before you today on the anniversary of that lifechanging day. Over the past two decades, I have been proud to advance U.S. interests in the Middle East and to support greater stability, prosperity, and opportunity for the people of the region. I helped lead our embassies in Israel, Cyprus, and Oman, and served as the Gulf Director at the National Security Council. If confirmed, I will be guided by my experiences in the region, including my previous posting in Bahrain.

This month we commemorate the fourth anniversary of the signing of the Abraham Accords. From my perch in Jerusalem, I have seen firsthand the commitment Bahrain and Israel share to their bilateral partnership. But the full breadth and depth of that partnership remains untapped. If confirmed, I will seek ways to deepen ties between Jerusalem and Manama.

Our countries' defense ties are the foundation of our bilateral relationship. A major non-NATO ally and Major Security Partner, Bahrain's hosting of NAVCENT, the U.S. Navy's Fifth Fleet, and the Combined Maritime Forces is critically important in the face of growing threats to maritime security. As a member of Operation Prosperity Guardian and Operation Poseidon Archer, Bahrain has punched above its weight to address threats to the free flow of commerce in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden. Bahrain has demonstrated a clear commitment to strengthening our close partnership, including through the U.S.-Bahrain Comprehensive Security Integration and Prosperity Agreement (C-SIPA). If confirmed, I will continue to enhance this partnership to address evolving security challenges and threats to regional stability.

Building upon the bedrock of our security and defense ties, C-SIPA also seeks to deepen our bilateral economic and technological cooperation, opening new opportunities for American businesses. In the year since C-SIPA was signed, we've seen the resumption of the Free Trade Agreement Joint Committee and Bahrain's increased commitment to trusted cellular and computer networks. If confirmed, I will build upon these early successes to ensure C-SIPA continues to yield value for the American people.

Since I first served in Manama a decade ago, Bahrain has made significant strides in advancing human rights, particularly in developing alternative legal pathways and prison reforms. But more progress can be made. We regularly raise human rights issues—including the cases of high-profile prisoners—with Bahrain's leaders. This year, more than 2,500 prisoners were released. I believe we should support such positive moves, even as we continue to press for more progress. I commend Bahrain for being a regional leader in combatting traffcking in persons and its commitment to a pluralistic society and religious coexistence. If confirmed, I will work to support Bahrain's efforts to continue improving human rights conditions and encourage an inclusive society and political dialogue.

The United States overwhelmingly remains Bahrain's strategic partner of choice. If confirmed, I will work hard to ensure that we remain Bahrain's foremost security, economic, and technology partner, and that Bahrain's relations with Russia and China do not negatively impact U.S. interests. I am closely tracking Bahrain's diplomatic engagement with Iran. Bahrain understands the risks of engaging Iran, and we will continue working together to protect and defend against Iran's aggression and plotting.

As always, my highest priority, if confirmed, will be the safety of American citizens, including U.S. service members and their families in Bahrain, and my colleagues at Embassy Manama.

Thank you again for the honor to address this Committee today. I look forward to your questions.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you for your comments.

Mr. Jones?

STATEMENT OF DOUGLAS D. JONES, OF MARYLAND, 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 BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Mr. JONES. Chairman Cardin, Ranking Member Risch, and distinguished members of this committee, it is an honor to appear before you today as President Biden's nominee to be the U.S. Ambassador to Bosnia and Herzegovina.

If confirmed, I pledge to work closely with this committee and others in Congress to advance U.S. interests in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

I would not be here today without the love and support of my family, friends, and colleagues. I would like to thank my wife Karen, who I met 24 years ago in Bosnia and Herzegovina where she worked for almost 7 years with NGO's, helping refugees return home from the war, for her love and support throughout many postings, frequent moves, and long separations.

We are blessed with our daughter Sophia and her remarkable resilience and indomitable sense of adventure growing up through multiple moves, countries, and schools.

I am grateful to my parents and my sisters, Alison, Lorraine and Hilary. To my late father, who served in the military and was also a Foreign Service Officer, I am indebted for instilling in me a calling to public service and for showing me the power of the United States and its values to inspire positive change throughout the world, and to my mother, who always championed my education and supported me whatever direction I decided to take.

The security and stability of Bosnia and Herzegovina is a critical piece to the United States' goal of a Europe whole, free, and at peace. The United States has played a pivotal role in Bosnia and Herzegovina for decades, bringing an end to a horrible war through the Dayton Peace Accords which laid the foundation for peace and stability.

Bosnia and Herzegovina has tremendous potential but that potential is too often stymied by corruption, ethno-nationalist divisions, and political dysfunction. If confirmed, I look forward to leading our excellent team at U.S. Embassy Sarajevo to protect the United States' decades of investment in Bosnia and Herzegovina by supporting its Euro-Atlantic integration as the only viable future for the country and working with our allies and partners on the necessary reforms for progress on membership in the European Union and NATO.

I am committed to using all available tools including sanctions and supporting the authority of the High Representative when called for to push back against internal and external malign influences that wish to break the country apart.

If confirmed, I will support rule of law and anti-corruption reforms at all levels of government. Tackling corruption is key to achieving real progress on Euro-Atlantic integration, government functionality, and economic opportunity.

Finally, I will work to thwart the efforts of local and outside actors, especially Russia and the People's Republic of China, that seek to undermine the security and stability of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

To the chair and ranking member, I thank this committee and other Members of Congress for your interest and active engagement in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared Statement of Mr. Jones follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF DOUGLAS D. JONES

Chairman Cardin, Ranking Member Risch, and distinguished Members of the committee, it is an honor to appear before you today as President Biden's nominee to be the U.S. Ambassador to Bosnia and Herzegovina. I am deeply grateful for the confidence and trust the President and the Secretary of State have placed in me. If confirmed, I pledge to work closely with this Committee and others in Congress to advance U.S. interests in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

I would not be here today without the love and support of my family, friends, and colleagues. I would like to thank my wife Karen—who I met 24 years ago this month in Bosnia and Herzegovina where she worked for over six years with NGOs helping refugees return home after the war—for her love and support throughout many postings, frequent moves, and long separations. We are blessed with our

daughter Sophia and her remarkable resilience and indomitable sense of adventure growing up through multiple moves, schools, and languages.

I am grateful to my parents, and my sisters Alison, Lorraine and Hilary. To my late father, Robert Jones, who served in the military and was also a Foreign Service Officer, I am indebted for instilling in me a calling to public service and for showing me the power of the United States and its values to inspire positive change throughout the world. And to my mother, who always championed my education and supported me whatever direction I decided to take my life.

The security and stability of Bosnia and Herzegovina is a critical piece to the United States' broader goals of a Europe whole, free, and at peace. The United States has played a pivotal role in Bosnia and Herzegovina for decades - bringing an end to a horrible war through the Dayton Peace Accords, which laid the foundation for peace and stability. Bosnia and Herzegovina has tremendous potential, but that potential is too often stymied by corruption, ethnonationalist divisions, and political dysfunction. If confirmed, I look forward to leading our excellent team at U.S. Embassy Sarajevo to help Bosnia and Herzegovina address these obstacles and realize its potential. It is in the interest of the United States to have a Bosnia and Herzegovina that is peaceful, prosperous, and integrated into Euro-Atlantic institutions. If confirmed, I would prioritize the following:

I would have no higher priority than the safety and security of Mission Sarajevo and all U.S. citizens in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

If confirmed, I will seek to protect the United States' decades of investment in Bosnia and Herzegovina by supporting its Euro-Atlantic integration as the only viable future for the country. I will commit to working with our Allies and partners on the necessary reforms required for progress on membership in the European Union and NATO. This is the future the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina have overwhelmingly said they want and the only path that ensures the country's peace and prosperity. I am committed to using all available tools including sanctions and supporting the authority of the High Representative when called for, to push back against internal and external malign influences that wish to break the country apart.

I will support rule of law and anti-corruption reforms at all levels of government. Corruption in Bosnia and Herzegovina is rampant across all sectors and hurts the government's ability to deliver on its promises and impacts citizens' day-to-day lives. We aren't the only ones who notice, the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina are living with this, which is why so many talented, young people are leaving. To achieve real progress on Euro-Atlantic integration, government functionality, economic opportunity, and tackling corruption is key.

Finally, I will work to thwart the efforts of local and outside actors, especially Russia and the People's Republic of China, that seek to undermine the security and stability of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Strong U.S. people-to-people and economic engagement are essential to push back on those who wish to undermine security and stability in BiH.

To the Chair and Ranking Member, I thank this committee and other members of Congress for your interest and active engagement in Bosnia and Herzegovina and I look forward to your questions.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you for your comments.

Mr. Heath?

STATEMENT OF MICHAEL G. HEATH, 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 MALAWI

Mr. HEATH. Chairman Cardin, Ranking Member Risch, and members of the committee, I am deeply honored and grateful to appear before you today as the ambassadorial nominee for the Republic of Malawi.

I know Senator Coons visited Malawi in March 2024 with four other senators and, if confirmed, I look forward to welcoming Senator Booker, who I know intended to make that trip as well.

If confirmed, I pledge to work closely with members of this committee and your staffs to promote and protect U.S. interests in the Republic of Malawi.

I am proud to be accompanied today by my wife Michelle, my son Nicholas, and my daughter Claudia as they have supported me throughout my previous postings in the Foreign Service both in Washington and abroad.

I would like to express my deep thanks to my late parents Ronald and Yoko and also to my brother Chris for providing me with the encouragement and the freedom to choose the Foreign Service as my career path despite the geographic distance this created between us for long periods.

I believe my current position in the Bureau of African Affairs and my previous work in neighboring Tanzania has prepared me well for the challenges and opportunities that await in the Republic of Malawi.

My first exposure to Africa came over 25 years ago during the development of the original African Growth and Opportunity Act. Then as now our overarching goals on the African continent and in Malawi itself are to support democratic and accountable governance, foster private sector investments to expand trade and employment opportunities, and promote Malawi's human capital development.

Malawi's recent history highlights the resilience of its core democratic institutions. The successful completion of its most recent Presidential elections in June 2020 after the Constitutional Court mandated a rerun of the flawed vote in 2019 underscores the independence and competence of Malawi courts and electoral commission. Malawi is scheduled to hold its next general election in September 2025 and the United States will stand with Malawi in its efforts to remain a model of governance in a region that has experienced severe democratic backsliding.

This year also marks 60 years of U.S.-Malawi diplomatic relations and we look forward to opening a new embassy compound next year. The strong bilateral relationship between Malawi and the United States is reflected by the government of Malawi's alignment with U.S. positions on key geopolitical issues.

Malawi has denounced Russia's invasion of Ukraine and boasts one of the highest voting coincidences with the United States at the United Nations among African countries.

Chairman Cardin, Ranking Member Risch, if confirmed I will do my utmost to protect American citizens and all mission personnel, Malawians and Americans alike.

Instilling a sense of community and camaraderie amongst them as well as our contractors, Peace Corps volunteers, and all others will be among my top priorities.

I want to give a special thanks to you and your respective staffs for providing me with this opportunity to appear before you and the rest of the committee today.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared Statement of Mr. Heath follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF MICHAEL HEATH

Chairman Cardin, Ranking Member Risch, and Members of the committee, I'm deeply honored and grateful to appear before you today as the ambassadorial nominee for the Republic of Malawi. I am also grateful to President Biden and Secretary Blinken for placing their confidence in me for this appointment.

I know Senator Coons visited Malawi in March 2024, along with Senators Murray, Peters, Cortez-Masto, and Welch. If confirmed, I pledge to work closely with Members of this committee and your staff to promote and protect U.S. interests in the Republic of Malawi.

I am proud to be accompanied today by my wife Michelle, my son Nicholas, and my daughter Claudia, as they have supported me throughout my previous postings in the Foreign Service both in Washington and abroad. I would like to express my deep thanks to my parents, Ronald and Yoko, who are unfortunately no longer with us, for providing me with the love, encouragement and freedom to choose the Foreign Service as my career path, despite the geographic distance this created between us for long periods of my working life.

I believe that my current position, as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for West Africa, and my previous work in neighboring Tanzania, has prepared me well for the challenges and opportunities that await in the Republic of Malawi. My first exposure to Africa came over 25 years ago when I served in the Bureau of African Affairs during the development of the African Growth and Opportunity Act. Then, as now, our overarching goals on the African continent, and in Malawi itself, are to support democratic and accountable governance, foster private sector investments to expand trade and employment opportunities, and promote Malawi's human capital development. As other countries in sub-Saharan Africa face challenges to their democratic institutions, we will work to ensure that Malawi maintains its current path and becomes a model for the region.

This year, Malawi marked the 60th anniversary of its independence and the 30th anniversary of its transition to multi-party democracy after 30 years of one-party rule. Malawi's recent history highlights the resilience of its core democratic institutions. The successful completion of its most recent presidential elections in June 2020, after the Constitutional Court mandated a rerun of the flawed vote in 2019, underscores the independence and competence of Malawi's courts and electoral commission. Malawi is scheduled to hold its next general election in September 2025, and the United States stands with Malawi in its efforts to remain a model of governance in a region that has experienced democratic backsliding.

This year also marks 60 years of U.S.-Malawi diplomatic relations, and we look forward to opening a new embassy compound next year. The strong bilateral relationship between Malawi and the United States is reflected by the government of Malawi's alignment with U.S. positions on key geopolitical issues. Malawi has strongly condemned Russia's invasion of Ukraine and boasts one of the highest voting coincidences with the United States at the United Nations among southern African countries.

The United States is Malawi's largest single provider of bilateral assistance, having provided more than $4.3 billion in total assistance over the last 20 years that has saved millions of lives and improved the livelihoods of an untold number of Malawians in one of the world's poorest countries. We have a large and effective USAID mission that covers areas such as health, education, private sector growth, democracy and governance.

If confirmed, my priorities in Malawi will be to promote effective governance, reduce corruption, increase security, and foster private sector expansion. Our ultimate economic goal is to build trade and employment opportunities to reduce dependence on development assistance, resulting in inclusive and sustainable wealth generation. I want to support Malawi's human capital development so its citizens can freely participate in the country's growth as a healthy, educated, and self-reliant populace.

Mr. Chairman, if confirmed, I will do my utmost to protect American citizens and all mission personnel—Malawians and Americans alike. Those of us who have served abroad know of the great contributions made to our missions by host country nationals. Instilling a sense of community and camaraderie amongst them, as well as among contractors, Peace Corps volunteers, and others, will be among my top priorities.

I thank you for this opportunity to appear before you and the rest of the committee today, and I look forward to your questions.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you for your comments.

We will now hear from Ms. Daschbach.

STATEMENT OF MARY E. DASCHBACH, OF RHODE ISLAND, 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 TOGOLESE REPUBLIC

Ms. DASCHBACH. Chairman Cardin, Ranking Member Risch, and distinguished members of the committee, it is an honor to appear before you as the President's nominee to be the U.S. Ambassador to Togo.

I would like to recognize my family for their love and encouragement, especially my husband Gabin, and also I would like to acknowledge my sister Ellen and my aunt Elinor who are here today, my mother Eileen, my brother John and my daughter Gabriella, who are watching online.

Finally, I would like to recognize my late father Joseph who encouraged me to take the Foreign Service exam many years ago.

Being here on September 11th reinforces how proud I am to serve our country overseas. I have served most of my career in Africa including as the public affairs officer in Togo.

While there I traveled throughout the country from Lomé to Cinkassé and have fond memories of the warm welcome I received from the Togolese people and the important work we did together.

The United States and Togo have a relationship based on shared goals of advancing peace and security and promoting trade and economic growth; and the United States is committed to working with Togo to strengthen its democratic institutions.

Togo faces a spillover of violence from the Sahel and is a key partner to promote stability in coastal West Africa. If confirmed, I will continue to foster an inclusive approach that prevents the spread of extremism in a way that protects civilians and addresses drivers of conflict.

The United States works closely with Togo to promote economic opportunity. Home to a deep-water seaport and an airport with direct flights to Newark and D.C., Togo seeks to grow as a regional transportation and logistics hub.

If confirmed, I will advocate for American investors and encourage Togo to foster a business climate that is attractive to U.S. companies, and above all I will prioritize the safety and security of Americans in Togo.

The United States is working with Togo to expend services to underserved populations through the Peace Corps, USAID, the Department of Agriculture and health programs such as the President's Malaria Initiative.

If confirmed, I will ensure that U.S. assistance is well managed and reaches the most vulnerable. Togo aspires to become a regional economic leader and to reinforce its internal security.

Yet, these goals require strong democratic institutions. Restrictions on the media, limitations on freedom of peaceful assembly and association, and impunity remain serious concerns.

If confirmed, I will promote governance that respects these fundamental rights in response to the concerns of all of Togo's citizens.

Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the committee, if confirmed I look forward to working with you and other Members

of Congress to reinforce our relationship with Togo at this critical time.

I welcome your questions.

[The prepared Statement of Ms. Daschbach follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF MARY E. DASCHBACH

Chairman Cardin, Ranking Member Risch, and distinguished Members of the committee, it is an honor to appear before you today as the nominee to be the U.S. Ambassador to Togo. I would like to thank President Biden and Secretary Blinken for this opportunity and express appreciation for this distinguished committee's time and consideration. I would also like to recognize my family for their love and encouragement during my nearly 30 years of government service.

I have served most of my career in Africa, including as the Public Affairs Officer at Embassy Lomé. I traveled throughout Togo and have fond memories of the warm welcome I received from the Togolese people. I was impressed by the richness and diversity of music, art, and cultural traditions, as well as the entrepreneurial spirit, resilience, and openness of the people I met.

The United States and Togo have a positive relationship based on our shared goals of advancing peace and security and promoting trade and economic growth; and the United States is committed to working with Togo to strengthen democratic institutions to ensure freedom and opportunity for all in Togo.

Today, Togo faces a spillover of extremist violence from the Sahel in the north of the country that could undermine its stability, development, and prosperity, and is seeking support to address this historic challenge. Togo is a key security partner for the U.S. strategy to prevent conflict and promote stability in Coastal West Africa. Our Embassy in Lomé is working with the government and people of Togo to foster an inclusive approach that strengthens resilience to extremism and prevents further spread in a way that protects civilians and addresses drivers of conflict. If confirmed, I will continue to advance security cooperation to promote responsiveness to at-risk communities, reinforce maritime cooperation, and enhance stability in West Africa.

The United States also works closely with Togo to promote bilateral trade and economic growth and to support opportunity and development. Home to the Gulf of Guinea's deepest port and a regional airport with direct flights to the United States, Togo seeks private sector investment to leverage its geographic advantage as a transportation and logistics hub, particularly as a gateway to the landlocked Sahel. Togo is a beneficiary of the African Growth and Opportunity Act and has established an export processing zone with U.S. government support. If confirmed, the Embassy team and I will advocate strongly on behalf of American investors and continue engagement with Togo to foster a business climate that is attractive to U.S. companies.

Togo's population is young and growing quickly. The United States is working with Togo to modernize its communications, technology, land, and energy sectors to expand services to underserved populations. Through Peace Corps, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food for Education program, and the President's Malaria Initiative and other health programs, the United States is strengthening Togo's capacity to reduce poverty, increase food security, and improve health. If confirmed, I will ensure that U.S. assistance is well-managed and reaches the most vulnerable.

While Togo aspires to become a regional economic leader and to reinforce its internal security, these goals cannot be achieved without strong democratic institutions. Restrictions on the media, limitations on freedom of peaceful assembly and association, and impunity remain a concern. If confirmed, my Embassy team and I will continue to work with the Government of Togo, political parties, civil society organizations, and other diplomatic missions to promote open and inclusive governance that responds to the concerns of all of Togo's citizens.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and distinguished Members of the committee for this opportunity. If confirmed, I am committed to a One Mission approach that draws upon the talents and strengths of the interagency team and I will prioritize the safety and security of Americans in country. I look forward to working with you and other Members of Congress to reinforce our relationship with Togo at this critical time. I welcome any questions you may have and hope you and your colleagues will visit to witness this important bilateral partnership firsthand.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you for your comments.

I am going to ask some obligatory questions that we asked all nominees. I will ask you to answer either yes or no.

I go through this every time but I just really want to stress the importance of these questions because it really underscores one of the frustrations that was expressed with Senator Risch and myself on accountability.

So I want you to think about these questions and recognize that by answering yes you are making a commitment to this committee to cooperate in regards to oversight.

So the first question is do you agree to appear before this committee and make officials from your office available to the committee and designated staff when invited? I will ask you each to go down the row so the court reporter can take down your answers and a simple answer would be appreciated.

[All witnesses answer in the affirmative.]

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

[All witnesses answer in the affirmative.]

The CHAIRMAN. 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.]

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

[All witnesses answer in the affirmative.]

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you all very much. You have passed your first test. We can now go on to the second round of questioning here.

We will go through 5-minute rounds of questioning and we will have a second round if members have additional questions after that.

So, Ambassador Smith, I want to start with you, if I might, and that is the world is dividing. We see Russia's aggression in Ukraine. We see the help that they are receiving from China.

They are enabling Russia to do—to use force and corruption to take on the sovereignty of other countries. We see Iran aligning, in a way, with Russia and China and North Korea. There may not be a formal alliance but there is an alliance.

And then we see countries that we thought were heading toward democracy and the West with backsliding. Georgia is a good example with their passage of the Russian style reporting laws or registration laws.

There are other countries that are trying to move in our direction but Russia is standing in the way. Armenia is a good example.

So my first question to you is, if you are confirmed what is your strategy to counter Russia's aggression not only on the battlefield but on encouraging countries to join their alliance, rather than the Western democratic States?

Ms. SMITH. Well, thank you, Chairman, for that question, and I fully agree with you. We should be concerned by the evolving and deepening relationship between China and Russia, and I would add the DPRK and Iran as well.

This is something I worked on day in and day out in Brussels closely with our allies to make sure that they understood what was happening—Iran's support for Russia, China's support for Russia's war in Ukraine through the provision of dual use components.

You are also correct that there are a number of countries that we see democratic backsliding. As I said in my opening remarks, the key here is our biggest strategic edge and advantage our allies and partners. I commit to you that if confirmed in this role I will work day and night to strengthen our relationships with allies and partners around the world to hold Russia, China, the DPRK, and Iran to account and to help other countries understand the risks of tipping in their direction and the benefits of aligning with us.

The CHAIRMAN. So in our conversations with President Zelensky and also with Secretary General Stoltenberg the issue came up as to what is the next phase of the war between Russia and Ukraine.

We know that President Zelensky is looking at ways in which there can be at least some understandings reached in the region to prevent—to stop the act of wars but that would require security so that it is not a Minsk I or Minsk II agreement, that there is a firm understanding that the agreements can be enforced and Ukraine's sovereignty can be protected.

One of the ways to do that is a different relationship between Ukraine and NATO. So I would like to get your assessment as to how far NATO or the United States should go in trying to work out an arrangement that will be satisfactory to Ukraine in regards to their sovereignty.

Ms. SMITH. Well, Mr. Chairman, thank you, first of all, for your recent visit this past weekend to Brussels. Thanks to all of you who have frequently traveled through Brussels to meet with our NATO allies and Secretary General Stoltenberg, who has done an amazing job.

On your question about Ukraine's relationship with NATO, our allies have been clear Ukraine will become a member of this alliance. But given the fact that a war is ongoing on their territory and that Ukraine has more to do in the area of reforms, the allies have reached the conclusion that this week, this month, is not the time to issue a proper invitation.

But we have to continue to move Ukraine closer to the alliance and we have done that in a variety of ways over the last two and a half years.

The CHAIRMAN. I recognize that and I recognize moving closer is important from the point of view of Ukraine's capacity, the access to technologies and weapons and training and all that comes along with it.

The question is how far will the United States and NATO go in anticipated settlement of the Ukrainian war and providing a security blanket for Ukraine?

Ms. SMITH. Yes, Mr. Chairman. I agree that we need to ensure that Ukraine has the protection that it needs. It needs to feel secure, obviously. First and foremost, it has to get those Russian troops out of its territory. That is the top priority.

But after that it needs to deepen its relationship with the alliance and, of course, now it has this vast latticework of bilateral security agreements where many countries around the world, not just

in Europe but in other regions such as the Indo-Pacific, have issued these bilateral commitments to enhance their security and ensure that this type of attack from Russia can never happen again.

The CHAIRMAN. Yes, I just would underscore that point. Russia cannot win in Ukraine. If they win in Ukraine it will not end there. We all know that.

So we have to make sure—NATO, the United States, the free world—that the end result is a Ukrainian sovereign State that is secure and that does require us to recognize that the NATO alliance has been a red line and that we recognize that Ukraine can benefit from that if we are willing to make the proper commitments to Ukraine's future.

It also requires changes in Ukraine itself to comply with the standards that we expect.

With that, let me turn it over to Senator Risch.

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

Ambassador Smith, I want to start—I mean, there is so much ground to cover here in the few minutes we have but I would like to start with the Middle East, and to me there is only one problem in the Middle East and that is Iran anymore.

After the Abraham Accords and after the enlightenment of a lot of the Arab States toward Israel it seems to me that all we have left is Iran. Now, you say, well, yes, but you got the Houthis and you got Hezbollah and you got Hamas.

These are all extensions of Iran, and Iran really operates with impunity through these organizations. I mean, we look at what is happening in the Red Sea. We look at what is happening in Gaza and these are all strings that are being pulled by Iran. Yet, they sit there happy in Tehran without having to pay a price.

In the last administration we really turned a screw on them tightly. They were down to under a quarter million barrels of oil a day and this whole thing is based on oil and money. Oil is money. Without the money they certainly could not do the kinds of things that they are doing in Lebanon, in Gaza, or in the Red Sea.

And yet this administration has allowed the production of oil to go way up into the millions of barrels every day. Help me understand the thinking of the administration in this regard.

I know they want—at the outset they wanted to sit down and try to talk about their nuclear ambitions and get a new agreement. But this is not working.

Give me your thoughts on this. I think instead of talking about these other things we need to focus really on Iran. That is where the problem is. Do you agree or disagree with that, by the way?

Ms. SMITH. Well, Ranking Member Risch, certainly I agree with you 100 percent. We need to maintain focus on Iran. This is a country that is engaging in terrorist activity.

It is using a vast network of proxies not just in the Middle East, by the way—in multiple other regions as well. This is a country that continues to suppress its own people.

This is a country that is providing the critical assistance that Russia needs to pursue this war of aggression inside Ukraine.

It is not only providing attack UAVs but it is also now providing these short-range ballistic missiles. So we have to continue the

pressure. We have to continue to work with a vast network of partners.

We just imposed additional sanctions yesterday with the E–3 in Europe in light of the news about the ballistic missiles, but we need to do more. We have to get at the financing for these terrorist activities.

We have to protect Israel and continue to maintain our focus. So 100 percent with you and, Ranking Member Risch, let me assure you right here and now that if I am confirmed this will be one of the key features of my mission without a doubt, that I will spend an extraordinary amount of time on Iran.

Senator RISCH. Well, that is encouraging to hear. We are in absolute agreement on what the problem is, the solution maybe we are—not as much.

The administration, in my judgment, has been a total failure on turning the screw on Iran and I think it is because they think somehow they are going to get to the table and negotiating an agreement, which, to me, any agreement with Iran is not going to be worth the paper it is written on.

I do not—these people do not have the same objectives that we have when we are sitting down trying to make an agreement.

I think almost any issue can be resolved if you have two parties that have two things, a similar objective and good faith, and with the Iranians we have neither, neither similar objectives nor is there good faith on the part of the Iranians.

So I think you guys are going to have to get much tougher on Iran than what it has been and I am refreshed to hear your commitment to do that. That is the only way this thing is going to get done.

They really should have to pay the price for what they are doing and they are not paying the price. They are fat and happy where they are and shelling the money out, a lot of it that we sent to them, to do these kinds of things all over the world.

Well, we have only got a little bit of time left. Tell me your thoughts on China. I feel the same way about China. Certainly, the—it is in a different way and at a different level.

But, again, the administration has not made China pay the price for some of the things that they have been doing. Your thoughts on that?

Ms. SMITH. Well, perhaps as quickly as I can, Senator, look, this is a country that is telling a very different story than reality. This is a country that is trying to portray itself as neutral in the war in Ukraine when in fact it has put its thumb on the scale and is providing Russia with critical dual-use components.

This is a country that says it is good for foreign investment and we know how hard American companies have struggled to operate inside China.

This is a country that claims it is for peace in the South China Sea and we are seeing their ships ram Filipino coast guard vessels. So our job is multifold.

We have to challenge them and use all of the tools at our disposal to call them out, to make sure that we can use punitive measures like sanctions, export controls, and all the rest.

But we also have to work with countries all around the world—places like Africa, Latin America, Europe—to help countries understand the risks that they incur by accepting Chinese investments or interests in their ports and other bits of critical infrastructure.

So this is an extraordinarily complex challenge but, again, count me in. If confirmed, I know that this also will occupy a lot of my time and I commit to work with you.

I know you have done an extraordinary amount of work. I appreciate personally the work you have done on NATO and China, which has been really important for me and Brussels. But this is a wider challenge and I stand ready to work with you, Senator.

Senator RISCH. Well, thank you, Ambassador. Well said.

I really hope you are able to make—take these words to the administration and tighten the screw much tighter than what we have, and in a good way.

Thank you so much for your service. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Shaheen?

Senator SHAHEEN. Ambassador Smith, I want to followup on Senator Risch's questions about the People's Republic of China as well a little bit because at NATO you worked to increase our coordination with our allies.

But there still are differences between how we view the threat from the PRC and how many of our European allies view that threat. So can you talk a little bit about that and also about what you think we should do to address that more?

Ms. SMITH. Absolutely.

First, Senator Shaheen, thank you for the lovely introduction. Much appreciated.

Senator SHAHEEN. Well deserved.

Ms. SMITH. On the China challenge inside NATO let me just say quickly NATO has changed significantly over the past couple of years. I will credit the last administration with all of their good work on China and we have carried that forward.

You know as well as anybody else that the new strategic concept that was rolled out in 2022 was the first time in NATO's history that the mission statement at NATO included the word China.

That is a big deal because the first step at NATO is recognize the nature of the challenge and the second step is let us get to work and address and join forces.

So we have made headway. We have to continue to bring in briefers. I know Deputy Secretary Campbell was in Brussels just yesterday briefing our allies on the subject of China.

We will continue doing that, sharing intelligence and then rolling up our sleeves and figuring out what more we can do to protect the NATO alliance from what China is doing in and around Europe.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you.

Mr. Jones, I am going to give Ambassador Smith a little break and move to you to ask about one of the countries that I have grown most—feel most favorably toward and that is Bosnia and Herzegovina.

It is a fragile democracy but it is a very special country, as you know, and it warms my heart to think that that is the country that you asked to serve in.

I think Ambassador Murphy has done an excellent job there. But, as you know, the challenges are significant and one of the concerns that I hear every time I visit in Bosnia-Herzegovina is the concern about the EU–4 mission, whether it is up to the task, whether the resolution is going to continue to be approved every year, and what would happen if it is not approved—what then happens in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

And so EU–4's mandate is set to expire on November 2d and I wonder if that is not renewed this year or if EU–4 is otherwise unable to respond in a crisis can you assure us—and perhaps Ambassador Smith might need to step in on this one—can you confirm that NATO is prepared to step in to avoid a security vacuum?

I know that Secretary General Stoltenberg has issued a Statement on this but can you provide any more details and should we be confident that that will happen?

Mr. JONES. Thank you, Senator, for raising that important issue, and also thank you for your years of engagement and focus on the Western Balkans and Bosnia-Herzegovina in particular.

EU–4's Operation Althea does remain critical to the security and stability of Bosnia and Herzegovina and it is important that the U.N. Security Council renew that mandate in November and also critical that EU–4 remain strong, capable, and visible in its presence in Bosnia and Herzegovina and that it has the forces and the capabilities to enforce its mandate to ensure a safe and secure environment.

Without speculating on what might happen should the U.N. Security Council mandate not be renewed, I think it is important to reiterate that the United States has been clear that we remain strongly committed to the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and multiethnic character of Bosnia and Herzegovina and also, as you say, that NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg and other senior leaders of NATO have been clear that the alliance will not allow a security vacuum to exist in the country.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you. And I assume you would confirm that, Ambassador Smith?

Ms. SMITH. I could not have said it better myself.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you.

Obviously, one of the challenges there is the Republic of Srpska and Milorad Dodik's continued rhetoric talking about secession, about the—his unwillingness to participate and his party's unwillingness to participate in governance throughout the country.

Do you think we have a plan in place to hold Dodik accountable for what is happening right now? We have some sanctions on him. But should he attempt complete secession of the Republic of Srpska are we prepared to take action, do you believe, against him and that action?

Mr. JONES. I believe it is important that we continue to impose consequences on those like Milorad Dodik who are undermining the security stability as well as the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

And, as I mentioned, I would remain committed to ensuring that we use—if confirmed, we use all tools available to us to continue that pressure and—including sanctions, including supporting the actions of the High Representative to use the powers available to

him to ensure that Bosnia and Herzegovina remains territorially intact and a sovereign country.

Thank you.

Senator SHAHEEN. Well, thank you very much. I look forward to continuing to work in the Western Balkans and hope I will have a chance to work with you once approved.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Young?

Senator YOUNG. Thank you, Chairman, and I want to congratulate all the nominees. Thank you for your service.

One thing that often comes up in my conversations with our partners in the Indo-Pacific, Ambassador Smith, is the perceived lack of focus in so much of our communications with our partners, especially in the economic and commercial space.

There are bright spots—tech diplomacy, supply chain resiliency activities and others—but I continue to perceive a certain lack of focus when it comes to our economic diplomacy.

When we do act we risk leaving our allies confused, sometimes frustrated, by inconsistent policies. I would cite IPEF and the zero progress on market access because we have not made that a priority, in part.

How do you think, Ambassador, that our lack of a clear market-driven trade agenda hinders our ability to be competitive in the Indo-Pacific?

Ms. SMITH. Well, thank you very much, Senator Young.

I know we were able to have a conversation about this some weeks ago, which I appreciated. I am in full agreement with you that the economic piece of our Indo-Pacific strategy has to be front and center to everything that we do in the region.

We have a multifaceted strategy but I would argue that the economic piece is really at the foundation of that strategy. I would agree with you that we could do more.

I think we could be more transparent, more consistent in our messaging. We want to make sure that we do not leave allies and partners confused because, in reality, allies and partners have to be a key cornerstone of everything we do on the economic front.

The strategy simply will not succeed if we do not bring them along. So, if confirmed, let me commit to doing more in the economic space in the Indo-Pacific and making sure that we do not leave any allies and partners confused about our intentions or what the overarching strategy is.

Senator YOUNG. Thank you. I think one of the things we have come to appreciate in a fairly short period of time in recent years has been the connection between our economic imperatives, our economic priorities on one hand and our sort of broader strategic and security concerns on the other and those are deeply linked.

But there are some urgent strictly security gaps that we are attempting to fill. We need to keep resourcing the Taiwanese with armaments that we have promised them, for example, many other priorities across the Indo-Pacific.

What steps would you counsel to help push back against the PRC's coercive security practices and support deterrence in the region?

Ms. SMITH. Well, Senator, this is a classic play on the part of the Chinese. The PRC, as you well know, regularly relies on economic coercion and we have to push back on that in a whole multitude of ways.

First and foremost, we have to make sure that countries do not find themselves in a position where they are at risk of economic coercion.

So we have to provide them with alternatives, make investments. We have worked with the G–7 on this to make sure that countries have the resources they need for their own economic prosperity.

But we also have to call out the Chinese for what they are doing and make sure that we come to the aid of countries like Lithuania, for example, that has experienced an enormous amount of economic coercion on the part of the Chinese. We have worked with the EU on that hand in glove.

Senator YOUNG. Thank you.

Ms. Hallett, in 2016 Bahrain joined Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries in severing diplomatic ties with Iran after the Iran-backed terrorist attack on the Saudi embassy in Tehran.

In recent months we have seen efforts by Bahrain and Iran to reestablish diplomatic relations, which is troubling considering Iran's support of Hamas' October 7 terror attacks.

Ms. Hallett, how do you view this possible official reengagement between the countries?

Ms. HALLETT. Senator, thank you for the question.

Certainly, the Bahrainis have—as I understand, have been quite forthcoming with us about why they are pursuing diplomatic engagement with Tehran.

Like every other GCC country they want to be able to have an opportunity to deescalate tensions as they arise, address situations that come up, and are very clear eyed about the threats that emanate from Iran, especially inside of Bahrain, related to Iranian interference in domestic affairs and their plotting.

Senator YOUNG. So as Ambassador what concrete actions will you take to prevent Iran's growing malign regional influence and in particular its destabilizing activities in Bahrain?

Ms. HALLETT. Senator, thanks for the question.

It is a concern that I share. Certainly, from my perch in Jerusalem I have seen firsthand the impacts—the profound impacts of Iran's support for terror, interference, disinformation, and the like in Israel and around the region.

I think it is critical that we continue to strengthen the relationships between the Abraham Accord partners, the United States, and Israel and expand those partnerships as much as possible, strengthen our commitment with Israel and with Bahrain and deliver on the commitments we have made, for example, in the comprehensive security integration and prosperity agreement that we signed a year ago to be able to isolate Iran and its proxies and support Bahraini security.

Senator YOUNG. Coming to the end of my time here I recognize that—Chairman, if I could just add on the economic front there is tons of opportunity, as I am sure Ms. Hallett is aware, in the U.S.-Bahraini relationship.

We have a free trade agreement. They host military presence. But bilateral trade volume is only $2.85 billion in 2023. I think that presents real opportunities for our country moving forward.

Ms. HALLETT. Senator, I could not agree more and something, if confirmed, I would commit to deepening between the United States and Israel our trade and economic ties, which C-SIPA has a—two major components committed to that that I would seek to continue the great work that has been done over the last year.

Senator YOUNG. Mr. Chairman, thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. You just reached the end of your time. That was perfect.

[Laughter.]

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Schatz?

Senator SCHATZ. Thank you, Chairman. Thank you all for being here and thank you for your willingness to serve.

Ambassador Smith, I want to talk to you a little bit more about the Asia Pacific region. We had a good conversation yesterday about this.

You know, it is a good story. Four or 5 years ago we had a convening with Asia Pacific leaders and they had a lot of very specific, very credible complaints about the United States' lack of engagement, and the good news is that we came back a year later and there were more members of the Senate who attended the private meeting and a lot of Asia Pacific Island leaders pleased with the progress and so on PIF, on the Pacific resilience facility, on economic cooperation, on embassy presence, and physical presence throughout the Asia Pacific region we are improving.

So my question for you is what is next. It seems to me that we are making good progress and it also seems to me that this is the most efficacious use of both dollars and human resources that we can get because showing up is an enormous deal.

But I am wondering what are the next steps because we have made a bunch of progress, but I think the PRC is waking up to the fact that we have woken up and now we have to make even more progress.

Your thoughts?

Ms. SMITH. Thank you, Senator, and thank you for the time yesterday. I enjoyed our discussion.

In full agreement with you here. We have made significant strides forward in the Indo-Pacific. We have engaged in new ways unilaterally, trilaterally, bilaterally in multilateral institutions.

We now have this vast latticework of networks across the Indo-Pacific but we cannot be complacent. We have to double down. We have to do more. You are absolutely right—this is about showing up.

This is about using the full array of tools in our toolkit, and for me personally what I continue to be very interested in is breaking down those silos between America's Atlantic allies and America's Pacific allies.

We can do more together. The challenges we face are global, whether it is cybersecurity or emerging tech or coercion. So we can bring these alliances, these allies, together in new and creative ways and continue to compete and prevail in that competition.

Senator SCHATZ. I understand what you are saying conceptually but I would like to picture it in reality.

What does it mean to break down silos between our Atlantic allies and our Pacific allies? I love the idea but how does it manifest itself?

Ms. SMITH. Thanks, Senator. Let me give you an example.

In the last couple of years, last 3 years in particular, NATO has deepened its relationship with its Indo-Pacific partners. They have four countries in the Indo-Pacific that are partners—Australia, New Zealand, Japan and South Korea.

We bring those partners into the alliance to hear from them about how they cope with disinformation, how they have stronger cybersecurity policies, how are they protecting critical infrastructure, what is their assessment of the Chinese threat.

All of that is brought into the NATO alliance and then we share back. How is Estonia coping with disinformation in Russia? How are we protecting critical infrastructure in the Baltic Sea?

So the exchanges have been unbelievable in terms of the amount of lessons learned that are being shared and then we are forging strategies and initiatives together that really build on the collective strength of both sets of partners and allies.

Senator SCHATZ. Thank you for that.

One final question. We had a good conversation about press freedom, and I think there are two ways to look at this.

One is that it is clear to me that this administration and the State Department have prioritized press freedom. It is also true that press freedom is on the decline.

So I am a little bit less interested in what are the current activities that we are engaged in and I, frankly, include the Congress here, and more interested in what is it that we can actually do to change the trajectory, which is highly alarming?

I know you prioritize it in your bilaterals. I know we try to talk about it when we travel. You know, I have legislation along these lines.

But I feel that we are failing on press freedom and I am wondering if we can together develop a new strategy.

Ms. SMITH. Well, Senator, I enjoyed our conversation on this, and I agree with you fully that we all, both here in Congress and across the administration, we need to double down our efforts in this regard.

Press freedom is a core part of our values, and we cannot just look at these relationships in a strategic framework. We have to think about how we continue to promote our values. We can do it privately, we can do it publicly and, in some cases, look at the full array of carrots and sticks to foster change.

Senator SCHATZ. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Ricketts?

Senator RICKETTS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And to all our nominees today I want to thank you for your service to our country and especially our Foreign Service career professionals that you sacrifice a lot of time away from your family and friends representing our great nation overseas, and really appreciate those sacrifices that you and your families make. So thank you very much for what you do for us.

Ambassador Smith, you have been very popular today so I am going to continue that trend. During your time as Ambassador to NATO you have been a staunch advocate for aiding Ukraine and stressing the urgency of supplying with the necessary weapons it needs to succeed.

Yet, to this day the administration is restricting how Ukraine uses these weapons, specifically preventing Ukraine from using long-range ATACMS to strike targets inside of Russia. But it was true for the tanks and for the F–16s. Very slow.

Frustratingly, Congress lacks a coherent explanation for these restrictions. I alone have heard four conflicting reasons. I have heard that it was necessary to ensure Ukraine is using their limited ATACMS effectively. I have heard these restrictions were to prevent Russian escalation.

I have heard this lifting restrictions would offer very little strategic value because Russian military assets are out of range and, most baffling, I have heard that this will help keep the door open for future relations with Russia. When you have a dictator in charge of a country, I am not sure why we are worried about that.

Let us be clear. None of these reasons really pass the muster.

Ambassador Smith, do you support removing the current restrictions on Ukraine's ability to use U.S.-supplied weapons to strike military targets inside Russian territory and if not, why not? And what is your understanding for why these restrictions need to be?

Ms. SMITH. Thank you very much for that question, Senator Ricketts.

Let me start by saying we absolutely have to ensure that Ukraine prevails. We have learned in the past that if dictators succeed—if Russia succeeds in taking over Ukraine it will likely keep going.

Our number-one priority, and my number-one priority while I have been in Brussels has been to ensure that the Ukrainians have the support they need to prevail on the battlefield.

You are right that there is a debate right now about the degree to which the Ukrainians can use our assets, particularly the ATACMS, to strike deeper into Russian territory and that debate is ongoing.

And let me just say if confirmed I look forward to joining that debate. It is about risk in a large part. I have certain views on risk. Other members of the administration may not share that view. But I want to be part of the debate. I look forward to it, if confirmed. The bottom line has to be that Ukraine has what it needs and, if confirmed, I look forward to working with you on this.

Senator RICKETTS. So what do you see as the reason for why these restrictions been put in place? Let us just take ATACMS.

So why have we not allowed Ukraine to use ATACMS to strike military targets inside of Russia and if the administration reverses this position, as President Biden said—you know, asked yesterday I think he said they are working on lifting the restrictions.

Why is it taking—I mean, it has been a year since we have given them ATACMS. Why is taking so long to lift them?

Ms. SMITH. Well, Senator, maybe two quick words on that. First and foremost, we do have to be clear. As Secretary Austin has said,

there is not a single asset that absolutely guarantees success so we have to keep that in perspective.

But I do think that as the administration has looked at providing different military capabilities, we are always thinking about the balance of risk.

But, again, I know these debates are ongoing and I look forward to joining them.

Senator RICKETTS. So if confirmed do you commit to working with your colleagues across the interagencies to lift these restrictions?

Ms. SMITH. I look forward to joining the debate and I would like to work with others—you and others on the committee on this particular question.

Senator RICKETTS. Great. Thank you, Ambassador. I am going to switch gears on you just a little bit here.

On Friday, the Wall Street Journal confirmed what has long been expected, that Iran has sent the first batch of hundreds of short-range ballistic missiles to Russia. You said the same thing yourself in earlier testimony.

The deliveries come as Ukraine's air defenses are being overwhelmed by Russian missiles and drone barrages, and unlike the Biden administration's ongoing restrictions of Western-supplied weapons to Ukraine I do not think that Iran is going to put any restrictions on how Russia uses any missiles it gives to them.

In March G–7 leaders warned that they would impose coordinated sanctions on Iran if they carried out these missile transfers. EU officials even threatened that missile transfers would constitute a red line that could see them directly wind back some of the sanctions relief from JCPOA.

However, despite these warnings Iran has still proceeded with its escalation, clearly showing Iran does not care or fear any potential consequences imposed by the administration or our European allies.

It is clear that sanctions on Iran Air are not going to cut it. Ambassador Smith, since the start of this administration, Iranian oil exports have exceeded over a hundred billion dollars, which has allowed the IRGC to produce the missiles and drones it is sending to Putin to kill Ukrainians and attack our ally Israel.

Do you believe stronger enforcement of oil sanctions is necessary to limit the IRGC's funding?

Ms. SMITH. Senator, thank you for that question.

Look, I have spent the better part of the last year pushing our European allies to fully understand the degree to which Iran is supporting Russia's war in Ukraine. It has been a top priority for me and it will remain so.

We have to work in concert with our allies and partners to apply pressure on this regime and call out what they are doing to support Russia.

But we also have to join forces with our friends in Europe and beyond to get the Ukrainians the maximum amount of air defense that they need right now to protect their people, to protect critical infrastructure, which the Russians are targeting almost each and every day, and make sure that they can continue to defend their territory.

If confirmed, I certainly will continue focus on Iran specifically and what it is doing to support Russia, but also its wider, long list of destabilizing behavior around the world.

Senator RICKETTS. And then just on that with regard to if you are confirmed and with regard to Iran, will you commit to working with our allies in London, Berlin, and Paris to trigger the snapback of the pre-JCPOA U.N. sanctions on Iran, including the U.N. global arms embargo as well as other U.N. drone and missile restrictions?

Ms. SMITH. Senator, again, I have worked hand in glove with our European allies to push them as much as possible on this particular challenge, and I will continue to do so.

Senator RICKETTS. Great. Thank you very much, Ambassador. I appreciate it.

Thank you, Mr. Chair, for being lenient with me as well.

The CHAIRMAN. Oh, you are a little bit——

Senator RICKETTS. I was better than Young.

The CHAIRMAN. No question.

[Laughter.]

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Helmy?

Senator BOOKER. Is there some protocol that the senior senator go first?

The CHAIRMAN. That is true. I just wanted you to know that you have more seniority on this round than the senior senator from New Jersey.

Senator BOOKER. And I will—well, I will interrupt the junior senator from New Jersey.

The CHAIRMAN. I do not mean to embarrass my good friend Senator Booker but if you got here on time you would——

Senator BOOKER. Wow.

[Laughter.]

Senator BOOKER. I would like to just take a moment that this is his first SFRC hearing. I have known this man for well over 15 years on foreign policy issues. He has been a great advisor to me in the past—the Governor. He is thoughtful. He is knowledgeable. He is an extraordinary addition to this committee and I am so grateful that he is here.

The CHAIRMAN. We join you in that welcoming and, Senator Helmy, you are very fortunate to have Senator Booker on this committee with you. He has been an incredibly valuable member of this committee and if you take advice from him you are taking advice from the right person on many of these issues.

Senator HELMY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like a copy of the record, please.

Thank you, Chairman. As someone who worked for Senator Booker for many years I have benefited from his guidance in foreign policy and other areas of policy and in life, and to your point, it was not easy—it was not hard to beat him here.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the earlier recognition and I look forward to serving on this committee in my short time and it is a great honor to serve alongside you, Chairman, Ranking Member Risch, my colleagues, my senior Senator, and I very much look forward to serving on this committee in my short time in this interim role.

I have to first start by honoring and respecting the American lives that were lost on this horrific day 23 years ago. As the junior Senator from New Jersey, the state that was home to many of those who passed and those who sacrificed their lives.

For their neighbors in lower Manhattan I honor and pray for the 3,000 innocently taken and lost including Zachary, who I knew, loved, and remember on this day and every day, and applaud the strength and service of our first responders who have kept our community safe and strong.

To all of you, I will be efficient with my time and thank you for your service. As a career staffer, I am grateful for your service to our Nation and express tremendous gratitude to your families as well, knowing what they do to help support you in your roles.

Ambassador Smith, I wanted to just pull on a couple threads I heard from my colleagues, if it is OK, really, starting with today's news. In light of Secretary Blinken and the U.K. foreign secretary's joint visit to Kyiv today notably, I believe, which is the first visit of its kind in nearly a decade.

The U.S., our NATO allies, and the wider international community, are looking to better understand the Ukrainian strategic posturing and its current objectives in the face of growing Russian aggression against civilian life, critical infrastructure, and the Ukrainian military's readiness with meetings with the Ukrainian president.

In that regard, Ambassador Smith, how does your current leadership and your high level involvement in deescalation efforts in the Ukrainian war and NATO engagement, speak to your ability to advise Secretary Blinken while working, as we heard from the Chairman and Ranking Member Risch, with Congress and this committee on the protracted conflicts, some of which seem to have no end in sight?

Ms. SMITH: Well, thank you very much, Senator, and welcome to the SFRC. Lovely to see you here.

On your question, Senator, look, as I have sat in Brussels over the last 3 years, I have turned to the full toolkit that sits before us.

But that starts first and foremost with diplomacy. It has been an honor to serve as Ambassador in Brussels, but I have also used my depth from working at the Pentagon for nearly 4 years as well.

And what has become clear is that whether or not you are talking about the China challenge and competing with China, talking about the war in Gaza, whether or not you are talking about Russia's war in Ukraine or a whole host of other issues—Sudan, the list is long—the secret to America's success on its foreign policy agenda is really bringing that full toolkit together.

I have experience with diplomacy and defense. I would rely on colleagues to also bring development into that mix to make sure that whatever challenge we are coping with we are bringing that full toolkit forward and relying first and foremost on diplomacy and then turning to other tools as necessary.

Senator HELMY. Thank you, Ambassador.

A follow-up question, if I may. With the increasing pressure on the U.S. to grant wider access and usage of the ATACMS to Ukraine, coupled with our recent confirmation of Iranian ship-

ments of ballistic missiles to Russia and Secretary Blinken's expressed commitment to ensure Ukraine is effective as possible in warding off Russian aggression, can you speak to how this shift in U.S. tactical assistance aligns with our prior and ongoing efforts toward deescalation and what can we expect, if anything, from the President's meeting with the U.K. Prime Minister this Friday?

Ms. SMITH. Well, thank you, Senator. Very pleased to see Secretary Blinken with his U.K. counterpart on the ground in Kyiv. The United Kingdom has been an indispensable partner on the Ukraine challenge.

They have provided critical security assistance, economic humanitarian assistance, and, of course, trained thousands of Ukrainians. So I could think of no better partner for the Secretary.

But you have heard the President say that ultimately this war will be settled at the negotiating table. We want to continue to work toward peace. We want to encourage Russia to come to that table and we want to allow President Zelensky to determine the conditions under which he will come to the table.

I understand he will be presenting us with his vision for a way forward this fall. We look forward to hearing that vision. But in the meantime we will continue to get them the assistance they need and encourage Russians to come to the table.

Senator HELMY. Thank you, Ambassador.

Chairman, as I come to the end of my time may I ask one more question?

The CHAIRMAN. Certainly. You can ask an additional question.

Senator HELMY. Ms. Hallett, an area where I have spent a good deal of time and focus is the Middle East and the issues in the region.

To piggyback off a question I believe Senator Young was asking, with the recent talks of normalization and diplomatic ties between the Kingdom of Bahrain and Iran officially brokered by the Kremlin at the request of King Hamad and the growing conflict between Iran and Israel, Ms. Hallett, if confirmed how do you envision the future of U.S. security cooperation with Bahrain as they become more involved in a military dialog and expand the regional security architecture and sustain the policy of detente with Tehran?

Ms. HALLETT. Senator, thank you for the question.

As I noted before, I think that the Bahrainis have been very forthcoming with us about why they are seeking to have a diplomatic dialog and relationship with Tehran, notwithstanding the interference, malign activity, and support for terrorism inside Bahrain and across the region that Bahrainis are certainly the most familiar with.

If confirmed as Ambassador, my job and that of the mission with our colleagues at NAVCENT, CENTCOM, the Pentagon, and, of course, the State Department would be to continue to deepen our partnership and take advantage of, for example, the agreement that was signed last year—the comprehensive security integration and prosperity agreement—so that we can anchor Bahrain and our other partners in the GCC with Israel, with us, to be able to isolate Iran.

That includes our coordination and cooperation on economy, trade, and investment bilaterally and then regionally, but certainly

also in the new field that we have engaged on under C-SIPA, which is dealing with trusted partners, trusted networks, and technological cooperation which helps buttress Bahrain not just from Iran but also from Russia and China as well.

So, if confirmed, I would seek to use all the tools in our bilateral relationship with Bahrain to make sure that we are addressing Bahrain's concerns and ours.

Senator HELMY. Thank you, Ms. Hallett. Thank you all.

Thank you, Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Van Hollen?

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Let me thank all of you for your service to our country and, Ambassador Smith, many of my questions related to NATO and your ongoing responsibilities some of them have been covered.

So I am going to spend my time asking a few questions of Ms. Hallett, not so much about your future post but the one that you are leaving now because I think the last time we saw each other was during my visit to Israel in mid July.

The day I met you I also met with hostage families whose loved ones had been kidnapped by Hamas. I met with families whose loved one had been—loved ones killed and murdered by Hamas including some Israeli Americans, and I was pleased to see the Justice Department determined to seek justice in those cases.

On that trip I also visited the West Bank and I visited two American families whose 17-year-old sons were killed in the West Bank, shot in the back of the head while they were driving.

In both cases reports implicated settlers or the IDF but we have been not really able to get any information even through the efforts of the—asking the State Department as to where these investigations lie.

And I must say we have written to Secretary Blinken a couple times for updates. Not really getting a sense that the U.S. Government is actively pursuing these cases.

Today can you give us any update on the investigation into the cases of those two 17-year-old American boys?

Ms. HALLETT. Senator, well, first, thank you for the question. It was good to see you in July and, of course, a privilege to be here with you today.

Look, as the Deputy Chief of Mission in Jerusalem I and those in the mission have no greater priority than the safety and security of American citizens in Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza.

The tragic death——

Senator VAN HOLLEN. My clock is ticking.

Ms. HALLETT. Yes. The——

Senator VAN HOLLEN. I know—I understand the words of being upset. I am just asking if you have an update on the status of the investigation into their killings.

Ms. HALLETT. So, Senator, it is my understanding from the Israeli government that those investigations are ongoing. I know that is unsatisfactory. It is to us in the embassy as well, and I assure you we will continue to ask and demand accountability and a full investigation as Secretary Blinken has done on every trip that he has taken.

In addition, Senator, with the death this past weekend of Aisha Noor, another American citizen who was tragically killed in the West Bank.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Right. And, of course, you know that raises the overall question about accountability. I did see the Secretary's Statements just yesterday about that being unprovoked and unjustified.

The Secretary also said, and I quote, "We have long seen reports of the security forces looking the other way when extremist settlers use violence against Palestinians."

He also said, and I quote, "We have seen reporting of excessive force by Israeli Security Forces against Palestinians." Do you agree with the Secretary's Statements?

Ms. HALLETT. Senator, I do, and I think the question of the rules of engagement and the use of live fire in the West Bank, as Secretary Blinken spoke clearly about from London, is serious and warrants further attention and discussion from us at the embassy and from the administration.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Well, I appreciate that because when I heard the Secretary talk about the need to change rules of engagement I had a flashback to the shooting—killing death of Shireen Abu Akleh.

I think you arrived on post about 3 months after that happened, and in that case the position that the government of Israel took for a long time was that she had been killed by Palestinian gunmen.

That turned out not to be the case. The Secretary of State asked for an independent investigation. That has not happened to this day. General Fenzel did do a report that has been classified that I think speaks to the need to address the rules of engagement. Have you had a chance to read that report?

Ms. HALLETT. I have not, Senator.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. I mean, that is—I will say that is discouraging because part of the problem is that the U.S. Government, in my view, has not taken sufficient action to hold individuals accountable for the killings of American citizens and, again, if you look at what has happened in that case, I just want to close, Mr. Chairman, with the Washington Post editorial from May 2023, so last year—it was on the 1-year anniversary of the killing of Shireen Abu Akleh.

It says, "A year after killing of Shireen Abu Akleh questions remain for Israel and for Biden," and the last paragraph begins, "Biden has rightly been shedding light on Russia's wrongful detention of Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich," and I am looking forward to meeting with him, I think, tomorrow. We are all glad. We all worked hard for his release.

And they go on to say "And the disappearance of Austin Tice, a freelance journalist in Syria. He," referring to Biden, "should be just as vocal about getting to the bottom of Abu Akleh's death and pursuing any necessary accountability."

I would submit that has not happened to date and so good to hear the Secretary's words yesterday. But we heard the same words a number of years ago and nothing has changed with respect to rules of engagement.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. The senior senator from New Jersey Senator Booker.

Senator BOOKER. Thank you. Thank you very much.

I just want to pause and give you all the depth of our gratitude. You have spent your careers serving our country. We have a strange way in America of fetishizing in a disproportionate manner wealth and celebrity, but the values that have made this Nation as strong as it is are values of service, sacrifice, and humility.

The jobs that you all are here before us for have enormous world-affecting consequences and on the global scale of importance you cannot forget the millions of families from our country to the ones that you all will be focused on that will be affected by the day to day decisions that you make.

And so I just want to take time to say I am humbled by the dedication you all have. Every Senator here operates with our names in the paper, our faces before the TVs, but the work that you do is extraordinary and I would be wrong if I did not point out that you do not do it alone. You all have in your introductions spoken of the families that support you and they, too, are evidencing those great American values of service and sacrifice.

And knowing the countries that you serve and, Ms. Smith, the work that you will do I just want you to know that as our tough questions have come the truth of the matter is every senator here, I know, has a profound sense of gratitude for you all dedicating your lives to this kind of work.

Ms. Hallett, I will not ask you any questions. You have dealt with me a lot already. You should get combat pay for that and I am sure I will see you again.

Mr. Doug Jones, I have no questions for you because you share the name with one of my favorite senators I have ever served with, and out of deference to him I will not ask you any questions.

The rest of you—I think I have the one question for each of you starting—and I want to pronounce your name right, Ms.—can you say it for me so I do not butcher it?

Ms. DASCHBACH. Daschbach.

Senator BOOKER. Daschbach. You showed obvious obsequiousness by mentioning the greatest city in America in your opening Statement, Newark, and so that will make me go a lot easier on you.

But I am really worried about the Sahel and extraordinary backsliding we are seeing with coups and violence, and I want to be candid with you. I left my recent trip to Nigeria and Ghana moving to me personally, especially Ghana as an African American, but I left there really discouraged.

I heard from civil society groups alarming things about corrupt governments. I heard young people, cultural influencers, questioning why America is supporting these democratic governments that are not democratic.

I heard people saying, well, maybe we need to go back to dictators. The crises in the north of all of these countries are growing, not shrinking. The terrorist activity is growing.

And I just would like to hear from you maybe some encouragement about what we could be doing in Togo and the region to better stop these trends that are moving against American interests of seeing democracy and freedom.

Ms. DASCHBACH. Thank you, Senator. I could not agree with you more.

If confirmed, one of my highest priorities will be to work with the Togolese government to address this threat coming from the Sahel and that—the way that has to be addressed is a whole of government approach.

It cannot be a military only solution. It has to be approach that respects the human rights of the civilians who are living in those areas, that incorporates their concerns, their needs, and that is work that I would continue, if confirmed.

The other area that I would make a high priority is engagement with youth. Togo's population is young and growing, and they are increasingly frustrated by the lack of dividends from democracy.

Senator BOOKER. And I will pause there. I am so happy to hear you say that as we know that by 2050 one out of every four human beings on the planet will be in Africa. It is the country—the continent that is going to explode in the latter half of this century in importance.

And maybe with that I want to go to Mr. Heath. One of the big concerning things I see on the continent right now is I think people are underestimating the impact of climate change that is going to further destabilize nations, cause more turmoil.

Right now Malawi is going through a horrific drought and in that region of Africa you are going to see the effect on the livelihoods really creating crisis circumstances for tens of millions of people.

What can we be doing more to deal with the coming climate crisis in that region of Africa?

Mr. HEATH. Thank you, Senator, and thanks for your kind words about our service and thanks for your focus on Africa.

Thank you for that question. There is no question that Malawi is facing tremendous challenges. As you know, the population of 19 million people is projected to double by the year 2040 and agriculture accounts for about 75 percent of the work force. It is heavily dependent on agriculture. They would like to shift more toward mining and tourism.

One of the problems they have been facing in the agricultural sector is the lack of a road infrastructure. So, as you know, our Millennium Challenge Corporation, the current compact that is operating in Malawi, is focused on improving that road infrastructure so that farmers can more easily get their products to market.

USAID also has a considerable program to work with farmers to deal with soil conditions, help them with fertilizers, access inputs.

Senator BOOKER. I am going to ask you to pause there. I am so delighted to hear your understanding of the nuance and the detail, and the power of these programs are—that we funded are a fraction of a percent of our budgets that make such a massive change in the trajectories of those nations and I look forward to working with you both on them.

My Senate colleague just showed me something extraordinary. I thought it was better to ask for forgiveness, not permission. He asked for permission to go over instead of forgiveness.

I am going to just not go over too much. But Ms. Smith, I am just going to say it because I am stunned in my nation right now that we are not focusing more on the crisis in Sudan.

It is unconscionable to me that reports are that over 8 million people are on the verge of famine and reports are if we continue with this trajectory that over 2 million people could die of starvation.

When I was coming up in the 1990's, early 2000's, there was so much attention on Darfur. I mean, it was a celebrity focus. But now it is a blind spot in America that—to the grievous suffering that is going on.

I am hoping—and I am grateful, obviously, for our Special Envoy Periello's work. I am really impressed. Every time I talk to State Department officials I am grateful for their thoughtfulness.

But we must do more as a Nation. We must do more as a government, and so I will say no question. I just want to speak to let you know this is a urgent crisis facing humanity right now and it is fueled by global power competitions that are undergirding this conflict and accelerating it, acting as an accelerant to the death and destruction and famine.

And so I just hope that in your position, which I am excited that you will ascend to, that you can make this a driving force because what we do can literally affect the livelihood and well being of millions of people.

And I am grateful to my chairman for him and his team being so centrally focused on this and I know this committee, as I discussed with him yesterday, will try to do as much as we can to support American efforts to bring a resolution to this crisis.

But dear God, I am hoping that more people in America, and especially our government, will deepen their sense of urgency to resolve this catastrophic level of human suffering.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Let me just thank Senator Booker for raising Sudan. It is a tragic situation. I also grew up with Darfur and saying that Darfur—we said never again and then we saw the genocide in Darfur and now we see it again in Darfur.

It is something that we are responsible to make sure we do everything we can to prevent what is happening there and here is the challenge, Ambassador Smith.

We have strategic partners that we are doing security business around the world that are adding to the tragedy of Sudan and it seems to many of us that we have not put a high enough priority on making it clear that they have responsibility to be constructive in ending the violence that is taking place in Sudan. To date we have not been effective in allowing—and making that a reality.

So, two things are happening. One, it does not have the visibility and therefore it is not getting the attention it needs, and, second, it does not appear that we have placed a high enough priority in working with our partners in the region to get the type of results that could be helpful in ending the tragedy there.

So, yes, I am going to continue to put a spotlight on it and I am going to work with Senator Booker. We have to do more. It is horrible what is happening there. It has been—in meeting with NGO's they believe it is the worst crisis in the world today, Sudan, and that is saying a lot because there is a lot of problem areas around the world.

So we need to do a better job in that regard.

So, Senator Booker, thank you for raising that issue.

I want to ask one or two more questions and then if other members have questions we will be glad to take that.

To Ms. Daschbach, I want to followup on the issue of opportunity. In December 2022 the MCC board of directors selected Togo as an eligible country for development.

However, Togo consistently is low in Freedom House's civil liberties scale and according to the Department of State's 2023 country report on human rights Togo's independent media, government critics, and opposition leaders face detention and torture.

So, my question to you is as you use the MCC opportunities it gives us some leverage. How do you intend to use whatever leverage we can to encourage Togo to have the type of reforms that we expect in countries that we have relations with?

Ms. DASCHBACH. Thank you, Senator, for the question.

Togo effectively used the MCC scorecard to improve their governance indicators. However, they have not made those efforts yet on the political side and if confirmed I would press them to do what they did on the economic side to maintain their eligibility if they can do that on the political side.

However, if they are not able to meet those eligibility criteria I would support the MCC board's decision if we need to use those valuable resources elsewhere.

These are important, significant amounts of money and I do believe that Togo can make some changes in order to remain eligible but that is something they are going to really need to do.

The CHAIRMAN. So, in furtherance of the first questions I have asked you, I am going to ask you to keep our staffs informed on a regular basis as to the progress or lack of progress being made in regards to those political reforms. This is an opportunity we do not want to miss.

Ms. DASCHBACH. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. We expect progress will be made. If not, there should be some consequences.

Ms. DASCHBACH. It will be one of my highest priorities.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Mr. Heath, corruption in Malawi is pretty high. It is a country that the U.S. barred entry of four Malawian officials due to their role in significant corruption. In May, the director general for an anti-corruption bureau left there to being suspended right before he was going to issue some warrants on an investigation. Journalists who reported the corruption issues now face jail time, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.

So what leverage do we have to deal with corruption in the country and how do you intend to use our presence to further anti-corruption issues?

Mr. HEATH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Yes, I am aware of the stepping down of the chairman of the anti-corruption bureau. She had been doing an effective job until that time.

From what I understand earlier this year it was announced that the anti-corruption bureau had investigated over 400 different cases of corruption; and yet, only about 26 of them resulted in prosecutions, and there were only 8 convictions.

If I am confirmed as Ambassador, one of my top tasks will be to insist, both in private and in public, that the Malawian Government redouble their efforts to tackle corruption at a very high level. This requires a significant amount of political will.

It also requires resources, and I know that our Government is providing resources to the anti-corruption bureau and to the judiciary to increase their capacity to take on these problems.

I would also want to link that to the problem of economic growth because economic growth is something that Malawi desperately needs.

Their GDP growth rate right now is only averaging about 2 percent, and as I mentioned before, with that burgeoning population that is not going to be enough. They need to attract foreign investment.

If they want to attract American investment they are going to have to demonstrate that corruption is being curtailed because corruption tips the scales against our companies who have to comply with the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act and it tips them toward adversarial countries that turn a blind eye to these practices.

Those are among the things that I would stress if confirmed to be Ambassador to Malawi. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. I thank you for that response because that is a very strong response. Again, I would ask you to keep us informed as to progress, or lack of progress, being made.

These are countries that do not always get into spotlights so it is important for you to keep us engaged on a regular basis. We will send you reminders now and then that we expect this information but it would be good if you initiate status memos to us in fighting corruption in the countries. We appreciate that.

Mr. Jones, I just want you to know we have been talking about this for a long time and they need constitutional reform. Bosnia is a great country but Republika Srpska and the way that they behave and with Serbia's views changing over history back and forth in different ways, Bosnia needs the certainty of a system of government that protects its ethnic diversity and allows it to function as a secure State in the region, and it is important, I think, for the United States to support the current security issues but to look for a permanent way in which Bosnia can be welcomed into Europe and welcomed into the region as a secure and independent State.

And I know you know the history well enough. It is well past time. It is a challenge with Republika Srpska. We recognize that.

And, Ms. Hallett, I just want to underscore and appreciate your answers. The way to solve the Middle East crisis is to isolate Iran, and you said that a couple times, and I agree with you.

The fact that we have normalization, the Abraham Accords with Bahrain and other countries that can work with us—we are working on normalization with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. If that comes about regional security against Iran can be the answer for secure Palestinian people and Israelis. So, I thank you for your response.

And last, Ambassador Smith, I want you—as I have urged earlier, we are going to be working with you to ease the restrictions on Ukraine's ability to defend itself from the brutality of Russia.

I agree with Senator Ricketts' point, and we will be working with you on all those issues.

With that, let me turn to Senator Risch.

Senator RISCH. Thank you, Mr.

[off mic].

The CHAIRMAN. Let me thank you all for your testimony today. The record will remain open to the close—until noon. I always get different scripts here. Until tomorrow at noon for members to ask questions for the record.

We ask that those questions that are submitted that you all answer them completely and quickly as possible because that will avoid further delays in our committee.

And if there is no further business the hearing will come to be adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:56 a.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

Additional Material Submitted for the Record

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO JULIE SMITH BY SENATOR BENJAMIN L. CARDIN

A key part of the China House's mandate is its strategic communications to audiences in the PRC and worldwide and to coordinate those efforts within the USG interagency. This effort on strategic communications implicates bureaus in the P and R family and is relevant across the USG interagency.

Question. If confirmed, how would you improve and better coordinate the U.S. government's message on China and to Chinese speaking audiences?

Answer. China House's strategic communications team and EAP's Office of Press and Public Diplomacy—working closely with other regional and functional bureaus, U.S. embassies and consulates, and Regional China Officers—ensure our messaging resonates with local audiences overseas and advances our policy goals globally. The Bureau of Global Public Affairs' work to translate key public documents into Chinese quickly and accurately and the 2024 launch of the Department's first Chinese-language spokesperson represent key efforts to improve U.S. government messaging to Chinese-speaking foreign audiences. U.S. public diplomacy officers in Mission China, at the American Institute in Taiwan, and in other Chinese-speaking areas engage daily through traditional and social media (on both international and China-specific platforms), as well as through public diplomacy programming with Chinese-speaking foreign audiences. If confirmed, I would ensure we continue and, where possible, expand these efforts to engage Chinese and Chinese-speaking audiences overseas. I would also look for ways to better coordinate U.S. government messaging on the PRC.

Question. What mechanisms exist, either led by China House or in which China House personnel takes part, to coordinate bureaus' efforts across the State Department?

Answer. China House's strategic communications team and EAP's Office of Press and Public Diplomacy (EAP/PPD) coordinate regularly and closely with strategic communications teams from all other Department of State regional bureaus to align efforts and identify cross-regional areas of focus, including on the PRC. Staff from China House's strategic communications team also brief outgoing public diplomacy (PD) officers and local staff on PRC issues, including as part of PD tradecraft trainings at the Department's Foreign Service Institute (FSI). GPA's Office of Global Communications Strategy partnered with China House and EAP/PPD to launch the Department's first global communications strategy on the PRC and is now focused on implementing that strategy. GPA also coordinates with functional Bureaus and China House on messaging across policy priority areas with PRC-related equities including AI and tech future, economic and energy security, and climate and food security. China House and EAP/PPD work with U.S. embassies and consulates overseas and bureaus domestically to identify opportunities for partnership on strategic communications and messaging, including before and after key bilateral and multilateral events, ensuring posts have proactive, affirmative U.S. messages that engage

local target audiences. If confirmed, I would support this work and encourage the bureaus under my leadership to improve coordination on messaging and programming on cross-cutting and transnational issues.

Question. What mechanisms exist, either led by China House or in which China House personnel take part, to coordinate interagency efforts to transmit timely and compelling content to PRC citizens through digital, print or public diplomacy efforts?

Answer. Staff and leadership from China House and EAP's Office of Press and Public Diplomacy (EAP/PPD) regularly partner with colleagues across the Department to participate in NSC-led interagency policy coordination meetings and other formal and informal interagency processes to coordinate interagency efforts on PRC-related messaging, including in advance of key U.S.-PRC bilateral engagements. At Mission China, the Embassy and Consulate press offices work with all agencies at post to produce traditional and social media content and coordinate messaging tailored for PRC audiences. If confirmed, I would encourage EAP to continue taking a leadership role in the U.S. interagency on messaging to Chinese and Chinese-speaking foreign audiences.

Question. If the Department was allocated additional resources to create and disseminate Chinese language content, where would you prioritize additional resources, if confirmed?

Answer. The Department devotes substantial resources in Washington and overseas to producing Chinese language content, including through the Department's first Chinese language spokesperson. As Chinese social media, like its foreign counterparts, is heavily video-focused, and video content is labor-intensive, additional resources to create informative and compelling social media video content could be well utilized.

Africa

Seven African countries have suffered military coups since 2020—Mali, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Chad, Sudan, Niger, and, most recently, Gabon. Five of these—Guinea, Mali, Burkina Faso, Chad, and Niger—are in West Africa or the Sahel.

During the last round of coups in Africa—from 2005 to 2013—the U.S. imposed, either unilaterally or in conjunction with the U.N., targeted sanctions on coup leaders in Mali, Guinea, Mauritania, Guinea Bissau, and the Central African Republic. The U.S. also sanctioned the former president of Niger for seeking an illegal third term in 2009.

Question. Why hasn't the U.S. imposed similar targeted sanctions on coup leaders in Africa this time around? Please explain this decision to break with precedent. Do you believe that individual targeted sanctions are no longer an appropriate response to coups in Africa? Why or why not?

Answer. Sanctions are at times the appropriate response to coups because they may create incentives to change behavior and deter similar actions by others. Sanctions, however, are just one tool among a range of diplomatic options to respond to political instability. If confirmed, I will carefully consider the use of sanctions in responding to recent coups.

Question. If confirmed, what specific diplomatic steps will you take to support the democratic and human security aspirations of people living in the Sahel?

Answer. While the United States has profound concerns about the conduct of coup leaders in the Sahel, we will not abandon the people in the Sahel. If confirmed, I will work to support a return to democracy and strengthen ties to the people through humanitarian, development, economic, and cultural engagement.

Question. To your knowledge does the administration have a strategy in the Sahel developed in the wake of the coups? If confirmed, will you commit to ensuring such a strategy is briefed to this Committee?

Answer. The Department has reviewed its 2022 Sahel Strategy and has made appropriate adjustments, recognizing that there is a fluid situation in the Sahel and no strategy can anticipate all the possibilities in the future. I understand our leadership in the Bureau of African Affairs is planning to brief the Committee on our current approach in the near term. If confirmed, I would ensure that as our strategy continues to evolve, the Department will keep the Committee apprised as appropriate.

Question. Are there lessons learned from our policy approach to the Sahel that we are applying to our approach to the whole coastal West African geography not just the GFA coastal West Africa countries in the wake of the coups in the Sahel?

Answer. Recent coups underscore the critical importance of ongoing U.S. efforts, in partnership with regional allies and civil society, to stem democratic backsliding and confront human rights violations and abuses using a mix of punitive measures and positive inducements. Our policy approach to coastal West Africa, including but not limited to the Global Fragility Act countries, is centered on improving social cohesion, particularly in rural communities; countering misinformation and disinformation; promoting economic prosperity and development; strengthening democratic institutions and transparent, accountable, and effective governance; and improving government and security responsiveness to vulnerable communities, including women and girls through our implementation of the Women, Peace, and Security Act. If confirmed, I will consult closely with Congress on this issue.

Our embassies in various African countries do not have sufficient staff to pursue our policy objectives. At some hard-to-fill posts in Africa, diplomats are having to take on two to three additional roles. These staffing gaps occur at entry level, mid-level and senior level positions. Additionally, the committee is receiving nominations of career diplomats for posts in Africa with little to no Africa experience. The President has even nominated people to serve as ambassador to countries in Francophone West Africa who don't speak French and therefore are unable to communicate directly with host government officials, opposition leaders, civil society activists, local media, or the broader population without the help of a translator.

Question. If confirmed, what will you do to ensure we have experienced, qualified diplomats to fill positions at hard-to-fill posts in African countries- especially at the ambassadorial level?

Answer. The Department has a robust process for recommending candidates for Chiefs of Mission. If confirmed, I am committed to identifying highly qualified individuals for every one of these positions in the Bureau of African Affairs, particularly emphasizing those candidates with hardship and regional experience, as well as demonstrated leadership experience.

As many as 150,000 people have been killed in Sudan and more than 8 million have been displaced inside and outside the country. Amnesty International reports indicate the increased risk of sexual violence against women and girls during this protracted conflict. The devastation in Darfur shows sufficient evidence of a genocide. On September 11th, the United Nations Security Council extended the Darfur arms embargo. Despite the arms embargo, the warring parties of RSF and SAF continue to be supplied weapons by external forces such as Turkey, UAE, Iran, and Egypt.

Question. What specific steps has the U.S. taken to pressure external actors to cease the delivery of arms into Sudan?

Answer. We have repeatedly called for an end to all external support to the belligerents in this conflict and have urged all our partners to use their influence to press the belligerents to agree to a ceasefire. We also successfully led efforts, along with partners, in the U.N. Security Council to renew the sanctions regime and arms embargo for Darfur, for another 12 months. The Treasury Department has also sanctioned nine entities for contributing to the conflict, including raising finance and procuring arms needed to continue the conflict.

Question. What specific steps will you take if confirmed to ensure that countries are respecting the U.N. arms embargo?

Answer. We will continue to speak out about our concerns about external support to the belligerents and raise these issues in bilateral discussions. Following the renewal of the Darfur U.N. arms embargo for an additional year, we are urging the UNSC to take action to stop the flow of arms into Darfur and share information on weapons transfers with the appropriate U.N. Panels to ensure they maintain the ability to investigate and report on sanctions violations.

