

NOMINATION

TUESDAY, MARCH 4, 2025

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

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:05 a.m., in room SD-419, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. James E. Risch presiding.

Present: Senators Risch [presiding], Ricketts, McCormick, Daines, Hagerty, Lee, Cruz, Scott, Shaheen, Coons, Murphy, Kaine, Merkley, Schatz, Van Hollen, Duckworth, and Rosen.

Senator RISCH. The committee will come to order.

Well, I want to thank all of you for being here today. We always welcome our guests as they watch our hearing. I want to remind everyone about the protocol within the committee.

We enjoy having you here to watch, but no participation of any kind in any way by the audience is to be participated. Those who do will be removed and banned for a year.

We have today to consider the nominations of the Honorable Christopher Landau to be Deputy Secretary of State, the Honorable Michael Rigas to be Deputy Secretary of State for Management and Resources, and the Honorable Matthew Whitaker to be the U.S. Permanent Representative to NATO.

We have two guests. Well, we actually have one guest with us here to introduce Mr. Whitaker, and that is Senator Ernst.

Senator Ernst's colleague is in a hearing right now that I think he is presiding over and so cannot be with us right now, but I have promised Senator Grassley that the moment he shows up in deference to his seniority here we will suspend the hearing and allow him to make a few remarks. But we—I will postpone my opening statement until after the introductory remarks.

So, with that, Senator Ernst, you are up. Welcome to our committee.

STATEMENT OF HON. JONI ERNST, U.S. SENATOR FROM IOWA

Senator ERNST. Thank you, Chairman Risch and Ranking Member Shaheen, and good morning to my distinguished colleagues.

It is an honor to be here today to introduce my friend and fellow Iowan, Matt Whitaker, and I would also like to extend my greetings to his friends and family that have joined us here today.

So, Matt was raised outside of Des Moines, Iowa, and went on to graduate from the University of Iowa, where he earned his bachelor of arts, master of business administration, and juris doctor,

and I have to state as well for the committee, and this is very important, that he was a University of Iowa Hawkeye football player and did take the team to the 1991 Rose Bowl.

So, that is probably one of his most significant achievements, and as an Iowa State Cyclone I try not to hold this against him.

[Laughter.]

Senator ERNST. So, Matt has proudly and honorably served our State and country as the U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Iowa, in private practice, and most recently as the former acting attorney general of the United States.

People are often surprised to learn how Matt and I became friends. So, it all began in 2013 during a heated five way primary for U.S. Senate which culminated in 2014.

As we both crisscrossed Iowa, working hard to earn the nomination for Republican running for U.S. Senate, we would often run into each other at the same events, and literally we could finish each other's sentences, and we knew our stump speeches so well, the joke between Matt and I was if you cannot make it to this event, I will go ahead and give your stump speech for you.

He was once a fierce opponent, but Matt became a very, very dear friend who graciously helped me win this Senate seat later that fall.

Since 2014, Matt has supported me in countless ways, offering wise counsel and keen insight on the issues facing our State, our nation, and the world today.

While some may just brush it off as Iowa nice, I believe this is a clear demonstration of Matt's character. He is willing to put differences aside, strengthen relationships, and put our country over politics.

Colleagues, I have had the privilege to travel with many of you to meet face to face with our NATO allies. Over the last few years during those exchanges a consistent theme has emerged—the need for American leadership, a willingness to speak hard truths and encourage our partners to step up.

Matt's experience has prepared him for this aspect of the job. With decades of law enforcement experience and having served as the acting attorney general, Matt has successfully collaborated across many organizations and jurisdictions.

He can articulate through firsthand knowledge the evolving global threats confronting our nation and NATO allies, and he has shown the courage to take on the dangers posed by terrorism, transnational criminal networks, and those seeking to do the Western world harm.

Matt's steady, proven leadership will be crucial in ensuring a stronger, safer world under President Trump's peace through strength foreign policy.

Colleagues, Matt Whitaker is the right person for this time and will be an excellent Ambassador to NATO, and I urge you to support his nomination.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Senator RISCH. Well, thank you very much, Senator Ernst. Certainly good praises for the candidate. I know you are busy, so we will excuse you if you feel so inclined.

Again, when Senator Grassley gets here we will suspend the proceedings and allow him to make a few remarks for us. So, the way this is going to work I am going to make an opening statement here, followed by Senator Shaheen. Then we will open it up for 5 minutes of questions for each member—perhaps a second round, if we have time.

And as I said, in the meantime if Senator Grassley—when Senator Grassley shows up we will recognize him.

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

Senator RISCH. Today, we see a generational shift occurring in American domestic and foreign policy. For years endless debate was a substitute for action. DEI replaced common sense, and where American strength and leadership had once been respected we were seen as weak.

Last November, Americans rejected the status quo and demanded change. President Trump is an exceptional and strong—President Trump is an exceptional and strong but different leader and U.S. foreign policy will reflect a new era that places the U.S. front and center.

We all know transitions are never easy, and the three witnesses before us will face challenges as the U.S. blazes a new trail. They have their work cut out for them.

Today, America faces threats from every corner of the world. Hostile powers like China, Russia, North Korea, and Iran have formed an authoritarian axis that seeks to weaken the United States.

While these countries may not be each other's traditional allies, their cooperation competes with American interests and values.

The Chinese government steals American intellectual property, floods our streets with fentanyl, and exploits our free markets for its gain while aggressively undermining American security.

To counter this threat we need to work with our allies in Asia, like Japan, Taiwan, the Philippines, Korea, and Australia. We must push back on Chinese influence in Latin America and Africa.

The State Department should reenergize its economic mission, supporting U.S. investment in partner countries to counter predatory investment from China.

In the Middle East the fall of Assad and the tremendous success of Israel's war against Hamas has turned the region on its head, and Iran's proxies network are in tatters.

We face a once in a lifetime opportunity to eject Iran's destabilizing presence from Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq. I hope the Administration will build momentum to weaken Iran before even thinking about negotiations with that regime.

And of course, his negotiations with Russia are ongoing. Securing a peaceful and permanent resolution to the war in Ukraine is critical.

Our first nominee, Mr. Landau, has been appointed to be the Deputy Secretary. He served as Ambassador to Mexico and managed one of the largest embassies. He had to tackle challenges from the illegal immigration crisis and drugs flowing into our country to

ensuring ag workers could still come to the United States during COVID.

Mr. Landau, I look forward to hearing about your plans to protect America in these turbulent times.

Our second witness, Mr. Rigas, has been nominated to be Deputy Secretary for Management and Resources.

Mr. Rigas, you will be uniquely situated to guide the next generation of department personnel.

The American people need a State Department staffed by our nation's best, all working to advance American interests and outcompete our adversaries.

You have a tremendous opportunity to return the department to peak performance and create a unified work force that rewards merit and accomplishment rather than DEI and divisive ideology.

To effectively advance our national interest I have said repeatedly that U.S. diplomats must get outside our embassies and engage with locals. In 2022 my Secure Embassy Construction Act became law, helping free our personnel to get out and do their jobs.

Under the previous Administration the State Department did not fully implement this law. I hope under your leadership this will be remedied.

Finally, we have Mr. Whitaker who has been nominated to be Ambassador to NATO. Today, NATO remains more than ever relevant to the security of the United States and Europe.

Unfortunately, many NATO members have taken it for granted for far too long. Our European allies left the heavy lifting to us and by their own admission did not pull their own weight in defense spending.

In 2014, Russia invaded Ukraine for the first time, but Europe did nothing. After the invasion of 2022, European leaders acknowledged the threat and pledged to do more, but not all NATO allies started to make the necessary investments.

Today, Europe by itself still lacks the capacity to field the necessary military force. U.S. taxpayers cannot continue to foot Europe's bill without dramatic investment from Europe. Europe now realizes that fact.

Mr. Whitaker, as our next Ambassador to NATO you will be tasked with preserving the fidelity, commitment, and integrity of NATO and ensuring our allies rise to meet the challenges of an increasingly dangerous world—a tough job.

At this year's summit in June all NATO allies must commit to significantly higher level of defense spending in addition to increasing their production of defense material and recruiting. Most have embraced the necessity of that new reality, given Russia's new aggression.

Mr. Whitaker, I look forward to hearing from you and will work to—that you will work to ensure our allies shoulder their share of the burden and make NATO more effective.

The days of endless discussion are over in U.S. foreign policy. This is where the rubber meets the road.

Thank you to all of our witnesses for your willingness to serve in what will be some challenging times.

Senator Shaheen, is it all right if we have—
Senator SHAHEEN. Absolutely.

Senator RISCH. Senator Grassley, our distinguished colleague from Iowa, I understand you have a few thoughts for us.

**STATEMENT OF HON. CHUCK GRASSLEY,
U.S. SENATOR FROM IOWA**

Senator GRASSLEY. Thank you very much to all the members of this distinguished committee. I am here to introduce a friend and a fellow Iowan.

This is Matt Whitaker, and he is nominated to serve our next U.S. Ambassador to NATO, and we also welcome his family here this morning.

Now, in Iowa, Matt is widely known for reasons I will give you, but he is also well known here in Washington for his service during the first Trump administration in which he served a long period of time, but most importantly as acting Attorney General.

Prior to that, while serving as chief of staff for the Department of Justice, Matt traveled around the globe meeting with world leaders on law enforcement matters, notably with Chinese officials to discuss fentanyl production.

During the George W. Bush administration Matt served our home State as U.S. Attorney for the Southern District, and that was from the years 2004 to 2009. His years of public service in the legal and criminal justice areas demonstrate an unwavering commitment to our country and to the rule of law.

Now, back home in Iowa, Matt is known for his outstanding achievements at Kinnick Stadium, home of the Iowa Hawkeyes, because on the football field Matt cultivated a no nonsense work ethic and commitment to teamwork that underscores our nation's motto *e pluribus unum*—out of many is one—and he never lets you forget about his support for the Hawkeyes.

He never forgets about his support for the University of Iowa, and it is hard for me to get him to admit there is even a University of Northern Iowa.

[Laughter.]

Senator GRASSLEY. Matt then brings that rallying cry to bear no matter where he goes as an athlete, as a U.S. attorney, or to the very top rung of our nation's law enforcement ladder.

So, I am proud to sit here shoulder to shoulder with a true friend this morning with the distinguished alumnus of the University of Iowa where Matt earned his undergraduate, his MBA, and his law degrees.

To my colleagues on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, I want to say thank you for allowing me to introduce an outstanding Iowan for this very important nomination, and I want you all to know that I extend my endorsement to this nominee to represent the United States on the world stage with our NATO allies, and he will do it with the same enthusiasm as he speaks about Iowa football.

Thank you.

Senator RISCH. Thank you, Senator Grassley, for those remarks. We appreciate that, and we know you have other things to do, so you are excused, and thank you for coming to our committee and giving us those thoughts.

With that, Senator Shaheen for her opening remarks.

**STATEMENT OF HON. JEANNE SHAHEEN,
RANKING MEMBER, U.S. SENATOR FROM NEW HAMPSHIRE**

Senator SHAHEEN. Well, thank you, Chairman Risch, and congratulations to each of our nominees. Welcome to your families and friends who are here with you today, and thank you for taking time to meet with me before today's hearing.

In only 1 month this Administration has managed to send much of the U.S. Government into chaos. And one of the most dangerous and concerning parts of this is the Administration's attack on our foreign policy and national security agencies.

Until last month, USAID programs were protecting us from diseases like Ebola and bird flu. They were countering the flow of illegal weapons, and they were fighting against the radicalization of young people by terror groups like ISIS in Syria, a group that, as we know, has inspired strikes here in the United States.

Today, these programs have gone dark. For some their fate remains unclear. It has left our country vulnerable.

Now, I have always supported government reform. I did that as Governor of New Hampshire, and I am all for making sure that our tax dollars go to the right place. But I do not think this is what this is.

This is a wrecking ball. It is unilateral disarmament and our adversaries are thrilled. The hosts on Russian state television cannot believe their luck that the U.S. is withdrawing from the world and breaking its promises.

China has not wasted a moment. They are already stepping in where the United States is standing down, and in the wake of the poorly planned layoffs by DOGE—the "Department of Government Efficiency"—which I have to say in quotes.

CNN has reported that Russia and China are actively trying to recruit disgruntled employees. Now, I do not believe they are going to be successful, because those employees are committed to the service of the United States.

But I just got back from a visit to Ukraine and Poland, and when it comes to foreign aid there the United States is completely shut down.

We met with one woman who was providing services to the children of Ukrainian refugees. She said the worst part about losing assistance was that she was told that she had to take down the American flags because they did not want anybody to think that the United States was providing assistance.

We talked to another man who was providing mental health services for refugees, and he said, in Poland we have always looked up to the United States as our dependable ally, and now we do not feel like we can trust you anymore. I am sure Ukrainians probably feel the same way.

After the shouting match in the Oval Office last week, our most important allies in Europe, in NATO, and around the world, they do not know if they can rely on the United States anymore either.

The foreign aid freeze and the mass termination of awards has hit my constituents in New Hampshire as well. Shutting down USAID has meant that we have cut 100,000 American jobs—farmers, shippers, logistics management, pharmaceutical manufacturing.

Last year American small businesses got a billion dollars in contracts from USAID. None of those businesses are going to get funding this year.

I heard from a small business in Concord, our capital of New Hampshire. It is a Federal contractor whose work includes counter terrorism actions in North Africa. His contract was terminated.

Billions of dollars in contracts are being terminated with no regard for how they impact our national security, no consultation with the Department of Defense or the intelligence community or any of our allies around the world.

I would like to see more detail on how Secretary Rubio was able to individually renew—review, I am sorry—individually review, which is what they said in court documents, more than 13,000 awards as they claimed in court filings. I do not believe he reviewed 13,000 awards. Maybe our nominees can explain this.

But Mr. Chairman, the person we need to hear from is Secretary Rubio, and I hope that he will take time to come before this committee.

But whether we are talking about NATO or Management and Resources at the State Department, to our nominees today I would ask this.

Do you believe that withdrawing from regions that need us the most, that ending our engagement in crisis zones, that taking one of our best soft power tools off the table, does that make America safer?

Does it make us more prosperous? Does it make us more secure? I do not believe so, but I look forward to hearing your thoughts.

Thank you.

Senator RISCH. Thank you very much, Senator Shaheen.

We will now hear from our nominees. We will welcome their families, welcome their friends here. We are anxious to hear a little bit more optimistic view than perhaps we just heard.

But these are new times calling for—new times and new ways of doing business, and we are excited to look forward to how you do that, and so if you will keep your remarks, please, to just a couple of few minutes here you can put anything you want in writing on the record.

But let us open up and hear, first of all, from Mr. Landau.

**STATEMENT OF HON. CHRISTOPHER LANDAU,
NOMINATED TO BE DEPUTY SECRETARY OF STATE**

Mr. LANDAU. Thank you, Senator.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Shaheen, distinguished members of this committee. I am honored to appear before you today as President Trump's nominee for Deputy Secretary of State.

I am grateful to the President and Secretary Rubio for their trust and confidence, and I appreciate the time that the members and staff of this committee have spent with me.

If confirmed I look forward to working closely with you.

On a personal note, I would like to thank my wife, Caroline, and our children, Nathaniel and Julia, who are here today for their love and support, and I would like to acknowledge my late parents, George and Maria Landau, for introducing me to the State Department and the Foreign Service.

My father was a career Foreign Service officer for almost 30 years and served as Ambassador to three countries in South America for 13 of those years. I was born in Spain, lived in Canada, Paraguay, Chile, and Venezuela, and attended the American School of Asuncion for 5 years.

My parents and my upbringing abroad triggered a lifelong passion for international relations that has culminated in this nomination. I only wish that my parents could be here today, which would have been my father's 105th birthday.

The experience of growing up abroad in a Foreign Service family proved invaluable when I served during the first Trump administration as Ambassador to Mexico. And my experience in Mexico, in turn, taught me what the State Department does well and what it could do better.

One of the department's biggest assets is a worldwide network of foreign missions and the people who staff them, and conversely, one of the department's biggest challenges is the constant need to sync those foreign missions with policymakers in Washington.

My experience in Mexico highlighted how essential it is to strengthen this feedback loop. Policymakers in Washington must provide our foreign missions with clear directions and demand accountability, and in return, our foreign missions must relay relevant and useful information back to policymakers in Washington.

The State Department's political leadership must be able to articulate the President's foreign policy to our embassies, foreign audiences, and the American people, and must demand and deliver concrete results.

My job, if confirmed, will be to harness the State Department's formidable worldwide footprint to make our country safer, stronger, and more prosperous. I would like to emphasize three major points.

First, we must defend the sovereignty of the United States—our people, our borders, our Constitution, and our laws. International organizations, treaties, and alliances can all be valuable tools for advancing our own national interests but we must never forget that they are just tools and not ends in themselves.

Our duty is to the people of the United States and to the Constitution of the United States. In particular, the State Department must recognize that global mass migration is one of the key foreign policy challenges of our time and prioritize enforcement of our immigration laws.

Second, we must leverage our national strength to secure better results for the American people in terms of both national and economic security.

Our diplomacy is most effective when people know that we say what we mean, and we mean what we say, and that we have the resources and the will to back it up.

Our country's economic and military might should allow us to rack up one diplomatic victory after another and steer clear of wars and foreign interventions.

Sadly, this has not been the case in recent decades.

And third—and I think you touched on this, Mr. Chairman—we must restore commercial statecraft as a pillar of our foreign policy. Our country's Founders understood the great potential of trade with foreign nations, but for a long time now economic and com-

mercial affairs have been relegated to second class status at the State Department, and our nation has racked up massive trade deficits with foreign countries.

We must work closely with the private sector to open new markets for American goods and services, out hustle foreign competitors, and attract foreign investment to the United States.

We also must ensure that our trade and commercial relations are fair and that other countries do not take advantage of our markets without affording us reciprocal access to theirs.

These are just a few of the key areas on which I hope to work and focus, if confirmed.

Again, I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you here today, and I look forward to your questions.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Landau follows:]

Prepared Statement of Christopher Landau

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Shaheen, and distinguished Members of this Committee:

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On a personal note, I'd like to thank my wife Caroline and our children Nathaniel and Julia, who are here today, for their love and support. And I'd like to acknowledge my late parents, George and Maria Landau, for introducing me to the State Department and the Foreign Service. My father was a career Foreign Service Officer for almost 30 years and served as Ambassador to three countries in South America for 13 of those years. I was born in Spain, lived in Canada, Paraguay, Chile, and Venezuela, and attended the American School of Asunción for 5 years. My parents, and my upbringing abroad, triggered a lifelong passion for international relations that has culminated in this nomination. I only wish that my parents could be here today, which would have been my father's 105th birthday.

