

Testimony of Christine Elder
Ambassadorial Nominee to the Republic of Liberia
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
Thursday, March 10, 2016

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Cardin, and Members of the Committee,

It is a great honor to appear before you today as nominee to serve as the U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Liberia. I am deeply grateful for the trust and confidence that the President and Secretary Kerry have shown in me with this nomination. If confirmed, I look forward to working closely with the Members of this Committee and their staffs to promote and protect U.S. interests in Liberia. It has been my privilege in over 25 years of public service to have worked in both the Departments of State and Commerce, in both the Civil and the Foreign Service. I have served in Mozambique as Deputy Chief of Mission and with other post-conflict countries in transition, and have worked on African issues for most of the past decade.

I can think of no higher honor than to represent the American people as Ambassador of the United States to the Republic of Liberia, a country with which the United States shares a unique history. I deeply appreciate the love and support of my family, friends, and colleagues who have made me the person before you today.

I would especially like to thank my husband Paul Hughes, who was previously a Foreign Service Officer and grew up with Foreign Service parents, and acknowledge my sister-in-law Dr. Alice Hughes, who was born during their parents' assignment in South Africa, and has also dedicated herself to a life of public service. Unable to join us today but very much in our hearts are my stepchildren Ellie and Christopher, in school in Washington State, my brother in Ohio, and my parents in Kentucky.

Mr. Chairman, the United States and Liberia share a special bond rooted in our deep historical ties, and preserved through our commitment to democracy, human rights, and economic prosperity. If confirmed, I will continue to strengthen our bilateral relationship and ensure that the United States remains a steadfast partner as Liberia continues to recover from the Ebola epidemic, reform its security sector, strengthen its democracy, and expand economic growth and opportunity for all its citizens.

Not long ago, Liberia and its neighbors were mired in crisis, confronting the deadliest and longest-recorded Ebola outbreak in history. As the death toll rose,

the country began to experience profound second-order effects: schools closed; an already fragile healthcare system collapsed; and commerce, industry, and tourism came to a standstill. Liberia's peace and democratic stability, earned through daily, dogged determination during the course of Liberia's post-civil war period, were suddenly under grave threat as a result of the epidemic.

In combatting Ebola, the United States adopted a vigorous, whole-of-government approach to support Liberia's own efforts. The State Department, the Department of Defense, USAID, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and other elements of the Department of Health and Human Services, all played critical roles. Our humanitarian assistance, including food aid, totaled more than \$509 million. The President deployed almost 3,000 troops to build treatment centers and assist in training healthcare workers. The Government of Liberia acted with determination to educate the Liberian people as local health care workers risked and – in many cases – gave their lives to save and ease the suffering of others. While no one can rule out a relapse, today Liberia has been declared Ebola-free, and with continued assistance from the United States, is on its way to recovery. We have confidence that if there is another outbreak, the country and its neighbors will be better able to control its spread.

If confirmed, I will lead our embassy's well-integrated interagency team, which remains deeply engaged in a partnership with Liberia to prevent, detect, and respond to future outbreaks before they become epidemics. I will make every effort to ensure U.S. assistance is spent wisely, and that synergetic efforts with the Liberian government and other partners support Liberia's development and post-Ebola recovery plan, as well as advance the Global Health Security Agenda.

Thirteen years after the end of Liberia's civil war and throughout the Ebola crisis, the security situation in Liberia has remained largely stable, and the country has made major security strides. The United States remains Liberia's closest partner in the reconstruction effort, investing more than \$2 billion in rebuilding the country since signing the peace accord in 2003, including over \$350 million on security sector reform. Since the signing of the peace accord, the country has successfully held two presidential and general elections, as well as Senate mid-term elections and several by-elections. The UN Security Council lifted targeted sanctions in September 2015, and the United States lifted targeted individual sanctions in November 2015. The UN Security Council also authorized reducing UNMIL's remaining military and police components to a residual force by June 30, 2016, as they complete the final phase of the peacekeeping mandate. If confirmed, I will continue our bilateral efforts to promote the Government of Liberia's capacity to manage conflict early warning and response, to provide for its own security, and to strengthen the frameworks and institutions that underpin the rule of law.

But more work lies ahead to secure a lasting peace. Civil society is still fragile, and the country is challenged by widespread corruption, a lack of resources, and poverty. The next test will come in October 2017, when Liberia holds presidential elections. If confirmed, I will champion efforts such as USAID's five-year, Liberia Elections & Political Transitions program to ensure the people of Liberia continue on their chosen path of democracy by conducting free, fair, and peaceful elections in 2017.

As the situation in Liberia normalizes and the country continues to rebuild, economic development remains a top priority for the Liberian government. The government is rightly focused on job creation, including revitalization of the mining and rubber sectors, but also including diversification beyond commodities. President Sirleaf's government understands that battling corruption and advancing governance and economic reforms through initiatives such as the Partnership on Illicit Finance and accession to the WTO are important means of attracting foreign investment and bolstering the economy.

Broadening the U.S.-Liberian relationship to increase emphasis on trade and investment will also be one of my priorities, if I am confirmed. I believe Liberia's growth and recovery will depend on inflows of private capital, and there are opportunities for American businesses to benefit from increased trade and investment in Liberia's largely untapped mining, fisheries, agriculture, power, and service sectors. If confirmed as Ambassador, I will work to advance U.S. business interests for the benefit of both the American and Liberian economies. I will also leverage our robust development assistance portfolios, spanning multiple sectors to help fight corruption, promote transparency and good governance, and help the Government of Liberia ensure that all Liberians have access to basic services, rights, and opportunities.

One key means to advance economic, social, and political development in Liberia is the recently signed \$257 million Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) Compact. Liberia's MCC Compact will enhance Liberia's engagement in the President's Power Africa initiative, focusing on the development of Liberia's power and road sectors. The local electricity utility currently reaches only two percent of the population. The MCC project will quadruple Liberia's power generation and significantly lower electricity rates for Liberians, which at 52 cents per kilowatt hour, are roughly five times the U.S. average. If confirmed, I will work closely with Liberia's government to support sustainability in the power and transportation sectors through targeted capacity building, and by encouraging robust private sector participation and investment in vital infrastructure.

Mr. Chairman, I thank you for this opportunity to appear before you and the other members of the Committee, and look forward to your questions.