Question. How can the U.S. best incorporate the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda into our overall strategy for Sudan? What elements of the interagency need to be included for an effective policy to assist women and girls during and after the conflict subsides, and what steps will you take, if confirmed, to ensure the agenda is effectively mainstreamed?

Answer. The Departments of State, Defense, Homeland Security and USAID remain committed to implementing the WPS agenda in conflict and crisis areas as reflected in the updated U.S. Strategy and National Action Plan on WPS released last year. The Strategy emphasizes the importance of women's meaningful participation in peace and political processes to prevent conflict and nurture democracy. For example, the Department invited fourteen Sudanese women civil society leaders and experts to participate in the August U.S.-mediated talks on Sudan in Switzerland. The women leaders were pivotal in advancing a code of conduct for the belligerent parties that included important measures to combat conflict-related sexual violence. We will continue to elevate women's voices and make every effort to support Sudanese women-led movements and their robust participation in Sudan's mediation processes and throughout a democratic transition.

Question. If confirmed, will you work to ensure that Secretary Blinken updates the December 2023 atrocities determination to reflect additional information regarding violations of international law, including the use of food as a weapon of war?

Answer. The Department continually monitors reports of atrocities in Sudan and assesses evidence of wrongdoing. The Secretary has the prerogative to make additional atrocity determinations if and when appropriate. All atrocity crimes are heinous and reprehensible.

The 2023 massacre in El Geneina in which 10,000 to 15,000 people were killed by Rapid Support Forces, is a stark symbol of the international community's failure to act to protect civilians in Sudan. Advocates are warning that civilians in El Fasher, caught in a perfect storm of starvation, seasonal rains, bombardment and deliberate blocking of humanitarian aid may suffer the same fate.

Question. If confirmed, what steps will you take to develop a mechanism to provide for protection of civilians in Sudan?

Answer. We continue to examine the full range of options to protect civilians and to support implementation of any future cessation of hostilities agreement in Sudan. We also continue to emphasize that an immediate cessation of hostilities is imperative and the most effective and durable way to protect the Sudanese people. We are pressing the belligerents to stop further attacks and establish local truces for El Fasher and other areas of conflict. We have also placed targeted sanctions on seven individuals who are responsible for exacerbating instability or involvement in serious human rights abuses.

Question. Will you commit to ensuring that all relevant bureaus under your remit immediately provide at least one year-long detailee to report directly to the Special Envoy for Sudan?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to staffing the Special Envoy with sufficient personnel and using all available assets from the relevant bureaus under my remit.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO JULIE SMITH BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

Nominations

The Under Secretary for Political Affairs has historically been responsible for providing input on candidates for other senior-position appointments. I have had serious vetting concerns with several nominees before this committee.

Question. Do you commit to conducting a deeper review of nominees, if confirmed?

Answer. The White House, in coordination with the Department of State, will continue to conduct a comprehensive vetting and review of all Department nominees.

Iran Policy

Almost two years ago, President Biden admitted the Iran nuclear deal was "dead," yet the Biden-Harris administration has not articulated what its Iran policy actually is. Iran continues to fund Hamas. Iran continues to attack Americans and our interests. Secretary Blinken just reported Iran is sending ballistic missiles to Russia for its invasion of Ukraine, which reminds us we need a serious Iran policy.

Question. Do you support the unfreezing of Iranian funds?

Answer. If confirmed, I am committed to ensuring that any Iranian funds held in restricted accounts outside of Iran are available only for humanitarian purposes, consistent with longstanding U.S. policy and values across administrations. I support using all available economic tools to deter, confront, and disrupt the full range of Iran's destabilizing and problematic behaviors, in close coordination with our allies and partners.

Question. What policy changes do you support to increase pressure and re-establish deterrence with Iran?

Answer. I support the Administration continuing to explore how to use all tools—military, economic, and diplomatic—available to deter, confront, and disrupt the full range of Iran's destabilizing and problematic behaviors, in close coordination with our allies and partners. This includes continuing to vigorously enforce all sanctions on Iran and pursue sanctions evaders, taking military action when necessary to defend U.S. personnel in the region, and engaging partners and allies to put diplomatic and multilateral pressure on Iran to cease its support to terrorist organizations and other destabilizing actors in the region.

China

I recently put out two reports on transatlantic cooperation on China. The Biden administration's record on this is dismal, especially on economic cooperation and Africa policy.

Question. If confirmed, what would be your top three priorities to advance a competitive strategy against China globally, including with our European partners?

Answer. I read your reports on enhancing transatlantic cooperation on China with interest as this has been one of my top priorities as the U.S. Permanent Representative to NATO. If confirmed, I would focus on ensuring the United States maintains an enduring competitive edge without allowing competition to inadvertently veer into conflict. Consistent with the Biden administration's China strategy, my top priorities would be to support investments in the sources of American strength, deepen alignment with allies and partners, and continue to implement robust competitive actions. If confirmed, I would work to ensure the United States leads in the sources of technological and economic growth, further institutionalizes the strengthening of ties with Indo-Pacific and European allies and partners, and prevents advanced and sensitive technologies from being used to undermine our national security. These priorities focus on putting ourselves in the best position to advance American interests in a multi-dimensional, long-term competition with the PRC.

Question. The very limited sanctions we have put on China for its support to Russia in Ukraine are not working. Why is the administration not being more aggressive in punishing China for its support for Russia's war?

Answer. The United States has already sanctioned or listed over 300 PRC-based entities that have provided support to Russia's defense industrial base and supported Russia's war against Ukraine. We will not hesitate to impose additional measures as necessary. We've also prioritized working with allies to further pressure the PRC, and in April and June the EU imposed export-related restrictions on PRC-based for their support to Russia's defense industrial base. We raise this issue consistently in multilateral discussions - including at NATO - and have built consensus among our allies and partners to speak out against the PRC's support to Russia's war effort, as we saw in recent G7 and NATO leaders' statements. We also continue to raise our concerns with the PRC at all levels.

Question. Do you believe that China should play any role in peace negotiations with respect to Ukraine or in reconstruction?

Answer. We call on all countries to play a constructive role in securing a just and lasting peace for Ukraine. However, I have no illusions about the nature of the PRC's strategic partnership with Russia. Beijing is neither an honest broker nor a neutral player, and I am realistic about Beijing's unwillingness to play a constructive, transparent role. The United States has taken action against persons in the PRC for actions that enable the Kremlin's war machine, and we will continue to do so as appropriate. If confirmed, I commit to monitoring Beijing's activity closely, to raising directly our concerns with the PRC, and to coordinating closely with our allies and partners on our concerns about PRC support for Russia. The United States will need to remain exceedingly wary of the PRC's role in Ukraine.

Yemen

One of President Biden's first acts was to de-list the Houthis as a terror organization and cut off arms sales to Saudi Arabia. Now, almost four years

later, the U.S. and UK are involved in an active bombing campaign in Yemen, the Houthis have crippled shipping through the Red Sea, and the administration has grudgingly resumed sales to the Saudis.

Question. What more can be done to pressure the Houthis?

Answer. The State Department is coordinating closely with interagency partners to identify new options to pressure the Houthis, and their enablers, to stop their attacks. Options to increase pressure include political, economic, and, as appropriate, military measures.

Question. What role is Europe taking to address the threat to shipping? Most of this cargo is headed for Europe.

Answer. The Department is working closely with European partners and allies on diplomatic efforts to press for a halt to Houthi attacks in the Red Sea and surrounding waters. Additionally, the European Union has established Operation Aspides, which is working in close coordination with U.S. and partner efforts in the region to protect international freedom of navigation in the Red Sea. Individual European partners have also taken part in coalition strikes aimed at degrading Houthi capacity to undertake additional strikes in the region.

Question. Can you comment on the resumption of arms sales to the Saudis? I understand their procedures to avoid civilian casualties are now on par with the U.S. Air Force.

Answer. Since the April 2022 truce between Saudi Arabia and the Houthis, there has not been a single Saudi airstrike into Yemen and cross-border fire has largely ceased. Saudi Arabia has also implemented a number of improvements in civilian harm mitigation procedures including modernizing strike planning to align with U.S. processes. The resumption of certain arms transfers to Saudi Arabia acknowledges these changes. Going forward, we will consider new transfers on a typical case-by-case basis consistent with the Conventional Arms Transfers Policy.

Afghanistan Withdrawal

Biden and Harris have argued that President Trump's agreement with the Taliban, the Doha agreement, "tied their hands" and made withdrawal a foregone conclusion. The State Department had the nerve to repeat this argument as recently as last week. The fact is the Doha agreement stipulated that the Taliban meet certain CT and dialogue benchmarks before the U.S. would withdraw troops.

Question. Did the Taliban meet any of their counterterrorism commitments or promises to engage in an intra-Afghan dialogue?

Answer. The United States' most critical, enduring interest in Afghanistan is ensuring that the country can never again be a launching pad for terrorist attacks against the United States. We press the Taliban to fulfill their counterterrorism commitments to prevent any group or individual, including al-Qa'ida and ISIS-K, from using the soil of Afghanistan to threaten the security of the United States and our allies. The Taliban have repeatedly stated that they will not allow terrorists to use Afghanistan to threaten the security of other countries. Al-Qa'ida and its regional affiliate, Al-Qa'ida in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), appear to maintain a low profile, presumably in accordance with Taliban directives. The Taliban are actively fighting ISIS-K, which they view as an existential threat. In addition to pressing the Taliban to uphold their counterterrorism commitments, the United States takes a whole-of-government approach to counterterrorism efforts related to Afghanistan, in cooperation with key partners and allies, who share our determination to prevent the re-emergence of external threats from Afghanistan.

The Taliban also committed to an intra-Afghan dialogue leading to an agreement on a political roadmap for Afghanistan. They have taken no steps over the last three years to signal an interest in fulfilling this commitment, and in fact have been consolidating their monolithic and non-representative governing arrangements. All Taliban leaders with meaningful decision-making authority are men and virtually all are Pashtun clerics. We continue to make clear to the Taliban that legitimacy begins at home and that any significant steps toward normalizing relations with the international community are contingent upon a profound improvement in the Taliban's conduct, particularly their respect for the rights of all Afghans.

Question. Have human rights and the threat from transnational terrorists become better or worse after the withdrawal?

Answer. The United States is deeply concerned about the deterioration of human rights in Afghanistan following the Taliban takeover in August 2021. The Taliban's discriminatory edicts targeting women and girls have been the most extreme. They

banned women and girls from education beyond the 6th grade, limited women's employment opportunities, restricted their freedom of movement, and have effectively removed them from public spaces. The Taliban's recent directives "Promoting Virtue and Preventing Vice" bar women's voices and faces in public. We continue to monitor the human rights situation in Afghanistan and are committed to using every tool at our disposal to support all Afghans, especially Afghan women and girls.

The United States' most critical, enduring interest in Afghanistan is ensuring that the country can never again be a launching pad for terrorist attacks against the United States. We press the Taliban to fulfill their counterterrorism commitments to prevent any group or individual, including al-Qa'ida and ISIS-K, from using the soil of Afghanistan to threaten the security of the United States and our allies. The Taliban have repeatedly stated that they will not allow terrorists to use Afghanistan to threaten the security of other countries. Al-Qa'ida and its regional affiliate, Al-Qa'ida in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), appear to maintain a low profile, presumably in accordance with Taliban directives. The Taliban are actively fighting ISIS-K, which they view as an existential threat. In addition to pressing the Taliban to uphold their counterterrorism commitments, the United States takes a whole-of-government approach to counterterrorism efforts related to Afghanistan, in cooperation with key partners and allies, who share our determination to prevent the re-emergence of external threats from Afghanistan.?

State Management and Oversight

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. Yes. Managers and supervisors must develop their teams year-round by setting Foreign and Civil Service performance goals, checking in regularly to provide direct and accurate feedback, and making course corrections as needed. All employees, Foreign and Civil Service, are disadvantaged when they do not have feedback and interaction that is timely and actionable throughout the entire rating period, not just once a year. Supervisors for Civil Service employees are required by the Foreign Affairs Handbook to recognize employees' performance and to take appropriate action to address poor performance. Supervisors for the Foreign Service are required to complete documented professional development sessions throughout the performance cycle. This is the standard to which I hold myself and is what I will expect from Department leaders, should I be confirmed.

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. Absolutely. If confirmed, I will work with the Global Talent Management Bureau to ensure that providing constructive employee feedback to improve performance is reinforced in our policies at every level and is being communicated and implemented globally. GTM has created resources to support employees, supervisors, and HR personnel in this area. If confirmed, I will ensure that our leaders and managers continue to be held accountable to the high standards we set for our employees and that we remain committed to continuous improvement. That is what I did during my time in NATO and, should I be confirmed, it is what will remain a priority for me in the future.

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 accomplish fully their missions?

Answer. Secretary Blinken has emphasized this when he said that "there's no substitute for face-to-face engagement. And there's no one more courageous, more intrepid, more enterprising than the U.S. Foreign Service, especially when it comes to public engagement, which is such a vital piece of our diplomacy."From personal experience I know that U.S. diplomats at Embassies and consulates overseas endeavor every day to engage with host country government officials, civil society organizations, and local citizens. Such engagement is a core tenet of American diplomacy in action and must continue. As our U.S. Permanent Representative to NATO

since November 2021, I have held numerous engagements outside the U.S.Mission in Brussels—in the city, throughout Belgium and around Europe.

Question. Do you support U.S. diplomats being able to access fully all local populations?

Answer. Yes, it is imperative that U.S. diplomats be able to access and interact with local populations in the countries that host our Embassies and consulates. While political and security concerns must always be at the forefront of these interactions, and the safety and security of American diplomatic personnel is paramount for any Chief of Mission, hearing directly from local citizens helps American diplomats gain a deeper understanding about a country, provides critical insights that help enhance diplomatic engagements, and makes us better, more effective professionals.

Question. Congressional Delegations (CODELs) and Staff Delegations (STAFFDELs) serve a critical oversight mission. Do you pledge to direct all posts to support fully all CODELs and STAFFDELs that seek to travel abroad?

Answer. The State Department strongly supports and encourages Congressional travel abroad. I have witnessed firsthand the value of Congressional engagement with foreign counterparts. More importantly, I understand that Congress has a critical role in conducting constitutionally mandated oversight of the Executive Branch to ensure taxpayer dollars are being spent wisely and in furtherance of advancing American's foreign policy goals. These visits are critically important as Members of Congress serve as strong advocates for American values and can convey or echo Mission messages to senior foreign counterparts. In 2023 alone, the Department supported over 594 congressional and staff delegations, including in war zones and other high-risk areas.

Question. Do you agree to direct all posts to support fully any CODEL or STAFFDEL, with the only exceptions for simultaneous or overlapping visits by the President or First Lady of the United States, the Vice President, or the Secretaries of State or Defense?

Answer. Each of our missions around the world are unique. Some of our larger posts are well equipped to handle multiple visits at the same time. For example, during the 80th anniversary of D-Day, U.S. Embassy Paris supported President Biden, two large congressional delegations consisting of some 73 Members of Congress, the Secretaries of Defense and State, in addition to a host of senior Executive Branch officials. On the other hand, some of our smaller missions simply do not have the resources or staffing on hand to support simultaneous congressional visits. Congressional travel to certain regions may also be limited due to safety or security considerations. However, our goal is always to facilitate official foreign travel. There may be rare instances, though, where we need to ask congressional delegations for their flexibility in working with our posts to select alternate travel dates.

Question. The U.S. has recently prioritized engagement with China on climate issues. Do you think climate is our most important issue in the China relationship? If so, what concessions on key strategic issues or constraints on U.S. behavior should we be prepared to give to secure China's cooperation on climate?

Answer. Climate change is not a bilateral issue, but a global one. The PRC is the world's largest emitter, and we cannot keep a safer, 1.5-degree Celsius future within reach unless the PRC acts faster to cut all its greenhouse gas emissions. We remain acutely aware of the need to narrowly scope and critically assess areas of cooperation to ensure they protect and advance U.S. national interests. The United States will continue to work with the PRC on global and transnational challenges, such as climate and counternarcotics, when it is in our interest to do so, and, 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 that is what the world expects. It is also true that the PRC's steps to date on climate are inadequate to the challenge.

Question. Why is the Biden administration and the State Department in particular facilitating cooperation on climate with U.S. cities, states, and think tanks, when we know the PRC prioritizes malign influence operations at the subnational level to undermine U.S. foreign policy? What guardrails should be put in place to prevent subnational engagements from being used to legitimize and facilitate PRC malign influence?

Answer. We are clear-eyed about PRC attempts to co-opt subnational and nongovernmental actors and are determined to push back against malign influence that exploits our openness. Under this administration, the Department established a Subnational Diplomacy Unit dedicated to engaging with state and local officials both

in the United States and abroad. This new office collaborates with the Office of China Coordination to work with state and local officials to raise awareness, bolster resilience to PRC influence, and serve as a resource to subnational governments to help ensure international engagements benefit U.S. communities. With that always in mind, we work with the PRC to enhance climate action to help avoid the worst climate impacts. States, provinces, and cities can play an important role in these efforts through practical climate cooperation in areas such as the power, transportation, waste, and building sectors. These interactions then will need to be carefully calibrated and seriously evaluated for their overall impact and effectiveness.

Question. In November 2023, Secretary of Treasury Yellen wrote that a "constructive economic relationship" with China can "serve as a stabilizing force for the overall relationship." Do you agree with this statement, and will that inform how you approach relations with China, if confirmed?

Answer. The United States will explore working with the PRC where our interests align, such as promoting global macroeconomic stability. Even as the United States and PRC work together where our interests intersect, we support de-risking, diversifying, and protecting the interests of our workers and companies. That means investing in our own capacities and in secure, resilient supply chains; pushing for level playing fields for our workers and our companies; defending against harmful trade practices; and protecting our critical technologies so that they are not used against us.

Question. Deputy Secretary of State Campbell recently said Beijing is giving Moscow's war machine "very substantial" support in return for Russian technical assistance on submarines and missile technology. Russia and China are ideologically aligned and have increased their cooperation on trade, technology, sanctions evasion, and propaganda since the war began. In light of this, do you believe there is a legitimate role for China in resolving the war between Russia and Ukraine, or in rebuilding Ukraine after the war is over? Please explain your view in detail.

Answer. We call on all countries to play a constructive role in securing a just and lasting peace for Ukraine.? However, I have no illusions about the nature of the PRC's strategic partnership with Russia.? Beijing is not an honest broker nor is it neutral. I am clear-eyed about Beijing's unwillingness to play a constructive, transparent role.? The United States has taken over 300 actions against PRC companies for supporting the Kremlin's war machine, and we will take further action as appropriate.? If confirmed, I commit to monitoring Beijing's activity closely, to raising directly our concerns with the PRC, and to coordinating closely with our allies and partners on our concerns about PRC support for Russia.? While serving at the U.S. Permanent Representative to NATO these last three years, I have repeatedly warned our NATO allies about how the PRC is supporting Russia's defense industrial base.

Question. Several Biden administration officials and European allies have told SFRC they believe pursuing a "wedge strategy" or exploiting perceived daylight between Russia and China should be a focus of U.S. foreign policy towards Russia and China. Do you hold this view? If yes, why? Is the Administration currently pursuing any efforts to exploit daylight between Russia and China?

Answer. While we continue to take steps to curb China's provision of support to Russia's war against Ukraine, we are realistic about the geopolitical reality of the PRC and Russia's alignment. There may be limited areas of friction between the PRC and Russia, such as the PRC's ambitions in the Arctic and Central Asia, but we do not believe they will supersede their leaders' impetus to maintain a close and cooperative relationship.

Question. Do you commit to prioritizing securing the release of wrongfully detained U.S. citizens Kai Li and Mark Swidan?

Answer. Yes. The release of American citizens subject to wrongful detentions is a top priority for this Administration, and every high-level meeting we have focuses on making progress on bringing them home. Due to the sensitive nature of these conversations, we should not publicly discuss our efforts or specific cases, but our efforts are ongoing. If confirmed, I will continue to prioritize bringing Americans home.

Question. Do you commit to working with allies and partners to press for the release of detained prisoners such as Ekpar Asat, Ilhan Tohti, and others in Xinjiang?

Answer. Yes. I am very concerned by the cases of Ekpar Asat and Ilham Tohti, and I supported senior U.S. officials continuing to raise their cases with the PRC. If confirmed, I will continue to strongly advocate on behalf of Ekpar Asat and Ilham

Tohti and other individual human rights cases of concern, as well as to work with our allies and partners to promote accountability for the PRC government's ongoing genocide, crimes against humanity, and other human rights abuses against Uyghurs and members of other ethnic and religious minority groups in Xinjiang.

Question. If confirmed, will you press for the release of Jimmy Lai and other political prisoners in Hong Kong?

Answer. Yes. If confirmed, I will continue to call on the PRC government to respect the rights and freedoms of people in Hong Kong, as guaranteed by the Basic Law and the Sino-British Joint Declaration, and will continue to advocate for the release of Jimmy Lai and other unjustly detained political prisoners in Hong Kong. The Administration raises human rights issues with the PRC government at every opportunity and at the highest levels. In his meetings with President Xi, President Biden raises concerns about PRC human rights abuses, including in Xinjiang, Tibet, and Hong Kong.

China's actions in the South China Sea are testing the credibility and value of U.S. commitments to allies and partners in the region. Senators Risch, Rubio, and Wicker have repeatedly requested the Biden administration provide a full list of plans, branches, and sequels or other diplomatic or non-defense options developed by the Departments of State and Defense to support the Philippines nearly a year ago.

Question. Will you commit to working with colleagues at State and DOD to do so? What should the United States do to support the Philippines in the South China Sea?

Answer. The PRC's dangerous, irresponsible, and unlawful actions in the South China Sea continue to undermine regional peace and stability. As President Biden has made clear, the 1951 United States-Philippines Mutual Defense Treaty extends to armed attacks against Philippine armed forces, aircraft, and public vessels—including those of its Coast Guard—anywhere in the South China Sea.

If confirmed, I will work across the Department and the interagency to support our oldest treaty ally in the Indo-Pacific—the Philippines—and uphold international law in the South China Sea. The United States should continue to consult closely with the Philippines at the highest levels on diplomatic response options, and strengthen the Philippines' defense capabilities, as well as work with international partners to maintain a steady drumbeat of support for the Philippines, given the PRC's pattern of escalatory behavior.

Question. What in your view is the intended end state of U.S. policy towards Burma?

Answer. The people of Burma have made clear they do not want to live under a military dictatorship. U.S. policy is to support them and all those working peacefully to restore Burma's path to democracy and to chart their own future. We stand in solidarity with the people of Burma and their resolve to bring stability, unity, prosperity, and democracy to their country. The United States is working with stakeholders and regional partners to end the violence in Burma and foster the conditions for a genuine federalist, inclusive, and democratic future for the country. The military regime must end its violence against the people of Burma, release those unjustly and arbitrarily detained, allow unhindered humanitarian access, and engage in a meaningful dialogue with all stakeholders to return the country to the path of inclusive, representative democracy.

Following the military coup d'état in February 2021, the United States has prioritized the following key lines of effort in our Burma policy: increasing economic and political pressure on the regime; ensuring close diplomatic coordination with our allies and partners to pursue an end to the crisis; expanding support for the pro-democracy and ethnic resistance organizations; providing atrocity prevention and civilian protection support in light of regime depredations; and maintaining our broader humanitarian assistance to the country.

Question. Is ASEAN's consensus-based model of decision making at odds with ASEAN centrality?

Answer. By make-up, ASEAN is a heterogeneous grouping, consisting of ten Southeast Asian countries with different governing structures, geographies, populations, cultural traditions, and foreign policy priorities. While these variations can mean that ASEAN's consensus-based model leads to some tough deliberations, achieving consensus is also what coheres ASEAN and anchors it within the regional architecture.

ASEAN Centrality means that ASEAN sits at the center of the regional institutional architecture, providing substantial convening power to bring global powers to the table to discuss pressing regional and international issues. ASEAN, therefore, has influence in setting the regional agenda over the PRC and other players, while most ASEAN member states are broadly aligned with the United States on many issues.

ASEAN's consensus-based model also has helped prevent conflict and deepen ties between member states throughout its 54-year history. That, in turn, further fortifies inter-ASEAN economic and cultural ties, balancing the gravitational pull in the region away from the PRC.

Last year, the State Department and USAID informed SFRC of their assessment that new leadership in Cambodia represented an opportunity to improve bilateral relations. Since then, we have seen little improvement in Cambodia's human rights record, and the government of Hun Manet has grown closer to the PRC.

Question. Have we lost Cambodia to China?

Answer. The window of opportunity to improve bilateral relations with the Hun Manet administration remains open despite the continued challenges we have seen over the past year. High-level Cambodian government officials continue to signal their desire to deepen cooperation with the United States, particularly in expanding economic, energy, and security assistance cooperation. We are working with our interagency partners on confidence building measures and will continue to engage the Cambodian government constructively on ways we can build a positive and sustainable long-term relationship on the foundation of shared mutual interests. For example, the USG has improved bilateral relations through strong engagement in the energy sector, particularly under the Japan-U.S.-Mekong Power Partnership (JUMPP). The Cambodian energy sector currently relies heavily on investment from Chinese companies. In April, the Department of State's Bureau of Energy Resources held the JUMPP Clean Energy Investment Conference in Phnom Penh, convening over 150 stakeholders across the private and public sectors to showcase clean energy investment opportunities in Cambodia and the region, and facilitate networking sessions between U.S. energy developers and Cambodian power sector officials. Cambodia remains an active and engaged participant in JUMPP.

We continue to engage the Cambodian government in Phnom Penh, in Washington, and through international fora, to make clear our human rights concerns and to call on Cambodian authorities to restore genuine multiparty democracy and independent media, respect human rights of the Cambodian people, and promote and protect fundamental freedoms including freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly. We also use every opportunity with high-level interlocutors to push for a positive resolution for cases of dual Cambodian American citizens Seng Theary [Tiery], Pen Vuthy [Voothy], as well as political opposition figure, Kem Sokha.

We believe accountability is an important part of any bilateral relationship and we must be ready to act when we see unjust actions taking place. In recent weeks, the State Department worked with Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) to sanction Cambodian business tycoon Ly Yong Phat, and several of his associated businesses, for their role in serious human rights abuses related to the treatment of workers subjected to forced labor in online investment scam operations. The interagency efforts that went into this action underscore our commitment to hold accountable those involved in human trafficking and other abuses, while also disrupting their ability to operate investment fraud schemes that target countless unsuspecting individuals, including Americans.

Question. What are the consequences for the United States of a PLA presence at Ream?

Answer. The United States, our like-minded partners, and countries in the region have consistently expressed serious concern about the intent, nature, and scope of construction at Ream Naval Base, as well as the role the PRC military is playing in this process and in future use of the facility.

The Cambodian people, neighboring countries, ASEAN, and the region would benefit from transparency on PRC activities at Ream. We have repeatedly urged the Cambodian government to closely examine the agreements its defense officials have made with Beijing to ensure the PRC will not be allowed to have a permanent military presence or sensitive technology at the base, which could undermine Cambodia's sovereignty and inadvertently affect regional peace and stability.

We do not want to see Cambodia lose control of its sovereign territory or ability to determine and protect its national interests within its own borders. Our allies

and partners in the region share these concerns and work collaboratively with us and the Cambodian government to ensure peace and stability across Southeast Asia and the entire Indo-Pacific.

Question. What U.S. interests are served by continuing to provide assistance to Cambodia?

Answer. Cambodia cooperates closely with the United States on upholding important global norms, including DRPK sanctions enforcement, Russia's war in Ukraine, and Burma's participation in ASEAN. Twice in the past eight months, Cambodia seized PRC-flagged and Palau-flagged vessels suspected of carrying DPRK-origin coal and iron ore based on U.S.-provided information to adhere to UNSC sanctions and to demonstrate the country's independent foreign policy.

Our foreign assistance in Cambodia, implemented primarily by USAID, advances U.S. national security interests by strengthening support for market-based, private sector-led sustainable economic growth; and providing a positive, transparent, and affirmative model of development, in contrast to the PRC's approach. Our assistance also enables collaboration on global health security matters, including capacity building and open sharing of disease-related surveillance data to better predict and respond to emerging threats, that do not respect international borders.

Cambodia also receives strong technical assistance from the Department of State's Bureau of Energy Resources Power Sector Program to expand energy access and improve electricity reliability. Under the Japan-U.S.-Mekong Power Partnership (JUMPP), the U.S. has strengthened its bilateral relationship with Cambodia on the energy sector. The program promotes energy security and independence in the Lower Mekong, where the region's energy sector holds significant investment from Chinese companies. Since 2019, Cambodia has received assistance on power grid reliability, incorporating more solar and batteries into its power system, and strengthening cross-border electricity trade to expand energy access and economic opportunity. Our support and guidance developing this high energy demand market will create new investment and market access opportunities for U.S. businesses.

Cambodia is now ASEAN's U.S. country coordinator and has shared with us its desire to leverage its three-year role to jointly elevate ASEAN-U.S. work on the digital economy, cybersecurity, and AI. Cambodia has also been a proponent of advancing disability rights, both at home and in ASEAN fora.

Question. Do you support providing FMF to Taiwan?

Answer. Yes. Consistent with the Taiwan Relations Act, I understand the United States makes available to Taiwan defense articles and services necessary to enable it to maintain a sufficient self-defense capability, commensurate with the threat it faces. Due to the increased threat from the PLA, I support further resources like FMF and PDA that enhance Taiwan's self-defense capability.

Question. Do you support providing Taiwan with equipment through PDA? Why has the Biden administration not used the full PDA authority it received in FY2023?

Answer. Yes. I understand the Administration's use of PDA for Taiwan shows continued commitment to help Taiwan maintain a sufficient self-defense capability, in line with our longstanding policy. PDA is a valuable complement to other security cooperation tools like FMS and FMF. Since it is a new authority in the Taiwan context, I understand the Administration is continuing to work with partners to maximize its effectiveness, and to continue to seek to maximize use of this authorization, as appropriate.

SFRC and SASC sent a request for information to the Administration about Taiwan defense issues in September 2022. We know the Departments of State and Defense did the analysis required to answer these questions, but have received nothing.

Question. Why hasn't Congress received the information it asked for? Deputy Secretary Kurt Campbell said in December 2023 that this would be, ensuring Congress receives timely responses to Congressional requests for information would be "among [his] highest priorities."

Answer. I do not have any specific information regarding these pending requests. If confirmed, I will coordinate with the necessary offices on a response.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO JULIE SMITH 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 PRC 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 its absolute control of Chinese society and industry, the CCP could stop all of these destructive actions tomorrow if it so chooses. Is the CCP an economic, diplomatic, military, and technological threat to the United States?

Answer. Last 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." As Secretary Blinken has said, under President Xi, the CCP has become more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad. If confirmed, I will advance U.S. national security interests and counter the People's Republic of China's (PRC) efforts to expand its problematic influence and use of coercion, through diplomatic engagements, public diplomacy, and commercial advocacy to bolster ties with our allies and partners.

Question. Does the CCP undertake any activities that are beneficial to U.S. interests? If so, please explain.

Answer. 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 2024 Annual Threat Assessment, the CCP is seeking to "preempt challenges to its reputation and legitimacy, undercutting U.S. influence, driving wedges between Washington and its partners, and fostering global norms that favor its authoritarian system." While we are clear-eyed about the threat the PRC poses to the international order and expect that to be the case for the foreseeable future, diplomacy with the PRC can make progress in discrete areas that matter to the American people, such as curbing the flow of fentanyl precursors and preventing competition from veering into conflict.

Question. Do you believe that there are any areas in which the CCP would constructively work with the United States in good faith, knowing that at any moment Chinese interlocuters with U.S. representatives could be disappeared? If so, please explain.

Answer. The United States will work with the PRC to address transnational challenges, such as climate change and fentanyl, when it is in the U.S. interest to do so. We are clear-eyed about the threat the PRC poses to the international order and focus on results-oriented diplomacy to deliver on key priorities that matter to the American people. If confirmed, I will work with my colleagues across the U.S. interagency and Congress 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 PRC in the countries or areas in which you will work?

Answer. If confirmed, my priority will be advancing U.S. national security interests 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 globally.

Question. As you may be aware, a group of federal employees penned an open letter to President Biden criticizing U.S. support for Israel in the aftermath of Hamas' brutal terrorist attack on October 7, 2023. In addition, employees from nearly two dozen agencies have staged walkouts in protest of the administration's Israel policy. Efforts like these directly undermine the duty of our diplomats to advance the policies of the President of the United States. Yes or no, did you sign the letter to the President expressing opposition to the President's Israel policy?

Answer. No. I did not.

Question. Yes or no, did you participate in the January 16, 2024 walkout?

Answer. No , I did not.

Question. If confirmed, would you define one of your employees or contractors signing an open letter criticizing you, or policies you undertake at the instruction

of the President, as insubordination as defined by the Government Accountability Office?

Answer. I am mindful of and value Department employees' right to free speech under the First Amendment. Moreover, I recognize that the expression of disagreement does not in and of itself constitute insubordination. If confirmed, I would work with the Department's Office of the Legal Adviser to determine the proper course of action in this or any other specific cases.

Question. In your view, are the actions these federal employees took, by anonymously signing a letter to the President of the United States, covered as "whistleblowing?"

Answer. If confirmed, I would work with the Department of State's Office of the Legal Adviser to understand whether a specific action constituted whistleblowing. Moreover, if confirmed, I will ensure that I and other managers in the Department protect whistleblowers' rights, including the right to free speech under the First Amendment.

Question. If confirmed, how will you address discipline issues, such as insubordination, that do not take established dissent channels?

Answer. I am mindful of and value Department of State employees' right to free speech under the First Amendment. As Secretary Blinken has said, we should "be sure to sustain and expand the space for debate and dissent that makes our policies and our institution better." Moreover, I understand the expression of dissent is unlikely to constitute insubordination. However, in other contexts, in the event a discipline issue came to me, including insubordination, I would consult with the Department's subject matter experts and attorneys to ensure the matter is handled appropriately.

Question. Have you ever expressed support for an Israeli ceasefire in Gaza?

Answer. I understand the Administration's primary focus is securing an immediate ceasefire of at least six weeks, getting hostages out, and surging more humanitarian assistance in to begin restoring the lives of Palestinians in Gaza. I support those efforts.

Question. Do you agree that Hamas is an antisemitic entity?

Answer. Yes, Hamas espouses antisemitism. Hamas, which is designated by the United States as a foreign terrorist organization, seeks to eliminate the State of Israel, and its founding charter calls for the killing of Jews.

Question. Would a ceasefire allow these groups to reconstitute and attack Israel, and Americans, in the future?

Answer. Endless conflict without a political plan will leave Israel bogged down in Gaza and exacerbate the security challenges it faces in the north of Israel, the West Bank, and against Iran and its partners and proxies. A ceasefire is necessary to create the conditions so the hostages can come home. Hamas is no longer capable of carrying out another October 7th attack. That said, as the President said, Israel has the right to defend itself against attacks and the obligation to pursue Hamas for the heinous terrorist attacks of October 7th.

Question. Do you agree that calling for a ceasefire in Gaza means calling for Israel to stop its pursuit of Hamas, a designated foreign terrorist organization, that orchestrated the October 7 attacks and still refuses to release all Israeli and American hostages?

Answer. Israel will always have the right to defend itself against attacks like the heinous attack on October 7th. The Administration maintains that a comprehensive approach starts with a deal for a ceasefire that would release all hostages.

Question. Do you believe that Israel, in its operation against Hamas, which is known to use civilians as human shields, is taking all necessary steps to minimize civilian casualties?

Answer. As Secretary Blinken said last week, "We continue to see Hamas hiding in, taking over, and otherwise using these sites from which to conduct its operations." It's very difficult in the heat of war to make a definitive assessment about any individual incident but what the National Security Memorandum-20 report states is that the IDF has undertaken steps to implement IHL obligations for the protection of civilians in the current conflict, including the requirements related to distinction, proportionality, and precautions in military operations. Israel's own concern is reflected in the fact it has hundreds of internal investigations underway.

For more than four decades, Iran has served as the primary source of instability and chaos in the Middle East. In Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Yemen and beyond, Iran is working against American interests. Iranian petroleum exports remain at or near levels not seen in years, providing funding for their terrorist activity. My recently enacted SHIP Act imposes sanctions on foreign ports, such as those in China, that knowingly process petroleum exported from Iran in violation of U.S. sanctions.

Question. Do you agree Iran must be prevented from obtaining a nuclear weapon?

Answer. Iran must be prevented from obtaining or developing a nuclear weapon and the United States must be prepared to use all elements of national power to ensure that outcome.

Question. In your view, what more should the U.S. be doing to stop Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon?

Answer. The United States must continue to prioritize preventing Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon through a comprehensive approach. We must lead decisively on this issue, secure the cooperation of international partners and consistently look for ways to strengthen our diplomatic efforts, refine our sanctions and sanctions enforcement posture, improve our intelligence capabilities and maintain military readiness.

Question. In your view, what is the proper U.S. response to Iranian support for Hamas, Hezbollah, the Houthis, and other proxies?

Answer. I support a holistic response, using all tools—military, economic, and diplomatic—available to deter, confront, and disrupt the full range of Iran's destabilizing and problematic behaviors, in close coordination with our allies and partners. This includes continuing to enforce all sanctions on Iran and to pursue sanctions evaders, taking military action when necessary to defend U.S. personnel in the region, and engaging partners and allies to put diplomatic and multilateral pressure on Iran to cease its support to terrorist organizations and other destabilizing actors in the region.

Question. Do you agree that the enforcement of U.S. sanctions passed by Congress on Iranian oil sales is not optional?

Answer. Yes, I agree that we must enforce U.S. sanctions laws passed by Congress.

Question. If confirmed, will you commit to fully enforcing the SHIP Act?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed, I commit to fully enforcing the SHIP Act.

The State Department was required by the SHIP Act to provide Congress a strategy to address Iran-China relations. That strategy was due last month and has not yet been received.

Question. If confirmed, how will you address the State Department's current failure to meet the statutory reporting requirements in the SHIP Act?

Answer. If confirmed, I will work with our Bureau of Legislative Affairs to provide an update on the status of these reports and ensure a strategy to address Iran-PRC relations is provided to Congress in the coming months.

Question. What should be done to stop Chinese purchases of Iranian oil and petroleum products?

Answer. Reducing Iranian oil exports remains a key priority for this Administration. We must continue to vigorously enforce our oil sanctions on Iran and engage in extensive diplomatic campaigns to ensure countries do not become purchasers of Iranian oil. We have seen larger state-owned Chinese companies stay away from Iranian oil, suggesting that our sanctions and engagement should be expanded upon to deter Chinese companies that are vulnerable to being cut off from Western financial institutions from engaging in this trade.

Question. Should the U.S. consider harsher penalties for violations of our Iran energy sanctions as they relate to China?

Answer. The United States should regularly review existing penalties for sanctions violations and ensure they are current and appropriate. I defer to the Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control and the Department of Justice on the type of penalties that are imposed as they are responsible for civil enforcement and criminal enforcement, respectively, of sanctions.

Question. If Iran enriches uranium to 90 percent, what should be the U.S. response?

Answer. President Biden and Secretary Blinken have made it clear that the United States will never allow Iran to obtain a nuclear weapon and is prepared to use all elements of national power to ensure that outcome. The United States continues to work closely with international partners to hold Iran to account for its nuclear escalations, its failure to live up to its Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)-required safeguards obligations, and its lack of cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Question. Similarly, the administration was mandated to produce a determination on Iranian officials that should be sanctioned under the recently passed Mahsa Amini Human Rights and Security Accountability Act (MAHSA) Act. That determination is now significantly delayed. If confirmed, do you pledge to enforce the MAHSA Act?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed, I do commit to implement the MAHSA Act as passed by Congress and signed by President Biden. The Act underscores U.S. support for the people of Iran in demanding respect for their human rights and promoting accountability for the Iranian government's abuses

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RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO STEPHANIE HALLETT BY SENATOR JEANNE SHAHEEN

Bahrain has been a key U.S. partner in the region, particularly when it comes to countering Iranian operations.

Question. As Bahrain seeks to potentially normalize relations with Iran, how can the U.S. ensure that our shared priorities with Bahrain are maintained?

Answer. Bahrain is interested in improving relations with Tehran solely to open channels to de-escalate tensions. Bahrain shares our concerns about Iran's destabilizing actions in the region and was the sole Arab country to publicly support actions to counter Houthi attacks on commercial vessels. If confirmed, I will ensure that Bahrain continues to see the benefits of our strategic partnership through the Comprehensive Security Integration and Prosperity Agreement (C-SIPA) and the Abraham Accords.

Question. If confirmed, how will you bolster U.S. ties with Bahrain to counter Iranian aggression but also increased Chinese interest in the region?

Answer. Bahrain very much considers the United States its partner of choice. If confirmed, I will continue to underscore the benefits of our partnership and strengthen Bahrain's economic and commercial independence through C-SIPA to minimize avenues of entry for PRC engagement. I will continue to ensure that Bahrain fully appreciates—as I know that they do—the advantages that come with avoiding strategic entanglement with the PRC. I will also build on our security cooperation in the Red Sea and Persian Gulf to further strengthen defense ties under C-SIPA to counter Iranian aggression.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO STEPHANIE HALLETT BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

Trafficking in Persons

In the State Department's 2024 Trafficking in Persons Report, Bahrain remained on Tier 1 for its sustained efforts to combat trafficking in persons.

Question. If confirmed, what concrete steps could you take to help Bahrain operationalize the prioritized recommendations contained in the TIP report?

Answer. Bahrain is a regional leader in combating trafficking in persons and is open to cooperating on operationalizing the recommendations in the TIP report. If confirmed, I will engage the Government of Bahrain at senior levels to advance and strengthen anti-TIP cooperation and work with relevant Bahraini agencies to encourage progress and provide technical support to implement the recommendations.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to accurately and honestly portraying the reality of the trafficking situation in Bahrain to Congress via the annual Trafficking in Persons report?

Answer. Yes. Embassy Manama staff work closely with the State Department's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons to accurately portray and report on the trafficking situation in Bahrain. Bahrain has been ranked Tier 1 in the

Department's TIP report since 2018. If confirmed, I will work to ensure that the government continues to make progress in its anti-trafficking work.

Religious Freedom

In the State Department's 2023 International Religious Freedom report, it was noted Bahrain lacked a general respect for freedom of religion or belief and expression.

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. Bahrain pursues a tradition of religious coexistence, though more work is needed to ensure respect for freedom of religion or belief and expression, including the right of religious leaders to speak and write freely, and to secure the full and equal participation of all citizens, irrespective of religious or political affiliation, in political and social activities and economic opportunities. If confirmed, I will work closely with the Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom to continue to engage senior Bahraini officials on religious freedom.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to personally engaging with civil society on this issue?

Answer. Yes. If confirmed, I will continue to engage with civil society and raise religious freedom issues with senior Bahraini officials, as our Embassy in Manama regularly does.

Question. If confirmed, what concrete steps can you take to help Bahrain increase their societal and governmental respect for religious freedom?

Answer. If confirmed, the Embassy and I will continue to work closely with the State Department's Office of International Religious Freedom to engage senior Bahraini officials and national human rights monitoring institutions on the issue and encourage reforms for greater freedom of religion and expression. If confirmed, I will meet regularly with religious leaders and community members from a broad spectrum of faiths, representatives of NGOs, and political groups to discuss freedom of religion and freedom of expression as it relates to religious practice.

Human Rights

In the State Department's 2023 Human Rights Report, Bahrain was noted for having no significant changes to the human rights situation in the last year; however, it also had significant human rights issues including limits on the freedom of expression, association, 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. While Bahrain has made improvements in human rights since 2011, serious concerns remain. For example, Bahrain has overly restrictive laws on the operation of civil society organizations (CSOs). If confirmed, I will direct the Embassy to consult with local CSOs to solicit their input on priorities for human rights reforms and will continue to raise these issues at the highest levels of the Bahraini government to emphasize that our bilateral partnership is strengthened by advancing respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to personally engaging civil society on this issue?

Answer. Yes. If confirmed, the Embassy and I will continue to engage with civil society on human rights issues and urge the Government of Bahrain to make further progress on human rights.

State Management and Oversight

Question. Management is a key responsibility for chiefs of mission. How would you describe your management style?

Answer. I have an inclusive and empathetic management style. Sometimes the best opportunities to move the needle forward on mission and Department goals are the result of fresh ideas from the field. As such, I encourage every team member to participate in policy discussions and present their ideas and perspectives. If confirmed, I will ensure all staff at Embassy Manama have the opportunity to make meaningful contributions to advancing our policy and operational priorities.

Question. Do you believe it is ever acceptable or constructive to berate subordinates, either in public or private?

Answer. No. It is never acceptable to berate subordinates.

Question. How do you envision your relationship with the Deputy Chief of Mission?

Answer. As a current Deputy Chief of Mission, I know how critical this relationship is for the success of our embassies around the globe. In Manama, if confirmed, I envision a strong, open, and trusting relationship with my DCM. Both of us have strong backgrounds in the region and in leading teams. I very much look forward to working closely with him to create a unified leadership team for Embassy Manama.

Question. If confirmed, what leadership responsibilities do you intend to entrust to your deputy chief of mission?

Answer. most of the internal coordination and operations for the Embassy, and the Chief of Mission is the public face of the United States to both the government and public. The DCM also needs to be included in external activities to be able to step into the role of Chargé d'Affaires in the absence of the Ambassador. If confirmed, I will work with my DCM to leverage his strengths and identify the most effective areas where he can help me to lead the Mission team.

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. Yes. I believe it is critical to provide employees with accurate annual employee evaluation reports. Throughout my Foreign Service career, I have met with each of my direct reports regularly to provide feedback on their performance and set aside several times a year to review their overall progress in meeting their work requirements and specific objectives. I also met regularly with employees supervised by my direct reports. Finally, I was always available for additional feedback if requested by the employee. I intend to continue this practice if confirmed.

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 will encourage each supervisor at Embassy Manama to meet regularly with their employees to provide both positive and constructive feedback on performance. I will also encourage all employees to draft meaningful award nominations for any deserving colleague or subordinate.

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 accomplish fully their missions?

Answer. It has always been my experience in the posts in which I have served that our diplomats and local staff make every effort, within security allowances, to get out of embassy walls to advance our mission. This is a practice and approach to our important work overseas that I have promoted as a Deputy Chief of Mission and section chief. For example, I encourage Consular and Management colleagues to participate in public outreach, such as meeting with students or explaining our travel and contracting regulations to appropriate audiences.

Question. How do you intend to ensure that U.S. diplomats are able to access all local populations?

Answer. If confirmed, I will ensure that the U.S. diplomats based in Bahrain build relationships and establish strong connections with local leaders and communities. I would promote engagement, dialogue, and cooperation with community stakeholders from the government, civil society organizations, and business community. While doing so I would implement robust security protocols to ensure diplomats' safety while allowing them to engage with all local populations.

Question. Congressional Delegations (CODELs) and Staff Delegations (STAFFDELs) serve a critical oversight mission. Do you pledge to support fully CODELs and STAFFDELs that seek to travel to post?

Answer. Yes. If confirmed, I pledge to fully support Congressional Delegations (CODELs) and Staff Delegations (STAFFDELs) that seek to travel to post.

Question. Do you agree to support fully any CODEL or STAFFDEL, with the only exceptions for simultaneous or overlapping visits by the President or First Lady of the United States, the Vice President, or the Secretaries of State or Defense?

Answer. Yes. If confirmed, I commit to fully supporting any CODEL or STAFFDEL, with rare exception.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO STEPHANIE HALLETT 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 PRC 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 its absolute control of Chinese society and industry, the CCP could stop all of these destructive actions tomorrow if it so chooses. Is the CCP an economic, diplomatic, military, and technological threat to the United States?

Answer. Last year, the Director of National Intelligence testified, "the CCP represents both the leading and most consequential threat to U.S. national security and leadership globally." Secretary Blinken has said 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, forthright diplomatic engagements, public diplomacy, and commercial advocacy to bolster U.S.-Bahrain ties.

Question. Does the CCP undertake any activities that are beneficial to U.S. interests? If so, please explain.

Answer. As Secretary Blinken has said, under President Xi, the CCP has become more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad. According to the Office of the Director of National Intelligence's 2024 Annual Threat Assessment, the CCP is seeking to "preempt challenges to its reputation and legitimacy, undercutting U.S. influence, driving wedges between Washington and its partners, and fostering global norms that favor its authoritarian system."

Question. Do you believe that there are any areas in which the CCP would constructively work with the United States in good faith, knowing that at any moment Chinese interlocuters with U.S. representatives could be disappeared? If so, please explain.

Answer. As the United States competes vigorously with the PRC, the United States manages this competition responsibly so that it does not veer into conflict. If confirmed, I will work with my colleagues across the U.S. interagency and Congress 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 PRC in the countries or areas in which you will work?

Answer. If confirmed, my priority will be advancing U.S. national security interests in Bahrain 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 Bahrain, and the region.

As you may be aware, a group of federal employees penned an open letter to President Biden criticizing U.S. support for Israel in the aftermath of Hamas' brutal terrorist attack on October 7, 2023. In addition, employees from nearly two dozen agencies have staged walkouts in protest of the administration's Israel policy. Efforts like these directly undermine the duty of our diplomats to advance the policies of the President of the United States.

Question. Yes or no, did you sign the letter to the President expressing opposition to the President's Israel policy?

Answer. No.

Question. Yes or no, did you participate in the January 16, 2024 walkout?

Answer. No.

Question. If confirmed, would you define one of the employees or contractors operating under your supervision signing an open letter criticizing you, or policies you undertake at the instruction of the President, as insubordination as defined by the Government Accountability Office?

Answer. If confirmed, I plan to create an environment of trust in which personnel are able to express opinions, make use of established dissent channels, and understand the importance of constructive dissent. Should such a matter arise, I would work with the Department's Office of the Legal Adviser and Bureau of Global Talent Management to determine the proper course of action.

Question. In your view, are the actions these federal employees took, by anonymously signing a letter to the President of the United States, covered as "whistleblowing?"

Answer. I believe these employees were expressing a dissenting view to their leadership. I support employees' right to express their views and hope that employees feel confident to directly raise their concerns with their supervisors and management without fear of reprisal. "Whistleblowing" is a term and activity covered by federal legislation and regulations; I defer to the Department's Office of the Legal Adviser to determine whether the referenced actions are considered protected whistleblowing activity.

Question. If confirmed, how will you address discipline issues, such as insubordination, that do not take established dissent channels?

Answer. If confirmed, I would address discipline issues, including insubordination, in accordance with Department procedures and by seeking guidance, including from the Bureau of Global Talent Management. I would document the conduct and provide counseling to the employee, offering opportunity for improvement. If continued violations occurred, disciplinary measures would be taken consistent with personnel policies.

Question. Have you ever expressed support for an Israeli ceasefire in Gaza?

Answer. I have never expressed support for a unilateral Israeli ceasefire in Gaza. As the Deputy Chief of Mission at Embassy Jerusalem, I continue to support U.S. and Israeli efforts to secure a hostage deal that results in a ceasefire that returns hostages home, including American citizens; permits a surge in the delivery of humanitarian aid to those in need; and allows for the return of civilians to their homes.

Question. Do you agree that Hamas is an antisemitic entity?

Answer. Yes. Hamas espouses antisemitism. Hamas, which is designated by the United States as a foreign terrorist organization, seeks to eliminate the State of Israel, and its founding charter calls for the killing of Jews.

Question. Would a ceasefire allow these groups to reconstitute and attack Israel, and Americans, in the future?

Answer. The United States remains committed to securing a hostage deal that results in a ceasefire that returns hostages home, including American citizens; permits a surge in the delivery of humanitarian aid to those in need; and allows for the return of civilians to their homes. The Administration's hope is that a more enduring peace could be built upon that, but Hamas cannot be permitted to dictate Gaza's future or threaten Israel. The U.S. Government supports Israel's right to protect and defend itself from Hamas' terrorism, consistent with international law.

Question. Do you agree that calling for a ceasefire in Gaza means calling for Israel to stop its pursuit of Hamas, a designated foreign terrorist organization, that orchestrated the October 7 attacks and still refuses to release all Israeli and American hostages?

Answer. The United States remains committed to securing a hostage deal that results in a ceasefire that returns hostages home, including American citizens; permits a surge in the delivery of humanitarian aid to those in need; and allows for the return of civilians to their homes. The Administration's hope is that a more enduring peace could be built upon that, but Hamas cannot be permitted to dictate Gaza's future or threaten Israel. The U.S. Government supports Israel's right to protect and defend itself from Hamas' terrorism, consistent with international law.

Question. Do you believe that Israel, in its operation against Hamas, which is known to use civilians as human shields, is taking all necessary steps to minimize civilian casualties?

Answer. It is very difficult in the heat of war to make a definitive assessment about any individual incident. As stated in the National Security Memorandum-20 report, the IDF has undertaken steps to implement international humanitarian law obligations for the protection of civilians in the current conflict, including the requirements related to distinction, proportionality, and precautions in offensive operations. Israel's own concern about such incidents is reflected in the fact it has a number of internal investigations underway.

Bahraini leaders have long feared that Iran seeks to destabilize the kingdom. Since 1979, as Iran's theocratic rulers have sought to export their model of religious governance to parts of the Arab world, Bahrain has publicly accused Iran of trying to organize coups by pro-Iranian Bahraini Shia Muslims. Bahraini officials have also accused Iran of backing violent Shia groups in Bahrain. Despite these conditions, in June 2024, Iranian media reported that Iran was seeking a dialogue over the restoration of diplomatic ties with Bahrain.

Question. How might normalized Bahrain-Iran relations impact Bahrain, U.S.-Bahrain relations, and U.S. policy more broadly?

Answer. Bahraini officials have publicly stated interest in improving relations and restoring diplomatic ties with Tehran solely as a means of opening communication channels to de-escalate tensions. Bahrain remains rightfully wary of Iran's destabilizing actions in the region and inside Bahrain. We are working to deepen Abraham Accord partnerships and deliver on commitments in the Comprehensive Security Integration and Security Agreement (C-SIPA) to counter Iran and strengthen Bahrain's security.

Question. What risks does normalization with Iran pose for U.S. Naval Support Facility Bahrain and for our armed services personnel serving inside the kingdom?

Answer. As host of NAVCENT and the U.S. Navy's Fifth Fleet, Bahrain remains a critical partner on security and defense issues in the region. Bahrain has demonstrated its commitment to countering Iran and Iranian-aligned malign actors through security cooperation. Bahrain's interest in improving relations with Tehran is to open channels to de-escalate tensions and resolve incidents that could otherwise harm our armed services personnel in the kingdom.

In September 2020, Israel and Bahrain signed the Declaration of Peace, Cooperation, and Constructive Diplomatic and Friendly Relations, a diplomatic normalization agreement commonly referred to as one of the "Abraham Accords." However, the Hamas-led October 7, 2023, attack against Israel and Israel's ensuing military operations in Gaza risk disrupting momentum toward closer Israeli-Bahrain ties. As conflict continues not only in Gaza, but in the wider Middle East region between Iran-supported groups and the United States and Israel, the Bahraini Government appears to be attempting to retain relations with Israel while avoiding antagonizing the Bahraini public, which is largely supportive of the Palestinians.

Question. If confirmed, what would you do to maintain the positive trend in Israeli-Bahraini relations?

Answer. The Government of Bahrain remains committed to the Abraham Accords at the highest levels despite regional backlash against Israel's operations in Gaza. Bahraini officials have publicly touted the diplomatic, commercial, and technological benefits of the Accords. If confirmed, I would ensure that Bahrain continues to reap the benefits of closer cooperation with Israel and work with Bahrain to encourage other countries in the region to join the Accords.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO STEPHANIE HALLETT BY SENATOR CHRIS VAN HOLLEN

Question. What is the latest substantive update that the State Department has received regarding the status of the Government of Israel's investigations into the deaths of both American citizens killed in the West Bank earlier this year, Tawfic Abdel Jabbar and Mohammad Ahmad Alkhdour, and when was that information re-

ceived? Have those responsible for each of their deaths been identified? Have those responsible for each of their deaths been held accountable?

Answer. The Department of State has no higher priority than the safety and security of U.S. citizens overseas. The U.S. Embassy in Jerusalem established communication with both families and provided all consular services as soon as they were made aware of these cases. We continue to urge the Government of Israel to expeditiously conduct its investigations. These investigations are ongoing, and we are eager to see the findings as soon as possible, including any appropriate accountability measures that will be taken. We will provide updates on the status of these investigations.

On September 11, President Biden said "Israel has acknowledged its responsibility for Aysenur's death, and a preliminary investigation has indicated that it was the result of a tragic error resulting from an unnecessary escalation. The U.S. Government has had full access to Israel's preliminary investigation, and expects continued access as the investigation continues, so that we can have confidence in the result. We will continue to stay in close contact with Israeli and Palestinian authorities regarding the circumstances that led to Aysenur's death. There must be full accountability." While I appreciate President Biden's statement, Ms. Hallett acknowledged that in the cases of the two Palestinian-American teenagers killed earlier this year, the responses from the Israeli Government so far have been unsatisfactory and "we will continue to ask and demand accountability and a full investigation."

Question. What actions is the U.S. Government prepared to take in order to ensure that there is in fact full transparency and accountability in each of these cases of American citizens killed in the West Bank?

Answer. The Department of State has no higher priority than the safety and security of U.S. citizens overseas. We continue to engage with the Government of Israel surrounding the troubling nature of their deaths, and to urge the Government of Israel to expeditiously conduct its investigation. These investigations are ongoing, and we are eager to see the findings as soon as possible, including any appropriate accountability measures that will be taken. We will provide updates on the status of the investigation and on our engagement with the Government of Israel.

On September 10, President Biden stated in regards to the death of Aysenur Ezgi Eygi, "Apparently it was an accident, ricocheted off the ground and just got hit by accident. I'm working that out now." What is the basis for this claim?

Question. Has this claim been independently substantiated by the United States Government? If so, please provide the analysis and report. Does the United States Government find that the bullet that killed Ms. Eygi "ricocheted off the ground"?

Answer. As the President said, there must be full accountability. No one—no one—should be shot and killed for attending a protest. We are looking carefully at the results of Israel's preliminary investigation into Ms. Eygi's death and calling for a speedy, thorough, and full investigation. But even on an initial read, it is clear that there are serious issues with Israeli Security Forces' operations in the West Bank that need to be dealt with. We will provide updates on the status of the investigation and on our engagement with the Government of Israel.

On September 8–9, Secretary of State Blinken, along with many other senior Biden administration officials participated in a forum at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel entitled "Middle East-America Dialogue Summit" (MEAD).

Question. Who paid for and sponsored that conference?

Answer. I refer you to the Middle East-America Dialogue Summit (MEAD) for questions regarding this conference and its sponsorship.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO DOUGLAS D. JONES BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

Bilateral Relationship

Question. If confirmed, how will you work to improve the U.S.-BiH bilateral relationship?

Answer. U.S. relations with Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) are deep and strong; if confirmed, I will endeavor to strengthen our bilateral relationship. I will continue to support BiH's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and multiethnic character. I will work with BiH to accelerate reforms for Euro-Atlantic integration, including addressing corruption and human rights, as well as greater regional economic integration. I will work to improve its business climate to attract greater U.S. investment and promote energy diversification to reduce BiH's reliance on Russian gas.

Question. What do you view as the primary challenges to the U.S.-BiH bilateral relationship?

Answer. The primary challenge to the U.S.-BiH bilateral relationship is efforts by both internal and external actors to undermine BiH's Euro-Atlantic integration, weaken state-level institutions, and create instability by promoting ethnonationalist narratives and division. Endemic corruption is another challenge that obstructs BiH's security, prosperity, and Euro-Atlantic integration.

Regional Coordination

Question. What role should the U.S. play in conjunction with the EU in efforts to improve good governance and stability in Bosnia?

Answer. The U.S. should continue to coordinate closely with the EU to improve good governance and stability in line with required reforms for EU accession. I understand that our Embassy in Sarajevo has excellent cooperation with EU Ambassador Luigi Soreca, the EU delegation in Sarajevo, as well as the Embassies of EU member states. If confirmed, I am committed to ensuring the strength and effectiveness of U.S.-EU cooperation. The United States and the EU are undoubtedly stronger when we work together in support of Bosnia and Herzegovina's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and multiethnic character.

Question. Do you believe European partners, including the European Union, should take the primary responsibility for addressing Bosnia's political and governance issues?

Answer. The EU and the United States' European partners recognize the importance of the region, which is why the EU decided in March 2024 to open accession negotiations with Bosnia and Herzegovina. The United States fully supported the EU's decision. The EU's Western Balkans Growth Plan is another initiative aimed at helping Bosnia and Herzegovina on its path to EU accession. Strong U.S. leadership remains essential, and if confirmed, I will work in close coordination with the EU.

Question. How will you coordinate with State Department officials and other ambassadors working on the Western Balkans region?

Answer. If confirmed, I will maintain regular communication with my colleagues in the region and in Washington to coordinate our efforts. Regional cooperation - among capitals as well as U.S. embassies - is necessary in the Western Balkans as many issues are cross cutting. If confirmed, I will maintain regular communication with fellow U.S. ambassadors throughout the region. I will also take advantage of opportunities to engage in face-to-face dialogue with officials from the region.

Question. How can further sanctions be used to address challenges in Bosnia? Will you encourage European partners and the EU to impose sanctions on bad actors, such as Milorad Dodik, as the U.S. has done?

Answer. Sanctions are an important tool for deterring bad actors and holding to account anyone who would undermine the security and stability of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The United States will continue to use sanctions as necessary. If confirmed, I will encourage our European partners and the EU to use their sanctions authorities as appropriate. I will also work with interagency colleagues to continue to refine and expand sanctions designations as needed.

Internal Issues

Question. What do you view as Bosnia's greatest challenges? As Ambassador, how will you help confront them?

Answer. Bosnia and Herzegovina's greatest challenges are political dysfunction, ethnonationalism, corruption, and malign influence. If confirmed, I will support reforms for Euro-Atlantic integration, including reforms to combat corruption and protect human rights. I will use all tools available to hold bad actors to account, including sanctions and support for the High Representative's use of Bonn Powers when needed. I will work to bolster energy security and to improve the business climate

to attract U.S. and Western investment and support private sector-led economic growth.

Question. How can the United States best support government reforms, democracy, and anti-corruption in Bosnia?

Answer. The United States encourages Bosnia and Herzegovina's government leaders to adopt reforms in line with Euro-Atlantic integration and to improve functionality. The United States also supports improving democratic governance and the rule of law through Department of State, USAID, and other U.S. government assistance programs. These programs support judicial and other relevant government institutions as well as civil society organizations. The use of targeted financial sanctions and visa restrictions also helps combat corruption.

Question. How will you engage with civil society, including Bosnia-based and foreign-based organizations?

Answer. If confirmed, I will continue the great work that Embassy Sarajevo is doing to engage with civil society, including BiH-based and foreign-based, organizations. I will engage civil society by including them in conversations surrounding reforms, supporting their work with available funding, and maintaining positive working relationships.

Question. How will you support efforts for reconciliation and relationship building amongst different ethnic groups in Bosnia?

Answer. If confirmed, I will support U.S. assistance programs that seek to bring together participants from across ethnic lines and re-establish social cohesion. I will also work with the State Prosecutor's Office to encourage the Bosnia and Herzegovina judiciary to proactively enforce the country's law banning genocide denial and the glorification of convicted war criminals. I will work to eliminate discriminatory approaches to education that further ethnic divisions.

Question. How will you engage with officials in Republika Srpska regarding attempts to undermine Dayton and secessionist rhetoric?

Answer. The United States has acted consistently to use the set of tools at its disposal to hold to account Republika Srpska officials who undermine Dayton and engage in secessionist rhetoric and actions. Multiple rounds of sanctions have targeted RS President Milorad Dodik and his network. If confirmed, I would continue to use sanctions; regional engagement and dialogue; support for the Office of the High Representative and EUFOR ALTHEA; and commitment to a strong civil society and independent media to push back against separatist rhetoric and actions.

Foreign Influence

Question. How will you engage with Bosnian Government and people to counter Russian influence?

Answer. If confirmed, I will take a multifaceted approach to counter Russian influence. First, I will support BiH's efforts to adopt and implement the required reforms for EU and NATO membership. Second, I will counter Russian disinformation in the media by supporting and engaging with those who are working to promote a free and plural media environment in BiH. Third, I will support reconciliation efforts throughout the country. Finally, I will support projects aimed at diversifying BiH's energy supply to reduce dependence on Russian gas.

Question. How will you engage with Bosnian government and people to counter Chinese influence?

Answer. The best way to counter PRC influence is to advance Euro-Atlantic integration. If confirmed, I will work to accelerate reforms toward EU accession, support regional economic integration, help stem brain drain, and increase resiliency to malign and coercive economic overtures. I will use all available tools to promote U.S. and Western investment as alternatives to PRC-backed projects. I will engage with civil society to support local efforts to counter PRC influence.

Question. How can the United States better counter and compete with Chinese and Russian influence in Bosnia?

Answer. If confirmed, I would prioritize assistance to strengthen information security and cybersecurity architecture as well as energy diversification as key ways to combat PRC and Russian influence. Working closely with the Foreign Commercial Service, Commercial Law Development Program, the Regional China Officers network, civil society organizations, and the U.S. Speakers Program, I would highlight the serious national security and sovereignty risks that come with the use of untrusted vendors.

State Management and Oversight

Question. Management is a key responsibility for chiefs of mission. How would you describe your management style?

Answer. As a manager, I believe in setting high standards, leading by example, and fostering an environment of mutual support, collaboration, and innovation. I regularly engage with members of my team and always seek to create a space for open dialogue and diversity of thought.

If confirmed, I will work hard to foster an environment of respect as Mission Sarajevo carries out important work on behalf of the American people. Our employees are our most important asset, and I am dedicated to professional development and helping employees grow and advance.

Question. Do you believe it is ever acceptable or constructive to berate subordinates, either in public or private?

Answer. No, it is never acceptable or constructive to berate subordinates, either in public or private.

Question. How do you envision your relationship with the deputy chief of mission?

Answer. If confirmed, I look forward to a close and productive relationship with the Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM). Having served three times as a Deputy Chief of Mission, I believe the relationship between an Ambassador and DCM should be a partnership based on trust and collaboration. If confirmed, I will work closely with the DCM to advance U.S. priorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, including protecting the safety and security of Americans, advancing the country's Euro Atlantic integration, pushing back against malign actors, and advancing shared priorities.

Question. If confirmed, what leadership responsibilities do you intend to entrust to your deputy chief of mission?

Answer. If confirmed, I look forward to building a foundation of trust and a highly collaborative working relationship with the DCM in which we will consult closely on the full range of management and policy issues. If confirmed, I will entrust the DCM with responsibility for the day-to-day operations of the Mission. I will also rely on the DCM to keep abreast of policy issues to be able to serve as Chargé d'Affaires in my absence.

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. Yes, I believe it is important to use the performance evaluation process to provide employees with timely, honest, accurate, and constructive feedback on their 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. If confirmed, I would support and encourage clear, accurate, and direct feedback to employees to improve performance and reward high achievers.

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 accomplish fully their missions?

Answer. Based on my experience serving overseas as a Foreign Service Officer, I believe U.S. diplomats do a remarkable job getting outside our embassy walls and advancing U.S. objectives by meeting local actors in diverse settings and environments. I firmly believe it is imperative that U.S. diplomats get outside of the Embassy to meet with local citizens, including host government officials and non-governmental organizations in order to understand local conditions and advance U.S. interests.

Question. How do you intend to ensure that U.S. diplomats are able to access all local populations?

Answer. I firmly believe it is imperative that U.S. diplomats get outside of the Embassy to meet with local actors, including host government officials, non-governmental organizations, and citizens. If confirmed, I will work with all of the staff at Embassy Sarajevo to ensure everyone has opportunities to engage with the local population.

Question. Congressional Delegations (CODELs) and Staff Delegations (STAFFDELs) serve a critical oversight mission. Do you pledge to support fully CODELs and STAFFDELs that seek to travel to post?

Answer. Yes.

Question. Do you agree to support fully any CODEL or STAFFDEL, with the only exceptions for simultaneous or overlapping visits by the President or First Lady of the United States, the Vice President, or the Secretaries of State or Defense?

Answer. Yes.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO DOUGLAS D. JONES 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 PRC 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 its absolute control of Chinese society and industry, the CCP could stop all of these destructive actions tomorrow if it so chooses. Is the CCP an economic, diplomatic, military, and technological threat to the United States?

Answer. In 2023, 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 assertive abroad, seeking to undercut U.S. influence and alliances. If confirmed, I will advance U.S. national security interests and oppose PRC efforts to expand its malign influence through robust and forthright diplomatic engagements, public diplomacy, and commercial advocacy to bolster U.S.-Bosnia and Herzegovina ties.

Question. Does the CCP undertake any activities that are beneficial to U.S. interests? If so, please explain.

Answer. As Secretary Blinken has said, the Administration assesses the CCP's activities in the context of the CCP's growing repression at home and increasing assertiveness 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 in which the CCP would constructively work with the United States in good faith, knowing that at any moment Chinese interlocuters with U.S. representatives could be disappeared? If so, please explain.

Answer. The United States will work with the PRC to address transnational challenges, such as climate change, when it is in the U.S. interest to do so. If confirmed, I will work with my colleagues across the U.S. interagency and Congress to advance U.S. objectives and counter harmful behavior by the PRC and other actors in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Question. If confirmed, will you approve any joint activity with organizations or representatives from the PRC in the countries or areas in which you will work?

Answer. If confirmed, my priority will be advancing U.S. national security interests in Bosnia and Herzegovina and countering efforts by our strategic and regional competitors to undermine our interests. The Administration has been clear that the PRC is our most consequential geopolitical challenge and that the United States is committed to working to strengthen our regional partners. 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 Bosnia and Herzegovina and the region.

As you may be aware, a group of federal employees penned an open letter to President Biden criticizing U.S. support for Israel in the aftermath of Hamas' brutal terrorist attack on October 7, 2023. In addition, employees from nearly two dozen agencies have staged walkouts in protest of the administration's Israel policy. Efforts like these directly undermine the duty of our diplomats to advance the policies of the President of the United States.

Question. Yes or no, did you sign the letter to the President expressing opposition to the President's Israel policy?

Answer. No, I did not sign the open letter to the President.

Question. Yes or no, did you participate in the January 16, 2024 walkout?

Answer. No, I did not participate.

Question. If confirmed, would you define one of the employees or contractors operating under your supervision signing an open letter criticizing you, or policies you undertake at the instruction of the President, as insubordination as defined by the Government Accountability Office?

Answer. If confirmed, I would seek to address employee concerns personally by creating an open, trusting, and harassment-free work environment. I am mindful of and value Department employees' right to free speech under the First Amendment. Moreover, I understand the expression of disagreement does not in and of itself constitute insubordination. If confirmed, I would work with the Department's Office of the Legal Adviser to determine the proper course of action should such a matter arise.

Question. In your view, are the actions these federal employees took, by anonymously signing a letter to the President of the United States, covered as "whistleblowing?"

Answer. I believe these employees were expressing a dissenting view to their leadership. I would hope that employees would feel confident to directly raise their concerns with their supervisors and management rather than signing an anonymous letter. "Whistleblowing" is a term and activity covered by legislation and regulations; I defer to the Department's Office of the Legal Adviser to determine whether the referenced actions are considered protected whistleblowing activity.

Question. If confirmed, how will you address discipline issues, such as insubordination, that do not take established dissent channels?

Answer. If confirmed, I will make sure that employees know that there are several avenues available to express policy disagreements. I would encourage employees to use established channels to express their views. According to Department regulations, insubordination is a disciplinary matter related to conduct on the job and may result in counseling and a penalty commensurate with the scale of the offense. If confirmed, I commit to addressing insubordination in consultation with the Department's human resources and legal professionals.

Question. Have you ever expressed support for an Israeli ceasefire in Gaza?

Answer. I understand the Administration has expressed support for an immediate ceasefire to secure the release of hostages, surge the delivery of humanitarian aid to those in need, allow for the return of civilians to their homes, and ultimately bring a lasting calm.

Question. Do you agree that Hamas is an antisemitic entity?

Answer. Yes, Hamas is a terrorist group and antisemitic entity. This foreign terrorist organization seeks to eliminate the State of Israel, and its founding charter calls for the killing of Jewish people.μ

Question. Would a ceasefire allow these groups to reconstitute and attack Israel, and Americans, in the future?

Answer. The United States remains committed to reaching a deal for an immediate ceasefire that secures the release of hostages and allows us to surge and sustain humanitarian aid and bolster the protection of civilians. The Administration's hope is that a more enduring peace could be built upon that. Working with partners, the U.S. government is attempting to secure the release of all hostages held by Hamas. The U.S. government supports Israel's right to protect itself from Hamas' terrorism consistent with international law.

Question. Do you agree that calling for a ceasefire in Gaza means calling for Israel to stop its pursuit of Hamas, a designated foreign terrorist organization, that orchestrated the October 7 attacks and still refuses to release all Israeli and American hostages?

Answer. The United States remains committed to reaching a deal for an immediate ceasefire that secures the release of hostages and allows us to surge and sustain humanitarian aid and bolster the protection of civilians. The Administration's hope is that a more enduring peace could be built upon that. Working with partners, the U.S. government is attempting to secure the release of all hostages held by Hamas. The U.S. government supports Israel's right to protect itself from Hamas' terrorism consistent with international law.

Question. Do you believe that Israel, in its operation against Hamas, which is known to use civilians as human shields, is taking all necessary steps to minimize civilian casualties?

Answer. It's very difficult in the heat of war to make a definitive assessment about any individual incident, but what the National Security Memorandum-20 report states is that the IDF has undertaken steps to implement international humanitarian law obligations for the protection of civilians in the current conflict, including the requirements related to distinction, proportionality, and precautions in offensive operations. Israel's own concern about such incidents is reflected in the fact it has a number of internal investigations underway.

Question. Bosnia's foreign policy is generally oriented toward Euro-Atlantic integration, although certain leaders have sought close ties to Russia and China. Bosnia's complex power-sharing and decision-making structures sometimes complicate foreign and defense policy. Bosnia presently participates in a NATO Membership Action Plan. Do you support NATO membership for Bosnia and Herzegovina?

Answer. I support Bosnia and Herzegovina's NATO membership aspirations and, if confirmed, would support the country in implementing the reforms necessary to meet NATO's membership criteria and to meet the obligations and commitments of possible future membership.

Question. If yes, how specifically would Bosnia and Herzegovina make NATO a more effective military alliance?

Answer. Before being considered for NATO membership, Bosnia and Herzegovina will have to implement reforms to demonstrate it is positioned to further the 1949 Washington Treaty's principles and contribute to Euro-Atlantic security. It has made progress in implementing some reforms required to meet NATO standards, but still has additional needed reforms to meet NATO's political, economic, and military criteria. If confirmed, I will support Bosnia and Herzegovina in making the necessary reforms to meet NATO membership criteria and support Euro-Atlantic security.

Question. What is your plan to counter Russia's activities to prevent deepened Bosnia ties with the EU and NATO by increasing tension between ethnic Bosnians, Serbs, and Croats?

Answer. Russia exerts influence in the political, economic, religious, cultural, and media spheres in Bosnia and Herzegovina—particularly in the Republika Srpska. If confirmed, I will take a multifaceted approach to counter these efforts. First, I will support Bosnia and Herzegovina's efforts to adopt and implement reforms required for EU and NATO membership. Second, I will counter Russian media disinformation by supporting those working to counter false anti-West narratives and promote a free and pluralistic media environment. Third, I will support nation-wide reconciliation efforts.

Question. If confirmed, how would you limit overall Russian and Chinese influence in the country?

Answer. EU and NATO integration and regional economic integration are the best bulwarks against malign influence. If confirmed, I will work to advance reforms to enable EU accession and support regional economic integration to attract high-quality investment, stem brain drain, and increase resilience to malign and coercive economic overtures. A successful strategy must also include sustained U.S. official engagement along with assistance to support the exclusive use of trusted critical infrastructure vendors, strengthen information security and cybersecurity, and increase energy diversification.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO MICHAEL G. HEATH BY SENATOR BENJAMIN L. CARDIN

In 2019 Malawi's constitutional court overturned the presidential election results due to widespread irregularities, highlighting the critical importance of strong institutions. Fresh elections in 2020 saw opposition candidate Lazarus Chakwera win the presidency. Maintaining the democratic gains made in Malawi is extremely important heading into their presidential elections next year. U.S. bilateral assistance to Malawi on health, development, and climate resiliency are vitally important to our shared partnership with the Government and broader civil society.

Question. If confirmed, what steps will you take to support credible elections in Malawi next year?

Answer. Free and fair elections are the bedrock of a democratic society. A U.S. Government priority is to strengthen democratic institutions in Malawi, and I will support the Malawian Government's efforts to increase voter participation in next year's elections if confirmed. I will provide support to educating Malawi's youth on the importance of political participation and actively work with the Malawian Government to eliminate any potential barriers to free and fair elections. I will engage our Mission as an observer in the elections. I will work with likeminded partners to ensure that any irregularities in voter registration, access to polling stations, and vote tabulation are identified and publicized. I will engage with stakeholders in civil society and key institutions such as the Malawi Defence Force to make it clear that any actions that go against free and fair elections will not be tolerated by the international community.

In Late August, the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) in Malawi called for an end to threat against journalist by Malawi politicians and their supporters. In April, Malawian authorities arrested journalist Macmillan Mhone after reporting on alleged government corruption. An Amnesty International report in February 2024 details a journalist going into hiding after investigative reporting on the Malawi Defense Forces. Attacks on press freedoms look to be on the rise ahead of the 2025 presidential elections.