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One of the Department's biggest assets is its worldwide network of foreign missions and the people who staff them. And conversely one of the Department's biggest challenges is the need to sync up those foreign missions with policymakers in Washington. My experience in Mexico highlighted the need to strengthen this feedback loop: policymakers in Washington must provide our foreign missions with clear directions and demand accountability for results, and in return our foreign missions must relay relevant and useful information back to policymakers in Washington. The State Department's political leadership must be able to articulate the President's foreign policy to our Embassies, foreign audiences, and the American people, and must demand and deliver concrete results.

My job, if confirmed, will be to harness the Department's formidable worldwide footprint to make our country safer, stronger, and more prosperous. I'd like to emphasize three major points.

First, we must defend the sovereignty of the United States—our people, our borders, our Constitution, and our laws. International organizations, treaties, and alliances can all be valuable tools for advancing our own national interests, but we must never forget that they are just tools and not ends in themselves. Our duty is to the people of the United States and the Constitution of the United States. In particular, the State Department must recognize that global mass migration is one of the key foreign policy challenges of our time and prioritize enforcement of our immigration laws.

Second, we must leverage our national strength to secure better results for the American people in terms of national and economic security. Our diplomacy is most effective when foreign leaders know that we say what we mean and we mean what we say, and that we have the resources and the will to back it up. Our country's economic and military might should allow us to rack up one diplomatic victory after

another and steer clear of wars and foreign interventions. Sadly, this has not been the case in recent decades.

Third, we must restore commercial statecraft as a pillar of our foreign policy. Our country's Founders understood the great potential of trade with foreign nations, but for a long time now economic and commercial affairs have been relegated to second-class status at the State Department and our nation has racked up massive trade deficits with foreign countries. We must work closely with the private sector to open new markets for American goods and services, outhustle foreign competitors, and attract foreign investment to the United States. We also must ensure that our trade and commerce is fair, and that other countries do not take advantage of our markets without affording us reciprocal access to theirs.

These are just a few of the key areas on which I hope to focus if confirmed. Again, I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you here today, and will do my best to answer your questions. Thank you.

Senator RISCH. Well, thank you, Mr. Landau.

It is great to hear somebody who has been out on the front lines and is now going to mesh that with the management at the State Department. You certainly have a background that qualifies you for that.

Mr. Rigas, the floor is yours for 5 minutes.

**STATEMENT OF HON. MICHAEL RIGAS, NOMINATED TO BE
DEPUTY SECRETARY OF STATE FOR MANAGEMENT AND RE-
SOURCES**

Mr. RIGAS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Shaheen, and members of the committee for the opportunity to appear before you today.

It is an honor to be nominated to be Deputy Secretary of State for Management and Resources, and I would like to thank President Trump for the opportunity to serve.

I would also like to thank my wife, Laura, my parents, John and Zoe Rigas, my siblings, and other family and friends who are here with me today for their support. And I want to recognize my daughter Mary Elizabeth, who is at her first confirmation hearing today, and my nephew Dino, who is at his second.

It is from my parents that my siblings and I were taught the importance of public service as a way to give back to this great country to which they immigrated.

My father spent over 25 years as a public school teacher and among the seven children in our family, five are in public service today.

I would also like to thank the members of the committee and the committee staff who took time to meet with me during this process. I look forward to working with each of you, if confirmed, to address the challenges and opportunities before the State Department today. I would also like to thank the staff of the State Department for their support during this process.

The role to which I have been nominated has enormous responsibility over how the State Department is managed and how its resources are deployed. I hope to bring my over 30 years of management and leadership experience to bear on the challenges facing the department.

I believe my experience in the private sector as well as my prior service at the General Services Administration, the Office of Personnel Management, and the Office of Management and Budget have prepared me for this role.

If confirmed, I look forward to the opportunity to help President Trump, Secretary Rubio, and the dedicated career civil and Foreign Service officers at the State Department carry out the President's bold vision for an America first foreign policy.

Our country faces a number of challenges around the world today, and if confirmed I will work to ensure the State Department is able to meet those challenges.

For my role I believe this means making sure that we have the right people with the right skills doing the right things in the right places.

Who are the right people? The right people are our fellow citizens, members of the civil and Foreign Service working around the country and around the world supported by American contractors and locally employed staff.

What are the right skills? The right skills include the knowledge our economic and political affairs officers need to understand the American economy and how we can compete and win abroad.

The linguistic skills of our Foreign Service officers, the skills required by consular officers, passport processors, diplomatic security, and others that allow the State Department to carry out the President's foreign policy and serve American citizens and American interests.

And where are the right places? The right places are wherever we need to bring America's best talent and skills to bear on the challenges we face as a nation and wherever America's political, economic, and national security interests need to be advanced and defended.

And what are the right things? Ensuring that, as Secretary Rubio said, every dollar we spend, every program we fund, and every policy we pursue must be justified with the answer to three simple questions: does it make America safer, does it make America stronger, and does it make America more prosperous.

Every day I will work to ensure that we are good stewards of the resources you entrust to the Department of State as we meet the high standards set by the President and the Secretary.

I also want to emphasize that reducing waste, fraud, and abuse will be a key area of focus for me. I know that every dollar we spend and every program we fund comes from the labor of a tax-paying American family.

Every \$100 we spend could have been a gift for a family's college fund. Every \$1,000 we spend could have been the car repairs the family needs for their daily commute, and every \$10,000 we spend could have been a family's down payment on their first home.

In each of my previous professional leadership roles I believe I left those organizations in a better position than I found them, and I hope to make a positive and meaningful impact here in my role at the State Department.

And each of the successes that I made previously was made possible because of the dedicated men and women I have had the privilege of serving with who have worked together as a team to achieve a shared vision of a better workplace for our organization and better service for our customers and taxpayers.

It would be an honor to serve at the State Department, if confirmed, and I want to thank the committee for considering my nom-

ination ,and I look forward to answering any questions you may have.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Rigas follows:]

Prepared Statement of Michael Rigas

Thank you, Chairman Risch, Ranking Member Shaheen, and Members of the committee for the opportunity to appear before you here today. It is an honor to be nominated to be Deputy Secretary of State for Management and Resources and I would like to thank President Trump for the opportunity to serve.

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Every \$10,000 we spend could have been that family's down-payment on their first home.

It is this responsibility that we owe to ordinary Americans—to steward their tax dollars, that I will take with me into this job every day, if confirmed.

In each of my previous professional leadership roles, I believe I left those organizations in a better position than I found them. I have endeavored to make a positive and meaningful impact, both in the public and private sectors, from improving customer service to saving taxpayer dollars.

Each of these successes was possible because of the dedicated men and women I have had the privilege of serving with, who worked together as a team, to achieve a shared vision of a better workplace for our organization and better service for our customers and taxpayers.

It would be an honor to serve at the State Department, if confirmed, to help advance America's interest around the world, and to continue delivering results for the citizens of this nation.

I want to thank the Committee for considering my nomination and I look forward to answering any questions you may have.

Senator RISCH. Thank you very much, Mr. Rigas.

Again, it is good to see someone come up through the ranks and know what they are taking a hold of over there at the State Department. It is a big job, no question about it.

Mr. Whitaker.

STATEMENT OF HON. MATTHEW WHITAKER, OF IOWA, NOMINATED TO BE UNITED STATES PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE ON THE COUNCIL OF THE NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION, WITH THE RANK AND STATUS OF AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY

Mr. WHITAKER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

First, I would like to thank my friends Chuck Grassley and Joni Ernst, both Senators from Iowa. As an Iowan it is very hard—much like picking your favorite child, picking your favorite Senator is very hard with having those two superstars, and I would like to thank my friends and family for joining me here today.

Chairman Risch, Ranking Member Shaheen, and distinguished members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to be here today.

I am honored to appear before you as President Trump's nominee to serve as the United States Ambassador to NATO. I am grateful to President Trump for his confidence and to this committee for its consideration.

If confirmed, I will work tirelessly to strengthen the alliance, ensure the security of the American people, and uphold our nation's role as the beacon of freedom and liberty.

It has been an honor of a lifetime to have served in two Administrations. Throughout my career I have overseen critical issues related to national security, law enforcement, and the protection of U.S. interests both domestically and abroad. My experience managing the Department of Justice has equipped me well to navigate the complexities of NATO.

As a former college football player at the University of Iowa, I understand that for a team to be strong, for NATO to be strong and successful, every player on the field, all 32 allies, must be strong.

President Trump has been clear. The United States remains committed to NATO and to the principle of peace through strength. That principle has guided NATO's founding and remains vital today as ever.

During President Trump's first term, America was strong, and our strength sent a message to the rest of the world. Peace prevailed with no new conflicts. ISIS was decimated. Soleimani was

brought to final justice. The groundbreaking Abraham Accords were signed, and America was safe and powerful.

I stand firm with President Trump in promoting peace abroad and security and prosperity at home. Strength deters aggression, and history has taught us that when America leads, the world is safer.

I believe that a robust NATO can continue to serve as a bedrock of peace and prosperity, but its vitality rests on every ally doing their fair share. By growing our economies and investing in our common defense, the free world will thrive and reach new heights of achievement. Under President Trump's leadership, NATO will be stronger and more effective than ever before.

It is important to remember what George Washington said in his first annual address to Congress—to be prepared for war is one of the most effectual means of preserving peace.

In the spirit of President Washington's wise counsel, we must also recognize that true leadership demands fairness, accountability, and shared sacrifice among nations.

Leadership is not charity. The American people have carried the burden of global security for too long. For decades U.S. taxpayers have funded the lion's share of NATO's defense while too many of our allies have failed to meet even their most basic obligations.

Europe can no longer ask a hardworking welder from my home State of Iowa to pay more in taxes to bolster Europe's defense while the products he makes are subject to unfair trade practices.

President Trump has been clear on this issue. NATO allies must meet their obligations. The United States will no longer subsidize nations that refuse to pay their fair share.

That is why, if confirmed, I will work to advance a policy of peace through strength by ensuring that all NATO members meet a minimum defense spending level of 5 percent, thereby ensuring NATO is the most successful military alliance in history.

This is not just an American mandate. It is a necessity for the survival of the alliance.

Russia and Ukraine are at war. China is expanding its military influence. Rogue states like Iran and North Korea continue to destabilize global security, and terrorist organizations remain intent on striking the West.

The threats are real, and they will not wait for bureaucratic debates or half-measures. That is why our NATO allies must, first, commit to spending at least 5 percent of their GDP on defense with no exceptions, no excuses.

Prioritize modernization and interoperability, because outdated forces and strategies cannot deter modern threats. Expand their contributions to NATO missions and readiness, and finally, prepare for hybrid threats and asymmetrical warfare.

I want to recognize and express my gratitude to those allies that are doing everything that is asked of them. Your contributions have not gone unnoticed.

Our mission is not to just deter but to defeat those who seek to do us harm. That means reinforcing our military capabilities and ensuring that NATO remains the premier force for stability in the region.

But strength is not only in our military power. It is in our resolve—the spirit of this alliance, the spirit of America.

We stand at a crossroads. We can either commit to a NATO that is strong, capable, and prepared, or we allow hesitation and inaction to embolden our adversaries. I know which path I choose.

Let us remember what Reagan said at NATO's 35th anniversary. Throughout its history the NATO alliance has been challenged by the military power and political ambitions of its adversaries, yet in every decade the nations of the alliance have consistently pulled together to maintain peace through their collective strength and determination.

Peace is secured through strength in steadfast partnership with those willing to defend it.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Whitaker follows:]

Prepared Statement of Matthew Whitaker

Chairman, Ranking Member, and distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to be here today. I am honored to appear before you as the President's nominee to serve as the United States Ambassador to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. I am grateful to President Trump for his confidence and to this committee for its consideration. If confirmed, I will work tirelessly to strengthen the alliance, ensure the security of the American people, and uphold our nation's role as the beacon of freedom and liberty.

It has been the honor of my lifetime to serve in two administrations: first as a United States Attorney and then as President Trump's acting Attorney General. Throughout my career I have overseen critical issues related to national security, law enforcement and the protection of US interests both domestically and abroad. My experience managing the Department of Justice has equipped me well to navigate the complexities at NATO.

As a former college football player at the University of Iowa, I understand that for a team to be strong and successful, for NATO to be strong and successful, every player on the field—all 32 allies—must be strong. A team is only as strong as its weakest link. To ensure victory, every teammate must pull their weight and do their job. NATO's strength lies in the commitment and readiness of all 32 members.

President Trump has been clear; the United States remains committed to NATO and to the principle of peace through strength. That principle has guided us since NATO's founding and remains as vital today as ever.

During President Trump's first term, America was strong, and our strength sent a message to the rest of the world. Peace prevailed with no new conflicts, ISIS was decimated, Soleimani was brought to final justice, the groundbreaking Abraham Accords were signed, and America was safe and powerful. I stand firm with President Trump in promoting peace abroad and security and prosperity at home. Strength deters aggression, and history has taught us that when America leads, the world is safer.

I believe that a robust NATO can continue to serve as a bedrock of peace and prosperity, but its vitality rests on every ally doing its fair share. By growing our economies and investing in our common defense, the free world will thrive and reach new heights of achievement. Under President Trump's leadership, NATO will be stronger and more effective than ever before.

It is important to remember what George Washington said in his first annual address to Congress: "To be prepared for war is one of the most effectual means of preserving peace."

In the spirit of President Washington's wise counsel, we must also recognize that true leadership demands fairness, accountability, and shared sacrifice among nations.

Leadership is not charity. The American people have carried the burden of global security for too long. For decades, U.S. taxpayers have funded the lion's share of NATO's defense while too many of our allies have failed to meet even their most basic obligations. Europe can no longer ask a welder from my home State of Iowa to pay more in taxes to bolster Europe's defense while the products he makes are subject to unfair trade practices.

President Trump has been clear on this issue: NATO Allies must meet their obligations. The United States will no longer subsidize nations that refuse to pay their fair share. That is why, if confirmed, I will work to advance a policy of Peace Through Strength by ensuring that all NATO members meet a minimum defense spending level of 5 percent, thereby ensuring NATO is the most successful military alliance in history.

This is not just an American mandate it is a necessity for the survival of the Alliance. Russia and Ukraine are at war, China is expanding its military influence, rogue states like Iran and North Korea continue to destabilize global security, and terrorist organizations remain intent on striking the West. The threats are real, and they will not wait for bureaucratic debates or half-measures.

That is why our NATO Allies must:

1. Commit to spending at least 5 percent of GDP on defense with no exceptions, no excuses.
2. Prioritize modernization and interoperability because outdated forces and strategies cannot deter modern threats.
3. Expand their contributions to NATO missions and readiness.
4. Prepare for hybrid threats and asymmetrical warfare.

I want to recognize and express my gratitude to those allies that are doing everything that is asked of them. Your contributions have not gone unnoticed.

NATO was founded on the principles of individual and collective defense—an attack against one is an attack against all. That commitment must be backed not just by words, but by action.

Our mission is not just to deter, but to defeat those who seek to do us harm. That means reinforcing our military capabilities and ensuring that NATO remains the premier force for stability in the region. But strength is not only in our military power; it is in our resolve. That is the spirit of this Alliance. That is the spirit of America.

We stand at a crossroads: we either commit to a NATO that is strong, capable, and prepared or we allow hesitation and inaction to embolden our adversaries. I know which path I choose. I believe in a NATO that stands as a bulwark against tyranny, a NATO where every member bares its fair share, and a NATO that remains a force for peace because it is backed by strength.

Together, as equal contributing partners, we will ensure the security of our nations, the protection of our citizens, and the preservation of peace for future generations.

At NATO's 35th anniversary, President Reagan said, "Throughout its history, the NATO Alliance has been challenged by the military power and political ambitions of [its adversaries]. Yet, in every decade, the nations of the Alliance have consistently pulled together to maintain peace through their collective strength and determination."

If confirmed, I will work every day to ensure that our allies understand this simple but unwavering truth: peace is secured through strength, in steadfast partnership with those willing to defend it.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.

Senator RISCH. Thank you. Thanks much, Mr. Whitaker.

We are now going to do a round of questions, 5 minutes to each—allotted 5 minutes to each of the members of the committee, and I am going to start.

And I want to start, Mr. Landau, with you, and I am assuming that you agree on the importance of our alliances in Asia to push back against China and the fact that that is going to be really important as we proceed through this 21st century with the ascendance of China.

Could you give us your thoughts on that, please?

Mr. LANDAU. A hundred percent, Senator. Thank you for that question, and I think you have put your finger on the key geopolitical challenge of our times for our country, which is the rise, as we have all experienced over the last 30 years, of the People's Republic of China both economically and militarily to now be our nation's foremost strategic competitor, really, all around the world.

I think there was a reference in one of the statements to they are not only in their region, but they are also in Africa, in Latin

America, and I think this is the biggest overall challenge to our nation's role in the world today.

And I think you have also I think correctly identified one of the key tools that we have to counter it. We are not alone. There is particularly the folks in China's neighborhood who have at least as strong an interest in countering China's rise and working very closely with us.

We have a number of organizations there. Obviously, Japan is a very close ally of ours. You know, Korea—the Republic of Korea, the ASEAN nations. We have the Quad with India, Australia, and Japan.

So, I think you have correctly identified that in trying to counter China's rise we should work with all these nations in the region. Again, some of the ASEAN nations—the Philippines, Vietnam—they are really there on the front lines.

And so I think we need to work very closely, but we also need to, I think, muster our economic forces around the world and really unleash our private sector.

I think for too long, honestly—and I alluded to this in my statement—the United States has not realized the importance of economics in foreign policy and commercial practices, and frankly, China has been engaged in some degree of coercive investment in certain countries.

We have seen that in Sri Lanka and other parts of the world, and frankly, in other parts of the world they are out hustling us.

Our private sector is not there on the ground coordinated with the U.S. Government, and if I am confirmed I would love to work with the private sector. When I was in Mexico the Chinese ambassador could go to a state and he could basically promise investment because they have state owned companies.

If I were to go to a state and they would talk to me about their investment needs and their resources I have to go to the private sector then. I cannot tell them what we are going to do.

And so I think it is critical to unleash the incredible and unmatched in the world American private sector to help promote our national interest in developing some of these countries, and frankly, and obviously in a way that produces results for them, too.

Senator RISCH. Well said.

Mr. Whitaker, you come in to take over this job at NATO in a particularly sensitive time, as I said in my opening statement, and I think you referred to also the fact that we are going to require our European friends and allies to step up.

Look, this is the most successful military alliance in the history of the world. We are proud of it. It is strong. It is stronger today than it has ever been.

The media focuses on our squabbles but does not point to the fact that by adding Sweden and Finland we dramatically increased the effectiveness and the power of NATO.

Having said all that, as Senator Shaheen referred to, when someone has been supplying certain things and they decide, well, they are not going to pay the whole tab anymore—a giant share of the tab—and asking the people to step up, people push back on you.

It is human nature. It happens. We are seeing that in other areas too that we have dealt with. So, you are your job is going to

be to go over there and convince them that they are going to have to step up.

The good news is you are seeing what we have been preaching to them for years, and that is that they do need to step up, that they cannot be requiring us, as pointed out, to come in and pay a bigger share than what we should pay.

And look, this alliance is a very wealthy complex of countries and has economies that are similar to the United States, and they should be able to step up.

So, could you give us your thoughts on that briefly, because I am running out of time. But you know the challenge. I know the challenge. In short order, what are you going to do about it?

Mr. WHITAKER. Well, thank you, Chairman.

In my 1 second that is left I will tell you I agree with you. I think these challenges can be reached and overcome. I have no concerns that our European allies and Canada can all do more. They now want to do more. It is pretty clear if you read what they have said over the last probably month or two.

But at the end of the day, words do not matter. It is going to be actions from our allies, and I fully expect that they will do what is necessary to continue to make NATO the strongest alliance ever on the history of the planet.

Senator RISCH. Thank you.

You are going to be involved in the debate in June, as you know, when they talk about the 2½ percent. That was everybody's agreement, and we are still a few short that have not made that agreement. So, it is going to be even tougher as we step up.

The good news is they recognize it, and the vast majority of them are willing to step up.

With that, Senator Shaheen.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to start with Mr. Landau and Mr. Rigas, because I heard from a USAID contractor in New Hampshire who was carrying out a project to combat tuberculosis in Myanmar that has been turned off because of the Administration's stop work order on foreign aid.

Now, the contractor reported to us that a shipment of drugs is now sitting in a warehouse because they cannot be delivered, and the U.S. Government will owe both the cost of the drugs and the storage fees, more than they would have paid without the stop work order, and meanwhile, the drugs are expiring, and the people who need them are suffering without the medication.

I think this is just one of many examples that we have heard about because of the stop work order, and I think this is a senseless waste of money. I do not think it makes us, as I said in my opening statement, stronger, more prosperous, or more secure.

So, I would ask you, Mr. Landau, tuberculosis is a communicable disease. It travels across borders. Drug resistant TB is a growing risk globally.

So, if you could answer yes or no, do you believe that cutting off our assistance to combat tuberculosis outbreaks makes America safer, stronger, and more prosperous?

Yes or no.

Mr. LANDAU. Senator, I think just to give you——

Senator SHAHEEN. Yes or no. Yes or no.

Mr. LANDAU. I think I have to give some context to the answer.

Senator SHAHEEN. I know the context.

Mr. LANDAU. Well, but I—

Senator SHAHEEN. But I want to know do you think this is a good position for the United States to take to stop foreign aid without any question about what the consequences will be on tuberculosis and the threat that it poses across borders, including in the United States?

Mr. LANDAU. Senator, I have before me Senator Rubio's waiver which here on its face says all life saving medicine, medical services, food, shelter, and substance assistance has been subject to a waiver to the 90 day freeze.

Senator SHAHEEN. And I am pleased about those waivers, but the reality is the funding has not been turned back on. Nothing is happening because of those waivers.

So, while Secretary Rubio has told us that there are waivers, we know that of the 5,400 or so programs from USAID that only 500 of those have been turned back on and that the funding is not going to help address tuberculosis and other humanitarian needs that we have.

And so I guess I would ask you, if confirmed will you ensure that if humanitarian waivers have been granted that there will be an effort to make sure that the funding follows those and that those programs that are lifesaving, that make a difference to our allies and make a difference, ultimately, to the United States get turned back on?

Mr. LANDAU. Absolutely, Senator.

Senator SHAHEEN. Another example we heard last week is that the Administration terminated programs in Syria to interdict and destroy chemical weapons. They also stopped programs, as I said in my opening statement, to provide support to the Al-Hol camp which holds ISIS fighters and detainees from the fight against ISIS.

Again, I would ask you do you think stopping those efforts make us safer and more prosperous and stronger?

Mr. LANDAU. I know you are one of the most bipartisan Senators on these issues, Senator, and I would certainly commit to working with you to make sure that as we identify what here is the baby and what here is the bathwater.

Because as you talk about medical, some of these critical things, they are also discovering that \$2 million is going to transgender clinics in Guatemala.

Senator SHAHEEN. Listen, I think that is a red herring. I am all for getting rid of that \$2 million going to that transgender clinic. I do not think you would get any disagreement from the majority of Members of Congress about that.

But that is a red herring. It does not account for the thousands of programs, the millions of dollars, and the thousands of people who are being laid off that provide those services around the world that do make us safer and stronger and more prosperous.

Mr. LANDAU. And Senator, I agree with you, and I would like to—if I am confirmed I commit to working closely with you so that we can identify—I would like to hear what you and your staff, the programs you identify—obviously, it is an ongoing process now—

precisely to review these programs to separate the kind that you are talking about from the kind that I just mentioned. They are both in the bucket, and you know, the goal is to actually be good stewards of taxpayer money. Thank you.

Senator SHAHEEN. So, based on that would you agree that dismantling all of our foreign assistance toolkit is not an approach that makes sense without reviewing the programs and seeing which are effective and which are not?

Mr. LANDAU. What is going on right now, as I understand it, Senator, is exactly such a review. I do not think anything is being permanently dismantled. I think we are in a 90 day period now.

We are under the executive order. These programs are being reviewed. Waivers are being granted in particular circumstances. If the waivers are not being effectuated I am happy to look into that and discuss that with you and your staff to make sure that if the Secretary grants a waiver, that waiver is actually going through.

I understand your concerns about that, and again, I can commit to making sure that happens. Thank you.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you. I am out of time but we will resume the conversation when I get another round.

Senator RISCH. Thank you, Senator Shaheen.

And I think what Senator Shaheen brings to the forefront is things that all of us in Congress have heard and that is that there is all of these programs out there, and they are being looked at right now.

And it is a daunting task. I sat with Senator Rubio—excuse me, Secretary Rubio—and we looked at that list, and I mean, it is thousands of programs, and in there we know there is stuff, just as Senator Shaheen indicated, that is absolutely critical to the national security of the United States, and there is other things in there that ought not be in there.

And for years, this has really gone unchallenged. We are supposed to be oversight, but the oversight of those billions—hundreds of billions of dollars and the thousands of programs is really daunting.

So, you have a task in front of you. I am sure Senator Shaheen will hold you to the commitment that you have made that you want to find those ones that are good for America and save them.

With that, Senator Ricketts.

Senator RICKETTS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to our nominees here for your willingness to continue to serve our great nation, and also thank you to the families who make it possible for you to be able to do that.

I really appreciate that. We know that none of us could be in this business if we did not have support and love from our family. So, thank you for that.

On Wednesday, Xi Jinping's top advisor overseeing Taiwan affairs, Wang Huning, urged Communist China to shape—this is a quote—“to shape the inevitable reunification of the motherland,” end quote.

The next day a defense ministry spokesman warned Taiwan, quote, “We will come and get you sooner or later.” This heightened rhetoric has been backed by increasingly aggressive actions on the part of Communist China.

Last week, a Chinese crewed cargo ship severed an undersea cable that connected Taiwan to some of its outlying islands, and the crew was detained by the Taiwanese authorities.

Beijing then launched an unannounced live fire exercise just 40 nautical miles off Taiwan's coastline.

Ambassador Landau, Xi Jinping has instructed his military to be ready to take Taiwan by force, if necessary, by the year 2027. Given Communist China's increased aggression toward Taiwan, if confirmed what actions will you take to support Taiwan's self-defense?

Mr. LANDAU. Senator, we have been very—thank you, Senator, and thanks for the excellent conversation that we had in your office.

And I appreciate, again, your focus on China, which is our major strategic competitor throughout the world, and we have heard some very bellicose remarks like that.

The President has made clear that his top priority in that part of the world is peace and stability on both sides of the Taiwan Strait and that the United States firmly rejects any unilateral change in the status quo on either side of that and any resolution of that dispute by force.

We have had a consistent "One China" policy since the 1970s as reflected in the Taiwan Relations Act, as reflected in the joint communiques and the Six Assurances, and you know, I think the best way, I think, to deter that—and Mr. Whitaker spoke to this a moment ago in the European context, but it is equally true in East Asia—is the, as George Washington said, that the best way to deter war is to be strong, and the Chinese leadership respects strength.

As I discussed in my earlier colloquy with Senator Risch, it is very important for the United States to work with our allies in the area to make it clear for everybody what the terrible consequences would be for the entire world, including the United States, if China or any of the actors in that region were to take unilateral action to disrupt the status quo on either side of the Taiwan Straits unilaterally.

Senator RICKETTS. Ambassador, though, what can you do, though, if confirmed, to be able to help specifically with Taiwan's self-defense?

Mr. LANDAU. Well, again, we have, you know, good relations with Taiwan. We work with them. I think the Taiwanese have a need to up their game in terms of their own defense spending, and that is something that is obviously on the table, and we need to work, again, with our regional allies in the area that the Quad nations—I think Secretary Rubio's first meeting was with the foreign ministers of the Quad—and I think we need to send a very clear message to China that, you know, that they are very much imperiling world peace if they continue this kind of saber rattling and consider unilateral actions in that area.

Senator RICKETTS. How can the United States better respond to or help Taiwan respond to the escalatory military drills that Communist China is doing around Taiwan? What can we do better to try and get them to stop these drills, the gray zone activity, that sort of thing?

Mr. LANDAU. Well, again, Senator, I think, you know, we work with our allies in that area. We work with Japan, Korea, Australia, India, the Philippines, Vietnam.

We are refurbishing our bases in the Philippines—our former bases—and I think, you know, we can work with all the countries in the region to let China know this is not just a problem you have with the United States. These are issues that really implicate your relationships with all of your neighbors and with the world.

Let me just emphasize, though, the President emphasized the other day in a press conference that he wants good relations with China. We are not looking to enter into a war with China or implacable enmity with China.

There is great win-win situations in terms of potential for trade as long as it is fair, and you know, we hope that we can focus on the positive side of the relationship to increase the prosperity for our peoples instead of going down a path of further bellicosity.

And so, you know, my job if I am confirmed as a diplomat will be to encourage the Chinese to move in that direction.

Senator RICKETTS. Great. Thank you, Ambassador.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator RISCH. Thank you.

Senator Coons.

Senator COONS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you to our nominees and your families for your willingness to serve, and I look forward to our conversation today.

Mr. Whitaker, I have an aunt and uncle who live in Iowa City. I am familiar with Hawkeye football and your record there, and I appreciate your citing Ronald Reagan and his comments at the 35th NATO summit and your understanding of teamwork.

And I think you would get uniform agreement from the members of this committee that our NATO partners all need to pull their weight.

Are you familiar with the Article 5 provisions of the NATO treaty?

Mr. WHITAKER. Yes, sir.

Senator COONS. And when has it been invoked?

Mr. WHITAKER. Only once in the history of NATO and that was to support the United States of America after it was attacked on September 11.

Senator COONS. And our then 29 NATO allies pulled their weight—deployed, served, fought alongside us, died, and I would argue that after Russia's aggressive invasion of Ukraine 3 years ago, they have continued to do the same. In fact, in total they have delivered more support for Ukraine than we have—support for refugees, support for their economy, and military support.

If you are confirmed as you head over to NATO I was encouraged to hear you say you view it as a strong and vital alliance, and you look forward to strengthening it.

Would it strengthen our alliance for us to abandon Ukraine and the uniform view of our NATO allies that defending Ukraine against Russian aggression is in our collective national interest?

Mr. WHITAKER. Yes. Thank you for that question, Senator.

Obviously, the situation on the battlefield—

Senator COONS. Please be brief, if you could.

Mr. WHITAKER. The situation on the battlefield in Ukraine is brutal. It is another land war in Europe. You know, there is—we have to end——

Senator COONS. Does it serve our national interest to abandon Ukraine?

Mr. WHITAKER. Well, what is in our national interest, obviously, is a broad question. We need——

Senator COONS. Mr. Whitaker, I have 3 minutes, not time for broad questions. I will simply assert, if I might, that from my view—and I think this is broadly shared on this committee—pulling in the same direction is what a team does.

Showing up, suiting up, getting in the fight, and pulling in the same direction is what a team with clear eyed leadership does, and whatever that was last Friday, I hope we can get back on track in a united approach with our vital allies instead of confusing them, dividing them, having a push for greater investment, interoperability, greater lethality of NATO as a united force would be a great mission for you.

I am concerned that that is not the direction that recent conversations between President Zelenskyy and President Trump will lead us.

Mr. Landau, Mr. Rigas, if I might.

I am encouraged, Mr. Landau, that you come from a Foreign Service family, that you have served as an ambassador, that you respect and understand the critical role that our Foreign Service plays.

Mr. Rigas, you spoke well about the skills that they develop over many, many years. I have visited our Foreign Service all over the world and am deeply impressed with their skills. I have also visited USAID missions and programs and projects all over the world, and I will tell you I am heartsick and angry at what I view as a chaotic, poorly executed chainsaw that has been taken to our critical NGO partners and USAID work around the world.

As my colleague, Senator Shaheen said, we all expected there would be reform, that there would be a thorough and disciplined look at how to tighten and focus and align USAID's development work around the world.

Instead, what we have seen in recent weeks has been chaotic. Thousands have been laid off. I have met over and over with NGO leaders who are saying that the whipsaw of stop work orders, waivers, and then the failure to turn the money back on across exactly those programs that were proclaimed as critical, lifesaving, humanitarian programs has resulted in household name NGOs—Samaritan's Purse, Catholic Relief Services, Save the Children, CARE—laying off thousands, shutting down programs all over the world.

If confirmed will you commit to sharing with us the process you used to get to where this is, whether or not these waivers have ever been respected, and to work with us to make sure we do not abandon this critical tool of U.S. foreign policy in the face of Chinese aggression around the world?

Mr. RIGAS. Senator, this committee plays a very important role in helping fashion the foreign policy of the United States of which these programs are a part, and so I certainly do commit to you, as I committed to the ranking member, to discussing.

I would love to hear, A, what programs you all think are the most important and that you see have the most effect in terms of your—the constituents you know and the broader effect, and second, making sure, to the point you just raised, Senator, that the implementation is done appropriately. If there is a waiver granted to make sure that that money is actually flowing again.

Senator COONS. I have not heard of a single example of a waiver being granted and the funding being turned back on, which is utterly unsurprising given that all the critical staff who facilitate payments and funding transfers have been laid off, furloughed, or sidelined.

So, we have literally just unilaterally disarmed one of the most vital tools in that work to deliver peace through strength in the face of Chinese aggression.

I am glad that Senator Risch recognized, as we all do, that China is expanding its influence in Latin America, in the Caribbean, in Africa, in Southeast Asia.

And we have confused our partners, we have encouraged our adversaries, and abandoning exactly those Americans who have spent decades overseas, and then leaving that space, whether it is confronting human trafficking, working against terrorists, combating pandemics, or pushing back against Russia and China and their malign influence in the world. This was a horrible, owned goal that I eagerly want to work with you to try and address because, frankly, tens of billions of dollars have been cut in the name of pursuing a few million dollars here and there that, yes, we can all agree should not have been spent the way they were spent.

But if thousands have been laid off, programs in dozens and dozens of countries have been shut down, and we have abandoned a key tool of our success in the cold war that Presidents from Kennedy to Reagan recognized as critical tools in our tool box, then we have made a profound error that is going to produce weakness through chaos, not peace through strength.

Thank you.

Senator RISCH. Thank you very much, Senator Coons.

I think you are—just as Senator Shaheen indicated, the sooner we get these guys in place, the sooner we will be able to rectify some of these things.

So, with that, I am going to move to Senator McCormick.

Senator MCCORMICK. Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member Shaheen, and thank you to the nominees for appearing before us at what is undoubtedly an incredibly consequential time. I have no doubt you will serve honorably and ably, and I am thrilled to support your nominations.

Mr. Rigas, I would like to start with you. Earlier in my career I served in several senior roles in the government in the national security arena, and I saw firsthand the importance of foreign assistance for our national security.

Now that I am—and I am concerned. I think we have more than a few examples of foreign aid and the bureaucracy getting ahead of itself, of supporting an ideological agenda, and that is why I supported the review of all foreign assistance.

But now that the review is complete or near completion I want to give you a chance to clarify whether we are continuing aid pro-

grams that, to paraphrase Senator Rubio, will make America safer, stronger, and more prosperous, and in particular I am interested in foreign aid and investment as an important arrow in the quiver for combating China's Belt and Road Initiative.

Through the counter PRC influence fund, foreign assistance programs have helped NGOs spotlight human rights abuses by the Chinese Communist Party, provide insights into China's opaque economy, and provide partner nations with economic alternatives to China's Belt and Road.

And Mr. Rigas, do you expect, or are we continuing those efforts? Mr. RIGAS. Thank you for the question, Senator.

I look forward, if confirmed, to looking under the hood in terms of what is going on with the pause. I believe it is a 90 day pause, so I do not think it has concluded yet.

But to the extent that aid is going to be flowing toward efforts to counter the PRC and counter the Belt and Road Initiative I think from the President's statements he has been very clear about the challenge that China faces the United States and to its interests.

I think he views China as a strategic competitor to the United States. The way he talks about that, I do not think he talks about them in terms of them being an adversary as much as they are vigorously pursuing their own interests, and that is almost always at our expense.

So, I think he would—you know, I do not want to presume what actions the President will take or the Secretary will take, right.

I do not think his past statements on China should be cause for concern in terms of programs that are being undertaken right now at USAID to counter China and the Belt and Road Initiative.

Senator MCCORMICK. Well, I would like to note, and while I probably disagree with Senator Coons and Shaheen about the magnitude of the abuse of spending, I do agree with the fact that from a national security perspective there are certain foreign aid initiatives that are absolutely critical.

I would suggest to you that those combating China, which I do view as an adversary, are particularly relevant, and I would want to make sure that in the future that we talk about that.

I would also like to flag for you the Development Finance Corporation and Millennium Challenge Corporation, which have much more performance based orientation to how American assistance is provided, are role models here, and how do you expect those to be integrated into our foreign aid strategy?

Mr. RIGAS. Thank you, Senator. That is a great question.

As Secretary Rubio has said and I think it has been repeated a few times during the hearing here that we should look at all of the programs and spending and aid that we are engaged in at the State Department through the prism of three questions: Does it make America stronger, does it make America more prosperous, does it make America safer.