Question. If confirmed, how would you and the U.S. embassy support press freedom in Malawi? Will you commit to making the protection of journalist a central issue in your engagements with the Government of Malawi?

Answer. If confirmed, I will continue to press the Government of Malawi to respect and protect media independence, and to take affirmative steps to protect and respond when journalists are threatened. I will use tools at our disposal such as grants from the State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor to protect journalists who are threatened by government intimidation. I will continue the Embassy's support for MISA Malawi's annual awards for World Press Freedom Day, and to explain our support for a free press through regular engagements with the media and public.

Democracy and Human Rights

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 Malawi? What steps will you take to pro-actively address any efforts to restrict or penalize NGOs and civil society via legal or regulatory measures should they occur?

Answer. If confirmed, I will work with civil society, non-governmental organizations, and human rights defenders in both the United States and Malawi to expand and protect democratic space in Malawi. An engaged and independent civil society is at the heart of every successful democracy, and I would pro-actively tackle any efforts that would impact or undermine the work of any credible civil society organizations in Malawi. I will direct the Embassy team to use programs such as small grants to strengthen individual civil society organizations and create networks of NGOs that can more effectively lobby against restrictive legal and regulatory measures.

Question. Will you and your embassy team actively engage with Malawi 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 Malawi?

Answer. The Embassy team already actively engages on issues that affect the freedom of press through training programs for journalists, support to MISA, and

in private and public engagements with the Government and parliamentary leaders. If confirmed, I would continue to build on this work and regularly meet with independent, local press and ensure that any actions that would undermine press freedom were underscored in my engagements with the Government, and the Malawi public.

Question. If confirmed, 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 investment and governance, and what will you prioritize in processes to administer such assistance?

Answer. The Embassy has robust programming through USAID, MCC, the State Department, and other agencies to strengthen the private sector, improve governance, and build human capital in Malawi. If confirmed as Ambassador, I will ensure that U.S. taxpayer investments in Malawi are used as effectively and efficiently as possible. I will prioritize programs that help the Malawian Government take ownership of its development responsibilities and transition away from donor dependence. As an example, the Millenium Challenge Corporation's current compact is working with Malawi's four largest cities to expand land-based revenue collection and increase resources for much needed urban service delivery. Rather than delivering these services through U.S. Government assistance, MCC is giving the cities the ability to generate their own revenue to provide services such as sanitation and clean water provision.

Question. What are the potential impediments you foresee in advancing democracy in Malawi and how do you intend to resolve them?

Answer. As one of the poorest countries in the world, many of Malawi's citizens are more concerned with finding enough food to feed their families than they are with the state of their democracy. Endemic corruption, inadequate educational facilities, a crumbling infrastructure, low internet penetration, and a growing youth bulge are just a few of the impediments that impact our work to advance democracy. If confirmed, I would continue to push economic reform and amplify our investments in the private sector in agriculture, tourism, and mining to help Malawi diversify and increase its revenue streams, so the country can increase food security and expand educational access. Equally important is tackling corruption which permeates Malawi at all levels. Supporting good governance programs and holding responsible actors accountable are the other tools that I would use to advance democracy in Malawi.Management & Accountability:

Question. Given the importance of representing the United States' diversity abroad, if confirmed, how will you ensure that our mission's staff and programmatic plans reflect this diversity?

Answer. If confirmed, I would continue my efforts to promote diversity abroad by incorporating DEIA principles into each of the mission's programmatic activities, starting with the Integrated Country Strategy. I would seek to recruit and support a workforce that reflects our nation's diversity and leverages the creativity of diverse, talented groups to advance America's foreign policy priorities in Malawi. I would also ensure that diversity principles will be applied to all programs involving the selection of recipients of U.S. Government funds, the beneficiaries of programming, the invitees to events, and the locations of travel. If confirmed, I would ensure that the existing DEIA council at Embassy Lilongwe be empowered to provide recommendations to the front office and the country team on improving diversity within the Mission.

Question. As a career member of the Foreign Service, please share how your experience in various posts, including your leadership position in Bureau for African Affairs, has prepared you to advance the Department's mission of fostering inclusive diplomacy/foreign assistance?

Answer. In my previous overseas post as Deputy Chief of Mission in Bangkok, Thailand, I set up the embassy's first Diversity and Inclusion Council in 2019 and issued a directive to all hiring offices to conduct personal interviews with each applicant within the mission using a three-person panel. Also, while in Thailand, I hired the first stateless person to serve as a Locally Employed Staff member at a U.S. diplomatic facility abroad. I also insisted that Department of Defense trainees on exchange programs reflect the diversity of the cadet pool regardless of host government gender restrictions on foreign trainees. In my experience, these actions challenged local stereotypes and advanced our goals of providing work and training opportunities on an equal and fair basis. If confirmed, I would take similar actions in Malawi to demonstrate that our emphasis on diversity goes beyond statements of intent and is reflected in the implementation of our programs.

Question. Will you commit to using your position, if confirmed, to promote the human rights and dignity of all people in Malawi, no matter their race or ethnicity, religion, nationality, disability, sexual orientation or gender identity? What specifically will you do to prioritize and to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in Malawi if confirmed?

Answer. If confirmed, it will be my honor to promote the human rights and dignity of all people in Malawi. Throughout my career, I have challenged biases that undermine the dignity of any person, regardless of their age, gender, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, national origin, or disability. If confirmed as Ambassador, I would work with human rights organizations to promote greater equity, accessibility, and inclusion for all Malawians. I would also ensure that all agencies at Mission Lilongwe uphold these principles in the design, engagement, and content of their programming so U.S. Government resources benefit all Malawians. Finally, I would support the active work of the Mission's DEIA council to ensure that our workforce aligns with the rich diversity that comprises Malawi's population.

Question. What challenges do LGBTQI+ people face in Malawi? What specifically will you commit to do to help LGBTQI+ people in Malawi if confirmed?

Answer. LGBTQI+ people in Malawi continue to face discrimination and lack of support from Malawi's Constitutional Court. Although negative sentiment exists on Western influence in promoting LGBTQI+ rights in Malawi, if confirmed, I will engage with human rights activists, including LGBTQI+ activists and allies, in a circumspect manner that protects them against potential backlash. I will work with our Mission to launch a human rights campaign that will highlight minority rights issues that are contextually appropriate in Malawi. Through USAID's Human Rights Grant Project, I will work with implementing partner CEDEP to engage with the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Homeland Security, Attorney General, and Parliament's Health Committee, and seek their commitment not to arrest LGBTQI+ persons and to ensure LGBTQI+ persons' access to health services is not compromised. Through the human rights grant, I will work with USAID to help provide safety and security to LGBTQI+ persons, staff working with LGBTQI+ persons, and LGBTQI+ data in the event of violence.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO MICHAEL G. HEATH BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

Question. What is your view of the role of a U.S. Ambassador in supporting democratic institutions and democratic governance?

Answer. The United States has a vested interest in advancing democracy around the world, and a U.S. Ambassador plays an important role by publicly advocating for and supporting programs and institutions that promote free and fair elections, judicial independence, good governance, and the protection of human rights. Democracies value and protect the intellectual, social, and economic contributions of their citizens, and in my view, a successful U.S. Ambassador underscores these values through their engagements with the Government, media, and public, and by their leadership and management of U.S. Mission and taxpayer resources.

Question. Do you commit to using your platform as U.S. Ambassador to Malawi, if confirmed, to publicly amplify and support the democratic aspirations of the people of Malawi?

Answer. I firmly believe that democracy remains the best tool we have to unleash our full human potential. I have promoted democratic principles in public and private throughout my tenure as Deputy Assistant Secretary for West Africa, as well as in previous posts. If confirmed, I commit to using my platform as U.S. Ambassador to Malawi to publicly amplify and support the democratic aspirations of the people of Malawi.

Question. In your view, how can the United States better support the democratic aspirations of the people of Malawi?

Answer. The United States should continue to provide robust technical assistance and capacity-building programs for Malawian electoral institutions to ensure free and fair elections and inclusive and transparent electoral processes. Equally important is supporting civil society organizations that promote democratic governance, human rights, and civic education. Since Malawi has a growing youth population, facilitating exchange programs and partnerships that foster democratic values and leadership skills among Malawian youth and emerging leaders will lay the founda-

tion for future elections. If confirmed, I would broadcast our work through the media, in both traditional and digital formats, and personal interactions to ensure the public is aware of our activities and guiding principles.

Question. Malawi is due to hold elections next year. The 2025 elections follow the annulment of Malawi's May 2019 general election due to irregularities by the country's constitutional court. As US Ambassador, if confirmed, how will you approach engagement on elections in this context?

Answer. Strengthening democratic institutions, promoting good governance, and enhancing civic engagement are key U.S. Mission goals in Malawi. USAID's Democracy, Rights, and Governance program in Malawi includes numerous activities that support these goals as part of USAID and the U.S. Government's Democracy Delivers, Partnerships for Democratic Development, and Economic Resilience initiatives. If confirmed as Ambassador, I would make sure that our commitment to fostering a democratic, accountable, and inclusive governance environment in Malawi continues to be at the forefront of our engagement. I also would broadcast our principles and activities in support of free and fair elections through the media and personal engagements with the public.

Question. You served as Deputy Assistant Secretary for West Africa during a pivotal time for the region. What lessons will you take from that experience to the role of US Ambassador to Malawi, if confirmed?

Answer. As Deputy Assistant Secretary for West Africa, I formulated and coordinated policies in the Washington interagency, briefed and consulted with Congress on key initiatives, and worked with African Governments and institutions to advance U.S. priorities and values. While public opinion surveys routinely demonstrate that African populations prefer democracy as their form of government, trends in West Africa have shown that publics are largely dissatisfied with the ability of governments to provide security, promote economic growth, and provide important services such as health and education. In some countries, self-serving military leaders have taken advantage of local conditions to overthrow civilian governments. In others, democratic leaders have sought to remain in power beyond their mandated terms.

I have learned the value of our voice in promoting free and fair democratic elections using the tools at our disposal, such as imposing visa restrictions, defending press freedoms, and engaging with civil society and youth. I have also learned that governments thirst for private sector investment, especially in the mining, transportation, and digital technology fields, to balance or counter the influence of our adversaries. If confirmed, I would urge our embassy team to ensure that Malawi's democratic elections in 2025 are free and fair and that the results reflect the will of the people. I would also seek to promote private sector engagement in key sectors to advance our goal of reducing Malawi's dependence on foreign assistance.

Question. What actions have you and the State Department taken regarding American citizen detainee in Nigeria Tigran Gambaryan's denial of medical care and access to justice, and why there has been no progress with the Nigerian Government, despite engagement by multiple high-level U.S. officials, including Secretary Blinken?

Answer. Since Tigran Gambaryan's arrest in Nigeria in February 2024, I have worked with our Embassy in Abuja to ensure he has received proper attention from our consular officials and that all avenues are being explored to secure his release from Nigerian detention on humanitarian grounds. We have used every recent high-level engagement, including the April U.S.-Nigeria Binational Commission, FM Tuggar's May visit to Washington, and the September U.S.-Nigeria Energy Dialogue in Washington, as opportunities to urge Mr. Gambaryan's release. I organized a series of high-level calls with Nigerian officials to demand Gambaryan's release on humanitarian grounds, and I have kept in constant contact with his family and legal team to explore further avenues for a resolution. We have also sought to ensure that Gambaryan has access to medication, legal advice, and phone contact with his family. We will continue to call for Gambaryan's immediate release on humanitarian grounds in all high-level engagements with the Nigerian Government.

Question. How will you practice commercial diplomacy on behalf of U.S. investments in Malawi?

Answer. If confirmed, I would engage with Malawian Government officials to strengthen our bilateral relationship and work together to tackle hindrances to doing businesses by advocating for good governance, anti-corruption measures, and economic policies and reforms that impact U.S. investments. I would also facilitate connections between U.S. businesses and local partners, government officials, and

other stakeholders. This would help U.S. companies navigate the local business environment and establish valuable relationships that will create opportunities for them to thrive.

Question. What is your assessment of Malawi's greatest barriers to increased two-way trade and investment with the United States?

Answer. Malawi remains interested in taking advantage of AGOA but has so far failed to productively pursue potential opportunities. The country's production capacity, the competitiveness of its products, and its ability to meet U.S. market standards and requirements have limited its exports to the United States. Weak transport and other supporting infrastructure have also been a limiting factor. Depleted foreign currency reserves have impeded imports from the United States and have disrupted operations for U.S. companies in the country. Lack of support from the government and commercial banks has limited the private sector and narrowed the export basket.

Question. What is your understanding of the tools at your disposal—including through Prosper Africa—as U.S. Ambassador to Malawi, 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 would have several tools at my disposal. Through Prosper Africa, I can empower businesses and investors with market insights, deal support, and financing opportunities. Through USAID, I can provide technical assistance to the Malawian Government to improve Malawi's business environment, support economic reforms, and bolster anti-corruption government agencies to aggressively pursue misappropriation of funds and create a level playing field for our companies. Through the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), I can support projects to promote infrastructure development which will make Malawi a more attractive place for U.S. trade and investments, particularly in agriculture, tourism and mining, which have been named by Malawi's Government as priority areas for investment.

Question. How will you work with Prosper Africa leadership to ensure that Malawi can benefit from Prosper Africa resources, tools and expertise?

Answer. If confirmed, I would first engage with Prosper Africa leadership to understand any roadblocks they may be encountering in Malawi. I would promote awareness of available Prosper Africa resources through collaboration with the Malawian Government, outreach to the Malawian private sector, and sharing information via our social media platforms. Opportunities could range from market study of viable business ventures, connection to U.S. investors, and access to finance. I would seek guidance from the U.S. private sector, congressional staff, and other experts on Africa to learn how Prosper Africa can maximize its impact in Malawi.

Question. What are the U.S. strategic interests in Malawi?

Answer. The longstanding and multifaceted U.S.-Malawi relationship has fostered a strong partnership that has endured over time. This robust bilateral relationship is evident in Malawi's alignment with U.S. positions on key geopolitical issues. For instance, Malawi has strongly condemned Russia's invasion of Ukraine and boasts one of the highest voting coincidence rates with the United States at the United Nations among southern African nations. Malawi has been a democratic bright spot in the region. The Malawi constitutional court's decision to rerun the 2019 elections, which were marred by irregularities in the initial vote, was respected by the Government, including the military which remained neutral throughout the process. Our continued support will be needed to keep the country on this successful path, however. While Malawi may not frequently make headlines in the United States, it holds strategic importance for U.S. interests in the region, including as an exporter of security through its peacekeeping contributions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Malawi's burgeoning mining sector also offers the potential to help diversify global mineral supply chains for commodities such as uranium, graphite, rutile, and rare earth elements.

Question. How do you plan to enhance interagency collaboration to ensure the effectiveness of our partnerships in Malawi?

Answer. To enhance interagency collaboration for a more effective and cohesive U.S. partnership in Malawi, if confirmed, I would conduct regular meetings with representatives from various U.S. Government agencies to discuss ongoing projects, share updates, and coordinate efforts. I would develop integrated country strategies that align the goals and activities of different agencies. This would ensure that all efforts are complementary and contribute to overarching U.S. objectives in Malawi.

I would develop and practice interagency crisis management plans to ensure a coordinated response to emergencies. This would include establishing clear roles and responsibilities for each agency during a crisis. I would engage with local stakeholders, including the Malawian Government, NGOs, and the private sector, in a coordinated manner. This would ensure that U.S. efforts are aligned with local needs and priorities, and that there is a unified U.S. presence.

In the State Department's 2024 Trafficking in Persons Report, Malawi remained on Tier 2 for its increasing efforts to combat trafficking in persons.

Question. If confirmed, what concrete steps could you take to help Malawi operationalize the prioritized recommendations contained in the TIP report?

Answer. If confirmed, I would prioritize collaborating with NGOs and international organizations to expand coordination and public messaging on the issue. I would engage civil society groups and influencers in monitoring and advocating for human rights and working with communities and authorities to counter human trafficking, including cases of forced marriage. I would connect U.S. Government and U.S.-based institutions with our Malawian partners to offer training and resources that can help them prevent trafficking, prosecute traffickers, and protect victims. Key priorities would be to press Malawian authorities to identify trafficking victims systematically and proactively by screening vulnerable populations, refer all trafficking victims to appropriate services, and increase efforts to investigate and prosecute trafficking crimes.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to accurately and honestly portraying the reality of the trafficking situation in Malawi to Congress via the annual Trafficking in Persons report?

Answer. Yes.

In the State Department's 2023 Country Reports on International Religious Freedom, a general lack of societal and governmental respect for religious freedom was noted in Malawi.

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. Malawi's constitution prohibits discrimination based on religion and provides for freedom of conscience, religion, belief, and thought. Malawi boasts a long history of interreligious tolerance, reflected in public opinion polls which show that Malawians embrace the diversity of religion that exists in their country. Within some communities, there are societal pressures to adopt locally dominant religious practices. If confirmed, I plan to draw upon my experience in previous assignments to advance religious freedom, and to work with the Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom to promote tolerance where needed.

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 Malawi increase its societal and governmental respect for religious freedom?

Answer. To help Malawi increase its societal and governmental respect for religious freedom, if confirmed, I would support interfaith initiatives and promote inclusive governance across all levels of the Government and civil society organizations. I would meet regularly with religious leaders of all denominations and communicate the importance of religious peace and tolerance in public and private diplomatic dialogues. I would also work with our Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom where opportunities arise.

In the State Department's 2023 Human Rights Report Country Report on Malawi, there were no significant changes in the human rights situation in the last year and several significant human rights issues, including restrictions on freedom of expression, were noted.

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 would personally engage and direct my team to work with civil society organizations to highlight restrictions on freedom of expression and other human rights challenges in Malawi. I would also engage with parliament and senior government leaders to raise these issues and press for appropriate legislative

changes and implementation. Finally, I would continue to support programs that promote judicial independence, a robust media environment, and good governance, which will enable Malawi to improve the human rights situation on the ground.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to personally engaging civil society on this issue?

Answer. Yes.

Many U.S. Missions have been under enormous stress over the last several years, with Missions in Africa experiencing specific challenges.

Question. What is your understanding of morale throughout Mission Lilongwe?

Answer. Morale at Mission Lilongwe, like many U.S. missions in Africa, has been impacted by resource and staffing constraints, difficult living conditions, poor transportation infrastructure, and the demanding nature of diplomatic work. However, the dedication and resilience of the staff, along with efforts to improve working conditions and support systems, have helped maintain a committed and motivated team.

Question. How do you intend to improve morale at Mission Lilongwe?

Answer. If confirmed, I would seek to address issues that have been identified by existing employees as challenges to Mission Lilongwe morale: These include a sense of isolation due to poor transportation networks both domestically and internationally, personnel shortages in management offices such as the human resources and regional security, and the inadequacy of air quality in residential housing from garbage burning in neighborhoods. I would also focus on the needs of Eligible Family Members, supporting employment, quality education, and activities that bring the community together as well as addressing concerns about specific issues or situations as they arise.

Question. How do you intend to create a unified mission and vision at Mission Lilongwe?

Answer. If confirmed, I would direct an immediate review of our Malawi Integrated Country Strategy by the Embassy's full country team, ensuring that our objectives and benchmarks are up to date and reflect current trends and capabilities in country. Creating a unified mission and vision requires that the Mission's goals and objectives are developed in a spirit of collaboration, and that barriers are reduced between U.S. direct hire personnel, contractors, locally engaged staff, and volunteers. Recognizing that almost half of mission personnel are employed by USAID, I would particularly emphasize the need for constant communication and cooperation with our USAID colleagues to promote our priorities in a manner that is complimentary and mutually reinforcing. Continual communication across all levels of the Mission is also essential, including through weekly Country Team meetings and meetings with agency leaders that include the Deputy Chief of Mission.

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Question. Management is a key responsibility of Chiefs of Mission. How would you describe your management style?

Answer. My management style is collaborative with an emphasis on personal accountability, to ensure that employees feel both empowered to complete their duties creatively and proactively while being responsible for their own performance and behavior. I address burgeoning personnel problems quickly to ensure they do not intensify over time, and focus on improving employee performance through coaching and available counseling resources both at the Embassy and in Washington. If confirmed, I would also seek to establish a productive and respectful working relationship with my Deputy Chief of Mission to ensure that responsibilities are clearly delineated and the Front Office has a unified vision and voice within the Mission.

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. If confirmed, I would establish a productive and respectful working relationship with my Deputy Chief of Mission to ensure that responsibilities are clearly delineated and the Front Office has a unified vision and voice within the Mission. I would ensure that the DCM has sufficient oversight of the Mission's management and is ready to stand in for me when required, and take the lead on mentorship of Mission personnel, particularly first and second tour officers. If confirmed, I would also ensure that the DCM models professional behavior and tackles any evidence of bullying or harassment proactively, both to hold employees accountable and to deter such activities in the future.

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 place high priority on drafting constructive evaluations with credible assessments of areas needing improvement.

Question. If confirmed, will you support and encourage clear, accurate, and direct feedback to employees in order to improve performance and reward high achievers?

Answer. Yes.

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, diplomats could get outside embassy walls more frequently to accomplish their missions without ignoring proper safety precautions where necessary. It is imperative that U.S. diplomats go beyond embassy walls to fully understand the broad range of opinions of the population. This means not only getting outside the building but traveling outside the capital. I would support and encourage all staff to engage broadly with a broad range of actors in Malawi. I would encourage and support in-country travel and mentor employees on developing innovative ways to engage virtually as well.

Question. How do you intend to improve the ability of U.S. diplomats to better access all local populations?

Answer. I would provide support for travel to various districts in Malawi to allow our diplomats to have in-person engagements with local governments, civil society, and the private sectors in those regions. I would increase our social media presence, to include TV media, to reach areas where we do not often cover. I would encourage recipients of our grants to come from regions we do not often work in. Utilizing the strength of the interagency, I would encourage our diplomats to engage in joint visits, where possible, to regions where other U.S. Government agencies have a stronger reach, such as CDC, USAID, DOD, and Peace Corps.

Question. Congressional Delegations (CODELs) and Staff Delegations (STAFFDELs) serve a critical oversight mission. Do you pledge to support fully CODELs and STAFFDELs that seek to travel to post?

Answer. Yes. Supporting CODEL and STAFFDEL travel should always be a top priority of any embassy to ensure proper collaboration with the legislative branch.

Question. Do you agree to support fully any CODEL or STAFFDEL, with the only exceptions for simultaneous or overlapping visits by the President or First Lady of the United States, the Vice President, or the Secretaries of State or Defense?

Answer. Yes.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO MICHAEL G. HEATH 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 PRC 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 its absolute control of Chinese society and industry, the CCP could stop all of these destructive actions tomorrow if it so chooses. Is the CCP an economic, diplomatic, military, and technological threat to the United States?

Answer. Last 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." As Secretary Blinken has said, under President Xi, the CCP has become more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad. If confirmed, I would advance U.S. national security interests and counter the People's Republic of China (PRC) efforts to expand its problematic influence and use of coercion, through diplomatic engagements, public diplomacy, and commercial advocacy to bolster U.S.-Malawi ties.

Question. Does the CCP undertake any activities that are beneficial to U.S. interests? If so, please explain.

Answer. As Secretary Blinken has said, under President Xi, the CCP has become more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad. According to the Office of the Director of National Intelligence's 2024 Annual Threat Assessment, the CCP is seeking to "preempt challenges to its reputation and legitimacy, undercutting U.S. influence, driving wedges between Washington and its partners, and fostering global norms that favor its authoritarian system."

Question. Do you believe that there are any areas in which the CCP would constructively work with the United States in good faith, knowing that at any moment Chinese interlocuters with U.S. representatives could be disappeared? If so, please explain.

Answer. The United States will work with the PRC to address transnational challenges, such as climate change, when it is in the U.S. interest to do so. If confirmed, I would work with my colleagues across the U.S. interagency and Congress 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 PRC in the countries or areas in which you will work?

Answer. If confirmed, my priority would be advancing U.S. national security interests in Malawi 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 Malawi and the region.

As you may be aware, a group of federal employees penned an open letter to President Biden criticizing U.S. support for Israel in the aftermath of Hamas' brutal terrorist attack on October 7, 2023. In addition, employees from nearly two dozen agencies have staged walkouts in protest of the administration's Israel policy. Efforts like these directly undermine the duty of our diplomats to advance the policies of the President of the United States.

Question. Yes or no, did you sign the letter to the President expressing opposition to the President's Israel policy?

Answer. No, I did not sign the open letter to the President.

Question. Yes or no, did you participate in the January 16, 2024 walkout?

Answer. No, I did not participate.

Question. If confirmed, would you define one of the employees or contractors operating under your supervision signing an open letter criticizing you, or policies you undertake at the instruction of the President, as insubordination as defined by the Government Accountability Office?

Answer. If confirmed, I would seek to address employee concerns personally by creating an open, trusting, and harassment-free work environment. I am mindful of

and value Department employees' right to free speech under the First Amendment. Moreover, I understand the expression of disagreement does not in and of itself constitute insubordination. If confirmed, I would work with the Department's Office of the Legal Adviser to determine the proper course of action should such a matter arise.

Question. In your view, are the actions these federal employees took, by anonymously signing a letter to the President of the United States, covered as "whistleblowing?"

Answer. I believe these employees were expressing a dissenting view to their leadership. If confirmed, I would emphasize that employees should have the confidence to directly raise their concerns with their supervisors and management rather than signing an anonymous letter.

Question. If confirmed, how will you address discipline issues, such as insubordination, that do not take established dissent channels?

Answer. If confirmed, I would make sure that employees in our Mission in Malawi know that there are several avenues available to express policy disagreements. I would encourage employees to use established channels to express their views.

Question. Have you ever expressed support for an Israeli ceasefire in Gaza?

Answer. I support the Administration's efforts to obtain a mutual ceasefire, secure the release of all hostages held by Hamas, and provide more humanitarian assistance to begin restoring the lives of Palestinian civilians in Gaza.

Question. Do you agree that Hamas is an antisemitic entity?

Answer. Yes, Hamas espouses antisemitism. Hamas, which is designated by the United States as a foreign terrorist organization, seeks to eliminate the State of Israel, and its founding charter calls for the killing of Jews.

Question. Would a ceasefire allow these groups to reconstitute and attack Israel, and Americans, in the future?

Answer. The United States remains committed to reaching a deal that protects Israel's security and secures the release of hostages, allowing us to also provide humanitarian aid to civilians in need. Working with partners, the U.S. government is attempting to secure the release of all hostages held by Hamas. The U.S. government supports Israel's right to protect itself from Hamas' terrorism consistent with international law.

Question. Do you agree that calling for a ceasefire in Gaza means calling for Israel to stop its pursuit of Hamas, a designated foreign terrorist organization, that orchestrated the October 7 attacks and still refuses to release all Israeli and American hostages?

Answer. Israel will always have the right to defend itself against attacks like the heinous attack on October 7th. The Administration maintains that a comprehensive approach starts with a deal for a ceasefire that would release all hostages.

Question. Do you believe that Israel, in its operation against Hamas, which is known to use civilians as human shields, is taking all necessary steps to minimize civilian casualties?

Answer. The National Security Memorandum-20 report states that the IDF has undertaken steps to implement obligations under international humanitarian law for the protection of civilians in the current conflict, including the requirements related to distinction, proportionality, and precautions in military operations. Israel's own concern is reflected in the fact it has a number of internal investigations underway.

Malawi has long-standing and close military relations with the United States. Malawi's military receives U.S. International Military Education and Training (IMET) aid and occasional U.S. peacekeeping training through the U.S. Global Peace Operations Initiative. Despite this relationship, the PRC has sought increasing engagement with the Malawi Defense Force (MDF).

Question. As Ambassador, what steps would you take to ensure the United States remains Malawi's preferred security partner?

Answer. The United States government through the State Department and Department of Defense has invested significant time and resources in building the MDF, training many of Malawi's generals while also establishing one of the pre-eminent non-commissioned officer training centers in Africa. In April 2024, Malawi launched a State Partnership Program (SPP) with Zambia and the North Carolina

National Guard. Through SPP, the National Guard conducts military-to-military engagements in support of partner nation security goals, as well as leverages whole-of-society relationships to facilitate interagency engagements within military, government, economic and social spheres. When Malawi's vice president tragically died in a plane crash in June of this year, the Embassy worked with the DOD to support the search and rescue mission through an air reconnaissance asset that was already in country. If confirmed, I would build upon these existing relationships to ensure Malawi's political and military leadership continues to look to the United States as its preferred security partner.

Question. Beyond military to military engagement, what diplomatic measures would you take to limit the influence of the PRC in Malawi?

Answer. If confirmed, I would use our public messaging platforms to spotlight our development assistance to Malawi in contrast to the one-sided PRC activities in the country, noting the grant-based infrastructure development from the Millenium Challenge Corporation compared to debt-financed PRC infrastructure projects. I would highlight our support to Malawi in the health, education, humanitarian assistance, and economic development sectors. I would promote opportunities for Malawi to export tariff-free to the United States through AGOA in comparison to the country's trading relationship to the PRC that has led to massive trade deficits. I would engage U.S. government agencies such as DFC, EXIM, and USTDA to promote investments in emerging sectors like critical minerals. The PRC is compelling our African partners into trajectories of debt, negative growth, and exploitive security relationships. The PRC has established a one-way relationship with African countries, dumping goods at below market prices while the United States has in contrast promoted African exports to the United States through AGOA. The United States seeks to demonstrate the value of our partnerships with African partners, while also promoting fairness and transparency. If confirmed, I intend to enhance cooperation with Malawian counterparts in the areas of accountable governance and human rights in an effort to curb democratic backsliding, to shore up the progress many African countries have made on democratization, human rights, and governance; and to ensure that democratic ideals (and not those offered by the PRC) are most attractive and compelling to African governments and their people.

Question. What is your assessment of the extent of PRC involvement and leverage in the Malawi economy via China's Belt and Road Initiative?

Answer. PRC companies are currently undertaking some limited road construction projects in Lilongwe. In comparison, the Millenium Challenge Corporation's first compact in Malawi that ended in 2018 built the infrastructure Malawi needed to connect to the Southern African Power Pool, expanded access to reliable power throughout the country through the construction and refurbishment of 22 substations and 367 km of transmission and distribution lines, and delivered an additional 12 megawatts of clean energy for the country. MCC's current compact signed earlier this year will improve rural access to markets and reduce transportation costs by investing in upgrades and improvements across different classes of roads within four selected corridors—totaling more than 300 km. In total, MCC's grant-based investments in Malawi's infrastructure equal $721.6 million, far surpassing what Malawi has received through the debt-financing of China's Belt and Road Initiative.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO MARY E. DASCHBACK BY SENATOR BENJAMIN L. CARDIN

Military juntas have taken over in Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso. To date, they have proven ineffective at combatting violent extremist organizations. Just last month, at least 400 people were killed in a single attack in Burkina Faso. Togolese citizens have suffered increasing attacks from extremists due to the inability of juntas to counter terrorists.

Question. What diplomacy and assistance are we deploying to help Togo respond to attacks by militant groups?

Answer. The United States is supporting the Government of Togo's early warning system in the north to effectively address vulnerability factors and instability risks and to empower community members to resolve conflicts and build peace. USAID's regional efforts enhance access of targeted populations to accurate and timely information and increase capacity to critically evaluate the quality of information. Members of the Togolese Armed Forces have also participated in the U.S.-led Exercise

Flintlock focused on strengthening the ability of nations in the region to counter violent extremist organizations and collaborate across borders. The State Department's Bureau of Counterterrorism has also provided assistance to Togolese law enforcement to improve border security capabilities and counter improvised explosive devices.

Question. Does the administration have a comprehensive strategy for countries in Coastal West Africa that incorporates lessons learned from the Sahel since the rash of recent coups?

Answer. There is a fluid situation in the Sahel, and we constantly review our strategy considering changing dynamics. The policy approach to West Africa is centered on improving social cohesion, particularly in rural communities; countering misinformation and disinformation; promoting economic prosperity and development; strengthening democratic institutions and transparent, accountable, and effective governance; and improving government and security responsiveness to vulnerable communities.

Togo is one of the countries within the regional Coastal West Africa (CWA) priority sub-region targeted for assistance under the Global Fragility Act. The rising threat of violent extremism and democratic backsliding in the larger region makes the Global Fragility Act's sub-regional approach to building resiliency critical to helping insulate Togo from internal and external shocks.

Question. If confirmed, in what ways will you leverage the authorities and comparative advantage of the different U.S. government agencies tasked within the Global Fragility Act to ensure there is an effective interagency approach to addressing dynamics in Togo?

Answer. If confirmed, I will leverage USAID's expertise in community stakeholder engagement, humanitarian affairs, and international donor coordination and incorporate U.S. Africa Command's experience in civil-military relations, as well as force protection and information sharing, to foster a whole-of-government, community-focused approach to help Togo build resiliency and coordinate effectively internally, as well as with its neighbors, to address the rising extremist threat in a way that protects civilian populations and achieves sustainable peace. My priorities will be to strengthen democracy and governance, promote respect for human rights, advance peace and security, foster economic opportunity and social development, and support an accountable and transparent security force in Togo. I will work closely with Togo's Global Fragility Act Country Coordinator at Embassy Lome, USAID—West Africa Regional Mission leadership, the Commander of U.S. Africa Command, and the Ambassadors from other GFA Coastal West Africa countries to coordinate our efforts, evaluate which existing interventions demonstrate maximum yields, and amplify effectiveness.

The same family has ruled Togo for since 1967—more than half a century. According to the Afrobarometer, 82 percent of Togolese reject the idea of a single party state, 82 percent support holding their president to two terms in office, 78 percent reject dictatorship, 68 percent prefer democracy over any other system of government, and only 33 percent are satisfied with the way democracy has functioned in Togo. This year, Togolese President Gnassignbe moved to extend his 19 year stay in power by altering the way in which the president of Togo is chosen.

Question. The U.S. strategy for Africa refers to "partners" or "partnership" several dozen times. It is impossible, however, to "partner" with everyone all the time. Are you concerned that, by "partnering" with a president who has set himself up—in the footsteps of his father—as president-for-life, the U.S. is alienating millions of Togolese who support democracy, oppose dictatorship, and support presidential term limits?

Answer. The U.S. partnership with Togo must be based on respect for political and human rights. The most recent efforts to change the constitution lacked transparency and inclusion of all stakeholders into the process. As a result, the effort was met with strong opposition from political parties and civil society. If confirmed, I will underscore to the Government of Togo that political inclusion, transparency, and accountability are key tenants the United States expects from its partners.

Question. Knowing that several coups, particularly in West Africa, stem directly from longstanding presidents' refusal to step down, will you, if confirmed, call on President Gnassingbe to refrain from seeking yet another term in office in order to pave the way for a new generation of leadership?

Answer. If confirmed, I will press President Faure Gnassingbe to promote democratic principles in Togo. I am concerned by the continued shrinking of civic space in Togo and the lack of transparency and broad participation in the recently passed constitutional change. Regardless of whether the form of government is presidential or parliamentary, democratic governments need to be responsive to their citizens. Togo's best path to long-term stability lies in political pluralism, free and fair elections that reflect the will of the people, and transparent and responsive democratic governance that strives to deliver the public services that address root causes of instability.

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 Togo?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to engaging robustly with a broad range of Togolese civil society stakeholders and U.S.-based organizations on many issues. Civil society includes some of our most important partners on fighting corruption; countering insecurity; working toward free and fair elections; and promoting respect for human rights, especially of women and children.

Question. What steps will you take to pro-actively address any efforts to restrict or penalize NGOs and civil society via legal or regulatory measures should they occur?

Answer. If confirmed, I will advocate in diplomatic channels, use the voice of the U.S. government, and deploy specialized programs and assistance through the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor and in collaboration with USAID, as appropriate, to proactively address any efforts to restrict or penalize NGOs and civil society via legal or regulatory measures should they occur.

Question. Will you and your embassy team actively engage with Togo on freedom of the press and address any government efforts designed to control or undermine press freedom through legal, regulatory, or other measures?

Answer. If confirmed, I will advocate that the government of Togo does not undermine fundamental freedoms of the Togolese people including freedom of expression, the press and peaceful assembly.

Question. Will you commit to meeting regularly with independent, local press in Togo?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to meeting regularly with independent press in Togo to understand their perspectives on the media environment and share U.S. perspectives.

Question. If confirmed, 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 investment and governance, and what will you prioritize in processes to administer such assistance?

Answer. If confirmed, I will utilize U.S. government assistance resources for building capacity of key actors and civil society with programs such as training for national elections commissions, voter education and election observation programs. I will utilize programs and policies aimed to increase marginalized groups', women's and youth political participation, including as voters, candidates and office holders. A foundation of transparent, efficient, and accountable governance is essential to building citizen confidence in Togo's future.

Question. What are the potential impediments you foresee in advancing democracy in Togo and how do you intend to resolve them?

Answer. U.S. Government efforts under the Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability, through foreign assistance programming and diplomatic engagement, focus on enabling and supporting democratic processes that are transparent, responsive, and inclusive. Togo is facing a spillover of extremist violence in the north of the country. To be effective, the effort to stop the spread of extremism cannot be over-militarized nor result in the further closing of civic space. If confirmed, I will support capacity?building for key actors and civil society, training for national elections commissions, promotion of marginalized groups' representation in government, a free press, and voter education and election observation programs. I will encourage policies that increase women's and youth political participation as voters, civil society members and leaders, and office holders at all levels of government. Our aim is to ensure that Togo is on a positive trajectory that embraces democratic norms that lead to peace and prosperity for the Togolese people.

Question. Given the importance of representing the United States' diversity abroad, if confirmed, how will you ensure that our mission's staff and programmatic plans reflect this diversity?

Answer. If confirmed, I will direct Embassy Lome's to publicize U.S. staff vacancies broadly, including with the Department's range of affinity groups in order to reach a broad range of potential applicants. I would confirm that all hiring decision-makers, both U.S. and local staff members, complete required Department training on mitigating unconscious bias and require the hiring decision-making process be documented.

I would also implement local staff recruitment processes to reach the full range of Togo's multi-ethnic population. I would support the recruitment of Department interns and overseas opportunities for civil service employees and continue my commitment to mentoring staff at all levels and from all backgrounds. I would review Embassy facilities and communication systems and direct adjustments, as feasible, so they are more accessible to all employees, family members, and members of the public who are served by the Embassy. I would ensure the content on our social media platforms is representative of the diversity of the United States, the selection process for Embassy foreign assistance grants is transparent, and that guests invited to Embassy events reflect Togolese ethnic, religious, and regional representation as well as gender balance.

Question. As a career member of the Foreign Service, please share how your experience in various posts has prepared you to advance the Department's mission of fostering inclusive diplomacy/foreign assistance?

Answer. I have been committed to an inclusive approach to management and program development throughout my career and if confirmed, I would lead the Embassy team to incorporate inclusion into all of our work. Working in small- and medium-sized Embassies, I fostered a one-team approach focused on collaboration that tapped into the potential of the interagency as well as all our employees, especially family members and local staff. In support of the Department's DEIA initiatives, I worked with each of my subordinates in Cameroon to develop a specific objective of their choosing into their work requirements at the beginning of the performance evaluation cycle. This resulted in concrete accomplishments such as a 25 percent increase the number of female security guards, the identification of younger civil society leaders from marginalized groups for U.S. exchange programs, and bystander training.

In several posts, I pressed to incorporate more women into security cooperation programs and encouraged the allocation of major foreign assistance grants to capable local partners rather than international organizations. In Togo, I invited Peace Corps volunteers from a range of different heritages to speak with students at the university and secured funding for summer youth leadership camps run by volunteers focused on building inter-ethnic tolerance. In Costa Rica, I collaborated with other Embassy sections to incorporate the police and local hospital staff into training to address gender-based violence and oriented our English language training programs toward students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. If confirmed, I will be attentive to this issue in Togo pursuant to and in line with Department policies.

Question. Will you commit to using your position, if confirmed, to promote the human rights and dignity of all people in Togo, no matter their race or ethnicity, religion, nationality, disability, sexual orientation or gender identity? What specifically will you do to prioritize and to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in Togo if confirmed?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed, I commit to using my position to promote respect for the human rights and dignity of all people in Togo, no matter the race or ethnicity, religion, nationality, disability, sexual orientation or gender identity. If confirmed, I will support the work of Post's DEIA Council, initiatives by individual officers, and inclusion of relevant best practices in the Mission's policy, programs, and initiatives pursuant to and in line with Department policies.

Question. What challenges do LGBTQI+ people face in Togo? What specifically will you commit to do to help LGBTQI+ people in Togo if confirmed?

Answer. Togolese law prohibits same-sex sexual conduct and the "promotion of same-sex conduct." While the law is rarely enforced, it serves as a threat against LGBTQI+ persons and activism for the protection of their human rights. LGBTQI+ persons are at frequent risk of violence and intimidation, but police ignore complaints. LGBTQI+ activists report persistent, significant discrimination by Togolese society and the Government of Togo, noting societal discrimination in access to edu-

cation, employment, housing, and health care. If confirmed, I will work with our Embassy team, as well as LGBTQI+ community members and organizations, to advocate respect for the human rights of all, including LGBTQI+ persons in Togo.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO MARY E. DASCHBACK BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

Democracy and Elections

Question. What is your view of the role of a U.S. ambassador in supporting democratic institutions and democratic governance?

Answer. I believe it is critical that the U.S. Ambassador defend and advance democracy. If confirmed, I will advance our partnership with Togo to respond to transnational threats and secure its borders in a way that protects civilians, builds resiliency, and leads to sustainable peace. If confirmed, I will leverage USG interagency resources and expertise to support efforts by a broad range of stakeholders to strengthen democratic institutions and governance in Togo, and I will advocate for a business environment that is open to U.S. private sector investment and inclusive economic growth.

Question. Do you commit to using your platform as U.S. Ambassador to Togo, if confirmed, to publicly amplify and support the democratic aspirations of the people of Togo?

Answer. Yes.

Question. In your view, how can the United States better support the democratic aspirations of the people of Togo?

Answer. U.S. Government diplomatic and foreign assistance efforts in Togo focus on enabling and supporting democratic processes that are transparent, responsive, and inclusive. If confirmed, I will leverage U.S. Government resources to underscore to the government of Togo that political inclusion, transparency, and accountability are key tenets the United States expects of its partners, and I will continue to convey USG concern about actions that shrink civic and political space. If confirmed, I will engage broadly with civil society organizations and orient U.S. Government assistance resources towards building the capacity media, civil society, and independent institutions to hold the government accountable to its commitments and to advance political pluralism and respect for fundamental rights. I will utilize programs and policies aimed to increase marginalized groups, women's and youth political participation, including as voters, civil society members, candidates and office holders. A foundation of transparent, efficient, and accountable governance is essential to building citizen confidence in Togo's future. Our aim is to put Togo is on a positive trajectory that embraces democratic norms.

Historically, Togo has not been a target of significant democracy and governance support by the State Department or USAID.

Question. What is your view of some areas where U.S. support in this area could encourage the opening of political space and political pluralism in Togo?

Answer. U.S. Government diplomatic efforts and foreign assistance programming focus on enabling democratic processes and promoting fundamental freedoms such as those of free assembly, press and expression. With the change in Togo's constitution, the legislative branch plays a greater role than before. If confirmed, I will tap U.S. Government democracy and governance resources and expertise to support a fair electoral framework and the impartiality of election management institutions. I will use U.S. Government resources to increase the capacity of citizens and civil society to engage elected representatives at the national and community levels, reinforce with officials the value of strong constituent relations, and encourage political parties to develop platforms that respond to the needs of all of the Togolese people. In addition, I will focus USG programs on increasing political and civic participation of women and youth.

Question. What is your outlook on Togo's future stability and democracy? What factors shape your analysis?

Answer. Togo's population is young and growing quickly. In my prior tour in Togo, I was deeply impressed by the entrepreneurial spirit, resilience, and openness of the people, especially the youth. I have a positive outlook on the future of Togo's stability and democracy, especially if more is done to improve economic opportunities for young people and strengthen democratic institutions so that the people of Togo

maintain their trust in democracy. If confirmed, I will use all available U.S. programs and policies to strengthen the partnership between the United States and Togo in pursuit of those goals.

Question. How will you practice commercial diplomacy on behalf of U.S. investments in Togo?

Answer. The government of Togo seeks private sector investment to leverage its advantage as a transportation and logistics hub and has significant development needs, particularly in the energy, digital, and agricultural sectors. If confirmed, I will work with Embassy Togo's Deal Team, the U.S. Foreign Commercial Service, and Prosper Africa to enhance our efforts to link U.S. firms with opportunities in Togo, whether through the International Trade Administration's (ITA) Express Leads system, Prosper Africa's Deal Room, reverse trade missions, or business facilitation organizations such as the Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Togo and the Corporate Council on Africa. I will also engage the Togolese-American diaspora. If confirmed, I will robustly advocate on behalf of American companies established in Togo, as well as for those competing for business opportunities to help resolve any challenges they may face doing business in Togo.

Question. What is your assessment of Togo's greatest barriers to increased two-way trade and investment with the United States?

Answer. Although the government of Togo 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 Togolese 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 Togo to improve on these investment and trade climate issues to strengthen their economy and make it more attractive to 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 Togo, if confirmed, to support addressing barriers to trade and investment in the enabling environment, including the need for economic and political reforms?

Answer. I would charge our Embassy officers with leveraging 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 Togo. If confirmed, I will facilitate engagement between potential U.S. investors, as well as the government of Togo, with the 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 will meet regularly with U.S. companies doing business in Togo and those interested in expanding their presence in Africa to understand investment and trade impediments in Togo and would advocate for their removal, using USAID trade and investment policy development tools as appropriate to support the government of Togo in such reform efforts. Given the comparatively small size of the Togolese market, I would advocate for Togo'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. How will you work with Prosper Africa leadership to ensure that Togo can benefit from Prosper Africa resources, tools and expertise?

Answer. Prosper Africa, as a one-stop shop through which U.S. and African companies can access USG assistance for expanded two-way trade and investment is a key resource and, if confirmed, I will consult with Prosper Africa leadership to identify the tools and expertise that we can best employed in Togo. In addition, I will utilize 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 Togo. Such assistance could help overcome barriers to trade and investment such as project financing and political risk.

U.S. Engagement and Strategic Interests

Question. What are the U.S. strategic interests in Togo?

Answer. U.S. strategic interests in the region include preventing state collapse while also preventing the terrorist threat from metastasizing. Strengthening democratic governance and promoting inclusive economic growth are key to this effort.

Today, Togo faces a spillover of extremist violence from the Sahel in the north of the country that could undermine its stability, development, and prosperity, and is seeking support to address this historic challenge. Togo is a key partner for the U.S. strategy to prevent conflict and promote stability in Coastal West Africa. The United States is supporting a whole of government, community-focused approach to help Togo build resiliency and coordinate effectively with its neighbors to address the rising extremist threat in a way that protects civilians and achieves sustainable peace. If confirmed, I will work closely with the Global Fragility Act Country Coordinator, USAID-West Africa Regional Mission leadership, the Commander of U.S. Africa Command, and the U.S. Ambassadors from other GFA countries in Coastal West Africa to coordinate our efforts for maximum effectiveness.

To promote stability, as well as to advance U.S. interests in a competitive environment, we must also work closely with Togo to promote bilateral trade and inclusive economic growth in Togo and throughout the region. Home to the Gulf of Guinea's deepest port and a regional airport with direct flights to the United States, Togo seeks private sector investment to leverage its geographic advantage as a transportation and logistics hub, particularly as a gateway to the landlocked Sahel. If I'm confirmed, the Embassy team and I will advocate strongly on behalf of American investors and continue engagement with Togo to foster a business climate that is fair and attractive to U.S. companies.

Togo's best path to long-term stability lies in political pluralism, free and fair elections that reflect the will of its people, and transparent, responsive, democratic governance that addresses root causes of instability and reinforces the trust of the Togolese people, especially the younger generation, in democracy. If confirmed, my Embassy team and I will continue to work with the government of Togo, political parties, civil society organizations, and other diplomatic missions to promote open and inclusive governance that respects fundamental human rights and responds to the concerns of all of Togo's citizens. If confirmed, I will also work closely with Department of State and interagency colleagues to address any efforts by the PRC or Russia to undermine U.S. interests in Togo and Coastal West Africa.

Question. How do you plan to enhance interagency collaboration to ensure the effectiveness of our partnerships in Togo?

Answer. The country team for Togo represents strong interagency partners all of which have deep engagement with Togo. If confirmed, I will confirm that the work of our interagency is complementary and aligned with U.S. interests, as necessary seeking engagement from agencies not represented at post, including through strategic planning meetings and thematic working groups to tackle cross-cutting issues. If confirmed, I will directly engage USAID West Africa Regional Mission, U.S. Africa Command, and MCC leadership, as well as the U.S. Ambassadors in the other GFA countries and the Sahel to coordinate our efforts in Togo within the broader regional strategy.

Millennium Challenge Corporation

Togo's recent constitutional changes removing direct presidential elections and the continued rule of Togo by one family for nearly 60 years reflects serious challenges to Togo maturing as a citizen-centered democracy.

Question. How can MCC and the State Department leverage the Togolese government's interest in signing a compact to promote democratic reforms and openness in the country?

Answer. The development of an MCC Compact in Togo represents one of the most important opportunities for the United States Government to create an environment supportive of democracy and to reinforce our influence and foreign policy objectives in the region. In the context of greater regional political instability and competing influence from the PRC and Russia, the MCC Compact investments will reinforce the U.S. partnership with Togo, especially in the key sectors of digital and energy. Togo successfully followed the MCC scorecard to make significant improvements in economic governance. If confirmed, I would encourage the government of Togo to do the same with the political rights indicators to concretely demonstrate its interest in maintaining eligibility. Nonetheless, if it becomes evident that the Togolese government is not making progress, I will support a decision by the MCC Board to refocus those valuable resources elsewhere.

Trafficking in Persons

In the State Department's 2024 Trafficking in Persons Report, Togo remained on Tier 2 for its increasing efforts to combat trafficking in persons.

Question. If confirmed, what concrete steps could you take to help Togo operationalize the prioritized recommendations contained in the TIP report?

Answer. If confirmed, I will urge the government of Togo to implement its National Action Plan by increasing resources to the National Commission Against Trafficking in Persons (CNLTP) and to dedicated target funding to each of the government agencies tasked with the prosecution, protection, and prevention of trafficking. If confirmed, I will charge an Embassy working group with leveraging the convening power of the U.S. Embassy to bring together relevant government officials and NGOs on a regular basis to convey our prioritized recommendations, foster a common effort, identify areas of achievable action despite resource constraints, and review progress. If confirmed, I will also foster coordination between Embassy Lomé and neighboring U.S. Embassies to encourage cooperation between border agents in Togo and its neighbors. The Embassy public affairs section will interact with the media and use Embassy social media platforms to raise awareness and to increase urgency. I will encourage Embassy Lomé staff to take advantage of the Department's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking resources on best practices and opportunities for technical assistance.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to accurately and honestly portraying the reality of the trafficking situation in Togo to Congress via the annual Trafficking in Persons report?

Answer. Yes.

Religious Freedom

In the State Department's 2023 report on International Religious Freedom, Togo was noted for lacking general societal and governmental respect for religious freedom.

Question. What is your assessment of this particular issue? If confirmed, how will you work with the Ambassador At Large for International Religious Freedom to bolster religious freedom in- country?

Answer. The constitution of Togo specifies the state is secular and protects the rights of all citizens to exercise their religious beliefs, consistent with the nation's laws. Religious organizations must register with the government, and unregistered denominations are prohibited from opening places of worship. If confirmed, I would continue the Embassy's long-standing advocacy for religious tolerance and freedom, and engagement with members of all faiths in Togo. I would work closely with the Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom and Office for International Religious Freedom, so our approach in Togo 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 Togo increase its societal and governmental respect for religious freedom?

Answer. If confirmed, I will use my position to host religious leaders from all faiths for roundtable discussions, and I will meet with a cross-section of religious leaders during in-country trips to emphasize the important role they can play to prevent and mitigate conflict. I would use our public diplomacy programming and exchanges to find opportunities to expose young leaders to religious freedom issues. I will also seek opportunities for U.S.-based experts on religious freedom to visit Togo and interact with various audiences in and out of the capital

Human Rights

In the State Department's 2023 Country Report on Human Rights, Togo was noted as having no significant change in its human rights situation but an increasing list of significant human rights issues, including the use of torture, threats against journalists, 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, I would direct the Embassy's political section, the public affairs section and USAID to continue robust engagement with local human rights organizations, journalists, and government officials to thoroughly research and document human rights abuse allegations, and shape Department understanding on this priority through detailed reporting. Furthermore, if confirmed, I will welcome the

opportunity to work with the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, to leverage their expertise and work with my staff to obtain Department funding designed to support human rights organizations in Togo. If confirmed, I will also require the integration of human rights into all U.S.-sponsored training for Togolese security sector professionals and raise allegations of human rights abuses and accountability issues with the government, including of security forces deployed to multilateral Missions.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to personally engaging with civil society on this issue?

Answer. Yes.

State Management and Oversight

Many U.S. Missions have been under enormous stress over the last several years, with Missions in Africa experiencing specific challenges.

Question. What is your understanding of morale throughout Mission Lomé?

Answer. My understanding is that morale is generally good at the Mission despite the challenging environment and limited staffing. Embassy personnel in Lomé have a strong sense of purpose and mission, which is evident in their output. Mission morale is a very high priority for me. If confirmed, I will be attentive to the needs of the community and will do all I can support high morale in the Mission workplace and community for all employees and their families.

Question. How do you intend to improve morale at Mission Lomé?

Answer. If confirmed, I plan to focus on morale in the workplace and for the community. In the workplace, I want all staff—Americans and Locally Employed Staff—to have direction and the necessary resources to do their work, to feel empowered, respected, and supported, to understand how their work fits into the Embassy's mission and achievement of Department goals, to benefit from professional development, and to be safe and healthy. In the community, I will be attentive to the needs of the Eligible Family Members, supporting employment, quality education, and activities that bring the community together as well as addressing concerns about specific issues or situations as they arise. If confirmed, I will make myself available through regular town halls and private meetings to listen to and address concerns about specific issues or situations as they arise.

Question. How do you intend to create a unified mission and vision at Mission Lomé?

Answer. If confirmed, I will be leading a U.S. Government team comprised of personnel from multiple agencies. Creating a unified mission and vision will require ensuring all agencies and offices understand the Mission's goals and objectives, which I plan to develop in a collaborative fashion, discussing together operational plans and tradeoffs as necessary so that our work is complementary and mutually reinforcing. Continual communications across all levels of the Mission are essential, including through weekly Country Team meetings, regular meetings with agency leaders that include the Deputy Chief of Mission, mission-wide participation in the Integrated Country Strategy and Mission Resource Request planning cycles, and thematic working groups. Under my leadership, Mission Togo will review our goals and achievements as we update our Integrated Country Strategy, an essential tool to focus all agency initiatives on Mission goals in support of U.S. strategic interests.

Question. How do you intend to improve morale at Mission Lomé?

Answer. If confirmed, I plan to focus on morale in the workplace and for the community. In the workplace, I want all staff—Americans and Locally Employed Staff—to have direction and the necessary resources to do their work, to feel empowered, respected, and supported, to understand how their work fits into the Embassy's mission and achievement of Department goals, to benefit from professional development, and to be safe and healthy. If confirmed, I will convey clear priorities to manage workloads given the small size of the Embassy staff. In the community, I will be attentive to the needs of the family members, supporting employment, quality education, and activities that bring the community together. If confirmed, I will make myself available through regular town halls and private meetings to listen to and address concerns about specific issues or situations as they arise.

Question. Management is a key responsibility of Chiefs of Mission. How would you describe your management style?

Answer. As a manager, I want people to love their work as much as I do and will do everything in my power to support that aim. If confirmed, I will lead and manage Mission Lomé in way that empowers employees at all levels, offers professional de-

velopment opportunities, supports innovation and engagement generated at all levels, and promotes efficiency and effectiveness of U.S. Government resources. I will foster a one-team approach focused on collaboration that taps into the potential of employees at all levels, including family members and local staff. I will meet regularly with employees of all levels and host and participate in community social events. If confirmed, the Deputy Chief of Mission and I will 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. Never.

Question. How do you envision your relationship with the Deputy Chief of Mission?

Answer. Having twice served as a Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM), I know the Ambassador and DCM must be a unified leadership team for the entire Mission. If confirmed, I will prioritize developing a relationship with the DCM that is characterized by two-way open and frank communication, mutual respect, division of labor as appropriate, and empowerment. I will make the DCM fully aware of all policy issues and known to senior Togolese leaders so that the DCM will seamlessly assume the role of Chargé d'Affaires in my absence. I want the DCM to be effective and happy in this key Mission role.

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.

Question. If confirmed, will you support and encourage clear, accurate, and direct feedback to employees in order to improve performance and reward high achievers?

Answer. Yes.

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 agree that it is imperative that U.S. diplomats get outside of our Embassy walls to accomplish fully our mission overseas. If confirmed, I will support and encourage all staff to engage broadly with a broad range of actors throughout Togo.

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 allocate funding for in-country travel and mentor employees on developing innovative ways to engage frequently and broadly at levels of society in Togo, such as through sports, music, food, or shared faith. To do so, if confirmed, I will prioritize making the necessary resources available for security and representation so that staff are able to cultivate contacts, engage broadly, and promote Mission goals outside of Lomé.

Some other ways I will support greater access to local populations, if I am confirmed, are to offer language lessons for staff who need this support to engage more effectively; host welcome receptions for new staff with key contacts from a broad range of organizations to support relationship building; and encourage our American staff to value and use the cultural and societal knowledge of the Embassy's Togolese staff.

Congressional Delegations (CODELs) and Staff Delegations (STAFFDELs) serve a critical oversight mission.

Question. Do you pledge to support fully CODELs and STAFFDELs that seek to travel to post?

Answer. Yes.

Question. Do you agree to support fully any CODEL or STAFFDEL, with the only exceptions for simultaneous or overlapping visits by the President or First Lady of the United States, the Vice President, or the Secretaries of State or Defense?

Answer. Yes.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO MARY E. DASCHBACK 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 PRC 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 its absolute control of Chinese society and industry, the CCP could stop all of these destructive actions tomorrow if it so chooses. Is the CCP an economic, diplomatic, military, and technological threat to the United States?

Answer. I concur with the statement by the Director of National Intelligence 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 in the PRC and more aggressive globally, including in Africa, seeking to undercut U.S. influence and alliances. We are clear eyed about the challenge. We understand the CCP and the PRC Government are inextricably linked in their global activities. If confirmed, I will advance U.S. national security interests and push back against PRC efforts to undermine U.S. strategic objectives through robust and forthright diplomatic engagements, public diplomacy, and commercial advocacy to bolster U.S.-Togo ties.

Question. Does the CCP undertake any activities that are beneficial to U.S. interests? If so, please explain.

Answer. The Administration assesses that, and 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 2024 Annual Threat Assessment, the CCP is seeking to "preempt challenges to its reputation and legitimacy, undercutting U.S. influence, driving wedges between Washington and its partners, and fostering global norms that favor its authoritarian system."

Question. Do you believe that there are any areas in which the CCP would constructively work with the United States in good faith, knowing that at any moment Chinese interlocuters with U.S. representatives could be disappeared? If so, please explain.

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. If confirmed, I will work with the Department of State's Office of China Coordination, the interagency, and Congress 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 PRC in the countries or areas in which you will work?

Answer. If confirmed, my priority will be advancing U.S. national security interests in Togo 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 with Congress to address the PRC's efforts to undermine U.S. objectives in Togo and the region.

As you may be aware, a group of federal employees penned an open letter to President Biden criticizing U.S. support for Israel in the aftermath of Hamas' brutal terrorist attack on October 7, 2023. In addition, employees from nearly two dozen agencies have staged walkouts in protest of the administration's Israel policy. Efforts like these directly undermine the duty of our diplomats to advance the policies of the President of the United States.

Question. Yes or no, did you sign the letter to the President expressing opposition to the President's Israel policy?

Answer. No, I did not sign the open letter to the President opposing the Israel policy.

Question. Yes or no, did you participate in the January 16, 2024 walkout?

Answer. No, I did not.

Question. If confirmed, would you define one of the employees or contractors operating under your supervision signing an open letter criticizing you, or policies you undertake at the instruction of the President, as insubordination as defined by the Government Accountability Office?

Answer. As a nominee for Ambassador, I believe valuing opinions, engendering trust, and fostering a harassment-free workplace are all key to managing dissent. If confirmed, I would ensure employees know how to use official dissent channels and the value the Department places in constructive dissent. While I would prefer that employees feel they could address concerns with me personally or through one of the channels offered by the Department, should such a matter arise I would seek guidance from the Department's Legal Adviser on what constitutes insubordination, as defined by the Government Accountability Office.

Question. In your view, are the actions these federal employees took, by anonymously signing a letter to the President of the United States, covered as "whistleblowing?"

Answer. I believe that employees must feel safe to express dissenting views to leadership. The U.S. Department of State Office of Inspector General Whistleblower Program exists in order to protect employees from retaliation when reporting potential wrongdoing. "Whistleblowing" is a term and activity covered by federal legislation and regulations; I defer to the Department's Office of the Legal Adviser to determine whether the referenced actions are considered protected whistleblowing activity.

Question. If confirmed, how will you address discipline issues, such as insubordination, that do not take established dissent channels?

Answer. If an employee did not express dissent through official channels, I would make sure that the employee knew that Department leadership listens to and values differing views on policy issues and would then encourage the employee to use standardized dissent channels to express views and effect change. If I felt the employee's actions were insubordinate, I would seek and follow guidance from the Management Support Unit and the Department's Office of the Legal Advisor.

Question. Have you ever expressed support for an Israeli ceasefire in Gaza?

Answer. No, I have not expressed support for an Israeli ceasefire in Gaza. I understand that it is the policy of the Administration to reach a ceasefire that brings the hostages home, that alleviates the suffering of the Palestinian people, and that ultimately brings an end to this war. Secretary Blinken has stated that a ceasefire opens the path to more durable security in Gaza and in Israel.

Question. Do you agree that Hamas is an antisemitic entity?

Answer. Yes, Hamas espouses antisemitism. Hamas, which is designated by the United States as a foreign terrorist organization, seeks to eliminate the State of Israel, and its founding charter calls for the killing of Jews.

Question. Would a ceasefire allow these groups to reconstitute and attack Israel, and Americans, in the future?

Answer. It is the policy of the Administration to reach a ceasefire that brings the hostages home, that alleviates the suffering of the Palestinian people, and that ultimately brings an end to this war. Secretary Blinken has stated that a ceasefire opens the path to more durable security in Gaza and in Israel. While Hamas is no longer capable of carrying out another October 7th attack, the U.S. Government supports Israel's right to protect itself from Hamas' terrorism consistent with international law.

Question. Do you agree that calling for a ceasefire in Gaza means calling for Israel to stop its pursuit of Hamas, a designated foreign terrorist organization, that orchestrated the October 7 attacks and still refuses to release all Israeli and American hostages?

Answer. Israel will always have the right to defend itself against attacks like the heinous attack on October 7. The Administration maintains that a comprehensive approach starts with a deal for a ceasefire that would include the release of all hostages.

Question. Do you believe that Israel, in its operation against Hamas, which is known to use civilians as human shields, is taking all necessary steps to minimize civilian casualties?

Answer. Israel has the right to protect itself, consistent with international law. The United States has emphasized to Israel that it must differentiate between civilians and Hamas terrorists and do everything possible to avoid civilian casualties. Hamas's use of civilians as human shields, a blatant violation of international law, does not lessen Israel's obligations under international humanitarian law.

In the heat of war it is difficult to definitively assess any individual incident, but the National Security Memorandum-20 report states that the IDF has undertaken steps to implement IHL obligations for the protection of civilians in the current conflict, including the requirements related to distinction, proportionality, and precautions in military operations. Israel's own concern is reflected in the fact it has a number of internal investigations underway.

Question. Togo faces growing Islamist violence emanating from neighboring Burkina Faso, where regional Al Qaeda and Islamic State affiliates are active. U.S. bilateral assistance has included an International Military Education and Training (IMET) program. If confirmed, what additional steps would you take to engage Togo's Government and security forces to combat Islamic extremism in the country?

Answer. Our interests in the region include preventing state collapse while also preventing the terrorist threat from metastasizing. If confirmed, I will support regional cooperation through the Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability, a whole-of-government approach to combat terrorist threats in Togo and its Coastal West Africa neighbors. In addition to the IMET program, Togo has participated in regional U.S.-led training exercises Flintlock and African Lion. The North Dakota National Guard and Togo have a State Partnership Agreement that includes engagements on aircraft maintenance, combat engineer training, NCO development, and counter-explosive devise training.

If confirmed, I will continue to support U.S. security cooperation and development assistance to combat terrorist threats to Togo and its neighbors as well as build broader regional security cooperation.

Question. Like other countries in the region, there are recent signs that Togo may be turning toward Moscow for military assistance. Togo has procured Russian military equipment, including helicopters delivered in 2022. According to one report, some 30 Russian military advisors arrived in early 2024 to assist with construction of a military camp in northern Togo. China's foreign minister visited Togo during a regional tour in January 2024 and reportedly pledged security assistance to bolster the Government's emergency program directed at Islamic extremism in the north. If confirmed, what diplomatic measures would you take to limit the influence of foreign military sales and security assistance overtures by the PRC and Russia in Togo?

Answer. If confirmed, my priority will be advancing U.S. national security interests in Togo 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 with Congress to address the PRC's efforts to expand its influence in Togo and the region.

If confirmed, I will continue to work closely with U.S., African, and allied defense, intelligence, and law enforcement partners to expose the full scope of the ever-changing Russian destabilizing influence. Wagner and Russia thrive where options are few. If confirmed, I would explore how vital bilateral U.S. foreign assistance could be used both to provide a credible alternative to Wagner and to build civilian institutions more resilient to malign foreign influence in line with the Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability.

NOMINATIONS

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 19, 2024

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

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:32 a.m., in room SD–419, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Tammy Duckworth presiding.

Present: Senator Duckworth [presiding], Murphy, Kaine, Van Hollen, Helmy, Risch, and Ricketts.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. TAMMY DUCKWORTH, U.S. SENATOR FROM ILLINOIS

Senator DUCKWORTH. Good morning, everyone. This hearing of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee will come to order. I want to welcome all the nominees who are appearing before us today and express my appreciation for your service and your continued willingness to serve.

I'd also like to thank the ranking member for working with us to put this hearing together. Should today's nominees be confirmed, they will be serving in parts of the world that are critical to the United States' interests in the Indo-Pacific, Central Asia, and Africa. Filling these positions matters not just for the State Department personnel serving in these embassies around the world, but it sends a message to these nations that the United States shows up.

In the interest of time and getting to hear from each of you, I'm going to keep it short today. Senator Risch, I'll turn it over to you for an opening Statement before we proceed to introductions.

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

Senator RISCH. Well done, Senator Duckworth, and I will do likewise. First of all, thank you to all of you who are here today. There's no doubt that you have important posts that we need to get filled. So if confirmed you will engage on U.S. strategic priorities at post ranging from counter-terrorism to global strategic competition, internationally recognized human rights to anti-corruption, and development of foreign assistance.

I'm pleased that all but one of the nominees have prior experience serving in Africa. This experience will serve them well as I know they're well apprised of the strategic competition playing out on the continent between the U.S. on one side, and Russia and China on the other.

Moving on to Asia, the two career nominees before us today are the first of a new crop of Ambassadors at newly established embassies in the Pacific Islands. What they do in the next few years will determine the success of a revitalized U.S. presence in this region. Both of them have management backgrounds within the department, which is sorely needed at these posts. Their priorities are simple but not easy. They need to ensure our new embassies are properly supported and resourced. They also need to actively recruit so that people want to serve at these posts.

We must move quickly to build our partnerships and strategically compete against the adversaries like Russia and China. We cannot let perfect be the enemy of the good when it comes to building and staffing up our embassies.

And finally, on nomination of Ambassador to the Kyrgyz Republic. Mr. Stimmler, if confirmed, it will be the responsibility to advance the U.S. relationship in a competitive environment with Russia and China. Certainly, a challenge. The Kyrgyz Republic was once a democratic bright spot in the region. The Government's recent crackdowns against the free press and political opposition have cast doubt on its future.

Without good execution of U.S. policies, these tough issues will only continue to get worse. I look forward to hearing from all of you as to how you plan to tackle these. Thank you, Madam Chairwoman.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you, Senator Risch. And turning now to introductions for our first panel. I understand Senator Murphy will introduce Ms. Dressel.

Senator Murphy.

Senator MURPHY. Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to introduce Abigail Dressel, the President's nominee to serve as U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Angola and concurrently as Ambassador to the Democratic Republic of São Tomé and Príncipe. Abby grew up in Wallingford, Connecticut the birthplace of Founding Father, Lyman Hall; star of National Lampoon Vacation movies, Beverly D'Angelo; and talk show host Morton Downey Jr.

She is an accomplished diplomat with deep foreign policy expertise in Africa, Europe, and Latin America. She has effectively already run two different embassies, serving as the Deputy Chief of Mission in both Argentina and Mozambique. She held senior positions in U.S. Embassies in Colombia and Brazil, served as the director of the Office of International Media Engagement at the Department of State. If confirmed, this will actually be her second tour in Angola and she already speaks fluent Portuguese, so she's ready to hit the ground running.

I had the pleasure of getting to know Ms. Dressel during her confirmation process, and I am confident that she will live up to the high standards of Wallingford, Connecticut's other famous brethren, and she'll serve with distinction if confirmed as our Ambassador to Angola.

Thank you very much for letting me introduce her.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you, Senator Murphy. And I will continue with additional introductions for our other nominees today.

Mr. John McIntyre has been nominated to serve as Ambassador to the Kingdom of Eswatini. Mr. McIntyre is a career member of the Senior Foreign Service, and currently serves as minister counselor for Management Affairs at the U.S. Embassy in Jakarta, Indonesia. Throughout his impressive career with the State Department, he has completed a wide range of diverse assignments across four geographic regions, including time spent in Jamaica, Brunei, Sri Lanka, and Afghanistan.

His broad experience demonstrates his success as a leader and a manager, and he has been recognized with numerous performance awards by the State Department. Welcome Mr. McIntyre, and we look forward to your testimony once all the introductions are complete.

Next, let me introduce Mr. Jeremey Neitzke. Mr. Neitzke has been nominated to be Ambassador to the Kingdom of Lesotho. A career member of the Senior Foreign Service, Mr. Neitzke is currently serving as a Deputy Chief of Mission at the U.S. Embassy in Mozambique. He has held a variety of overseas positions and Washington assignments with the State Department, including posts in Argentina, Panama City, and Kenya, just to name a few.

He has also served as Deputy Chief of Mission in Malawi and has a background spent in both management at the Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization operations. And perhaps most importantly, he's from the great State of Illinois. Mr. Neitzke, welcome, and is particularly good to be here with a fellow Illinoian.

Next, Mr. James Holtsnider. Mr. Holtsnider has been nominated to serve as Ambassador to the Independent State of Samoa. A career member of the Senior Foreign Service, Mr. Holtsnider currently serves as Deputy Chief of Mission at the U.S. Embassy in Kuwait City, Kuwait. He previously served as the deputy director of the Office of Iranian Affairs in the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, and he has served at prior posts in Somalia, Iraq, and Italy to name just a few.

Prior to his career at the State Department, Mr. Holtsnider also served for 6 years in the United States Marine Corps. Oorah! Welcome Mr. Holtsnider, and we look forward to your testimony.

Finally, I am pleased to introduce Mr. Brian Stimmler, who has been nominated to serve as Ambassador to the Kyrgyz Republic. Mr. Stimmler is a career member of the Senior Foreign Service, currently serving as a director of the Office of Central Asian Affairs in the State Department's Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs. Previously, he served as Deputy Chief of Mission of the U.S. Embassy in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, and has demonstrated deep expertise in central Asian affairs.

His career has also taken him to post in Serbia, Bosnia, and Japan with broad language skills to match. Welcome, Mr. Stimmler. And I want to apologize for butchering any of your names or the countries as well. I take that all on myself, so please feel free to correct me so that I will not butcher it in the future.

I will now turn it over to each of you to share your testimoneys, beginning with Mr. McIntyre.

STATEMENT OF JOHN MCINTYRE OF TEXAS, 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 KINGDOM OF ESWATINI

Mr. MCINTYRE. Thank you, Chairwoman Duckworth, Ranking Member Risch, and distinguished members of this committee. It is my great honor to appear before you as the nominee to be the next U.S. Ambassador to the Kingdom of Eswatini.

I'm grateful to the President and Secretary Blinken for their confidence in me, and I hope to earn your trust as well. If confirmed, I pledge to work closely with you to advance U.S. interest in Eswatini. I could not be here today without the support of my family. My parents, Curt and Midge McIntyre instilled in me as well as my sisters, Catherine and Courtney, the value of service, especially to our great nation. It is an honor for me to carry on this family tradition.

My Foreign Service career brought me to Kosovo, where I met my amazing wife, Flora Zylfijaj. Flora, along with my in-laws, Ruzhdi and Fatime Zylfijaj, embody perseverance and grace. Flora, and I strive to follow the excellent examples of our parents to set with our own children, Emma, and Ian.

I have been privileged to serve 25 years in the Foreign Service and over a third of my career as Chargé d'Affaires or Deputy Chief of Mission at embassies as diverse as Brunei, Trinidad and Tobago, and Jamaica. First and foremost, the safety and wellbeing of U.S. citizens has been and will remain paramount. Likewise, I am fully committed to promoting respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and advancing good governance. If confirmed, these will be foundational priorities for me as U.S. Ambassador to Eswatini.

I recognize however, that we face serious challenges in Eswatini. If confirmed, I commit to use my position as Ambassador to emphasize the need for Eswatini to improve its record on human rights and strengthen democratic processes. Senate resolution 174 unanimously agreed to on April 15th, indicated how seriously the U.S. Senate views these issues. And I'll say here today that I share that seriousness and urgency. I will speak candidly to King Mswati III and his Government about what we see in Eswatini and what our concerns are.

If confirmed, I will continue to call for a thorough and transparent investigation until the killing of the pro-democracy activist to Thulani Maseko in January, 2023. His killing, which remains unsolved but bore all the hallmarks of a targeted assassination, was an abomination and one that cannot remain unaddressed. If confirmed, I will continue the Embassy's good work of engaging with and directly supporting the individuals and groups who preserve Maseko's legacy, and continue to call for greater civil liberties and opportunities for political participation in Eswatini.

Our engagement with Eswatini must be multifaceted and balance the full range of our interest, including engagement with one of 12 countries around the world and the only country in Africa that maintains diplomatic relations with Taiwan. If confirmed, I'll seek to sustain and deepen our work in areas where we have ongoing and successful cooperation, in particular in the area of health.

Our PEPFAR programming is not only vital to the wellbeing of the people of Eswatini, but to global health security. Despite Eswatini having the world's highest HIV prevalence, over a decade and a half of U.S. Government assistance, coupled with strong political will and leadership from the Government of Eswatini, have brought the country to near HIV epidemic control.

This kind of programming changes lives, it saves lives. It is central to our work in Eswatini, and if confirmed, I will ensure that it continues and grows. If confirmed, I pledge that Mission Eswatini's policy and programs will reflect the administration and congressional priorities. I hope my testimony affirms for the committee that I, if confirmed, will be the United States primary advocate for these priorities. It is truly an honor to appear before you today and I look forward to your questions. Thank you.

[The prepared Statement of Mr. McIntyre follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF JOHN MCINTYRE

Thank you, Madam Chairwoman and Ranking Member Risch, and distinguished Members of this committee. It is my great honor to appear before you as the nominee to be the next U.S. Ambassador to the Kingdom of Eswatini. I am grateful to the President and Secretary Blinken for their confidence in me, and I hope to earn your trust as well. If confirmed, I pledge to work closely with you to advance U.S. interests in Eswatini.

I would not be here before you today without the support of my family. My parents, Curt and Midge McIntyre, instilled in me, as well as my sisters, Catherine and Courtney, the value of service, especially to our great nation. It is an honor for me to carry on this family tradition. My Foreign Service career brought me to Kosovo, where I met my amazing wife, Flora Zylfijaj. Flora, along with my in-laws, Ruzhdi and Fatime Zylfijaj, embody perseverance and grace. Flora and I strive to emulate the excellent examples our parents set with our own children, Emma and Ian.

I have been privileged to serve 25 years in the Foreign Service and over a third of my career as Chargé d'Affaires or Deputy Chief of Mission at embassies as diverse as Brunei, Trinidad and Tobago, and Jamaica. First and foremost, the safety and well-being of U.S. Citizens has been and will remain paramount.

Likewise, I am fully committed to promoting respect for human rights and fundamental freedom and advancing good governance. If confirmed, these will be foundational priorities for me as U.S. Ambassador to Eswatini.

Eswatini's 1.2 million people belong to the story of a growing, modernizing African continent, a young and dynamic continent that in a few decades will account for one out of every four people on the planet. Emaswati have large aspirations for the future. The United States should be a partner of the people of Eswatini in making these aspirations a reality.

I recognize, however, that we face serious challenges in Eswatini. If confirmed, I commit to use my position as Ambassador to emphasize the need for Eswatini to improve its record on human rights and strengthen its democratic processes. Senate Resolution 174, unanimously agreed to on April 15, indicated how seriously the U.S. Senate views these issues, and I will say here today that I share that seriousness and urgency. I will speak candidly to King Mswati III and his Government about what we see in Eswatini, and what our concerns are.

If confirmed, I will also continue to call for a thorough and transparent investigation into the killing of the pro-democracy activist Thulani Maseko in January 2023. His killing, which remains unsolved but bore all the hallmarks of a targeted assassination, was an abomination, one that cannot remain unaddressed. If confirmed, I will continue the Embassy's good work of engaging with and directly supporting the individuals and groups who preserve Maseko's legacy and continue to call for greater civil liberties and opportunities for political participation in Eswatini.