And I think having some kind of metrics applied to this spending so we can look at not just the outputs, how many dollars are being spent, but what are the outcomes we are getting from all of these programs.

And so I would welcome the opportunity to work with you and your staff on the programs at MCC and DFC, and indeed, across the entire spectrum of State to make sure we are getting good outcomes.

Senator McCORMICK. Very good. Thank you.

Mr. Whitaker, good to see you. I think you and I both agree that President Trump laid out a credible path to peace with Ukraine with an economic arrangement, an agreement to or a hope of stopping the fighting and creating a deterrent.

We also both agreed that Europe stepping up in a much more significant way was key to restoring deterrence. How is that going to happen?

How do you expect that to happen? You said in your testimony that you thought there is much more of an orientation toward more investment on the part of Europeans. How do you see that playing out?

Mr. WHITAKER. Well, obviously, if confirmed that I will be right in the middle of those conversations, and I appreciated the time we spent together last week. We have known each other for a long time, and it is good to see you today and last week.

I think our European partners in NATO understand the challenge. The question is how fast can they rise to the challenge, and you know, I am planning on, if confirmed, going there in the first 30 days, meeting with every single ally one on one, and finding out what their path to the 5 percent is, and if they cannot get there understanding why they cannot get there or why they are unwilling to.

And those are the conversations that, again, with the confidence of the Senate I will be happy to go have with all of our important allies in Europe.

Senator McCORMICK. Thank you.

And I will just end with this statement.

I agree with the Senator Coons that based on Article 5 the Europeans and NATO did step up after 9/11 but I also will note that despite decades of constant pressure from American Presidents, including Democrats, NATO continues to underinvest relative to its very commitments.

And so this is not open to discussion. They have failed to meet their obligations, and I hope you will be able to convince them that it is in their interest to do so.

Thank you.

Mr. WHITAKER. Thank you.

Senator RISCH. Thank you very much.

Senator Murphy.

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

Mr. Landau, I deeply appreciate your service to this country and your willingness to come before this committee. But I will be honest with you, I find it pretty offensive that you are trying to maintain that there is some good faith review happening at USAID when the representatives of the Administration in charge of cost cutting have made it clear that the goal is to destroy USAID.

Do you know what percentage of USAID employees have been fired or furloughed?

Mr. LANDAU. Senator, I do not. I am here as a private citizen. I am a nominee, so I am not part of the Administration at this point.

Senator MURPHY. So, you do not have—do you have a ballpark guess? You are about to help lead America's diplomatic efforts. A ballpark guess as to how many USAID employees have been fired or furloughed?

Mr. LANDAU. Again, Senator, I have just looked at the way the President has set this forth, that he has instituted a 90 day review period.

Senator MURPHY. You have not read reports that you might be able to cite today?

Mr. LANDAU. Well, I have seen some reports, again, in the press but I want to be very careful before I start acting as if I know what is going on behind the scenes. But I am not part of the Administration yet. Obviously, if I am confirmed you can call me before me for oversight before you—excuse me, for oversight.

Senator MURPHY. But here is the problem.

So, the number is 94 percent. Ninety-four percent of USAID staff have been fired or essentially permanently furloughed, and you stated to us that you believe this is a good faith 90 day review.

And yet you actually do not know how many people have been fired or furloughed. How can you come to the conclusion that this is a good faith review when you actually do not know the extent of the terminations?

Would it not be relevant as to the question as whether it was a good faith review if 94 percent of the agency had already been terminated?

Mr. LANDAU. Well, Senator, again, I do not—I think it is important to recognize what are the programs and how are these people that are being fired or—

Senator MURPHY. But how do you come to the conclusion that this is a good faith review if you do not even know what is happening?

Mr. LANDAU. Well, again, Senator—

Senator MURPHY. You cannot have it both ways. You cannot come to the committee and say, I know this is a good faith review, but I do not know anything that is happening because I am not in the Administration.

Mr. LANDAU. Well, Senator, again, I assume the government—there is a presumption of governmental regularity that exists generally in the law.

You know, I believe strongly that the President wants to comply with the law, wants to make sure that we are doing the American taxpayers' bidding by looking carefully at these programs and making sure that we separate the baby from the bathwater.

Senator MURPHY. I just do not think you can have it both ways. I do not think you can come here and tell us that you know that this is a good faith review but assert that you do not have any basic information about what is happening.

Mr. Rigas, which article—excuse me, which branch of government has the power to decide how taxpayer money is spent? Is it the legislative branch, the executive branch, or the judicial branch?

Mr. RIGAS. Thank you for the question, Senator.

My understanding—

Senator MURPHY. I do not need an explanation. Which one is it?

Mr. RIGAS. Well, Congress has the power of the purse. The executive has the power to make sure the laws are faithfully implemented, and the courts arbitrate disputes between those two branches.

Senator MURPHY. So, if Congress has authorized an agency or a department and has appropriated money with the caveat that the money shall be spent, does the Administration have the obligation to spend that money in accordance with how Congress has appropriated the dollars?

Mr. RIGAS. Senator, I am not a lawyer, but my understanding is the executive has a role in how those moneys are spent. So, to the extent that the—

Senator MURPHY. So, I do not—so that that seems like a pretty—I mean, and I think Republicans and Democrats on this committee should care about the answer to this question. That is a pretty easy one.

If Congress has authorized a function, an agency or department, and has appropriated dollars with the word “shall,” do you believe the executive branch can decide not to spend those dollars?

Mr. RIGAS. Well, I am familiar with, like, mandatory entitlement programs which has that language, and those are on auto pilot. So—

Senator MURPHY. This is not a mandatory—this is not an entitlement program. Congress has established—let me give an example.

The National Endowment for Democracy is established by law. We appropriate every year, and we say that the dollars appropriated, in this case \$315 million, shall be spent. You are going to oversee spending at the Department of State.

Do you believe that the executive branch could choose not to spend dollars that are appropriated by Congress with a “shall” rather than a “may”?

Mr. RIGAS. I do not think so, but I am not the ultimate arbiter of that question and how the money is spent—

Senator MURPHY. You are the arbiter of that question. You are actually being nominated for the job that would decide how those dollars are spent.

Mr. RIGAS. I think we are—the question at hand here is how is the money—on what things is the money being spent, not whether—

Senator MURPHY. No. No. We decide how that money is spent and you are supposed to execute it. If we say \$315 million is to be spent at the National Endowment for Democracy, do you believe that you have the ability to deny that money to be spent on the functions that Congress appropriates? This is a really important question.

Mr. RIGAS. I do not think so, but I also think what that—

Senator MURPHY. You do not think so?

Mr. RIGAS. What is that—

Senator MURPHY. You do not think so. So, yes or no?

Mr. RIGAS. I think if that is what the law says, then is what needs to happen.

Senator MURPHY. OK. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator RISCH. Thank you.

Senator DAINES.

Senator DAINES. Mr. Chairman, thank you.

Thanks for coming before the committee today.

Mr. Whitaker, I want to start with some questions for you. We had a great meeting, and I thank you for stopping by my office. We both share—I have a sweetheart from Iowa, my wife, and also a graduate of the University of Iowa. So, go Hawkeyes, here on behalf of my sweet wife.

Mr. WHITAKER. Thank you, sir.

Senator DAINES. So, we talked a lot about NATO when you stopped by. You go back to the 2014 NATO Wales summit declaration. It has taken most members a decade to meet that 2 percent of GDP defense spending goal, and that was only after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine.

It is now becoming more and more apparent the 2 percent is not sufficient to meet security demand. Just looking at a recent chart that lists NATO allies here. At the top 10 in terms of absolute spending, countries in Europe there were three that did not meet even the 2 percent goal—Italy, 1 and a half percent, Canada, 1.4 percent.

So, that is the one non-European country on this chart, but is one of the top 10 spenders, and Spain at 1.3 percent. I think we both agree 2 percent is not enough, and yet they are not even meeting that in some cases, some of the larger countries in terms of spend for defense.

You have stated support for this 5 percent spending requirement and taking a page out of Ronald Reagan's playbook of peace through strength. What are your thoughts on additional requirements on investment spending to ensure we are going to have modern military capabilities there at the NATO?

Mr. WHITAKER. Well, thank you, Senator. I enjoyed the time together as well in your office last week.

What I would say to that question is quite simply that our European allies and Canada need to do much more.

In the 10 years of under spending up until the outbreak of—in 2022 the war in Ukraine I think is—there is really a weakness of the alliance, and I think now we are getting a lot of positive words from our NATO allies that they will spend dramatically more, that they finally understand this time.

We also have some allies like Poland and some allies in the Baltics that are—have been, you know, on message and are spending much more. And so we have to make sure that we do not group everybody in one, you know, group and chastise them all because there is many allies that are doing more, mostly because of their geopolitical location on the border of Russia.

But at the same time, it is not just a matter of spending money, and we do need dramatic more spending. It is how that money is spent, making sure it goes to modernization, interoperability, to address the hybrid threats in cyber, in space. You know, we are seeing sea cables cut in the Baltic Sea.

All of these issues are—NATO is on the forefront, and that alliance is built and should be equipped to address those threats and to continue to be the most successful alliance ever conceived.

And you know, I will be happy to report back to you, Senator, and the committee on what I find as soon as I get over there and hear what our allies are saying both publicly, and more importantly, privately, but most importantly, what they are actually doing.

Senator DAINES. Mr. Whitaker, thank you.

I want to shift gears to Mr. Landau.

As you know, Iran is the world's leading sponsor of terror. The Islamic Republic uses revenues from oil exports to fund their network of proxies as well as their ballistic missile and the nuclear enrichment programs.

Due to recent action by the Trump administration and our allies in Israel, Iran is finally on its back foot after 4 years of appeasement from the Biden administration.

Well, there has been great progress made in just a short 6 weeks. We cannot lose sight of the long term goal or permanently eradicating Iran's terrorist proxy network.

Ambassador Landau, how do you, if confirmed as deputy secretary, plan to further degrade the Iranian proxy networks and influence campaigns that are occurring in places like Gaza, Lebanon, Iraq, Yemen, and elsewhere?

Mr. LANDAU. Thank you for that question, Senator, and thank you again for our great meeting in your office.

Just to cut to the chase there, I think the President and Secretary Rubio have articulated a policy of maximum pressure on Iran. This was the pressure that was pursued in the first Trump administration to great success.

Iran was really back on its heels at that time. Unfortunately, that position was not followed in the subsequent Administration, and we saw Iran get much more aggressive again.

But I think you are right. This is a historic moment when Iran is back on its heels in terms of Hamas, Hezbollah, and its other allies in that area, and we have got to work with our ally Israel to make sure that Iran can no longer continue to be an exporter of terror and instability throughout the Middle East.

All the countries in the Middle East, I think, want to work with us to contain Iran, and that will be a critical part of this Administration's foreign policy if I am confirmed. Thank you.

Senator DAINES. Thank you, Mr. Landau.

Chairman, back to you.

Senator RISCH. Senator Schatz.

Senator SCHATZ. Thank you. Thanks for being here.

I have been in the Senate for more than 10 years. I have never—well, no, only one other time I have not asked a question. I am not going to ask a question.

I think it is very important that all of us—because we have not had Secretary Rubio here to talk about the evisceration of USAID, it is important for everybody to understand exactly what happened.

I am just going to lay out the facts here. First of all, it is important to understand that the so called Department of Government Efficiency head said that they are going to feed USAID to the wood chipper.

That does not sound like a good faith review. They said it was going to be a 90 day review, and then when a Federal court said

that they had to not violate the Foreign Assistance Act and the appropriations law and the Prompt Payments Act and the Impoundment Act, they came back and they eliminated 5,800 programs at AID and another 4,000-odd at State. Flatly illegal.

Any Administration is within their rights, maybe even obliged, to review and reform spending. The way to review and reform spending is in this building.

Senator Graham as the chairman of the SFOPs Committee and myself as the ranking member of the SFOPs Committee had a very constructive conversation about how to better align the State Department's objectives with USAID's objectives.

And by the way, this has been a bipartisan complaint over many, many Administrations, that they are not sufficiently aligned and that we are not targeting economic assistance, foreign military financing, and humanitarian aid as precisely as we ought to, and maybe even that some of the NGOs and for profits that deliver the aid ought to be held accountable just like in the Defense Department, just like any other department, for reducing their overhead costs.

I said, I am in. Two days later they fire—they do not fire everybody. They send 94 percent of employees home. Secretary Rubio reassures us multiple times, most of us on this committee on a bipartisan basis, do not worry. There is a waiver process.

There is a waiver process. The problem is the building is shut down, and nobody has access to their emails. You cannot process a waiver for lifesaving humanitarian aid with no personnel.

And so if there is an effort to reform USAID, to tighten up what it is that we do, to make sure that—and everybody—by the way, since I got on this committee and before, everybody talks about how smart China is for having Belt and Road, for making friends across the planet, and how cheap it is to do this kind of diplomacy compared to the Department of Defense.

And we admire that, and we ponder it, and we say we should do our own version of that. That is USAID. It is also parts of the State Department.

And so I am all in for a 90 day review, but I just want everybody to understand what is happening now. A, what is happening is illegal. It is violating the Foreign Affairs Reform and Restructuring Act of 1998. It is violating the Impoundment Control Act, and it is violating annual appropriations bills.

So, first of all, it is illegal.

Second of all, according to USAID's own internal memos, this closure will result in up to 18 million additional cases of malaria per year because of the United States' illegal decision to shutter this agency.

I cannot believe that this has taken on some sort of partisan vibe. Does the United States of America under any President support 18 million additional cases of malaria? Is that who we have become? Is that America first?

We are going to disagree about a lot in the foreign policy space but we should not disagree about abiding by the law. We should not disagree that babies when we can prevent it should not get HIV/AIDS from their moms, and we should not disagree about a basic premise of foreign policy and the exercise of American might,

which is sometimes the smartest thing for us to do is to show up with help.

We have been doing this on a bipartisan basis, and we have to get back to that. This idea of a waiver process is fine, except it is not working. This idea of a 90 day review is fine, except in the meantime we have eviscerated the program.

And so I understand none of you are in the government, but I am just hoping, I am praying, I am begging that we can get back to a bipartisan consensus that we do not cut off our nose to spite our face, and we are the good guys. We do not cause death on purpose.

Senator RICKETTS [presiding]. Senator Hagerty.

Senator HAGERTY. Thank you, Chairman Ricketts and Ranking Member Shaheen. I appreciate you holding this meeting for us, and I want to congratulate all of my friends here.

All three of us served together in the last Trump administration, and I so admire the work that you did then, and I am really looking forward to the work that you are going to do as we come into the next iteration of the Administration.

I would like to start, Ambassador Landau, with you on a topic that is very specific. You understand it. Your background is our Ambassador to Mexico. You get it. It is something that is deeply concerning to me, and I think a number of my colleagues are aware of this, but perhaps, a number are not, and that is what is happening with the Mexican government and their unfair extralegal campaigns to go in and confiscate the properties of U.S. companies.

And you and I have talked specifically about the expropriation of Vulcan Materials—their quarries, their deepwater port, their properties in Mexico.

Those aggregates that they mine there in the Gulf of America are deeply critical to the infrastructure that we actually put in place in places like Florida and Louisiana because there is not an aggregate source. The seam runs out, so to speak, before you get there.

What the Mexican government has done is come in and taken this property from Vulcan Materials, an Alabama company—an American company—and they have a mine in Quintana Roo.

They have got this deepwater port on the Yucatan Peninsula, and my fear is that that deepwater port is going to be for sale to the highest bidder if the Mexican government gets its hand on it, and I can tell you who that highest bidder will be. It will be the CCP.

Think about having a deepwater port that close, that proximate to the United States of America.

I brought this seizure to the attention of the Biden administration. They did nothing to stop it. In fact, in the waning hours of the Biden administration, Ambassador Katherine Tai, the U.S. trade rep at the time, actually tried to go in and create some changes to the USMCA in a way that would, quote, “allow them” to basically gut the claim that Vulcan Materials has and put Mexico on path to expropriate American properties throughout the nation.

Senator Kaine and I subsequently led an effort to try to stop this plan to harm U.S. companies, and we eventually were able to get this taken care of.

But it just—it was shocking to me that we as a nation and certainly as a State Department were willing to stand by and watch another nation expropriate the property of an American company.

And Vulcan is not the only one. That is just the one you and I have talked about more deeply.

So, Ambassador Landau, could I get your perspective on how U.S. companies abroad who are facing this type of illegitimate activity, whether it be in Mexico, Colombia, Honduras—how will you expect us to approach this?

Mr. LANDAU. Absolutely, Senator, and thank you for that question, and thanks to you for your distinguished service as Ambassador to Japan and what you have done in your present role as a senator to try to make the State Department a better place.

I know you have sponsored very important legislation that I hope we have a chance to work with.

Going to your specific question, when I served as ambassador my number one job was to protect American interests in Mexico where I was serving as Ambassador. And so if an American company is being threatened or harassed by the local government, it seems to me all our ambassadors have to understand that that is not a favor they are doing the company by standing up for their interest.

That is their job as the representatives of our country. We want to support Americans whether they be businesses or individuals. I am, as you are, extremely concerned about the actions of the Mexican government with respect to the Vulcan Materials plant in the aggregate.

I am familiar with that situation. I can certainly commit to you that on day one, if I am confirmed, I will call the Mexican government to address that problem and express our very strong concerns about what has happened to that American investment in Mexico.

And I can also say that I would hope that if our friends in Mexico are watching this hearing they will understand that it is not in their interest if they are looking to renew their free trade agreement with the United States to have a United States Senator asking a nominee for Deputy Secretary of State about this terrible problem. The headline should be about great investment opportunities in all of our countries in North America.

So, it makes me sad for a lot of the Mexicans who I know are trying to increase trade that we wind up stuck on this issue, and I very much hope the Mexican government will be able to resolve that problem even before I take office if, in fact, I am confirmed.

More broadly—

Senator HAGERTY. There is one more point I want to cover with you before I run out of time.

You were an exceptional Ambassador to Mexico, and you are going to be in a position to deploy our ambassadors who are vested with the full power of independent action. They are plenipotentiary.

So, I just want to get your thoughts on how you see the deployment of America's ambassadors around the world, how you will empower them to act on our nation's behalf. How do you see the ambassadorial role?

Mr. LANDAU. I think the ambassadorial role is so important, Senator. I think one of the reasons I was very honored to be asked by

the President to become Deputy Secretary of State is that I have been an ambassador recently, and I think we need to have someone in the State Department who understands at the highest levels, working closely with the Secretary and the President, what an ambassador does and how to increase and strengthen that feedback loop between our Washington policymakers and our embassies, which I am afraid is somewhat broken in both directions.

Every—I plan to meet, if I am confirmed, with every outgoing ambassador to go over what are your top three priorities. I need specific action items and results, and then have accountability for ambassadors so that when they go to their foreign posts they can make it clear to their teams this is what Washington is expecting of us, and we need to actually produce results to make sure that our embassies are providing us with useful, actionable information.

I think that feedback loop really has deteriorated, and I look forward to working closely with you. I know given your experience as Ambassador to Japan, you have thoughts on this, and I think there is a lot more we can do to improve the performance of our embassies and make it more relevant to policymaking.

Senator HAGERTY. There certainly is, and you will find bipartisan support for this on this committee.

I am sorry, my time has run out and I am sorry I did not get a chance to speak with our other two distinguished nominees here.

But I wish you all three the best and I encourage my colleagues to get these folks on the ground and confirmed quickly.

Thank you.

Senator RICKETTS. Senator Rosen.

Senator ROSEN. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I want to thank Chair Risch and Ranking Member Shaheen for holding this hearing today.

And before I begin my questions, I would like to take a moment to discuss the State Department's reckless decision to effectively gut USAID and end foreign assistance.

This will not only undermine our national security, harm our global standing, and lead to the deaths of innocent people around the world, but this negligence will also have an impact on my State of Nevada which has benefited from nearly \$40 million in USAID investments for global projects.

I have also heard from constituents who have lost their jobs at USAID or soon expect to. So, to my constituents and to the USAID staffers out there, let me say this. We are grateful—I am grateful for your work. You did not deserve this, and we will not forget what has happened.

On a different matter, having met with President Zelenskyy on Friday morning before the humiliating disaster in the Oval Office, I must also share my extreme frustration and embarrassment at President Trump and Vice President Vance's comments.

Moreover, last night's decision to suspend military assistance to Ukraine is a betrayal of the highest magnitude. Putin's war against Ukraine is a threat to all democracies—all democracies around this planet. You all know this to be true.

This is why the U.S. must continue our support. I know many of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle agree. I urge them all to speak out.

Today, I am going to speak a little bit more about women, peace, and security because thanks to Ranking Member Shaheen's leadership, the Women, Peace and Security—WPS—Act was signed by President Trump in 2017.

It requires the Administration to promote the meaningful participation of women in all aspects of conflict prevention and resolution.

WPS programs are not DEI. They are an effective way of increasing the odds of reaching and keeping peace in conflict settings, and so we know that when women are in the room, the outcomes are better because of it.

So, Mr. Landau, it is my understanding that many, if not all, WPS programs have been terminated or been paused. You have been an ambassador so I must ask you, do you believe it benefits U.S. national security to end these types of programs?

Do you believe that these actions run contrary to the legal mandate of the WPS of 2017 and that they are going to hurt us?

This is the law, and so I want to ask you to be brief. I can take your full comments off the record because I have a few other questions. Do you think this is hurting us?

Mr. LANDAU. Senator, I would make two quick points. First, I think that my experience in life has always been that women add a very valuable perspective and particularly on national security issues, and I am pleased to see how many women are in the State Department.

It is a massive change since my father's days 40 years ago, and I think that is a change for the good.

Senator ROSEN. Thank you.

Mr. LANDAU. With respect to your question about the law, obviously, if I am confirmed I will take an oath to support the Constitution and laws of the United States, and that is exactly what I intend to do.

Senator ROSEN. Thank you.

Mr. Whitaker, I am going to turn quickly to you, because last summer the United States and NATO allies committed to an updated WPS policy recognizing the importance of women's full, equal and meaningful participation in national security decisionmaking.

As a permanent representative to NATO will you commit to upholding the WPS agenda and ensure full implementation of the WPS law?

Mr. WHITAKER. Well, Senator, thank you for the question.

I appreciate our time together to talk about this, and this came up in our meeting as you recall.

The practical effect at NATO is, for example, designing military equipment for the combatants, for the Ukrainians in—that are fighting this war including many females because of the manpower challenges that Ukraine has had.

So, certainly, NATO has taken this and a practical—and implemented in that regard, and I will continue to work on that goal.

Senator ROSEN. Thank you.

I am going to move quickly on to democracy programming in Iran because the Iranian regime terrorizes the people of Iran. Its terrorist proxies attack and destabilize countries throughout the region, and we know throughout the world.

It is why the U.S. has long supported programs in Iran that help Iranian people uncover corruption, expose terrorism, document human rights atrocities, and achieve internet freedom.

These programs are now paused or terminated. It is a surprising move, but unsurprisingly, it is applauded by Iranian state media.

So, Mr. Landau, do you think it makes our nation stronger, safer, and more prosperous for the U.S. to abandon Iranians working to expose Iranians' regime of corruption and support for terrorism? Is doing this—is it in our best interest?

Mr. LANDAU. Senator, I would like to thank you for your leadership, particularly in that part of the world and on Israel and Iran issues.

You have been a very strong and consistent voice, and with respect to that particular funding I am not familiar with those particular programs. If I am confirmed I will certainly look into those programs, and I would like to continue to discuss those with you again if I am confirmed.

Senator ROSEN. Well, I would—my last moment before we turn it over, I would say I appreciate your commitment, but anything that the Iranian regime is applauding that because we stopped doing something is probably a good reason to restore it.

Thank you.

Senator RICKETTS. Senator Van Hollen.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

So, we only get 5 minutes, and we have a lot to cover, so I am going to ask if you could keep your responses short.

Elon Musk called AID a, quote, "criminal enterprise" and he said we should put it through the wood chipper.

Mr. Landau, do you agree with Elon Musk?

Mr. LANDAU. Senator, I agree with the President who insisted or created a 90 day waiver—

Senator VAN HOLLEN. This is a simple question. Mr. Landau, I am asking you whether or not you agree with Elon Musk, who called AID a criminal enterprise and said we should put it through the wood chipper. Yes or no. This is a pretty simple question.

Mr. LANDAU. Senator, I think USAID provides some valuable services to our country as it has—we have to separate—

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Mr. Landau, you know that the first claim that Elon Musk made about AID programs was a big lie. Did you see his claim that AID spent \$50 million—the U.S. Government spent \$50 million on condoms in Gaza? Did you see that claim?

Mr. LANDAU. You know, I am not familiar with that particular—

Senator VAN HOLLEN. That was the first—the new press person at the White House, that was the first piece of evidence she put out there about mispending U.S. Government. That was a lie, was it not?

Mr. LANDAU. Senator, I respect your focus—

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Mr. Landau, this is my time to ask questions. If you do not want to answer them you do not have to.

But let me ask you this pretty straightforward question. Do you think that Putin and Russia were the aggressors in Ukraine?

Mr. LANDAU. Senator, at this point there are peace negotiations taking place across the world. Obviously, Ukraine—

Senator VAN HOLLEN. OK. Mr. Landau, this is a yes or—were they the aggressor or were they not the aggressor?

Mr. LANDAU. Senator, Ukraine invaded—

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Mr. Landau, let me try Mr. Whitaker.

Mr. LANDAU [continuing]. Excuse me, Russia invaded Ukraine—

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Mr. Whitaker is going to be if confirmed our Ambassador to NATO.

Mr. Whitaker, was Russia and Putin—were they the aggressors in the war on Ukraine?

Mr. WHITAKER. Thank you, Senator. A couple quick thoughts on this.

First of all, you know, today I am not here to assign labels, but I would say that J.D. Vance on Friday said that Russia invaded Ukraine.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. OK. So, you do not know if they are the aggressor because—were you surprised, for example, that the United States sided with North Korea and Russia against Ukraine and are you—and our NATO allies at the U.N. and that President—were you surprised at all?

Mr. WHITAKER. Senator, I think everything needs to be put in the context, as Ambassador Landau was trying to. It is all a part of the negotiation for peace.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. OK. Well, I think it is pretty clear to anybody with eyes to see that Russia and Putin were the aggressors in Ukraine, and it is very troubling that we cannot get a straight yes or no answer here.

Mr. Rigas, I heard your testimony. We all agree that we should get rid of any waste, fraud, and abuse. I would submit that if you are interested in getting rid of waste, fraud, and abuse in U.S. Government you do not start by firing all the inspector generals whose job it is to be on the lookout for waste, fraud, and abuse. But we agree that we want people who can perform well in their jobs, right?

OK. I am glad we can agree on that. And you would agree that it would be wrong to terminate somebody claiming that they were a poor performer when they were not. Would you agree with that?

Mr. RIGAS. Yes.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. OK. Are you aware of the fact that many of these probationary employees that are being fired, the notices they are getting claim poor performance, but in fact they have had very glowing recent performance reviews. Are you aware of that?

Mr. RIGAS. I have read accounts of that in the media, sir.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Right. So, but you would agree that it is a bad idea to claim someone is a poor performer when they are not?

Mr. RIGAS. I think so, yes.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. So, let me ask you about Schedule F. You are familiar with Schedule F?

Mr. RIGAS. Yes.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. OK. So, I am worried about Schedule F being implemented at State Department because, as you know, we currently have a system where, you know, Presidents, of course, are entitled to lots of political positions.

There are hundreds and hundreds of them. But we also have a merit based civil service system, and my question to you is this.

Do you agree that it would be a bad idea to take positions at the State Department that are currently merit based, where people get hired based on their experience and their knowledge, and convert those into political positions? Do you agree that that would be a bad idea?

Mr. RIGAS. So, thank you for the for the question, Senator. Are you referring to the new executive order the President signed, which was the policy schedule for career officials?

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Yes. I am talking about whether you agree it would be a bad idea to take merit based positions at the State Department and convert them into political positions?

Mr. RIGAS. Well, I think, you know, that the distinction between career and noncareer officials I think is important. Noncareer officials obviously have a lot more accountability because they are totally at will, and if they are not performing they will move—

Senator VAN HOLLEN. So, just to make sure I understand, you are saying we should convert more people to political because that would make them at will and more easily fired regardless of their merits?

Mr. RIGAS. No. What I am saying is that leadership should have some flexibility in terms of—there is a limited number of positions in the Senior Executive Service that can be political, only 10 percent government wide, and the law allows the leadership to determine which 10 percent of their department the agency will be. So, it is possible that a general SES position—a position might be general in one Administration and noncareer in another.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Do you agree it would be a bad idea to convert 50,000 to 60,000 merit based positions in the U.S. Government, including some in the State Department, from merit based to political?

Mr. RIGAS. So, I am not aware of any proposal to convert 50,000 or 60,000 positions to nonmerit based positions.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Well, OK. That is Russ Vought's plan. So, we should have a follow up conversation.

Mr. RIGAS. Yes. Yes. If I could say, the new executive order signed provides for competitive hiring for those positions. The Schedule F executive order, which was signed in 2020, had non-competitive hiring. So, that—the new iteration of that has changed how the hiring occurs.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Right. But anyway, we can have a follow up. I just—I hope our colleagues will agree that, of course, Presidents are entitled to lots of political positions. I mean, all of you were nominated. I understand that.

But we have had a tradition, and the Pendleton Act has established the idea of a merit based civil service and merit based Foreign Service. That law was extended. And so, you know, I hope, Mr. Chairman—Senator Ricketts—that we will all agree that we should not begin converting merit based civil service positions or merit based Foreign Service positions based on knowledge and qualifications into political sort of payoffs.

But I appreciate the time, and I thank you.

Senator RICKETTS. Senator Merkley.

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

I wanted to ask you, Mr. Landau, is President Trump a Russian asset?

Mr. LANDAU. Absolutely not, Senator. He is the President of the United States duly elected by the American people.

Senator MERKLEY. Well, the reason I ask is many people back home have been asking me this question, and they say if he was an asset, we would see exactly what he is doing now.

For example, he proceeded to forward or express from the Oval Office propaganda that has been Russian propaganda, that Ukraine started the war, that Zelenskyy is a dictator.

Second of all, he gave away key things on the negotiating table before the negotiations even started, assuring U.S. would absolutely oppose any possibility of NATO membership for Ukraine.

Third, he has cut off the arms shipments to Ukraine, completely undermining their ability against a massive neighbor next door with short supply lines and huge resources.

Fourth, he has undermined the partnership with Europe, which has been essential to security over the last 80 years, a major goal of Putin's, and then he has done everything to discredit and demean Zelenskyy on the international stage with the just shameful press conference in which he teamed up with the Vice President to attack Zelenskyy.

I cannot imagine that if he was a Russian asset he could do anything more favorable than these five points. What else could a Russian asset actually possibly do that Trump has not yet done?

Mr. LANDAU. Senator, the President has made it absolutely clear that his top priority is to try to bring peace and end an absolutely savage war.

I know you are familiar with the savagery. This is turning into World War I style trench warfare now in eastern Ukraine. The President is an exceptionally gifted deal maker. He is probably the only individual in the entire universe that could actually stop this.

The President understands as part of his deal making—

Senator MERKLEY. Well, let us turn to another focus here.

Mr. LANDAU [continuing]. That you have to use carrots and sticks.

Senator MERKLEY. Thank you very much, since you are now off the topic I was raising.

Mr. Whitaker, these five things that the President has done that are so favorable to Putin and so damaging to Ukraine and to our partnership with Europe, do you approve of them?

Mr. WHITAKER. Well, Senator, thanks for that question.

I am just going to have to politely disagree with you on those five things and the way you frame them. You know, the war in Ukraine would have never happened if President Trump was President in 2022. The war in Ukraine happened because of Joe Biden's weakness after his withdrawal from Afghanistan.

Senator MERKLEY. Yes. I do not think that was the question I asked, but maybe you could some other time go on television and express those points of view. But do you mind just answering the question I asked? Do you agree with the five things that President Trump has done, starting with him expressing Russian propaganda from the Oval Office?

Mr. LANDAU. Well, you know, again, as I mentioned to your colleague, I am not here to assign labels. We are in the middle of a very important peace negotiation. I agree with Ambassador——

Senator MERKLEY. OK, great. Thank you. I do hope that we have an Administration that works to get the very best deal for Ukraine.

But what a Russian asset would do would be to work to get the very best deal for Russia, and that appears to be exactly what Donald Trump is trying to accomplish.

I want to turn to USAID, and you have heard from my colleagues. We have a group of Mercy Corps headquartered out of Oregon that has contracts all over the world, places like Liberia and Kenya and Syria and DRC and Ethiopia.

One of the things that I was really struck by was one of their contracts—these are mostly clean water, health care, nutrition contracts, helping people in desperate situations in partnership with the host nations, which is all about both helping people but also building that relationship with those nations.

But in Liberia the contract that was canceled provides support for school lunches for 146 schools and 25,000 children.

I was very struck by this particular contract because when I was down in Guatemala, I was asking the president what is the most effective program we have in Guatemala that he would like to see expanded—he is the former president of Guatemala—and he said, school lunch program.

He said, here is the reason why. One, our kids do not have enough nutrition. They are stunted. Second of all, the prospect of getting lunches at school gets them to school, and education is essential.

He said, third of all, it creates local contracts for people who prepare the lunches. So, it is a little bit of economic investment in every village around the country.

Does it make any sense to cancel a program like that that is so beneficial in so many different ways and is done in partnership with the host nation?

Mr. WHITAKER. Is that directed to me, Senator?

Senator MERKLEY. Sure. Why not?

Mr. WHITAKER. Well, as you know, NATO is a different animal——

Senator MERKLEY. Absolutely. I know it is, but you have broad foreign policy experience so maybe you would like to—maybe I will just get quickly an answer from all three of you whether it makes sense to cancel such a program.

Mr. LANDAU. Senator, if I could hop in a second.

Secretary Rubio's waiver specifically covers lifesaving medicine, medical services, food, shelter, and subsistence.

Senator MERKLEY. Very interesting. Then why has this contract not been restored?

Mr. LANDAU. Again, sir, I can just look at the waiver. If confirmed——

Senator MERKLEY. OK. Well, here is the thing. Let me just explain that the solicitor general, Sarah Harris, said the funding freeze is not continuing. It is over. But the fact is the gears are not turning, and the gears have to turn in order for contracts to be restored and for aid to flow.

And so, we are talking about diseases overseas. We do not want people getting on planes with those diseases and bringing those—well, the fancy term, but Ebola type style of diseases here to the United States, et cetera, and it is just double talk to say that the funding freeze is over when the gears are not turned because the Administration is finding other ways to keep them from turning, including having fired all the people who turn the gears.

So, I do not want to hear about the waivers when there is no sincerity in actually applying them and making the AID function again.

My time is up. Thanks.

Senator RISCH [presiding]. Thank you.

Senator Scott.

Senator SCOTT OF FLORIDA. Do you want to go?

Senator RISCH. Yes, I am sorry. Senator Lee was here first. Actually, I did not see come back in.

Senator Lee.

Senator LEE. Thank you.

Senator RISCH. Senator Lee, go ahead, and then we will go to—

Senator LEE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thanks to all of you for being here and for your willingness to serve.

Mr. Landau, I would like to start with you, if that is all right. You have spoken today about the need to restore statecraft—economic statecraft—as a core function of the U.S. State Department.

You have also acknowledged this Administration has been clear eyed about the need to rethink and revisit certain aspects of foreign aid and how it works.

But getting back to economic statecraft, would you agree that the tools available to the United States in the economic statecraft domain, including things like trade agreements and other efforts that involve reducing trade barriers, arguably have a better return on investment for us than foreign aid in the traditional sense and should perhaps be our primary line of effort?

Mr. LANDAU. Senator Lee, I appreciate that question. I think that is such an important point to underscore, that there is probably no force in the world that is as powerful as the American private sector, and if we are looking to increase prosperity abroad, I think we will get a much higher rate of return from helping private sector money find its way to places where the private sector knows how best to spend it and how best to get returns.

Not to say there is not a role for USAID, but I think looking at this for maybe—for too long, for decades we have looked at this as American taxpayers sending aid dollars abroad.

I would love to focus on how do we get the American private sector to improve the standard of living of countries abroad by investing, by increasing flows of capital to some of those other countries so they can build a kind of—again, we saw that in China.

There is no more powerful force than free market systems when those are operating. So, again, I think your insight is a very important one.

That is not to say there is not a role for certain government programs, and that is fine, but in terms of State Department resources

I think we have severely underinvested in the kind of programs you are talking about.

Senator LEE. People want to trade with the United States, and they benefit meaningfully from it. Their people benefit meaningfully from it. And so insofar as we can use that, that can really go a long way. It can make a really big difference.

Mr. Whitaker, I would like to go to you next. You know, it is, in my view, and the view of many, including within the current Administration, far past time for our NATO allies to take their own defense, their own security needs seriously and the President, of course, has called for our allies to spend 5 percent of GDP on defense.