Our engagement with Eswatini must be multifaceted and balance the full range of our interests, including engagement with one of 12 countries around the world, and the only country in Africa, that maintains diplomatic relations with Taiwan.

If confirmed, I will seek to sustain and deepen our work in the areas where we have ongoing and successful cooperation—in particular, in the area of health. Our PEPFAR programming is not only vital to the well-being of the people of Eswatini, but to global health security. Despite Eswatini's having the world's highest HIV

prevalence, over a decade and a half of U.S. Government assistance, coupled with strong political will and leadership from the Government of Eswatini, has brought the country to near HIV epidemic control.

This is the kind of programming that changes lives—that saves lives. It is central to our work in Eswatini, and if confirmed, I will ensure that it continues and grows.

If confirmed, I pledge that Mission Eswatini's policies and programs will reflect the Administration's and congressional priorities. I hope my testimony affirms for the Committee that, if confirmed, I will be the United States' primary advocate for these priorities. It is truly an honor to appear before you today, and I look forward to your questions.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you, Mr. McIntyre.

And now, Mr.—is it Neitzke or Neitzke? Please correct me.

Mr. NEITZKE. Neitzke, like an evening on the slope, Senator.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Neitzke. All right, thank you.

STATEMENT OF JEREMEY NEITZKE, OF ILLINOIS, 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 KINGDOM OF LESOTHO

Mr. NEITZKE. Thank you, Chairwoman Duckworth, and Ranking Member Risch, and distinguished members of this committee. I am deeply honored to be considered for the position of U.S. Ambassador to the Kingdom of Lesotho. I'm grateful for the confidence President Biden and Secretary Blinken have shown me by this nomination, and if confirmed, I look forward to working with this committee and the Congress in advancing U.S. interests.

At the outset, I want to recognize and thank my wife Tania, and our children, Michael, and Mariana. They're the bedrock of our Foreign Service journey and without their love and support, I would not be here today. I also want to acknowledge and thank my mother, Jacqueline, and my brother Jeffrey, watching from afar online, and my father who we lost to cancer some 15 years ago.

I joined the Foreign Service more than 20 years ago, but my career more truly began when the United States Peace Corps sent me to Kenya, an experience that taught me lessons in humility, adaptability, and the impact that the United States can have on the world when it leads with its values. Since that time, my service in Africa has led me to South Africa, Malawi, and Mozambique. I'm humbled by the opportunity to continue my service to the United States on the continent where I have served the majority of my career.

I have led inter-agency teams to implement PEPFAR programs, Money and Challenge Compacts, and the Global Fragility Act. I have supported efforts to bolster democratic accountable governance, and I have had the honor and privilege of supervising and serving alongside hundreds of U.S. and Foreign Service nationals whose dedication to our assured values makes us stronger and more effective.

If confirmed, I will work with the Government and people of Lesotho to shape what is in our mutual interests, a country that is stable, resilient, and prosperous. A democratic Lesotho is consistent with American interest and contributes to regional stability. If confirmed, I will work in partnership with the Government of Lesotho to support their democratic institutions and civil society, so the

people of Lesotho continue to be represented by responsive governance and combat corruption that erodes its progress.

One of Lesotho's greatest challenges is an HIV/Aids adult prevalence rate of 22.7 percent, one of the highest in the world, devastating the country's social and economic fabric. The United States' commitment to ending HIV/Aids through the PEPFAR program through the world, has transformed millions of lives. The Government of the Kingdom of Lesotho has been a steadfast partner in this fight.

If confirmed, I will focus on promoting sustainability and long-term planning with the Ministry of Health and National AIDS Commission to take on greater responsibilities and plan for the future.

As the largest bilateral partner to Lesotho, the United States plays a pivotal role in helping promote economic development in a country whose Government is strongly committed to improving the lives of its citizens. The legislative reforms the Government of Lesotho enacted earlier this year demonstrate a commitment to our shared vision of growing the Lesotho economy. If confirmed, I will work with the Government of Lesotho to ensure that MCC investments are sustained and benefit as many Basotho as possible.

Lesotho is a shining example of how AGOA stimulates economic growth. AGOA has spurred a vibrant textile and apparel industry that is the Nation's largest private employer and Sub-Saharan Africa's largest exporter of garments to the United States. If confirmed, I will work to encourage the Government of Lesotho to continue policy and legislative reforms necessary to promote sustainable economic growth, empower Basotho entrepreneurs, and attract foreign investment, particularly in the energy sector where U.S. innovation and leadership through its private sector can be transformative.

Madam Chair, Members of this committee, thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you today. I welcome any questions.

[The prepared Statement of Mr. Neitzke follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF JEREMEY NEITZKE

Thank you, Chairwoman Duckworth, Ranking Member Risch, and distinguished Members of this committee.

I am deeply honored to be considered for the position of U.S. Ambassador to the Kingdom of Lesotho. I am grateful for the confidence President Biden and Secretary Blinken have shown in me by this nomination. If confirmed, I look forward to working with this committee and the Congress in advancing U.S. interests and supporting Lesotho in its efforts to strengthen democratic institutions, end the HIV/AIDS pandemic, and achieve sustainable, broad-based economic growth.

At the outset, I want to recognize and thank my wife Tania and our children, Michael and Mariana. They are the bedrock on which our foreign service journey is built. Without their love and support, I would not be here today.

I joined the Foreign Service more than twenty years ago, but my career more truly began when the United States Peace Corps sent me to Kenya—an experience that altered the course of my life. An experience that taught me lessons in humility, adaptability, and the impact that the United States can have on the world when it leads with its values. Since that time, my service in Africa has led me to South Africa, Malawi, and Mozambique. I am humbled by the opportunity to continue my service to the United States on the continent where I have served the majority of my career. If confirmed, I will draw on my experience to advance U.S. interests in Lesotho. I have led interagency teams to implement

PEPFAR programs, MCC compacts, and the Global Fragility Act. I have supported efforts to bolster democratic, accountable governance. And I have had the

honor and privilege of supervising and serving alongside hundreds of dedicated U.S. and Foreign Service Nationals whose dedication to our shared values makes us stronger and more effective. Those experiences will enhance my effectiveness in working with the Government and people of Lesotho to shape what is in our mutual interests: a country that is stable, resilient, and prosperous.

A democratic Lesotho is consistent with American interests and contributes to regional stability. The United States remains a strong supporter of Lesotho's efforts to consolidate the gains achieved since the country's embrace of democratic governance in the 1990s. If confirmed, I will work in partnership with the Government of Lesotho to support their democratic institutions and civil society so that the people of Lesotho continue to be represented by responsive governance and combat corruption that erodes its progress.

One of Lesotho's greatest challenges is an HIV/AIDS adult prevalence of 22.7 percent, one of the world's highest, devastating the country's social and economic fabric. The United States commitment to ending HIV/AIDS through the PEPFAR program has transformed millions of lives around the world. The Government of the Kingdom of Lesotho has been a steadfast partner in this fight, and I look forward to working with them and colleagues in the U.S. Government to continue our strides forward. If confirmed, I will focus on promoting sustainability and long-term planning with the Ministry of Health and National AIDS Commission to take on greater responsibilities and plan for the future.

As the largest bilateral donor to Lesotho, the United States plays a pivotal role in helping promote economic development in a country whose Government is strongly committed to improving the lives of its citizens. Earlier this year, the Lesotho five-year Millennium Challenge Compact, which will lead to improvements to water and sanitation systems, healthcare infrastructure, and investment climate, entered into force. The legislative reforms the Government of Lesotho enacted earlier this year demonstrate a commitment to our shared vision of growing the Lesotho economy with a healthy workforce and sustainable jobs. If confirmed, I will work with the Government of Lesotho to ensure that MCC investments are sustained and benefit as many Basotho as possible.

Lesotho is a shining example of how AGOA stimulates economic growth.

AGOA has spurred a vibrant textile and apparel industry that is the nation's largest private sector employer and sub-Saharan Africa's largest exporter of garments to the United States. The country continues to face substantial economic challenges, however. The Government of Lesotho has an ambitious plan to become the world's first sustainable "digital hydro nation" and generate clean energy for domestic use and export to neighboring countries. If confirmed, I will work to encourage the Government of Lesotho to continue policy and legislative reforms necessary to promote sustainable economic growth, empower Basotho entrepreneurs, and attract foreign investment, particularly in the energy sector where U.S. innovation and leadership can be transformative.

Madam Chair and Members of the committee, thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you today. I welcome any questions.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you. They're all finishing ahead of schedule. This is wonderful. Thank you, Mr. Neitzke.

Ms. DRESSEL.

STATEMENT OF ABIGAIL L. DRESSEL, OF CONNECTICUT, 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 ANGOLA, AND TO SERVE CONCURRENTLY AND WITHOUT ADDITIONAL COMPENSATION AS AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF SAO TOME AND PRINCIPE

Ms. DRESSEL. Chairwoman Duckworth, Ranking Member Risch, distinguished members of the committee, it is an honor to appear before you today. I would like to thank President Biden and Secretary Blinken for this opportunity. Senator Murphy, thank you so much for the gracious introduction.

I am deeply grateful to my husband who is watching from Argentina and our two wonderful children for their constant love and support, as well as to my mother, sister, and brother-in-law who join me here today, and my father and grandparents who are watching from Connecticut. I would be remiss if I did not recognize the friends, mentors, and colleagues around the world who have enriched my life and this career.

It has been an honor to serve and represent the United States for 22 years as a Foreign Service officer in Africa, Latin America, and Europe. If confirmed, it would be a privilege to lead the team and encourage strong morale at U.S. Embassy, Luanda, a dynamic and dedicated group, working hard on the front lines of U.S. policy.

The United States has a robust and multifaceted partnership with the people and Government of Angola. When I served in Luanda 16 years ago, it would've been difficult to imagine the paradigm shift in our bilateral relationship that has taken place in recent years. In the past year, Presidents Lourenco and Biden met in the Oval Office. Secretary Blinken and Secretary Austin visited Luanda. U.S. companies and development agencies pledged billions in investment in Angola, showing their confidence in the benefit of stronger ties, and we turned to Angola as a trusted mediator to bring regional peace and security.

If confirmed, I would build on this progress and support a more prosperous, democratic, and secure Angola. I would work every day to protect the people who serve at U.S. Embassy, Luanda, and the Americans who live in Angola and in São Tomé and Príncipe. I would ensure that the recent transformational investments by U.S. companies and U.S. development finance agencies, bring tangible benefits for both of our economies and people.

I would prioritize identifying new avenues of economic cooperation while supporting the continued fight against corruption. I would recognize the progress Angola has made toward increasing transparency in implementing democratic reform, while working with our Angolan partners to continue to expand civic space and build capacity. I would support a more secure Angola by increasing U.S. military training, supporting military modernization, and expanding maritime security cooperation. I would continue the invaluable support the United States provides as the largest donor of demining efforts in Angola.

If confirmed, I would have the honor of serving concurrently as the Ambassador to São Tomé and Príncipe. The archipelago, a democratic leader, plays a strategically important role in Africa, yet it is still reeling from the economic effects of the pandemic. If confirmed, I would work to help São Tomé and Príncipe stabilize its economy and increase our security cooperation.

Madam Chairwoman, ranking member, my experience in Africa has shown me that the American people benefit when we invest in our relationships across the Atlantic. If confirmed, I hope I would have many opportunities to work closely with this committee and to host you in Angola and in São Tomé and Príncipe. Thank you.

[The prepared Statement of Ms. Dressel follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF ABIGAIL L. DRESSEL

Madam Chairwoman, Ranking Member Risch, distinguished Members of the committee, it is an honor to appear before you today. I would like to thank President Biden for this opportunity and for the trust that he and Secretary Blinken have in my ability to serve our country as U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Angola and to the Democratic Republic of Sao Tome & Principe. I am equally appreciative for this distinguished committee's consideration.

I am deeply grateful to my husband and our two wonderful children for their constant love and support; as well as to my mother, father, sister, brother-in-law, and grandparents. I would be remiss if I didn't recognize the friends, mentors, and colleagues who have enriched this career and my life.

It has been an honor to serve and represent the United States for 22 years as a Foreign Service Officer. If confirmed, it would be a privilege to lead the team and encourage strong morale at U.S. Embassy Luanda, a dynamic and dedicated group working hard on the front lines of U.S. policy.

The United States has a robust and multifaceted partnership with the people and Government of Angola. When I served in Luanda 16 years ago, it would have been difficult to imagine the paradigm shift in our bilateral relationship that has taken place in recent years. I am deeply fortunate to be nominated at a time of extraordinary potential for expanding that bilateral relationship. If confirmed, I would lead the Embassy team to deliver on that potential for the benefit of the American and Angolan people.

In the past year, Presidents Lourenco and Biden met in the Oval Office and Secretary Blinken visited Luanda. U.S. firms and development agencies pledged billions in investment in Angola, showing their confidence in the benefit of stronger ties. We initiated an ongoing Defense Committee Meeting and Energy Security Dialogue, and we turned to Angola as a trusted mediator to bring regional peace and security.

If confirmed, I would build on this progress and support a more prosperous, democratic, and secure Angola. I would work every day to protect the people who serve at the U.S. Embassy Luanda and all Americans who live in Angola and São Tomé and Príncipe.

If confirmed, I would support a more prosperous Angola by working to ensure that the recent transformational investments by U.S. companies and U.S development finance agencies bring tangible benefits for both of our economies and people. I would prioritize identifying new avenues of economic cooperation while supporting the continued fight against corruption.

Since President Lourenco's election in 2017, Angola has made progress toward increasing transparency and implementing democratic reform, but work remains. If confirmed, I would support a more democratic Angola by working with our Angolan partners to continue to expand civic space and build the capacity of civil society, media, and the judiciary. I would build on our ongoing advocacy for local elections and protection of independent media, and work with the elected Angolan Government while maintaining collaborative relationships with the full spectrum of Angolan political parties.

Twenty-two years after the end of its civil war, Angola has become a regional leader that promotes security and stability. Angola has worked to broker peace among Great Lakes countries, including between the Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda. If confirmed, I would support a more secure Angola by increasing U.S. military training, helping Angola replace Soviet equipment with NATO-compatible defense articles, and expanding maritime security cooperation. I would also continue the invaluable support the United States provides as the largest donor to demining efforts in Angola.

If confirmed, I would have the honor of serving concurrently as the Ambassador to São Tomé and Príncipe. The archipelago plays a strategically important role in Africa, and its maritime exclusive economic zone is critical to Gulf of Guinea shipping lanes. São Tomé and Príncipe is a democratic leader in Africa, yet like many small island nations, is still reeling from the economic effects of the pandemic. If confirmed, I would work with Sao Tomean partners, international financial institutions, and the international community to help São Tomé and Príncipe stabilize its economy. I will also work to increase our security cooperation—especially maritime security—with this crucial geopolitical partner.

Madam Chairwoman, Ranking Member Risch, my experience in Africa has shown me that the American people benefit when we invest in our relationships across the Atlantic. If confirmed, I hope I would have many occasions to work closely with this committee and host you and your colleagues in Angola and São Tomé and Príncipe.Thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you today.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you, Ms. Dressel.

And Mr. Holtsnider, I hope I'm saying that correctly; Talofa lava.

STATEMENT OF JAMES HOLTSNIDER, OF IOWA, 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 INDEPENDENT STATE OF SAMOA

Mr. HOLTSNIDER. Talofa lava, Madam Chairwoman, Ranking Member Risch, and distinguished members of this committee. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today as the president's nominee to be the U.S. Ambassador to the Independent State of Samoa. I'm honored by this nomination and grateful to the President and Secretary Blinken for the confidence they have shown in me.

If confirmed, I look forward to working closely with this committee and Congress to advance U.S. foreign policy interests in Samoa. I would like to thank my family who just flew in from Iowa. My wife Nana, and our children, Maud and Henry, for their unwavering support and sacrifice throughout my career, especially during my time in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Somalia.

When I was a young enlisted marine assigned to Combat Service Support Group 3 in Hawaii in the 1990's, I never imagined that more than 25 years later I would be honored to be asked to serve again in the Pacific. The United States is a Pacific nation. We share longstanding historic and cultural ties with our Samoan neighbors. Samoa is a leader in security and economic stability in the Pacific region. Samoa has a strong commitment to free trade and has exhibited unique leadership in forging a stronger partnership with the Pacific Islands Forum.

At the same time, Samoa faces significant challenges to its security and prosperity. Samoa has been affected by rising sea levels, multiple natural disasters in recent decades, and significant economic shocks making the country more vulnerable to malign influence from the PRC. Through foreign assistance and robust publicly messaging campaigns, the PRC has moved aggressively to assert itself in Samoa, especially as Samoa is strategically located near key shipping routes and telecommunications links connecting the United States with Asia and Oceana.

To foster a free and open Pacific, protect global security, and advance U.S. interests in the region, our team at U.S. Embassy in Apia under Ambassador Udall's leadership, is expanding mutually beneficial support to Samoa, particularly on security and law enforcement matters.

Embassy Apia and our interagency counterparts are partnering with Samoan law enforcement to protect Samoa's maritime resources to eliminate illegal unreported and unregulated fishing and to combat transnational crime and drug smuggling.

Our small team in Apia is doing excellent work to highlight America's shared values with Samoa and America's value to Samoa. We have returned Peace Corps volunteers to Samoa, updated the bilateral ship rider agreement in April, conducted U.S. military medical missions, begun a State partnership program with the Nevada National Guard, increased engagements with senior

U.S. officials, assisted with disaster preparedness, and hosted the Young Pacific Leaders Annual Conference and regional Workshop in Samoa.

As we engaged closely with Samoan officials who must also work closely with partners and allies in the region to give Samoa and its people opportunities and options in a free and open Pacific region. If confirmed, I would become the first resident U.S. Ambassador in Samoa since the country's independence, providing a tangible symbol of U.S. commitment to engagement and the bilateral relationship. Samoa is an important multilateral partner on many global issues including contributing to global security through peacekeeping operations.

If confirmed, I will encourage Samoa to implement a foreign policy that reflects shared American and Samoan values, and increases Samoa's concurrence with U.S. interests and international institutions. As a responsible democracy, Samoa is uniquely positioned to contribute to regional stability. If confirmed, I will encourage the Samoan Government to continue to play a constructive role as a regional leader, and spread the Samoan model of democracy, piece, and stability.

Through targeted assistance, we'll continue to support good governance initiatives to promote opportunities and sustainability for Samoa and its people. For example, we are working with Samoa to safeguard biodiversity, prepare for emergency response to tsunamis, and improve health outcomes in the medical system, and we are doing so with no strings attached.

Before I conclude, I would like to thank the dozens of people in the Department of State and on your congressional staff who've assisted with the nomination process. I continue to be impressed by the high quality of Americans in public service in the department and in the Congress. I would also like to thank the members of this committee specifically for their sustained focus on our island partners, and for helping provide the funds and authorities needed to open our embassies in the Pacific.

Madam Chairwoman, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today, and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared Statement of Mr. Holtsnider follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF JAMES HOLTSNIDER

Madam Chairwoman, Ranking Member Risch, and distinguished Members of this committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today as the President's nominee to be the United States Ambassador to the Independent State of Samoa.

I am honored by this nomination and grateful to the President and Secretary Blinken for the confidence they have shown in me. If confirmed, I look forward to working closely with this committee and Congress to advance U.S. foreign policy interests in Samoa.

I want to thank my family who just flew in from Iowa—my wife Nana and our children Maud and Henry—for their unwavering support and sacrifice throughout my career, especially during my time in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Somalia.

When I was a young, enlisted Marine assigned to Combat Service Support Group 3 in Hawaii in the 1990s, I never imagined that more than 25 years later I would be honored to be asked to serve again in the Pacific.

The United States is a Pacific nation, and we share longstanding historic and cultural ties with our Samoan neighbors. Samoa is a leader in security and economic stability in the Pacific region. Samoa has a strong commitment to free trade, and

it has exhibited unique leadership in forging a stronger partnership with the Pacific Islands Forum. At the same time, Samoa faces significant challenges to its security and prosperity. Samoa has been affected by rising sea levels, multiple natural disasters in recent decades, and significant economic shocks, making the country more vulnerable to malign influence from the PRC. Through foreign assistance and robust public messaging campaigns, the PRC has moved aggressively to assert itself in Samoa, especially as Samoa is strategically located near key shipping routes and telecommunication links connecting the United States with Asia and Oceania.

To foster a free and open Pacific, protect global security, and advance U.S. interests in the region, our team at the U.S. Embassy in Apia under Ambassador Udall's leadership is expanding mutually beneficial support to Samoa, particularly on security matters. Embassy Apia and our interagency counterparts are partnering with Samoan law enforcement to protect Samoa's maritime resources, to eliminate illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing, and to combat transnational crime and drug smuggling.

Our small team in Apia is doing excellent work to highlight America's shared values with Samoa and America's value to Samoa. We have returned Peace Corps volunteers to Samoa, updated the bilateral shiprider agreement in April, conducted U.S. military medical missions, begun a State Partnership Program with the Nevada National Guard, increased engagements with senior U.S. officials, assisted with disaster preparedness, and hosted the Young Pacific Leaders annual conference and regional workshop in Samoa. As we engage closely with Samoan officials, we must also work closely with partners and allies in the region to give Samoa and its people opportunities and options in a free and open Pacific region.

If confirmed, I would become the first resident U.S. ambassador in Samoa since the country's independence, providing a tangible symbol of U.S. commitment to engagement and the bilateral relationship.

Samoa is an important multilateral partner on many global issues, including contributing to global security through peacekeeping operations. If confirmed, I will encourage Samoa to implement a foreign policy that reflects shared American and Samoan values and increases Samoa's concurrence with U.S. interests in international institutions. As a responsible democracy, Samoa is uniquely positioned to contribute to regional stability. If confirmed, I will encourage the Samoan Government to continue to play a constructive role as a regional leader and spread the Samoan model of democracy, peace, and stability.

Through targeted assistance, we will continue to support good governance initiatives to promote opportunities and sustainability for Samoa and its people. For example, we are working with Samoa to safeguard biodiversity, prepare for emergency response to tsunamis, and improve health outcomes in the medical system. And we are doing so with no strings attached.

Before I conclude, I would like to thank the dozens of people in the Department of State and on your Congressional staff who assisted with the nomination process. I continue to be impressed by the high quality of Americans in public service in the Department and in the Congress. I would also like to thank the Members of this committee for their sustained focus on our island partners and for helping provide the funds and authorities needed to open our embassies in the Pacific.

Madam Chairwoman, thank you for the opportunity to testify today and I look forward to your questions.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you, Mr. Holtsnider.

Mr. STIMMLER.

STATEMENT OF BRIAN STIMMLER, OF NEBRASKA, 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 KYRGYZ REPUBLIC

Mr. STIMMLER. Chairwoman Duckworth, Ranking Member Risch, distinguished members of the committee, thank you very much for the opportunity to speak with you today. I'm honored to appear before you as President Biden's nominee to be the next U.S. Ambassador to the Kyrgyz Republic. I'm deeply grateful for the trust President Biden and Secretary Blinken have placed in me with this nomination.

I'm also grateful to share this day with my family, my wife, Sunny, and my two daughters, Story and Sariah. Anyone who knows us would attest that I would not be here today without Sunny's constant support and matchless example of service and leadership. She and my children have shown love, patience, and a sense of adventure as we have spent the last two decades living in seven countries together, including in the Kyrgyz Republic. I would also like to thank my mother Emmy, who taught me my earliest lessons in service, my late father, Ken, who served with the Navy during the Vietnam War, and my brothers Mark and Zach, who served with the Air Force in Afghanistan and Iraq.

If confirmed, my highest priority will be the safety and welfare of embassy personnel and American citizens in the Kyrgyz Republic. I look forward to strengthening the already close community that is U.S. Embassy, Bishkek. The Embassy's local staff have a special place in my heart. They have protected and served the Embassy community through countless crises. I will always remember their sacrifices to keep embassy personnel safe during the 2020 revolution and helped us evacuate hundreds of Americans during the COVID pandemic.

The United States has a willing partner in the Kyrgyz Republic. The Kyrgyz Government recognizes that the best way to avoid being pawn of its great power neighbors is to diversify its economic, political, and security relationships. Similarly, our goal is to ensure it is free to make its own decisions and pursue its own partnerships.

Today I would like to highlight three lines of effort I will prioritize if confirmed. Expanding our economic relationship, broadening our security partnership, and supporting democratic institutions. The Kyrgyz Republic is working to diversify its economy and reduce its reliance on Russia and China. These goals are also in our interest. If confirmed, I'll partner with the Kyrgyz Government, business leaders, and civil society, to foster a more equitable and transparent business climate to attract American investors. I will also continue our efforts to ensure that the Kyrgyz Republic complies with U.S. sanctions imposed on Russia for its unprovoked war against Ukraine.

My second priority if confirmed, will be the continued expansion of our bilateral security partnership. We are already working together to counter terrorism, strengthen borders, and repatriate and reintegrate family members of Kyrgyz's foreign terrorist fighters from northeastern Syria. There is space to do more.

Finally, the Kyrgyz Republic has long stood out among its neighbors in media independence, political engagement, and civil society activism. Thanks to its freedom-loving, independent-thinking citizens. If confirmed, I'll work to protect fundamental human rights, and strengthen the ability of civil society and independent voices to engage with the Kyrgyz Government and play their essential role in the country's development.

Madam Chairwoman, Mr. Ranking Member, members of the committee, if confirmed, I look forward to working with your committee to deepen our partnership with the Kyrgyz Republic and our many shared priorities. Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to answering your questions.

[The prepared Statement of Mr. Stimmler follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF BRIAN STIMMLER

Madam Chairwoman, Ranking Member Risch, and distinguished Members of the commitee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. I am honored to appear before you as President Biden's nominee to be the next U.S. Ambassador to the Kyrgyz Republic. I am deeply grateful for the trust President Biden and Secretary Blinken have placed in me with this nomination.

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Madam Chairwoman, Ranking Member Risch, Members of the commitee, if confirmed, I look forward to working with your commitee to deepen our partnership with the Kyrgyz Republic on our many shared priorities.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to answering your questions.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you, Mr. Stimmler, and thank you to all of our nominees for your testimony. We'll start a period of questions now.

First, I have a few questions that speak to the importance of this committee, that this committee places on responsiveness by all officials in the executive branch. I would ask each of you to provide just 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. MCINTYRE. Yes.
Mr. NEITZKE. Yes.
Ms. DRESSEL. Yes.
Mr. HOLTSNIDER. Yes.
Mr. STIMMLER. Yes.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Do you commit to keeping this committee fully and currently informed about the activities under your purview?

Mr. MCINTYRE. Yes.
Mr. NEITZKE. Yes.
Ms. DRESSEL. Yes.
Mr. HOLTSNIDER. Yes.
Mr. STIMMLER. Yes.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Do you commit to engaging in meaningful consultation while policies are being developed, not just providing notifications after the fact?

Mr. MCINTYRE. Yes.
Mr. NEITZKE. Yes.
Ms. DRESSEL. Yes.
Mr. HOLTSNIDER. Yes.
Mr. STIMMLER. Yes.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Do you commit to promptly responding to requests for briefings and information requested by the committee and its designated staff?

Mr. MCINTYRE. Yes.
Mr. NEITZKE. Yes.
Ms. DRESSEL. Yes.
Mr. HOLTSNIDER. Yes.
Mr. STIMMLER. Yes.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you. Now on to other questions.

Mr. Holtsnider, as you mentioned in your opening Statement, it's an exciting time with new activity in the relationship between the United States and Samoa. From the Peace Corps returning to the new partnership with Nevada's National Guard, opportunities for more Coast Guard collaboration, it's encouraging to see this kind of positive trajectory. As wonderful as it is for securities partnerships, it is even more critical to make sure we capitalize on them effectively to make sure that we are showing up and following through on those relationships.

If confirmed, what steps would you take as ambassador to make that follow through happen, and is there more we can do in Congress to further reinforce that positive trajectory?

Mr. HOLTSNIDER. Thank you, Senator, for the question. When we talk about global competition and presence in the Pacific, we have to have a team on the field. And so a huge thank you to this committee and to the Senate more broadly for providing the resources and the authorities to make it possible to be there.

As noted in my opening testimony, if confirmed, I would be the first resident Ambassador in Samoa, a position the Samoans have been asking for, for a long time, but it's more than just me. There's also a team on the ground. We have now three Americans who are there. We have a public diplomacy officer who's very actively engaged in reaching out to Samoan youth, to standing up exchange

programs, to combating misinformation. But there's more that we can do.

And so if confirmed, when I arrive in Samoa, one of the first things that I will do is undertake a review of what does the sustainable and appropriate presence look like across the full interagency that's responsible to the U.S. taxpayer, but also leverages the full capabilities of the U.S. Government to be able to address humanitarian assistance, increased law enforcement cooperation, and many, many other areas, Senator.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you.

On a different subject, Mr. Holtsnider, consular services in the PICs can face unique challenges given the vastness of the Pacific and how far flung islands can be. How would you assess our Embassy's ability to provide the necessary services today and do you foresee any need for additional resources as we continue to buildup additional layers of partnership with Samoa?

Mr. HOLTSNIDER. Thank you, Senator, for the question. Completely agree on the importance of visas, both for our border security, but also to facilitate travel and trade between Samoa and the United States. My understanding is that currently there is some limited visa service available on intervals from our colleagues in New Zealand, but if confirmed, I will commit to looking to see how we can expand those to make it appropriate, regular and easy for our Samoan partners and for colleagues in American Samoa sometimes travel over for services as well.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you.

I'll now turn it over to the ranking member for his questions.

Senator RISCH. Thank you, Senator Duckworth. I want to start with you Mr. McIntyre. Senator Coons and I are the two that led the resolution condemning the assassination of the opposition leader there in Eswatini. It's been 2 years and not much has happened. What are your thoughts on that? I mean, this is—you know, you really can't have much if you're assassinating the people that are trying to engage in the democratic process. What are your thoughts there? How optimistic are you that we're going to be able to move the Eswatini Government and security services to actually provide some answers on that?

Mr. MCINTYRE. Senator, thank you for the question. And as noted in my testimony, this is going to be front and center for me if I'm confirmed. I think you have to speak publicly, be forward leaning. I have quite a bit of experience in the Caribbean working with rule of law including in situations like this.

So you have to be persistent. You have to say that publicly, you have to engage with the host government. You have to continue to offer the assistance in terms of law enforcement. There has to be progress made. You noted this correctly. If there's not rule of law there is no civil society, there is no democracy promotion, there is no economic development, no forward movement.

So I pledge if confirmed, this will be the priority—one of the priorities for me first and foremost as the Ambassador. Thank you.

Senator RISCH. Well, appreciate that. You referenced rule of law, and of course, to us, that's the beginning and end of what civil society is. Most countries have laws and purport to be living under a rule of law, but we all know laws don't make a difference if they're

not enforced, if they're not lived by or what have you. So it is really disheartening to see what happened there and how people kind of look the other way on it. It's just not the way civil society goes forward.

Mr. Stimmler, I've always been fascinated by Central Asia, the countries that are right there on the doorstep of Russia and China. And I do have to tell you that the description you gave of Kyrgyz is not fully congruent with—you heard my opening Statement that they've had some backsliding there. Can you elaborate on that a little bit? Are we in disagreement here, or you think that they can do better? That there has been some recent backsliding there?

Mr. STIMMLER. Senator, thank you very much for this question. This is something I think about every day. I agree and I'm concerned about recent developments in the Kyrgyz Republic. I'll say that it's not consistent with their democratic traditions. If confirmed, I commit to engaging with the Government and with civil society to advance the rule of law per the comment you just made, to work to defend the rights of women and members of marginalized communities, to expand citizen participation in political processes, and to work with you and with your committee, your staff and consult closely with you on these and related important issues as I've done in the past.

Senator RISCH. Well, I appreciate that. I appreciate your thoughts on one other subject. Again, I've always been fascinated by these countries and their dependence to a large degree on their neighbors economically and energy, and otherwise. I was surprised when the war broke out, that Russia really pressured these countries to get involved. And they all said no.

In fact, some of them, I'd never met people from the country before, but yet they sent delegations here to meet with us individually and say, "Hey, this is not our fight. We don't want anything to do with it. Don't confuse us with Russia."

Has that changed any over the years now that the war's been going on?

Mr. STIMMLER. Thank you, Senator. That has not changed. The Kyrgyz Republic has been very clear that they have not recognized the so-called Breakaway Republics in Ukraine. They have prosecuted their own citizens for fighting on Russia's behalf in Ukraine, and they've made clear that their country will not be a conduit of sanctions of Asian or export control evasion.

If I am confirmed, I will continue to highlight the consequences that come with non-compliance. I will ensure that we provide the training and the information needed to the Government, to banks, to the private sector, so that they understand how to comply with our sanctions and I'll work to strengthen the country's sovereignty and resilience against this unwanted pressure.

Senator RISCH. Since you are familiar with the region, how would you compare Kyrgyz to the other stans? Is this feeling that you've described ubiquitous in the region in Central Asia?

Mr. STIMMLER. There are strengths and weaknesses with each country and challenges that they deal with, but I will say that they are all neutral. They've remained neutral. They have relations with both Russia, longstanding relations with Russia, and relations with

Ukraine, and they're working very hard to ensure that they do not run counter to our sanctions regime.

Senator RISCH. One of the things that surprised me a little bit, is at least one of them told me that when I asked them about the pressure from Russia, they indicated they were actually getting more pressure from China than they were from Russia. Do you find that to be true in the region?

Mr. STIMMLER. Thank you for the question. I think the pressure from Russia is different from the pressure from China. China's very interested in engaging economically in the region——

Senator RISCH. Always.

Mr. STIMMLER [continuing]. And asserting their unfair advantage, behaving very aggressively, non-transparently in the business sector. But in essence, the problem is the same because of these great power neighbors. We need to work to help all the countries of Central Asia strengthen their sovereignty and resilience.

Senator RISCH. Appreciate your thoughts. Thank you, Senator Duckworth.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you.

Senator KAINE.

Senator KAINE. Thank you. And congratulations to all the nominees. Your careers, just reading about each of your experiences really warrant significant admiration and appreciation from the committee.

I want to spend my time with Mr. McIntyre and Mr. Neitzke talking about PEPFAR. Eswatini has the highest HIV adult prevalence rate in the world at 25.9 percent, and girls and young women age 15 to 24 account for almost half of new HIV infections. Lesotho has the second highest adult prevalence rate at 19.3 percent. And the good news is, that rate is a good bit lower than it was 10 years ago. In 2013, the rate was 24.6 percent. We marked the 20th anniversary of PEPFAR in 2023. We're in a short-term mode of extending a year at a time. PEPFAR has saved countless lives in Eswatini and Lesotho. That reduction in Lesotho in particular demonstrates that, and has supported significant progress in the treatment and prevention of HIV/Aids.

There's been some debate here about what we do with PEPFAR, but can you just describe generally the importance of PEPFAR funding to these two nations where you will be serving?

Mr. MCINTYRE. Thank you, Senator for the question. PEPFAR is our leading investment in Eswatini. I've had almost 10 years of working with the PEPFAR program. I meant what I said in my testimony. It changes lives. It saves lives. I did want to thank you for your comment regarding women and children. I think sometimes that needs more focus. I think that's where we can do a better job in Eswatini. I absolutely pledge, if I'm confirmed, PEPFAR will be one of my priorities. It's an incredibly important program. Thank you.

Senator KAINE. Thank you.

Mr. Neitzke?

Mr. NEITZKE. Thank you, Senator. Yes, echoing my colleague, the importance of PEPFAR has been transformative. It may be the single greatest achievement of U.S. foreign development assistance in the 21st century. It has transformed and saved millions and mil-

lions of lives around the world. Our investments in Lesotho are on par as the largest investment that we make as a government, and it's transformative.

Echoing my colleague's comments about the importance of addressing young girls and women in particular as an issue, but also I think it's important to note that when you think about these programs engaging with youth, youth who do not remember what the pandemic was like 15, 20 years ago, those who don't remember the coffin industry, the businesses that were taking off, working in Africa in that time period, I remember having a funeral to attend on behalf of my local staff routinely because we lost people that we were working with.

We didn't talk about what it was then. We didn't necessarily know, or the stigma was there. That's changed. And that's changed because of the investments that the U.S. taxpayer, this community, this Congress has made on the continent. I think we should be very proud of that. Thank you.

Senator KAINE. I think it's an amazing bipartisan achievement. And, you know, there's some controversy around reauthorization attending to different points of view about abortion, but PEPFAR isn't about abortion at all. And I hope we can resolve it. One last question on this topic.

We are in a mode where we sort of do it a year at a time but you can't really count on it long term. Talk about the difference in a PEPFAR program that you can count on over a number of years, and one that's always kind of on the verge of some controversy about whether it's going to be extended just year by year.

Mr. MCINTYRE. Senator, thank you for the question. You are correct that it is important to be able to plan out health outcomes, take time. You don't immediately get to the 95 95 95 goals right away. And so it's helpful to be able to plan out. I think the key with the program is a continued investment and engagement by the Embassy in support of it, and it is a cross agency program, so I think that's also a powerful symbol as well. Thank you.

Mr. NEITZKE. Yes, thank you, Senator. In terms of the long term, it's important to also think about the fact that we have global partners. We're the largest investor in the global fund as well, providing grant assistance to most of the nations that engage and impact our programs. There are different ways we can have talk about sustainability. It's certainly an element that we should be engaging with our host governments with.

And this would be a top priority of mine if confirmed to work with the Government of the Kingdom of Lesotho, to find a better pathway long term so that those investments can be met. The goal of achieving epidemic control is that there are less new infections to worry about within the broader populations. And so hopefully with those investments we make over time, we're able to focus on prevention rather than treatment. Thank you.

Senator KAINE. Thank you both for your commitment. And just for the audience here, anybody watching, Mr. McIntyre mentioned the 95 95 95, and just to clarify that for everyone, the UNAIDS 95 95 95 target is this: by 2030, 95 percent of HIV infected individuals will be diagnosed to know their HIV status, of whom 95 percent are

to be receiving antiretroviral therapy, of whom 95 percent are to have achieved viral suppression.

That's the target that we are shooting for in the global battle against HIV/Aids, and the U.S. investment is critical to reaching those laudatory targets. So thank you for your testimony. I hand it back, Madam Chair.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you.

Senator RICKETTS.

Senator RICKETTS. Great. Thank you, Chair. First of all, folks, I want to say thank you to all of you for your service to our country. And I know that in the Foreign Service, that you spend a lot of time away from your friends and family in this country, that you represent our Nation. And as a Governor, I've had the opportunity to interface with a lot of folks when I was on trade mission, and just wanted to let you know how much we appreciate the sacrifice that you and your families make to be able to serve our country. So thank you very much.

And Mr. Stimmler, I want to give a special shout out to you since you grew up in Nebraska and Omaha. I think you've still got family in Omaha as well, so that's fantastic. Thanks.

In recent years, Beijing has increasingly positioned itself as the public safety and policing partner of choice in the Pacific nations or with the Pacific nations. Last week at a forum on China-Pacific Island Police cooperation, the PRCS Minister of Public Security called for a new chapter of law enforcement cooperation with Pacific Island Nations. And just having somebody, the Minister of Public Security from a communist dictatorship saying new chapters sounds very ominous and Orwellian.

And of course, this makes sense because given that in August, Samoa opened a new police academy that was funded and built for by the PRC. This is concerning, given that Beijing's views of policing cooperation as an area where it can compete for influence, gather intelligence, and surveil the local Chinese population. And of course, we know what they're trying to do without even having these sorts of relationships, even in our own country here.

Mr. Holtsnider, how concerned are you with the PRCS malign influence in Samoa and in areas of policing elsewhere? And if confirmed, what would be your plans to be able to address it?

Mr. HOLTSNIDER. Thank you, Senator for the question. Absolutely agree that there is an intense need to focus on law enforcement cooperation in Samoa. So far, we've done enormously good work with like-minded partners with New Zealand, with Australia, with others. Our Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement has a number of programs underway. The Coast Guard Shiprider agreement that was recently renewed is a great way for us to expand Samoa's policing capability to the maritime domain, but there is absolutely more that we can do, Senator.

And so if confirmed, I will prioritize that as well as addressing some of the malign messaging that's coming out of the PRC and some of the focus on law enforcement.

Senator RICKETTS. Do you feel like we have good lines of communication and good cooperation going on with Australia and New Zealand on this matter?

Mr. HOLTSNIDER. I do, Senator.

Senator RICKETTS. Great.

At the Pacific Islands Forum last month in Tonga, leaders endorsed a regional policing initiative funded by Australia. The initiative included establishing a training center in Brisbane, four skill centers across the Pacific, and a force of about 200 police officers that could be deployed across the region to deal with natural disasters or other emergencies.

How important is this initiative to push back against the PRC efforts to increase its security and policing ties with the Pacific Island countries?

Mr. HOLTSNIDER. Thank you, Senator for the question. Our cooperation and coordination with our like-minded colleagues from Australia, from New Zealand, from Japan, incredibly important in the Pacific. It was with great interest and I think enthusiasm that many of us read about that recent agreement. Hopefully we'll be able to expand other law enforcement and coordination and cooperation efforts with like-minded partners. But absolutely agree, Senator. Very important.

Senator RICKETTS. Great, thank you.

The Chinese Communist Party is seeking above all to reunify Taiwan without resorting to armed forces. As a result, one of the Communist party's objectives is to isolate Taiwan diplomatically. Since 1949, the CCP and Taiwan have been locked in a battle for diplomatic recognition with the CCP spending billions to win recognition for its one China policy. Today, Taiwan has only 12 countries that it has formal relations with including Eswatini.

Just last week, Eswatini was the only one of the Africa's 54 countries that declined to attend the triennial China-Africa Summit in Beijing. However, the reports the PRC is building up its business and economic interest in Eswatini in a sign that Taiwan's last African ally is gradually pivoting toward Beijing.

Mr. McIntyre, given the economic and political leverage the PRC holds over many African nations, if confirmed, what actions will you take to ensure that Eswatini balances these pressures and maintains its longstanding partnership with Taiwan?

Mr. MCINTYRE. Senator, thank you for that question. If confirmed, the relations with Taiwan, Eswatini's commitment to maintain those relations will be one of my top priorities. I've seen the pressure firsthand that China exerts on small countries through my time in the Caribbean. You have to be open and honest about that. You have to speak publicly and privately with the host government, and with citizens as well. People need to know exactly what is or isn't going to happen as you increase relations with the Communist Chinese party.

The pressure is great, but I do think that the Government of Eswatini can rely on me, if confirmed as an ambassador, to be an engaged partner in discussing these matters.

Senator RICKETTS. Is there more that we can do to help Eswatini be able to stand up to the PRC and support them? Is there other things we should be doing to be able to make sure that you know, we're helping them out and keeping that relationship with Taiwan?

Mr. MCINTYRE. Sure. I thank you for the question, Senator. Again, if confirmed as Ambassador, I would like to see us expand our programs, our priorities. There's a number of areas where the

Chinese tend to concentrate, whether it be telecommunications, infrastructure, business development, whatever we can do to promote our interests there along those lines, I think would be great.

But to be very frank, from my experience in the Caribbean, I think a lot of it is just speaking frankly about what's going on, showing the information. I think once people realize what the real truth is, it's there in front of them. Thank you.

Senator RICKETTS. So sunlight's the best antiseptic to fight the PRC's corruption?

Mr. MCINTYRE. Amen.

Senator RICKETTS. Great. Thank you, Mr. McIntyre.

Mr. MCINTYRE. Thank you, sir.

Senator DUCKWORTH. And the newest member of our committee. I normally would sit next to you down there on that end of the dais. So welcome, Senator Helmy.

Senator HELMY. Thank you, Chairwoman, thank you ranking member. And I would echo Senator Ricketts' and other comments about thanking you for your service, and of course, of your families who serve alongside you.

Some of my answers, given my public service and private sector experience and public health have been more than adequately asked and more than adequately answered. But I would note, I appreciated Mr. McIntyre, Mr. Neitzke, your focus and your testimony on public health, and I think, as you said, a focus on public health leads to better communities, better economies, and stronger nations. And I appreciate the comments and those questions have been asked.

But Mr. Stimmler, I'd like to pull or piggyback on the questions from Ranking Member Risch. In your assessment, how would you assess the current State of the Kyrgyz's political system, and in your experience working with Bishkek, what might the United States do to more effectively support the promotion of democracy?

Mr. STIMMLER. Thank you, Senator, very much for the question. President Japarov has a great deal of popularity right now riding at 75, 80 percent popularity. There are concerning recent trends that we've discussed several times with various Kyrgyz officials, including with President Japarov. And if I am confirmed, I will work hard to engage both with the Government and with civil society to talk about, to advocate for our values, to explain why democratic governance is important.

I will call out instances of corruption. I will call out threats to human rights, including the freedom of peaceful assembly, expression, and association.

Senator HELMY. Thank you. How would you assess the current efforts around sanctions enforcement by the Kyrgyz Government? What efforts have the United States undertaken to curb the transit of dual use goods to Russia. And in your view, what can be done to better improve that?

Mr. STIMMLER. Thank you, Senator. We are engaged in robust conversation with the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic, with senior officials in the Government, with the national bank, with bank executives, with the private sector, explaining to them what our sanctions are. They are complex, as you know, and working through any questions they might have.

Just recently, back in April, Kyrgyzstan divorced, ended its national payment systems, their Swift equivalent system with Russia's Mir National Payment System. Their banks, over the past couple of months have been in the process of severing all relations with sanctioned Russian banks. This is a result of close collaboration that we have with the Kyrgyz Government, and it demonstrates their intent to adhere to sanctions and export control restrictions.

Senator HELMY. Thank you. I close once again by thanking you for dedicating your careers to serving a grateful nation. Back to you, Chair.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Senator Van Hollen.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you. Thank you, Madam Chair. And let me also start by thanking all of you for your service to our country. As somebody who grew up in a Foreign Service family, I'm greatly appreciative of the sacrifices you make. And I've teamed up with Senator Sullivan a number of years ago to create the Foreign Service Caucus, and we encourage all members of the Senate to join, to support you and your efforts on behalf of our country.

Senator Helmy just asked the question I was going to ask you Mr. Stimmler, and thank you for your answer there. Because I think we're all interested in making sure that Kyrgyzstan, you know, complies with the sanctions that we put in place for good reason to stop Putin's war machine. And we know Putin is determined to try to find ways around that. So we look forward to working with you in pursuing those efforts.

Ms. Dressel, thank you for your past service. And Angola is a big and important country as you know. And I'm interested broadly in what you think our priorities should be there. But I do want to focus on one particular aspect of our more recent investments in both physical and digital infrastructure, clean energy, and agriculture along the Lobito Economic Corridor.

In my view, these are the kind of economic investments that we should be making across the African continent. These projects in Angola, the DRC, and Zambia diversify our supply chains in critical minerals. They create more opportunities for U.S. businesses. They also improve standards of living across the continent. They encourage intracontinental trade. They respect the rule of law, and they help those countries provide more opportunities for their people, in contrast with the PRC debt trap approach, which in my view does not, you know, provide those kinds of long-term opportunities.

So, could you speak to what you plan to do to try to make sure that these investments are sustainable? This is always a challenge when we make these kinds of commitments. But then more broadly, what your other priorities will be.

Ms. DRESSEL. Thank you very much for the question, Senator. I couldn't agree more. Angola is currently doing excellent work on Lobito Corridor, and if confirmed, my priority overall would be to help promote a more prosperous, more secure, and more democratic Angola. And I believe the work on the Lobito Corridor falls in that first category, promoting a more prosperous Angola.

I was pleased to learn just yesterday that the first copper from the DRC left the port of Lobito and arrived in September in Balti-

more, cutting down transport times from 25 days to 8 days, which is very exciting. But the Lobito Corridor, as much as——

Senator VAN HOLLEN. I should just add, we were very happy in the Port of Baltimore to be one of the destination points of early shipment.

Ms. DRESSEL. But I think that the Lobito Corridor is much more than that. It's about investment in renewable energy. It's about investment in agriculture. It's about connecting communities in Africa to the international supply chain.

So if confirmed, my goal and my priority would be to build very strong relationships with the Government, with international development finance agencies, with this committee of course, and back in Washington to the people working on the Lobito Corridor, to ensure a coordinated and smooth approach, and to ensure that these billions of dollars of U.S. investment really get to where they should be going, which is to benefit the U.S. economy and people, and the Angolan economy and people. Thank you, sir.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Well, thank you. You referenced you know, governance in Angola need to move you know, toward greater democracy. Can you just talk a little bit about those challenges and what your plans are?

Ms. DRESSEL. Sure. Since I served in Angola from 2007 to 2009, and I actually served as an election observer in 2008, I believe that the country has made tremendous progress in terms of democratic governance, but work remains to be done. I would focus on helping to build civil society, on developing strong relationships with the full spectrum of political parties, and on working with the Government to emphasize the importance of free media and free expression. Thank you, sir.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. I appreciate that. And we all mentioned the importance of the Foreign Service. And one of the things we are working on here, and I know I want to thank the ranking member as well as to make sure we address the overseas comparability pay issue, the cliff that's in place. Senator Sullivan and I have been working on that, but I know that on a bipartisan basis. So thank you. Thank you, Senator Risch too. Thank you all very much.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you again to all the nominees for your willingness to serve and for your answers today. Those nominees on the first panel can be excused, and I'll ask the second panel to come take your seats. Thank you.

[Pause.]

Senator DUCKWORTH. Moving on to introductions for our second panel. Welcome.

Ms. Amanda Jacobsen has been nominated to serve as Ambassador to the Republic of Equatorial Guinea. Ms. Jacobsen is a career member of the Senior Foreign Service and currently serves as Deputy Chief of Mission to the U.S. Embassy in Botswana, where she was also Chargé d'Affaires for 11 months.

With over two decades of experience as a diplomat, she has served in East, West, and Southern Africa as well as in Washington, where her work has been called on to help shape and articulate the U.S. Government's positions on the full range of issues involving U.S. policy in Africa.

Welcome Ms. Jacobsen, and we look forward to your testimony once all the introductions are complete.

Next, let me introduce Mr. Keith Hanigan. Mr. Hanigan has been nominated to be Ambassador to the Solomon Islands. Mr. Hanigan is a career member of the Senior Foreign Service currently serving as Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Director of Operations, Bureau of Administration.

Throughout his career, he has been actively involved in welfare issues that support American families and locally engaged staff at post. Mr. Hanigan previously served as facility manager at U.S. Embassies in San Salvador, Guatemala City, Managua, Brasilia, Vienna, Baghdad, London, and Kabul. His time in public service has allowed him to experience diverse living and working environments, overcoming challenges, and maximizing opportunities to support the department's diplomatic missions.

Mr. Hanigan welcome, and we look forward to your testimony very shortly as well.

Next, Ms. Kali Jones. Ms. Jones has been nominated to be Ambassador to the Republic of Benin. A career member of the Senior Foreign Service, Ms. Jones currently serves as senior advisor for the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs. Her time in public service has also taken her to posts in Botswana, Brazil, and Haiti, as well as post in Washington, and as a diplomat in residence at Tulane University.

With over two decades as a career diplomat, she has worked in bilateral and multilateral missions and in diverse functional roles.

Ms. Jones, welcome and we look forward to your testimony.

Next, Ms. Stephanie Miley has been nominated to be Ambassador to the Republic of The Gambia. Ms. Miley is a career member of the Senior Foreign Service, and most recently served as Deputy Chief of Mission to the U.S. Embassy in Kinshasa in the DRC, where she was also Chargé d'Affaires for 6 months. Previously, she served as senior advisor in the office of the Undersecretary for Economic Growth, Energy, and Environment among many other diverse posts with the State Department.

In her career as a diplomat, Ms. Miley has served across multiple geographic regions and addressed a wide array of economic, political, military, and national security issues.

Welcome Ms. Miley, and we look forward to your testimony.

Finally, I am pleased to introduce Mr. Christophe Tocco, who has been nominated to serve as Ambassador to the Islamic Republic of Mauritania. Mr. Tocco is a career member of the Senior Foreign Service currently serving as senior Deputy Assistant Administrator in USAID's Bureau for Planning, Learning, and Resource Management.

His time in public service has also taken him to posts in Congo, Senegal, Rwanda, and Morocco, as well as with the OECD's Development Assistance Committee providing him with extensive experience in African Affairs. Prior to joining the Foreign Service, he was a Peace Corps volunteer in Morocco. Welcome Mr. Tocco.

I'll now turn it over to each of you to share your testimoneys, beginning with Ms. Jacobsen.

STATEMENT OF AMANDA S. JACOBSEN, OF WASHINGTON, 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 EQUATORIAL GUINEA

Ms. JACOBSEN:

[Off mic.]—and distinguished members of committee. I'm honored to appear before you as President Biden's nominee for U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Equatorial Guinea. If confirmed, I look forward to working with Congress to advance U.S. interests in Equatorial Guinea.

I'm grateful to my family, my husband, Cort, and children, Nahuel, Aya, Aferebea, and Amani for their support and sacrifices. All of my children have spent the majority of their childhoods in Africa. I want to acknowledge the presence of my sister, Rebecca Gehle and family members, Carolyn Brem and Ambassador Richard Boucher and my mother Rosemary, who's watching from Phoenix.

I'm proud to hail from a family of teachers, firefighters, and farmers in Wisconsin, who encouraged me to become a public servant. I'm grateful to have spent my Foreign Service career in challenging environments, including Togo, Nepal, and Ethiopia, advocating for American foreign policy priorities including trade, global health, and respect for human rights.

I'm passionate about mentoring the next generation of U.S. diplomats and if confirmed, I will harness my foreign policy experiences to strengthen our partnership with Equatorial Guinea, while positioning the United States as the partner of choice. U.S. oil and gas companies have invested billions in Equatorial Guinea, and if confirmed, I will work closely with them and the Government of Equatorial Guinea to improve the investment climate and to prioritize the safety and security of American citizens.

I will also work with the Government and like-minded partners to develop Equatorial Guinea's economic potential in environmental conservation and tourism. Equatorial Guinea is an upper middle-income country, yet struggles with income inequality. If confirmed, I will work with the Government of Equatorial Guinea, like-minded partners, and civil society to encourage investment in the health and education sectors.

Regional security is a key element of our relationship. If confirmed, I will work with the U.S. Interagency and Government of Equatorial Guinea to enhance maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea. Mutual goals include the protection of offshore oil and gas facilities and protecting Equatorial Guinea against piracy and illegal fishing. The U.S. Government welcomed Equatorial Guinea joining the Partnership for Atlantic Cooperation in 2023. If confirmed, I will work to increase the number of military exchanges through U.S. International Military and Education training, and to strengthen our security partnership.

On democracy and good governance, if confirmed, I will engage with the Government, civil society, and the media to advocate for human rights. I will harness U.S. Government tools such as exchanges, training, and programming to strengthen the capacity of

civil society and address corruption. Combating trafficking in persons remains a top U.S. priority, and I understand that the Government of Equatorial Guinea made significant efforts to combat trafficking and was upgraded to tier two watch list in the 2024 TIP report.

Critical work remains. If confirmed, I will strengthen the U.S. Embassy's partnerships with Equatoguineans, particularly youth countrywide to help them achieve their vision for their country's secure, prosperous future. If confirmed as Chief of Mission, I will prioritize the safety, health, and resilience of the U.S. Embassy team, under the ethos of one team, one mission. Ongoing coordination and consultation with Congress will be essential to achieving our policy and resource goals.

Madam Chairwoman, ranking member, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared Statement of Ms. Jacobsen follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF AMANDA S. JACOBSEN

Madam Chairwoman, Ranking Member Risch, and distinguished Members of the committee, I am honored to appear before you as President Biden's nominee for U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Equatorial Guinea. I deeply appreciate the confidence and trust the President and Secretary of State have shown in nominating me. If confirmed, I look forward to working with Congress to advance our interests in Equatorial Guinea. I am grateful to my family—my husband, Cort, and children Nahuel, Aya, Aferebea, and Amani—for their support and sacrifices. All of my children have spent the majority of their childhoods in Africa. I also want to acknowledge the presence of my sister, Rebecca Gehle.

I am proud to hail from a family of teachers, firefighters, and farmers in Wisconsin who encouraged me to become a public servant where I now have the opportunity to advance U.S. national security priorities. I am grateful to have spent my Foreign Service career in challenging environments including Togo, Nepal, and Ethiopia, advocating for American foreign policy priorities including trade, global health, and respect for human rights, while supporting the safety of U.S. citizens overseas. I am passionate about mentoring the next generation of U.S. diplomats.

I believe my Foreign Service assignments have prepared me with the expertise I will need in regional security, health diplomacy, democracy and governance, commercial advocacy, and crisis management. I led interagency teams and managed U.S. Government resources as Deputy Chief of Mission and Chargé d'Affaires in Botswana. During my leadership tenure, the U.S. Government global health team, in collaboration with the Government of Botswana and other stakeholders supporting Botswana's National HIV response, helped Botswana surpass U.N. global targets ahead of 2030; these efforts have helped Botswana approach HIV epidemic control. We also successfully hosted the "Epic Guardian" military exercise with AFRICOM leadership. In Ethiopia I served as the Public Affairs Officer during a time of acute civil unrest, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. My team and I strengthened youth outreach, empowered civil society, and prioritized media professionalization. In Washington, I served in the Africa Bureau helping shape policy and strategic messaging affecting our 50+ Posts overseas as the Bureau's Spokesperson and Special Assistant. If confirmed, I will harness my foreign policy experiences to strengthen our partnership with Equatorial Guinea, while positioning the United States as the partner of choice.

U.S. oil and gas companies have invested billions in Equatorial Guinea and, if confirmed, I will work closely with them and the Government of Equatorial Guinea to improve the investment climate and to prioritize the safety and security of American citizens. I will also work with the Government and like-minded partners to develop Equatorial Guinea's economic potential in environmental conservation and tourism. Equatorial Guinea is an upper middle-income country yet struggles with income inequality. If confirmed, I will work with the Government of Equatorial Guinea, like-minded partners, and civil society to encourage investment in the health and education sectors.

Regional security is a key element of our relationship. If confirmed, I will work with the U.S. interagency and the Government of Equatorial Guinea to enhance maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea. Mutual goals include the protection of offshore oil and gas facilities and protecting Equatorial Guinea against piracy and illegal fishing. The U.S. Government welcomed Equatorial Guinea joining the Partnership for Atlantic Cooperation in 2023. If confirmed, I will work to increase the number of military exchanges through U.S. International Military and Education Training (IMET) programming and to strengthen our security partnership.

On democracy and governance, if confirmed, I will engage with the Government, civil society, and the media to advocate for human rights. I will harness the vast array of U.S. Government tools such as exchanges, trainings, and programming to strengthen the capacity of civil society and address corruption. Combatting Trafficking in Persons (TIP) remains a top U.S. priority. I understand the Government of Equatorial Guinea made significant efforts to combat trafficking and was upgraded to Tier 2 Watch List in the 2024 TIP Report. Critical work remains. If confirmed, I will spend my tenure strengthening the U.S. Embassy's partnerships with a wide spectrum of Equatoguineans country-wide, particularly youth, to help them achieve their vision for their country's secure, prosperous future.

If confirmed, I look forward to working with the talented, hardworking U.S. Mission team in Malabo to achieve our shared objectives of economic diversification, regional security, and democracy and governance, and to strengthen the relationship between our people and governments. If confirmed, as Chief of Mission I will prioritize the safety, health, and resilience of the U.S. Embassy community under the ethos of "One Team, One Mission." Ongoing coordination and consultation with Congress will be essential to achieving our policy and resource goals.

Madam Chairwoman, Ranking Member Risch, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I look forward to your questions.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you, Ms. Jacobsen.

Mr. Hanigan?

STATEMENT OF KEITH D. HANIGAN, OF NEW JERSEY, A CAREER MEMBER OF THE SENIOR FOREIGN SERVICE, CLASS OF THE COUNSELOR, NOMINATED TO BE AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE SOLOMON ISLANDS

Mr. HANIGAN. Madam Chairwoman, Ranking Member Risch, and distinguished members of the committee, I want to thank you for your service to our Nation and for your bipartisan interest in ensuring that the United States maintains strong and effective relationships with countries in the Indo-Pacific. I am honored to appear before you today as President's nominee to serve as the first resident U.S. Ambassador to Solomon Islands, and I'm grateful for the confidence that President Biden and Secretary Blinken have placed in me.

I appreciate the hard work that this committee and the department did in reopening our Embassy in Honiara, and would like to recognize the expeditionary diplomats who prepared for and have overseen this reopening, including Ambassador Yastishock.

With the chair's permission, I would like to thank my family members who are with me today, including my children, my sister, and my brother-in-law, and to recognize those in the family who were not able to attend in person. They have been my anchors and full partners in this incredible Foreign Service journey, and I thank them for their love and sacrifices along the way.

I would also like to acknowledge my parents, Levin and Patricia Hanigan, who are no longer with us, but whose lifelong example of honesty, integrity, service, and compassion continues to guide our family. Finally, I would like to recognize my foreign and civil service colleagues and mentors for their support throughout my career.

Before joining the Foreign Service in 1995, I lived in Solomon Islands for 7 years as a Peace Corps volunteer, a private sector engineer, and a local employee with Embassy Honiara, who assisted with its closure in 1993. I developed a deep respect for the culture and people of Solomon Islands. My experiences there built upon those of my father who served in the U.S. Navy during World War II, including transporting marines for the Battle of Guadalcanal. The events of the Second World War have created an enduring bond between the people of the United States and the people of the Solomon Islands.

My familiarity with Solomon Islands' culture, language, and socioeconomic dynamics means that if confirmed, I will be ready on day one. I bring 30 years of experience in the Foreign Service, serving in eight countries, in five regions, including challenging environments in both Iraq and Afghanistan. I will leverage my decades of management experience to strengthen the institutional capacity of Embassy Honiara. I will endeavor to transform one of our newest and smallest missions into a strong and effective platform to meet the challenges of the moment and prepare for those in the future.

As highlighted in the U.S. Pacific Partnership Strategy, the region will play a pivotal role in the international arena for years to come. It is critical that we continue enhancing our presence across the Pacific and prioritize working within the Pacific Islands regional architecture. As a leader in the region and the next PIF chair, Solomon Islands exercises considerable influence. Our relationship with Solomon Islands is more important now than ever.

If confirmed, my overarching goal will be to rebuild the presence of the United States in Solomon Islands and to further strengthen our bilateral relationship. I will also work in close coordination with our partners in the region to bolster our alliances and explore areas of mutual interest and cooperation with the host country, such as tackling climate change, unexploded ordinance removal, and promoting educational opportunities for Solomon Islanders.

Solomon Islands' future hinges on the commitment to security and freedom of navigation, strengthening institutional democracy, and the rule of law, and tapping into the talents of its citizens in sustainable economic development. I will continue to buildupon the important work that USAID, Millennium Challenge Corporation, and others have accomplished in these areas, while also prioritizing respect for media freedom, protecting human rights, combating trafficking in persons, and empowering women.

Thank you for this opportunity to appear before you today and for considering my nomination. If confirmed, I look forward to working with you in representing the interest of the American people and to welcoming you to the Happy Isles to on a visit sometime soon. I look forward to any questions.

[The prepared Statement of Mr. Hanigan follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF KEITH D. HANIGAN

Madam Chairwoman, Ranking Member Risch, and distinguished Members of the Committee, I want to thank you for your service to our nation and for your bipartisan interest in ensuring that the United States maintains strong and effective relationships with countries in the Indo-Pacific.

I am honored to appear before you today as the President's nominee to serve as the first resident U.S. Ambassador to Solomon Islands and I am grateful for the confidence that President Biden and Secretary Blinken have placed in me. I appreciate the hard work that this Committee and the Department did in re-opening our Embassy in Honiara and would like to recognize the expeditionary diplomats who prepared for and have overseen this reopening, led by Ambassador Ann Marie Yastishock.

With the Chair's permission, I would like to thank my family members who are with me today, including my four children, my sister and brother-in-law, and to recognize those in the family who were not able to attend in person. They have been my anchors and full partners in this incredible Foreign Service journey, and I thank them for their love and sacrifices along the way. I would also like to acknowledge my parents, Levin and Patricia Hanigan, who are no longer with us but whose lifelong example of honesty, integrity, service and compassion continues to guide our family. Finally, I would like to recognize my Foreign and Civil Service colleagues and mentors for their support throughout my career.

Before joining the Foreign Service in 1995, I lived in Solomon Islands for seven years as a Peace Corps volunteer, a private sector engineer, and a local employee with Embassy Honiara who assisted with its closure in 1993. I developed a deep respect for the culture and people of Solomon Islands. My experiences there built upon those of my father, who served in the U.S. Navy during World War II, including transporting Marines for the Battle of Guadalcanal. The events of the Second World War have created an enduring bond between the people of the United States and the people of Solomon Islands. My familiarity with Solomon Island's culture, language, and socio-economic dynamics means that, if confirmed, I will be ready on day one. I bring 30 years of experience in the Foreign Service, serving in eight countries and five regions, including challenging environments in both Iraq and Afghanistan. I will leverage my decades of management experience to strengthen the institutional capacity of Embassy Honiara. I will endeavor to transform one of our newest and smallest missions into a strong and effective platform to meet the challenges of the moment and prepare for those of the future.

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If confirmed, my overarching goal will be to rebuild the presence of the United States in Solomon Islands, and to further strengthen our bilateral relationship. I will also work in close coordination with our allies and partners in the region, to bolster our alliances and explore areas of mutual interest and cooperation with the host country, such as unexploded ordnance removal, tackling climate change, and promoting educational opportunities for Solomon Islanders.

Solomon Islands' future hinges on its commitment to security and freedom of navigation, strengthening institutional democracy and the rule of law, and tapping into the talents of its citizens in sustainable economic development. I will continue to build on the important work that USAID, Millenium Challenge Corporation, and others have accomplished in these areas while also prioritizing respect for media freedom, protection of human rights, combatting trafficking in persons, and empowering women.

Thank you for this opportunity to appear before you today and for considering my nomination. If confirmed, I look forward to working with you in representing the interests of the American people and to welcoming you to the Happy Isles on a visit sometime soon. I look forward to any questions.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you, Mr. Hanigan.

Ms. Jones?

STATEMENT OF KALI C. JONES, 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 REPUBLIC OF BENIN

Ms. JONES. Good morning. Madam Chair, ranking member, I am honored to appear before you today as President Biden's nominee to be the next U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Benin. I am

humbled by the confidence the President and Secretary Blinken have placed in me, and I wish to thank members of this committee for the opportunity to testify today.

I'd like to begin by thanking my family. I want to thank my husband Nicholas Sims, who is here with me today, for his steadfast support. He encouraged me to serve our country at the highest levels. I want to also express my gratitude to my parents, Dr. Stella Pinckney-Jones and the late Harry Jones, and my siblings, Dr. Brigette Jones-McGeathy, who served as a captain in the U.S. Air Force, Shauna Jones, also here with me today, and Harry W.P. Jones, for their love and dedication. Our family motto is, service is the rent you pay for your space on earth, and that has been my guiding light for my Foreign Service career.

If confirmed, I look forward to working with you and other Members of Congress to advance U.S. policy and to strengthen our bilateral relationship with Benin, pursuing our shared interest in promoting economic development, fortifying democratic institutions, and fostering regional security cooperation. To improve the wellbeing and economic prospects of Benin's growing population, I will work with all stakeholders to promote an environment that optimizes private sector led economic growth.

The United States and Benin are both invested in the success of the Millennium Challenge Corporation. Benin's third compact, which will improve transportation infrastructure and facilitate market access, marks the first instance in MCC history where the host government's financial contribution is larger than that of the United States. Benin is also a strong partner to the United States in promoting peace and security in West Africa and the Sahel.

It's committed to improving its counter-terrorism capabilities and participating in regional security efforts. If confirmed, I will prioritize engaging the Government of Benin to enhance security sector assistance, community building, and youth development, to strengthen social cohesion and civil society resilience in line with the Global Fragility Act and our strategy to prevent conflict and promote stability.

For nearly three decades, Benin has been regarded as a model of multi-party democracy in West Africa. Upcoming elections in 2026 will be a critical test for Benin's democracy. If confirmed, I will work closely with Benin's Government, civil society, and other stakeholders to promote open and inclusive governance, advocate for fundamental freedoms, and ensure all voices in Benin have the opportunity to be heard. As always, my highest priority, if confirmed, will be the welfare and safety of American citizens, including my colleagues at Embassy Cotonou.

Madam Chair, ranking member, thank you again for the honor to testify before you today. If confirmed, I look forward to working with you. I welcome your questions.

[The prepared Statement of Ms. Jones follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF KALI C. JONES

Madam Chair, ranking member, and distinguished Members of the committee, I am deeply honored to appear before you today as President Biden's nominee to be the next U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Benin. I am humbled by the confidence the President and Secretary Blinken have placed in me. And I wish to thank the Members of this Committee for the opportunity to testify today.

Please allow me to begin with thanks to my family. I want to first express my gratitude to my parents, Dr. Stella Pinkney-Jones and the late Harry Jones, for their love and dedication. Our family motto is "service is the rent you pay for your space on Earth," and that has been my guiding light through my career as a Foreign Service Officer. I also want to thank my siblings, Dr. Brigette Jones-McGeathy, who served as a Captain in the U.S. Air Force, Shaunna Jones and Harry Jones II. Lastly, I want to thank my husband Nicholas Sims, who is here with me today, for his steadfast support; he encouraged me to serve our country and advance the mission of State at the highest levels.

If confirmed, I look forward to working with you and other Members of Congress to advance U.S. policy and to strengthen our bilateral partnership with Benin, pursuing our shared interests in promoting economic development, fortifying democratic institutions, and fostering regional security cooperation.

Benin stands out as one of our most steadfast partners in a region increasingly important to our national security and economic interests. The Government of Benin has prioritized private-sector led economic growth, a necessity given that over one-third of Benin's population lives in poverty. In order to optimize economic growth, challenges such as limited infrastructure and under-resourced health and education services need to be addressed.

The United States is taking action with programs made possible through the Global Fragility Act and our Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability to strengthen social cohesion, improve government responsiveness and inclusion, and enhance security force responsiveness and accountability to communities at-risk for violent extremist influence in northern Benin.

The United States and Benin are both invested in the success of the Millenium Challenge Corporation, whose third compact aims to improve regional transportation infrastructure, reform transportation regulations, and facilitate market access. The third compact in Benin also marks the first instance in the history of the Millenium Challenge Corporation where the host government's financial contribution to a project is larger than the U.S. contribution—a testament to the value Benin places on the project and its relationship to the United States.

Benin is a strong partner to the United States in promoting peace and security in West Africa and the Sahel. Recognizing the ongoing threat of violent extremism, Benin's Government is committed to improving its counterterrorism capabilities and participating in regional security efforts. The United States supports these initiatives through training programs and significant equipment donations to strengthen Benin's defense and military capabilities. If confirmed, I will prioritize engaging with the Government of Benin on counterterrorism and countering violent extremism—including enhancing security sector assistance, community building, and youth development to strengthen social cohesion and civil society resilience in line with our Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability.

For nearly three decades, Benin has been regarded as a model of multi-party democracy in West Africa. Recent restrictions on freedoms of expression and peaceful assembly and changes to electoral laws have underscored the need for the United States to support Benin in upholding its democratic values and human rights. Upcoming elections in 2026 will be a critical test for Benin's democracy. If confirmed, I will work closely work with Benin's Government, civil society, and other stakeholders to promote open and inclusive governance. This includes strengthening the rule of law and enhancing the capacity of independent institutions. I will also engage with human rights defenders and support initiatives that advocate for fundamental freedoms, ensuring that all voices in Benin have the opportunity to be heard.

As always, my highest priority, if confirmed, will be the welfare and safety of American citizens, including my colleagues at Embassy Cotonou.

Madam Chair, ranking member, and Members of the committee, thank you again for the honor to appear before you today. If confirmed, I look forward to working with you. I welcome your questions.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you, Ms. Jones.

Ms. Miley?

STATEMENT OF STEPHANIE A. MILEY, 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 THE GAMBIA

Ms. MILEY. Madam Chairwoman, Ranking Member Risch, and distinguished members of the committee. I'm honored to appear before you today. I'd also like to thank the staff of the committee who meets with all nominees and helps prepare us for this important role in this important meeting.

I am deeply grateful to President Biden and Secretary Blinken for the confidence they have shown me as their nominee for U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of The Gambia. I am joined today by my husband, Lieutenant Colonel retired Kurt Berman, now also serving as a Foreign Service officer, and our 15-year-old son, Connor. Without their unstinting love and support, I would not be here before you.

I'm grateful for the support of my friends and colleagues, but most importantly, the example of public service and civic engagement of my mother, Margaret, who turns 92 next month, and my late father, Daniel. It was their 65 years of loving devotion to my developmentally disabled sister, Jeannie, the most precious of my parents' four children and the center of our family, that showed me the meaning of quiet courage, unending compassion, and profound commitment.

It has been my privilege to serve my country and the American people for almost four decades. First, as a Peace Corps volunteer, and then as a Foreign Service officer in Latin America, Europe, the Middle East, north Africa, and most recently Sub-Saharan Africa.

The United States and The Gambia have a deepening relationship based on shared ideals of democracy, religious tolerance, good governance, regional and global security, and inclusive economic prosperity. As we expand our partnership, we must underscore our shared commitment to protect human rights, particularly the rights of women and girls. Although a recent attempt to repeal the ban on the harmful practice of female genital mutilation failed, this remains a prevalent practice in The Gambia, and so remains a critical issue to address.

If confirmed, I will promote human rights in The Gambia, including the rights of women and girls. I will support the ongoing democratic process and transitional justice efforts. I will work for inclusive economic development, and I will pursue U.S. national security and foreign policy interests by helping the Gambian people achieve their goal of becoming a prosperous, secure, and democratic nation.

Thank you, Madam Chairwoman, Senator Risch, and members of the committee for this opportunity to address you today. If confirmed, I will prioritize the safety and security of Americans in country, and will ensure that the talented and dedicated team at Embassy Banjul has the resources, guidance, and confidence to serve the Government and the people of the United States. If confirmed, I hope to continue collaborating closely with you and other distinguished Members of Congress to advance our Nation's security and foreign policy interests.

I look forward to your questions. Thank you.
[The prepared Statement of Ms. Miley follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF STEPHANIE A. MILEY

Madam Chairwoman, Ranking Member Risch, 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 me as their nominee for U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of The Gambia.

I am grateful for, and here today because of, the support of friends and the tutelage of colleagues, but most importantly, the examples of public service and private constancy from my mother, Margaret, who turns 92 next month, and my late father, Daniel. Their engagement in our community molded our family and spurred my career as a public servant. Through their work in local government, church, and civic organizations, they taught their four children—my brother Robert, my late sisters Mary and Jeanne, and me—the importance of contributing to the greater good. But it was also the sixty-five years of their loving devotion to my developmentally disabled sister Jeanne, the most precious of my parents' children and the center of our family, that showed me the meaning of quiet courage, unending compassion, and profound commitment. I am joined today by my loving husband, Lt. Colonel, retired, Kurt Beurmann, now also serving as a Foreign Service Officer, and our 15-year-old son, Connor. Without their unstinting love and support, I would not be here before you.

I have been honored to serve our country and the American people for almost four decades—first as a Peace Corps Volunteer and then as a Foreign Service Officer in Latin America, Europe, the Middle East, North Africa, and most recently, Sub-Saharan Africa. During that time, I have worked to advance political security, economic development, post-conflict stabilization, and other policies to achieve U.S. national security goals. It has been a privilege to work with colleagues from the Departments of Defense, Justice, Commerce, Agriculture, the Agency for International Development, and other U.S. Government departments and agencies, in bilateral and multilateral contexts, to secure a better future for the people of the United States and our partners. I have benefitted immensely from the knowledge and expertise of my colleagues, inspired by the diversity of experience and insight demonstrated across our civil service and Foreign Service cohorts, to continue the tradition of excellence in the Department of State.

The United States and The Gambia have a close and deepening bilateral relationship based on shared ideals of democracy and respect for human rights, religious tolerance, good governance, regional and global security, and inclusive economic prosperity. After 22 years of authoritarian rule, the Gambians have now voted twice, in 2016 and again in 2021, to move further along their transition from dictatorship to democracy. With support from the United States, The Gambia can continue strengthening its democracy and bringing human rights violators from the previous regime to justice. However, much more remains to be done if the aspirations of the citizens of The Gambia for a transparent and accountable government are to be realized. To that end, The Gambia is working with ECOWAS to develop a first-of-its-kind Hybrid Court to increase The Gambia's capacity to hold human rights violators to account.

As we expand our partnership with the Gambian people, we must underscore our shared commitment to protect human rights, including the rights of women and girls. This year, The Gambia came worryingly close to repealing a ban on the harmful practice of Female Genital Mutilation, also referred to as FGM. Through the concerted efforts of Gambian civil society leaders and legislators, the ban has stayed in place. However, FGM remains a prevalent practice in The Gambia, where 73percent of girls and women between 15 and 49 have undergone the procedure, and so remains a critical issue to address.

If confirmed, I will promote human rights in The Gambia, including the rights of women and girls. I will support and encourage the ongoing democratic process and promote transitional justice. I will work for inclusive economic development, including through advocacy for U.S. exports, support for U.S. investment, and efforts to diversify The Gambia's economy. I will pursue U.S. national security and foreign policy interests by helping the Gambian people achieve their goal of becoming a prosperous, secure, and democratic nation.

Thank you, Madam Chairwoman, Ranking Member Risch, and Members of the committee, for the opportunity to address you today. If confirmed, I will prioritize the safety and security of Americans in country, and I am committed to ensuring the team at Embassy Banjul has the resources, guidance, and confidence to serve the Government and the people of the United States to their utmost abilities. I will

also collaborate closely with you and other distinguished Members of Congress to advance our nation's security and foreign policy interests. I look forward to your questions.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you, Ms. Miley.

Mr. Tocco?

STATEMENT OF CHRISTOPHE ANDRE TOCCO, OF CALIFORNIA, 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 ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF MAURITANIA

Mr. TOCCO. Madam Chairwoman, Ranking Member Risch, it's a great honor to be nominated to be the next Ambassador to the Islamic Republic of Mauritania. If confirmed, I look forward to working with Congress to advance our shared interests.

My experience in North and Sub-Saharan Africa, working across African and Arab cultures has prepared me for this next step of leadership in service to my country. I'm here today largely because of the support of my family, friends, and mentors. My immigrant parents, Andre and Bridgitte Tocco instilled in me a love for this country and the opportunities it provides. They inspired me to serve the United States globally. I have therefore dedicated the last 20 years to representing the generosity of the American people and building bridges across continents and cultures.

I'm grateful for my family's support, particularly my spouse Rabia, son Sammy, and daughters Sabrine and Sophia, who graciously adapt to each new assignment no matter how difficult. I'm also grateful for State Department and USAID mentors who showed me the traits of great leaders and how to succeed in U.S. embassies, including the importance of humility in leadership.

My commitment to Africa began as a Peace Corps volunteer in Morocco, where I served as a health volunteer nearly 30 years ago. Throughout my career, I've worked in partnership with host governments, civil society, and private sector partners. When I look at Mauritania, I see a country that is a regional partner in security and counter-terrorism, that has the potential for continued progress addressing human rights, and the potential to grow through bilateral trade-in investment from U.S. companies.

Facilitating the continued development of Mauritania in three areas will be key to building a strong bilateral relationship. The deteriorating security environment in the Sahel is serious and requires we focus on countering violent extremism. If confirmed, I will strive to strengthen our security partnership because a stable Mauritania is key to stabilizing the Sahel.

It's also equally important to address the issue of slavery directly and ensure that human rights are respected for all Mauritanians. The country's actions to address the Trafficking in Persons Report are a step in the right direction, and show what can be done with sustained political will. If confirmed, I will also work with all parts of the U.S. Government to ensure we are promoting mutual economic prosperity. Mauritania has a rich endowment of natural resources, including natural gas and critical minerals that U.S. businesses can and should play a role in developing.

Finally, and probably most importantly, I take seriously my commitment to protect U.S. citizens overseas, including our mission personnel. I will do everything in my power to protect Americans and American interests in Mauritania and ensure the security of our mission.

Madam Chairwoman, ranking member, I thank you for this opportunity to appear before you and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared Statement of Mr. Tocco follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF CHRISTOPHE A. TOCCO

Madame Chairwoman, Ranking Member Risch, and distinguished Members of the committee, it is a great honor to be nominated to be the next ambassador to the Islamic Republic of Mauritania. I appreciate the confidence and trust the President and Secretary of State have shown in nominating me for this position. If confirmed, I look forward to working with Congress to advance United States interests in Mauritania. My experience in North and Sub-Saharan Africa working across African and Arab cultures, as well as multiple overseas assignments, has prepared me for this next step of leadership and service to my country.

I am here today largely because of the support of my family, friends, and mentors. My immigrant parents, Andre and Brigitte Tocco, instilled in me a great love for this country and the opportunities it provides, and they inspired me to serve the United States globally. Together, with my wife, Rabiaa, and our three children, Sammy, Sabrine, and Sophia, I have dedicated the last twenty years to representing the generosity of the American people and building bridges across continents and cultures. I am grateful for my family's support, particularly my spouse who graciously adapts to each new assignment with me. I am also grateful for the talented mentors who have shown me the leadership traits required to succeed in Embassies throughout my career, including the importance of humility in leadership.

My commitment to Africa began as a Peace Corps volunteer in Morocco, where I served as a health volunteer and built a school with community participation. After starting my career as a locally hired contractor with the U.S. Embassy in Morocco, I joined USAID's Foreign Service. Throughout my career, I have worked in partnership with host governments, civil society, and private sector partners, mainly in Africa.

While in Senegal, I established and led the USAID Sahel regional program covering Mauritania, Burkina Faso, and Niger, focusing on how to address the issue of repeated droughts in the region.

When I look at Mauritania, I see a country that is a regional partner in security and counterterrorism, that has the potential for continued progress addressing human rights issues, and the potential to grow through bilateral trade and investment from U.S. companies. Facilitating the continued development of Mauritania in these three areas is key to a mutually beneficial U.S.-Mauritania relationship. If confirmed, these will be my priorities as Ambassador.

The deteriorating security environment in the Sahel requires that U.S. efforts focus on countering violent extremism and managing the refugee crisis. I will strive to strengthen our security partnership because a stable Mauritania is key to stabilizing the Sahel. If confirmed, I will encourage Mauritania to continue to work closely with us and our partners to counter growing regional security threats.

It is important to address the issue of slavery head on and ensure that human rights are respected for all Mauritanians. The country's actions to address the Trafficking in Persons Report recommendations are a step in the right direction and show what can be done with sustained political will. If confirmed, I will advocate for respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all.

If confirmed, I will also work with all parts of our government to ensure we are promoting mutual economic prosperity. Mauritania has a rich endowment of natural resources, including natural gas, critical minerals, and a green hydrogen potential that U.S. businesses can and should play a role in developing.

Finally, I take seriously my commitment to protect U.S. citizens overseas, including our mission personnel. I will do everything in my power to protect Americans and American interests in Mauritania and ensure the security of our mission.

Madame Chairwoman, Ranking Member Risch, Members of the committee, I thank you for this opportunity to appear before you. I look forward to your questions.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you, Mr. Tocco.

Proceeding to questions, I'm going to ask the same responsiveness questions I ask the first panel, I would ask each of you to provide just a verbal yes or no to these questions.

First, do you agree to appear before this committee and make officials from your office available to the committee and designate the staff when invited?

Ms. JACOBSEN. Yes.

Mr. HANIGAN. Yes.

Ms. JONES. Yes.

Ms. MILEY. Yes.

Mr. TOCCO. Yes.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Do you commit to keeping this committee fully and currently informed about the activities under your purview?

Ms. JACOBSEN. Yes.

Mr. HANIGAN. Yes.

Ms. JONES. Yes.

Ms. MILEY. Yes.

Mr. TOCCO. Yes.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Do you commit to engaging in meaningful consultation while policies are being developed, not just providing notifications after the fact?

Ms. JACOBSEN. Yes.

Mr. HANIGAN. Yes.

Ms. JONES. Yes.

Ms. MILEY. Yes.

Mr. TOCCO. Yes.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Do you commit to promptly responding to requests for briefings and information requested by the committee and its designated staff?

Ms. JACOBSEN. Yes.

Mr. HANIGAN. Yes.

Ms. JONES. Yes.

Ms. MILEY. Yes.

Mr. TOCCO. Yes.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you. Would you like to go forth with your questions? I don't mind at all.

Ranking Member Risch.

Senator RISCH. Thank you very much, Senator Duckworth. I appreciate that. I will be brief.

Mr. Tocco, you're headed to a really dangerous neighborhood. You know during this current Presidential administration, four of the five Sahel countries, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, and Chad have all, at least once, had a military coup or unconstitutional change in government. Give me your thoughts on—give me some optimism if you can, as to where you're headed, whether they're going to go the same direction.

Mr. TOCCO. Thank you very much, Senator, for your question. I think there has been a very significant turn of events that have been very negative, and the impacts of them were seen——

Senator RISCH. That's an underStatement, if I've ever heard one.

Mr. TOCCO. Yes. And we've seen the impact of that in Mali just yesterday with the terrible terrorist attack in the Capitol. That

makes the bilateral relationship with Mauritania all the more important. It's a fledgling democracy. It's had a peaceful transition of power in 2019. It's a stable security partner of the United States, and it now has AGOA eligibility and MCC threshold eligibility.

All of these things are important to keep Mauritania connected to the United States, and also seeing the value of being a partner of the United States. Regarding the other countries in the Sahel, I think the dynamics will continue to show an increase in mortality and conflict will grow, and eventually those regimes will be open to further negotiations with the United States to reestablish relationships.

Senator RISCH. Thank you.

But you are optimistic though, as far as Mauritania is concerned that it's going to continue on a steady line?

Mr. TOCCO. Yes, I'm relatively optimistic on Mauritania because they've taken all the right steps and as a result of that, we've reinStated AGOA eligibility and given them MCC threshold, and we have used those to also push for more reforms. And so, as a nascent democracy, democracies all require lots of time to evolve and grow, they are at least saying that they share our values, and it's our job to continue to bring them in the fold and show them what we've learned as a democracy over a 250-year history and help them move along that path.

Well, good luck. We'll be watching and wish you all the best because obviously things are not going in the right direction in the neighborhood, and it'll be good if we can have at least one victory there. So thanks for your service. Thank you.

And thank you, Madam Chairwoman. Thank you for that.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you.

Mr. Hanigan, my first question is for you. If confirmed, you would be going into one of our newest embassies. We just reopened after 30 years of absence, and that reinvigorated demonstration of our commitment along with the new government under Prime Minister Manele presents a potential opportunity to open a new chapter in the bilateral relationship after years of the Solomon Islands slide toward the PRC.

What opportunities do you see for the U.S. Government under the Manele Administration, and what do we need to do to capitalize on them?

Mr. HANIGAN. Thank you so much for your question. I was actually there when we brought down the flag in 1993, and I was heartbroken, not just because I lost my job, but because we missed the opportunity, I felt we let down our Solomon Islands friends and our American citizens who live there. So, fast forward 30 years, unhappy with the State of play right now in this country. But I think in the recent election, and we certainly saw in the voting from the people, that there is a will to change directions of the country, right?

And while Manele comes in, he represents an opportunity for us to really partner together. But we have to be present. We have to be on the ground. We have to be positively implementing our Pacific strategy and to show that we are here and we're here to stay. Thank you.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you. As you highlighted in your testimony, your previous time there, as a Peace Corps volunteer gives you an excellent starting point to build on, if confirmed, to lead our mission in the Solomon Islands. And I did not know that you were there in 1993, so that is very impressive. Although the Peace Corps has not yet returned to the Solomon Islands, we have other active programs and exchanges that can help with that engagement and public diplomacy work. The Young Pacific Leaders Program to name one example.

What more can we do to implement a proactive public diplomacy strategy and reach across a remote and distributed areas of the Pacific Island countries like the Solomon Islands?

Mr. HANIGAN. Thank you so much for your question. I think one of the things I'm most excited about in getting there, that we have a PAO, so we can actually kind of counter a lot of the mis and disinformation that is coming from the PRC and control of the media. So that it's going to be something of vital importance. We need to change the narrative to the things that we are going to do to help, and there's a myriad of things that we can do.

USAID is working on economic growth. The scale program is doing well, disaster preparedness, the climate ready program that we can really work, the Millennium Challenge Corporation through their threshold program is three things. As you said, educational scholarship opportunities, I think are really important.

Obviously, we're concerned about PRCs elite capture, and we need to be really kind of producing and offering opportunities to our Solomon Islands young people, 40 percent of which are less than 15 years old. So that's a sector we really need to be addressing. So I would say for that, obviously I'm biased. I would love to see Peace Corps brought back. I know we're close with Solomon Islands Government on that, but that will obviously be another big push for me, the soft diplomacy, and how has it affected so many lives in Solomon Islands over the years. So, thank you so much for your question.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you.

Ms. Jones, Benin is one of five coastal West African focused countries under the Global Fragility Act, and an increasingly important security partner as violent extremist groups in the Sahel move south toward coastal West Africa. Recent coups in West Africa reinforce an important lesson that is often overlooked. We cannot address insecurity through security assistance alone.

If confirmed, how will you ensure that development and diplomacy in Benin are not overshadowed or overwhelmed by defense security assistance and support for the Benin military?

Ms. JONES. Senator, thank you so much for the question. Addressing the security challenges in Benin will be one of my highest priorities, and I agree that we can't address security only through the prism of security. And if I am confirmed, I will ensure that we focus not only on security, but also economic development through the Global Fragility Act. Its goals are to focus on social cohesion in at-risk communities, as well as civil society resilience.

And I want to ensure that our team is focused on those elements as well and not only our military partnership, because we know that communities need to have a government that is accountable

and responsible for their needs. And I would focus with the Government on that particular aspect, which is being accountable to the citizens in the North where they at risk maybe from extremism. So that would be my focus, is leveraging the Global Fragility Act in that way.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you.

I'm going to turn to Ms. Jacobsen. Equatorial Guinea holds elections, but these contests are neither free nor fair. Opposition candidates face arbitrary arrests and torture for demonstrating against a government. Human Rights Watch details how suppression of criticism and dissent has helped the president to remain in power for more than 40 years.

Given the limited democratic and information space in Equatorial Guinea, what types of bilateral assistance should the U.S. balance in order to promote a free electoral and journalistic environment in Equatorial Guinea? And what steps will you take of confirm to support credible elections?

Ms. JACOBSEN. Thank you very much for the question, Senator. As mentioned in my opening Statement, strengthening good governance and respect for human rights will be one of my top priorities if confirmed. First, we will work closely—I would work closely with the Government of Equatorial Guinea to respect international agreements related to human rights. I will welcome greater partnership across Equatorial Guinean society to advocate for good governance, and working tirelessly to build NGO capacity so the society itself can advocate for good governance and human rights.

If confirmed as Ambassador, I will travel the country to meet with youth leaders, civil society, farmers, women entrepreneurs, to understand the situation. I will then be prepared to speak with the Government at all levels to raise these concerns. A lot of time, the United States is one of the only partners in the region, in the country, that can raise these concerns directly with the Government.

With related to your question on elections, again, I will work closely with civil society, I will work closely with youth leaders to hear about their vision for their country's secure, prosperous future, and work that the voice of the people will be heard as Equatorial Guinea prepares for elections.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you.

Ms. Miley, through the Office of Global Justice, the U.S. is supporting The Gambia as it undertakes a hybrid court to hold those who engaged in human rights abuses between 1994 and 2017 accountable. Specifically, GCJ is working with the Gambian Ministry of Justice to expand capabilities on case preparation. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission emphasized that citizens of The Gambia want accountability for those who engaged in gross human rights violations during the Jammeh regime.

Along with the work that GCJ is doing with the Government of Gambia on hybrid court support, how else can the U.S. reinforce accountability in The Gambia?

Ms. MILEY. Thank you, Chairwoman Duckworth for your question. If I may before I get to my answer, I'd just like to say as a government geek and someone who, since I was in the fourth grade and wrote a report on JFK and the Peace Corps, it's been a dream to be a public servant. And so I can't help smiling. I know you've

been here, all of your staff have been here many times, but it's such an honor to be in this room and before this committee. Thank you.

Now to the question. It is critically important that we support transitional justice and that we find ways to ensure that the people of the country can feel that their, their needs have been met by ensuring that those who have perpetrated heinous crimes in the previous regime are brought to justice, are brought to accountability, and it is a transparent process to do that.

As you mentioned, there is the hybrid court that is being supported by ECOWAS and the Government of The Gambia. I understand that the vote on that in ECOWAS has been postponed until December, but that gives us scope to continue the work to ensure that what is proposed is as strong as possible.

We, in the U.S. Government and in the Embassy in Banjul, if confirmed, I will try and lead the team to ensure that we are supporting all elements of the judiciary, of investigative nature, so that they have the resources necessary to have a process that the people of the country can have confidence in and move forward in order to close the chapter, the sad Chapter of the previous administration. Thank you.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you.

Senator HELMY.

Senator HELMY. Thank you, Chairwoman. Just two questions for my fellow New Jersian if I may. Mr. Hanigan, how did the Solomon Islands fit into the U.S. strategy and the Indo-Pacific and in the Pacific Islands region as it becomes one of China's closest partners in the Asia Pacific? And to what extent is the U.S. Government coordinating with the Solomon Islands, with Australia, to curtail the PRCs malign influence and growing military presence?

Mr. HANIGAN. Great. Thank you so much for your question and thanks for your great service to the wonderful State of New Jersey. I think in our relationship with Solomon Islands we have a bright future with them on that in terms of working through with our colleagues and partners in Australia.

Really what we need to do is we need to be present. We need to be there and working with them face to face. Having lived in the Solomon Islands, I know that everything's about relationships. We need to reestablish that relationship. We need to give them options that they have not previously had. We need to model our values that are shared between our two countries, and we need to work as a united team with our partners, right?

Australia is literally their backyard, so they're key with us. New Zealand as well. We have great opportunities with Japan and EU, with the Republic of Korea. So it is going to be a team effort, right? We are going to do everything that we can to kind of be back and be present, but we're also going to work with our partners because that's going to bring success. Thank you, sir.

Senator HELMY. One followup question, if I may. In, in the last panel, there was a great conversation about the importance of resources and team to effectuate the U.S. mission in another nominee. If confirmed, how is the new U.S. Embassy in the Solomon Islands helping to promote those objectives, and what are the staffing levels needs, and to what degree are they being met?

Mr. HANIGAN. Thank you so much for your question. We are at the beginning of our journey there in that, and so we have some amazing officers on the ground right now. The conditions in which they're working are not optimal yet. I think that's going to be a huge part of getting there and being present and having an ambassador on the ground that can help to try to work through potential land deals going forward, that we can have a better physical platform from which to conduct diplomacy on that. So we will definitely be looking at that.

In terms of our overall sizing, I know that once we kind of build that platform and have enough space to accommodate people, there'll be a number of agencies, groups who would like to join, and we will welcome them as soon as we can fit them in the end. But our initial thing will be to really develop that platform. Right now, we're in a shoebox in Blums Building, and a lot of the managers are working out of their hotels.

So, it's not acceptable that. We're going to try to accelerate the lease fit out at Panatina while we look at a more permanent base right in the center of town, because we know that Panatina is outside kind of the work area and not optimal. But it was the best option at the time when our teams went out there. But I think that's going to be one of the biggest things for us is to actually establish a strong foundation for U.S. diplomacy going forward and to work so closely with our partners. Thank you so much.

Senator HELMY. Thank you, Mr. Hanigan. I close by thanking all of you for your service to a grateful nation and thanking all of your families who serve alongside of you. And I would be remiss if I didn't note the tremendous service and leadership of our chairwoman. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you. Thank you again to all of the nominees for your willingness to serve and for your answers today. The record for this hearing will remain open until close of business today, Thursday, September 19th, 2024. Please ensure that questions for the record are submitted by no later than close of business today.

With that, our hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 12:12 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

Additional Material Submitted for the Record

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO JOHN MCINTYRE BY SENATOR BENJAMIN L. CARDIN

In January 2023, human rights lawyer and pro-democracy opposition activist, Thulani Maseko was killed following 2021 pro-democracy protests in which Mr. Maseko played a key role. To this day, authorities in Eswatini have not arrested nor undertaken a credible investigation into Thulani's murder. Human Rights Watch reports highlight that Eswatini security forces failed to ensure security force accountability during a crackdown on pro-democracy protests, which led to the death of 46 people. Other pro-democracy advocates in Eswatini, including former Members of Parliament, received long prison sentences for terrorism charges stemming from their participation in 2021 pro-democracy protests.

Question. What tools does the U.S. have to support pro-democracy advocates in Eswatini, while protecting them from repressive regime actions?

Answer. The U.S. Embassy in Eswatini will continue putting human rights and democratic principles at the center of U.S. foreign policy in Eswatini through advocacy, capacity-building, and diplomatic engagement. If confirmed, I will speak directly with host government officials to express concerns regarding the restrictive operating environment for civil society and impunity for attacks against civil society activists. I will ensure the Embassy continues to use programs and grants like the Africa Regional Democracy Fund to strengthen civil society through legal, policy, and public advocacy on rights-based issues and raise the profile of human rights defenders, including through the Secretary's Human Rights Defender Awards and International Visitor Leadership Program's exchanges. The embassy will help reduce the likelihood of violence by training Eswatini's security forces on human rights through a combination of engagement and professional military and police training programs, such as the International Military Education and Training (IMET) and International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA) programs.

If confirmed, I will also leverage USAID/Southern Africa's Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance (DRG) resources and their range of regional programs to develop the capacity of civil society groups and regional organizations to promote democratic values and practices and facilitate rule of law and the protection of individual civil, political, economic, and social rights.

Question. What steps will you take, if confirmed, to encourage a credible investigation into Mr. Maseko's death?

Answer. With the murder of Thulani Maseko, Eswatini lost a powerful and respected voice for nonviolence and a brave defender of human rights. If confirmed, I will continue to press the Government of Eswatini to make progress on a full, independent, and transparent investigation into his murder and accountability for those responsible. I will underscore to the Government that it must demonstrate its commitment to justice and transparency by keeping the public informed on the status of the investigation and ensure the safety and well-being of Maseko's widow and children. If confirmed, I will use public diplomacy platforms to amplify the voices of human rights defenders and speak out against those who seek to target, harass, or harm civil society and human rights activists.

Corruption in Eswatini is pervasive, and officials who engage in corruption often act with impunity. In 2024, Eswatini failed its "control of corruption" scorecard with the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC). According to Afrobarometer survey data, 87 percent of Eswatini citizens polled say that the level of corruption in the country increased over the past year, and 83 percent of citizens think the Government is doing a poor job of fighting corruption. In 2022, the Public Accounts Committee in Eswatini parliament revealed that since 2018, $404 Million dollars in public funds had been lost through unauthorized expenditures by government ministries.

Question. If confirmed, what steps will you take to ensure good governance and accountability in Eswatini?

Answer. If confirmed, I pledge to continue U.S. efforts to support Eswatini's media, which frequently highlights government corruption and mismanagement, even in the face of public attacks by government officials on its independence. We will use mechanisms such as the Africa Regional Democracy Fund, to empower a range of civil society partners and build their capacity to hold public institutions accountable and will engage directly with government institutions through programming including the Financial Services Volunteer Corps, which strengthens oversight bodies including the Eswatini Parliament's Public Accounts Committee and the Anti-Corruption Commission.

Question. What reforms does Eswatini need to undertake to build up the capacity to address corruption on a systematic level?

Answer. Corruption is a pervasive problem for Eswatini's Government, as evidenced by King Mswati III's declaration of corruption as a "national disaster" last year and Prime Minister Russell Dlamini's creation of an anti-corruption task team early this year. Key agencies have only recently begun investigating and prosecuting corruption cases and may lack the capacity or political support to tackle more complex or high-level cases. If confirmed, I will make use of the full range of tools available, including assistance from the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, to support the comprehensive practical and legal reforms necessary to prevent, investigate and prosecute government corruption.

Democracy and Human Rights:

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 Eswatini? What steps will you take to proactively address any efforts to restrict or penalize NGOs and civil society via legal or regulatory measures should they occur?

Answer. If confirmed, I will continue to engage with these important individuals and organizations, and to reinforce—publicly and in private—the U.S. belief that a robust civil society, independent of state control or government involvement, is necessary for a healthy society to thrive. Civil society organizations in Eswatini fill gaps in government service delivery and play a key role in protecting human rights and advancing human progress. If confirmed, I will ensure robust engagement with multi-stakeholder bodies, regional multilateral organizations, international CSO networks, and other like-minded partners working in Eswatini to coordinate diplomatic messaging and advocacy and mobilize opposition to restrictive legislation and other government practices that hinder or place undue restriction on civil society and non-governmental organizations. Through the Embassy's consistent investment in civil society in Eswatini, my team and I will continue to support the rule of law and good governance and ensure the Government of Eswatini protects, promotes, and implements its human rights obligations and commitments.

Question. Will you and your embassy team actively engage with Eswatini 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 Eswatini?

Answer. If confirmed, the Embassy team and I will vigorously engage Eswatini's Government and media to underline U.S. support for press freedom and opposition to any undue restrictions on the Fifth Estate. I commit to regularly engaging with independent journalists or other members of Eswatini's information space and leveraging programs to develop a more independent, competent, and objective journalist corps, increase cooperation among key media stakeholders, and assist in developing uniform press standards. Additional efforts will focus on improving digital literacy, countering misinformation, and educating communities, leaders, and influencers about constitutional rights, women's land rights, and other proposed pieces of legislation.

Question. If confirmed, 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 investment and governance, and what will you prioritize in processes to administer such assistance?

Answer. If confirmed, I will utilize all appropriate resources at Embassy Mbabane's disposal to attract U.S. private sector investment in Eswatini's economy, prioritizing growth sectors with the potential to employ large numbers of Eswatini's burgeoning youth demographic. We will also leverage regional programs such as the Africa Regional Democracy Fund, the Southern African Political Parties and Dialogue Program, and USAID's Political Parties for Resilient and Inclusive Democracies in Southern Africa (PoPRID) to develop strong civil society institutions and allies advocating for human rights and the prevention of violence, support the development of democratic political parties, and support legal aid efforts. I will also use the Embassy's engagements on eligibility under the Africa Growth Opportunity Act to encourage an economy and society that is open and bound by the rule of law, which will not only further U.S. policy but make Eswatini a more attractive destination for investment.

Question. What are the potential impediments you foresee in advancing democracy in Eswatini, and how do you intend to resolve them?

Answer. Although political parties do exist in Eswatini, the lack of guidelines for their operation and limitations on their participation in elections have resulted in strained relationships between government, traditional leaders, and civil society. Until the leadership, institutions, civil society, and general public of Eswatini establish a forum for effective discussion of democratic reforms, the advance of democracy will be impeded. If confirmed, I will lead Embassy Mbabane's team to continue and expand U.S. efforts to promote inclusive dialogue in all its forms as a crucial tool for conflict prevention and political transformation in Eswatini.Tackling endemic corruption that permeates society at all levels is also imperative to improving governance. Supporting good governance programs and holding responsible actors accountable are other tools that I would use to advance democracy in Eswatini. Con-

currently, we will build the capacity of civil society, advocate for government transparency, and support respect for rule of law.

Management & Accountability

Question. Given the importance of representing the United States' diversity abroad, if confirmed, how will you ensure that our mission's staff and programmatic plans reflect this diversity?

Answer. The importance of diversity to the United States abroad will be reflected in our mission's staff and programmatic plans through effective advocacy and modeling by mission leadership. If confirmed as U.S. Ambassador to Eswatini, I will ensure that Mission Eswatini's staff and programmatic plans reflect the United States' commitment to diversity. Our staff recruitment, selection, and retention will embody the current best practices. We will actively seek a wide spectrum of candidates for positions, our processes will be transparent, and I will ensure that staff retention ensures our commitment to diversity.

If confirmed, I will confirm our programmatic plans incorporate a broad diversity of interests and needs. Our mission will ensure that those who have been traditionally underrepresented are actively sought out for participation in wide array of our programmatic plans and programs. If confirmed, Mission Eswatini will positively model the United States' commitment to diversity in staffing and programmatic plans.

Question. As a career member of the Foreign Service, please share how your experience in various posts has prepared you to advance the agency's mission of fostering inclusive diplomacy/foreign assistance?

Answer. Throughout my Foreign Service career, especially as a member of the Career Senior Foreign Service, I have led efforts to promote and instill inclusion in our staffing, diplomatic outreach, and foreign assistance.If confirmed as U.S. Ambassador to Eswatini, that commitment to inclusivity will have a place of prominence in our mission's goal and objectives. Our mission will seek out personnel, programs and foreign assistance recipients from a broad spectrum of society. We will reach out across the socio-economic spectrum to seek those who have been traditionally underrepresented. Equally important, our mission will focus on retention and expansion of opportunities to confirm that participation that is inclusive remains so. In previous senior leadership positions in the Department, both overseas and domestically, I ensured that diplomacy and foreign assistance were inclusive using the commitment, methods, and programs noted above. If confirmed as the next U.S. Ambassador to Eswatini, my commitment to inclusivity will remain steadfast.

Question. Will you commit to using your position, if confirmed, to promote the human rights and dignity of all people in Eswatini, no matter their race or ethnicity, religion, nationality, disability, sexual orientation or gender identity? What specifically will you do to prioritize and to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in Eswatini if confirmed?

Answer. If confirmed, it will be my honor to promote the human rights and dignity of all people in Eswatini. I will not tolerate bias against any person, regardless of their age, gender, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or disability. If confirmed, I will work with human rights organizations to promote greater equity, accessibility, and inclusion for all in Eswatini. I will also ensure that the entire team at Embassy Mbabane upholds these principles in the design, engagement, and content of their programming. Internally, I would support the Mission's DEIA council to ensure that our own personnel practices and working environment reflect our external posture on these issues.

Question. What challenges do LGBTQI+ people face in Eswatini? What specifically will you commit to do to help LGBTQI+ people in Eswatini if confirmed?

Answer. Eswatini has seen recent progress in this space, although clear challenges for LGBTQI+ people remain. While there are colonial era common law prohibitions against same-sex conduct, no penalties are specific, and there have been no reported arrests or prosecutions for consensual same-sex conduct. The law does not prohibit discrimination against LGBTQI+ persons in housing, employment, nationality laws, and access to government services such as health care. Societal discrimination against LGBTQI+ persons remains widespread, and LGBTQI+ persons generally conceal their sexual orientation and gender identity.

An ongoing issue is the failure of the Government of Eswatini to register LGBTQI+ advocacy groups as NGOs despite a court decision requiring them to do so. If confirmed, I would advocate directly with the relevant officials for the right of these groups to lawfully operate. I would also use the convening power of the Em-

bassy and the strong relationships built with key population groups through our PEPFAR programming to bring together the range of LGBTQI+ stakeholder groups and back efforts for those groups to lobby government on key issues with a more unified voice.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO JOHN MCINTYRE BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

Governance, Rights, & Corruption

Question. What is your view of the role of a U.S. ambassador in supporting democratic institutions and democratic governance in Eswatini?

Answer. The United States has a vested interest in advancing democracy around the world, and a U.S. ambassador plays an important role by publicly advocating for and supporting programs and institutions that promote free and fair elections, judicial independence, good governance, and the protection of human rights. Democracies value and protect the intellectual, social, and economic contributions of their citizens, and in my view, a successful U.S. ambassador underscores these values through their engagements with the Government, media, and public, and by their leadership and management of U.S. Mission and taxpayer resources.

Question. Do you commit to using your platform as U.S. Ambassador to Eswatini, if confirmed, to publicly amplify and support the democratic aspirations of the people of Eswatini?

Answer. I firmly believe that democracy remains the best tool we have to unleash our full human potential. I have promoted democratic principles in public and private throughout my tenure, as well as in previous posts. If confirmed, I commit to using my platform as U.S. Ambassador to Eswatini to publicly amplify and support the democratic aspirations of the people of Eswatini. I also commit to supporting and protecting the fundamental freedoms of expression and peaceful assembly and advocating on behalf of political and human rights activists who face official sanction or intimidation for exercising these rights.

The Region

Question. Given South Africa's significant role in Eswatini, how will you manage South Africa/Eswatini relations, including coordination with the U.S. Ambassador in Pretoria?

Answer. Eswatini has a strong relationship with South Africa bound by economic ties, as South Africa is its dominant trading partner, and through Eswatini's membership in the Southern Africa Customs Union and the Common Monetary Area. Eswatini is currently largely reliant on South African energy generation to meet its electricity needs. There are also important cultural links, with more people identifying as Swati living in South Africa than in Eswatini itself. However, Eswatini's unique role in the region as the last country in Africa to maintain diplomatic relations with Taiwan and in its strong support of Israel makes it increasingly vulnerable to pressure from its neighbors.

If confirmed, I will seek ways to bolster Eswatini's commitments to Taiwan and Israel and partner with the U.S. Ambassador in Pretoria to utilize the full range of U.S. regional programming and support across key regional initiatives, including health, energy, economic development, democracy and human rights promotion and humanitarian assistance. This coordinated approach will allow Embassy Mbabane to leverage the scale and expertise of Mission South Africa's interagency, acting as a force multiplier for our own in-country resources.

Trade & Investment

Question. How will you practice commercial diplomacy on behalf of U.S. investments in Eswatini?

Answer. If confirmed, I plan to use my position as Ambassador to promote beneficial opportunities for U.S. companies in Eswatini. That begins by creating a better enabling environment for business and leveraging USG tools to support the Government of Eswatini's efforts to combat corruption, strengthen the rule of law, and create more efficient and transparent business regulations to support investment. My Embassy would also work closely with the regional interagency, including the U.S. Foreign Commercial Service, the Development Finance Corporation, and the U.S. Trade and Development Agency, on targeted interventions that can create opportunities for U.S. investors, suppliers and exporters. Given the importance of govern-

ment spending to Eswatini's economic development, the Embassy will use its strong relationships with the Government of Eswatini to identify projects for U.S. companies, particularly in the infrastructure and clean energy generation sector.

Question. As U.S. Ambassador to Eswatini, how would you use tools like Prosper Africa to address trade and investment barriers and promote necessary economic and political reforms?

Answer. The Government of Eswatini is openly and actively seeking foreign direct investment to develop its economy, which creates an opportunity for the United States as the world's largest economy to shape the direction of that development. Interagency initiatives such as Prosper Africa, targeted technical assistance programs such as the Department of Commerce's Commercial Law Development Program and economic levers such as the eligibility requirements of the Africa Growth Opportunity Act all serve to incentivize the Government of Eswatini to create a more equitable and open economy and society.

If confirmed, I will use the tools at my disposal to ensure fair market access for U.S. companies, improve the ease of doing business in Eswatini and promote sound commercial law. I plan to encourage officials to take a long-term mindset to economic development that lifts up the nearly 60% of youth who are unemployed and includes women and marginalized communities. The Embassy would also be firm on the message that Eswatini must guarantee respect for good governance, due process, workers' rights, and human rights if it wishes to attract American and international business.

Trafficking in Persons

In the State Department's 2024 Trafficking in Persons Report, Eswatini was upgraded to Tier 2, but significant work remains.

Question. If confirmed, what concrete steps could you take to help Eswatini operationalize the prioritized recommendations contained in the TIP report?

Answer. Over the past rating period, the Government of Eswatini took the positive steps of opening a shelter for victims of trafficking and GBV, assisting victims at the shelter, and finalizing and distributing shelter guidelines. The Government increased investigations of trafficking crimes and trained police on victim identification.

If confirmed, I would build on this progress by connecting U.S. Government and U.S.-based institutions with our partners to offer training and resources that can help them prevent trafficking, prosecute traffickers, and protect victims. Key priorities would be to press Eswatini authorities to identify trafficking victims systematically and proactively by screening vulnerable populations, refer all trafficking victims to appropriate services, and increase efforts to investigate and prosecute trafficking crimes. I would prioritize collaborating with NGOs and international organizations to expand coordination and public messaging on the issue. I would engage civil society groups and influencers in monitoring and advocating for human rights and working with communities and authorities to counter human trafficking.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to portraying the realities of trafficking on the ground as accurately as possible through the annual Trafficking in Persons report to Congress?

Answer. Yes.

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. Eswatini's constitution protects freedom of religion including freedom of thought, conscience, and the right to worship, alone or in community with others. In practice, certain minority faiths face challenges in receiving equal treatment from the Government and religious groups have reported they face government pressure to avoid discussion of social justice topics which it deems too "political." The Embassy regularly engages with government officials on issues of religious freedom and tolerance and hosts religious leaders to foster interfaith reconciliation and dialogue. If confirmed, I plan to draw upon my experience in previous assignments to advance religious freedom, and to work with the Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom to promote tolerance where needed.

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 Eswatini increase their societal and governmental respect for religious freedom?

Answer. To help Eswatini increase its societal and governmental respect for religious freedom, if confirmed, I would meet with key officials to advocate for the removal of legal and practical restrictions on religious groups, such as inconsistent and inefficient registration processes for new groups and the limitation on non-Christian groups' right to perform functions such as solemnizing marriages. I would encourage the Government to end the state-owned broadcasters' favoritism towards certain groups and to provide equal access to media for all religious organizations. I would meet regularly with religious leaders of all denominations and communicate the importance of religious peace and tolerance in public and private diplomatic dialogues. I would also work with our Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom where opportunities arise.

Human Rights

In the State Department's 2023 Country Reports on Human Rights, Eswatini was noted for having significant changes in the human rights situation. Significant human rights abuses included serious restrictions on fundamental freedoms like assembly, 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. Prioritizing the support and protection of civil society organizations supports our foreign policy objectives of promoting good governance and protecting fundamental freedoms as drivers of stability and sustainable economic growth. If confirmed, I will personally engage and direct my team to work with civil society organizations to highlight restrictions on freedom of expression and peaceful assembly and other human rights challenges in Eswatini.

I would also engage directly with host government officials to underscore concerns regarding the restrictive operating environment for civil society and impunity for threats against civil society activists. I would ensure the Embassy continues to use programs and grants like the Africa Regional Democracy Fund to strengthen civil society and raise the profile of civil society activists, including through International Visitor Leadership Program exchanges. If confirmed, I will also leverage USAID/Southern Africa's Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance (DRG) resources and their range of regional programs that promote judicial independence, a robust media environment, and good governance, all of which will enable the Government of Eswatini to improve the human rights situation on the ground.

Question. If confirmed, do you personally commit to engaging with civil society on this issue?

Answer. Yes.

State Management and Oversight

Question. Management is a key responsibility for chiefs of mission. How would you describe your management style?

Answer. If confirmed, I will use all the leadership and management experience I gained over a 25-year Foreign Service career. As a member of the State Department's management cone, I have led and managed small, medium, and large numbers of staff representing a diversity of skills and abilities as well as backgrounds, in multiple fields. My management style ensures clear expectations to achieve U.S. foreign policy goals and objectives, coupled with appropriate accountability. I provide the guidance and tools needed for Embassy staff to attain their fullest capabilities. I encourage feedback and innovation. Having served a third of my career in Embassy front office positions, I model inclusive leadership, high performance standards, ethical conduct, and a willingness to take on new responsibilities.

Question. Do you believe it is ever acceptable or constructive to berate subordinates, either in public or private?

Answer. No. I believe that it is never acceptable or constructive to berate subordinates, either in public or private.

Question. How do you envision your relationship with the Deputy Chief of Mission?

Answer. Having served three tours as a Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM), I consider the working relationship between the ambassador and the DCM fundamental to an Embassy's success. The ambassador must have confidence and trust in the DCM. If confirmed, I would establish a productive and respectful working relationship with my Deputy Chief of Mission to ensure that responsibilities are clearly de-

lineated, and the Front Office has a unified vision and voice within the Mission. I would ensure that the DCM has sufficient oversight of the Mission's management and is ready to stand in for me when required, and take the lead on mentorship of Mission personnel, particularly first and second tour officers. If confirmed, I would also ensure that the DCM models professional behavior and tackles any evidence of bullying or harassment proactively, both to hold employees accountable and to deter such activities in the future.

Question. If confirmed, what leadership responsibilities do you intend to entrust to your Deputy Chief of Mission?

Answer. While serving as DCM, I have taken on the role of the Chief Operations Officer (COO) of the Embassy, with the ambassador serving as Chief Executive Officer (CEO). I believe that this is a good model for success, regardless of Embassy size and staffing. It is fundamental that the ambassador hold accountability for Embassy operations as well as policy goals and objectives. The DCM should serve as the primary conduit for the front office, to ensure that the Embassy is a productive workplace. If confirmed, I look forward to using my long-term experience as a DCM to guide my interactions with my DCM.

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. Yes. Constructive feedback and accountability are key elements of my leadership and management philosophy.

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.

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 accomplish fully their missions?

Answer. In my experience, diplomats could get outside Embassy walls more frequently to accomplish their missions without ignoring proper safety precautions where necessary. It is imperative that U.S. diplomats go beyond Embassy walls to fully understand the broad range of opinions of the population. This means not only getting outside the building but traveling outside the capital. I would support and encourage all staff to engage broadly with a broad range of actors in Eswatini. I would encourage and support in-country travel and mentor employees on developing innovative ways to engage virtually as well.

Question. How do you intend to ensure that U.S. diplomats are able to access all local populations?

Answer. I would provide support for travel to various districts in Eswatini, to allow our diplomats to have in-person engagements with local governments, civil society, and the private sectors in those regions. I would increase our social media presence, to include TV media, to reach areas where we do not often cover. I would encourage recipients of our grants to come from regions we do not often work in. Utilizing the strength of the interagency, I would encourage our diplomats to engage in joint visits, where possible, to regions where other U.S. Government agencies have a stronger reach, such as CDC, USAID, DOD, and Peace Corps.

Congressional Delegations (CODELs) and Staff Delegations (STAFFDELs) serve a critical oversight mission.

Question. Do you pledge to support fully CODELs and STAFFDELs that seek to travel to post?

Answer. Yes. Supporting CODEL and STAFFDEL travel should always be a top priority of any Embassy to ensure proper collaboration with the legislative branch.

Question. Do you agree to support fully any CODEL or STAFFDEL, with the only exceptions for simultaneous or overlapping visits by the President or First Lady of the United States, the Vice President, or the Secretaries of State or Defense?

Answer. Yes.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO JOHN MCINTYRE 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 PRC 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 its absolute control of Chinese society and industry, the CCP could stop all of these destructive actions tomorrow if it so chooses. Is the CCP an economic, diplomatic, military, and technological threat to the United States?

Answer. Last 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." As Secretary Blinken has said, under President Xi, the CCP has become more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad. If confirmed, I would advance U.S. national security interests and counter the People's Republic of China (PRC) efforts to expand its problematic influence and use of coercion, through diplomatic engagements, public diplomacy, and commercial advocacy to bolster U.S.-Eswatini ties.

Question. Does the CCP undertake any activities that are beneficial to U.S. interests? If so, please explain.

Answer. As Secretary Blinken has said, under President Xi, the CCP has become more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad. According to the Office of the Director of National Intelligence's 2024 Annual Threat Assessment, the CCP is seeking to "preempt challenges to its reputation and legitimacy, undercutting U.S. influence, driving wedges between Washington and its partners, and fostering global norms that favor its authoritarian system."

Question. Do you believe that there are any areas in which the CCP would constructively work with the United States in good faith, knowing that at any moment Chinese interlocuters with U.S. representatives could be disappeared? If so, please explain.

Answer. The United States will work with the PRC to address transnational challenges, such as climate change, when it is in the U.S. interest to do so. If confirmed, I would work with my colleagues across the U.S. interagency and Congress 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 PRC in the countries or areas in which you will work?

Answer. If confirmed, my priority would be advancing U.S. national security interests in Eswatini 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 Eswatini and the region.

Question. As you may be aware, a group of federal employees penned an open letter to President Biden criticizing U.S. support for Israel in the aftermath of Hamas' brutal terrorist attack on October 7, 2023. In addition, employees from nearly two dozen agencies have staged walkouts in protest of the administration's Israel policy. Efforts like these directly undermine the duty of our diplomats to advance the policies of the President of the United States. Yes or no, did you sign the letter to the President expressing opposition to the President's Israel policy?

Answer. No, I did not sign the open letter to the President.

Question. Yes or no, did you participate in the January 16, 2024 walkout?

Answer. No, I did not participate.

Question. If confirmed, would you define one of the employees or contractors operating under your supervision signing an open letter criticizing you, or policies you

undertake at the instruction of the President, as insubordination as defined by the Government Accountability Office?

Answer. If confirmed, I would seek to address employee concerns personally by creating an open, trusting, and harassment-free work environment. I am mindful of and value Department employees' right to free speech under the First Amendment. Moreover, I understand the expression of disagreement does not in and of itself constitute insubordination. If confirmed, I would work with the Department's Office of the Legal Adviser to determine the proper course of action should such a matter arise.

Question. In your view, are the actions these federal employees took, by anonymously signing a letter to the President of the United States, covered as "whistleblowing?"

Answer. I believe these employees were expressing a dissenting view to their leadership. If confirmed, I would emphasize that employees should have the confidence to directly raise their concerns with their supervisors and management rather than signing an anonymous letter.

Question. If confirmed, how will you address discipline issues, such as insubordination, that do not take established dissent channels?

Answer. If confirmed, I would make sure that employees in our Mission in Eswatini know that there are several avenues available to express policy disagreements. I would encourage employees to use established channels to express their views.

Question. Have you ever expressed support for an Israeli ceasefire in Gaza?

Answer. I support the Administration's efforts to obtain a mutual ceasefire, secure the release of all hostages held by Hamas, and provide more humanitarian assistance to begin restoring the lives of Palestinian civilians in Gaza.

Question. Do you agree that Hamas is an antisemitic entity?

Answer. Yes, Hamas espouses antisemitism. Hamas, which is designated by the United States as a foreign terrorist organization, seeks to eliminate the State of Israel, and its founding charter calls for the killing of Jews.

Question. Would a ceasefire allow these groups to reconstitute and attack Israel, and Americans, in the future?

Answer. The United States remains committed to reaching a deal that protects Israel's security and secures the release of hostages, allowing us to also provide humanitarian aid to civilians in need. Working with partners, the U.S. Government is attempting to secure the release of all hostages held by Hamas. The U.S. Government supports Israel's right to protect itself from Hamas' terrorism consistent with international law.

Question. Do you agree that calling for a ceasefire in Gaza means calling for Israel to stop its pursuit of Hamas, a designated foreign terrorist organization, that orchestrated the October 7 attacks and still refuses to release all Israeli and American hostages?

Answer. Israel will always have the right to defend itself against attacks like the heinous attack on October 7th. The Administration maintains that a comprehensive approach starts with a deal for a ceasefire that would release all hostages.

Question. Do you believe that Israel, in its operation against Hamas, which is known to use civilians as human shields, is taking all necessary steps to minimize civilian casualties?

Answer. The National Security Memorandum-20 report states that the IDF has undertaken steps to implement obligations under international humanitarian law for the protection of civilians in the current conflict, including the requirements related to distinction, proportionality, and precautions in military operations. Israel's own concern is reflected in the fact it has a number of internal investigations underway.

Question. Historically, helping Eswatini combat its HIV/AIDS pandemic through the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) program has been the dominant focus of U.S. engagement with and assistance for Eswatini. However, Swati military personnel participate in International Military Education and Training (IMET) programs and some law enforcement officials train at the U.S.-funded International Law Enforcement Academy in Botswana, with a focus on topics that includes human trafficking. What do you see as the most important U.S. interests at stake in Eswatini?

Answer. If confirmed as U.S. Ambassador to Eswatini, my priorities will include promoting human rights, countering PRC influence, supporting Eswatini's relations with Taiwan, engaging with civil society, advocating for rule of law including a thorough and transparent investigation into the murder of Thulani Maseko, the economic promotion of U.S. companies and services, strengthening Eswatini's response to ending HIV as a public health threat by 2030, and the protection of U.S. citizens and embassy staff working in Eswatini.

Question. What opportunities beyond PEPFAR and IMET do you see for engagement with the government of Eswatini?

Answer. We will work across government, on topics such as Africa Growth Opportunity Act eligibility, to raise the importance of protecting human rights. Foreign Minister Pholile Dlamini-Shakantu, formerly the Minister of Justice, has engaged U.S. officials on Senate Resolution 174 and the underlying concerns about human rights. In addition, Embassy Mbabane has a strong rapport with a number of key cabinet and government officials, some of whom are USG program alumni, and we will leverage those relationships to press U.S. concerns on human rights and other issues. We see a key opportunity to partner with the Government of Eswatini on its efforts to combat corruption, with a range of USG tools available to assist in the comprehensive legal and practical reforms necessary to build a transparent, accountable government. If confirmed, I will seek opportunities to partner with Eswatini on clean energy production, harnessing the enormous capacity of the U.S. private energy sector to provide Eswatini with environmentally and economically sustainable energy.

Question. What is your evaluation of the progress made by Eswatini against the problem of trafficking in persons (TIP)?

Answer. The Government of Eswatini does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking in persons but is making significant efforts to do so. During the period covered by the State Department's 2024 TIP report, the Eswatini government demonstrated overall increasing efforts compared with the previous reporting period, and Eswatini was therefore upgraded to Tier 2. These positive steps included opening its shelter for victims of trafficking and gender-based violence (GBV), assisting victims at the shelter, and finalizing and distributing shelter guidelines. The government increased investigations of trafficking crimes, trained police on victim identification, extended its 2019–2023 National Action Plan (NSFAP) through 2025, and allocated a budget for efforts to combat human trafficking and migrant smuggling.

However, the Eswatini government did not meet the minimum standards in several key areas. It did not report initiating any new prosecutions of traffickers. Lack of government coordination and effective leadership of the Prevention of People Trafficking and Smuggling Secretariat (Secretariat) continued to hinder the government's anti-trafficking efforts. Official complicity in trafficking crimes remained a concern. The government did not formally appoint a new Protection Officer in the Secretariat, hindering overall victim identification efforts.

Question. Eswatini is the last African country with diplomatic relations with Taiwan. However, the sustainability of Eswatini's alliance with Taiwan is uncertain given the significant economic and political leverage China holds over African nations. What would be your concerns be should Eswatini switch its recognition to the PRC?

Answer. If confirmed, one of my top priorities will be sustaining Eswatini's recognition of Taiwan and prioritizing ways the Embassy can partner with Taiwan on shared development goals. Based on my experience in embassy leadership positions in the Caribbean, I will use the skills and abilities I developed to counter PRC malign influence and use all the tools at my disposal to improve the resiliency of Eswatini's institutions and partnerships to prevail against the challenges the PRC presents.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO JEREMEY NEITZKE BY SENATOR BENJAMIN L. CARDIN

Lesotho is one of only a handful of countries in Africa listed as "Free" by Freedom House. The government of Lesotho has, however, taken steps to restrict human rights, close civil society space, and silence dissent. This includes using security forces to suppress peaceful protests over the building of a dam and the displacement of as many as 17 villages in 2023, criminal-

izing media interviews with music groups banned by the government, threatening journalists, and introduction a draft "Computer Crimes and Cyber Security Bill" which, if passed, would subject journalists to fines and 17 years imprisonment for reporting on "classified" information.

Question. What steps is the U.S. taking to support local journalists and civil society organizations in Lesotho?

Answer. One of Embassy Maseru's primary goals is to strengthen democratic institutions, promote good governance, and encourage the government to pass and implement the omnibus bill containing media reforms. The U.S. mission also supports capacity building programs that enhance journalists' abilities to counter disinformation using A.I. and other technologies, and to strengthen the financial independence of independent journalists and media influencers, helping them counteract the malign influence of state actors. Additionally, the Mission promotes investigative journalism for journalists, NGOs, and other agents of positive social change, empowering them to hold the Government of the Kingdom of Lesotho and other actors accountable.

Question. If confirmed, what will you do to support journalistic freedoms?

Answer. If confirmed, I will prioritize supporting journalistic freedoms by strengthening partnerships with local media organizations to enhance their capacity and resilience. I will advocate for the protection of journalists and the rights to free expression, engaging with Lesotho government officials to encourage the enforcement of laws that safeguard these freedoms. Additionally, I will promote initiatives that combat disinformation and support independent journalism, ensuring that diverse voices can contribute to informed public discourse.

Lesotho continues to struggle with corruption. A 2024 survey by the Afrobarometer, for instance, found that a majority of Basotho said corruption has increased over the past year, that police are most widely seen as corrupt, and that one-fifth of citizens said they had to pay a bribe to law enforcement officials.

Question. What steps is the U.S. taking to combat corruption in Lesotho?

Answer. The USAID-funded Financial Services Volunteer Corps (FSVC) has provided support to Lesotho's Directorate on Corruption and Economic Offences (DCEO), enabling it to successfully investigate four cases and recover stolen funds. U.S. Government support through FSVC has strengthened the DCEO's credibility and capacity to conduct investigations and will be key to helping the administration keep its promise of combatting corruption.

DCEO leadership had cited financial limitations, staff shortages, insufficient training, an outdated case management system, and lack of up-to-date technology as major reasons for the Directorate's poor performance. The Lesotho government's decision to double the agency's budget in 2023 speaks to its dedication to combatting corruption, and the successes attained as a result of the increased budget allocation and U.S. Government assistance support DCEO's claim that it is making progress.

Question. If confirmed, what specific actions will you take, if confirmed, to address corruption and support those individuals and organizations combat corruption?

Answer. If confirmed, anti-corruption matters will be amongst my top priorities. A pattern of impunity and lack of accountability in Lesotho has hindered growth and service delivery to its citizens. The current administration under the leadership of Prime Minister Matekane has prioritized combatting corruption by ensuring relevant government agencies track, investigate, and prosecute corrupt actors. If confirmed, I will support rule of law organizations like the Lesotho Council of Non-Governmental Organizations and other organizations in the vanguard of Lesotho's anti-corruption efforts and ensure Lesotho officials recognize that corruption is an obstacle to both long-term development and the health of our bilateral relationship.

Democracy and Human Rights

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 Lesotho? What steps will you take to proactively address any efforts to restrict or penalize NGOs and civil society via legal or regulatory measures should they occur?

Answer. Yes. Open democratic space relies upon an open press, freedom of assembly, and the right of redress. These are core American values that, if confirmed, I would be a staunch advocate for both publicly and privately. Engagement with a broad array of civil society organizations and NGOs ensures that foreign audiences

know that they have an ally in the United States. If confirmed, I would pursue an effort to localize and build the capacity of partner institutions.

Question. Will you and your embassy team actively engage with Lesotho 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 Lesotho?

Answer. If confirmed, my team and I will robustly support a free press in Lesotho and oppose any unnecessary constraints on the Fifth Estate. We will meet on a regular basis with independent Basotho journalists.

Question. If confirmed, 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 investment and governance, and what will you prioritize in processes to administer such assistance?

Answer. If confirmed, I will utilize all appropriate resources at Embassy Maseru's disposal to attract U.S. private sector investment in Lesotho's economy, prioritizing growth sectors such as renewable energy with the potential to employ large numbers of Lesotho's youth demographic. Self-sufficiency in this sector will increase foreign direct investment, improve indicators related to ease of doing business, and reduce reliance on humanitarian assistance from the international community. Lesotho's power sector has the potential to lift millions out of poverty domestically and regionally.

Question. What are the potential impediments you foresee in advancing democracy in Lesotho, and how do you intend to resolve them?

Answer. Political instability and weak democratic institutions have been core impediments to Lesotho's development, limiting government effectiveness and degrading democratic norms. One of Embassy Maseru's primary goals is to strengthen democratic institutions, promote good governance, and encourage the government to pass and implement the omnibus bill containing constitutional, parliamentary, judiciary, security, public service, economic, and media reforms.

Embassy Maseru has worked to improve civilian-military relationships and to support Lesotho's ongoing efforts to professionalize its security forces To advance regional security, U.S. Government-supported training for Lesotho security personnel has sought to build peacekeeping capabilities and strengthen respect for human rights. Recent training for security personnel has contributed to the professionalization of the Lesotho Defense Force (LDF). The mission also collaborates with like-minded partners to advance these goals.

If confirmed, I will continue to work with the interagency to identify ways to further promote the professionalization of Lesotho's security forces, promote respect for human rights, and to foster improved civilian oversight of the military and law enforcement.

Management & Accountability

Question. Given the importance of representing the United States' diversity abroad, if confirmed, how will you ensure that our mission's staff and programmatic plans reflect this diversity?

Answer. Developing effective teams that can best achieve U.S. policy goals requires building teams that reflect a diversity of viewpoints and experiences. If confirmed, I will pursue a broad-based recruitment strategy to fill available positions both among my American and Basotho staff. I will also engage with a wide range of civil society voices, youth, marginalized communities, and underrepresented populations among the people of Lesotho so that U.S. policy and program formulation benefits from the widest array of voices in their development.

Question. As a career member of the Foreign Service, please share how your experience in various posts has prepared you to advance the agency's mission of fostering inclusive diplomacy/foreign assistance?

Answer. I have had the honor of serving in a wide variety of posts with a broad diversity of staff from Africa, the Caribbean, and South America. I also have served with a rich diversity of Americans. Every embassy is in its own right a multi-cultural platform, a blending of America's melting pot with the knowledge and experience of Locally Employed Staff. Having served in supervisory and leadership roles for the entirety of my 23 years in the Foreign Service has taught me the importance of working collaboratively and leveraging the individual strengths of our team. Localized, targeted partnerships with civil society and non-governmental organizations through which U.S. resources and expertise can build local capacity will in turn have greater long-term sustainability and impact.

Question. Will you commit to using your position, if confirmed, to promote the human rights and dignity of all people in Lesotho, no matter their race or ethnicity, religion, nationality, disability, sexual orientation, or gender identity? What specifically will you do to prioritize and to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in Lesotho if confirmed?

Answer. Yes. Promoting human rights and the dignity of every person and community are core to American values. If confirmed, I will actively promote and support programmatic and diplomatic efforts to ensure protections, and the implementation of law reflects those values. This includes efforts to combat gender-based violence, combating trafficking in persons, and supporting underrepresented and marginalized communities.

I will ensure our mission proactively conducts public outreach to uplift voices of disenfranchised communities and use our convening power to bridge gaps between marginalized communities and Lesotho government leadership.

I will also ensure that U.S. Government grants reach as wide an audience as possible. In a low-middle income country like Lesotho, a little funding goes a long way. I will make every effort to ensure we use our programming to level the playing field by not only providing access to funding that would improve the lives of those who live in the capital of Maseru, but also for those who live in remote areas.

Question. What challenges do LGBTQI+ people face in Lesotho? What specifically will you commit to do to help LGBTQI+ people in Lesotho if confirmed?

Answer. The mission proactively works with Lesotho's LGBTQI+ advocacy groups and encourages the Government of the Kingdom of Lesotho (GOKL) to listen to them. In recent years, the GOKL has been increasingly open to listening to the voices of its LGBTQI+ citizens, with LGBTQI+ groups given a seat at the table for planning Lesotho's national reform strategy. Post leadership has openly engaged these activists to identify ways to collaborate and effect meaningful change; I would seek to continue and deepen that trend.

If confirmed, I will follow two principles—first, do no harm. The second, be an ally and advocate, amplifying Basotho voices and organizations to emphasize that these communities are part of the fabric of Lesotho society.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO JEREMEY NEITZKE BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

Governance, Rights, & Corruption

Question. What is your view of the role of a U.S. Ambassador in supporting democratic institutions and democratic governance in Lesotho?

Answer. If confirmed, I would use my role to support democratic institutions and governance and foster stability and prosperity in the country.

I would prioritize building strong relationships with local leaders, civil society organizations, and grassroots movements that advocate for democratic principles. This involves actively engaging in dialogue and offering U.S. support for initiatives that promote transparency, accountability, and the rule of law.

Lesotho's 2022 election was deemed free and fair and brought a degree of stability after a decade of uncertainty. If confirmed, I would work to ensure this trend continues by working with both the Government and electoral bodies to ensure that processes are inclusive and transparent.

If confirmed, I would leverage U.S. resources to support programs that enhance civic engagement and empower youth and marginalized communities. By nurturing an informed and active citizenry, we can help Lesotho build resilient democratic institutions that reflect the will of its people.

Question. Do you commit to using your platform as U.S. Ambassador to Lesotho, if confirmed, to publicly amplify and support the democratic aspirations of the people of Lesotho?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to using my platform to support and amplify the democratic aspirations of the Basotho people. I will work closely with the Government of Lesotho, civil society, and other stakeholders to promote transparency, accountability, and good governance. These efforts will not only focus on supporting Lesotho's reform process, but also aim to ensure that the voices of all Basotho are heard and respected.

If confirmed, my mission will be to uphold the democratic values we share and to reinforce the partnership between our countries in a manner that benefits both the United States and Lesotho.

The Region

Question. Given South Africa's significant role in Lesotho, how will you manage South Africa/Lesotho relations, including coordination with the U.S. Ambassador in Pretoria?

Answer. South Africa plays a crucial role in Lesotho's economic, political and social landscape, given their shared history, interconnected economies, and geographic proximity. If confirmed, I will approach U.S. engagement in Lesotho with an understanding of this dynamic and will prioritize strong coordination with our Embassy in Pretoria.

If confirmed, I would regularly communicate and coordinate with our Ambassador in Pretoria to align our objectives, share insights, and ensure a cohesive approach to regional issues. Some programmatic resources to address regional democracy promotion and anti-corruption efforts are based in Embassy Pretoria. Maintaining communication with our Ambassador in Pretoria would help ensure that we could effectively address issues that affect both countries, and help increase coordination between officials on both sides of the border.

Trade & Investment

Question. How will you practice commercial diplomacy on behalf of U.S. investments in Lesotho?

Answer. There are many opportunities for U.S. companies in Lesotho in the service, manufacturing, and textile sectors. The renewable energy sector is poised to galvanize and transform the Lesotho economy. I would prioritize strategic engagement of U.S. companies poised to invest in U.S. technology. I would work to deepen the established relationships of U.S. businesses present in Lesotho to identify and leverage opportunities within Lesotho's growing energy sector. By facilitating partnerships between U.S. companies and local stakeholders, we can promote the deployment of innovative technologies that will not only meet Lesotho's domestic energy demands but also help position the country as a net exporter of renewable energy in the Southern African region.

Question. As U.S. Ambassador to Lesotho, how would you use tools like Prosper Africa to address trade and investment barriers and promote necessary economic and political reforms?

Answer. Prosper Africa as a vital tool for addressing trade and investment barriers and promoting economic and political reforms that can foster sustainable growth in Lesotho.

If confirmed, I would leverage Prosper Africa to facilitate stronger trade relationships between the United States and Lesotho. This involves identifying specific barriers that U.S. businesses face, such as regulatory hurdles or market access issues, and working closely with the Basotho Government to address these challenges. I would promote initiatives under Prosper Africa that focus on enhancing capacity building within local institutions. Providing technical assistance and training can strengthen governance structures that support economic reforms and help ensure they are effective and sustainable.

Trafficking in Persons

> *In the State Department's 2024 Trafficking in Persons Report, Lesotho remained on Tier 2 for its overall increasing efforts to fully meet the minimum standards for eliminating trafficking. However, the Government identified fewer victims and almost fully relied on NGOs to provide all services to trafficking victims.*

Question. If confirmed, what concrete steps could you take to help Lesotho operationalize the prioritized recommendations contained in the TIP report?

Answer. The Government of the Kingdom of Lesotho does not fully meet the minimum standards for eliminating trafficking but is making significant efforts to do so. If confirmed, I will lead the Embassy Maseru team to continue encouraging and supporting the Lesotho Government in implementing U.S. recommendations from the annual TIP Report. The Embassy team goes beyond simply sharing the report, by organizing briefings with government agencies aimed at helping them act on recommendations that demonstrate Lesotho's progress on improving anti human trafficking efforts.

The Mission has facilitated conversations to expand shelter options for trafficking survivors, while also identifying ways to enhance prosecutions of human traffickers. A U.S. State Department grant funds a 30-month program to strengthen Lesotho's capacity to prosecute trafficking cases and protect victims.

If confirmed, I will lead the Embassy Maseru team to encourage the Lesotho Government to take concrete steps, such as proactively identifying trafficking victims, increasing efforts to investigate and prosecute trafficking crimes, and dedicating funding for victim services. My team will also work to support strengthening collaboration between law enforcement and labor inspectors, facilitating more effective criminal investigations.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to portraying the reality of the trafficking situation accurately to Congress via the annual Trafficking in Persons report?

Answer. Yes. I commit to ensuring the team describes the reality on the ground and provides the proper context for doing so according to the annual report instructions.

Religious Freedom

In the State Department's 2023 Report on International Religious Freedom, Lesotho was noted for lacking a general 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. Religious freedom is a cornerstone of democratic governance. While Lesotho has a relatively strong record on protecting religious freedom, vigilance in ensuring this right is upheld for all citizens is essential. If confirmed, I would work closely with the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom to monitor the situation in Lesotho, address any emerging concerns, and ensure that all religious communities enjoy equal protection under the law.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to personally engaging with civil society on this issue?

Answer. I commend the efforts of Embassy Maseru in fostering dialogue on this important issue, particularly the engagements between religious leaders and cabinet-level members this past May. These meetings, the first of their kind, have been pivotal in raising awareness and promoting understanding among key stakeholders in Lesotho.

If confirmed, I fully commit to personally engaging civil society on religious freedom. One of my top priorities would be to organize regular forums and dialogues that bring together religious leaders, government officials, and civil society to discuss challenges and opportunities related to religious freedom. By creating a safe and inclusive space for open communication, we can work to dispel misconceptions, build trust, and strengthen interfaith cooperation, reinforcing the importance of protecting the rights of all faith communities.

Question. If confirmed, what concrete steps can you take to help Lesotho increase their societal and governmental respect for religious freedom?

Answer. If confirmed, I would take a multi-faceted approach to help Lesotho increase societal and governmental respect for religious freedom. In addition to establishing regular forums between government officials, civil society, and religious leaders, I would actively promote cultural exchange initiatives that highlight the diversity of faiths in both the United States and Lesotho. These exchanges would not only foster greater mutual understanding, but also encourage interfaith dialogue, helping to dispel myths and build bridges between different religious communities.

Human Rights

In the State Department's 2023 Country Reports on Human Rights, Lesotho was noted for having no change in its human rights situation in the previous year. However

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 would take several strategic actions to direct our embassy in collaboration with civil society organizations to enhance the human rights situation.

I'd encourage the team to build partnerships that support organizations that serve as watchdogs and can provide accurate information we can use in annual reports. I would also work with civil society to ensure their findings are properly communicated to relevant stakeholders outside of U.S. Government annual reporting to help increase and promote accountability.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to personally engaging civil society on this issue?

Answer. Yes.

State Management and Oversight

Question. Management is a key responsibility for chiefs of mission. How would you describe your management style?

Answer. My management style is founded on three principles: be kind, be clear, be collaborative. Being kind reflects a workplace culture that is respectful, in which harassment or bullying has no place, and that listens to all voices at the table. Being clear reflects sharing information and being intentional about priorities so that we are focused and coordinated. Being collaborative recognizes that the interagency matters, that organizations have their strengths and that we can only achieve the goals the American people have entrusted us with by working together.

Question. Do you believe it is ever acceptable or constructive to berate subordinates, either in public or private?

Answer. No. I believe that it is never acceptable or constructive to berate subordinates, either in public or private.

Question. How do you envision your relationship with the Deputy Chief of Mission?

Answer. As a two-time Deputy Chief of Mission, I know the essential nature of the partnership between the Ambassador and Deputy Chief of Mission. I envision a partnership founded on open communication, trust, and collaboration.

If confirmed, I would establish a productive and respectful working relationship with my Deputy Chief of Mission to ensure that responsibilities are clearly delineated, and the Front Office has a unified vision and voice within the Mission. I would ensure that the DCM has sufficient oversight of the Mission's management and is ready to stand in for me when required, and take the lead on mentorship of Mission personnel, particularly first and second tour officers. If confirmed, I would also ensure that the DCM models professional behavior and tackles any evidence of bullying or harassment proactively, both to hold employees accountable and to deter such activities in the future.

Question. If confirmed, what leadership responsibilities do you intend to entrust to your Deputy Chief of Mission?

Answer. If confirmed, one of my first tasks will be to discuss mission priorities and opportunities with my Deputy Chief of Mission. Beyond the traditional internal management of mission operations, I believe it is also important to provide leadership, public diplomacy, and policy opportunities to the DCM and other members of the team as part of a long-term investment in the foreign service as an institution.

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. Yes. I take the role of mentorship, feedback, and coaching very seriously. I meet regularly with the employees I both rate and review to provide feedback. I place high priority on drafting constructive evaluations with credible assessments of areas needing improvement. If confirmed, I will continue this essential function.

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.

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 accomplish fully their missions?

Answer. Diplomacy cannot be conducted within the walls of our embassies and requires regular engagement with a wide range of actors and organizations to be effective.

In my experience, diplomats could get outside embassy walls more frequently to accomplish their missions without ignoring proper safety precautions where necessary. It is imperative that U.S. diplomats go beyond embassy walls to fully under-

stand the broad range of opinions of the population. This means not only getting outside the building but traveling outside the capital. I would support and encourage all staff to engage broadly with a broad range of actors in Lesotho. I would encourage and support in-country travel and mentor employees on developing innovative ways to engage virtually as well.

Question. How do you intend to ensure that U.S. diplomats are able to access all local populations?

Answer. Regular engagement with a wide range of actors and organizations often requires going to them, in the places they live and work. With the support of a strong management platform and empowered regional security office such that doing so can be done in safe and secure manner will be a priority, if confirmed.

I would provide support for travel to various districts in Lesotho to allow our diplomats to have in-person engagements with local governments, civil society, and the private sectors in those regions. I would increase our social media presence, to include TV media, to reach areas where we do not often cover. I would encourage recipients of our grants to come from regions we do not often work in. Utilizing the strength of the interagency, I would encourage our diplomats to engage in joint visits, where possible, to regions where other U.S. Government agencies have a stronger reach, such as CDC, USAID, DOD, and Peace Corps.

Congressional Delegations (CODELs) and Staff Delegations (STAFFDELs) serve a critical oversight mission.

Question. Do you pledge to support fully CODELs and STAFFDELs that seek to travel to post?

Answer. Yes. I welcome visits from Congressional stakeholders as essential to understanding the challenges and opportunities present in country. Supporting CODEL and STAFFDEL travel should always be a top priority of any embassy to ensure proper collaboration with the legislative branch.

Question. Do you agree to support fully any CODEL or STAFFDEL, with the only exceptions for simultaneous or overlapping visits by the President or First Lady of the United States, the Vice President, or the Secretaries of State or Defense?

Answer. Yes.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO JEREMEY NEITZKE 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 PRC 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 its absolute control of Chinese society and industry, the CCP could stop all of these destructive actions tomorrow if it so chooses. Is the CCP an economic, diplomatic, military, and technological threat to the United States?

Answer. Last 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." As Secretary Blinken has said, under President Xi, the CCP has become more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad. If confirmed, I would advance U.S. national security interests and counter the People's Republic of China (PRC) efforts to expand its problematic influence and use of coercion, through diplomatic engagements, public diplomacy, and commercial advocacy to bolster U.S.-Lesotho ties.

Question. Does the CCP undertake any activities that are beneficial to U.S. interests? If so, please explain.

Answer. As Secretary Blinken has said, under President Xi, the CCP has become more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad. According to the Office of the Director of National Intelligence's 2024 Annual Threat Assessment, the CCP is seeking to "preempt challenges to its reputation and legitimacy, undercutting U.S. influence, driving wedges between Washington and its partners, and fostering global norms that favor its authoritarian system."

Question. Do you believe that there are any areas in which the CCP would constructively work with the United States in good faith, knowing that at any moment Chinese interlocuters with U.S. representatives could be disappeared? If so, please explain.

Answer. The United States will work with the PRC to address transnational challenges, such as climate change, when it is in the U.S. interest to do so. If confirmed, I would work with my colleagues across the U.S. interagency and Congress 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 PRC in the countries or areas in which you will work?

Answer. If confirmed, my priority would be advancing U.S. national security interests in Lesotho 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 Lesotho and the region.

As you may be aware, a group of federal employees penned an open letter to President Biden criticizing U.S. support for Israel in the aftermath of Hamas' brutal terrorist attack on October 7, 2023. In addition, employees from nearly two dozen agencies have staged walkouts in protest of the administration's Israel policy. Efforts like these directly undermine the duty of our diplomats to advance the policies of the President of the United States.

Question. Yes or no, did you sign the letter to the President expressing opposition to the President's Israel policy?

Answer. No, I did not sign the open letter to the President.

Question. Yes or no, did you participate in the January 16, 2024 walkout?

Answer. No, I did not participate.

Question. If confirmed, would you define one of the employees or contractors operating under your supervision signing an open letter criticizing you, or policies you undertake at the instruction of the President, as insubordination as defined by the Government Accountability Office?

Answer. If confirmed, I would seek to address employee concerns personally by creating an open, trusting, and harassment-free work environment. I am mindful of and value Department employees' right to free speech under the First Amendment. Moreover, I understand the expression of disagreement does not in and of itself constitute insubordination. If confirmed, I would work with the Department's Office of the Legal Adviser to determine the proper course of action should such a matter arise.

Question. In your view, are the actions these federal employees took, by anonymously signing a letter to the President of the United States, covered as "whistleblowing?"

Answer. I believe these employees were expressing a dissenting view to their leadership. If confirmed, I would emphasize that employees should have the confidence to directly raise their concerns with their supervisors and management rather than signing an anonymous letter.

Question. If confirmed, how will you address discipline issues, such as insubordination, that do not take established dissent channels?

Answer. If confirmed, I would make sure that employees in our Mission in Lesotho know that there are several avenues available to express policy disagreements. I would encourage employees to use established channels to express their views.

Question. Have you ever expressed support for an Israeli ceasefire in Gaza?

Answer. I support the Administration's efforts to obtain a mutual ceasefire, secure the release of all hostages held by Hamas, and provide more humanitarian assistance to begin restoring the lives of Palestinian civilians in Gaza.

Question. Do you agree that Hamas is an antisemitic entity?

Answer. Yes, Hamas espouses antisemitism. Hamas, which is designated by the United States as a foreign terrorist organization, seeks to eliminate the State of Israel, and its founding charter calls for the killing of Jews.

Question. Would a ceasefire allow these groups to reconstitute and attack Israel, and Americans, in the future?

Answer. The United States remains committed to reaching a deal that protects Israel's security and secures the release of hostages, allowing us to also provide humanitarian aid to civilians in need. Working with partners, the U.S. Government is attempting to secure the release of all hostages held by Hamas. The U.S. Government supports Israel's right to protect itself from Hamas' terrorism consistent with international law.

Question. Do you agree that calling for a ceasefire in Gaza means calling for Israel to stop its pursuit of Hamas, a designated foreign terrorist organization, that orchestrated the October 7 attacks and still refuses to release all Israeli and American hostages?

Answer. Israel will always have the right to defend itself against attacks like the heinous attack on October 7th. The Administration maintains that a comprehensive approach starts with a deal for a ceasefire that would release all hostages.

Question. Do you believe that Israel, in its operation against Hamas, which is known to use civilians as human shields, is taking all necessary steps to minimize civilian casualties?

Answer. The National Security Memorandum-20 report states that the IDF has undertaken steps to implement obligations under international humanitarian law for the protection of civilians in the current conflict, including the requirements related to distinction, proportionality, and precautions in military operations. Israel's own concern is reflected in the fact it has a number of internal investigations underway.

Bilateral relations with Lesotho center on U.S. aid programs, mostly in the health sector, and trade relations under the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA). AGOA requires countries to meet multiple eligibility criteria, including ones relating to the rule of law and political pluralism. Lesotho was designated Tier 3 (worst-performing) in the State Department's 2020 Trafficking in Persons (TIP) report. In 2023, Lesotho was taken off the watch list and classed as a Tier 2 country, one that does not meet minimum standards for TIP elimination, but is making significant efforts to do so.

Question. Do you believe Lesotho is on track to maintain its AGOA eligibility? If not, what actions would you take as ambassador?

Answer. I believe that Lesotho is and will remain on track to maintain AGOA eligibility. Lesotho's participation in AGOA is a tremendous success story. AGOA has served as an irreplaceable catalyst for the country's development and a vehicle for lifting women out of poverty over the last two decades. As a result of the success of its participation in AGOA, the textile industry makes up one-third of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and employs approximately 39,000 workers, predominantly women, making it the country's largest private sector employer. Lesotho's textile industry accounts for more than one-fifth of all AGOA apparel exports to the United States. The country ranks second in the value of goods exported under AGOA and third in volume of goods exported, primarily in textiles. Lesotho has the highest value of AGOA imports per worker at $313 and the second highest AGOA non-crude petroleum utilization rate in 2021.

One of the primary AGOA eligibility requirements is that a country must have established, or make progress towards establishing, a market-based economy. This creates a more-level playing field for U.S. companies doing business in Lesotho and serves as a useful counterweight to actors seeking to influence Lesotho to adopt policies counter to U.S. interests. By creating a more-level playing field for U.S. companies overseas, we contribute to economic prosperity at home, too. The U.S. Government has invested millions of taxpayer dollars to combat poverty, malnutrition, and health pandemics across Lesotho. This investment and effort to create jobs and economic power locally ultimately decreases the U.S. taxpayer burden over the long term.

Question. What is your plan to advance Lesotho's progress on its present TIP challenges?

Answer. The Government of the Kingdom of Lesotho does not fully meet the minimum standards for eliminating trafficking but is making significant efforts to do so. The Embassy team goes beyond simply sharing the annual TIP report to the host nation by organizing briefings with government agencies positioned to act on recommendations that demonstrate Lesotho's progress on improving anti human trafficking efforts. Of note are current conversations spurred by the Mission to ex-

pand shelter options for trafficking survivors as well as identifying ways the justice sector can increase prosecutions of those accused of human trafficking. A U.S. State Department grant funds a 30-month program to increase Lesotho government capacity to prosecute TIP cases and protect victims. If confirmed, I will lead the Embassy Maseru team to continue to encourage and support the Lesotho government to meet U.S. recommendations to combat TIP, such as proactively identify trafficking victims, increase efforts to investigate and prosecute trafficking crimes, and increased collaboration between law enforcement and labor inspectors to facilitate more effective criminal investigations. If confirmed, I will ensure TIP-elated issues remain at the center of discussions with the Lesotho government.

Question. The Office of the Inspector General (OIG) at U.S. Embassy Maputo reported sharp criticisms of the Management Office which you led at the time. Among the findings cited by OIG were widespread dissatisfaction in the Embassy community with human resource management and general service office responsiveness, which both fell under your purview. The report noted that the human resources section's scores were lower than average for both other diplomatic posts in Africa and the worldwide average. What did you learn from this feedback and experience?

Answer. The referenced OIG inspection took place during my first months of arrival and largely reflected the state of management operations I encountered as the new management officer. In part, the challenges identified in the General Services and Human Services offices reflected a lack of personnel and effective training. My efforts and advocacy to address those issues resulted in the first-ever dedicated Human Resources Officer, an assistant General Services Officer, and dozens of new employed Locally Employed Staff—growth necessary due to increasing presence of development and diplomatic personnel as Embassy Mozambique added staff tied to PEPFAR, the first MCC compact, and other expanding U.S. programs. My reforms, training plans, and enforced accountability led to improved embassy operations. For my efforts, I was nominated for and received a Meritorious Honor Award, the citation of which reads, "For exceptional leadership in directing broad institutional change in administrative support systems that markedly improved the working environment and quality of life for all U.S. Mission Maputo employees."