Now, defense spending is at least in part driven by threat perceptions by what people perceive as necessary in order to keep themselves safe and the perception of a threat risk may vary a little bit between the East bloc and the West bloc sort of within NATO, and it varies also depending on which side of the Atlantic Ocean you might be on.

Defense spending is also a decision that is, of course, necessarily subject to domestic processes, to domestic scrutiny, to engagement normally with elected representatives, people who are elected to make law in their respective countries.

In light of all these factors how achievable—how reconcilable, how gettable is this sort of return to a proper burden shifting in light of all the challenges that we face there?

Mr. WHITAKER. Yes, that is a great question, Senator. I enjoyed our time yesterday to talk about this. For a few minutes it seemed like a couple lawyers nerding out on the law, but you know, I did enjoy the discussion.

Senator LEE. It was kind of like that, I guess, was it not?

[Laughter.]

Mr. WHITAKER. But that being said, you are right. Defense spending is subject to domestic political concerns, and for too long our European allies and Canada—many of them—have balanced their budgets of their domestic political concerns on the backs of the American taxpayer, who has taken our place in the world as the only superpower very seriously and has invested in our defense.

And you know, obviously, if confirmed, when I get over there, I look forward to the conversation with all of the members on this committee about whether or not our NATO allies are really committed to the alliance.

They say they are. But again, are these politicians just providing empty promises or are they actually stepping up, understanding that the world is dangerous and the U.S. is their best ally in a dangerous world.

Senator LEE. Right, and that the U.S. is their best ally, albeit an ally that they are ready to cast aside the minute they decide to hold site meetings that do not include us when they are upset with us.

But regardless, we have been holding—bearing a disproportionate share of their security umbrella for a very long time.

It has been good for them insofar as their objective has been an inexorable march toward Western European style socialism but

that does not necessarily make it fair to the United States of America or her taxpayers.

Thank you.

Senator RISCH. Thank you, Senator Lee.

And Mr. Whitaker, let me say that if you are going to have a conversation to nerd out on the law you could not find a better or more willing partner than Senator Lee. He is outstanding in that.

Mr. WHITAKER. I agree with you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator RISCH. Senator—oh, excuse me.

Senator Kaine.

Senator Kaine. Thank you.

A simple question for each of you.

Who instigated the current war in Gaza?

Mr. LANDAU. I would say Hamas did by—

Senator Kaine. Mr. Rigas.

Mr. RIGAS. I would agree with my colleague.

Senator Kaine. Mr. Whitaker.

Mr. WHITAKER. Yes, October 7 was an invasion by Hamas.

Senator Kaine. So, you did not have any problem saying who instigated the war in Gaza, but none of you would be candid about who instigated the war in Ukraine, and what you said is the reason—and I am going to be fair to Mr. Rigas, I did not hear you be equivocal about that. I heard Mr. Whitaker and Mr. Landau.

What you said is there are sensitive and delicate negotiations going on right now, and I am not here to label.

There is a sensitive and delicate negotiation going on between Israel, Gaza, and other parties right now about extending a ceasefire, and it is really important to Israel, and it is really important to hostage families, and it is really important to Palestinians.

It is really important in the Red Sea because the Houthis have stopped firing into the Red Sea during the ceasefire, and if we extend it we have reason to believe that the Houthis will continue to not fire at U.S. ships.

So, I am noticing this. Senator Shaheen and I were just at a hearing with the deputy secretary of defense, Mr. Colby—Bridge Colby—and he said the same thing. He was asked who was responsible for the war in Ukraine—who instigated it.

Well, there is a sensitive, delicate negotiation. I do not want to—really want to opine about who instigated it. So, I asked him who instigated the war in Gaza, and he said it was Hamas.

We got to be willing to tell the truth, and I know answering the question truthfully might make a superior uncomfortable, but Americans deserve the truth, and if we are voting to confirm people for really critical positions—and you have all served in important positions, and you are all nominated for really important positions—we have got to have a sense that you are going to be truthful and that the truthful nature of your comments may or may not be listened to.

Your advice may or may not be followed. But what you owe to your commander in chief, what you owe to the country, what you owe to the oath you take, is to be truthful.

And I just cannot help but notice it was so easy to answer the question about who instigated the war in Gaza and so difficult for

just folks to be plain and to answer the question about who instigated the war in Ukraine.

Mr. RIGAS, I have a question for you about Schedule F and my colleague Senator Van Hollen has already mentioned it. And Schedule F was the first Trump term proposal.

It is now schedule PC, and you indicated there were some similarities, there are some differences. You were part of both OPM and the OMB during the first Trump term, and the guidance in that agency suggested there was a desire to reclassify 80 percent of employees in those agencies from traditional political service to Schedule F.

Do you have a sense of what the likely percentage reclassification would be at the Department of State under Trump administration term two?

Mr. RIGAS. Thank you for the question, Senator.

And again, I enjoyed our meeting. I think you were the first Senator I met with in this process, so I got off to a great start there.

I do not—I do not know that I can put a number on that. I can tell you how I went about the process at OPM. At the time, I was actually the acting director of the Office of Personnel Management.

Senator KAINE. Please do.

Mr. RIGAS. So, I had to implement the President's executive order on Schedule F, and what we did is we asked our career chief human capital officer and our H.R. folks to look at the position descriptions to see which positions were policymaking, policy influencing, confidential, or policy advocating positions.

Senator KAINE. And was that with a goal to getting to this 80 percent will be Schedule F?

Mr. RIGAS. No, that was—my understanding the 80 percent number I am not sure where that comes from, but I know—I think you may be referring to what happened at OMB where OMB director vote at the time—

Senator KAINE. That is correct.

Mr. RIGAS [continuing]. Did a similar analysis and came up with that number.

Senator KAINE. Was there a target number at OPM?

Mr. RIGAS. There was not. We just asked them to look at the position descriptions, and let those speak for themselves.

Senator KAINE. How does Schedule PC differ from Schedule F?

Mr. RIGAS. Schedule PC—to my understanding, I think the major difference is that it provides for a competitive hiring process.

Senator KAINE. But folks can still be fired and not really have recourse to challenge a termination?

Mr. RIGAS. Yes. Yes, they would be—

Senator KAINE. And that is pretty important. Right now—I will just say this and conclude—we see the Administration firing probationary employees because probationary employees do not have the same access to challenge it.

What that means is it is a war on veterans because probationary employees are either brand new people, like right out of college, or career switchers. Thirty percent of the Federal work force is veterans. They are career switchers.

They tend to come in after serving 15 or 20 years, and they are probationary, even though they may be 45 or 50 years old, and that

is why President Trump in his first 6 weeks in office has fired more veterans than any President in the history of the United States, and I think that is a disgrace, not a distinction.

But I appreciate you sharing the difference between Schedule F and what schedule PC is.

And I yield back, Mr. Chair.

Senator RISCH. Thank you, Senator Kaine. There is nothing to yield back, but I will accept it. Thank you.

Senator Scott.

Senator SCOTT OF FLORIDA. Thank you, Chairman.

First off, congratulations on your nominations. You guys have had distinguished careers, and I know you are going to do a great job. It is fun to listen to everybody's ideas about foreign policy.

So, first, let me just start with Mr. Whitaker. How do you see your role helping the President get our European allies to do their job, not only for their own security, but to carry their full weight as NATO members?

It does not seem to me that they must be too worried about their defense right now or what is going to happen. But how are you going to get them to do their—what they are—what they should be doing?

Mr. WHITAKER. Well. Thank you, Senator Scott, and it is good to see you again.

You know, first, obviously being there day to day in Brussels at NATO headquarters interacting with our 31 other NATO allies I think is the most important thing to have. Somebody like myself, you know, that has been with President Trump since the last Administration I think is going to send a very clear message from the President that it is time to step up and not just pay lip service to it.

I think it also is important to drive the issues that I mentioned earlier—interoperability, a modernization of our warfighting effort at NATO with our allies, and at the same time addressing the hybrid threats, you know, that we are seeing in space and cyber and in the seas with cable cutting and the like.

So, I think there is a lot of things, but the primary thing is, if confirmed, getting there and pressing upon our allies how serious this moment in world history is.

Senator SCOTT OF FLORIDA. When I first came up here in 2019 I went to Munich Security Conference and met with the German delegation, and they basically told us to go jump in the lake.

They were not going to increase their funding, and so how are you going to change that attitude? What is going to change?

I mean, why would they change? I mean, we have been we have been sitting here, been their umbrella forever. What is going to make them change?

Mr. WHITAKER. Well, President Trump is going to make them change, and I think you have already seen the dramatic increase in commitments from our NATO allies, and his saying things like NATO is a good thing if done properly and used properly, and saying that Europeans need to step up.

I think, you know, President Trump communicates directly, and he has been very clear to our allies, and if anybody is below the—what they committed to 10 years ago of 2 percent, in June during

the first Trump summit with our NATO allies, that is going to be a very bad scene.

But if there is not a commitment and a plan to get to 5 percent as soon as possible I think, you know, again, our NATO allies should be very concerned.

Senator SCOTT OF FLORIDA. Since Russia invaded Ukraine the Baltics and Poland and few others have acted with speed and commitment to help themselves and help Ukraine. Have we reached a point where we now are more aligned with, you know, Poland and the Baltic states than we are with all the other NATO nations?

Mr. WHITAKER. Well, Senator, obviously, if you are on the border with Russia, and you are seeing how Vladimir Putin has conducted his foreign policy, you have a real view of the world and they have—Poland and our Baltic Allies have been really extraordinary in addressing what, you know, is their threats because remember Article 3—everybody wants to talk about Article 5, Senator, but Article 3 says that each NATO ally commits to both the collective defense but individual defense, and I think that is often ignored in the broader discussion.

But that is so important to, you know, what is happening with those on the front line. And at the same time they should be applauded for that commitment to increasing their defense spending and recognizing the real threat because Russia is the largest geopolitical threat to Europe.

It is not the largest geopolitical threat to the United States of America, and—because we have talked about it earlier, China is that geopolitical threat, and the United States needs to address that, and it needs to balance all of those concerns.

Senator SCOTT OF FLORIDA. Mr. Rigas and Landau, can you talk a little bit about how you envision the realignment of the Secretary of State's office as you work with Secretary of State Rubio? How would you how—what do you guys think you ought to be doing to make us more focused?

Mr. RIGAS. Thank you for that question.

Senator SCOTT OF FLORIDA. We talked about that a little bit yesterday.

Mr. RIGAS. Sure. Sure. Thank you very much for that question, Senator.

You know, as I said in my opening statement, I think part of what I am going to be responsible for and what I would like to do is make sure we have the right people with the right skills doing the right things and in the right places, and I would like to roll up my sleeves and ask questions about where people are and what they are doing. I was talking to a Senior Foreign Service officer who is in Africa and said, you know, I have got one economic affairs slot here and I struggle to fill, and Paris has five.

And I do not know if that is the right, you know, mix or the right allocation of where folks ought to be, but I would like to ask questions and come up with a good plan for that.

Senator SCOTT OF FLORIDA. Ambassador Landau, would you add anything?

Mr. LANDAU. You know, Senator, again, I think we need to really increase our focus on economic diplomacy around the world and just—I would like to thank you for your leadership on hemispheric

issues, and if I am confirmed I really look forward to working closely with you.

Senator SCOTT OF FLORIDA. Thank you.

Thank you, Chairman.

Senator RISCH. Thank you, Senator Scott.

Mr. Whitaker, thank you for that comment on Section 3. Everybody focuses on Section 5, but Section 3 is really, really important. The good news is in my discussions with the European allies most, if not all, have come to or are coming to the realization that the biggest threat is not Russia.

It is, obviously, an immediate problem, but for the rest of this century the challenge—our challenge, the Europeans' challenge—is going to come from China, clearly.

With that, Senator Shaheen, did you have a—

Senator SHAHEEN. I do. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I would like to echo what you just said about China, but I would point out that one of the things that China is watching very closely is what we do in Ukraine, and if we walk away from our allies and—our ally Ukraine, it is going to say a lot to President Xi about what we might do in terms of supporting or not supporting Taiwan if he invades.

So, I would just urge you all to consider that as you are looking at the calculus about how we need to address China.

Mr. Whitaker, you alluded to this a little bit, but I just want to be clear. Under your leadership in Brussels, if confirmed, will the United States' commitment to NATO be ironclad including our commitment to Article 5?

Mr. WHITAKER. Thank you, Senator, and we talked about this when we had a chance to visit last week.

It will be ironclad. You know, Article 5, I think, binds all of the allies. But at the same time, as President Trump has been—and he just spoke on this earlier this week—he says, I support it, but we should not have to use it, and I think that is very important.

Senator SHAHEEN. Well, and—sorry to interrupt, but I just have limited time. So, do you support the continued presence of U.S. troops on NATO's eastern flank, including in Poland where the U.S. leads the multinational battle group and also in the Baltic states?

Mr. WHITAKER. Yes. As we discussed, Senator, I think obviously those forward deployed Eastern European U.S. assets, together with our allies, are very important to this strategic posture of both the United States of America and most importantly, NATO.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you.

You talked about wanting to commit the United States to 5 percent of GDP for our defense spending. Do you know what we spend now in terms of GDP?

Mr. WHITAKER. Senator, I have seen a lot of estimates but the best I can tell is we spend about \$850 billion on the United States defense, which is about 3 and a half percent of our GDP.

Senator SHAHEEN. Actually, in 2024 we spent \$886 billion, which is 3.4 percent of GDP, a little over that. Do you know what it would take to get us to 5 percent?

Mr. WHITAKER. Well, in Iowa we would say a whole lot more money.

Senator SHAHEEN. A whole lot more money. So, 5 percent of our GDP last year would be \$1.5 trillion so it would take another \$550 billion.

So, as we are talking about how do we get to an increased level of spending, we also need to have a plan for how the United States would get there.

Mr. Rigas, I want to go back to something we discussed in my office, and I raised a concern about some of your writings with respect to how you reference Federal employees.

So, if you could just clarify for me in this hearing, do you believe that career Federal employees, patriotic Americans like Mr. Landau's father who served as a career Foreign Service officer across both Republican and Democratic administrations, do you believe those career Federal employees are able to carry out the President's lawful policies?

Mr. RIGAS. Thank you for the question, Senator, and thank you again for taking the time to meet with me.

Yes, and I have said there were a number of writings I submitted as part of my questionnaire including this chapter that I co-authored on America first national security policy, and right on page 1 I say there, we believe that most civil servants show up to work every day and do their jobs dutifully on behalf of the President and the American people.

Many career officials have tremendous institutional knowledge and expertise and are a great resource to our government and they serve our fellow citizens well.

Senator SHAHEEN. I appreciate your clarifying that, because that has been my experience as well and I think it is unfortunate to make such blanket statements about career employees being members of the swamp and not being willing to carry out the President's policies no matter who the President is.

So, Mr. President—or Mr. Chairman, for the record, I would like to introduce these two pieces of writings from Mr. Rigas for the record. One is a September 2023 op-ed and the other is the chapter of a book co-authored by Mr. Rigas, chapter 12.

Senator RISCH. They will be included in the record. Thank you, Senator.

[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 document.]

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you.

Mr. Landau, the National Endowment for Democracy is an organization whose concept was conceived by President Reagan, but it has been starved for funds by this Administration despite a line item for its appropriation and a statutory mandate that NED—the acronym for the National Endowment for Democracy—receive a grant annually from the State Department.

They have had to furlough 75 percent of their staff. They have halted all grantmaking. Now, this is a low overhead cost organization. As I said, it is one that was created and conceived by President Reagan.

It works exclusively to advance free elections, the free market, and democracy in places where our adversaries rule against their

people and against America—countries like Iran and China and North Korea and Cuba.

So, if you are confirmed will you ensure that the Department of State complies with the NED Act, appropriations law that make NED's funds urgently available?

Mr. LANDAU. Yes, Senator. I believe with all my soul and every fiber of my body in the rule of law, that if a law is constitutional that it is our job, if I am confirmed to be part of the executive branch, to comply with that law.

And so if, in fact, you know, there are mandatory statutory items then I will certainly, you know, do my best to make sure. My job will be to follow the law.

That is what I do. If I am part of the executive branch—you all make the laws, and it is our job, for those of us who might be in the executive branch, to execute the laws, assuming the law is constitutional. So, I can give you that commitment.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator RISCH. Senator Duckworth.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Mr. Chairman, thank you, and I echo the ranking member's call to bring Secretary Rubio before this committee. Every one of us should have the chance to go over the list of USAID programs with Secretary Rubio.

I am extremely concerned about the upheaval and devastation being wrought by this Administration's disastrous and systemic dismantling of our foreign policy and foreign assistance apparatus, and I am further concerned by the long term impacts, not least of all to the lives and livelihoods of those around the world, but also the trust and commitments that this Administration has broken that cannot be repaired so easily even if the folks in charge did an about face today.

Last year, then Dep. Sec. of State Kurt Campbell met with this committee and emphasized the strategy of invest, align, compete, in response to the PRC's growing geopolitical influence in the Indo-Pacific.

Secretary Rubio highlighted his own vision of making us safer, stronger, and more prosperous, but he is currently failing at that mark as he cedes ground to the PRC. The PRC is undercutting our soft power and is now pursuing an agenda that is opaque, illegal if you ask me, and fails to uphold our commitment contracts and contracts throughout the process. The Trump administration is undercutting our soft power.

Look at our farmers in the Midwest. I am especially concerned with the cuts to USAID. Over the last 4 fiscal years, USDA purchased food commodities to distribute via USAID from farmers in Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Nebraska, Wisconsin, Missouri, Florida.

In Iowa, USAID accounted for \$64 million in funds that were bought from Iowa farmers. In Indiana, \$4 million. Nebraska, we bought \$102 million worth of agricultural goods for USAID. In Missouri it was \$79 million. Florida, \$99 million. Wisconsin, \$230 million. These programs now are on hold, and our farmers are going to suffer as a result of ending the USAID programs.

Mr. Rigas, you worked at the firm that advises clients how to navigate Federal contracting, and I am hearing from organizations

in Illinois and around the country that are still owed tens of millions of dollars in reimbursement for work done in December and January.

They have not been paid. They do not know when they will receive the money they are owed, and we are getting to the point where they may be owed interest on their outstanding money as well.

Some of these American founded and run organizations are exploring bankruptcy as something they may have to consider. They have already laid off hundreds of staff, by the way, and that does not sound like prosperity to me.

Some of them report that they have been told by USAID that reimbursements for work done in December and January will only be provided for expenses that this Administration deems legitimate or that they would have approved, even though these were contracts from the last Administration for work done during the last Administration.

Mr. Rigas, who was the president back in December through January 20?

Mr. RIGAS. Who was the president in December of—

Senator DUCKWORTH. 2024 through January 20 of 2025.