My experience in Mozambique reinforced the fact that effective management operations underpin effective foreign policy execution, priorities which I have consistently applied in my work throughout my career.

Question. If confirmed, how will you prevent similar problems from occurring at the Embassy in Lesotho?

Answer. Management moves diplomacy. That is my underlying management philosophy, meaning that the work we do as diplomats is founded on a sound administrative platform that is accountable, productive, and responsibly manages taxpayer resources. If confirmed, I will mentor and support the management operations of our missions, focused on building an accountable workforce dedicated to implementing U.S. priorities in Lesotho.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO ABIGAIL L. DRESSEL BY SENATOR BENJAMIN L. CARDIN

For the past decade, successive administrations have forged deeper ties with Angola. The Obama Administration initiated the U.S.-Angola Strategic Partnership Dialogue, which was maintained by the Trump administration. The Trump administration later signed a bilateral defense accord during a 2017 visit to Washington, DC. The Biden administration has supported the development of the Lobito rail corridor and related investments and launched a U.S.-Angola Energy Security Dialogue. Secretary Blinken and Defense Secretary Austin have traveled to Angola, and President Biden met with President Lourenço at the White House. All of this signals an increasingly close relationship with a country that Freedom House categorizes as "not free" regarding the exercise of political rights and civil liberties.

Question. To your knowledge, how heavily have fundamental freedoms factored into any of the administration's top officials' engagements with Angola?

Answer. During their November 2023 Oval Office meeting, Presidents Biden and Lourenco committed to increased partnership on issues that define our shared future, including strengthening democracy. Secretary Blinken, in his January 2024 visit to Angola, discussed democracy, governance and human rights in his meeting with President Lourenco and in his public remarks with Foreign Minister Tete An-

tonio. The Secretary noted U.S. support for Angola's advancement of human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the rights to freedoms of expression, including for members of the press, association, peaceful assembly, and religion or belief.

In April 2024, USAID Administrator Power and Deputy Secretary Verma met with representatives of civil society organizations during their visit to Angola to discuss pending legislation on NGOs, a bill on national security (that has since been signed into law), and legislation that would allow for the first-ever local elections in the country. Like Secretary Blinken, Administrator Power also raised these issues during her meeting with President Lourenco, including concerns from civil society about their voices in local decision making, as well as limited press freedom.

If confirmed, I would ensure that my engagement with Angolan and São Tomé and Príncipe officials included discussions of U.S. support for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and I would encourage high level U.S. visitors to do the same.

Question. What steps is the administration asking the Angolans to take with regard to increasing respect for political rights?

Answer. Good governance is one of three central pillars guiding the Embassy's current engagement with both the Angolan government as well as civil society. In addition to democracy and governance programming that works to strengthen civil society and support independent media, U.S. Government officials visiting Angola are briefed on the state of political rights in the country and are encouraged to raise these issues with their interlocutors. The U.S. also continues to advocate for progress on scheduling first-ever municipal elections to further develop inclusive and representative government.

Question. If confirmed, what specific steps will you take to promote political rights and fundamental freedoms?

Answer. If confirmed, I would build on and expand the Embassy's current work to promote political rights and fundamental freedoms. I would continue to communicate consistently with high-level Angolan officials, including to President Lourenco, the importance of setting a date for local elections. I would support and expand U.S. assistance programs that support the strengthening of civil society and independent media. These programs include amplifying civil society and faith-based organizations' roles in free and fair elections and local decision making. I would encourage the government to ensure equitable and transparent registration processes for NGOs and religious organizations seeking official recognition.

I would support and advocate for expansion of the Africa Regional Democracy Fund project to promote press freedom in Angola through specialized training and advocacy, specifically, building the capacity of the Angolan Ombudsperson's office and strengthening Angola's public defenders. If confirmed, I would encourage embassy personnel to identify opportunities where the United States could support Angola along its democratic trajectory, while building strong relationships with civil society and the full spectrum of political parties and independent media.

Last week, Angola's president signed the Bill on the Crimes of Vandalism of Public Goods and Services, which provides prison terms of up to 25 years for people who participate in protests that result in vandalism and service disruptions, and the National Security Bill, which, according to Human Rights Watch "permits excessive government control over media, civil society organizations, and other private institutions."

Question. Has the administration spoken out publicly, expressing concern about the aforementioned legislation?

Answer. To my knowledge, the administration has not spoken out publicly on either of these recently approved laws, although post has reported on developments related to these and other pieces of legislation that could potentially limit civil liberties. The administration will publicly report on the impact of these laws on human rights and fundamental freedoms in the annual Human Rights Report.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to this Committee to speak out about politically restrictive laws and regulations enacted by the Angolan government?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed, I will speak out about politically restrictive laws and regulations enacted by the Angolan government.São Tomé has a positive democratic reputation based largely the fact that it regularly conducts of elections and has peaceful transfers of power. However, opposition parties have repeatedly alleged irregularities during elections, and the State Department reports that governance challenges include "serious problems" with judicial independence and "serious government corruption."

Question. Are you concerned about the state of democracy in São Tomé? What about with judicial independence?

Answer. São Tomé and Príncipe regularly conducts democratic elections with peaceful transfers of power. International observers found the 2022 election to be fair and free of abuses and irregularities despite opposition parties repeatedly alleging irregularities during elections. In the 2023 Human Rights Report, the State Department noted challenges regarding judicial independence and government corruption.

Question. What priorities will you set in terms of support for strengthening democratic governance in São Tomé if confirmed?

Answer. If confirmed, I would work closely with the Government of São Tomé and Príncipe to strengthen democratic governance and to secure resources to support their work in this area. Moreover, I would work with the government, international partners, and international finance institutions to help the country face its economic crisis.

Democracy and Human Rights

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 Angola and São Tomé and Príncipe? What steps will you take to proactively address any efforts to restrict or penalize NGOs and civil society via legal or regulatory measures should they occur?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed, I commit to meet with civil society members, human rights, and other non-governmental organizations in the United States and with local human rights NGOs, and other member of civil society in Angola and São Tomé and Príncipe. In addition, I would use the convening power of the USG to advance inter-religious dialogue, which helps to increase social support for religious freedom. Moreover, I would develop strong relationships with the governments of both countries and engage will the full spectrum of political parties. In my public remarks and in private meetings, I would discuss the importance of an open and democratic society, including the ability of NGOs and civil society to act freely. I will encourage the government to maintain registration processes and regulations that are transparent and equitable.

Question. Will you and your embassy team actively engage with Angola and São Tomé and Príncipe 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 Angola and São Tomé and Príncipe?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed the Embassy team and I would actively engage with Angola and São Tomé and Príncipe on freedom of the press and address any government efforts designed to control or undermine press freedom through legal, regulatory, or other measures. If confirmed, I would commit to meeting regularly, and encouraging my team to do the same, with independent, local press in Angola and São Tomé and Príncipe.

Question. If confirmed, 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 investment and governance, and what will you prioritize in processes to administer such assistance?

Answer. If confirmed, I would utilize U.S. Government assistance resources to promote a more prosperous, democratic, and secure Angola. I would seek to ensure that the significant resources allocated to support investment along the Lobito Corridor and throughout the country resulted in tangible gains for the U.S. and Angolan economies and their people.

I would seek to further strengthen post's support to civil society, independent media and the judiciary by strengthening and expanding current programs, in addition to identifying new ones. I would advocate for support for independent international and domestic election observer missions for Angola's 2027 presidential elections. Finally, I would endeavor to expand military exchange between the United States and Angola's defense sectors.

Question. What are the potential impediments you foresee in advancing democracy in Angola and São Tomé and Príncipe and how do you intend to resolve them?

Answer. While Angola has made significant advances in its democracy in the past several years, the country remains highly centralized and has a winner-take-all electoral system that has been dominated by a single party since independence in 1975.

While opposition parties have gained seats in the National Assembly with each successive election, the ruling People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) still enjoys a legislative majority, allowing the party to enact its agenda with limited need to compromise. I am also concerned with reports that individuals who criticize the government or peacefully protest government policies have been subjected to arrest, imprisonment, and persecution. If confirmed, in my interactions with government officials, I would raise areas of concern related to democratic backsliding while championing positive steps on Angola's democratic trajectory. Furthermore, I would advocate for more participation by civil society and develop strong relationships with the full spectrum of political parties. I would advocate for the government to hold first-ever local elections to further advance inclusive and democratic governance.

The foremost impediment to São Tomé and Príncipe's democracy are the country's current economic challenges caused by limited resources and a significant budget deficit. To prevent these issues from spilling over to the democratic arena, if confirmed, I would work with international partners and the São Tomé and Príncipe government to chart a sustainable path forward.

Management & Accountability

Question. Given the importance of representing the United States' diversity abroad, if confirmed, how will you ensure that our mission's staff and programmatic plans reflect this diversity?

Answer. If confirmed, I would prioritize recruiting, developing, and supporting a workforce that reflects the diversity of the United States. I would harness the unique experiences and backgrounds of this team to advance U.S. foreign policy objectives. I would ensure transparency across staffing procedures, to include hiring and promotion. The same transparency would be fundamental in embassy programming, where I would ensure that the mission's initiatives and development assistance actively incorporate the perspectives of U.S. staff as well as of diverse communities in Angola and São Tomé and Príncipe. I would encourage the Embassy team to build robust relationships across all sectors and implement systems to strategically plan U.S. Government events, outreach, and travel, and assistance fully incorporating, acknowledging and celebrating the rich diversity of the United States and Angola and São Tomé and Príncipe.

Question. As a career member of the Foreign Service, please share how your experience in various posts has prepared you to advance the agency's mission of fostering inclusive diplomacy/foreign assistance?

Answer. As a two-time Deputy Chief of Mission, I supported mission Argentina as we developed a recruitment process that encouraged applications from local candidates throughout the entire country, not just the capital city. This initiative served to support effectively the mission's increased outreach and diplomacy with Argentina's 23 provinces. Moreover, I ensured that representation on the Local Employed Staff Committee included individuals in varied positions and with differing longevity at post, so that embassy management could get fulsome feedback about issues confronting all Locally Employed staff. I set in place processes to develop guest lists that represented the full spectrum of host-nation counterparts.

With regards to foreign assistance, in Mozambique, I worked closely with the PEPFAR team, to ensure that our health assistance and diplomacy included the broadest range of affected populations. If confirmed, I will remain focused on this issue in accordance with Department policies.

Question. Will you commit to using your position, if confirmed, to promote the human rights and dignity of all people in Angola and São Tomé and Príncipe, no matter their race or ethnicity, religion, nationality, disability, sexual orientation or gender identity? What specifically will you do to prioritize and to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in Angola and São Tomé and Príncipe? if confirmed?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed, I would commit to using my position to promote the human rights and dignity of all people in Angola and São Tomé and Príncipe, no matter their race or ethnicity, religion or belief, nationality, disability, sexual orientation or gender identity. I would build on and expand Embassy Luanda's efforts to support education and life skills training for visually impaired youth, and inclusive economic growth projects such as the initiative along the Lobito Corridor that will match workforce skills with private sector needs.

In the administration of our foreign assistance, I would advocate for geographic diversity of programs, even in a small country like São Tomé and Príncipe. Moreover, I would develop a network of contacts that represent the diversity of Angola

and São Tomé and Príncipe. I would support the Embassy team in their efforts to do the same.

Question. What challenges do LGBTQI+ people face in Angola and São Tomé and Príncipe? What specifically will you commit to do to help LGBTQI+ people in Angola and São Tomé and Príncipe if confirmed?

Answer. Angola is one of a few African countries with a legislative framework protecting LGBTQI+ people. However, enforcement of those laws is uneven, LGBTQI+ organizations have limited resources, and LGBTQI+ individuals face resistance in being accepted. While not criminalized, homosexuality is stigmatized in São Tomé and Príncipe. Members of the LGBTQI+ community can face ostracism and discrimination.

If confirmed, I would work with the Embassy team, as well as LGBTQI+ community members and organizations, to advocate respect for the human rights of all. I would explore opportunities to enhance embassy support for LGBTQI+ NGOs in Angola, recognizing the discrimination LGBTQI+ Angolans faced in obtaining education, employment, health care, and housing. Additionally, I would engage with the LGBTQI+ community in São Tomé and Príncipe to understand and address their concerns and needs, while doing no harm.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO ABIGAIL L. DRESSEL BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

Lobito Corridor

Question. The Lobito Corridor aims to advance U.S. strategic interests by securing critical minerals, yet it remains a costly project without guaranteed benefits for U.S. taxpayers. If confirmed as ambassador, how will you ensure the project's long-term feasibility and value for taxpayer dollars? Will you commit to raising concerns about its viability in interagency discussions?

Answer. The Lobito Corridor is a transformational opportunity to bring critical mineral resources to the world and to connect local populations to global supply chains. Beyond the renovation of the railroad line, the project will develop renewable energy, telecommunications, and agriculture throughout the corridor to bring tangible benefits to the economies and people of the United States and Angola. If confirmed, I would seek to ensure the project's long-term feasibility and value for taxpayer's dollars by working closely with the U.S. interagency and private sector to identify and resolve challenges during the project's execution. If confirmed, I would also encourage programs to enhance the oversight capacities of key government audit institutions.

Yes, if confirmed, I would commit to raising concerns about its viability in interagency discussions.

Question. While countering China's influence is critical in U.S. engagement with Angola, the U.S. must uphold its principles of democracy, good governance, and anti-corruption. Do you believe these principles are being fully applied to U.S. policy on Angola, particularly about U.S. support for the Lobito Corridor?

Answer. I believe the principles of democracy, good governance, and anti-corruption are being fully applied to U.S. policy on Angola, particularly in relation to U.S. support for the Lobito Corridor. If confirmed, I would continue to uphold these standards and work with governmental and nongovernmental partners to further strengthen governance in Angola.

Angola has moved up 51 places on the Corruption Perceptions Index since 2017 and in 2022 joined the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI). Since 2019, the USAID-funded FSVC project to improve the efficiency and transparency of government procurement has contributed to this achievement. Many tenders are now publicly competed, and there is increased regulation and oversight of the banking sector.

Democracy and Governance

Question. How do you plan to address democracy and governance issues in Angola while navigating the challenges of great power competition?

Answer. I do not believe that addressing democracy and governance issues and navigating the challenges of great power competition are mutually exclusive. If confirmed, I would work to take advantage of President Lourenco's stated desire to work with market economies to continue to demonstrate to him and the Angolan people the benefits of working with the United States. I would seek to establish a

positive and affirmative agenda that built on the efforts Angola has made to advance democratic and governance issues while continuing to advance necessary political and economic reforms.

Question. What is your view of the role of a U.S. ambassador in supporting democratic institutions and democratic governance?

Answer. The United States has a vested interest in advancing democracy around the world, and a U.S. ambassador plays an important role by publicly advocating for and supporting programs and institutions that promote free and fair elections, judicial independence, good governance, and the protection of human rights. Democracies value and protect the intellectual, social, and economic contributions of their citizens, and in my view, a successful U.S. ambassador underscores these values through their engagements with the government, media, and public, and by their leadership and management of U.S. Mission and taxpayer resources.

Question. Do you commit to using your platform as U.S. Ambassador to Angola and São Tomé and Príncipe, if confirmed, to publicly amplify and support the democratic aspirations of the people of Angola and São Tomé and Príncipe?

Answer. I firmly believe that democracy remains the best tool we have to unleash our full human potential. I have promoted democratic principles in public and private throughout my tenure, as well as in previous posts. If confirmed, I commit to using my platform as U.S. Ambassador to Angola and São Tomé and Príncipe to publicly amplify and support the democratic aspirations of the people of Angola and São Tomé and Príncipe.

São Tomé and Príncipe

Question. If confirmed, you will be based in Angola, but also Ambassador to São Tomé and Príncipe. How will you approach being Ambassador to São Tomé and Príncipe as a small island country without a full Mission?

Answer. If confirmed, I would be fully committed to advancing U.S. interests in both Angola and in São Tomé and Príncipe. I would travel quarterly to São Tomé and Príncipe to consult and build strong relationships with the government, civil society, business, and other international partners and would encourage regular visits by other Embassy staff. I would ensure the officer providing dedicated coverage to the archipelago and the local staff based there had the guidance and resources to successfully advance U.S. policy goals. I would ensure proper management and oversight of U.S. Government resources in São Tomé and Príncipe.

Question. In your opinion, what are the U.S.'s strategic priorities in our relationship with Sao Tomé and Príncipe? Do you think U.S. engagement with São Tomé and Príncipe historically has matched its strategic importance?

Answer. The United States' strategic priorities in our relationship with São Tomé and Príncipe include supporting the country's strong democracy and governance record, including the peaceful transition of power between political parties; promoting peace and security through maritime security cooperation and the Atlantic Partnership initiative; and, supporting São Tomé and Príncipe's economic development to strengthen its economy while working with international partners to help the country find a solution to its budget deficit. The U.S. engagement at Embassy Luanda has included regular and systematic visits to São Tomé and Príncipe to engage with a wide variety of actors on U.S. foreign policy priorities. If confirmed, I would seek to continue and further expand U.S. engagement in line with available resources.

Trade, Investment & Economic Diversification

Question. How will you practice commercial diplomacy on behalf of U.S. investments in Angola?

Answer. If confirmed, I would develop strong relationships with U.S. businesses and U.S. business associations in Angola in close cooperation with the Foreign Commercial Service office in the Embassy. I would strive to understand U.S. businesses' concerns and challenges in the local operating environment. I would advocate vigorously for their interests in Angola. I would engage with the Government of Angola to advocate for a level-playing field for U.S. businesses and transparency in public tenders and work to ensure tenders included language requiring bids from trusted vendors. I would welcome U.S. trade missions to Angola, and I would aim to lead reverse trade missions to the United States to promote Angolan investment in the United States. I would actively seek out opportunities for U.S. businesses in Angola. Finally, I would actively support the SelectUSA inward investment program to encourage Angolan investment in the United States.

Question. How will you practice commercial diplomacy on behalf of U.S. investments in São Tomé and Príncipe?

Answer. If confirmed, I would develop strong relationships with U.S. businesses and U.S. business associations in São Tomé and Príncipe in close cooperation with the Foreign Commercial Service office in the Embassy. I would strive to understand U.S. businesses' concerns and challenges in the local operating environment. I would advocate vigorously for their interests in São Tomé and Príncipe. I would engage with the Government of São Tomé and Príncipe to advocate for a level-playing field for U.S. businesses and transparency in public tenders and work to ensure tenders included language requiring bids from trusted vendors. I would welcome U.S. trade missions to São Tomé and Príncipe. I would actively seek out opportunities for U.S. businesses in São Tomé and Príncipe. Finally, I would actively support the SelectUSA inward investment program to encourage São Tomé and Príncipe investment in the United States.

Question. What is your assessment of Angola's greatest barriers to increased two-way trade and investment with the United States?

Answer. Angola remains a beneficiary of the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA). Every year, Angola and all other beneficiaries must be evaluated by an interagency committee to determine whether the country meets the AGOA eligibility criteria. One of these requirements is the reduction or elimination of barriers to U.S. trade and investment. While Angola is currently eligible for AGOA benefits, concerns remain about some barriers to trade, including import quotas on some food and beverage items and delays in obtaining import licenses. If confirmed, I would discuss our concerns regarding trade barriers and import quotas with the appropriate Angolan authorities.

Question. As U.S. Ambassador to Angola and São Tomé and Príncipe, how would you use tools like Prosper Africa to address trade and investment barriers and promote necessary economic and political reforms?

Answer. If confirmed, I would seek to leverage Prosper Africa's experience, resources, and partnerships with private sector companies across sub-Saharan Africa to promote economic growth and resilience and to link Angola to regional markets supported through Prosper Africa's programs. I would consult with Prosper Africa's leadership and its constituent agencies to learn about its work in Angola and what efforts that have already been made to address trade and investment barriers and promote necessary economic and political reforms. I would work with the team at Embassy Luanda on these issues, encouraging them to engage with Prosper Africa as a resource and a force multiplier.

Question. How will you work with Prosper Africa leadership to ensure that Angola and São Tomé and Príncipe can benefit from Prosper Africa resources, tools and expertise?

Answer. If confirmed, I would seek to leverage Prosper Africa's experience, resources, and partnerships with private sector companies across sub-Saharan Africa to promote economic growth and resilience and to link São Tomé and Príncipe to regional markets supported through Prosper Africa's programs. I would consult with Prosper Africa leadership to learn more about their existing programs in Angola and São Tomé and Príncipe as well as hear their perspective on what challenges and opportunities exist in those countries. I would work with the team at Embassy Luanda on these issues, encouraging them to engage with Prosper Africa as a resource and a force multiplier.

Question. What specific initiatives would you support to promote Angola's economic diversification in sectors like agriculture and mining where U.S. expertise could be beneficial?

Answer. In the agricultural sector, if confirmed, I would build on Angola's participation in the Vision for Adaptive Crops and Soils (VACS) program in which the United States and Angola are partnering to boost agricultural productivity and nutrition by developing diverse, climate-resilient crop varieties and building healthy, fertile soils. I would also work closely with USAID colleagues who are expanding support to smallholder farming communities along the Lobito Corridor in partnership with the Angolan private sector, to increase their productivity and incomes with a focus on women's empowerment. Given the immense opportunities that exist for the development of Angola's agriculture sector, I would advocate for Angola's inclusion in the Feed the Future initiative. Moreover, I would work with private industry and the U.S. interagency to explore financing options for commercial agriculture along the Lobito corridor. With USAID's New FY 24 USAID Economic Resilience Funds, we will channel the Lobito Corridor's economic benefits for broad-

based, inclusive economic growth. This will include exploring opportunities to match workforce skills with private sector needs—and to support diversity in employment—and support the industrialization of agricultural inputs and outputs for regional export markets, linking to U.S. business interests and expertise.

In the mining sector, if confirmed, I would support the joint Embassy Luanda/U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) project to build on USGS's existing partnership with Angola's geological institute and create and deliver, in a free and open-access platform, newly collected geoscience data and derivative products that will attract interest and investment in the Angola mining sector. This effort would foster a level-playing field for all players interested in exploring for and developing mineral resources in Angola.

Question. How would you ensure economic reforms and diversification efforts benefit the broader population, particularly in rural areas?

Answer. The Lobito Corridor is an excellent example of how economic reforms and diversification efforts can benefit the broader population. For example, the EXIM-financed Sun Africa project will use solar power and sub-stations to bring electricity to rural populations. Another project along the corridor empowers small farmers to use the railway to sell their goods, increasing local food production and enhancing national food security. Through a public private partnership with USAID, the U.S. owned telecommunications firm Africell launched a mobile money platform that supports these small farmers to make and receive payments, enhancing their operational efficiency by drastically reducing their dependence on cash transactions. In addition, U.S.-based Acrow Corporation, with $380 million in EXIM financing, is building 186 prefabricated bridges to support critical infrastructure in Angola and permit better mobility for isolated populations. If confirmed, I will continue to support these projects while advocating for economic efforts that provide tangible benefits to all Angolans, especially those in rural areas.

Question. How can U.S. development assistance support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Angola to foster job creation and inclusive growth?

Answer. Up until FY 2024, all U.S. development assistance to Angola was health related, effectively limiting the U.S. Government's direct work to support the Angolan private sector. More recently, however, the mission began taking advantage of new opportunities to engage with the private sector through central funds. One example entails support for smallholder women farmers in the provinces that contain the Lobito Corridor in partnership with a larger Angolan agribusiness that supports and purchases the increased volume of produce from these communities, thereby increasing their income.

The Embassy's ongoing partnership with U.S.-owned business Africell helps the company commercialize their mobile money platform, Afrimoney, benefiting smaller businesses by easing transaction costs. This partnership was made possible by USAID's Enterprises for Development, Growth, and Empowerment (EDGE) fund. Just this year, Angola was selected to receive Economic Resilience Funds. With these resources, USAID will expand its partnerships with the Angolan private sector to help ensure that Angolans have the necessary skills to fill the thousands of new jobs being created through USG investment in the Lobito Corridor. This assistance will also support broader efforts by the World Bank, development assistance from our allies, and others, to create new opportunities for SME growth in Angola outside of the natural resources sector, with the goal of supporting Angola's top line development objective of economic diversification, which in turn we believe is the key to more inclusive growth in Angola. If confirmed, I will support and expand on these efforts.

Question. How would you leverage U.S. technology to improve Angola's agricultural productivity and food security?

Answer. If confirmed, I would take advantage of U.S. digital technology to create and support platforms that put more information in the hands of small holder famers and producers. I would work with my team, the Government of Angola, and industry to use these platforms to link purchases to sellers and lower transaction costs. Moreover, I would take advantage of U.S. research and technological know-how to share more resilient seeds and best practices with Angolan partners. For example, Angola was recently selected for inclusion in the Vision for Adaptable Crops and Soils (VACS) initiative, as announced by Secretary Blinken during his January 2024 visit to Angola. The VACS initiative features partnerships with CGIAR, the global partnership that unites international organizations engaged in research about food security, led by U.S. land grant universities. The Mission is looking forward to its partnership with International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) in implementing this initiative. Building on this, the Mission would like to

begin new exchange programs with U.S. land grant universities, linking to other development assistance programs that are working directly with smallholder farmers to increase their productivity and food security in partnership with larger local Angolan agribusinesses.

Question. How would you address Angola's significant external debt to promote sustainable economic growth and diversification?

Answer. If confirmed, I would work closely with the Angolan government and the Department of Treasury to maintain the U.S. Department of Treasury advisor embedded within the Ministry of Finance since 2022. Through this program, Angola has developed new techniques for issuing public debt and managing liabilities, allowing the country to reduce risk, lower borrowing costs, and limit reliance on foreign borrowing. Equivalent to approximately 80 percent of GDP, Angola's general government debt and its debt servicing costs remain sizeable, with approximately 25 percent of this debt owed to the PRC and PRC state-owned enterprises including banks. I would work closely with the IMF and other international and multi-lateral development banks to understand Angola's macroeconomic situation and how it could most effectively address and manage its debt.

Trafficking in Persons

In the State Department's 2024 Trafficking in Persons Report, Angola remained on Tier 2 but remains behind in several key areas. São Tomé and Príncipe was not listed in the report.

Question. If confirmed, what concrete steps could you take to help Angola operationalize the prioritized recommendations contained in the TIP report?

Answer. One of Angola's principal challenges in confronting trafficking in persons is a lack of capacity and resources. If confirmed, I would consult with my colleagues in the J/TIP office to understand their perspectives on how to most effectively engage the Angolan government on trafficking issues and to advocate for resources to help the Angolans build capacity to address recommendations in the report. At post, I would work with the country team to develop and implement an action plan to address the recommendations from the report, focusing on building Angolan capacity to respond to recommendations. Finally, I would work with this committee and other relevant committees and members of Congress on trafficking issues, inviting members to come to Angola and meet with their legislative counterparts in the Angolan National Assembly to demonstrate the importance of improving Angola's anti trafficking in persons legislative framework.

Question. As U.S. Ambassador to São Tomé and Príncipe, how will you make anti-trafficking a priority in the bilateral relationship?

Answer. If confirmed, I would continue the existing engagement by Embassy Luanda with law enforcement and justice officials in São Tomé and Príncipe on this issue. In general, as was reported in the 2023 Human Rights Report, there were no confirmed reports that traffickers exploited domestic or foreign victims in the country or that traffickers exploited victims from abroad in São Tomé and Príncipe. If confirmed, I pledge that Embassy Luanda will continue monitoring and reporting on the situation in consultation with relevant interlocutors in São Tomé and Príncipe and, should the need arise, provide relevant capacity-building resources to help identify and aid any victims of trafficking and bringing their traffickers to justice.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to accurately and honestly portraying the reality of the trafficking situation in Angola and São Tomé and Príncipe to Congress via the annual Trafficking in Persons report?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed I commit to accurately and honestly portray the reality of the trafficking situation in Angola and São Tomé and Príncipe to Congress via the annual Trafficking in Persons report.

Question. Why is São Tomé and Príncipe not listed in the 2024 Trafficking in Persons report?

Answer. The State Department did not receive any confirmed reports of trafficking in persons in São Tomé and Príncipe during the reporting cycle for the 2024 Trafficking in Persons report.

Religious Freedom

In the State Department's 2023 Report International Religious Freedom, it was noted both São Tomé and Príncipe and Angola have limited 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. Both Angola and São Tomé and Príncipe allow religious groups to register and operate within their countries. In Angola, the 2023 report noted U.S. officials raised with the Angolan government delayed registration approvals for some religious groups. If confirmed, I would consult with the Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom to understand his concerns about both countries. Once at post, I would meet with religious leaders and government officials to hear from them about the situation on the ground, including religious groups facing issues with the registration process. I would invite the Ambassador-at-Large to visit Angola and São Tomé and Príncipe, leveraging his visit with both governments to encourage a greater commitment to religious freedom.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to personally engaging with civil society on this issue?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed, I commit to personally engaging with civil society on this issue.

Question. If confirmed, what concrete steps can you take to help Angola and São Tomé and Príncipe increase their societal and governmental respect for religious freedom?

Answer. Using the annual International Religious Freedom Report, if confirmed, I would encourage the Embassy team to build a religious engagement strategy, including deploying other mission leaders and me to engage government and civil society in both countries on respecting religious freedom. I would expect this strategy to include public and private meetings, as well as public campaigns built around important religious festivals or holidays throughout the year. I would also consult my Public Affairs Section leveraging exchange programs to engage with government and civil society leaders on religious freedom.

Human Rights

In the State Department's 2023 Country Reports on Human Rights, Angola and São Tomé and Príncipe were both listed as having no significant changes in the human rights situation but were also noted as having significant 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. Incorporating the voices and perspectives of civil society is essential for fostering open and accountable governance. If confirmed, I would collaborate closely with civil society to gain insights that will guide the Embassy's engagement with the government, as I have successfully done in previous assignments. Additionally, I would advocate for the Governments of Angola and São Tomé and Príncipe to safeguard human rights and fundamental freedoms, including freedom of expression and for members of the press. I would also promote the development of a robust, independent, and inclusive civil society that reflects the diversity of both countries.

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 this issue.

State Management and Oversight

Question. Management is a key responsibility for Chiefs of Mission. How would you describe your management style?

Answer. My management style is to establish an environment of trust, transparency, and openness with excellent communication where team members feel appreciated and empowered. I seek to build on the strengths of each individual to produce the best possible results. I offer constructive feedback and invite my team members to do the same for me. I seek to set a vision, work with my team to develop strategies to execute it, and provide them the support and resources that they need to be successful. I strive to lead by example in establishing the highest ethical standards for my team and myself. I endeavor to be a leader who is present, who makes timely decisions with the best information at hand, and who supports her team as it takes measured risk. If confirmed, I would also seek to establish a productive and respectful working relationship with my Deputy Chief of Mission to ensure that responsibilities are clearly delineated, and the Front Office has a unified vision and voice within the Mission.

Question. Do you believe it is ever acceptable or constructive to berate subordinates, either in public or in private?

Answer. No. I believe that it is never acceptable or constructive to berate subordinates, either in public or private.

Question. How do you envision your relationship with the Deputy Chief of Mission?

Answer. If confirmed, I would establish a productive and respectful working relationship with my Deputy Chief of Mission to ensure that responsibilities are clearly delineated and the Front Office has a unified vision and voice within the Mission. I would ensure that the DCM has sufficient oversight of the Mission's management and is ready to stand in for me when required, and take the lead on mentorship of Mission personnel, particularly first and second tour officers. If confirmed, I would also ensure that the DCM models professional behavior and tackles any evidence of bullying or harassment proactively, both to hold employees accountable and to deter such activities in the future.

Question. If confirmed, what leadership responsibilities do you intend to entrust to your Deputy Chief of Mission?

Answer. As a two-time Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM), I understand the role well and believe strongly that open communication, trust and transparency are essential in the Ambassador—DCM relationship. If confirmed, I would partner with the DCM on all aspects of mission leadership, including advancing strategic priorities and Embassy management and oversight. I would include the DCM in all meetings, working groups and engagements while entrusting the DCM with internal daily management and mentoring. Moreover, I would encourage the DCM to take part in public engagements, and to the lead on specific policy portfolios, to enhance their professional development. I would meet regularly with the DCM to discuss strategic priorities, Embassy morale, and operations.

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. Yes. I place high priority on drafting constructive evaluations with credible assessments of areas needing improvement. I have provided this type of constructive feedback throughout my career, and if confirmed, I would continue to do so at Embassy Luanda.

Question. If confirmed, will 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.

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, diplomats could get outside Embassy walls more frequently to accomplish their missions without ignoring proper safety precautions where necessary. It is imperative that U.S. diplomats go beyond Embassy walls to fully understand the broad range of opinions of the population. This means not only getting outside the building but traveling outside the capital. I would support and encourage all staff to engage broadly with a broad range of actors in Angola and São Tomé and Príncipe. I would encourage and support in-country travel and mentor employees on developing innovative ways to engage virtually as well.

Question. How do you intend to improve the ability of U.S. diplomats to better access all local populations?

Answer. I would provide support for travel to various districts in Angola and São Tomé and Príncipe to allow our diplomats to have in-person engagements with local governments, civil society, and the private sectors in those regions. I would increase our social media presence, to include TV media, to reach areas where we do not often cover. I would encourage recipients of our grants to come from regions we do

not often work in. Utilizing the strength of the interagency, I would encourage our diplomats to engage in joint visits, where possible, to regions where other U.S. Government agencies have a stronger reach, such as CDC, USAID, DOD, and Peace Corps.

Question. Congressional Delegations (CODELs) and Staff Delegations (STAFFDELs) serve a critical oversight mission. Do you pledge to support fully CODELs and STAFFDELs that seek to travel to post?

Answer. Yes. Supporting CODEL and STAFFDEL travel should always be a top priority of any Embassy to ensure proper collaboration with the legislative branch.

Question. Do you agree to support fully any CODEL or STAFFDEL, with the only exceptions for simultaneous or overlapping visits by the President or First Lady of the United States, the Vice President, or the Secretaries of State or Defense?

Answer. Yes. I agree to support fully any CODEL or STAFFDEL, with the only exceptions for simultaneous or overlapping visits by the President or First Lady of the United States, the Vice President, or the Secretaries of State or Defense.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO ABIGAIL L. DRESSEL 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 PRC 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 its absolute control of Chinese society and industry, the CCP could stop all of these destructive actions tomorrow if it so chooses. Is the CCP an economic, diplomatic, military, and technological threat to the United States?

Answer. Last 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." As Secretary Blinken has said, 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 efforts of the People's Republic of China (PRC) to expand its problematic influence, through robust and forthright diplomatic engagements, public diplomacy, and commercial advocacy to bolster U.S.-Angola ties.

Question. Does the CCP undertake any activities that are beneficial to U.S. interests? If so, please explain.

Answer. As Secretary Blinken has said, under President Xi, the CCP has become more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad. According to the Office of the Director of National Intelligence's 2024 Annual Threat Assessment, the CCP is seeking to "preempt challenges to its reputation and legitimacy, undercutting U.S. influence, driving wedges between Washington and its partners, and fostering global norms that favor its authoritarian system."

Question. Do you believe that there are any areas in which the CCP would constructively work with the United States in good faith, knowing that at any moment Chinese interlocuters with U.S. representatives could be disappeared? If so, please explain.

Answer. The United States will work with the PRC to address transnational challenges, such as climate change, when it is in the U.S. interest to do so. If confirmed, I would work with my colleagues across the U.S. interagency and Congress 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 PRC in the countries or areas in which you will work?

Answer. If confirmed, my priority will be advancing U.S. national security interests in Angola and São Tomé and Príncipe 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 Angola and São Tomé and Príncipe, and the region.

Question. As you may be aware, a group of federal employees penned an open letter to President Biden criticizing U.S. support for Israel in the aftermath of Hamas' brutal terrorist attack on October 7, 2023. In addition, employees from nearly two dozen agencies have staged walkouts in protest of the administration's Israel policy. Efforts like these directly undermine the duty of our diplomats to advance the policies of the President of the United States. Yes or no, did you sign the letter to the President expressing opposition to the President's Israel policy?

Answer. No, I did not sign the open letter to the President.

Question. Yes or no, did you participate in the January 16, 2024 walkout?

Answer. No, I did not participate.

Question. If confirmed, would you define one of the employees or contractors operating under your supervision signing an open letter criticizing you, or policies you undertake at the instruction of the President, as insubordination as defined by the Government Accountability Office?

Answer. If confirmed, I plan to create an environment of trust in which personnel are able to express opinions and to use dissent channels and understand the importance of constructive dissent. Moreover, I understand the expression of disagreement does not in and of itself constitute insubordination. If confirmed, I would work with the Department's Office of the Legal Adviser to determine the proper course of action should such a matter arise.

Question. In your view, are the actions these federal employees took, by anonymously signing a letter to the President of the United States, covered as "whistleblowing?"

Answer. I believe these employees were expressing a dissenting view to their leadership. I support employees' right to express their views and hope that employees feel confident to directly raise their concerns with their supervisors and management without fear of reprisal. "Whistleblowing" is a term and activity covered by federal legislation and regulations; I defer to the Department's Office of the Legal Adviser to determine whether the referenced actions are considered protected whistleblowing activity.

Question. If confirmed, how will you address discipline issues, such as insubordination, that do not take established dissent channels?

Answer. If confirmed, I would address discipline issues, including insubordination, in accordance with Department procedures and by seeking guidance, including from the Management Support Unit. I would document the conduct and provide counseling to the employee, offering opportunity for improvement. If continued violations occur, disciplinary measures would be taken consistent with personnel policies.

Question. Have you ever expressed support for an Israeli ceasefire in Gaza?

Answer. I support the Administration's efforts to obtain a mutual ceasefire, secure the release of all hostages held by Hamas, and provide more humanitarian assistance to begin restoring the lives of Palestinian civilians in Gaza.

Question. Do you agree that Hamas is an antisemitic entity?

Answer. Yes, Hamas espouses antisemitism. Hamas, which is designated by the United States as a foreign terrorist organization, seeks to eliminate the State of Israel, and its founding charter calls for the killing of Jews.

Question. Would a ceasefire allow these groups to reconstitute and attack Israel, and Americans, in the future?

Answer. The United States remains committed to reaching a deal that protects Israel's security and secures the release of hostages, allowing us to also provide humanitarian aid to civilians in need. Working with partners, the U.S. Government is attempting to secure the release of all hostages held by Hamas. The U.S. Government supports Israel's right to protect itself from Hamas' terrorism consistent with international law.

Question. Do you agree that calling for a ceasefire in Gaza means calling for Israel to stop its pursuit of Hamas, a designated foreign terrorist organization, that orchestrated the October 7 attacks and still refuses to release all Israeli and American hostages?

Answer. Israel will always have the right to defend itself against attacks like the heinous attack on October 7th. The Administration maintains that a comprehensive approach starts with a deal for a ceasefire that would release all hostages.

Question. Do you believe that Israel, in its operation against Hamas, which is known to use civilians as human shields, is taking all necessary steps to minimize civilian casualties?

Answer. The National Security Memorandum-20 report states that the IDF has undertaken steps to implement obligations under international humanitarian law for the protection of civilians in the current conflict, including the requirements related to distinction, proportionality, and precautions in military operations. Israel's own concern is reflected in the fact it has a number of internal investigations underway.

Question. The U.S. Government has sought to strengthen bilateral ties with Angola by providing or pledging investments, including for the regional Lobito rail corridor project, designed, in part, to help develop African mineral supply chains not controlled by China, and by increasing defense cooperation. However, Angola has also retained close ties to both Russia and the PRC. The PRC has also expressed interest in São Tomé and Príncipe in the past as a possible deep-sea container port and regional logistics hub. What is your assessment of the extent of Russia and China's economic, diplomatic, and military influence in Angola and how does such activity affect U.S. interests?

Answer. Following the end of Angola's civil war in 2002, the PRC became the country's primary partner for reconstruction. As a result, Angola was heavily indebted to the PRC in oil-backed loans. In recent years, though, Angola has sought to recalibrate its relationship with the PRC, and pledged to increase cooperation with "market-based economies." While the PRC continues to invest in multiple sectors in Angola and has an active diplomatic presence there, the Government's new approach has provided tangible opportunities for the United States and like-minded countries.

If confirmed, I would leverage opportunities like Angola hosting the U.S.'Africa Business Summit in 2025 to highlight the benefits of working with United States. I would use U.S. technical assistance and high-level messaging to bolster Angola's anti-corruption efforts and economic reforms, knowing that this improved environment would increase the competitiveness of U.S. firms in Angola. If confirmed, I would lead the Embassy in identifying and promoting opportunities for American companies, advocating for their participation in tenders and investment prospects. Moreover, I would work to move forward and expand the Lobito Corridor and its associated projects to show results of U.S. partnership.

Angola and Russia have a close and long-standing bilateral relationship dating back to the USSR's assistance to African national liberation movements. In recent years, however, Angola has voted in favor of the territorial integrity of Ukraine at the United Nations and sought to replace its Soviet-era military equipment with NATO compatible articles. If confirmed, I would seek to consolidate the progress made on the U.S.'Angola military partnership and our shared support for Ukraine.

Question. If confirmed, how would you limit overall Russian and Chinese influence in Angola?

Answer. The best way to limit Russian and PRC influence in Angola is to continue to offer an alternative style of partnership based on mutual respect. The United States views Angola as a strategic partner and regional leader, and the U.S.-Angola partnership is critical to advancing our shared goals for expanding economic prosperity and energy access, upholding democracy and human rights, and advancing regional security.

Question. Although recent developments indicate PRC infrastructure initiatives in São Tomé and Príncipe appear to have fallen through, if confirmed, how would you continue to monitor this situation and limit PRC influence?

Answer. Embassy Luanda has an office with locally employed staff located in São Tomé and Príncipe, with one American employee in the Political and Economic Section in Luanda dedicated to monitor developments in São Tomé and Príncipe. If confirmed, I would work to strengthen the team focused on São Tomé and Príncipe, and I would expect to travel there quarterly to engage with the government, business, and civil society.

In addition, if confirmed, I would continue to work with our international partners to try to secure additional funding to help address São Tomé and Príncipe's budget shortfall. I believe the best way to limit PRC influence in São Tomé and Príncipe

is to be an active and engaged partner dedicated to working with the government and people to find solutions to their challenges.

Question. Angola's ruling party, the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola, is part of the "Former Liberation Movements of Southern Africa," a regional grouping of left-wing nationalist movements. This grouping has close party-to-party ties with the CCP. If confirmed, how would you engage with Angola given the ruling party's longstanding ties with Beijing?

Answer. If confirmed, I would build on and continue the administration's efforts to demonstrate to the Angolan government and people the benefits of a positive relationship with the United States. Since President Lourenco was elected in 2017, Angola has demonstrated that it is seeking a strategic partnership with the United States and other likeminded countries. If confirmed, I would advocate tirelessly for U.S. businesses, while keeping myself and the Embassy team well-informed about PRC-related developments in Angola.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO JAMES HOLTSNIDER BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

Strategic Competition in Indo-Pacific

Question. How would a strengthened U.S. diplomatic presence in Apia with a resident U.S. Ambassador affect U.S. relations with Samoa and the region? What would be the likely short-term and long-term effects?

Answer. A strengthened U.S. diplomatic presence in Apia with a resident Ambassador would significantly benefit U.S. relations with Samoa and the region. Samoa is strategically located in the Pacific Islands, a region where geopolitical competition is intensifying. The presence of a resident U.S. Ambassador is crucial to counterbalance growing PRC influence and to ensure that Samoa remains aligned with democratic values and U.S. interests. The Samoan government has long been asking for a U.S. resident Ambassador. A resident Ambassador would signal to the Samoan people that we value our bilateral relationship.

If confirmed, I would seek to enhance communication and collaboration with the Samoan government on issues of mutual interest, such as maritime security, law enforcement cooperation, and economic development. In the long-term, I would seek to ensure a more stable and prosperous Samoa, less susceptible to PRC influence. If confirmed, I would advocate for strong U.S. leadership in the Pacific, promoting a rules-based international order.

Question. You have spent your career working on Middle East issues. If confirmed, what lessons will you bring to your role as the first resident U.S. Ambassador to Samoa? What would be your top three priorities on the ground?

Answer. In my work in Somalia, it became clear to me that there is no substitute for a fulsome interagency presence on the ground to advance U.S. national security interests. Based on my previous experience in Middle Eastern assignments, I have learned the importance of working closely with partners and allies. If confirmed, I would commit to engaging regularly with our Australian, British, Japanese, and New Zealand counterparts. In Kuwait, I was reminded of the importance of regional constructs like the Gulf Cooperation Council. If confirmed, I would endeavor to help Samoa leverage their constructive role in the Pacific Islands Forum to combat the PRC's malign intentions.

If confirmed, my three top priorities would be mobilizing our team to combat the PRC's activities in Samoa, expanding our law enforcement cooperation, and partnering with the Samoan government on natural disaster preparedness and mitigation programs for rising sea levels. To undertake these important efforts, I would also prioritize ensuring our team has the right personnel, infrastructure, and support for a long-term effort.

Question. Given the importance of opening new embassies in the Pacific Islands and building them up quickly in order to compete directly with the PRC, what would be your top priorities in doing so in Samoa? What needs to be done and how can you go about moving the ball forward quickly and efficiently?

Answer. If confirmed, my three top priorities would be mobilizing our team to combat the PRC's activities in Samoa, expanding our law enforcement cooperation, and partnering with the Samoan government on natural disaster preparedness and mitigation programs for rising sea levels. To undertake these important efforts, if confirmed, I would also prioritize ensuring our team has the right personnel, infra-

structure, and support for a long-term effort.If confirmed, my first priority internally would be to review interagency staffing levels to ensure we have the right mix of U.S. and locally-hired personnel from appropriate U.S. Government agencies that advance our interests over the long-term and is cognizant of costs to the U.S. taxpayer. My second internal priority, if confirmed, would be to review our currently-leased office space, housing, and other physical property to ensure we have the needed facilities to carry out our work safely and effectively. If confirmed, my third internal priority would be to review all ongoing and planned programs to ensure that we are maximizing the opportunities available to counter the PRC's malign influence, including by coordinating with partners and allies.

Question. Would the Department benefit from expediting procedures in order to open embassies in the Pacific Islands more quickly? How would doing so help in a place like Samoa?

Answer. The State Department continuously examines ways to expand our diplomatic, development, and people-to-people efforts in countries where we do not have personnel physically present, and we regularly review staffing in the region. We opened an embassy in Solomon Islands in January 2023, and an embassy in Tonga in May 2023, less than one year after it was announced. We recently opened an embassy in Port Vila, Vanuatu in July 2024 and have expressed our interest in opening an embassy in Kiribati. This work builds on U.S. efforts to place more diplomatic staff throughout the region to further engage with our Pacific neighbors, connect U.S. programs and resources with needs on the ground, and build people-to-people ties.

As a key priority initiative under the Secretary's Modernization Agenda, the Department is finalizing a new "Micro Mission" embassy category to quickly and inexpensively streamline embassy opening and operating procedures with tradeoffs in staffing and facility size. If confirmed, I would explore ways our mission could streamline operating procedures to operate more effectively and ensure that we bring the full power of the U.S. interagency team to Samoa.

Trafficking in Persons

In the State Department's 2024 Trafficking in Persons Report, Samoa is not listed in the Country reports.

Question. If confirmed, how will you work to eliminate trafficking in Samoa?

Answer. The State Department's 2023 Human Right Report for Samoa indicated there were no confirmed reports during the year that traffickers exploited domestic or foreign victims in the country or that traffickers exploited victims from abroad. As there were not any confirmed reports of trafficking cited, Samoa does not have a country report in the annual Trafficking in Persons Report. If confirmed, I will ensure our team continues to monitor the situation closely, investigate all reports of trafficking, and engage the Samoan government, relevant local civil society organizations, and U.S. Government offices including the State Department's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons (J/TIP) to address any issues that arise related to trafficking in persons in Samoa.

Question. Why is Samoa not listed in the country reports in the 2024 Trafficking in Persons report?

Answer. The State Department did not receive any confirmed reports of trafficking in persons in Samoa during the reporting cycle for the 2024 Trafficking in Persons Report. As there were not any confirmed reports of trafficking cited, Samoa does not have a country report in the annual Trafficking in Persons Report.

Religious Freedom

In the State Department's 2023 Report on International Religious Freedom, Samoa was noted for lacking 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 State Department's 2023 Report on International Religious Freedom indicated that Samoa's constitution provides for the right to choose, practice, and change one's religion, while noting reports of strong societal pressure at the village and local levels for individuals to participate in church services and other religious activities and, in some cases, to make large donations to support church leaders and projects. If confirmed, I will work with the Ambassador At Large for International Religious Freedom to promote freedom of religion or belief in Samoa, including engaging the Samoan government and relevant local civil society organizations.

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 Samoa increase their societal and governmental respect for religious freedom?

Answer. If confirmed, I will work with our Embassy team and the office for the Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom to develop a strategy to promote religious freedom in Samoa, including engaging the Samoan government and relevant local civil society organizations. I would also seek to leverage available resources such as small grant programs. If confirmed, I would continue U.S. Embassy Apia's ongoing coordination with members of Samoan religious groups, and will work with the Office of the Ombudsman, the Samoan government office responsible for human rights including freedom of religion or belief.

Human Rights

In the State Department's 2023 Country Reports on Human Rights, it was noted there were no significant changes in the human rights situation in Samoa in the preceding year.

Question. How will you direct your embassy to work with civil society organizations to improve the human rights situation on the ground?

Answer. Samoa is a democratic country with a record of good governance, respect for human rights, an independent judiciary, and a free media. The 2023 report did identify a number of issues, including credible reports of: enforcement of or the threat to enforce criminal libel laws to limit expression; extensive sexual and gender-based violence; laws criminalizing consensual same-sex sexual conduct between adults, although not enforced; and the existence of child labor. The report indicated that the government has taken credible steps to identify and punish officials who committed human rights abuses. If confirmed, I will seek to engage the government, relevant local organizations, and members of civil society. I would also leverage available resources such as small grant programs, to promote human rights in Samoa.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to personally engaging on this issue?

Answer. Yes.

State Management and Oversight

Question. Management is a key responsibility for Chiefs of Mission. How would you describe your management style?

Answer. As a mission-focused leader, my goal is to empower my teams by providing clear guidance and priorities, alongside resources. I seek to delegate authority where appropriate, but not responsibility, while simultaneously focusing on mentoring and developing the next generation of U.S. Government employees across all agencies. I am also a strong believer in the power of close interagency partnership and the importance of active public diplomacy.

Question. Do you believe it is ever acceptable or constructive to berate subordinates, either in public or private?

Answer. No.

Question. How do you envision your relationship with the deputy Chief of Mission?

Answer. Embassy Apia's current Deputy Chief of Mission is an exceptionally capable Foreign Service Officer, with a background in both business administration and service in Australia. If confirmed, I would seek to develop a collaborative relationship with the Deputy Chief of Mission focused on accomplishing our mission and taking care of our team.

Question. If confirmed, what leadership responsibilities do you intend to entrust to your deputy Chief of Mission? 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. If confirmed, I would work closely with the current Deputy Chief of Mission to divide leadership responsibilities appropriately. Based on my previous experience as a long-term Charge d'Affaires, if confirmed, I would likely ask the Deputy Chief of Mission to take on the daily management of many of the routine tasks at the mission, the difficult and important work of implementing the rightsizing of Embassy Apia after a thorough review, ensuring that the Mission is responsive to inter-

nal requirements from Washington, and to ensure that he always provides me with candid feedback on my performance and where our mission could excel if we changed processes or procedures.

Additionally, I believe that accurate and direct employee evaluation reports (EERs) are crucial for creating and maintaining employee excellence at the Department. If confirmed, I would ensure that my DCM and I provide timely, constructive feedback to our staff, recognizing their achievements and identifying areas for growth.

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. Yes.

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 in order to create and continue employee excellence at the Department, both accurate employee evaluation reports and direct feedback for all members of our team are imperative.

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 accomplish fully their missions?

Answer. In my experience, whether or not U.S. diplomats focus on engaging the people in a country outside of our Embassies' walls depends on the guidance from a particular Embassy's leadership. If confirmed as Ambassador, I would commit to prioritizing engagement with the Samoan people, both for myself and the entire team, on all of the islands and in both rural and urban areas.

Question. How do you intend to ensure that U.S. diplomats are able to access all local populations?

Answer. If confirmed, I would commit to prioritize engaging with the Samoan people, on all of the islands and in both rural and urban areas. In Samoa, we are fortunate to have Peace Corps volunteers assigned throughout Samoa's multiple islands. To the extent possible, if confirmed, I would seek to visit both the Peace Corps volunteers and the numerous USAID projects throughout the country, among other engagements, as a model for other officers. I also believe that we can be doing more to support our team in engaging the Samoan people. For example, given that many Samoans are not fluent in English, if confirmed, I would work to ensure that Embassy Apia begins a post language program to help U.S. officials gain basic fluency in Samoan language and customs.

Question. Congressional Delegations (CODELs) and Staff Delegations (STAFFDELs) serve a critical oversight mission. Do you pledge to support fully CODELs and STAFFDELs that seek to travel to post?

Answer. Yes.

Question. Do you agree to support fully any CODEL or STAFFDEL, with the only exceptions for simultaneous or overlapping visits by the President or First Lady of the United States, the Vice President, or the Secretaries of State or Defense?

Answer. Yes.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO JAMES HOLTSNIDER 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 PRC 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 its absolute control of Chinese society and industry, the CCP could stop all of these destructive actions tomorrow if it so chooses. Is the CCP an economic, diplomatic, military, and technological threat to the United States?

Answer. Last 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." As Secretary Blinken has said, 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 efforts of the People's Republic of China (PRC) to expand its malign influence, through robust diplomatic engagements, public diplomacy, and commercial advocacy to bolster U.S.-Samoa ties.

Question. Does the CCP undertake any activities that are beneficial to U.S. interests? If so, please explain.

Answer. As Secretary Blinken has said, under President Xi, the CCP has become more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad. According to the Office of the Director of National Intelligence's 2024 Annual Threat Assessment, the CCP is seeking to "preempt challenges to its reputation and legitimacy, undercutting U.S. influence, driving wedges between Washington and its partners, and fostering global norms that favor its authoritarian system.

Question. Do you believe that there are any areas in which the CCP would constructively work with the United States in good faith, knowing that at any moment Chinese interlocuters with U.S. representatives could be disappeared? If so, please explain.

Answer. The United States will work with the PRC to address transnational challenges, such as seeking to curtail the international flow of drugs including opioids, when it is in the U.S. interest to do so. If confirmed, I would work with my colleagues across the U.S. interagency and Congress 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 PRC in the countries or areas in which you will work?

Answer. If confirmed, my priority will be advancing U.S. national security interests in Samoa 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 interagency colleagues and Congress to address the PRC's efforts to expand its influence in Samoa, and the region.

Question. As you may be aware, a group of federal employees penned an open letter to President Biden criticizing U.S. support for Israel in the aftermath of Hamas' brutal terrorist attack on October 7, 2023. In addition, employees from nearly two dozen agencies have staged walkouts in protest of the administration's Israel policy. Efforts like these directly undermine the duty of our diplomats to advance the policies of the President of the United States. Yes or no, did you sign the letter to the President expressing opposition to the President's Israel policy?

Answer. No, I did not sign the open letter to the President.

Question. Yes or no, did you participate in the January 16, 2024 walkout?

Answer. No, I did not participate.

Question. If confirmed, would you define one of the employees or contractors operating under your supervision signing an open letter criticizing you, or policies you undertake at the instruction of the President, as insubordination as defined by the Government Accountability Office?

Answer. If confirmed, I plan to create an environment of trust in which personnel are able to express opinions and to use dissent channels and understand the importance of constructive dissent. Moreover, I understand the expression of disagreement does not in and of itself constitute insubordination. If confirmed, I would work with the Department's Office of the Legal Adviser to determine the proper course of action should such a matter arise.

Question. In your view, are the actions these federal employees took, by anonymously signing a letter to the President of the United States, covered as "whistleblowing?"

Answer. I believe these employees were expressing a dissenting view to their leadership. I support employees' right to express their views and hope that employees feel confident to directly raise their concerns with their supervisors and management without fear of reprisal. "Whistleblowing" is a term and activity covered by federal legislation and regulations; I defer to the Department's Office of the Legal Adviser to determine whether the referenced actions are considered protected whistleblowing activity.

Question. If confirmed, how will you address discipline issues, such as insubordination, that do not take established dissent channels?

Answer. If confirmed, I would address discipline issues, including insubordination, in accordance with Department procedures and by seeking guidance, including from the Management Support Unit. I would document the conduct and provide counseling to the employee, offering opportunity for improvement. If continued violations occur, disciplinary measures would be taken consistent with personnel policies.

Question. Have you ever expressed support for an Israeli ceasefire in Gaza?

Answer. I support the Administration's efforts to obtain a mutual ceasefire, secure the release of all hostages held by Hamas, and provide more humanitarian assistance to begin restoring the lives of Palestinian civilians in Gaza.

Question. Do you agree that Hamas is an antisemitic entity?

Answer. Yes, Hamas espouses antisemitism. Hamas, which is designated by the United States as a foreign terrorist organization, seeks to eliminate the State of Israel, and its founding charter calls for the killing of Jews.

Question. Would a ceasefire allow these groups to reconstitute and attack Israel, and Americans, in the future?

Answer. The United States remains committed to reaching a deal that protects Israel's security and secures the release of hostages, allowing us to also provide humanitarian aid to civilians in need. Working with partners, the U.S. Government is attempting to secure the release of all hostages held by Hamas. The U.S. Government supports Israel's right to protect itself from Hamas' terrorism consistent with international law.

Question. Do you agree that calling for a ceasefire in Gaza means calling for Israel to stop its pursuit of Hamas, a designated foreign terrorist organization, that orchestrated the October 7 attacks and still refuses to release all Israeli and American hostages?

Answer. Israel will always have the right to defend itself against attacks like the heinous attack on October 7th. The Administration maintains that a comprehensive approach starts with a deal for a ceasefire that would release all hostages.

Question. Do you believe that Israel, in its operation against Hamas, which is known to use civilians as human shields, is taking all necessary steps to minimize civilian casualties?

Answer. The National Security Memorandum-20 report states that the IDF has undertaken steps to implement obligations under international humanitarian law for the protection of civilians in the current conflict, including the requirements related to distinction, proportionality, and precautions in military operations. Israel's own concern is reflected in the fact it has a number of internal investigations underway.

Question. Presently, the State Department's Integrated Country Strategy (ICS) for Samoa includes five mission goals related to enhancing mutual security, promoting climate mitigation and adaptation, strengthening economic ties, supporting Samoa as a responsible democracy, and ensuring that the Embassy provides efficient and effective consular services. However, it is clear through its robust diplomatic and economic engagement, that PRC views Pacific Island nations as critical components in its broader geopolitical strategy aimed at expanding influence in the Indo-Pacific region. What is your assessment of the present state of PRC activities and their effectiveness in Samoa?

Answer. The People's Republic of China (PRC) has significantly increased its diplomatic and economic activities in Samoa, reflecting its broader strategy to expand influence in the Indo-Pacific region. PRC initiatives include substantial investments in infrastructure projects, development aid, and increased diplomatic engagements. While these activities have added to Samoa's infrastructure and economic development, they also raise concerns about debt sustainability and the potential for increased political PRC influence. The effectiveness of the PRC's activities in Samoa

is evident in ongoing bilateral interactions, signing of economic and technical agreements, and the visible presence of PRC-funded projects, such as the Police Academy.

Question. Given the PRC's intention to expand its presence and influence in the region, what changes are needed to the current ICS and priority initiatives to counter the PRC in Samoa?

Answer. If confirmed, I will work to contest the PRC's expanding influence in Samoa to ensure Samoa's democratic values are upheld and American national security interests advanced. If confirmed, I will closely review our mission goals, as well as our staffing and resources, to ensure that our strategies and interagency team effectively address the challenge of the PRC's malign influence. The current team on the ground has focused on working to 1) enhance security cooperation with Samoa to ensure regional stability and mutual security; 2) increase support for disaster preparedness, thereby reducing dependency on external actors; 3) strengthen economic ties through trade and investment initiatives that promote sustainable development and economic diversification; 4) support democratic governance and civil society organizations to reinforce Samoa's democratic institutions and values; and 5) expand public diplomacy efforts to foster people-to-people connections and cultural exchanges, thereby strengthening bilateral relations on a grassroots level.

Question. While Serving as Chargé d'Affaires at the U.S. Embassy in Kuwait, a tweet was posted celebrating LGBTQI rights in conjunction with Pride Month. The tweet also referred to President Biden as a "champion for the human rights of #LGBTQI persons." This message was met with significant backlash from the Kuwaiti government and public. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Kuwait summoned you to express their disapproval of the tweet, which they deemed disrespectful to Kuwaiti laws and cultural values. Did you approve this tweet?

Answer. In my capacity as Chargé d'Affaires, I was fully responsible for all actions undertaken by the U.S. Embassy in Kuwait by all agencies, sections, and offices, including all social media posts.

Question. Do you think the tweet was helpful to a country that clearly would be offended by it?

Answer. In general, I believe that we are most effective when we are standing up for our values while working closely with civil society while avoiding public actions that could create negative repercussions. Given the strong negative response to the social media posting by our Kuwaiti partners and the ensuing distraction from other U.S. national security priorities, I re-directed the U.S. Embassy in Kuwait to halt any further social media posting on LGBT issues for the remainder of my time as Chargé d'Affaires.

Question. If confirmed, will you celebrate LGBTQIA+ and Pride Month activities in Samoa?

Answer. If confirmed, I will support activities that promote human rights and inclusivity, in alignment with the policies of the current administration, and taking into account local culture and customs. This commitment stands in contrast to the human rights records of other great powers in the region, underscoring the importance of our values in promoting a just and inclusive society.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO BRIAN STIMMLER BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

Bilateral Relationship

Question. If confirmed, how will you work to improve the U.S.-Kyrgyz bilateral relationship?

Answer. If confirmed, I will engage closely with the Kyrgyz Government and people to expand our economic ties, broaden our security cooperation, and strengthen democratic governance. I will partner with the Kyrgyz Government and business leaders to support development of growing sectors like IT and mining and implement necessary reforms to improve the business climate and attract private sector investment, including from American investors. I will seek to deepen our security cooperation by expanding training opportunities and increasing U.S. defense engagement on border security, military medicine, explosive ordnance disposal, selective special operations forces field training, institutional capacity building, and humanitarian and disaster response activities. Finally, I will work with the govern-

ment, civil society, and law enforcement to improve anticorruption efforts and promote human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Question. What do you view as the primary challenges to the U.S.–Kyrgyz bilateral relationship?

Answer. I see the Kyrgyz Republic's dependence on, and vulnerability to, its great-power neighbors as our greatest challenge. The PRC holds more than 30 percent of the Kyrgyz Republic's total external debt, and the Kyrgyz economy relies heavily on PRC trade and investment. Russia retains strong historic, economic, cultural, linguistic, and security ties with the Kyrgyz Republic and continues to exert pressure on the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic to limit its cooperation with the United States and other likeminded countries.

Question. If confirmed, how will you work with the Kyrgyz Government and private sector to increase economic ties with the United States?

Answer. If confirmed, I will engage with the Kyrgyz Government and businesses to promote free trade, reduce business corruption, help ensure compliance with U.S. sanctions, and expand the rule of law to strengthen commercial ties and offer the Kyrgyz Republic alternatives to lending and investment that could create security and economic vulnerabilities for the country. I will also support ongoing efforts to lower trade barriers between the United States and the Kyrgyz Republic, assist small and medium enterprises throughout the country, and increase English language adoption, which will facilitate the Kyrgyz Republic's integration into the global economy and foster closer U.S.-Kyrgyz ties.

Question. How can U.S.-Kyrgyz relationships benefit from increased people-to-people ties, and how would you support such efforts if confirmed as Ambassador?

Answer. For over 30 years, the United States and the people of the Kyrgyz Republic have enjoyed a warm friendship based on a shared respect for human rights and close people-to-people ties. The U.S. Mission in the Kyrgyz Republic works tirelessly to foster increased ties through several U.S. Government-funded exchange programs—including Fulbright, the International Visitors Leadership Program, and the Future Leaders Exchange Program, among many others—and robust public engagement with the Kyrgyz people. Similarly, over three decades the Peace Corps has built tremendous goodwill through Volunteers' service to and personal friendships with the people of the Kyrgyz Republic. If confirmed, I will advocate strongly for these programs and seek additional opportunities for engagement with the Kyrgyz people.

Internal Issues

Question. How do you believe the United States can best support government reforms, democracy, and anti-corruption work in the Kyrgyz Republic? In what areas of government do you think progress of reforms is most viable?

Answer. Continued U.S. support for Kyrgyz civil society is vital to promote the rule of law, advocate for the rights of women and members of minority groups, build capacity of local governance, maintain press freedom, and ensure citizen participation in political processes. The United States also supports anticorruption efforts through Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) and USAID programming in partnership with the Kyrgyz Government, law enforcement bodies, and relevant civil society and media stakeholders. If confirmed, I will also focus on engaging the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic and Members of Parliament to ensure that media and other non-governmental organizations continue to have the independence to carry out their vital work and promote accountable governance.

Question. If confirmed, how will you engage with civil society in the Kyrgyz Republic? Please be descriptive. Do you believe that the recently passed law regulating foreign-funded NGOs in Kyrgyz Republic will complicate this work? If so, how?

Answer. I am very concerned about the impact of the Law on Foreign Representatives on non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which has led several NGOs and media organizations to curtail or cease social justice advocacy and critical political reporting on corruption and other issues to avoid government pressure. If confirmed, I will engage frequently with civil society organizations to hear their concerns and urge the Kyrgyz Government to allow NGOs, activists, and media to operate without fear of reprisal. If confirmed, I will also support Mission efforts to support local NGOs through U.S. Government-funded grants, exchanges, and training programs.

Question. If confirmed, how will you support efforts for reconciliation and relationship-building amongst different ethnic groups (particularly Uzbeks and Kyrgyz) in Kyrgyz Republic?

Answer. If confirmed, I will support the Kyrgyz Republic's positive efforts to resolve its outstanding issues with its neighbors in the region, especially Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. I will also encourage the Kyrgyz Government to strengthen its adherence to the rule of law and protect the rights of women and members of minority groups and support projects that increase the political and economic participation of women, minority communities, and other marginalized groups.

Question. If confirmed, what will you do to support the work of RFE/RL and ensure open access for Congressionally funded international journalists in Kyrgyzstan?

Answer. Defending media freedom in the Kyrgyz Republic has been a primary focus of the United States. If confirmed, I will continue to advocate both publicly and privately for RFE/RL's local affiliate Azattyk and other independent media organizations in the Kyrgyz Republic. If confirmed, I will engage regularly with the Kyrgyz Government and Members of Parliament to urge the protection of media independence and human rights, including freedom of expression. I will also continue support for projects and grants that assist local, independent media outlets and journalists.

Foreign Influence

Question. If confirmed, how will you engage with the Kyrgyz Government and people to counter Russian influence?

Answer. If confirmed, I will work with the Kyrgyz Government and private sector to reduce the Kyrgyz Republic's economic dependence on, and vulnerability to, pressure from Moscow by promoting free trade, reducing business corruption, and expanding the rule of law. I will also advocate for media independence and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and support continued U.S.-Kyrgyz educational and cultural exchanges.

Question. Russian influence in Central Asia was diminished following its failed invasion of Ukraine. How do you believe the U.S. can best take advantage of this window of opportunity and build lasting progress in the U.S.-Kyrgyz relationship?

Answer. The United States has a willing partner in the Kyrgyz Republic. The Kyrgyz Republic wants to diversify its economic, political, and security partnerships to avoid becoming a pawn of Russia. The United States can continue to support the Kyrgyz Republic's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity by strengthening U.S.-Kyrgyz security cooperation, facilitating regional cooperation on security, energy, the environment, and economic connectivity through the C5+1 regional diplomatic platform, and continuing to urge the protection of human rights and the development of democratic institutions in the country.

Question. If confirmed, how will you engage with the Kyrgyz Government and people to counter Chinese influence?

Answer. If confirmed, I will engage with the Kyrgyz Republic to diversify its trading partners, reduce business corruption, and expand the rule of law to strengthen commercial ties and offer the Kyrgyz Republic alternatives to lending and investment that could create security and economic vulnerabilities for the country. I will also continue to encourage the Kyrgyz Government to promote accountability for the PRC government's use of forced labor as well as its genocide and crimes against humanity against Uyghurs and members of other ethnic and religious minority groups in Xinjiang, including ethnic Kyrgyz.

Question. If confirmed, how will you work to compete with and counter Chinese influence at the subnational level in Kyrgyzstan?

Answer. If confirmed, I will support the continued provision of U.S. assistance to advance the Kyrgyz Republic's development goals, in contrast to the PRC, which offers high-interest loans. I will also look for opportunities for U.S. investment in promising sectors, such as IT and critical minerals, and support continued engagement with the Development Finance Corporation (DFC) and international development finance institutions about potential investment in the Kyrgyz Republic's infrastructure needs. Furthermore, if confirmed, I will support programs to help small and medium enterprises throughout the country access the international economy and absorb more foreign direct investment.

Question. What do you believe the United States should do to better counter and compete with Chinese and Russian influence in Kyrgyz Republic?

Answer. The Kyrgyz Republic wants to diversify its economy and reduce its reliance on Russia and China. The United States should continue to support the development of a thriving IT sector—where 40 percent of exports are to the United States, with U.S. companies playing an important role—while also supporting local job creation and small and medium sized enterprises and promoting opportunities for increased access to credit, including for women, through venture capital, public-private partnerships, and connections with the international economy. We should also continue to help build the English skills of Kyrgyz children, university students, and professionals, which will be key to facilitating greater cultural and commercial ties with the United States and other countries.

Trafficking in Persons

In the State Department's 2024 Trafficking in Persons Report, Kyrgyzstan was downgraded to Tier 2 Watch List for failing in several key areas to meet the minimum standards to eliminate trafficking.

Question. If confirmed, what concrete steps could you take to help Kyrgyzstan operationalize the prioritized recommendations contained in the TIP report?

Answer. If confirmed, I will support U.S.-funded training opportunities at the national and subnational level that can improve Kyrgyz authorities' capacity to investigate and prosecute trafficking crimes, encourage prioritization of existing projects with government ministries that support efforts to identify and assist trafficking victims, and continue to urge the Kyrgyz Government to implement these recommendations.

Question. What is your assessment of the trafficking situation in country?

Answer. The Kyrgyz Republic has made meaningful steps toward addressing trafficking, but more needs to be done at the national and local levels to assist victims and prosecute traffickers.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to accurately portraying the trafficking situation on the ground in country to Congress via the annual Trafficking in Persons report?

Answer. Yes. The annual Trafficking in Persons report is one of the U.S. Government's most valuable tools for helping countries identify and address deficiencies in their efforts to tackle this global problem.

Religious Freedom

In the State Department's 2023 Report on International Religious Freedom, Kyrgyzstan was noted as lacking 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. I am concerned about increasing government restrictions limiting individuals' enjoyment of their right to freedom of religion or belief, especially the use of anti-extremism laws to restrict religious practices of non-traditional Muslims and members of minority religious groups. If confirmed, I will look for opportunities to work with our Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom to publicly and privately advocate for respect for freedom of religion or belief and facilitate engagements with Kyrgyz officials and religious leaders.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to personally engaging with civil society on this issue?

Answer. Yes. If confirmed, I look forward to engaging with civil society, including religious communities, to raise awareness of this democratic value and address shortcomings.

Question. If confirmed, what concrete steps can you take to help Kyrgyzstan increase their societal and governmental respect for religious freedom?

Answer. If confirmed, I will support public Embassy events that promote religious freedom; promote engagements with religious communities; and continue to raise issues faced by religious groups at the national and local levels with the Kyrgyz Government.

Human Rights

In the State Department's 2023 Human Rights Report, Kyrgyzstan was noted as having no change in its human rights situation in the preceding year, but significant human rights issues remained.

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 Embassy teams to continue to meet frequently with civil society and human rights activists; identify additional opportunities to provide U.S.-funding to support civil society actors and human rights defenders; and report regularly on the human rights situation, through regular reporting and the Human Rights Report.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to personally engaging with civil society on this issue?

Answer. Yes. The Kyrgyz Republic has a robust civil society community that works to raise public awareness of both the importance of human rights and threats to the enjoyment of those rights. If confirmed, I will strengthen the Embassy's connections to these organizations and individuals and work together with them to promote and defend these rights in the Kyrgyz Republic.

State Management and Oversight

Question. Management is a key responsibility for chiefs of mission. How would you describe your management style?

Answer. I strive to be inclusive and supportive of my colleagues by creating an environment where people feel respected, valued, and welcomed. I provide an overall vision to the team and guide them in setting their own goals in support of that vision, then ensure that they have the tools and support they need to succeed. I invest my personal time in proactive communication, mentoring, and formal and informal activities and events to build community, sustain morale, and strengthen resilience. I try to model work-life balance to signal to my team that it is appropriate and necessary to take time to recharge and tend to personal interests and responsibilities outside of the office. I take time every day to acknowledge and praise good work and sacrifices in support of the mission.

Question. Do you believe it is ever acceptable or constructive to berate subordinates, either in public or private?

Answer. No, it is never acceptable to berate subordinates. When it is time for a difficult conversation with a subordinate, I enter the conversation focused on how I can help that individual succeed. I have found that when people know their leaders value and support them, they set high standards for themselves and are receptive to constructive feedback.

Question. How do you envision your relationship with the Deputy Chief of Mission?

Answer. Having served as Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM) in the Kyrgyz Republic, I know from firsthand experience that the ambassador-DCM relationship needs to be built on trust and open communication. If confirmed, I will endeavor to create a relationship in which the DCM feels empowered to give me honest feedback, share mistakes and challenges without fear of reprisal, and work alongside me in establishing and communicating a vision to the team.

Question. If confirmed, what leadership responsibilities do you intend to entrust to your Deputy Chief of Mission?

Answer. If confirmed, I will rely on the DCM to provide day-to-day oversight of the many sections and agencies represented in the Embassy, ensuring that they are focused on advancing mission goals. The DCM will closely manage personnel issues, counseling often first-time managers in their responsibilities and helping them address challenges that arise. The DCM will devote time to maintaining an equitable and inclusive work environment that welcomes diversity and addresses accessibility issues. She/he will ensure everyone at post is provided with the mentoring and support needed for personal and professional development. The DCM will be my partner in all these endeavors, including in keeping morale high at post.

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. Yes. Managers have a responsibility to provide constructive feedback to subordinates to help them achieve their potential and to provide value to the American taxpayer. I have effectively used the evaluation process as a tool to motivate

performance improvement, to document poor performance, and to recognize and reward excellent 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 have received several written commendations for employee evaluation reports I have written for my subordinates. If confirmed, I look forward to providing mentorship and oversight to the managers at Embassy Bishkek to help them utilize the performance evaluation process as a constructive tool to raise performance and recognize hard work.

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 accomplish fully their missions?

Answer. I believe that U.S. diplomats have the most impact and are optimally fulfilling their mandate when they are outside the walls of the Embassy engaging with local partners and audiences. When I served in the Kyrgyz Republic as DCM, our diplomats were proactive in establishing and maintaining relationships with a broad spectrum of officials, business leaders, civil society leaders, and ordinary citizens. If confirmed, I will encourage my team to continue that practice to prioritize spending as much time as possible interacting with host-country interlocutors.

Question. How do you intend to ensure that U.S. diplomats are able to access all local populations?

Answer. If confirmed, I will encourage my team to engage with interlocutors and citizens not only in the capital, but throughout the country. These interactions are critical both to share our message and to gain insights not evident to those living in the "bubble" of the capital. Embassy Bishkek has partners in the cities and villages of every region, and I look forward to travel widely myself to demonstrate to my team the value that comes from such engagement. Whether diplomats are engaging with the public at American Corners, talking with local government leaders in regional capitals, or monitoring rural development projects, it is vital that we develop, expand, and maintain these relationships.

Question. Congressional Delegations (CODELs) and Staff Delegations (STAFFDELs) serve a critical oversight mission. Do you pledge to support fully CODELs and STAFFDELs that seek to travel to post?

Answer. Yes. In my experience, CODELs and STAFFDELs are a powerful tool to both strengthen bilateral relations and convey Washington's perspective on topical issues. If confirmed, I will welcome CODELs and STAFFDELs to post and facilitate meetings with government leadership and our key contacts in business and civil society. Please come visit!

Question. Do you agree to support fully any CODEL or STAFFDEL, with the only exceptions for simultaneous or overlapping visits by the President or First Lady of the United States, the Vice President, or the Secretaries of State or Defense?

Answer. Yes. If confirmed, I will welcome CODELs and STAFFDELs to post and facilitate meetings with government leadership and our key contacts in business and civil society. Please come visit!

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO BRIAN STIMMLER 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 PRC 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 its absolute control of Chinese society and industry, the CCP could stop all of these destructive actions tomorrow if it so chooses. Is the CCP an economic, diplomatic, military, and technological threat to the United States?

Answer. Last 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." As Secretary Blinken has said, 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 efforts of the People's Republic of China (PRC) to expand its problematic influence, through robust and forthright diplomatic engagements, public diplomacy, and commercial advocacy to bolster U.S.-Kyrgyzstani ties.

Question. Does the CCP undertake any activities that are beneficial to U.S. interests? If so, please explain.

Answer. As Secretary Blinken has said, under President Xi, the CCP has become more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad. According to the Office of the Director of National Intelligence's 2024 Annual Threat Assessment, the CCP is seeking to "preempt challenges to its reputation and legitimacy, undercutting U.S. influence, driving wedges between Washington and its partners, and fostering global norms that favor its authoritarian system."

Question. Do you believe that there are any areas in which the CCP would constructively work with the United States in good faith, knowing that at any moment Chinese interlocuters with U.S. representatives could be disappeared? If so, please explain.

Answer. The United States will work with the PRC to address transnational challenges, such as climate change, when it is in the U.S. interest to do so. If confirmed, I would work with my colleagues across the U.S. interagency and Congress 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 PRC in the countries or areas in which you will work?

Answer. If confirmed, my priority will be advancing U.S. national security interests in the Kyrgyz Republic 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 the Kyrgyz Republic and throughout Central Asia.

As you may be aware, a group of federal employees penned an open letter to President Biden criticizing U.S. support for Israel in the aftermath of Hamas' brutal terrorist attack on October 7, 2023. In addition, employees from nearly two dozen agencies have staged walkouts in protest of the administration's Israel policy. Efforts like these directly undermine the duty of our diplomats to advance the policies of the President of the United States.

Question. Yes or no, did you sign the letter to the President expressing opposition to the President's Israel policy?

Answer. No, I did not sign the open letter to the President.

Question. Yes or no, did you participate in the January 16, 2024 walkout?

Answer. No, I did not participate.

Question. If confirmed, would you define one of the employees or contractors operating under your supervision signing an open letter criticizing you, or policies you undertake at the instruction of the President, as insubordination as defined by the Government Accountability Office?

Answer. If confirmed, I plan to create an environment of trust in which personnel are able to express opinions and to use dissent channels and understand the importance of constructive dissent. Moreover, I understand the expression of disagreement does not in and of itself constitute insubordination. If confirmed, I would work with the Department's Office of the Legal Adviser to determine the proper course of action should such a matter arise.

Question. In your view, are the actions these federal employees took, by anonymously signing a letter to the President of the United States, covered as "whistleblowing?"

Answer. I believe these employees were expressing a dissenting view to their leadership. I support employees' right to express their views and hope that employees feel confident to directly raise their concerns with their supervisors and manage-

ment without fear of reprisal. "Whistleblowing" is a term and activity covered by federal legislation and regulations; I defer to the Department's Office of the Legal Adviser to determine whether the referenced actions are considered protected whistleblowing activity.

Question. If confirmed, how will you address discipline issues, such as insubordination, that do not take established dissent channels?

Answer. If confirmed, I would make sure that employees at our Mission in the Kyrgyz Republic know that there are several avenues available to express policy disagreements. I would encourage employees to use established channels to express their views. I would address discipline issues, including insubordination, in accordance with Department procedures and by seeking guidance, including from the Management Support Unit. I would document the conduct and provide counseling to the employee, offering opportunity for improvement. If continued violations occur, disciplinary measures would be taken consistent with personnel policies.

Question. Have you ever expressed support for an Israeli ceasefire in Gaza?

Answer. I support the Administration's efforts to obtain a mutual ceasefire, secure the release of all hostages held by Hamas, and provide more humanitarian assistance to begin restoring the lives of Palestinian civilians in Gaza.

Question. Do you agree that Hamas is an antisemitic entity?

Answer. Yes, Hamas espouses antisemitism. Hamas, which is designated by the United States as a foreign terrorist organization, seeks to eliminate the State of Israel, and its founding charter calls for the killing of Jews.

Question. Would a ceasefire allow these groups to reconstitute and attack Israel, and Americans, in the future?

Answer. The United States remains committed to reaching a deal that protects Israel's security and secures the release of hostages, allowing us to also provide humanitarian aid to civilians in need. Working with partners, the U.S. Government is attempting to secure the release of all hostages held by Hamas. The U.S. Government supports Israel's right to protect itself from Hamas' terrorism consistent with international law.

Question. Do you agree that calling for a ceasefire in Gaza means calling for Israel to stop its pursuit of Hamas, a designated foreign terrorist organization, that orchestrated the October 7 attacks and still refuses to release all Israeli and American hostages?

Answer. Israel will always have the right to defend itself against attacks like the heinous attack on October 7th. The Administration maintains that a comprehensive approach starts with a deal for a ceasefire that would release all hostages.

Question. Do you believe that Israel, in its operation against Hamas, which is known to use civilians as human shields, is taking all necessary steps to minimize civilian casualties?

Answer. The National Security Memorandum-20 report states that the IDF has undertaken steps to implement obligations under international humanitarian law for the protection of civilians in the current conflict, including the requirements related to distinction, proportionality, and precautions in military operations. Israel's own concern is reflected in the fact it has a number of internal investigations underway.

The State Department describes bilateral relations with Kyrgyzstan as characterized by "ebbs and flows" and notes "wide swings in our political and security relationship." Some of these swings can be attributed to other actors exercising influence in the region. The PRC has supported several large-scale infrastructure projects in Kyrgyzstan, financed primarily through China's state-owned financial institutions. China's Export-Import Bank owns about $1.7 billion of Kyrgyzstan's estimated $6.2 billion of foreign debt. The PRC is also Kyrgyzstan's largest trading partner, followed by Russia. In the past, Russian diplomatic pressure has resulted in negative outcomes for the United States, such as when the Kyrgyz parliament voted in 2013 not to extend the U.S. lease on the airbase in Manas.

Question. If confirmed as Ambassador, what is your strategy to contain Chinese and Russian influence in the Kyrgyz Republic that runs counter to U.S. interests?

Answer. If confirmed, I will consider all tools at the U.S government's disposal to counter the malign influence of the PRC and Russia. I will continue to support the provision of U.S. assistance to advance the Kyrgyz Republic's development goals,

as well as U.S. contributions to international development finance institutions, which are making major investments into the Kyrgyz Republic's infrastructure needs. I will also engage with the Kyrgyz Republic to promote free trade, reduce business corruption, and expand the rule of law to strengthen commercial ties and offer the Kyrgyz Republic alternatives to lending and investment that could create security and economic vulnerabilities for the country.

If confirmed, I will also continue to call on Kyrgyz leaders to uphold the U.N. Charter and condemn the Russian Federation's use of force against Ukraine and violations of international law. I will also work to increase sanctions compliance in the Kyrgyz Republic and seek to reduce the Kyrgyz Republic's economic dependence on, and vulnerability to pressure from, Moscow. I will also seek to provide the Kyrgyz authorities the information and training they need to strengthen their ability to comply with sanctions and export controls on dual-use goods that Russia seeks to procure for its war effort.

Question. Are there any areas where Beijing and Moscow diverge? If so, please explain.

Answer. As the Kyrgyz Republic's largest trading partner, the PRC is primarily interested in expanding its investment and business opportunities in the country. In many economic areas, Beijing's leaders seek unfair advantages; behave aggressively, non-transparently, and coercively; and undermine the rules and values at the heart of an open and stable international system.

Russia is interested in retaining its strong historic, economic, cultural, linguistic, and security ties with the Kyrgyz Republic and continues to exert pressure on the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic to limit its cooperation with the United States and other likeminded countries.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO AMANDA S. JACOBSEN BY SENATOR BENJAMIN L. CARDIN

The Obiang Government is described as one of the most corrupt in the world. High-level officials in the Equatorial Guinea government have faced criminal charges for pervasive corruption. In 2014, Vice President Obiang agreed to relinquish more than $30 million in assets purchased with corrupt proceeds. U.S. Assistant Attorney General Caldwell described the case against Vice President Obiang stating that, "through relentless embezzlement and extortion, Vice-President Obiang shamelessly looted his government and shook down businesses in his country to support his lavish lifestyle". The U.S. is not the only country to seize assets from Vice President Obiang. France and South Africa have also ruled against the Vice President for illicit financial practices.

Question. How would you assess the effectiveness of the Global Magnitsky Act to address the alarming levels of corruption in Equatorial Guinea?

Answer. If confirmed, I will work with interagency partners to consider all available tools that promote accountability and combat corruption, and assess what mechanisms, if any, would result in changing the behavior of the Government of Equatorial Guinea.

If confirmed, I will utilize a measured and strategic approach by urging the Government of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea to adopt good governance practices, including increased transparency and accountability, and more effectively implement its international anticorruption obligations and commitments.

Question. Would you recommend further actions to address transnational kleptocracy stemming from Equatorial Guinea?

Answer. I fully support the U.S. Foreign Corrupt Practices Act and, if confirmed, I would do everything in my power to uphold it, including mandatory reporting against violators if applicable. If confirmed, I am willing to work with the interagency to use the full range of U.S. law and regulations to stop corruption. If confirmed, I will continue the Embassy's efforts to prioritize law enforcement cooperation, such as training Equatoguinean officials through the U.S. International Law Enforcement Academy to help build capacity to fight against international crime.

I understand that Equatorial Guinea's political and economic situation has created opportunities for the PRC and other competitors to exploit. If confirmed, I will build on ongoing collaboration among all relevant U.S. Government entities to ensure our efforts remain aligned and complementary. Moreover, while U.S. oil and gas companies have been the cornerstone of Equatorial Guinea's economic develop-

ment for the past three decades, hydrocarbons are a limited resource, and Equatorial Guinea needs to diversify its economy to promote further growth. Unfortunately, potential foreign investors from other sectors are rightly wary about the current investment climate, including contract sanctity and a politicized judicial system, and thus the Government of Equatorial Guinea will need to address such issues if it wants to encourage increased foreign investment from reliable, transparent partners.

Question. If confirmed, what specific actions will you take to address public corruption?

Answer. If confirmed, I will utilize a measured and strategic approach by urging the Government of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea to adopt democratic governance practices, including increased transparency and accountability, more effectively implement its international anticorruption obligations and commitments, and invest more in its people, particularly in education and health. Equatorial Guinea has an anti-corruption law, and if confirmed, I will work to build on that and obtain real commitments from the government to counter the corruption that threatens the Equatoguinean people's security, economic opportunity, and development. If confirmed, I will continue to work with interagency partners to consider all available tools to promote accountability and combat impunity in Equatorial Guinea.

Equatorial Guinea's lack of economic opportunities continues to hamper overall development, particularly amongst its majority under 25 years old population. The World Bank's 2020 Country Opinion Survey for Equatorial Guinea highlighted that 59 percent of respondents felt that economic opportunities for citizens were decreasing. Within the same World Bank survey, 79 percent of respondents attributed corruption as a main contributor to failing economic and social reforms. Young people are vying for economic and social inclusion, but the lack of political will to invest in the future of the population of the government of Equatorial Guinea poses a significant risk to the stability of the country.

Question. If confirmed, what areas will you focus on to bring the voices and concerns of young people to the forefront of the government of Equatorial Guinea's development agenda?

Answer. The Equatoguinean public, especially the youth, is generally receptive to U.S. Government programs and messaging on our policy priorities as evidenced by the increasing number of social media users following U.S. Embassy accounts. However, the combination of an underfunded education system, the low capacity of civil society and media professionals, and the Government of Equatorial Guinea's conflation of all civil society actors, including the youth, as connected to the political opposition poses real challenges to engagement. I recognize that Equatoguinean youth are eager for training and skill-building, and many have participated without incident in a number of trainings, exchanges, and events provided by the U.S. Embassy.

If confirmed, I will continue to strengthen and expand the relationships we have built in this space focusing on youth in areas such as civic engagement, journalism, cultural affairs programming, and English language training that support the U.S. Embassy's regional security, economic prosperity, and good governance priorities.

Question. What international partners and financial institutions can we partner with to expand opportunities for youth participation in civic and political space in Equatorial Guinea?

Answer. If confirmed, I will continue the Embassy's efforts to work with partners such as the United Nations, non-governmental organizations, and the U.S. oil sector to advance opportunities to strengthen the capacity of the youth through civil society organizations and amplify their voices. If confirmed, I will also encourage the government to collaborate productively with these entities for the betterment of the country of Equatorial Guinea, while respecting the local operating context. In this vein, if confirmed, I will ensure that we coordinate U.S. efforts and engagement with other diplomatic missions.

Democracy and Human Rights

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 Equatorial Guinea?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed, I commit to meeting with members of civil society, including human rights and other non-governmental organizations in the United

States and will regularly meet with representatives of local human rights NGOs and civil society in Equatorial Guinea.

Question. What steps will you take to proactively address any efforts to restrict or penalize NGOs and civil society via legal or regulatory measures should they occur?

Answer. If confirmed, I will be clear in messaging, both publicly and privately, that if the Government of Equatorial Guinea demonstrates interest in and takes concrete steps to improve democratic governance and respect for human rights—including equitable and transparent regulations that meet international human rights standards to allow civil society organizations to register and operate—we could potentially discuss other ways to improve the bilateral relationship.

Question. Will you and your embassy team actively engage with Equatorial Guinea 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 Equatorial Guinea?

Answer. Yes. I fully recognize the undue restrictions on freedom of expression including for members of the press in Equatorial Guinea, all of which negatively affect democracy and democratic development. Journalists are censored or self-censor, and journalistic capacity is low. If confirmed, I will raise these important concerns with the Government of Equatorial Guinea. I commit to building on and expanding U.S. Embassy Malabo's strong relationships with journalists and members of civil society to increase their professional capacity in order to dispel myths and disinformation and work to hold the government accountable.

Question. If confirmed, 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 investment and governance, and what will you prioritize in processes to administer such assistance?

Answer. If confirmed, I will continue to use professional exchanges, journalist trainings, democracy and good governance grants, and capacity building resources to expand and strengthen the U.S. Embassy's network of local partners, who are vital in advocating for and implementing meaningful change in society. We need to recognize, however, that the changes the United States and so many Equatoguineans seek will not happen overnight. While I would hope that the timeline for such changes will not have to be "generational," it may be wise to adopt an incremental approach that embodies the philosophy of "First, Do No Harm," lest we endanger the very people we seek to assist. If confirmed, I would welcome the opportunity to discuss our approach with you and your colleagues in greater depth.

Question. What are the potential impediments you foresee in advancing democracy in Equatorial Guinea, and how do you intend to resolve them?

Answer. The State Department's 2023 Human Rights Report on Equatorial Guinea notes many significant issues of concern, including reports of excessive use of force by security forces; disregard for the rule of law; undue restrictions on freedom of expression including for members of the press; restrictions on peaceful assembly; and widespread official corruption—all of which negatively affect democracy and democratic development.

While Equatorial Guinea is officially a multiparty democracy with a constitution that guarantees certain rights to its citizens, the reality remains that opposition parties have significantly fewer resources and less capacity than the president's political party, and the same person has been in power for 45 years. Opposition parties have not achieved political goals, and therefore have no track record with the public. There is no independent electoral commission and thus no accountability process before, during or after elections. Journalists continue to be censored or self-censor, and overall journalistic capacity is low. This situation provides ample opportunity for malign actors to establish themselves in Equatorial Guinea. If confirmed, I will raise these important concerns with the Government of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea, in addition to fostering and expanding the U.S. Embassy's engagement with civil society, youth leaders, the political opposition, and media representatives.

Management & Accountability

Question. Given the importance of representing the United States' diversity abroad, if confirmed, how will you ensure that our mission's staff and programmatic plans reflect this diversity?

Answer. I am passionate about mentoring the next generation of U.S. diplomats. If confirmed, I will work closely with the Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM) to recruit and retain qualified U.S. diplomats, Eligible Family Members, and Locally Em-

ployed Staff that reflect the diversity of the United States and the host government. If confirmed, I pledge to mentor Country Team members and in turn hold them accountable to mentor their respective teams. For U.S. diplomats, if confirmed, I will reach out to Department affinity groups to publicize vacancies at U.S. Mission Malabo. For Locally Employed Staff I will ensure vacancy announcements reach a broad audience country-wide using both social media and traditional media to maximize exposure. I will ensure hiring practices meet Department guidelines and are properly implemented. I will work with the DCM to ensure U.S. Mission Malabo facilities are accessible and compliant with Americans with Disabilities Act guidelines.

Programmatically, if confirmed, I will harness the U.S. Embassy's convening power to ensure our program and exchange participants reflect the cultural and socio-economic diversity of Equatorial Guinea, with a particular focus on youth, women, members of minority groups, and individuals from rural areas. To promote inclusivity, I will engage all members of the U.S. Mission community to contribute to the Embassy's long-term policy direction outlined in the Integrated Country Strategy, to include areas of programmatic and management focus. If confirmed, I will work with the Country Team to ensure our grant opportunities are disseminated widely to civil society groups.

Question. As a career member of the Foreign Service, please share how your experience in various posts has prepared you to advance the agency's mission of fostering inclusive diplomacy/foreign assistance?

Answer. I am passionate about fostering inclusive diplomacy. Throughout my career I have prioritized diversifying the contacts of the Embassies where I have served—from farmers to refugees to journalists - particularly outside of the capital city, to ensure the U.S. Embassy has a more holistic pulse on what is going on in the country. I have prioritized robust engagement with youth, particularly in Africa, as they are the changemakers of the future yet traditionally marginalized. When serving as the Cultural Affairs Officer in Nepal, my team and I recruited youth participants that reflected the diversity of Nepal's ethnic and religious groups and castes for exchanges, English language programs, and cultural programs. As Public Affairs Officer in Ethiopia, my team and I similarly prioritized program and exchange participants who reflected the diversity of Ethiopia's ethnic and religious groups, made every effort to recruit new Ethiopian staff from diverse backgrounds country-wide, and disseminated our grant opportunities widely to diverse civil society organizations. As Chargé d'Affaires in Botswana, I used public speeches to bolster the government of Botswana's decriminalization policy of the LGBTQI+ community and its decision to provide anti-retroviral treatment (ARVs) to both citizens and non-citizens.

Question. Will you commit to using your position, if confirmed, to promote the human rights and dignity of all people in Equatorial Guinea, no matter their race or ethnicity, religion, nationality, disability, sexual orientation or gender identity? What specifically will you do to prioritize and to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in Equatorial Guinea if confirmed?

Answer. Yes. I commit to using my position, if confirmed, to defend the human rights and dignity of all people in Equatorial Guinea, no matter their race or ethnicity, religion, nationality, disability, sexual orientation or gender identity.

If confirmed, I will meet with the Embassy's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Council to hear about what work has been done both internally at the Embassy and externally, what has been most effective, and if there are other areas we might focus on moving forward. If confirmed, I will travel throughout Equatorial Guinea to diversify the Embassy's contacts to better understand the political, economic, and social landscape and how the Embassy might partner with Equatoguineans, particularly youth, in new ways to advance our regional security, economic prosperity, and good governance priorities. I will ensure the U.S. Embassy is publicizing its exchange and grant opportunities to diverse stakeholders and audiences country wide.

Question. What challenges do LGBTQI+ people face in Equatorial Guinea? What specifically will you commit to do to help LGBTQI+ people in Equatorial Guinea if confirmed?

Answer. No laws exist in Equatorial Guinea expressly criminalizing same-sex sexual conduct for civilians, but neither do they prohibit discrimination, and members of the Equatoguinean LGBTQI+ community are challenged by societal stigmatization and discrimination. Same-sex sexual conduct was criminalized in the armed forces, as was LGBTQI+ identity; there were multiple reports of enforcement, with several women convicted and serving sentences in military jails on these charges. Some LGBTQI+ individuals were removed from government jobs or academic positions because of their actual or perceived sexual orientation. The Equatoguinean

government has made no effort to combat this or investigate abuses and has stated such sexual orientations and gender identities are inconsistent with cultural beliefs.

Promoting respect for human rights and democracy is a priority for our mission in Equatorial Guinea. As part of that effort, Embassy Malabo has developed a positive and productive relationship with local LGBTQI+ organization Somos Parte del Mundo and has funded this group and others to help foster a more inclusive environment for LGBTQI+ citizens of Equatorial Guinea. If confirmed, I will ensure our Embassy continues promoting and advancing respect for the human rights of LGBTQI+ persons in partnership with civil society working against discrimination and stigmatization.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO AMANDA S. JACOBSEN BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

Governance, Rights, and Corruption

Equatorial Guinea's political environment is marked by authoritarian rule, human rights violations, and endemic corruption, particularly among the ruling elite. U.S. policy aims to promote good governance, human rights, and anti-corruption efforts in the country. Vice President Teodoro Nguema Obiang's lavish lifestyle and corruption scandals symbolize the broader governance challenges the U.S. faces in its relations with the Obiang regime.

Question. How will you push for greater political transparency and anti-corruption reforms while maintaining diplomatic relations with a government known for human rights abuses and endemic corruption?

Answer. Promotion of respect for human rights and good governance remains central to our efforts and is a cornerstone of U.S. policy towards Equatorial Guinea. The United States prioritizes the fight against corruption globally and, if confirmed, I will seek real commitment from the Government of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea to counter the corruption that threatens security, economic opportunity, and development. If confirmed, I will encourage and welcome greater partnership across the full spectrum of Equatoguinean society to advocate for responsive governance that will increase transparency and promote respect for human rights.

Question. Given Vice President Nguema Obiang's history of corruption and the U.S. legal actions against him, how do you plan to navigate relations with him while advocating for U.S. interests in good governance?

Answer. If confirmed, I will utilize a measured and strategic approach by publicly and privately urging the Government of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea, including the Vice President, to adopt democratic governance practices, including increased transparency and accountability, to more effectively implement the country's international anticorruption obligations and commitments, and to invest more in its people, particularly in the education and health sectors. Equatorial Guinea has an anti-corruption law, and if confirmed, I will work to build on that and obtain real commitments from the government to counter the corruption that threatens the Equatoguinean people's security, economic opportunity, and development. If confirmed, I will continue to work with U.S. interagency partners and the Department's Office of the Coordinator on Global Anti-Corruption to consider all available tools to promote accountability and combat impunity in Equatorial Guinea.

Question. What strategies will you use to ensure that U.S. aid, especially funds from forfeited assets, is appropriately allocated to benefit the people of Equatorial Guinea rather than the elite?

Answer. If confirmed, I will utilize a measured and strategic approach by urging the Government of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea to increase transparency and accountability, to implement its international anticorruption obligations and commitments more effectively, and to invest more in its people, particularly in the education and health sectors. If confirmed, I will continue to work with international partners, such as the United Nations, as well as the U.S. interagency, to consider all available tools to promote accountability and combat impunity in Equatorial Guinea.

U.S. Government assistance to Equatorial Guinea, including small grants for democracy and good governance and public diplomacy, are competed among civil society organizations to ensure transparency and that funds are appropriately allocated to benefit the people of Equatorial Guinea rather than elites. Forfeited assets are in the process of being returned to Equatorial Guinea "in kind" through the United Nations. Internationally procured health care equipment and medicines are going

towards the critical health care needs of the Equatoguinean population. If confirmed, I will continue to monitor U.S. aid in country closely, to ensure it reaches the general population and not the elites.

Security Cooperation and Strategic Competition

Equatorial Guinea's strategic location in West Africa has made it a focal point for U.S. concerns over China's potential naval presence and Russia's growing influence. The U.S. seeks to maintain security ties with EG while countering Chinese and Russian influence in the region. The potential establishment of a Chinese naval base in EG is of significant concern for U.S. national security interests.

Question. How do you intend to counter Chinese and Russian influence in Equatorial Guinea, particularly concerning China's reported interest in establishing a naval base?

Answer. I understand that Equatorial Guinea's political and economic situation has created opportunities for the PRC and Russia to exploit. If confirmed, I will build on ongoing collaboration among all relevant U.S. Government entities to ensure our efforts remain aligned and complementary.

In addition, if confirmed, I would continue to work with European and other likeminded nations and the government of Equatorial Guinea to strengthen Equatorial Guinea's resilience to external influence that exacerbates domestic problems. If confirmed, I will work with our partners that have influence with the Equatorial Guinea government to highlight to the benefits of cooperation with the United States and likeminded partners on areas of common strategic interest including in the economic and security realms. At the same time, if confirmed, I would underscore to the highest levels of the government of Equatorial Guinea that any steps towards a PRC military facility in the region would raise serious national security concerns and complicate regional security.

Question. What role do you envision for U.S. security cooperation with Equatorial Guinea, and how will you ensure that such cooperation strengthens U.S. strategic interests without enabling the regime's authoritarian practices?

Answer. Equatorial Guinea remains a potential partner of the United States in maritime security and other areas. Our potential emerging security partnership is vital for addressing immediate threats such as illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing, trafficking in persons, and piracy, while building capacity in Equatorial Guinea and the Gulf of Guinea region to ensure long-term security and economic growth. If confirmed, I will engage the government of Equatorial Guinea to collaborate on shared concerns, including maritime security, economic development and diversification, and environmental preservation, while continuing to emphasize concerns about corruption, good governance, and human rights issues. If confirmed, I will seek further engagement with the U.S. International Law Enforcement Academy to strengthen security cooperation efforts.

Question. How will you balance the need for strategic military access and cooperation with Equatorial Guinea against the U.S. commitment to promoting democracy and human rights in the country?

Answer. The United States is committed to support Equatorial Guinea in facing its maritime domain security challenges. Over the past three years, the United States has taken a deliberate, cautious approach to our military reengagement, focusing on confidence building activities in order to assess host nation buy-in and absorptive capacity. Maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea region is an important U.S. national security interest. The United States recognizes the threat posed by piracy to maritime security in the region and to the significant U.S. oil sector investments there, including the safety and security of American citizens who work in the Gulf of Guinea.

Human rights are also a central priority for the U.S. Government's engagement with Equatorial Guinea. If confirmed, I will tirelessly raise governance and human rights concerns with the Government of Equatorial Guinea at all levels, emphasizing how those concerns intersect our other areas of cooperation, such as economic diversification, anticorruption, trafficking in persons, and maritime security. If confirmed, I will work with U.S. Government public diplomacy programs such as professional exchanges, journalism trainings, democracy and good governance grants, and other capacity building resources to expand and strengthen the U.S. Embassy's network of local partners and civil society members, who are critical in advocating for and implementing meaningful changes.

Energy and Economic Development

Equatorial Guinea's economy heavily depends on oil and gas exports, with U.S. companies historically playing a significant role in the energy sector. However, declining oil production and concerns over corruption have impacted foreign investment. The U.S. seeks to support diversification and economic transparency while maintaining investments in the energy sector.

Question. How will you support U.S. businesses in the energy sector, mainly as ExxonMobil exits Equatorial Guinea and other firms reassess their investments in the country?

Answer. If confirmed, I will represent the interests of U.S. companies with the government, including with the Ministry of Mines and Hydrocarbons, the Ministry of Commerce, and the Ministry of Finance, the Economy and Planning. If confirmed, I will also ensure that U.S. Embassy Malabo continues to maintain strong relationships with the local offices of U.S. companies and to prioritize the protection of U.S. investments and interests. If confirmed, one of my overarching goals will be to support diversification and economic transparency and, maintain U.S. investments in the energy sector.

If confirmed, I will also work with U.S. companies and the Government of Equatorial Guinea to improve the investment climate, and to prioritize the safety and security of American citizens.

Question. What measures will you advocate to promote economic diversification in Equatorial Guinea and reduce its dependence on oil, particularly in light of the U.S.'s broader energy transition goals?

Answer. Natural resource-driven economies like that of Equatorial Guinea face liquidity problems when the price of the export commodity falls dramatically; such developments also directly affect the efficiency and profitability of U.S. firms in the hydrocarbon sector. Non-oil and gas companies in Equatorial Guinea have also faced a variety of obstacles in conducting business. If confirmed, I will emphasize to Equatoguinean officials how damaging these obstacles, including non-payment of debts to U.S. investors, as well as apparent political influence or favoritism in commercial dealings, are to Equatorial Guinea's ability to attract and maintain foreign investment.

If confirmed, I pledge to continue the U.S. Government's economic diversification efforts in Equatorial Guinea. One of the key areas where the U.S. could help Equatorial Guinea diversify its economy is through eco-tourism. As one of the most biodiverse countries in the world, U.S. conservation experts have been working in Equatorial Guinea for decades discovering new species on Bioko Island. To help make this exceptional natural resource sustainable for the Equatoguinean people, the country could benefit from U.S. expertise in national park management, eco-hospitality, and protection of wildlife. This would, in turn, create jobs for local people, who then would be less reliant on hunting endangered bushmeat in the forests.

Question. How do you plan to address corruption in the business environment to ensure that U.S. firms can operate transparently and avoid entanglement in the country's pervasive graft?

Answer. If confirmed, I will utilize a measured and strategic approach by urging the Government of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea to adopt good governance practices, including increased transparency and accountability, to more effectively implement its international anticorruption obligations and commitments, and to invest more in its people, particularly in the education and health sectors. I will emphasize to Equatoguinean officials how damaging corruption, as well as apparent political influence or favoritism in commercial dealings, are to Equatorial Guinea's ability to attract and maintain foreign investment. I will work to obtain real commitments from the government to counter the corruption that threatens the Equatoguinean people's security, economic opportunity, and development. If confirmed, I will also continue to work with U.S. interagency partners and the Department's Office of the Coordinator on Global Anti-Corruption to consider all available tools that promote accountability and combat corruption.

Trafficking in Persons

In the State Department's 2024 Trafficking in Persons Report, Equatorial Guinea was upgraded to Tier 2 Watch List due to successful prosecution of traffickers for the first time since 2019 and convicting traffickers for the first time under its 2004 anti-trafficking law.

Question. If confirmed, what concrete steps could you take to help Equatorial Guinea operationalize the prioritized recommendations contained in the TIP report?

Answer. If confirmed, I will work with the Equatoguinean government to operationalize the recommendations included in the 2024 Trafficking in Persons (TIP) report. If confirmed, I will work to foster good relationships with all levels of the government to encourage progress in key areas, such as fully implementing an updated National Action Plan. If confirmed, I will also work with the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons to address how else the United States can best help Equatorial Guinea to continue to improve its anti-TIP efforts. Critical work remains, and, if confirmed, I will continue U.S. efforts to work with the government of Equatorial Guinea, partners such as the United Nations and International Organization for Migration, and civil society to remain focused on addressing this issue.

Religious Freedom

In the State Department's 2023 International Religious Freedom report, Equatorial Guinea was noted for a need to increase efforts to promote religious tolerance and respect for human rights.

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 U.S. foreign policy priority, and the Department of State continues to closely monitor religious freedom in Equatorial Guinea. If confirmed, I commit to working with civil society, diverse religious leaders, and the government of Equatorial Guinea to ensure all citizens enjoy freedom of religion and worship as stated in their Constitution. If confirmed, I commit to also work with the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom and Congress to emphasize the importance of religious freedom, to address any religious freedom concerns, and to further strengthen tolerance and respect among and for members of religious communities in Equatorial Guinea.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to personally engaging with civil society on this issue?

Answer. Yes, I do.

Question. If confirmed, what concrete steps can you take to help Equatorial Guinea increase their societal and governmental respect for religious freedom?

Answer. If confirmed, I will continue to strengthen and expand the relationships we have built in this space and work to further diversify our religious contacts country-wide. If confirmed, I will continue to advance opportunities to both strengthen the capacity of civil society organizations and amplify their voices and to encourage the government to collaborate productively with these groups. If confirmed, I will work to ensure that we coordinate our efforts with other diplomatic missions.

Human Rights

In the State Department's 2023 Human Rights Report, Equatorial Guinea has significant human rights issues included arbitrary or unlawful killings, torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

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 commit to regularly engaging with members of civil society and meeting with U.S.-based and Equatorial Guinea-based representatives of human rights and related non-governmental organizations, with the aim of amplifying their concerns directly with the government. I will encourage the government to collaborate productively with these organizations for the betterment of Equatorial Guinea. If confirmed, I will adopt an incremental approach that embodies the philosophy of "First, Do No Harm," so that the U.S. Embassy efforts will not endanger the very people we seek to assist.

State Management and Oversight

Question. Management is a key responsibility for chiefs of mission. How would you describe your management style?Answer 15:I would describe my management style as collaborative and consultative. When I was Deputy Chief of Mission and Chargé d'Affaires in Botswana I employed an "Open Door Policy" to enable Embassy colleagues to come to me with ideas, feedback or concerns. I walked the U.S. Embassy halls daily to ensure my team knew that I was available to them and a committed, hands-on manager and leader. I also hosted quarterly town halls to facilitate open conversations and direct feedback. I have found Embassy offsites to be a useful tool to build respect among team members and enable them to feed their ideas into

policy and management priorities. I am passionate about both mentorship and morale.

I prioritize the morale of my Embassy community, including Eligible Family Members, contractors and Locally Employed Staff, by both spearheading community events myself and actively participating in events organized by others. I encourage work-life balance to ensure our teams are resilient. I believe it is crucial to clearly and frequently communicate the Embassy's mission and strategic direction, so our community understands how their important work serves the national security interests of the United States.

Question. Do you believe it is ever acceptable or constructive to berate subordinates, either in public or private?

Answer. No, I do not believe it is ever acceptable or constructive to berate subordinates, either in public or in private.

Question. How do you envision your relationship with the deputy chief of mission?

Answer. If confirmed, I envision my relationship with the Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM) to be one of mutual respect and collaboration. I have found throughout my career that a successful Front Office works first and foremost as a team. I would prioritize open communication through daily one-on-one meetings and frequent feedback sessions to ensure we are aligned on issues related to policy, management, and resources. I will work with the DCM to communicate high ethical standards to the Embassy community and foster a culture of inclusion and mutual respect.

Question. If confirmed, what leadership responsibilities do you intend to entrust to your deputy chief of mission?

Answer. If confirmed, I would ask the Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM) to assume responsibility over management issues, including management controls, performance management and mentorship, and crisis preparedness while understanding the Chief of Mission is ultimately responsible in all ways for the work of the Embassy. If confirmed, I would collaborate closely with the DCM on policy development and implementation, engagement with the government of Equatorial Guinea, and outreach to youth, civil society, and the media. I would ensure s/he will be prepared to step in at a moment's notice as Chargé d'Affaires through active mentorship.

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. Yes, I do.

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 would.

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 accomplish fully their missions?

Answer. In my experience, I find that the U.S. diplomats who are the most successful professionally and have the highest morale are those who leave the embassy walls and actively engage with youth, host government officials, civil society representatives, and members of the international community. If confirmed, I will work with the Deputy Chief of Mission to ensure our entire team—will have regular opportunities to get outside of the Embassy compound to enhance their effectiveness as representatives of the U.S. Government. This enables professional development opportunities while improving morale.

Question. How do you intend to ensure that U.S. diplomats are able to access all local populations?

Answer. If confirmed, I will work closely with the Deputy Chief of Mission to ensure that contact building and reporting is an integral part of all U.S. diplomats' job responsibilities and reflected in their annual evaluations. I will work with the Management Officer to ensure there is adequate travel funding available, so U.S.

diplomats are able to travel throughout Equatorial Guinea to access local populations countrywide, build the U.S. Embassy's contact base, and report their experiences accordingly via front channel cable and congressionally mandated reports, as appropriate. I will ensure that all visits are cleared by the Regional Security Officer to ensure the safety and security of our team.

Question. Congressional Delegations (CODELs) and Staff Delegations (STAFFDELs) serve a critical oversight mission. Do you pledge to support fully CODELs and STAFFDELs that seek to travel to post?

Answer. Yes, I do.

Question. Do you agree to support fully any CODEL or STAFFDEL, with the only exceptions for simultaneous or overlapping visits by the President or First Lady of the United States, the Vice President, or the Secretaries of State or Defense?

Answer. Yes, I do.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO AMANDA S. JACOBSEN 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 PRC 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 its absolute control of Chinese society and industry, the CCP could stop all of these destructive actions tomorrow if it so chooses. Is the CCP an economic, diplomatic, military, and technological threat to the United States?

Answer. Last 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." As Secretary Blinken has said, 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 efforts of the People's Republic of China (PRC) to expand its problematic influence, through robust and forthright diplomatic engagements, public diplomacy, and commercial advocacy to bolster U.S—Equatorial Guinea ties.

Question. Does the CCP undertake any activities that are beneficial to U.S. interests? If so, please explain.

Answer. As Secretary Blinken has said, under President Xi, the CCP has become more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad. According to the Office of the Director of National Intelligence's 2024 Annual Threat Assessment, the CCP is seeking to "preempt challenges to its reputation and legitimacy, undercutting U.S. influence, driving wedges between Washington and its partners, and fostering global norms that favor its authoritarian system."

Question. Do you believe that there are any areas in which the CCP would constructively work with the United States in good faith, knowing that at any moment Chinese interlocuters with U.S. representatives could be disappeared? If so, please explain.

Answer. The United States will work with the PRC to address transnational challenges when it is in the U.S. national interest to do so. If confirmed, I would work with my colleagues across the U.S. interagency and Congress 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 PRC in the countries or areas in which you will work?

Answer. If confirmed, my priority will be advancing U.S. national security interests in Equatorial Guinea 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 Equatorial Guinea, and the region.

Question. As you may be aware, a group of federal employees penned an open letter to President Biden criticizing U.S. support for Israel in the aftermath of Hamas' brutal terrorist attack on October 7, 2023. In addition, employees from nearly two

dozen agencies have staged walkouts in protest of the administration's Israel policy. Efforts like these directly undermine the duty of our diplomats to advance the policies of the President of the United States. Yes or no, did you sign the letter to the President expressing opposition to the President's Israel policy?

Answer. No, I did not sign the open letter to the President.

Question. Yes or no, did you participate in the January 16, 2024 walkout?

Answer. No, I did not participate in the January 16, 2024 walkout.

Question. If confirmed, would you define one of the employees or contractors operating under your supervision signing an open letter criticizing you, or policies you undertake at the instruction of the President, as insubordination as defined by the Government Accountability Office?

Answer. If confirmed, I will strive to create an environment of trust in which personnel at U.S. Embassy Malabo are able to express their opinions, to use dissent channels appropriately, and to understand the importance of constructive dissent. As I understand it, an expression of disagreement does not, in and of itself, constitute insubordination. If confirmed, I would work with the Department's Office of the Legal Adviser to determine the proper course of action should such a matter arise.

Question. In your view, are the actions these federal employees took, by anonymously signing a letter to the President of the United States, covered as "whistleblowing?"

Answer. I believe these federal employees were expressing a dissenting view to their leadership. I support employees' right to express their views and hope that employees feel confident to directly raise their concerns to their supervisors and management without fear of reprisal. "Whistleblowing" is a term and activity covered by federal legislation and regulations; I defer to the Department's Office of the Legal Adviser to determine whether the referenced actions are considered protected whistleblowing activity.

Question. If confirmed, how will you address discipline issues, such as insubordination, that do not take established dissent channels?

Answer. If confirmed, I will address discipline issues, including insubordination, in accordance with Department of State procedures and by actively seeking guidance, including from the Management Support Unit. I would document the conduct and provide direct counseling to the employee, offering opportunity for improvement. If continued violations occur, disciplinary measures would be taken consistent with Department of State personnel policies.

Question. Have you ever expressed support for an Israeli ceasefire in Gaza?

Answer. I support the Administration's efforts to obtain a mutual ceasefire, secure the release of all hostages held by Hamas, and provide more humanitarian assistance to begin restoring the lives of Palestinian civilians in Gaza.

Question. Do you agree that Hamas is an antisemitic entity?

Answer. Yes, Hamas espouses antisemitism. Hamas, which is designated by the United States as a foreign terrorist organization, seeks to eliminate the State of Israel, and its founding charter calls for the killing of Jews.

Question. Would a ceasefire allow these groups to reconstitute and attack Israel, and Americans, in the future?

Answer. The United States remains committed to reaching a deal that protects Israel's security and secures the release of hostages, allowing us to also provide humanitarian aid to civilians in need. Working with partners, the U.S. Government is attempting to secure the release of all hostages held by Hamas. The U.S. Government supports Israel's right to protect itself from Hamas' terrorism consistent with international law.

Question. Do you agree that calling for a ceasefire in Gaza means calling for Israel to stop its pursuit of Hamas, a designated foreign terrorist organization, that orchestrated the October 7 attacks and still refuses to release all Israeli and American hostages?

Answer. Israel will always have the right to defend itself against attacks like the heinous attack on October 7, 2023. The Administration maintains that a comprehensive approach starts with a deal for a ceasefire that would release all hostages.

Question. Do you believe that Israel, in its operation against Hamas, which is known to use civilians as human shields, is taking all necessary steps to minimize civilian casualties?

Answer. The National Security Memorandum-20 report states that the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) has undertaken steps to implement obligations under international humanitarian law for the protection of civilians in the current conflict, including the requirements related to distinction, proportionality, and precautions in military operations. Israel's own concern is reflected in the fact it has a number of internal investigations underway.

Question. Equatorial Guinea (EG) has regional strategic importance for the United States, as the PRC reportedly has explored potentially locating a naval base there, where China also helped build a commercial port. The commander of U.S. Africa Command has said that establishment of a PRC naval base in West Africa would "change the whole calculus of the geostrategic global campaign plans of protecting the homeland." Simultaneously, EG ties with Russia also may be growing closer; in late 2023, the EG president reportedly met with Vladimir Putin on prospective bilateral cooperation in various areas, and Russia reportedly plans to open an embassy in EG. What is your assessment of the extent of PRC and Russian defense ties to EG?

Answer. The PRC and Russia have deployed their familiar suite of transactional economic, investment, security, and development tools in Equatorial Guinea as they have elsewhere on the continent. Both countries have long bilateral histories in Equatorial Guinea, going back over 50 years. The PRC and Russia are engaged in various sectors, and most importantly have established relationships with the leadership of Equatorial Guinea up to and including the President and Vice President. If confirmed, I will use all tools at the U.S Government's disposal to counter the PRC and Russia.

Question. If confirmed, what specific actions would you take to deter the establishment of a PRC naval base in EG?

Answer. I share the concern of Congress, as well as our African and European partners, over potential militarization of the Gulf of Guinea. This includes the possible construction of a PRC military installation in Equatorial Guinea. We must engage frequently with countries facing security challenges in their maritime domains. Our partnership with Equatorial Guinea, as with other African states, is vital for addressing immediate threats such as trafficking in persons, illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing, and piracy, and building capacity in the region to ensure long-term security and economic growth.

If confirmed, I will ensure that Equatorial Guinea's Government clearly understands that certain potential steps involving PRC-basing activity would raise serious U.S. national security concerns both for the United States and our partners in the region and complicate regional security.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO KEITH D. HANIGAN BY SENATOR RICHARD E. RISCH

Strategic Competition in Indo-Pacific

Prime Minister Manele came to power earlier this year, and his government has prioritized building ties with China, Australia, Japan and the U.S. as he works to increase foreign direct investment. It's widely thought he will continue the pro-PRC policies of his predecessor, but there may be some new opportunities for bilateral engagement.

Question. As U.S. Ambassador, if confirmed, what would be your priorities for engaging with Manele and his administration?

Answer. I applaud Solomon Islands for successfully conducting an orderly, efficient, and historic election. I look forward to working to develop a strong, personal relationship built on trust and mutual understanding. I will also work closely with PM Manele's administration on matters such as climate resilience, maritime security partnership, including finalizing a USCG Shiprider agreement, unexploded ordnance (UXO) removal, Millennium Challenge Corporation's Threshold program, and USAID's Strengthening Competitiveness, Agriculture, Livelihoods, and Environment SCALE) Program, and re-establishing the Peace Corps program in Solomon Islands.

Question. What lessons will you bring from your experiences overseeing U.S. facilities around the world to building up the U.S. presence in Solomon Islands, if confirmed?

Answer. If confirmed, I would bring several key lessons from my experience managing U.S. facilities globally to building up our presence in the Solomon Islands. First, I've learned the importance of adaptability in responding to local conditions, whether that means navigating unique logistical challenges or aligning our efforts with local government priorities. Second, effective interagency coordination is critical. Ensuring close collaboration with security, development, and defense counterparts helps maximize the impact of our presence. Third, I've seen how essential it is to prioritize sustainability in infrastructure planning, making sure facilities are functional, resilient and scalable to support long-term U.S. engagement and ever-changing needs. It is also vital that we take advantage of the Embassy in a Box Act and SECCA flexibilities afforded the Department by Senator Risch and the SFRC to accelerate the construction, fit out, and delivery of our diplomatic facilities. Lastly, fostering strong relationships with local partners and communities is vital for ensuring that our presence is not only effective but also welcomed and mutually beneficial.

Question. What would be your top priorities to build up and staff our new missions in the Pacific Islands quickly? How would you ensure we do not let perfect be the enemy of the good?

Answer. To quickly build and staff new missions in the Pacific Islands, I would prioritize fast-tracking recruitment, securing resources, and adopting a phased approach. Utilizing experienced personnel and temporary duty staff would allow us to establish core functions immediately. To ensure we don't let "perfect be the enemy of the good," I would focus on getting essential operations running first, while developing a mid- and long-term staffing and infrastructure master plan, ensuring we meet urgent diplomatic needs while setting the stage for future growth and expanded services.

Question. What are your views on my "embassy in a box" legislation, which would allow the State Department to build new embassies in places like the Pacific more quickly and efficiently by cutting red tape with the Department?

Answer. I believe this legislation is a promising, innovative, and welcome approach toward modernizing U.S. diplomatic infrastructure and deepening relationships in strategically important regions like the Pacific. The idea of streamlining the process to establish embassies more quickly could significantly enhance U.S. diplomatic presence, allowing for faster deployment of resources and more agile responses to geopolitical and regional challenges. Given the increasing influence of major powers like the PRC in the Pacific, this could be a timely and critical initiative for advancing U.S. interests in a competitive and dynamic environment. At the same time, it will be important to adhere to international building codes and maintain high standards for security, sustainability, and adaptability of our built environment in coordination with other agencies to ensure long-term success.

State Management and Oversight

Question. Management is a key responsibility for Chiefs of Mission. How would you describe your management style?

Answer. My management style is collaborative, adaptive, and results-oriented. I prioritize open communication and transparency, ensuring that team members feel heard and supported while fostering a culture of mutual respect and accountability. I set a clear vision and communicate it consistently and continuously, and as a team we develop our core values, which serve as our contract of how we will conduct and comport ourselves to achieve our mission objectives. I believe in empowering my team by delegating responsibilities appropriately, trusting their expertise, and providing them with the autonomy to make decisions. At the same time, I maintain a hands-on approach when needed, and I'm always available for guidance or feedback. I maintain a flexible approach as well. I adapt my style to best meet the needs of the team and the challenges at hand while focusing on achieving the Mission's objectives and maintaining morale and cohesion.

Question. Do you believe it is ever acceptable or constructive to berate subordinates, either in public or private?

Answer. No.

Question. How do you envision your relationship with the deputy Chief of Mission?

Answer. If confirmed, I would establish a productive and respectful working relationship with my Deputy Chief of Mission to ensure that responsibilities are clearly delineated, and the Front Office has a unified vision and voice within the Mission. One team, one mission. I would ensure that the DCM has sufficient oversight of the Mission's management and is ready to stand in for me when required, and take the lead on mentorship of Mission personnel, particularly first and second tour officers. If confirmed, I would also ensure that the DCM models professional behavior and addresses any evidence of bullying or harassment proactively, both to hold employees accountable and to deter such activities in the future.

Question. If confirmed, what leadership responsibilities do you intend to entrust to your deputy Chief of Mission?

Answer. If confirmed, I would work closely with the Deputy Chief of Mission to appropriately divide leadership responsibilities. I would likely ask the Deputy Chief of Mission to take on the daily management of many of the routine tasks of the Embassy to ensure that the Mission is compliant with Department regulations and responsive to internal requirements from Washington. I will also create a working environment and culture that enables him to provide me with candid feedback on my performance and to propose ideas on how to improve our mission performance by changes to our policies, processes and/or procedures.

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. Yes. I place a high priority on the employee performance process, including drafting measurable performance objectives, holding a minimum of two counseling sessions during the rating period, constructively identifying areas for improvement and recognizing exceptional performance through the Department's awards process.

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.

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 accomplish fully their missions?

Answer. In my experience, diplomats need to get outside embassy walls more frequently to accomplish their missions without ignoring proper safety and security protocols. It is imperative that U.S. diplomats go beyond embassy walls to fully understand the broad range of opinions of the population. This means not only getting outside the building but traveling outside the capital. In my previous time living in Solomon Islands, I traveled to every province except Isabel and Temotu, but if confirmed, I plan to visit every province during my tour. I would support and encourage all staff to engage broadly with a broad range of actors in Solomon Islands. I would encourage and support in-country travel and mentor employees on developing innovative ways to engage virtually as well.

Question. Question: How do you intend to ensure that U.S. diplomats are able to access all local populations?

Answer. I would provide support for travel to various districts in Solomon Islands to allow our diplomats to have in-person engagements with local Governments, civil society, and the private sectors in those regions. I would increase our public affairs presence, to include social media, TV, radio and newsprint, to reach areas where we do not often cover. I would encourage the selection of our grant recipients to come from regions we do not often work in. Utilizing the strength of the interagency, I would encourage our diplomats to engage in joint visits, where possible, to regions where other U.S. Government agencies have a stronger reach, such as CDC, USAID, DOD, and Peace Corps.

Question. Congressional Delegations (CODELs) and Staff Delegations (STAFFDELs) serve a critical oversight mission. Do you pledge to support fully CODELs and STAFFDELs that seek to travel to post?

Answer. Yes. Supporting CODEL and STAFFDEL travel should always be a top priority of any embassy to ensure proper collaboration and in person communication with the legislative branch.

Question. Do you agree to support fully any CODEL or STAFFDEL, with the only exceptions for simultaneous or overlapping visits by the President or First Lady of the United States, the Vice President, or the Secretaries of State or Defense?

Answer. Yes.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO KEITH D. HANIGAN 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 (PRC) 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 CCP a threat to the United States?

Answer. Last 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." As Secretary Blinken has said, under President Xi, the CCP has become more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad. If confirmed, I will advance U.S. national security interests and counter the People's Republic of China's (PRC) efforts to expand its problematic influence and use of coercion, through diplomatic engagements, public diplomacy, and commercial advocacy to bolster U.S.-Solomon Island ties.

Question. Does the CCP undertake any activities that are beneficial to U.S. interests? If so, please explain.

Answer. 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 2024 Annual Threat Assessment, the CCP is seeking to "preempt challenges to its reputation and legitimacy, undercutting U.S. influence, driving wedges between Washington and its partners, and fostering global norms that favor its authoritarian system."

Question. Do you believe that there are any areas within which the CCP that would constructively work with the United States in good faith, knowing that at any moment Chinese interlocuters with U.S. representatives could be disappeared at a moment's notice? If so, please explain.

Answer. The United States will work with the PRC to address transnational challenges, such as climate change, when it is in the U.S. interest to do so. If confirmed, I will work with my colleagues across the U.S. interagency and Congress 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 PRC in the countries or areas in which you will work?

Answer. If confirmed, my priority will be advancing U.S. national security interests in Solomon Islands 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 Solomon Islands and the region.

Question. As you may be aware, a group of federal employees penned an open letter to President Biden criticizing U.S. support for Israel in the aftermath of Hamas' brutal terrorist attack on October 7, 2023. In addition, employees from nearly two dozen agencies have staged walkouts in protest of the administration's Israel policy. Efforts like these directly undermine the duty of our diplomats to advance the poli-

cies of the President of the United States. Yes or no, did you sign the letter to the President expressing opposition to the President's Israel policy?

Answer. No, I did not sign the open letter to the President.

Question. Yes or no, did you participate in the January 16, 2024 walkout?

Answer. No, I did not participate.

Question. If confirmed, would you define one of the employees or contractors operating under your supervision signing an open letter criticizing you, or policies you undertake at the instruction of the President, as insubordination as defined by the Government Accountability Office?

Answer. If confirmed, I plan to create an environment of trust in which personnel are able to express opinions and to use dissent channels and understand the importance of constructive dissent. Moreover, I understand the expression of disagreement does not in and of itself constitute insubordination. If confirmed, I would work with the Department's Office of the Legal Adviser to determine the proper course of action should such a matter arise.

Question. In your view, are the actions these federal employees took, by anonymously signing a letter to the President of the United States, covered as "whistleblowing?"

Answer. I believe these employees were expressing a dissenting view to their leadership. I support employees' right to express their views and hope that employees feel confident to directly raise their concerns with their supervisors and management without fear of reprisal. "Whistleblowing" is a term and activity covered by federal legislation and regulations; I defer to the Department's Office of the Legal Adviser to determine whether the referenced actions are considered protected whistleblowing activity.

Question. If confirmed, how will you address discipline issues, such as insubordination, that do not take established dissent channels?

Answer. If confirmed, I would make sure that employees in our Mission in Solomon Islands know that there are several avenues available to express policy disagreements. I would encourage employees to use established channels to express their views.

Question. Have you ever expressed support for an Israeli ceasefire in Gaza?

Answer. I support the Administration's efforts to obtain a mutual ceasefire, secure the release of all hostages held by Hamas, and provide more humanitarian assistance to begin restoring the lives of Palestinian civilians in Gaza.

Question. Do you agree that Hamas is an antisemitic entity?

Answer. Yes, Hamas espouses antisemitism. Hamas, which is designated by the United States as a foreign terrorist organization, seeks to eliminate the State of Israel, and its founding charter calls for the killing of Jews.

Question. Would a ceasefire allow these groups to reconstitute and attack Israel, and Americans, in the future?

Answer. The United States remains committed to reaching a deal that protects Israel's security and secures the release of hostages, allowing us to also provide humanitarian aid to civilians in need. Working with partners, the U.S. Government is attempting to secure the release of all hostages held by Hamas. The U.S. Government supports Israel's right to protect itself from Hamas' terrorism consistent with international law.

Question. Do you agree that calling for a ceasefire in Gaza means calling for Israel to stop its pursuit of Hamas, a designated foreign terrorist organization, that orchestrated the October 7 attacks and still refuses to release all Israeli and American hostages?

Answer. Israel will always have the right to defend itself against attacks like the heinous attack on October 7th. The Administration maintains that a comprehensive approach starts with a deal for a ceasefire that would release all hostages.

Question. Do you believe that Israel, in its operation against Hamas, which is known to use civilians as human shields, is taking all necessary steps to minimize civilian casualties?

Answer. The National Security Memorandum-20 report states that the IDF has undertaken steps to implement obligations under international humanitarian law for the protection of civilians in the current conflict, including the requirements related to distinction, proportionality, and precautions in military operations. Israel's

own concern is reflected in the fact it has a number of internal investigations underway.

Question. Since the Solomon Islands (SI) switched diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to the PRC in 2019, it has become a focal point of the geopolitical rivalry between the United States, along with its allies in the region, and China. A security agreement between the Solomon Islands and the PRC, signed in April 2022, reportedly allows China to assist in maintaining civic order in the Solomon Islands through the deployment of "armed police, military personnel and other law enforcement" as well as to act "according to its own needs." There is concern the pact, the text of which has not been made public, could lead to a permanent PRC military presence or otherwise enable China to project military power in the region. At the same time this pact was being negotiated, U.S. diplomats chose to expend their efforts to reprimand the Solomon Islands for their stance on same-sex marriage rather than discourage the agreement. What are your concerns related to the SI-PRC security agreement?

Answer. The U.S. has a vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific for all. The United States respects the ability of nations to make sovereign decisions in the best interests of their people. That being said, we are concerned about the potential implications that security agreements with the PRC may have on the sovereignty and autonomy of Pacific Islands nations.

I do not believe importing PRC security forces, surveillance technology, or policing methods will help any Pacific Islands country. We reiterate our concerns over the expansion of the PRC's internal security and surveillance apparatus, which actively facilitates PRC government efforts to repress members of ethnic and religious minority groups in Xinjiang.

The United States is committed to supporting Taiwan's relationships around the world, both diplomatic and unofficial. We talk to every country about how Taiwan is a reliable, likeminded, and democratic partner, and its partnerships around the world provide significant and sustainable benefits to the citizens of those countries.

Question. If confirmed, what specific actions would you take to help dissuade a permanent Chinese military or police presence in the SI?

Answer. Pacific leaders have said consistently that countries in the Pacific Islands region have the capability and proven record of meeting the region's policing and broader security needs. Pacific Islands Forum members Australia, Fiji, New Zealand, and Papua New Guinea have long been committed security partners on policing with Solomon Islands.

If confirmed, I will continue coordinating with likeminded partners and standing up for the values and ideals that we share across the Pacific and in Solomon Islands in particular and present alternative solutions to the security problems facing Solomon Islands.

Question. As ambassador, will you choose to message LGBTQIA+ issues over security concerns in Solomon Islands?

Answer. If confirmed, addressing security concerns in Solomon Islands will be my top priority. Throughout my career, I have worked in close partnership with Diplomatic Security (DS) to safeguard personnel from both a physical and technical security standpoint and I also worked closely with the interagency and our U.S. and International Security Assistance Forces in both Iraq and Afghanistan. Safety and security are always foremost in my mind.

I am also committed to advocating for equal rights, a core value and policy priority of the United States. Before joining the Foreign Service in 1995, I lived in Solomon Islands for seven years as a Peace Corps volunteer, a private sector engineer, and a local employee with Embassy Honiara. I developed a deep respect for the culture and people of Solomon Islands. I will carefully balance all priorities and ensure we effectively advance U.S. values and interests in Solomon Islands, all while strengthening people to people ties.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO KALI C. JONES BY SENATOR BENJAMIN L. CARDIN

Benin's constitution bars President Talon from seeking a third term in 2026. Third-term bids are inherently destabilizing. With Benin now threated by Islamic extremists in the north, it is more important than ever for Talon to retire in accordance with the Benin constitution, paving the way for new leadership in 2026.

Question. Are you confident that President Talon will retire in accordance with Benin's constitution at the end of his second and final term in 2026? What actions will you take, if confirmed, to encourage the President not to run for a third term?

Answer. Benin has a history of peaceful transitions of power and respecting term limits, and it is important that this tradition continues, especially in the current security environment. If confirmed, I will engage President Talon and his government to encourage adherence to the constitution, emphasizing the importance of stability, continuity, and respect for democratic norms. Additionally, I will work with civil society, political leaders, and other stakeholders to strengthen democratic institutions and to bolster democratic processes, reinforcing the message that Benin's future stability and security depend on respect for its constitution.

Question. According to the State Department Human Rights Report, the 2021 elections were "widely reported not to be fair." What steps will you take if confirmed to support inclusive, transparent, and credible elections free of political influence in 2026?

Answer. If confirmed, I will prioritize supporting inclusive, transparent, and credible elections in 2026. This will involve working closely with Benin's electoral commission, civil society organizations, and international partners to strengthen election management institutions, improve voter education, and enhance the transparency of the electoral process. I will encourage the full participation of opposition parties in the electoral process without undue restrictions or interference.

If confirmed, I will advocate for the deployment of election observers to monitor the elections and encourage they are conducted in accordance with democratic principles. The U.S. Embassy will support local media and civil society organizations in their efforts to promote accountability and transparency. U.S. assistance programs will provide technical support and capacity-building to advance elections that are free from political influence and reflect the will of the Beninese people.

Benin's security forces have been documented targeting Fulani communities as they counter violent extremism in the north. In 2022, Amnesty International reported on the arbitrary arrests of Fulani people as security forces fight against terrorism. A 2023 United States Commission on International Religious Freedom underscores the severity of abuses against Fulani Muslim communities in Benin.

Question. In what ways can the U.S. leverage its assistance to ensure that Benin's security forces respect human rights as it responds to the threat of violent extremism? What actions will you take, if confirmed, to ensure the government takes actions to hold abusive security forces accountable?

Answer. U.S. assistance to Benin's security forces is tied to respect for human rights and accountability. If confirmed, I will leverage U.S. training programs, such as International Military Education and Training (IMET) and other security cooperation initiatives, to emphasize human rights, the protection of civilians, and the rule of law in counterterrorism operations. I will also engage Beninese authorities to ensure push for security force training on avoiding discriminatory practices and respecting the rights of all communities, including the Fulani.

Additionally, I will encourage the Government of Benin to establish mechanisms for monitoring and investigating reports of abuses by security forces, ensuring that those responsible are held accountable. I will also advocate for transparency and cooperation with civil society organizations to document abuses and promote community engagement to build trust between security forces and local populations. Through these efforts, we can support Benin's fight against violent extremism and advance human rights.

Question. What support can we offer Fulani communities in Benin to help them effectively monitor and report on state security force abuses?

Answer. The United States can offer assistance to local civil society organizations in these communities document human rights violations. We can support training programs that promote community-based monitoring and facilitate dialogue between Fulani leaders and government officials to build trust and increase responsiveness to concerns.

Democracy and Human Rights

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 Benin? What steps will you take to proactively address any efforts to restrict or penalize NGOs and civil society via legal or regulatory measures should they occur?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed, I commit to regularly meeting with civil society members and human rights organizations in both the United States and Benin. These meetings will help promote transparency and accountability in Benin.

To proactively address any efforts to restrict or penalize NGOs, the U.S. Embassy team, at my direction, will monitor the legal environment and engage with the government to highlight the importance of a vibrant civil society. We will work with local partners to identify early warning signs of restrictions and advocate for protections that allow NGOs to operate freely, using public diplomacy and U.S. assistance programs to support these efforts.

Question. Will you and your embassy team actively engage with Benin 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 Benin?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed, I will ensure the U.S. Embassy actively engages with Benin on press freedom and addresses any efforts to undermine it. I commit to meeting regularly with independent and local press to stay informed and support transparency.

Question. If confirmed, 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 investment and governance, and what will you prioritize in processes to administer such assistance?

Answer. If confirmed, I will use U.S. Government assistance, including the Democracy Commission Small Grants and USAID funding, to promote good governance, political inclusion, and economic growth in Benin. My focus will be on transparency, strengthening democratic institutions, and supporting marginalized populations, particularly women and youth.

Question. What are the potential impediments you foresee in advancing democracy in Benin, and how do you intend to resolve them?

Answer. Key impediments to advancing democracy in Benin include recent electoral reforms, limitations on press freedom, and regional instability. If confirmed, I will work with the Beninese government, civil society, and international partners to promote political inclusion and free, fair, and transparent elections. Strengthening election institutions and supporting civil society will be critical.

If confirmed, I will also focus on balancing security efforts with human rights protections, ensuring counterterrorism operations do not undermine democratic principles.

Management and Accountability

Question. Given the importance of representing the United States' diversity abroad, if confirmed, how will you ensure that our mission's staff and programmatic plans reflect this diversity?

Answer. If confirmed, I will prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion in both staffing and programmatic initiatives at the U.S. Mission in Benin as I have done over the course of my 22-year career. I will institute recruitment processes, particularly for Locally Employed Staff, that are open, fair, and transparent, and give opportunities to individuals from a broad range of backgrounds. Additionally, I will advance professional development and leadership opportunities that promote diversity at all levels of the Mission.

To promote diversity in our assistance programs, particularly by engaging with marginalized communities, including women, youth, and underrepresented ethnic and religious groups, I will conduct a review of the Integrated Country Strategy. I will encourage the use of U.S. Government resources, such as exchange programs and small grants, to support initiatives that promote inclusivity and ensure that our engagement with Benin reflects the values of diversity and equal opportunity that are central to U.S. policy.

Question. As a career member of the Foreign Service, please share how your experience in various posts has prepared you to advance the agency's mission of fostering inclusive diplomacy/foreign assistance?

Answer. Throughout my Foreign Service career, I have had the privilege of serving in diverse settings that have prepared me to advance the agency's mission of fostering inclusive diplomacy and foreign assistance. In each post, I've worked closely with local communities, government officials, and civil society groups to support U.S. policies and assistance programs promote inclusivity, respect for human rights, and democratic values.

My experiences have reinforced the importance of engaging with underrepresented and marginalized groups, particularly in sectors such as education, health, and governance, where inclusion is key to sustainable development. I've also learned the value of building partnerships with stakeholders from diverse backgrounds, supporting foreign assistance that reflects the needs and aspirations of all segments of society.

If confirmed, I will bring these lessons with me to Benin, fostering collaboration that builds on inclusivity and ensures our diplomatic and assistance efforts reach the most vulnerable populations.

Question. Will you commit to using your position, if confirmed, to promote the human rights and dignity of all people in Benin, no matter their race or ethnicity, religion, nationality, disability, sexual orientation or gender identity? What specifically will you do to prioritize and to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in Benin if confirmed?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed, I will fully commit to promoting the human rights and dignity of all people in Benin, regardless of their race, ethnicity, religion, nationality, disability, sexual orientation, or gender identity. Specifically, I will work with civil society and government officials to support policies that protect marginalized groups. I will support U.S. assistance programs that promote diversity by focusing on inclusive education, healthcare, and governance initiatives. Additionally, I will use public diplomacy to highlight the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion for Benin's long-term development.

Question. What challenges do LGBTQI+ people face in Benin? What specifically will you commit to do to help LGBTQI+ people in Benin?

Answer. LGBTQI+ people in Benin face significant challenges, including social stigma, discrimination, and limited legal protections. While same-sex relations are not criminalized, societal attitudes often marginalize LGBTQI+ individuals, making it difficult for them to access basic services, employment, and social acceptance.

If confirmed, I will work closely with civil society, human rights groups, and the government to advocate for LGBTQI+ rights. I will support U.S. assistance programs and public diplomacy that promote inclusivity and raise awareness about the need to protect LGBTQI+ individuals from discrimination. My goal is to support initiatives that reduce stigma and foster greater acceptance in Beninese society.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO KALI C. JONES BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

Political Landscape and Governance

Benin faces democratic backsliding under President Patrice Talon, challenging political freedoms, opposition activities, and press freedom. The U.S. aims to balance its support for democratic governance, human rights, and the rule of law while maintaining strong bilateral relations.

Question. How will you balance U.S. security cooperation with Benin while addressing concerns over democratic backsliding under President Talon's administration?

Answer. U.S. Government diplomatic efforts and foreign assistance focus on supporting democratic processes and promoting fundamental freedoms. Restrictions to political participation and democratic backsliding in Benin have underscored the importance of ensuring that our security cooperation does not come at the expense of democratic governance.

If confirmed, I will work to maintain a balance between advancing security cooperation to address threats like violent extremism and reinforcing our expectations of political inclusion and transparency. U.S. assistance will aim to strengthen democratic institutions, and I will engage the Government of Benin and civil society organizations to advocate for political reforms that reflect the aspirations of the Beninese people.

Question. What actions will you take to promote inclusive political participation, protect press freedom, and ensure free and fair elections in Benin, particularly before the 2026 presidential election?

Answer. If confirmed, I will prioritize promoting inclusive political participation and press freedom by engaging the Government of Benin, civil society organizations, and international partners to support these principles. I will advocate for reforms that protect freedom of expression and ensure that opposition parties have the space

to participate fully in the political process. In the lead-up to the 2026 presidential election, I will work to promote transparent electoral processes by supporting election monitoring efforts, engaging independent election management institutions, and using U.S. assistance programs to strengthen civil society organizations' ability to advocate for fair and free elections.

Question. How do you intend to work with Beninese civil society and opposition groups to strengthen democratic institutions and address the arrests and convictions of opposition figures on dubious grounds?

Answer. If confirmed, I will engage civil society organizations and opposition groups to support democratic governance and uphold the rule of law. I will leverage U.S. assistance programs to build the capacity of civil society, media, and independent institutions to promote transparency and accountability. Additionally, I will emphasize the importance of political inclusion and work with local actors to advocate for the fair treatment of all political figures, advocating that opposition leaders are not unfairly targeted or prosecuted based on dubious grounds.

Security and Counterterrorism

Benin faces escalating threats from Islamist insurgencies and regional extremist groups, particularly in the northern region. Enhancing Benin's counterterrorism capabilities and regional security cooperation is critical to prevent further destabilization and support U.S. security interests in West Africa.

Question. How do you assess the current threat level from Islamist insurgencies in Benin, and what measures will you prioritize to mitigate this threat?

Answer. The threat from violent extremists in northern Benin is growing, particularly due to violence emanating from neighboring countries like Burkina Faso and Niger. The increasing activity of groups affiliated with Al Qaeda and ISIS in the region poses a significant risk to Benin's stability. If confirmed, I will prioritize enhancing Benin's counterterrorism capabilities by expanding U.S. security assistance through initiatives like the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership. I will also focus on strengthening regional security cooperation, fostering intelligence sharing, and supporting military training to help Benin's security forces address the evolving threat from extremist groups.

Question. What role do you see for U.S. military and intelligence assets in supporting Benin's counterterrorism efforts, including the potential relocation of U.S. personnel and assets following the withdrawal from Niger?

Answer. U.S. military and intelligence assets play a critical role in supporting Benin's counterterrorism efforts. With the increasing threat from extremist groups in the Sahel, if confirmed, I will work to expand U.S. intelligence sharing and training initiatives to help Benin enhance its ability to counter violent extremism. The relocation of U.S. personnel and assets following the withdrawal from Niger presents an opportunity to bolster security cooperation in Benin and neighboring countries. I will also work to strengthen Benin's military capabilities through ongoing training programs and align intelligence support with Benin's counterterrorism strategy.

Question. How do you plan to address and resolve the local grievances in northern Benin that extremist groups exploit for recruitment and enhance collaboration with Benin through regional security initiatives like the Multi-National Joint Task Force?

Answer. Local grievances in northern Benin, such as poverty, marginalization, and lack of economic opportunities, are key factors that extremist groups exploit for recruitment. If confirmed, I will prioritize addressing these grievances by supporting development initiatives aimed at improving livelihoods, expanding education, and providing economic opportunities in the region. Working closely with the Government of Benin, I will advance U.S. assistance programs designed to meet the needs of vulnerable communities, reducing the appeal of extremist ideologies.

Additionally, I will work to strengthen regional security cooperation through initiatives like the Multi-National Joint Task Force, promoting intelligence sharing, joint military operations, and capacity-building to address cross-border threats. Enhancing coordination between Benin and its regional neighbors is essential for effectively countering extremist activities in northern Benin.

Economic Development and Trade

Benin's economy relies heavily on agriculture and faces challenges in diversification, poverty reduction, and infrastructure development. The U.S.

aims to promote sustainable economic growth, regional economic integration, and U.S. investments amidst growing competition from other foreign powers.

Question. What measures will you advocate to promote economic development and reduce poverty in Benin, particularly in rural areas, while fostering economic diversification beyond traditional exports like cotton and cashews?

Answer. If confirmed, I will advocate for measures that promote inclusive economic development and poverty reduction, particularly in rural areas where poverty is most prevalent. U.S. assistance will focus on supporting agricultural productivity while promoting diversification into other sectors such as renewable energy, technology, and infrastructure development. Programs aimed at increasing access to finance for smallholder farmers and rural entrepreneurs, as well as initiatives to improve agricultural value chains, will be essential in reducing poverty and fostering sustainable economic growth.

Additionally, if confirmed, I will work to strengthen Benin's integration into regional and global markets, advocating for trade facilitation measures and infrastructure improvements that will enhance market access for a broader range of products. U.S. assistance programs will prioritize job creation, especially for youth and women, and support entrepreneurship through technical assistance, training, and partnerships with local enterprises.

Question. How will you leverage U.S. assistance programs like the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) to address infrastructure and trade challenges and encourage Benin's participation in regional agreements like the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)?

Answer. If confirmed, I will leverage U.S. assistance programs such as the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) to address Benin's infrastructure and trade challenges by focusing on key sectors like transportation, energy, and digital infrastructure. Improving infrastructure will help reduce trade barriers and facilitate Benin's integration into regional and global markets, making it easier for businesses to access markets and grow their operations.

If confirmed I will also encourage Benin's active participation in the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) by advocating for reforms that streamline trade processes and enhance regional economic integration. U.S. assistance programs can help Benin build the capacity to fully implement AfCFTA agreements, which would open up new trade opportunities and foster greater economic collaboration with neighboring countries.

Question. With China's increasing economic influence in Benin, how do you plan to promote U.S. economic engagement and investment to ensure balanced and sustainable growth?

Answer. If confirmed, I will prioritize promoting U.S. investment in key sectors such as renewable energy, infrastructure, and technology to create opportunities that support Benin's economic growth. By fostering partnerships with U.S. businesses, I will advocate for high-quality investments that emphasize sustainability, transparency, and long-term economic benefits for the Beninese people.

I will also work closely with U.S. Government programs like Prosper Africa, the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation (DFC), and USAID to facilitate U.S. private sector engagement. These efforts will focus on creating an enabling environment for U.S. companies to compete fairly and contribute to Benin's development, while offering alternatives to the People's Republic of China (PRC)'s influence that align with Benin's long-term economic interests.

Health and Humanitarian Assistance

U.S. assistance in Benin is focused on health programs, particularly those targeting malaria, maternal health, and other humanitarian needs. Strengthening these initiatives and ensuring they reach the most vulnerable populations is critical to improving overall well-being and resilience.

Question. How do you plan to strengthen the impact of U.S. health programs in Benin, particularly those targeting malaria and maternal health, and reduce maternal and child mortality rates?

Answer. If confirmed, I will work to strengthen the impact of U.S. health programs in Benin by coordinating closely with the Ministry of Health and other local partners to ensure that U.S.-funded programs, such as those targeting malaria and maternal health, reach the most vulnerable populations. I will prioritize expanding access to health services in rural areas, where maternal and child mortality rates are often highest.

Additionally, I will leverage U.S. Government initiatives such as the President's Malaria Initiative (PMI) and USAID programs to build capacity in the healthcare

sector, improve the distribution of life-saving treatments, and support community-based health interventions. By enhancing health infrastructure and training healthcare workers, we can make lasting improvements in maternal and child health outcomes.

Question. Given Benin's high poverty rates, especially in rural areas, what additional initiatives would you propose to improve access to essential services like education, clean water, and sanitation?

Answer. If confirmed, I will advocate for U.S. assistance programs that focus on improving infrastructure in rural areas, particularly those that increase access to clean water, sanitation, and education. I will work closely with USAID and other partners to support initiatives aimed at building schools, expanding access to potable water, and improving sanitation facilities.

Additionally, I will support programs that enhance community-driven development, empowering local leaders to prioritize their needs and invest in sustainable solutions. By strengthening U.S.-Benin partnerships in these critical sectors, we can help improve health outcomes, increase school attendance, and ultimately reduce poverty in rural areas.

Question. How do you see the Global Fragility Act's role in enhancing the U.S. approach to building resilience and stability in Benin and ensuring that U.S. humanitarian assistance reaches the most vulnerable populations?

Answer. The Global Fragility Act (GFA) provides a comprehensive framework for addressing the root causes of instability and conflict, and it is a key tool in strengthening Benin's resilience to both internal and external pressures. If confirmed, I will prioritize implementing the GFA's community-based approach to address vulnerabilities in Benin, focusing on conflict prevention, governance, and economic empowerment.

I will work to ensure that U.S. humanitarian assistance is targeted to reach the most vulnerable populations, including those affected by poverty, displacement, and violent extremism. By coordinating closely with local partners, civil society, and multilateral organizations, we can create sustainable solutions that not only provide immediate relief but also build long-term stability.

Managing Relations with Regional Partners and Organizations

Benin's regional engagement, mainly through organizations like ECOWAS and other international partnerships, is critical for promoting stability and security in West Africa. Navigating these relationships while addressing regional security challenges is vital for U.S. foreign policy goals.

Question. How will you work with Benin to strengthen its role within ECOWAS and promote regional stability, especially in response to recent military coups in West Africa?

Answer. If confirmed, I will engage closely with Benin's leadership and ECOWAS to support their efforts in promoting regional stability and addressing the challenges posed by recent military coups in West Africa. Benin plays an important role as a stable democratic partner within ECOWAS, and the United States remains committed to supporting ECOWAS in upholding constitutional order and responding to threats to democracy and security in the region.

I will leverage diplomatic channels and U.S. assistance programs to bolster Benin's capacity to engage ECOWAS on issues of conflict prevention, democratic governance, and security cooperation. Strengthening Benin's involvement in regional initiatives will be key to enhancing collective efforts against violent extremism and promoting long-term peace and stability in West Africa.

Question. How do you assess Benin's engagement with other international partners, such as Rwanda, in counterterrorism efforts, and how will you enhance cooperation with European partners like France and the EU?

Answer. Benin has been actively engaging international partners, including Rwanda, to strengthen its counterterrorism capabilities and address the growing threat of violent extremism in the region. Rwanda has provided military support and training, which has contributed to Benin's efforts to bolster its security forces and enhance its ability to respond to these threats.

If confirmed, I will work to further enhance U.S. cooperation with Benin in counterterrorism efforts, while also deepening coordination with key European partners such as France and the EU. France, as a long-time partner in West Africa, plays a crucial role in regional security, and working closely with France and the EU will allow for more comprehensive support to Benin in countering extremism. I will prioritize aligning U.S. efforts with those of our European partners to ensure

our collective actions are complementary and have a greater impact on regional security.

Question. How will you leverage U.S. diplomatic and economic tools to align Benin with democratic values and human rights in regional and international fora?

Answer. If confirmed, I will leverage U.S. diplomatic and economic tools by engaging Benin's government and civil society to promote democratic values, human rights, and the rule of law. Through our diplomatic channels, I will encourage Benin's participation in international and regional fora, such as ECOWAS and the African Union, where democratic governance and human rights are prioritized. The United States will continue to support capacity-building efforts in Benin's institutions to foster good governance and transparency.

Additionally, I will promote the use of U.S. assistance programs, including the Millennium Challenge Corporation and USAID, to incentivize reforms that advance democratic governance and human rights. By aligning these economic tools with Benin's international commitments, we can foster stronger collaboration on shared values in regional and global settings.

Addressing Malign Foreign Influence and Strategic Competition

Benin's growing engagement with foreign powers like Russia and China presents strategic challenges for the United States. Countering malign influence requires a nuanced approach that leverages U.S. diplomatic, economic, and soft power tools.

Question. What strategies will you employ to counter Russia's and China's growing influence in Benin, particularly in the economic and security sectors?

Answer. If confirmed, I will prioritize strengthening U.S. economic engagement and security cooperation with Benin to counter the growing influence of our geopolitical adversaries. This includes advocating for increased U.S. investment in key sectors like infrastructure, energy, and technology to provide credible alternatives to PRC-sourced financing, particularly under the Belt and Road Initiative. By promoting transparent and sustainable investment models, the United States can help mitigate the risks associated with debt-financed projects that often accompany assistance from the PRC.