Mr. RIGAS. President Joe Biden.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Putting your contracting advisor hat back on, would you have advised anyone in December to anticipate that the government might not reimburse for work appropriately directed under that Administration?

Mr. RIGAS. I think the Federal contracting law is pretty clear. So, if a contractor has provided goods or services they are going to be paid. I do not see how that would not happen.

Senator DUCKWORTH. OK, but they have not been paid yet for December or January. That is a problem for these companies that are now facing bankruptcy, and it is going to cost taxpayers more money if we have to pay those contracts with interest.

If confirmed, you will be overseeing the Office of Foreign Assistance where many of these illegal and unprecedented directives have originated.

Can you commit to me that if you are confirmed, Mr. Rigas, you will swiftly move to correct this issue and at a bare minimum reimburse organizations for the work that they did before the stop work order?

Mr. RIGAS. Of course, Senator. If confirmed, absolutely I would go and make sure—see what kind of disconnect has occurred or if there has been a miscommunication.

But certainly to me it would seem anyone that has a contract to provide goods and services to the U.S. Government and has rendered those goods and services the U.S. Government should be paid for them and will be paid.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Good. That is good to hear. Thank you.

I am not even talking about what has happened under this funding freeze, which I also find egregious. I am just talking about work that was done prior to that freeze, and so thank you for that commitment.

Moving on to our strength, one area where I thought we might have continuity of purpose, and in our discussion we talked about

UXO clearance. With this Administration stop work order and foreign assistance freeze UXO clearance work funded by the U.S. and implemented by partners on the ground were stopped.

In some countries, like Vietnam, those war legacies issues are the bedrock of our relationship that we have cultivated over decades. In others they are one of the few connective tissues we have.

And you know what happened when we stopped—did the stop work? Immediately PRC came in and gave a \$4.4 million contract to take over the UXO work that we were funding—that we established on the ground.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to submit for the record a Radio Free Asia article talking about the PRC stepping in.

Senator RISCH. It will be included, Senator.

[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 document.]

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I do not think it looks good. Do you think that looks good to have the PRC stepping in on this work?

Mr. RIGAS. I am not familiar with that particular case, but I think we have talked at this hearing about our need to compete and confront where China is gaining around the world at the expense of U.S. interests.

So, to the extent—it would certainly be a priority of mine. I know it is a priority of the President to push back on the gains that China has made, certainly, in the Western Hemisphere and everywhere else where U.S. interests are at stake.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator RISCH. Senator Cruz.

Senator CRUZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Landau, I want to focus on Iran's push to build nuclear weapons, which I believe presents one of the most immediate and acute threats to American national security.

Under the first Trump administration, President Trump imposed maximum pressure, first by denying the Ayatollah oil revenue, then rescinding civil nuclear waivers, and ultimately by invoking U.N. snap back sanctions.

The Biden administration dismantled that pressure as the Iranian regime knew that they would, and so the regime began rushing to a nuclear weapon immediately after the November election.

We know the result. Today, the Ayatollah has achieved a nuclear breakout time of nearly zero. We now face the very real possibility of an Iranian nuclear arsenal. I do not believe this is a threat the U.S. can tolerate, and I am glad that the Trump administration is taking action.

We have already seen the Trump administration restore parts of the maximum pressure campaign with the goal of cutting their oil exports completely to zero. Next, we have to cancel any civil nuclear waivers and reinvoke the U.N. snap back.

I asked in written testimony to this committee whether Secretary Rubio intends to do so, and here was his response: Quote, "I believe it is our national security interest for the U.N. Security Council to snap back the sanctions that were suspended under the JCPOA. I

will execute the President's guidance and work with our allies to ensure that snapback takes place."

I also asked incoming Ambassador to the United Nations Stefanik about the issue, and she said she will work with the White House and Secretary Rubio to develop a strategy to do exactly that.

Both said an Iranian nuclear weapon poses an acute national security threat to the United States.

First, do you agree with their assessment that it is in the national security interest of the United States to snap back the U.N. sanctions?

Mr. LANDAU. Yes, Senator.

Senator CRUZ. Talk about how you would work to support our U.N. mission, the State Department, and the Administration, and in particular to invoke the U.N. snap back mechanism either unilaterally or working with allies?

Mr. LANDAU. Senator, let me just take a step back and reiterate I am so glad that you bring up this really important issue of Iran's nuclear capabilities because I think there are few more acute threats in the world today, and I think the President has made it clear on numerous occasions that he shares the view that you just articulated, that it is completely unacceptable to U.S. national security for Iran to be a nuclear armed power in this world.

Certainly, the State Department will do everything we can, as Senator Rubio and Representative Stefanik have indicated to you, to work with other countries around the world to make sure that there are not just U.S. sanctions on Iran, but that we—if an alliance means something, it has got to mean something that when we say something is an existential threat to the world, that our allies would agree with us and would act in conjunction.

You cannot just be allies for the things that the allies might care about. I mean, there are broader implications of things that we care about, and I think we should generally make it clear to our allies that if you want to be our allies, let us try to identify and work together on issues that we all care about in different parts of the world. And so Iran is certainly one of those.

Senator CRUZ. Terrific.

Mr. Whitaker, we have heard a lot of histrionics recently about President Trump's policies toward Europe and Ukraine.

First, obviously, and candidly I have heard from colleagues on both sides of the aisle the meeting between President Trump and Ukrainian President Zelenskyy was an inexplicable catastrophe.

What we witnessed was an outburst that was completely out of line, delusional, and frankly, deeply disrespectful to the President of the United States.

In my view, President Zelenskyy's behavior in that meeting will go down in history as the most disastrous Oval Office encounter ever. Zelenskyy's behavior was the exact opposite of what he should have been doing.

The United States has provided Ukraine with hundreds of billions of dollars to support its fight against Russia, and yet his attitude was arrogant, and his actions did not just harm Ukraine, they also harmed America.

In fact, President Zelenskyy played right into Putin's hands by setting back efforts to end the war quickly. Any outcome that benefits Russia does not benefit America. The war must end, I believe, with a clear and unmistakable loss for Russia.

After the war ends, the next question is going to be what Europe does with energy, and as you and I discussed energy was a major cause of the war with Joe Biden waiving sanctions on Nord Stream 2, which was the precipitating cause of the war.

Two part question. Number one, what is your understanding of why the war started, and number two, how should the issue of European energy security be handled, and should Europe get its energy from Russia or from America?

Mr. WHITAKER. Yes. Well, thank you, Senator. I enjoyed our conversation. We have known each other for a long time and it was good to not only catch up but talk about these important issues that face our European allies and the NATO alliance that we are a part of.

First, it is very clear to me that when Joe Biden removed those sanctions from Nord Stream 2, that gave the money that Vladimir Putin needed to execute this war—it took away the need for Russian gas to pass through Ukraine because they had a new route for that gas straight to central Europe.

At the same time, Joe Biden's weakness in the Afghanistan withdrawal I think also gave a green light to Vladimir Putin to commence the war in 2022.

So, I think those two factors, as we discussed, were critical to that war and would have never happened if Donald Trump was president in 2022.

There is no doubt to me that one of the reasons for the NATO alliance, it is, again, as I mentioned earlier, the most successful alliance in the history of the world.

But it also protects our allies, and our allies should protect us, and that includes not only military alliances but trade alliances.

And the fact that Europe continues to buy billions of dollars worth of gas from Russia instead of buying American liquid natural gas I think is just a travesty, and hopefully, we can increase that capacity to export here in the U.S. and for them to receive it in Europe so that dependence on Russia and the funding of Vladimir Putin's war machine can end.

Senator CRUZ. Very much agree. Thank you.

Senator RISCH. Thank you, Senator.

For the record, your comments are well taken on Europe attempting to replace that, and there is a lot of efforts going on on their part to do it. Frankly, a lot of us are amazed that they were able to do as much as they have in such short order, but they continue to work on it. So, good for that.

Senator Coons.

Senator COONS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you again to our three colleagues.

I checked with my office, and you may have requested meetings with me. I apologize if my schedule did not permit me to meet with you before this hearing.

I would welcome a chance to meet after this because I think the odds you will be confirmed are high and you will play central roles

in our State Department and in our engagement with our critical NATO partners in Europe.

Mr. Landau, as I said before—Ambassador Landau, forgive me—your decades of engagement with the Foreign Service, your previous service as an ambassador in Mexico I think recommends you for this role.

And if I heard you correctly, in your opening testimony you suggested that mass migration globally is one of the great challenges to stability, peace, security around the world.

Help me understand. In your view, are programs that counter human trafficking, programs that help families sustain themselves with productive agriculture and help reduce the pressures for migration, are those programs beneficial?

Mr. LANDAU. I think, as a general matter, Senator, yes, they can be beneficial. I think you would have to look program by program.

I do not think you can paint with too broad a brush, and I think certainly we have been putting a lot of money into countries like Honduras for as long as I can remember—my whole life—and I am not sure that we have seen the kind of results you would expect.

So, I think theoretically, yes, and I think we should certainly explore are there programs that we can promote to—that are actually effective programs to limit migration.

Senator COONS. So, Ambassador, I will tell you that, in my view, having visited a number of programs that were sponsored through the U.S. State Department and through USAID that were designed to help young people resist predation by human traffickers, reduce their temptation to join gangs, help support rural agriculture in countries like Guatemala, Mexico, Costa Rica, Colombia, were largely effective in reducing the inclination to go hundreds if not thousands of miles and present at our southern border.

I think they are wise investments, and I think it is unwise that they have been abruptly cut off. I hope we can work together on finding ways to identify and restore funding to those programs that reduce mass migration and those programs that effectively counter China and Chinese and Russian disinformation.

Are you familiar with IRI and NDI?

Mr. LANDAU. Yes, the International Republican Institute and—yes. Yes.

Senator COONS. International Republican Institute and National Democratic Institute. Launched by President Reagan, for decades deserving of bipartisan support, critical for sustaining, for example, a NATO ally, Romania—Moldova, not yet a member of either the EU or NATO—that are facing upcoming elections.

The IRI and NDI for decades have helped counter disinformation by Russia and China and helped facilitate the movement toward being democracies by former Soviet states.

Do you have any sense whether it is a good idea or a bad idea to completely shut down IRI and NDI?

Mr. LANDAU. Senator, I think it is something that we should certainly look very closely at, and if I am confirmed I would be more than happy to work with you to talk about specific efforts there. Let us look at the funding streams, what they are doing.

And again, I think I can certainly commit to working with you on that.

Senator COONS. Well, I would appreciate the opportunity. My experience over the last few weeks—and I served with Senator Rubio and voted for Secretary Rubio—has been that, on the one hand, we are told there is a long review going on, there is waivers being given.

But Senator Sullivan is the board chair of IRI—a Republican, Marine veteran, a big believer in IRI. They are laying people off.

We do not have time for a long discussion. We need to act to restore funding and functionality to a wide range of long demonstrated bipartisan programs from PEPFAR to counter trafficking to counter migration to programs that counter Russian and Chinese disinformation.

Last, Mr. Rigas, if I might. Is it your understanding that the work force at State should brace for DOGE style cuts that will lead to thousands of members of the civil service being fired abruptly without cause and without warning?

Mr. RIGAS. Thank you for the question, Senator.

I have no insight into any plans of that nature, and to the extent my understanding is at least from reading media reports is probationary employees that have been let go or put on leave, I believe that has already happened.

Senator COONS. One of those probationary employees just joined my office. A talented and capable young person who left a great job in Rome to come back to the United States to take a job at the State Department working in international religious freedom was abruptly fired without cause, and I will say for a young generation of potential career Foreign Service and civil service officers I think we are causing real harm.

We have long benefited from new generations of folks joining the diplomatic service, the civil service, and I think we are making a huge mistake.

I think we need to look carefully at the alignment of the State Department, at whether the funds are being spent wisely, the posts and missions make sense, but to do it in the same way that the chainsaw was just taken to USAID would be a tragic mistake.

We should not be shutting down missions, laying off individuals by the thousands, and canceling programs all over the world.

You should not let what just happened to AID happen to the State Department. I think it would be a critical strategic mistake.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator RISCH. Thank you, Senator Coons.

Thank you to our panel. A strong showing today. You guys have done well. I look forward to moving the Administration forward after we get you confirmed as soon as we possibly can.

I am going to add the letters of support for each of the members to this record.

[The information referred to was not received at time of print.]

Senator RISCH. For the information of the members of the committee, the record remain open until close of business tomorrow Wednesday, March 5, including for members to submit questions for the record. I would ask you to answer those questions as rapidly as you can.

With that, the hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 12:41 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

Additional Material Submitted for the Record

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO CHRISTOPHER LANDAU BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

Question. Europe: Russia has created serious difficulties for our Embassy in Moscow to maintain day to day operations. While we need to make progress and improve our diplomats' ability to do their jobs, we must make sure that there is reciprocity in diplomatic access with Russia. Over the past few years, Russia has placed much tougher burdens on Embassy Moscow than the previous Administration was willing to put on their embassy and consulates here in the United States. How will you work to support our diplomatic mission in Moscow while making sure Russia does not maintain an unfair advantage in terms of diplomatic presence?

Answer. I am committed to an America first foreign policy and that includes ensuring that Russia does not maintain an unfair advantage when it comes to embassy operations. Any agreements with Russia regarding diplomatic missions will first and foremost consider Embassy Moscow's needs and strictly ensure reciprocity. Talks in Istanbul February 27 identified concrete initial steps to stabilize bilateral mission operations, and talks will continue in order to enable Embassy Moscow to achieve the President's foreign policy goals.

Question. Europe: How will you support U.S. missions facing extreme pressure from host countries, specifically Russia and Belarus?

Answer. Any country that places a U.S. mission under extreme pressure will be met with reciprocal treatment. Foreign countries should know that whatever they do to our diplomats overseas, they can expect serious consequences on the basis of reciprocity. As the son of a career Foreign Service Officer who grew up in missions abroad, and as a former Ambassador myself, I take the well-being of our diplomats seriously and will not tolerate any maltreatment.

Question. Europe: How will you support U.S. Ambassadors who face hostile treatment from their host governments and make it clear that our Ambassadors are representatives of the U.S. President and government, and that they should be respected as such?

Answer. As the son of a former U.S. Ambassador, and as a former U.S. Ambassador myself, I understand very well that U.S. Ambassadors serve as the personal representatives of the President and the chief representative of the United States government to their country of assignment. The U.S. Government abroad must be respected, and hostile treatment from host governments will be met with firm consequences. This extends to our Ambassadors abroad, regardless of the state of bilateral relations, we expect our Ambassadors to be treated with utmost respect. The President has been very clear about what happens when foreign countries do not respect the United States.

Question. Europe: How will you work to protect the identities of current and former U.S. partners in Russia and Belarus who are vulnerable to repressions from their nations' governments should their work with the U.S. be publicized?

Answer. I am aware of the risks faced by partners should their information be publicized, including physical danger, heavy fines, criminal prosecution, and imprisonment. If confirmed, I will use all tools available to me to protect the information of vulnerable partners.

Question. Middle East: The Biden administration's approach to the Middle East alienated our regional allies. Overly restrictive arms sales, an initial repudiation of the Abraham Accords, an advertised "pivot to the Pacific," and an Iran embrace pushed many longstanding Middle East partners to start hedging to meet their security needs. How does the Trump Administration plan to change its approach to Middle Eastern partners in a manner that furthers our security interests?

Answer. The Administration plans to re-engage with the Middle East to pick up on the very successful initiatives of the President's first term. This Administration's priorities are ending conflict; countering the rise of China; promoting economic growth while providing new markets for U.S. exports; and preventing Iran from manufacturing or acquiring a nuclear weapon as well as curtailing its ballistic missile program and support for terrorist groups. The Administration is committed to

strengthening our iron-clad relationship with Israel, advancing Israeli security, and promoting the Abraham Accords. If confirmed, I will work to ensure the Gaza cease-fire and Lebanon cessation of hostilities and related commitments, including the return of hostages, endure.

Question. U.S. Interests and Allies in Africa: The Biden Administration's Africa policy resembled a marketing campaign targeting African elites, diaspora communities, and its domestic base with flashy events and promises. Instead of substantive engagement with clear objectives, it pursued poorly conceived Presidential and diplomatic initiatives and questionable development programs. One example is a U.S.-backed railroad, marketed as countering China but, as of now, primarily facilitating the PRC's mineral extraction. U.S. credibility has faltered, leaving Africans asking, "Where is the United States?" Meanwhile, strategic competitors expand their influence. How will you steer U.S. policy in Africa differently if confirmed?

Answer. If confirmed, I will work closely with Secretary Rubio to build constructive and substantive relationships in Africa. I will prioritize substance and outcomes over form and slogans, including working with our partners to deliver opportunities for American businesses and enable private sector-led economic development. This framework also offers opportunities for our partners in Africa to benefit through increased economic prosperity, self-sufficiency, and sovereignty. There is enormous potential for greatly increased commercial statecraft in Africa that benefits our Nation.

Question. U.S. Interests and Allies in Africa: What is your assessment of the greatest threat to U.S. national security in Sub-Saharan Africa?

Answer. Chinese market capture, exploitation of natural resources, information manipulation, and adversarial economic and security partnerships undermine U.S. influence, economic opportunities, and national security interests. Pervasive issues of poor governance, corruption, and economic instability on the continent complicate stable relationships and affiliates of ISIS and Al Qaeda have used ungoverned spaces to further destabilize governments and targeted U.S. interests on the continent.

Question. U.S. Interests and Allies in Africa: In your assessment, which Sub-Saharan African countries constitute our greatest allies?

Answer. The ongoing conflict in the eastern DRC and the deteriorating domestic situation in South Africa are significant threats to stability in the region. Given our shared history and shared values, I understand that the United States maintains productive relationships with many African countries. The Department also works closely with the African Union as the continent's premier multilateral organization and the primary forum for African countries to build consensus and shape positions on regional and global issues. If confirmed, I would support advancing America's national interests through working more closely with the private sector, governments, and directly with African citizens.

Question. U.S. Interests and Allies in Africa: How will you engage with the Africa Bureau to broaden partnerships with allies on the African continent?

Answer. It is in the United States' interest to support African efforts to increase self-reliance and to reduce our involvement in peacekeeping efforts as well as humanitarian and development aid. If confirmed, I will work with the Africa Bureau to engage African countries who show willingness to achieve mutually beneficial objectives and support the efforts of the African Union to deliver results for Africans and build a more peaceful, prosperous continent. If confirmed, I would support engaging in robust diplomacy in Africa to build partnerships and advance U.S. priorities.