In the security sector, I will focus on deepening U.S. security partnerships through training, capacity-building, and intelligence sharing with Beninese security forces, particularly in counterterrorism. I will also leverage U.S. programs like the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership and regional military exercises to enhance Benin's ability to respond to threats without becoming dependent on foreign actors such as Russia. Additionally, through diplomatic channels, I will work to reinforce shared values of democratic governance and human rights, distinguishing the United States as a trusted and reliable partner that supports Benin's long-term stability and sovereignty.

Question. How do you plan to address the impact of foreign disinformation campaigns and promote U.S. soft power and transparency in foreign investments in Benin?

Answer. If confirmed, I will prioritize countering foreign disinformation campaigns by working closely with the Embassy's public diplomacy team to provide accurate information about U.S. policies and investments in Benin. We will engage local media, civil society organizations, and digital platforms to amplify U.S. messaging, ensuring accurate and transparent information reaches the public. I will also advocate for media literacy programs to help Beninese citizens critically assess disinformation and identify foreign propaganda efforts, particularly those from malign actors such as Russia and the PRC.

To promote U.S. soft power, I will highlight the positive impact of U.S. investments, focusing on transparency, sustainability, and the long-term benefits to the Beninese people. By promoting U.S. business practices and values such as transparency, anti-corruption, and fair labor standards, we can contrast U.S. investments with those of other foreign actors that may prioritize short-term gains over local development. I will also work to expand cultural and educational exchanges between the U.S. and Benin, reinforcing the appeal of U.S. values and partnerships.

Question. How will you engage with the Beninese government to ensure that foreign investments and infrastructure projects align with U.S. interests and promote sustainable development?

Answer. If confirmed, I will advocate for transparency, sustainability, and alignment with international best practices in foreign investments and infrastructure projects. I will promote U.S. investments as an alternative that prioritizes long-term

benefits for the local economy and encourages good governance. By leveraging U.S. programs such as the Millennium Challenge Corporation and Prosper Africa, I will support initiatives that focus on infrastructure development in ways that enhance economic growth, environmental sustainability, and the well-being of Benin's population.

Trafficking in Persons

In the State Department's 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report, Benin was downgraded to Tier 2 Watch List for its failure to meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking. The government initiated fewer investigations and prosecutions and did not convict any traffickers. The government identified fewer trafficking victims and referred significantly fewer victims to services. The government remained without formal procedures for the identification and referral of trafficking victims to care. Additionally, the government did not have adequate protection services, including shelter, for adults.

Question. If confirmed, what concrete steps could you take to help Benin operationalize the prioritized recommendations contained in the TIP report?

Answer. If confirmed, I will advocate for the implementation of the recommendations outlined in the Trafficking in Persons (TIP) report through the establishment of formal procedures to identify and refer trafficking victims to appropriate care and support services. Additionally, I will encourage the Government of Benin to increase investigations, prosecutions, and convictions of traffickers, ensuring accountability for these crimes. U.S. assistance programs can provide capacity-building support to strengthen Benin's legal and judicial systems, improve victim services, and foster partnerships with civil society organizations to combat trafficking. I will also work with international partners and NGOs to support Benin's efforts to address trafficking and provide better protection for victims.

Religious Freedom

In the State Department's 2023 International Religious Freedom report, Benin was noted to have issues with religious tolerance.

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. If confirmed, I will prioritize engaging the Government of Benin, religious leaders, and civil society to promote religious tolerance and respect for religious freedom. While Benin has a history of relative religious harmony, challenges remain in addressing issues of religious tolerance, particularly with minority religious groups. I will work closely with the Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom and other U.S. Government agencies to support initiatives that foster dialogue among religious communities and advance religious freedom. Additionally, I will promote U.S. programs that encourage the protection of religious minorities, and the prevention of any discriminatory practices based on religion.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to personally engaging with civil society on this issue?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed, I commit to personally engaging with civil society on promoting religious freedom in Benin. Civil society organizations play a critical role in fostering interfaith dialogue, advocating for the protection of religious minorities, and ensuring that religious freedoms are respected. I will work closely with these groups to support their efforts and promote an environment of religious tolerance and inclusion.

Question. If confirmed, what concrete steps can you take to help Benin increase their societal and governmental respect for religious freedom?

Answer. If confirmed, I will support initiatives that promote interfaith dialogue and religious tolerance by working closely with religious leaders, civil society organizations, and government officials in Benin. I will engage with local religious communities to foster mutual understanding and respect among different faiths. Additionally, I will leverage U.S. assistance programs to support training and capacity-building for government officials and civil society actors on religious freedom issues, and I will encourage the government to adopt policies that protect the rights of all religious groups. I will also work with the Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom to coordinate U.S. efforts in this area and advocate for religious tolerance and inclusion.

Human Rights

In the State Department's 2023 Human Rights Report, Benin continued to have significant human rights issues including arbitrary or unlawful killings and arbitrary arrest or detention.

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 the U.S. Embassy to strengthen its engagement with civil society organizations that focus on human rights in Benin. This will include regularly meeting with local and international human rights groups to gather insights and ensure that their concerns are heard and addressed. I will prioritize supporting U.S.-funded programs that build the capacity of these organizations to monitor, report, and advocate against human rights abuses.

Additionally, I will work with the Embassy's country team to maintain a robust dialogue with the Government of Benin, pressing for accountability in cases of human rights violations and encouraging reforms to strengthen rule of law and protection for all citizens.

State Management and Oversight

Question. Management is a key responsibility for Chiefs of Mission. How would you describe your management style?

Answer. As a manager, I prioritize fostering an inclusive and collaborative work environment where all team members feel valued and empowered. I believe in leading by example, maintaining open lines of communication, and ensuring that all employees have the resources and support they need to succeed. My approach is to delegate appropriately while providing clear guidance and accountability. I also emphasize professional development and creating opportunities for staff to grow in their roles. If confirmed, I will work closely with my Deputy Chief of Mission and country team to maintain a high level of morale and ensure the efficient operation of the mission.

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 subordinates, either in public or private.

Question. How do you envision your relationship with the deputy chief of mission?

Answer. The relationship between an ambassador and a deputy chief of mission is the most critical because it sets the tone for the Mission. If confirmed, I will build a relationship with the DCM based on two-way open and frank communication, mutual respect, and a clear division of labor. I will ensure the DCM is fully integrated into policy discussions and known to senior Beninese leaders, so the DCM can seamlessly assume the role of Chargé d'Affaires in my absence. My goal is for the DCM to be effective and empowered.

Question. If confirmed, what leadership responsibilities do you intend to entrust to your deputy chief of mission?

Answer. If confirmed, I will entrust the Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM) with the oversight of day-to-day management of the Mission, coordinating interagency efforts, and ensuring the effectiveness and efficiency of our management platform. The DCM will play a critical role in ensuring that all sections and agencies work collaboratively toward our shared mission goals. I will rely on the DCM to lead on operational matters, personnel issues, and resource management. I will ensure that the DCM is empowered to act as Chargé d'Affaires in my absence and is fully integrated into decision-making processes.

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 performances in order to encourage improvement and reward those who most succeeded in their roles?

Answer. Yes, I believe it is essential to provide employees with accurate and constructive feedback on their performance. Regular, clear, and honest evaluations are critical to fostering professional growth, encouraging improvement, and developing the Department's next generation of leaders. Constructive feedback allows employees to understand how their work aligns with the mission's goals. I also fully believe that those who most succeed in their roles must be publicly acknowledged to maintain a motivated, high-performing workforce that is dedicated to achieving U.S. foreign policy objectives.

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 will support and encourage the provision of clear, accurate, and direct feedback to all employees. Constructive feedback is essential for improving employee performance and professional development. Through informal and formal awards, I will recognize high achievers who contribute significantly to the mission. This practice not only enhances individual performance but also strengthens team effectiveness.

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 accomplish fully their missions?

Answer. I agree that it is imperative for U.S. diplomats to engage directly with local actors outside of the embassy to fully accomplish their missions. While many diplomats make efforts to get out and engage with host government officials, non-government organizations, and local citizens, more can be done to enhance these efforts. If confirmed, I will model and encourage embassy staff to engage a broad range of actors throughout Benin to build relationships and gather insights that will inform our diplomatic efforts and support U.S. foreign policy goals.

Question. How do you intend to ensure that U.S. diplomats are able to access all local populations?

Answer. If confirmed, I will prioritize providing the necessary resources and support for U.S. diplomats to engage with local populations throughout Benin. This includes ensuring they have the logistical and security support to travel outside the capital and engage with communities in rural and remote areas. I will also encourage creative approaches to outreach, such as partnering with local organizations and utilizing public diplomacy tools to reach a broader segment of the population. Regular travel, language training, and cultural sensitivity will be key components of our efforts to engage effectively with all local populations.

Question. Congressional Delegations (CODELs) and Staff Delegations (STAFFDELs) serve a critical oversight mission. Do you pledge to support fully CODELs and STAFFDELs that seek to travel to post?

Answer. Yes.

Question. Do you agree to support fully any CODEL or STAFFDEL, with the only exceptions for simultaneous or overlapping visits by the President or First Lady of the United States, the Vice President, or the Secretaries of State or Defense?

Answer. Yes.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO KALI C. JONES 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 PRC 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 its absolute control of Chinese society and industry, the CCP could stop all of these destructive actions tomorrow if it so chooses. Is the CCP an economic, diplomatic, military, and technological threat to the United States?

Answer. Last 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." As Secretary Blinken has said, under President Xi, the CCP has become more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad. If confirmed, I will advance U.S. national security interests and counter the People's Republic of China (PRC) efforts to expand its problematic influence and use of coercion, through diplomatic engagements, public diplomacy, and commercial advocacy to bolster U.S.-Benin ties.

Question. Does the CCP undertake any activities that are beneficial to U.S. interests? If so, please explain.

Answer. 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 2024 Annual Threat Assessment, the CCP is seeking to "preempt challenges to its reputation and legitimacy, undercutting U.S. influence, driving wedges between Washington and its partners, and fostering global norms that favor its authoritarian system."

Question. Do you believe that there are any areas in which the CCP would constructively work with the United States in good faith, knowing that at any moment Chinese interlocuters with U.S. representatives could be disappeared? If so, please explain.

Answer. The United States will work with the PRC to address transnational challenges, such as climate change, when it is in the U.S. interest to do so. If confirmed, I will work with my colleagues across the U.S. interagency and Congress 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 PRC in the countries or areas in which you will work?

Answer. If confirmed, my priority will be advancing U.S. national security interests in Benin 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 Benin and the region. If confirmed to be Ambassador, I will enhance our partnerships to jointly address shared challenges, which include countering PRC efforts to undermine shared values on accountable democracy, human rights, free markets, and environmental stewardship.

Question. As you may be aware, a group of federal employees penned an open letter to President Biden criticizing U.S. support for Israel in the aftermath of Hamas' brutal terrorist attack on October 7, 2023. In addition, employees from nearly two dozen agencies have staged walkouts in protest of the administration's Israel policy. Efforts like these directly undermine the duty of our diplomats to advance the policies of the President of the United States. Yes or no, did you sign the letter to the President expressing opposition to the President's Israel policy?

Answer. No, I did not sign the open letter to the President.

Question. Yes or no, did you participate in the January 16, 2024 walkout?

Answer. No, I did not participate.

Question. If confirmed, would you define one of the employees or contractors operating under your supervision signing an open letter criticizing you, or policies you undertake at the instruction of the President, as insubordination as defined by the Government Accountability Office?

Answer. If confirmed, I plan to create an environment of trust in which personnel are able to express opinions and to use dissent channels and understand the importance of constructive dissent. Moreover, I understand the expression of disagreement does not in and of itself constitute insubordination. If confirmed, I would work with the Department's Office of the Legal Adviser to determine the proper course of action should such a matter arise.

Question. In your view, are the actions these federal employees took, by anonymously signing a letter to the President of the United States, covered as "whistleblowing?"

Answer. I believe these employees were expressing a dissenting view to their leadership. I support employees' right to express their views and hope that employees feel confident to directly raise their concerns with their supervisors and management without fear of reprisal. "Whistleblowing" is a term and activity covered by federal legislation and regulations; I defer to the Department's Office of the Legal Adviser to determine whether the referenced actions are considered protected whistleblowing activity.

Question. If confirmed, how will you address discipline issues, such as insubordination, that do not take established dissent channels?

Answer. If confirmed, I would address discipline issues, including insubordination, in accordance with Department procedures and by seeking guidance, including from the Manager Support Unit. I would document the conduct and provide counseling to the employee, offering opportunity for improvement. If continued violations occur, disciplinary measures would be taken consistent with personnel policies.

Question. Have you ever expressed support for an Israeli ceasefire in Gaza?

Answer. I support the Administration's efforts to obtain a mutual ceasefire, secure the release of all hostages held by Hamas, and provide more humanitarian assistance to begin restoring the lives of Palestinian civilians in Gaza.

Question. Do you agree that Hamas is an antisemitic entity?

Answer. Yes, Hamas espouses antisemitism. Hamas, which is designated by the United States as a foreign terrorist organization, seeks to eliminate the State of Israel, and its founding charter calls for the killing of Jews.

Question. Would a ceasefire allow these groups to reconstitute and attack Israel, and Americans, in the future?

Answer. The United States remains committed to reaching a deal that protects Israel's security and secures the release of hostages, allowing us to also provide humanitarian aid to civilians in need. Working with partners, the U.S. Government is attempting to secure the release of all hostages held by Hamas. The U.S. Government supports Israel's right to protect itself from Hamas' terrorism consistent with international law.

Question. Do you agree that calling for a ceasefire in Gaza means calling for Israel to stop its pursuit of Hamas, a designated foreign terrorist organization, that orchestrated the October 7 attacks and still refuses to release all Israeli and American hostages?

Answer. Israel will always have the right to defend itself against attacks like the heinous attack on October 7th. The Administration maintains that a comprehensive approach starts with a deal for a ceasefire that would release all hostages.

Question. Do you believe that Israel, in its operation against Hamas, which is known to use civilians as human shields, is taking all necessary steps to minimize civilian casualties?

Answer. The National Security Memorandum-20 report states that the IDF has undertaken steps to implement obligations under international humanitarian law for the protection of civilians in the current conflict, including the requirements related to distinction, proportionality, and precautions in military operations. Israel's own concern is reflected in the fact it has a number of internal investigations underway.

Question. Two U.S.-designated Foreign Terrorist Organizations are reportedly active in northern Benin: a regional Al Qaeda affiliate known as the Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (aka JNIM) and the Islamic State (IS) Sahel affiliate. Additionally, an IS Nigeria-based affiliate (IS-West Africa) profits from ivory poaching in Benin. Benin presently receives U.S. security assistance through various channels, including the State Department's Trans Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership and the Defense Department's global train and equip program. What additional opportunities do you see to engage with Benin regarding its security challenges and ability to counter Islamic extremism and terrorism?

Answer. Benin faces significant security challenges from both Al Qaeda and Islamic State affiliates operating in its northern regions. In addition to the ongoing U.S. security assistance through the Trans Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership and the Defense Department's global train and equip program, there are several opportunities to further engage with Benin. One option is to expand intelligence-sharing initiatives between U.S. and Beninese security forces, improving their ability to respond to emerging threats. Additionally, increased counterterrorism training for Benin's military and law enforcement personnel, particularly focused on protecting civilians and respecting human rights, could enhance their capacity to counter violent extremism.

Finally, bolstering community resilience programs aimed at addressing the root causes of extremism, such as economic underdevelopment and lack of social services in vulnerable areas, could help diminish the influence of extremist groups.

Question. The PRC has become a significant economic partner for Benin, financing infrastructure projects and partially canceling debt. The countries formalized their cooperation through Benin's 2019 participation in the Belt and Road Initiative and a 2023 ″strategic partnership″ agreement. In 2024, economic ties deepened with the

completion of the Niger-Benin pipeline, which was built, financed, and operated by the China National Petroleum Corp (CNPC). Public opinion in Benin appears increasingly favorable towards the PRC, potentially at the expense of U.S. soft power in the region. If confirmed, what steps would you take to limit China's growing influence in Benin?

Answer. If confirmed, I would use our public messaging platforms to spotlight our development assistance to Benin in contrast to the one-sided PRC activities in the country, noting the grant-based infrastructure development from the Millenium Challenge Corporation compared to debt-financed PRC infrastructure projects. I would highlight our support to Benin in the health, education, humanitarian assistance, and economic development sectors. I would promote opportunities for Benin to utilize AGOA trade preferences to increase exports in comparison to the country's trading relationship to the PRC that has led to massive trade deficits. I would engage U.S. Government agencies such as DFC, EXIM, and USTDA to promote high-quality Western-led investment in emerging sectors like critical minerals. The PRC is compelling our African partners into trajectories of debt, negative growth, and exploitive security relationships. The PRC has established a one-way relationship with African countries, dumping goods at below market prices while the United States has in contrast promoted African exports to the United States through AGOA. The United States seeks to demonstrate the value of our partnerships with African partners, while also promoting fairness and transparency. If confirmed, I intend to enhance cooperation with Benin counterparts in the areas of accountable governance and human rights in an effort to curb democratic backsliding, to shore up the progress many African countries have made on democratization, human rights, and governance; and foster democratic ideals (and not those offered by the PRC) that are the most attractive and compelling to African governments and their people.μ

Question. What opportunities do you see for possible U.S. investment in Benin that may serve as a counter-weight to Chinese initiatives?

Answer. There are several key sectors in Benin where U.S. investment could serve as a counterweight to Chinese initiatives, particularly in infrastructure, energy, and agriculture. U.S. companies have the opportunity to invest in Benin's renewable energy sector, including solar and wind power, through initiatives like Power Africa, which would help diversify Benin's energy sources and promote sustainable development. Additionally, the expansion of digital infrastructure is critical, and U.S. companies could offer secure, transparent alternatives to Chinese-led projects in this area.

The agricultural sector, which is vital to Benin's economy, presents significant opportunities for U.S. investment in agribusiness, technology, and supply chain development. U.S. companies can also play a key role in enhancing Benin's port and logistics infrastructure, particularly in Cotonou, which serves as a gateway for trade in West Africa. Furthermore, educational and healthcare investments, such as through USAID programs, can build human capital and provide long-term stability, offering a meaningful contrast to debt-driven Chinese initiatives.

By focusing on these areas, U.S. investment can help foster inclusive economic growth while promoting transparency and good governance, positioning the United States as a reliable partner for Benin's development.

Responses to Additional Questions for the Record Submitted to Stephanie A. Miley by Senator Benjamin L. Cardin

The election of opposition candidate, Adama Barrow in 2016 provided a clear break from the past, and The Gambia has made a degree of progress in advancing democratic values and citizen freedoms. Freedom House's Freedom in the World Report highlights consistent improvements to freedom of assembly and expression in The Gambia under the Barrow administration.

Question. What specific initiatives can the United States support in The Gambia to ensure the democratic gains attained in the recent years are institutionalized so the outcome of future electoral contests are credible and citizenry remains actively involved? What role, if confirmed, will you play in helping with those efforts?

Answer. If confirmed, I will seek to utilize U.S. Government assistance resources for building capacity of key actors and civil society with programs such as training for national elections commissions, voter education, and election observation programs. I will also seek to utilize programs and policies aimed at increasing political

participation of marginalized groups, including women and youth, as voters, candidates, and office holders. A foundation of transparent, efficient, and accountable governance is essential to building citizens' confidence in their new democratic system.

Through the Office of Global Criminal Justice, the U.S. is supporting The Gambia as it undertakes a hybrid court to hold those who engaged in human rights abuses between 1994 and 2017 [accountable]. Specifically, GCJ is working with the Gambian Ministry of Justice to expand capabilities on case preparation. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission emphasized that citizens of The Gambia want accountability for those who engaged in gross human rights violations during the Jammeh regime.

Question. Along with the work that GCJ is doing with the government of The Gambia on hybrid court support, how else can the U.S. reinforce accountability in The Gambia?

Answer. If confirmed, I will leverage USAID's expertise in community stakeholder engagement, humanitarian affairs, and international donor coordination to foster a whole-of-government, community-focused approach to help The Gambia build resiliency and coordinate effectively internally, as well as with its neighbors, to address accountability in a way that promotes civic engagement and achieves functional judicial institutions.

Question. What role can the U.S. play in advancing investigative journalism, documentation, and capacity building of lawyers and victims to ensure that the hybrid court is able to fulfill its mandate? If confirmed, what specific actions will you take to help Gambian efforts to foster accountability?

Answer. If confirmed, I will strongly and routinely advocate across the U.S. interagency, with likeminded country missions, and via multilateral channels to encourage a variety of programming to support capacity building of lawyers, journalists, and civil society members who are active in the development of the hybrid court. I will encourage grant programs to seek candidates from regions we do not often work in, to expand our understanding of the impact of past abuses. I will support programs that promote judicial independence, a robust media environment, and democratic governance, which will enable The Gambia to improve the human rights situation on the ground. I will foster exchanges between the Gambian Ministry of Justice and civil society with stakeholders across the U.S. Government and civil society. If confirmed, I will also continue and enhance the open flows of exchange, in close ordination with our Office of Global Criminal Justice, to ensure that the Gambians are supported in the development and implementation of the hybrid court.

Democracy and Human Rights:

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 The Gambia? What steps will you take to pro-actively address any efforts to restrict or penalize NGOs and civil society via legal or regulatory measures should they occur?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to meeting regularly with a range of civil society members, including human rights defenders, independent media, and civically engaged youth on a broad spectrum of issues. I will utilize U.S. Government assistance for building capacity of key actors and civil society organizations by seeking out programming to develop advocacy and communication strategies to strengthen civic engagement within marginalized communities and build capacity of journalists to reduce the spread of disinformation and misinformation through accurate and timely reporting. I will utilize programs and policies aimed to increase political participation of marginalized groups including women and youth as voters, candidates, and office holders. A foundation of transparent, efficient, and accountable governance is essential to building citizen confidence in The Gambia's future. Should the government pursue efforts to tighten civic space and create barriers for civil society, I commit to using public and private diplomatic channels to challenge such an effort.

Question. Will you and your embassy team actively engage with The Gambia 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 the Gambia?

Answer. If confirmed, I will work to prevent the government of The Gambia from undermining fundamental freedoms of the Gambian people, including freedoms of expression, including for members of the press, and peaceful assembly. I commit to

regular engagements with independent and local press, as well as online activists with significant reach in The Gambia.

Question. If confirmed, 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 investment and governance, and what will you prioritize in processes to administer such assistance?

Answer. If confirmed, I will utilize U.S. Government assistance resources, including through the Africa Regional Democracy Fund (ARDF), to build the capacity of key stakeholders and civil society actors, support training for national elections commissions, educate voters, promote electoral transparency, and champion election observation programs. I will utilize programs and policies to increase the political participation of marginalized groups, including women and youth, as voters, candidates, and officeholders. A foundation of transparent, efficient, and accountable governance is essential to building citizen confidence in The Gambia's future.

Question. What are the potential impediments you foresee in advancing democracy in The Gambia and how do you intend to resolve them?

Answer. Afrobarometer's most recent report shows that while 64 percent of Gambians "prefer democracy" only 34 percent are "satisfied with democracy." If confirmed, I will seek out ways to support civil society in addressing corruption in pursuit of strengthening accountable governance in The Gambia and bolster the existing belief among the majority of Gambians that democracy is the best form of government for a fair and prosperous society. I will support capacity?building for key actors and civil society organizations, training for national elections commissions, promotion of marginalized groups' representation in government, a free press, and voter education and election observation programs. I will encourage policies that increase women's and youth political participation as voters, civil society members and leaders, and office holders at all levels of government. Our aim is to support The Gambia on its positive trajectory that embraces democratic norms and peace and prosperity for the Gambian people.

Management and Accountability:

Question. Given the importance of representing the United States' diversity abroad, if confirmed, how will you ensure that our mission's staff and programmatic plans reflect this diversity?

Answer. If confirmed, I will direct Embassy Banjul to publicize U.S. staff vacancies broadly, including with the Department's range of affinity groups, in order to reach a broad range of potential applicants. I will ensure that all hiring decision-makers, both U.S. and local staff members, complete required Department training on mitigating unconscious bias, and will require the hiring decision-making process be documented.

If confirmed, I will also implement local staff recruitment processes to reach the full range of The Gambia's multi-ethnic population. I will support the recruitment of Department interns and overseas opportunities for civil service employees and continue my commitment to mentor staff at all levels and from all backgrounds. I will review Embassy facilities and communication systems and direct adjustments, as feasible, so they are more accessible to all employees, family members, and members of the public who are served by the Embassy. I will ensure the content on our social media platforms is representative of the diversity of the United States, the selection process for Embassy foreign assistance grants is transparent, and that guests invited to Embassy events reflect Gambian ethnic, religious, and regional representation, as well as gender balance.

Question. As a career member of the Foreign Service, please share how your experience in various posts has prepared you to advance the agency's mission of fostering inclusive diplomacy/foreign assistance?

Answer. I am committed to embracing the energy, ideas, and talent of my civil service and Foreign Service colleagues, who represent the diversity of thought, experience, and approach that strengthens our diplomacy and advances our priorities. I have been fortunate to work with great teams who value creativity and cooperation as well as alternative thinking, unorthodox solutions, and respectful dissent, so that all voices can be heard and all options considered as we work on behalf of the American people. I have worked with volunteer LES and DEIA committees, helping them to transform to elected councils with broader participation, greater responsibilities, and a more regularized relationship with the Embassy Front Office. If confirmed, I will continue to encourage the diversity and inclusion that improves our

performance, produces thoughtful solutions for the complex challenges we face overseas, and demonstrates the wealth of talent in the United States.

Using our foreign assistance in an inclusive manner ensures that all members of society have a stake in their government and the ability to engage in shaping their future, and I have tried to work in this manner throughout my career. With the Mexican Assistant Secretary of State for North American Affairs, a colleague and I co-chaired the U.S.-Mexico Gender Working Group addressing root causes of women's marginalization including issues of domestic violence and financial dependence. As part of this we raised the profile of the union of women miners with the Government of Mexico, using our convening power to highlight the risks of injury, violence, and underpayment that disproportionately affected women. In Kosovo, we used small grants to strengthen moderate voices among the minority Serb population and worked with the U.N. to assist Kosovar Albanian mothers in finding answers to their children's disappearances through DNA testing, at a time when the Serbian government was not cooperative. While at NATO as POLAD to SACEUR, I pushed for a wider understanding of UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security, to ensure that NATO efforts in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Kosovo took women's perspectives into account. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), we raised the tragic situation of decades of conflict in eastern DRC, which takes the heaviest toll on the most vulnerable—women, children, and the elderly—and worked with likeminded partners on donor coordination to multiply the effects of our resources. If confirmed, I will continue to explore ways to leverage our foreign assistance to achieve our goals of open, inclusive societies that embrace transparent and accountable democratic governance.

Question. Will you commit to using your position, if confirmed, to promote the human rights and dignity of all people in The Gambia, no matter their race or ethnicity, religion, nationality, disability, sexual orientation or gender identity? What specifically will you do to prioritize and to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in the Gambia if confirmed?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed, I commit to using my position to promote respect for the human rights and dignity of all people in The Gambia, no matter the race or ethnicity, religion, nationality, disability, sexual orientation or gender identity. If confirmed, I will support the work of Post's DEIA Council, initiatives by individual employees, and inclusion of relevant best practices in the Mission's policy, programs, and initiatives pursuant to and in line with Department policies. I will also draw on the expertise and resources of the Department's Office of the Special Representative of Racial Equity and Justice to ensure we lead by example and reflect the United States commitment to addressing racial discrimination, inequity, and intolerance of all forms both within our own borders and globally.

Question. What challenges do LGBTQI+ people face in The Gambia? What specifically will you commit to do to help LGBTQI+ people in The Gambia if confirmed?

Answer. The situation for LGBTQI+ persons in The Gambia is extremely difficult, as members of the community are subject to pervasive prejudice; instances of violence, robbery, blackmail, and rape; and laws criminalizing consensual same-sex activity. The Barrow administration has stated that "homosexuality is a non-issue in The Gambia" and that decriminalization is neither needed nor a possibility. Due to prevailing cultural and political norms, LGBTQI+ persons are significantly marginalized in The Gambia and struggle to find allies even among human rights defenders. Key populations, including men who have sex with men and transgender persons, are often unable to access HIV/AIDS care and treatment due to stigma. The LGBTQI+ community has specifically requested that Western diplomatic missions not make their situation a highly visible aspect of our engagement specifically because it puts LGBTQI+ persons at risk and undermines their efforts to change Gambian minds and attitudes. If confirmed, I commit to regularly meeting with LGBTQI+ activists and with civil society organizations that support victims of abuse and promote public health to ensure the Mission promotes rights and protections to the greatest possible extent while also ensuring we do no harm through our interventions.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO STEPHANIE A. MILEY BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

U.S. Engagement and Strategic Interests

As the U.S. Ambassador to The Gambia, your role, if confirmed, is pivotal in fostering robust bilateral relations that underscore democratic values and strategic partnerships. Understanding your approach to enhancing U.S. engagement and advancing our strategic interests in these countries is vital.

Question. What are the U.S. strategic interests in The Gambia?

Answer. Beyond serving and protecting American citizens, our key policy priorities are strengthening The Gambia's democratic institutions; encouraging good governance, including supporting The Gambia's justice sector reform initiatives and transitional justice efforts, such as efforts to hold accountable those most responsible for the widespread violations of human rights during the Jammeh-era; strengthening the capacity of civil society and The Gambian legislature to exercise their constitutional authorities constructively; and encouraging economic growth. If confirmed, I will continue to promote inclusive country-led development and enhance U.S. influence in the face of strategic competition. Each of these priorities furthers U.S. interests to achieve our objectives of promoting regional stability, limiting our strategic competitors' expansion, and creating new markets for U.S. goods.

Question. How do you plan to enhance our engagement with The Gambia to demonstrate a democratic dividend and partnership with their governments?

Answer. If confirmed, I will seek out ways to support civil society in addressing corruption in pursuit of strengthening accountable governance in The Gambia and to bolster the existing belief among the majority of Gambians that democracy is the best form of government for a fair and prosperous society. I will support capacity building for key actors and civil society organizations, training for national elections commissions, promotion of marginalized groups' representation in government, a free press, and voter education and election observation programs. I will encourage policies that increase women's and girls' and all young people's political participation as voters, active civil society members and leaders, and office holders at all levels of government. Our aim is to support The Gambia on its positive trajectory that embraces democratic norms and peace and prosperity for the Gambian people.

Question. Considering the rising influence of Russia and China in the region, how will you promote U.S. strategic interests while balancing The Gambia's efforts to diversify its international partnerships?

Answer. The Gambia's relationship with the People's Republic of China (PRC) is defined by transactional and opaque decision making, with The Gambia providing access to natural resources in exchange for Beijing's provision of infrastructure development. PRC companies and labor are generally utilized, undermining progress for Gambian companies and the Gambian labor force. The country's interaction with most international partners is based on financial assistance: the government often acts in direct response to requirements set forth as conditions for continued or increased aid. The EU's regular infusion of millions of Euros in direct budgetary support gives it significant leverage in The Gambia. The ongoing MCC Threshold Program and the developing MCC Compact Program will help to cement the United States as a partner of choice. The Gambia has weak relations with Russia, and there is no Russian Embassy in Banjul. The Gambia has shown support for the United States and its allies in international fora and was the first African country to pledge to support Ukraine's Human Rights council resolution regarding Russia's further invasion. If confirmed, I will strengthen and build on our existing relationship with The Gambia.

Democratic Governance and Human Rights

The Gambia is at a crossroads between strengthening democratic governance and slipping back into authoritarian practices. The U.S. has expressed support for Gambia's democratic aspirations, but concerns about President Barrow's actions suggest democratic backsliding. U.S. foreign policy toward Gambia must navigate these challenges while advocating for human rights, the rule of law, and good governance.

Question. What steps will you take to encourage President Barrow and his government to implement constitutional reforms, mainly introducing presidential term limits, and ensure they apply retroactively to his current term?

Answer. The recent release of a draft constitution for public review represents an important step forward. The initial draft released by President Barrow's administra-

tion includes presidential term limits. If confirmed, I will work with a range of actors to encourage President Barrow to work with opposition leaders, including in the National Assembly, to support the passage of the draft constitution which includes presidential term limits, among other forms to strengthen and reform Gambian democracy. If confirmed, I will advocate for respect for human rights, the rule of law, accountability, access to justice, creation of constitutionally mandated term limits, and strong democratic institutions as fundamental to The Gambia's peace and prosperity.

Question. How will you address concerns regarding the suppression of media and dissent in The Gambia, and what measures will you propose to safeguard the country's press freedom and civil liberties?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to meeting regularly with a range of civil society members, including human rights defenders, independent media, and civically engaged youth on a broad spectrum of issues. I will utilize U.S. government assistance for building capacity of key actors and civil society organizations by seeking out programming to develop advocacy and communication strategies to strengthen civic engagement within marginalized communities and build capacity of journalists to reduce the spread of disinformation and misinformation through accurate and timely reporting. I will utilize programs and policies aimed to increase political participation of marginalized groups including women and girls, and all young people, as voters, candidates, and office holders. A foundation of transparent, efficient, and accountable governance is essential to building citizen confidence in The Gambia's future. Should the government pursue efforts to tighten civic space and create barriers for civil society, I commit to using public and private diplomatic channels to challenge such an effort.

Question. Given the mixed reactions to President Barrow's alliance with the APRC, what strategies will you employ to balance U.S. support for national reconciliation with accountability for Jammeh-era human rights abuses?

Answer. Although President Barrow has made an alliance with the ARPC, his administration has aggressively pursued human rights violators from the Jammeh-era and reconciliation for its victims. In November 2023, the government passed the Victims' Reparations Act, which creates avenues of redress for victims, and the Ban from Public Office Bill, which will prevent individuals recommended by the Truth, Reconciliation, and Reparations Commission (TRRC) from holding public office.

If confirmed, I will support U.S. efforts to guide The Gambia in its path toward reconciliation through accountability of human rights abuses committed during the Jammeh-era. I will work closely with the Department's Office of Global Criminal Justice (GCJ), which is working with the Gambian Ministry of Justice to expand its capabilities on case preparation and implement recommendations by the Truth, Reconciliation, and Reparations Commission (TRRC). If confirmed, I will engage with all Members of the National Assembly, including the ARPC, to encourage the implementation of the TRRC recommendation and promote greater reconciliation and accountability in The Gambia.

Women's Rights and Gender Equality

> *The U.S. has been actively engaged in supporting Gambia's stance on maintaining the 2015 ban on female genital mutilation and cutting and advocating for broader gender equality. Despite the recent legislative victory to uphold the ban, gender inequality remains a significant issue in Gambia. The incoming ambassador must navigate these sensitive cultural dynamics while promoting U.S. values on human rights.*

Question. What approaches will you use to support Gambian civil society organizations working to prevent FGM and other harmful practices against women and girls, and how will you engage with Gambian lawmakers to strengthen the existing ban?

Answer. As we expand our partnership with The Gambia, we must underscore our shared commitment to protect human rights, including the rights of women and girls. This year, The Gambia came worryingly close to repealing a ban on the harmful practice of Female Genital Mutilation and Cutting (FGM/C). Through the concerted efforts of Gambian civil society leaders and legislators, the ban has stayed in place. However, FGM/C remains a prevalent practice in The Gambia, where 73 percent of girls and women between 15 and 49 have undergone the procedure. If confirmed, I commit to working with Gambian civil society organizations to prevent the harmful practice of Female Genital Mutilation and Cutting (FGM/C). I commit to meeting regularly with a range of civil society members, including human rights defenders, independent media reporting on FGM/C, and civically engaged youth, in-

cluding and especially girls and women and the organizations they lead, on methods to prevent FGM/C. I will meet regularly with Members of The Gambian National Assembly and President Barrow to express U.S.-concerns over FGM/C in The Gambia and determine opportunities for collaboration to stop the harmful practice.

Question. How do you plan to promote gender equality in The Gambia, particularly in addressing the high female illiteracy rates and the country's poor ranking in the Global Gender Gap Report?

Answer. The United States regularly recognizes The Gambia's leadership on human rights and democracy issues regionally and internationally, through its role in multilateral and international institutions such as the UN, AU, OIC, the ICJ, and ECOWAS. If confirmed, I hope to build on this foundation and to work with the government of The Gambia to uphold its international commitments to human rights, including to protect and promote the rights of all women and girls. I will work across the interagency—including with USAID and MCC—to support the Gambian Government in addressing challenges like female literacy levels, women's ability to access decent work and well-paying jobs, and to live free from violence and discrimination.

Question. What strategies will you employ to ensure U.S. aid and programs are effectively utilized to advance women's rights in a context where there is significant pushback against perceived Western influence on cultural and religious matters?

Answer. The context in The Gambia, as exhibited by the recent threat to reverse Gambia's FGM/C ban, is indeed challenging and a pattern we are seeing across regions, sectors, and spaces—whether in domestic laws, multilateral agreements and negotiations, or the ability to safely run programming to promote women's and girls' empowerment. If confirmed, I will seek to adapt strategies and use the tools available to us—foreign policy, foreign assistance, and partnerships with other global actors—to empower girls and women in a way that elevates their agency and their solutions. It takes years—decades even, certainly beyond the term of one Ambassador—to change entrenched norms and practices. Pushback like we have seen on The Gambia's anti-FGM/C law is a part of the process, and if confirmed, I will seek to strengthen our investments and accelerate our efforts to truly counter the backlash. Using the tools available to us, and in close coordination with local, grassroots partners, including women and girls themselves, I will lead the U.S. Mission to The Gambia to make critical steps towards positive change, if confirmed

Economic Development and Business Environment

Economic development and a conducive business environment are critical for sustainable development in The Gambia. Your insights into promoting U.S. businesses and fostering inclusive economic growth in these nations are of paramount interest.

Question. What measures will you take to promote U.S. businesses and create economic opportunities in The Gambia?

Answer. If confirmed, I will work to deepen the economic relationship between the United States and The Gambia by promoting trade missions, fostering partnerships between U.S. and Gambian businesses, and leveraging The Gambia's African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) benefits. If confirmed, I will advocate for increased U.S. investment in The Gambia's infrastructure, including by U.S. telecommunications firm Africell. I will encourage U.S. and Gambian firms to participate in the annual U.S.-Africa Business Summit, which connects government leaders and private sector decision makers to drive U.S.-Africa sustainable business partnerships.

Question. What initiatives will you support to improve the business climate in The Gambia, making it more attractive for U.S. investors and benefiting local entrepreneurs and the broader economy?

Answer. If confirmed, I will work with the team at Embassy Banjul to maintain close contact with the U.S. business community in The Gambia, regularly advise firms in the United States seeking to enter the Gambian market, and coordinate with the Foreign Commercial Service to publicize public tenders of interest to U.S. companies.

Question. What role do you see for U.S. companies in supporting sustainable and inclusive economic growth in The Gambia?

Answer. U.S. companies are market leaders in telecommunications, agriculture, tourism, digital finance, and health care in The Gambia. Africell, owned by an American citizen, is the largest cell phone service provider in the country. InnovaRx

Global Health, a North Carolina-based company, is a leading provider of quality medicines and telehealth care. In early 2021, Vista Group, a New York-based investment company, acquired a multi-national bank with branches in Nigeria, Guinea, Sierra Leone, and The Gambia after a lengthy court dispute in The Gambia. Gambia Milling Company, jointly owned by a Gambian entity and Kansas-based Seaboard Corporation, which I worked with in the Democratic Republic of the Congo on their similarly structured milling company MIDEMA, is the country's largest provider of processed grain products. The presence and engagement of these companies allows the Embassy to highlight the many contributions of U.S. private sector partners, such as expanded employment opportunities, training and professional development for staff, and investment in communities, which are hallmarks of U.S. companies in their work around the world. The Gambia's positive economic growth presents opportunities for both the Gambian people and U.S. exporters in search of new markets. Gambians are familiar with and think highly of U.S. products, and gradually rising incomes will allow increased imports. Remittances from the Gambian diaspora represent at least a third of GDP. Gambian-Americans are eager to invest in The Gambia, frequently in businesses with a social development nexus.

If confirmed, I will maintain close contact with U.S. businesses in The Gambia, regularly advise firms in the United States seeking to enter the Gambian market, and coordinate with the Foreign Commercial Service to publicize public tenders of interest to U.S. companies. I will work with the Gambian Government to provide a stable and transparent investment environment for U.S. companies like Africell, while encouraging the entry of others.

Question. What efforts will you pursue as ambassador, if confirmed, to help crackdown on corruption in The Gambia, a significant factor impacting the investment climate in the country?

Answer. If confirmed, I will work with the Gambian Government to provide a stable and transparent investment environment for U.S. companies like Africell, while encouraging the entry of others. In the provision of U.S. assistance, I will promote standards of transparency and accountability. If confirmed, I will work to address obstacles such as corruption, inconsistent application of laws, and bureaucratic red tape by engaging with both U.S. and Gambian business communities, the United States interagency including the Department of Commerce and United States Trade Representative, and Gambian Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs counterparts to promote an improved investment climate.

Question. What priorities will you advocate for in developing a comprehensive MCC compact for The Gambia, and how will you ensure it addresses immediate and long-term development needs?

Answer. If confirmed, I will advocate for a MCC Compact Program that supports critical infrastructure creation and refurbishment, increases job opportunities, and protects the natural environment of The Gambia to help the country avoid major fluctuations in important industries such as agriculture and tourism. I will meet regularly with key stakeholders in the implementation of the MCC Compact Program, including President Barrow, Members of the National Assembly, MCC technical advisors, and relevant ministries that contribute to the Programs.

Question. Given Gambia's heavy reliance on the informal sector, what measures will you support to promote sustainable economic growth and formal job creation, particularly for underemployed and rural populations?

Answer. If confirmed, I will maintain close contact with U.S. businesses in The Gambia, regularly advise firms in the United States seeking to enter the Gambian market, and coordinate with the Foreign Commercial Service to publicize public tenders of interest to U.S. companies. I will work with the government to promote a business-enabling climate to support transition from informal to formal sector investment and employment. I will support programs and grants that provide opportunities for young Gambians to gain professional experience and career opportunities, such as the Department's International Visitor Leadership Program and the Mandela Washington Fellowship.

Transitional Justice and Accountability

The Truth, Reconciliation, and Reparations Commission (TRRC) highlighted numerous abuses under former President Yahya Jammeh, yet many of its recommendations remain unimplemented. The U.S. has shown strong support for advancing justice for Jammeh-era abuses. The following U.S. ambassador must continue to push for accountability while balancing political realities in Gambia.

Question. How do you plan to support the establishment of a hybrid Gambian-ECOWAS court to prosecute high-level perpetrators of Jammeh-era abuses, and what role will the U.S. play in ensuring its effectiveness and impartiality?

Answer. The Gambian Truth, Reconciliation, and Reparations Commission demonstrated citizens of The Gambia want accountability for those who engaged in gross human rights violations during the Jammeh regime. If confirmed, I will leverage USAID's expertise in community stakeholder engagement, humanitarian affairs, and international donor coordination to foster a whole-of-government, community-focused approach to help The Gambia build resiliency and coordinate effectively internally, as well as with its neighbors, to address accountability in a way that promotes civic engagement and achieves functional judicial institutions. I will also engage closely with the Department's Office of Global Criminal Justice (GCJ), which is working with the Gambian Ministry of Justice to expand capabilities on case preparation.

Question. What steps will you take to engage with the Gambian Government to ensure the implementation of the TRRC's recommendations, particularly those related to reparations for victims and institutional reforms?

Answer. The Gambia transitioned to democracy in January 2017 after 22 years of dictatorship. Their Truth, Reconciliation, and Reparations Commission (TRRC) has set the stage for accountability and transitional justice, and the government has taken many actions necessary to implement those recommendations and hold accountable those most responsible for the egregious crimes involving violations of human rights and affronts to dignity testified to at the Commission. In November, the Gambian National Assembly passed the Victims Reparations Act to provide financial redress for victims and the Ban from Public Office Act and to prevent human rights violators from Jammeh's regime from holding government positions. If confirmed, I will support The Gambia in its effort to implement TRRC recommendations, including implementation of the Victims Reparations Act and Ban From Public Office Bill.

Question. How will you address potential resistance from within the Gambian Government or other stakeholders to these accountability measures, and what leverage will the U.S. use to promote compliance with international human rights standards?

Answer. If confirmed, I will strongly and routinely advocate across the U.S. interagency, with likeminded country missions, and via multilateral channels to encourage a variety of programming to support capacity building of journalists and civil society members who are active in the holding the Gambian Government accountable. I will support programs that promote judicial independence, a robust media environment, and democratic governance, which will enable The Gambia to improve the human rights situation on the ground. I will foster exchanges between the Gambian Ministry of Justice and civil society with stakeholders across the U.S. government and civil society. I will emphasize to key stakeholders in the Gambian Government that U.S. foreign assistance is dependent on a positive human rights record. If confirmed, I will also continue and enhance the open flows of exchange, in close ordination with our Office of Global Criminal Justice, to support the Gambian-led effort to development and implement the hybrid court.

Regional Security and Foreign Influence

The Gambia's regional and international security landscape is shaped by its relations with neighboring Senegal, its engagement with China and Russia, and its participation in regional security arrangements. As The Gambia continues to navigate these complex relationships, the U.S. must support stability and democratic norms while countering malign influences from other global actors.

Question. What actions will you take to promote regional security cooperation between Gambia and Senegal, especially considering local opposition to the Senegalese-led stabilization mission?

Answer. The Senegalese-led mission in The Gambia, known as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Mission in The Gambia (ECOMIG), was established in January 2017. The mission was initiated to provide stability and security in The Gambia following a political crisis that arose from the disputed presidential election in December 2016. To promote regional security cooperation between The Gambia and Senegal, especially considering local opposition to the Senegalese-led stabilization mission, I will promote open and transparent dialogues between Gambian and Senegalese officials to address concerns and build trust, encourage confidence-building measures such as joint patrols to enhance mutual trust, and

offer U.S. mediation assistance to resolve any disputes. If confirmed, I will support The Gambia's efforts to train the Gambian armed forces and gain sufficient sovereign defense and security capability. I will also encourage The Gambia to work closely with Senegal to pursue joint security exercises and other opportunities to enhance Sene-Gambia security.

Question. How will you counter increasing Chinese and Russian influence in The Gambia, particularly in trade, investment, and security cooperation, while maintaining strong bilateral relations with the Gambian Government?

Answer. The Gambia's relationship with the People's Republic of China (PRC) is defined by transactional and opaque decision making, with The Gambia providing access to natural resources in exchange for Beijing's provision of infrastructure development. PRC companies and labor are generally utilized, undermining progress for Gambian companies and the Gambian labor force. The country's interaction with most international partners is based on financial assistance: the government often acts in direct response to requirements set forth as conditions for continued or increased aid. The EU's regular infusion of millions of Euros in direct budgetary support gives it significant leverage in The Gambia. The ongoing MCC Threshold Program and developing MCC Compact Program will help to cement the United States as a partner of choice. The Gambia has weak relations with Russia, and there is no Russian Embassy in Banjul. The Gambia has shown support for the United States and its allies in international fora and was the first African country to pledge to support Ukraine's Human Rights council resolution regarding Russia's further invasion. If confirmed, I will strengthen and build on our existing relationship with The Gambia.

U.S. companies are market leaders in telecommunications, agriculture, and health care in The Gambia, and other opportunities exist. If confirmed, I will encourage the Mission to maintain close contact with the small number of U.S. businesses in The Gambia, advises firms in the United States seeking to enter the Gambian market, and coordinates with the Foreign Commercial Service to publicize public tenders of interest to American companies. I will work to stop any expansion of influence from the PRC and Russia and support improved governance, law enforcement, security, and justice.

Question. What role do you see for the U.S. in supporting The Gambia's efforts to diversify its international partnerships, and how will you balance this with the U.S. strategic interests in the region?

Answer. The Gambia is already on its way to increasing its international recognition and recently became Chair of the Organization of International Cooperation. Since its transition to democracy in 2017 after 20 years of dictatorship, The Gambia has shown mutual respect and allyship with the United States, including in U.S.-led efforts in the U.N. Human Rights Council and U.N. General Assembly. The Gambia continually turns to the United States for support in areas that naturally align with our strategic interests, including transitional justice, democracy and governance, and economic development. If confirmed, I will support the plethora of U.S.-programming in The Gambia, including the Millenium Challenge Corporation Threshold and Compact projects, technical support from the Department's Office of Global Criminal Justice, and programming from the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, among others. If confirmed, I will also engage with the government of The Gambia, civil society, and members of the Gambian media to maintain and reaffirm that we are the partner of choice in the region and in international fora.

Trafficking in Persons

In the State Department's 2024 Trafficking in Persons Report, The Gambia was 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 The Gambia operationalize the prioritized recommendations contained in the TIP report?

Answer. If confirmed, I will charge an Embassy working group with leveraging the convening power of the U.S. Embassy to bring together relevant government officials and NGOs on a regular basis to convey our prioritized recommendations, foster a common effort, identify areas of achievable action despite resource constraints, and review progress. If confirmed, I will also foster coordination between Embassy Banjul and neighboring U.S. Embassies to encourage cooperation between border agents in The Gambia and its neighbors. The Embassy public affairs section will interact with the media and use Embassy social media platforms to raise awareness and to increase urgency. I will encourage Embassy Banjul staff to take advantage

of the Department's resources in the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking on best practices and opportunities for technical assistance.

Religious Freedom

In the State Department's 2023 International Religious Freedom report, The Gambia was noted for a need to continue support for religious tolerance and diversity.

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 key U.S. foreign policy priority, and the Department continues to closely monitor the religious freedom situation in The Gambia. The Gambia is generally tolerant of religious freedom and members of the majority Muslim population are largely accepting of members of the Christian minority. If confirmed, I plan to draw upon my experience in previous assignments to advance religious freedom, and to work with the Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom to promote tolerance where needed.

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 The Gambia increase their societal and governmental respect for religious freedom?

Answer. To help The Gambia increase its societal and governmental respect for religious freedom, if confirmed, I would work with international partners to support initiatives that promote religious freedom. These efforts may include engaging partners to discuss the role of religion in building peace and stability in the region. If confirmed, I will meet with religious leaders of all denominations and communicate the importance of religious peace and tolerance in public and private diplomatic dialogues. I will also work with our Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom where opportunities arise.

Human Rights

In the State Department's 2023 Human Rights Report, The Gambia was noted to have significant human rights issues including harsh and life-threatening prison conditions, serious government corruption, sexual violence, child, early, and forced marriage, and female genital cutting.

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 would personally engage and direct my team to work with civil society organizations to highlight restrictions on freedom of expression and other human rights challenges in The Gambia. I will seek opportunities to hold round tables that allow civil society to network and convene. I will seek out appropriate Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (DRL) and Public Diplomacy (PD) grants that can empower the existing efforts of civil society. Where appropriate and in line with United States. Finally, I would support programs that promote judicial independence, a robust media environment, and good governance, which will enable The Gambia to improve the human rights situation on the ground.

State Management and Oversight

Question. Management is a key responsibility for chiefs of mission. How would you describe your management style?

Answer. I am a 'walk-about manager', circulating throughout the mission, trying to understand people on a personal level, inviting them to meals and social activities, and always ensuring they know that I have an open door. This is particularly important in small hardship posts, where camaraderie can be high but at times some team members may feel disconnected and isolated. In previous assignments I have worked with the whole cohort present at U.S. missions abroad, all of whom I met with frequently to hear and understand their perspectives and ideas. Some examples of my engagement with various groups include: experienced mid-level officers (one-on-one coaching); new entrants to the Service (monthly mentoring); Locally-employed Staff (using low-cost and no-cost ways to improve working conditions and morale and engaging with the LES Committee on issues of health insurance, death benefits, etc.); representatives from other agencies (weekly and monthly meetings to understand their priorities and needs); family members (monthly coffees to hear their ideas for improving family support and 'pizza and a movie nights' for all

children), and our Marines (informal dinners and a formal taste-testing challenge to select a new chef for the Ambassador's residence). If confirmed, I will continue my efforts to find creative ways to include all employees and family members in a positive, productive team, so that they are empowered to do their best to advance U.S. policy and programmatic priorities.

Question. Do you believe it is ever acceptable or constructive to berate subordinates, either in public or private?

Answer. No.

Question. How do you envision your relationship with the Deputy Chief of Mission?

Answer. Having twice served as a Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM), I know the Ambassador and DCM must be a unified leadership team for the entire Mission. If confirmed, I will prioritize developing a relationship with the DCM that is characterized by two-way open and frank communication, mutual respect, division of labor as appropriate, and empowerment. I will make the DCM fully aware of all policy issues and known to senior Gambian leaders so that the DCM will seamlessly assume the role of Chargé d'Affaires in my absence. I want the DCM to be effective and happy in this key Mission role.

Question. If confirmed, what leadership responsibilities do you intend to entrust to your Deputy Chief of Mission?

Answer. If confirmed, I would establish a productive and respectful working relationship with my Deputy Chief of Mission, clearly communicate the delineation of responsibility, and provide a unified vision and voice from the Front Office for the Mission. I will support the DCM to have sufficient familiarity with policy issues and proper oversight of the Mission's management so that they are ready to stand in for me when required. I would also ask the DCM to take the lead on mentorship of Mission personnel, particularly first and second tour officers. If confirmed, I would also guide the DCM to model professional behavior and tackles any evidence of bullying or harassment proactively, both to hold employees accountable and to deter such activities in the future.

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. Yes. I place high priority on drafting constructive evaluations with credible assessments of areas needing improvement.

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.

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 accomplish fully their missions?

Answer. In my experience, diplomats strive to get outside embassy walls as often as possible to accomplish their missions, without ignoring proper safety precautions where necessary. It is imperative that U.S. diplomats go beyond embassy walls to fully understand the broad range of opinions of the population. This means not only getting outside the building but traveling outside the capital. If confirmed, I would support and encourage all staff to engage broadly with a broad range of actors in The Gambia. I would encourage and support in-country travel and mentor employees on developing innovative ways to engage virtually as well.

Question. How do you intend to ensure that U.S. diplomats are able to access all local populations?

Answer. If confirmed, I would provide support for regular travel to various districts in The Gambia to encourage our diplomats to have in-person engagements with local governments, civil society, and the private sectors in those regions. I would increase our media presence, to include TV, radio, social media, and other

popular methods to reach areas where we do not often travel. I would encourage recipients of our grants to come from regions we do not often work in. Utilizing the strength of the interagency, if confirmed, I would encourage our diplomats to engage in joint visits, where possible, to regions where other U.S. government agencies, such as USAID, DoD, and Peace Corps, have a stronger reach.

Congressional Delegations (CODELs) and Staff Delegations (STAFFDELs) serve a critical oversight mission.

Question. Do you pledge to support fully CODELs and STAFFDELs that seek to travel to post?

Answer. Yes. Supporting CODEL and STAFFDEL travel should always be a top priority of any embassy to enable proper collaboration with the legislative branch.

Question. Do you agree to support fully any CODEL or STAFFDEL, with the only exceptions for simultaneous or overlapping visits by the President or First Lady of the United States, the Vice President, or the Secretaries of State or Defense?

Answer. Yes.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO CHRISTOPHE ANDRE TOCCO BY SENATOR BENJAMIN L. CARDIN

Question. If confirmed, what specific steps will you take to help strengthen democratic institutions and norms in Mauritania?

Answer. I have promoted democratic principles throughout my public service. If confirmed, I plan to continue U.S. support to develop key democratic institutions in Mauritania, including media, civil society, and organizations such as the National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI). This support can help encourage free and fair elections and citizen participation in the democratic process. In addition, if confirmed I will encourage economic development and bilateral trade by leveraging the benefits under the African Growth and Opportunity Act in order to build resilience against the conditions that might enable democratic backsliding.

Question. What role, if any, can you play in encouraging Mauritania to engage with neighboring military juntas in Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso to press for transitions to democracy?

Answer. If confirmed, I will work with partners in Mauritania to explore options to promote regional stability. By strengthening our bilateral relationship with Mauritania and promoting democracy and good governance, we can help Mauritania serve as a model to military juntas. In addition, I will encourage Mauritania to expand relations with other democratic governments in the region and explore areas where they can engage Sahel states to encourage a return to democracy.

Question. Given the recent events in the Sahel, we have been waiting for a clear strategy from the administration that takes into account recent events. We are also waiting for details about the lessons learned from our engagements in the Sahel, and how these lessons are being applied to our ongoing approach in coastal West Africa, which is facing increasing pressure from violent extremists from the Sahel. Can you share with us the current status of the strategy for the Sahel, and what lessons have been learned that we can apply to Mauritania?

Answer. Though I am not currently involved in conversations about our Sahel strategy from my position at the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), I understand our position has been to continuously revisit and adapt our approach given the very fluid situation in the Sahel over the last few years. Recent coups underscore the critical importance of ongoing U.S. efforts, in partnership with regional allies and civil society, to stem democratic backsliding and confront human rights violations and abuses using a mix of punitive measures and positive inducements. If confirmed, I will promote democracy, economic development, and security in Mauritania which are all vital components to prevent threats to security and democratic governance.

Mauritania's extensive human trafficking networks prey on the vulnerability of domestic and foreign victims. Stemming from hereditary slavery and forced labor, human trafficking networks take advantage of those most disenfranchised in Mauritania. Mauritania has entered into agreements with the European Union to address the flow of migration that directly benefit human trafficking networks. The Department of State's Trafficking in

Persons report ranked Mauritania at tier 2, with notable recommendations on how the government of Mauritania can further address human trafficking.

Question. If confirmed, how would you work with the government of Mauritania to advance effective anti-human trafficking measures and economic support programs that target the vulnerable populations human traffickers take advantage of?

Answer. If confirmed, I will engage the Ministry of Justice to encourage their efforts to enhance the legal frameworks necessary to prosecute human traffickers. I will also continue efforts to train public and justice sector staff on slavery and trafficking laws, as well as their implementation and enforcement. In addition, if confirmed I will continue to support efforts to raise public awareness about the prohibition of human trafficking, including hereditary slavery.

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 Mauritania? What steps will you take to proactively address any efforts to restrict or penalize NGOs and civil society via legal or regulatory measures should they occur?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed I commit to meet with civil society members, human rights groups, and other non-governmental organizations in the U.S. and with local human rights NGOs and other members of civil society in Mauritania. If confirmed, I will engage directly with the Mauritanian government to advocate for the protection of civil society organizations (CSOs), and I will explore opportunities to support CSOs to strengthen their ability to advocate for their rights under Mauritanian law. This includes highlighting the positive contributions of CSOs and advocating for their protection. If confirmed, I will also collaborate with international partners, including the European Union and other donors, to coordinate efforts to advocate for the protection of civil society.

Question. Will you and your embassy team actively engage with Mauritania 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 Mauritania?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed I commit to meeting regularly with independent, local press in Mauritania. I also commit to personally engaging with authorities, and directing my embassy team to do the same, in order to advocate for freedom of the press. If confirmed, I will examine other efforts to support free expression by exploring support to civil society organizations focused on media and free expression.

Question. If confirmed, 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 investment and governance, and what will you prioritize in processes to administer such assistance?

Answer. If confirmed, I will continue to work closely with our interagency colleagues to utilize USG funding opportunities to advance economic opportunity and good governance efforts in Mauritania. Given my public service in USAID, if confirmed I look forward to utilizing my knowledge of USG resources to advance our strategic goals in Mauritania. Mauritania's recent reinstatement to the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) on January 1 sparked heightened enthusiasm to maximize trade benefits with the American market. If confirmed, I will encourage the Government of Mauritania to ensure compliance with AGOA criteria including human rights benchmarks, to diversify exports to take better advantage of AGOA, and to support bilateral trade and investment opportunities. In the provision of U.S. assistance, I will promote standards of transparency and accountability.

Question. What are the potential impediments you foresee in advancing democracy in Mauritania, and how do you intend to resolve them?

Answer. The deteriorating security environment in the Sahel, including the threat of violent extremism, poses a significant challenge to advancing democracy. Well-functioning institutions that are accountable to the people are an essential part of a long-term effort to reverse the expansion of violent extremist organizations. If confirmed, I will seek to address the issue of lack of access to basic documents for disenfranchised groups such as birth certificates which are required for school and voter registration by working with Mauritanian counterparts to address any impediments. In addition, if confirmed I will continue to support efforts to build the capacity of the National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI) and other democratic institutions. I also commit to leveraging opportunities like the Millennium Chal-

lenge Corporation Threshold Agreement and continued AGOA eligibility to encourage democratic reforms, if confirmed.

Question. Given the importance of representing the United States' diversity abroad, if confirmed, how will you ensure that our mission's staff and programmatic plans reflect this diversity?

Answer. If confirmed, I will direct Embassy Nouakchott to publicize U.S. staff vacancies broadly, including with the Department's range of affinity groups in order to reach a broad range of potential applicants. I will confirm that all hiring decision-makers, both U.S. and local staff members, complete required Department training on mitigating unconscious bias and require the hiring decision-making process be documented, that hiring panels have diverse members, and that interview questions be standardized.

If confirmed, I will also implement local staff recruitment processes to reach the full range of Mauritania's multi-ethnic population. I will support the recruitment of Department interns and overseas opportunities for civil service employees and continue my commitment to mentoring staff at all levels and from all backgrounds. If confirmed, I will review Embassy facilities and communication systems and direct adjustments, as feasible, so they are more accessible to all employees, family members, and members of the public whom the Embassy serves. I will also ensure the content on our social media platforms is representative of the diversity of the United States, the selection process for Embassy foreign assistance grants is transparent, and that guests invited to Embassy events reflect Mauritanian ethnic, religious, and regional representation as well as gender balance.

Question. As a career member of the Foreign Service, please share how your experience in various posts has prepared you to advance the Department's mission of fostering inclusive diplomacy/foreign assistance?

Answer. Throughout my career, an inclusive approach to development has been the cornerstone of good development. I first learned this as a Peace Corps volunteer in Morocco where we learned how to do community mapping and engagement to understand local needs. If confirmed, I will seek to understand the populations we engage with by learning who has the power to make decisions, who participates, and who does not and why. In most countries there are particular gender and ethnic dynamics that limit female and/or ethnic group decision making and participation. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, our local staff expected female employees to serve tea even though they were all professionals of the same rank. The affected women confided in me, and we organized a series of role plays as part of Mission wide meetings. Through theatre, comedy, and calling out poor behavior, we were able to make the point that gender discrimination was not tolerated at our Mission. An inclusive approach analyzes and understands the power dynamics between genders and ethnic groups, and with that knowledge ensures that the U.S. engages, trains, supports, and promotes a representative cross-section of society not just the most visible or powerful. Supporting diversity with our partners means also supporting diversity within our own ranks. Studies regularly show that diverse teams make better and more informed decisions. So inclusive U.S. Embassy teams are not only the right thing to do, but they are also good management, and they ensure the U.S. is making the best-informed decisions.

Question. Will you commit to using your position, if confirmed, to promote the human rights and dignity of all people in Mauritania, no matter their race or ethnicity, religion, nationality, disability, sexual orientation or gender identity? What specifically will you do to prioritize and to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in Mauritania if confirmed?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed, I commit to using my position to promote respect for the human rights and dignity of all people in Mauritania, regardless of race or ethnicity, religion, nationality, disability, sexual orientation or gender identity. If confirmed, I will support the work of Post's DEIA Council, initiatives by individual officers, and inclusion of relevant best practices in the Mission's policy, programs, and initiatives pursuant to and in line with Department policies. I will also draw on the expertise and resources of the Department's Office of the Special Representative for Racial Equity and Justice to ensure we lead by example and reflect the United States commitment to addressing racial discrimination, inequity, and intolerance of all forms both within our own borders and globally.

Question. What challenges do LGBTQI+ people face in Mauritania? What specifically will you commit to do to help LGBTQI+ people in Mauritania if confirmed?

Answer. Mauritanian law criminalizes same-sex sexual conduct and the "promotion of same-sex conduct," with a maximum penalty of death and differing pen-

alties for men and women. While the law is rarely enforced, it threatens LGBTQI+ persons and activists who advocate for human rights. LGBTQI+ persons are at risk of violence, discrimination and harassment. LGBTQI+ activists report persistent discrimination by Mauritanian society and the Government of Islamic Republic of Mauritania, noting societal discrimination in access to education, employment, housing, and health care. If confirmed, I will work with our Embassy team, as well as LGBTQI+ community members and organizations, to promote respect for the human rights of all Mauritanians, including LGBTQI+ persons, while also ensuring we do no harm through our interventions.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO CHRISTOPHE ANDRE TOCCO BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

Security Cooperation and Strategic Competition

Mauritania has been a critical partner for U.S. counterterrorism operations in the Sahel, a region rife with Islamist insurgencies and military coups. With increased Chinese and Russian involvement in the region, maintaining Mauritania's strategic alignment with the U.S. is crucial. Mauritania's relatively stable security situation, unlike neighboring Sahel nations, makes it a potential stronghold for U.S. defense and intelligence interests.

Question. What steps will you take to strengthen Mauritania's counterterrorism capacity, particularly given its unique security situation relative to the rest of the Sahel?

Answer. Mauritania's strategic location and its status as a democracy make it a key partner in efforts to combat terrorism. If confirmed, I will prioritize strengthening Mauritania's capacity to address security threats, which is crucial for regional stability and to mitigate the spread of extremist violence. Recognizing the interconnected nature of security in the Sahel, if confirmed I will encourage Mauritania to continue its collaboration with regional and international partners. This includes participation in U.S. multinational exercises like FLINTLOCK, which enhance interoperability and collective response capabilities, and as part of NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue. I will also explore expanded security cooperation, such as human rights training for security forces to enhance security force-community relations that can be a driver of instability if neglected.

Question. How will you address Russia's and China's increasing influence in Mauritania, especially in sectors like defense and infrastructure?

Answer. If confirmed, I will work to deepen the U.S.-Mauritania partnership by emphasizing our desire to be the preferred partner in security cooperation, economic development, and governance. This includes highlighting the long-term sustainability and mutual respect inherent in U.S. partnerships compared to the often-exploitative models employed by other nations. Mauritania's recent reinstatement to the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) on January 1 sparked heightened enthusiasm to maximize trade benefits with the American market, and Mauritania's multi-million-dollar Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) Threshold Agreement could further bolster resilience in the infrastructure sector.

Question. How do you plan to balance U.S. security cooperation with ensuring that Mauritania respects human rights, particularly in anti-terror operations?

Answer. If confirmed, I will work with Mauritania to mitigate the regional expansion and influence of terrorist groups through improved governance, law enforcement, security, and justice. I will advance these aims within a rule of law framework and with respect for human rights. If confirmed, I will continue seeking programming that builds counterterrorism capacity in Mauritania. Ensuring that these efforts are conducted with a strong emphasis on human rights will be a priority in our cooperation with Mauritania.Topic: Economic Development & U.S. Commercial InterestsWith significant U.S. investment in Mauritania's burgeoning natural gas sector, the country is becoming a key player in energy markets, particularly as European countries seek alternatives to Russian gas. U.S. firms such as Kosmos Energy are poised to benefit from the upcoming natural gas production, but political instability and corruption remain risks to business operations.

Question. How will you work with the Mauritanian Government to ensure that U.S. companies, like Kosmos Energy, have a stable and transparent investment environment in the face of ongoing corruption issues?

Answer. If confirmed, I will work with the Mauritanian Government to ensure a stable and transparent investment environment for U.S. companies like Kosmos Energy, while encouraging the entry of others. If confirmed, I will encourage the Government of Mauritania to ensure compliance with AGOA criteria including human rights benchmarks, to diversify exports to take better advantage of AGOA, and to support bilateral trade and investment opportunities. In the provision of U.S. assistance, I will promote standards of transparency and accountability. If confirmed, I will work to address obstacles such as corruption, inconsistent application of laws, and bureaucratic red tape by engaging with both U.S. and Mauritanian business communities, the United States interagency including the Department of Commerce and United States Trade Representative, and Government of Islamic Republic of Mauritania (GIRM) counterparts to promote an improved investment climate.

Question. What specific measures will you promote to protect U.S. commercial interests in Mauritania's natural gas and renewable energy sectors, particularly in light of growing Chinese competition?

Answer. If confirmed, I will work to deepen the economic relationship between the United States and Mauritania by promoting trade missions, fostering partnerships between U.S. and Mauritanian businesses, and leveraging Mauritania's African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) benefits. These efforts will include working with the U.S.-Mauritanian Business Council to identify and capitalize on opportunities in the natural gas and renewable energy sectors. If confirmed, I will advocate for increased U.S. investment in Mauritania's natural gas projects, such as the Greater Tortue Ahmeyim (GTA) and BirAllah fields, and renewable energy initiatives. To accomplish this goal, I will explore technical assistance and capacity-building programming to improve Mauritanian Government agencies' procurement integrity and transparent review of tenders. I will also promote investment opportunities for U.S. companies.

Question. How do you plan to address infrastructure and development challenges that could hinder U.S. businesses, including gaps in logistics and regulatory frameworks?

Answer. If confirmed, I will promote a more conducive environment for U.S. businesses to thrive in Mauritania by supporting capacity-building programs to enhance the capabilities of local institutions, by engaging the private sector to discuss ways to improve gaps in logistics management, and by advocating for an improved regulatory environment that is welcoming to foreign investment.

Democratic Rights and Governance

Mauritania has a troubling history of slavery, ethnic exclusion, and human trafficking, which have long been points of contention in its relations with the U.S. Despite some progress, systemic issues remain. The U.S. lifted some aid restrictions due to recent improvements, but ensuring these reforms are deepened and sustained will be critical to U.S. support.

Question. What concrete actions will you advocate to ensure the Mauritanian Government continues to make progress in addressing slavery and human trafficking, particularly among the Haratine and sub-Saharan communities?

Answer. If confirmed, I will engage the Ministry of Justice to encourage their efforts to enhance the legal frameworks necessary to prosecute human traffickers. I will also continue efforts to train public and justice sector staff on slavery and trafficking laws, as well as their implementation and enforcement. In addition, if confirmed I will continue to support efforts to raise public awareness about the prohibition of human trafficking, including hereditary slavery.

Question. How will you engage with civil society and opposition figures like Biram Dah Abeid to advance human rights and fight racial and ethnic exclusion in Mauritania?

Answer. If confirmed, I will meet with civil society and opposition members, with a special emphasis on opposition voices and local human rights NGOs that address racial and ethnic exclusion issues. If confirmed, I will also engage directly with the Mauritanian Government to advocate for the protection of human rights for all citizens regardless of their racial or ethnic background. I will also collaborate with international partners, including the European Union and other donors, to coordinate efforts to advocate for the protection of civil society.

Trafficking in Persons

In the State Department's 2024 Trafficking in Persons Report, Mauritania remained on Tier 2 because it did not fully meet 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 Mauritania operationalize the prioritized recommendations contained in the TIP report?

Answer. If confirmed, I will engage the Ministry of Justice to encourage their efforts to enhance the legal frameworks necessary to prosecute human traffickers. I will also continue efforts to train public and justice sector staff on slavery and trafficking laws, as well as their implementation and enforcement. In addition, if confirmed I will continue to support efforts to raise public awareness about the prohibition of human trafficking, including hereditary slavery. The government's previous efforts, such as caravans conducted by the Commission for Human Rights, Humanitarian Action, and Relations with Civil Society, serve as a model for these initiatives. Finally, I will encourage the Mauritanian Government to continue and expand programs like the General Delegation for National Solidarity and the Fight against Exclusion (Taazour), which address the social and economic conditions that leave many citizens vulnerable to forced labor.

Religious Freedom

The State Department's 2023 International Religious Freedom report notes significant religious freedom issues in Mauritania including apostasy and blasphemy.

Question. In the State Department's 2023 Country Reports on International Religious Freedom, a general lack of societal and governmental respect for religious freedom was noted in Mauritania. 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. My assessment of the religious freedom situation in Mauritania is that it remains a significant challenge, with both societal and governmental constraints on religious expression. The constitution defines Mauritania as an Islamic republic and designates Islam as the sole religion of the citizenry and state. The law prohibits blasphemy and apostasy, with severe penalties, including the death sentence, although these have not been applied in practice. If confirmed, I will continue to raise issues of religious freedom with senior government officials, including the Minister of Justice and the Minister of the Interior. This includes advocating for the reform of laws criminalizing blasphemy, apostasy, and tartuffery, and promoting the protection of religious minorities. If confirmed, I will advocate for the passage of laws that protect religious freedom, consistent with international human rights standards. This includes supporting the draft law on violence against women and girls, or "Karama" law, which has faced opposition due to concerns about its consistency with sharia. If confirmed, I plan to draw upon my experience in previous assignments to advance religious freedom, and to work with the Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom to promote religious tolerance.

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 Mauritania increase its societal and governmental respect for religious freedom?

Answer. To help Mauritania increase its societal and governmental respect for religious freedom, if confirmed, I would work with international partners to support initiatives that promote religious freedom. These efforts may include engaging partners to discuss the role of religion in building peace and stability in the region. If confirmed, I will meet with religious leaders of all denominations and communicate the importance of religious peace and tolerance in public and private diplomatic dialogues. I will also work with our Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom where opportunities arise.

Human Rights

In the State Department's 2023 Human Rights Report, Mauritania continued to have significant human rights issues including credible reports of arbitrary or unlawful killings and serious restrictions on freedom of expression and media.

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 personally engage with civil society organizations to highlight restrictions on freedom of expression and other human rights challenges in Mauritania, and I will direct the embassy team to do the same. I will also strongly and routinely advocate across the United States interagency, with likeminded diplomatic missions, and via multilateral channels to encourage a variety of engagements and programming to support civil society organizations promoting respect for human rights. Finally, if confirmed I will continue to support programs that promote judicial independence, a robust media environment, and good governance which will enable Mauritania to improve the human rights situation on the ground.

State Management and Oversight

Management is a key responsibility for Chiefs of Mission.

Question. How would you describe your management style?

Answer. My management style is one of seeking to empower and delegate to my staff and teams. A leader's role is to set the vision and goals and encourage teams to achieve them. With empowerment and delegation, employees take on more responsibility for themselves and their work. To be clear, delegation does not mean lack of oversight. A good manager should always require accountability and transparency and model that behavior him or herself first. If confirmed, I will therefore seek to model the behaviors I expect of others including integrity, hard work, collaboration, and an acceptance of feedback/alternate positions. A collaborative management style allows diverse opinions and views to come to the fore and improves the ability for the U.S. Embassy to make the most informed decisions. Ultimately, a manager or leader must also be seen as a caring human who understands the needs, challenges and goals of the staff he or she leads.

If confirmed, I will also seek to establish a productive and respectful working relationship with my Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM) to ensure that responsibilities are clearly delineated, and the Front Office has a unified vision and voice within the Mission.

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. If confirmed, I will establish a productive and respectful working relationship with my Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM) to ensure that responsibilities are clearly delineated, and the Front Office has a unified vision and voice within the Mission. I will ensure that the DCM has sufficient oversight of the Mission's management and is ready to stand in for me when required and will work with me to prioritize mentorship of Mission personnel, particularly first and second tour officers. If confirmed, I will also ensure that the DCM models professional behavior and tackles any evidence of bullying or harassment proactively, both to hold employees accountable and to deter such activities in the future.

Question. If confirmed, what leadership responsibilities do you intend to entrust to your Deputy Chief of Mission?

Answer. If confirmed, I will entrust the Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM) with leadership for the overall organizational health of the Embassy and clearly communicate my expectations for leadership. This will include ensuring that first and second tour officers and new supervisors are mentored and coached. The DCM will also lead engagement with the local employee staff association and U.S. eligible family members, though I remain committed to meeting these groups and working with the DCM to address any concerns. If confirmed, I will expect the DCM to lead the Embassy in an alter-ego capacity and be able to also engage on substantive policy issues in addition to chief operating officer responsibilities. Lastly, if confirmed, I will expect the Deputy Chief of Mission to model good behavior which includes providing honest feedback to me.

In order to create and continue employee excellence at the Department, accurate and direct employee evaluation reports (EERs) for Foreign Service Officers is imperative, though often lacking.

Question. Do you believe that it is important to provide employees with accurate, constructive feedback on their performance to encourage improvement and reward those who most succeed in their roles?

Answer. Yes. I place high priority on drafting constructive evaluations with credible assessments of areas needing improvement. I will also commit to working with

employees throughout the year to address any needed areas of improvement and provide resources including training and additional opportunities to build their skills.

Question. If confirmed, will you support and encourage clear, accurate, and direct feedback to employees in order to improve performance and reward high achievers?

Answer. Yes.

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. If confirmed, I will encourage the embassy team to engage Mauritanians throughout the country consistent with best security practices. It is imperative that U.S. diplomats go beyond embassy walls to fully understand the broad range of opinions of the population. This means not only getting outside the building but traveling outside the capital. If confirmed, I will support and encourage all staff to engage with a broad range of actors in Mauritania. I will also encourage and support in-country travel and mentor employees on developing innovative ways to engage virtually as well.

Question. How do you intend to improve the ability of U.S. diplomats to better access all local populations?

Answer. If confirmed, I would provide support for travel to various districts and states across Mauritania to allow our diplomats to have in-person engagements with local governments, civil society, and the private sectors in those regions. I would increase our social media presence, to include TV and radio media, to reach areas where we do not often cover. I would encourage recipients of our grants to come from regions we do not often work in. Utilizing the strength of the interagency, if confirmed I would encourage our diplomats to engage in joint visits, where possible, to regions where other U.S. government agencies have a stronger reach, such as CDC, USAID, and the Department of Defense.

Congressional Delegations (CODELs) and Staff Delegations (STAFFDELs) serve a critical oversight mission.

Question. Do you pledge to support fully CODELs and STAFFDELs that seek to travel to post, and Do you agree to support fully any CODEL or STAFFDEL, with the only exceptions for simultaneous or overlapping visits by the President or First Lady of the United States, the Vice President, or the Secretaries of State or Defense?

Answer. Yes. Supporting CODEL and STAFFDEL travel should always be a top priority of any embassy to ensure proper collaboration with the legislative branch.

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