Question. Eastern Congo: The escalating crisis in Eastern Congo, marked by intensified fighting between Rwanda-backed M23 rebels and DRC forces, has displaced millions, heightened regional tensions, and resulted in the occupation of large parts of the region by foreign and rebel forces. What specific diplomatic steps is the U.S. taking to press Rwanda and the DRC to reduce tensions and stop backing armed groups in the crisis?

Answer. I understand that in recent calls with Rwandan President Kagame and DRC President Tshisekedi, the Secretary urged an immediate cease-fire in the region and for all parties to respect principles of sovereignty. I also understand that the Secretary also spoke with Angolan Foreign Minister Tete and Kenyan President Ruto about finding a diplomatic solution to the crisis. If confirmed, I would plan to prioritize efforts to end the conflict.

Question. Eastern Congo: How is the U.S. using sanctions, aid conditions, or military ties to ensure accountability for violence and support lasting peace?

Answer. On February 20, the Department of the Treasury sanctioned James Kabarebe, the Minister of State for Regional Integration in the Rwandan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, along with Lawrence Kanyuka Kingston, M23's civilian spokesperson. United States sanctions policy is designed to elicit behavior change. I understand these recent designations aim to pressure Rwanda to return to negotiations under the enhanced Luanda mediation process to achieve a diplomatic solution to the conflict.

Question. Eastern Congo: What exact measures is the U.S. committing to deliver humanitarian aid to displaced people in Eastern Congo amid rising insecurity?

Answer. Secretary Rubio granted a waiver to the pause on foreign assistance for emergency life-saving humanitarian activities. I understand some of the United States' traditional humanitarian partners are continuing to deliver life-saving assistance in the DRC and for new refugees in the region anticipating reimbursement under the waiver, while some are using alternative funding sources. The United States continues to call for protection of civilians seeking safety and for all parties to uphold humanitarian principles and guarantee unhindered humanitarian access.

Question. Eastern Congo: Should any sustainable critical minerals deal focused on helping to end the current crisis include regional stakeholders like Rwanda and Uganda? If not, why not?

Answer. The overriding goal of the United States is a durable peace that addresses security concerns and lays the foundation for a thriving regional economy and future partnership. If confirmed, I will work to promote U.S. investment in the critical minerals sector in the region, to secure America's critical mineral supply chains and to ultimately prevent Chinese dominance of the sector.

Question. High Threat Posts: The majority of high threat State Department posts are in Sub-Saharan Africa. U.S. personnel face numerous risks ranging from traffic accidents to armed conflict to coup d'états to crime and banditry. In April 2023, the security situation in Khartoum rapidly deteriorated with the outbreak of war between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces, leading the U.S. military to evacuate embassy personnel by helicopter. Currently, two US missions are on ordered departure due to the crisis in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo: Embassy Kinshasa and Embassy Bujumbura. Embassy Khartoum remains closed. How will you draw upon the lessons from the lead-up to and evacuation of Embassy Khartoum and ordered departure in DRC to prepare other high-risk posts where a similar scenario could play out, for instance in South Sudan, Chad, the Central African Republic, or Somalia?

Answer. The President and the Secretary have been clear that the safety and security of Americans is the Administration's highest priority. If confirmed, it will be mine as well. All high-threat posts continually prepare for various events, natural and man-made, through drills, exercises, evacuation route testing, and hosting interagency partners to maintain the most up-to-date contingency plans. If confirmed, I will work to ensure regional security officers at high-threat posts are well-trained and supported and the Chief of Mission and country team understand contingency planning and available security support.

Question. High Threat Posts: Will you commit to ensure that all posts in sub-Saharan Africa maintain up-to-date Emergency Action Plans?

Answer. Yes.

Question. Coups in Africa: What lessons have been learned from the recent coups in Africa (Mali, Chad, Sudan, Guinea, Burkina Faso, Niger and Gabon) that should be applied to other countries at risk for unconstitutional transfer of power, including countries like DRC, Burundi, Cameroon, South Sudan, and Zimbabwe?

Answer. Recent military coups in Africa have highlighted the need for prudence in engaging with African nations. There are many opportunities for America in Africa, but poor governance in Africa can also create opportunities for our adversaries and violent terrorist groups to threaten U.S. interests. If confirmed, I will work with the Department to utilize lessons learned to the benefit of American (and African) strength, security, and prosperity.

Question. Sudan: The war in Sudan is among the world's most devastating conflicts, posing a severe humanitarian crisis. Without U.S. leadership, the conflict risks destabilizing the region, enabling exploitation by malign foreign actors like Russia and Iran, and causing the collapse of a nation central to the Red Sea and

Horn of Africa regions. If confirmed, how will you ensure the United States is leading in resolving the Sudan conflict and stabilizing this critical region?

Answer. If confirmed, I will seek to advance the interests of the United States in a stable Sudan by strategically engaging with our partners. The United States remains focused on Sudan, including by providing lifesaving emergency assistance, and is urging other countries to take up their share of the burden of this assistance.

Question. China: I am really concerned about the authoritarian axis forming between Russia, China, and Iran, and the way China is increasing economic and military support to these adversaries. How do you see China's role and relationships with these countries, and when do we start to think about doing something to counter this behavior?

Answer. I share the concern that China's current leadership is enabling authoritarian governments around the world diplomatically, economically, and militarily. The United States stands for freedom and we need to use a whole-of-government approach and every element of our national power, including our diplomatic tools, to counter authoritarianism where it challenges our interests. While the President has stressed that our goal is to work toward good relations with China, he has also emphasized the need for a clear-eyed view of China and preventing China from gaming the rules of the international system for its advantage. If confirmed, I will further the President's policy of dealing with China as a global strategic competitor.

Question. Chinese Malign Influence in Africa: China's presence in Africa is well-established and continues to expand across many countries. The United States has approached countering China mainly through the lens of competition, often without the requisite level of commitment and resources needed to compete effectively and build enduring, mutually beneficial partnerships that reflect American values. What steps will you take to enhance U.S. presence and engagement in Africa, not merely as a response to competition but to foster stable, effective, and strong partnerships that advance U.S. interests and our African partners?

Answer. Africa provides extraordinary opportunities for U.S. businesses. If confirmed, I will work with my colleagues within the Department to re-energize its economic mission and support U.S. investment and U.S. companies. If confirmed, I will work with my colleagues within the Department to seek new opportunities to build a safer, stronger, more prosperous future together, by harnessing the power of the U.S. private sector across Africa.

Question. Chinese Malign Influence in International Organizations: Understanding the Chinese Communist Party's attempt to rewrite international norms and rules in International Organizations and shape them to their benefit, how can you, if confirmed, push back on this malign influence and reinstate America's influence in these organizations?

Answer. If confirmed, I will prioritize countering China's influence in international organizations through strong American leadership. If confirmed, I will prioritize confronting CCP ideological language and China's foreign policy initiatives, combating China's attempts to normalize its authoritarian actions, and pushing back on the CCP's inroads in developing countries by leveraging bilateral and multilateral partnerships.

Question. The United Nations: The United States is the largest contributor in both assessed and voluntary funds for the United Nations and affiliated organizations. It is no secret that the organization is rife with waste, fraud, and abuse as well as Anti-American and Anti-Israeli behavior. If confirmed, what are the major reforms you would pursue at the United Nations to make it work better and harder for the American people?

Answer. The U.N. was founded to maintain international peace and security, develop friendly relations among nations, and solve international problems. The U.N. has not lived up to this founding mission, and we must demand better.

I share President Trump's vision of a reformed U.N. returning to its founding mission of promoting peace and security around the world through a strong America-first, peace-through-strength foreign policy.

Question. Western Hemisphere: Do you agree that the involvement of entities under the influence of the Communist Party of China in critical infrastructure in Panama is contrary to American and Panamanian obligations under the Panama Canal Treaty?

Answer. If confirmed, I look forward to supporting the Secretary's efforts to curtail the CCP's influence in the Canal area and the region, building off recent steps in Panama to curb CCP threats. I understand on February 3 Panama notified Bei-

ing that Panama will exit the Belt and Road Initiative—the first country in the region to do so. On March 4, CCP-connected CK Hutchison announced the sale of 90 percent of the two Panama container port concessions at either end of the Canal to a consortium led by BlackRock.

Question. Western Hemisphere: The fiscal year 2025 NDAA requires the Secretary of State submit a report regarding the involvement of the Maduro regime in detaining American citizens and lawful permanent residents. If confirmed, do you commit to ensure this report is submitted in a timely manner?

Answer. Yes.

Question. Western Hemisphere: The fiscal year 2025 NDAA requires the Secretary of State to submit a 5-year strategy to implement the Western Hemisphere Partnership Act by July 2025. This strategy is meant to include important indicators for engagement and investment in the region. If confirmed, do you commit to ensuring the timely delivery of this strategy?

Answer. Yes.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO CHRISTOPHER LANDAU BY SENATOR JEANNE SHAHEEN

Question. I am concerned that dismantling our foreign assistance toolkit—a core component of American soft power and a facilitator of our hard power—will undermine our efforts to counter China. For example, halting our ability to support U.S. companies in the construction of secure undersea cables, strategic ports, and the procurement of critical minerals does not help us compete with China. How do you see the administration's approach on foreign aid vis-à-vis the stated goal to counter China?

Answer. China is our major strategic competitor, and the United States must work closely with our allies in the East Asia and the Pacific region and around the world as we address this challenge. At the same time, as the Secretary has said, every dollar of foreign assistance must be judged by whether it makes America safer, stronger, and more prosperous. I understand that the review of foreign assistance is ongoing, but if I am confirmed I will work carefully within the Department to ensure that U.S. foreign assistance and foreign policy are appropriately aligned.

Question. Under what circumstances and what timing would you recommend lifting sanctions and restarting critical assistance programs necessary to prevent Russia and Iran from reasserting their influence in Syria? Additionally, how do you plan to use diplomatic tools to prevent instability in Syria?

Answer. Lifting sanctions sends a message to the world about the new authorities and we must take into account the situation on the ground and actions, responsible or irresponsible, as we carefully consider whether and how to lift sanctions. For now, our sanctions measures remain in place, although we have provided some relief under General License 24 and other general licenses for transactions meant to help stabilize Syria. If confirmed, I will use all diplomatic tools at my disposal to ensure a more stable Syria, free of Russian and Iranian influence.

Question. Secretary Rubio has engaged both Presidents of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Rwanda on the escalating crisis in Eastern DRC. The inclusion of foreign and regional fighters signals that there are prospects of a regional war in Central Africa. What is your understanding of the underlying factors driving the conflict in Eastern DRC?

Answer. If confirmed, I will prioritize finding a diplomatic solution to the conflict in eastern DRC that brings about a durable peace. While DRC and Rwanda should uphold their commitments under the enhanced Luanda Process, which will allow for a negotiated resolution to grievances and promote accountability, I will look beyond this process to a renewed US diplomatic effort, if confirmed. My understanding is that myriad underlying factors drive the conflict, including ethnic animosities, mineral resources, and governance issues.

Question. If confirmed, will you commit to reviewing the United States' policy toward Rwanda and sharing this review with appropriate committees of Congress?

Answer. Yes.

Question. Committee Process: Do you commit to coming before this Committee upon request and to provide regular updates regarding Department's policies and changes to existing policy?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to appear before this Committee upon request, with the understanding that any such response would be organized with the Department of State's Bureau of Legislative Affairs and conducted in accordance with long-standing Department and executive branch practice.

RESPONSE TO AN ADDITIONAL QUESTION FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO CHRISTOPHER LANDAU BY SENATOR BILL HAGERTY

Question. Do you commit that you and your Department will fully support the work of the bipartisan Commission on Reform and Modernization of the Department of State ("Commission") as described in the laws that authorize and provide appropriations for it, and closely cooperate with the Commission?

Answer. If I am confirmed, I will fully support and cooperate with the work of the Commission on Reform and Modernization and ensure all relevant laws and authorities are followed. I am committed to working closely with Congress on this matter.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO CHRISTOPHER LANDAU BY SENATOR BRIAN SCHATZ

Question. Following President Trump's Executive Order "Reevaluating and Realigning United States Foreign Aid" and additional policy directives, many grantees and implementers of programs through the U.S. Department of State and U.S. Agency of International Development (USAID) have been unable to access funds that they were owed for work that was already completed prior to the inauguration. If a contractor provides service under contract for the U.S. Department of State, what is the obligation of the U.S. Government to pay for services rendered?

Answer. I believe that the State Department must pay its bills. If a contractor provides a service pursuant to contract with the Department and then submits a request for legitimate expenses associated with the provision of that service to their contracting officer, they should be paid. If the contractor is not paid or is dissatisfied with the payment they receive, I understand there is a prescribed method for pursuing such claims against the Department.

Question. What is the legal obligation for payments on services rendered?

Answer. If the Department enters into a contract with third party to provide services to the Department, then my understanding is that the Department is obliged to pay for those services in accordance with the contract's terms and conditions.

Question. Given this withholding of payments for services rendered, what credibility does the U.S. have to decry foreign dictators who violate the rule of law and refuse to honor business contracts?

Answer. As I outlined above, my understanding is that the Department is obliged to pay for services in accordance with a contract's terms and conditions. Accordingly, I do not believe that there is a risk to America's credibility as we advocate for the rule of law.

Question. The Trump Administration's deep cuts to foreign assistance and to USAID cedes the field to our adversaries, threatens the investments of American farmers and other businesses, and puts countless lives at risk worldwide. As the son of a career Foreign Service Officer and former Ambassador yourself, what effects do you believe the dismantling of USAID and foreign assistance will have on our ability to engage partners and deter adversaries?

Answer. As the son of a career Foreign Service officer and former Ambassador, I think foreign development assistance can play a positive role in our ability to engage partners and deter adversaries, which is precisely why I believe it is so important to assess whether particular foreign development assistance programs are in fact playing such a positive role. If confirmed, I look forward to working with you to address the programmatic efficiencies and consistency with United States foreign policy of particular programs.

Question. Secretary Rubio provided assurances during his confirmation hearing regarding his commitment to work with Congress but has not been responsive to numerous pending questions and requests for briefings that my staff and I have submitted. What assurances can you provide that if you are confirmed to be the highest-ranking official in the foreign affairs enterprise after Secretary Rubio, you will change course?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to cooperating with this Committee and working to ensure the Department is responsive to questions and requests for briefing and information from this Committee, with the understanding that any such engagement will be organized with the Department of State's Bureau of Legislative Affairs and conducted in accordance with the Department's legal obligations and long-standing Department and executive branch practice.

Question. Effective foreign policy cannot be shaped or advanced separate from the personnel and programs required to implement it. While we can have differences of opinion on the level of resources and how they are aligned, this Administration's decision to illegally cut USAID by 92 percent and U.S. Department of State by 60 percent, and rapidly plan for a global retreat of staff and presence, all without engaging Congress, indicates that it is not interested in having necessary discussions on these complex issues. If confirmed to your position, how do you intend to plan and execute ongoing discussions of potential realignment of resources?

Answer. If confirmed, I will work closely with Secretary Rubio, the Deputy Secretary for Management and Resources, and other senior leaders to engage with this Committee and ensure that any realignment of resources best serves America's national interests and responds to the Secretary's criteria of ensuring the Department is making America safer, stronger, and more prosperous, consistent with applicable legal requirements.

Question. As a former Ambassador in the region, you are well aware of the People's Republic of China's (PRC) expanding role in Latin America and worldwide. This Administration is calling for vast cuts to the U.S. Department of State, in addition to the dismantling of USAID, and there are already reports that the PRC is reaching out to former U.S. grantees to offer funding. How can the United States challenge growing PRC dominance when we are drastically reducing our physical and staff presence abroad?

Answer. Consistent with President Trump's executive order, the Department paused all U.S. foreign assistance funded by or through the State Department and USAID for review. The pause is not about ending foreign aid. It is to ensure American foreign assistance is aligned with foreign policy interests. That is how we can best compete with China.

Question. Unrestricted and independent journalism is crucial for promoting transparency, accountability, and an informed citizenry, which are vital for the health and strength of global democracy. Last year, an alarming number of journalists were imprisoned and killed, particularly in conflict zones. How does the U.S. Department of State plan to support independent journalism and press freedom globally?

Answer. The United States stands for freedom, including freedom of expression. If confirmed, I will aggressively promote the benefits of the U.S. model of freedom of expression to the world.

Question. What message does it send about the U.S. government's commitment to media freedom when U.S. embassies are questioning local journalistic organizations about their ties to prominent American media institutions, as occurred at Embassy Windhoek?

Answer. The United States stands for freedom, including freedom of expression. If confirmed, I will aggressively promote the benefits of the U.S. model of freedom of expression to the world.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO CHRISTOPHER LANDAU BY SENATOR JACKY ROSEN

Question. Elizabeth Tsurkov: Elizabeth Tsurkov, a US-based PhD candidate, was kidnapped in Iraq on March 21, 2023, by Kata'ib Hezbollah (KH)—a US designated terrorist organization—while conducting field research for her dissertation at Princeton University. Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed al-Sudani has made assurances that he is working on securing her release, but as the 2-year anniversary of

her abduction approaches, it is critical that this Administration makes Elizabeth's release a priority and holds Mr. Sudani to his word.

What, in your opinion, can be done to expedite Ms. Tsurkov's release?

Answer. The United States cannot tolerate hostage-taking of U.S. nationals or those of our partners, such as Israel. The Administration has and will continue to underscore with the Iraqi government the urgency of securing Elizabeth Tsurkov's release. The Administration has made clear to the Iraqi government the need to gain control of armed groups that act within its borders and take innocent people captive.

Question. If confirmed, will you work with me and within the Administration to communicate to the Iraqis that securing Ms. Tsurkov's release is of the utmost importance to maintain the health of the US-Iraq relationship?

Answer. I will.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO MICHAEL RIGAS BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

Question. Embassy Construction and Risk Management: My Secure Embassy Construction and Counterterrorism Act of 2022 (SECCA 2022) was enacted more than 2 years ago as a way to require the Department to re-balance its risk calculus while driving down the costs of current and future embassies, yet the State Department has yet to fully implement it. Do you support fully implementing SECCA 2022 to reduce costs at embassies and consulates?

Answer. Your SECCA 2022 legislation empowered the Department to develop solutions that balance mission location, footprint, setback, and collocation and provided increased flexibility for site selection, design, and construction. If confirmed, I am committed to use the full spectrum of the authorities afforded to uphold our obligation to protect our personnel, improve fiscal efficiencies, and deliver effective and secure diplomatic facilities in support of the Administration's foreign policy objectives.

Question. Embassy Construction and Risk Management: Will you promulgate guidance that requires the Bureau of Diplomatic Security and all other relevant bureaus under your purview to implement SECCA 2022?

Answer. The Department issued guidance to all employees last year on implementation of amendments to the Secure Embassy Construction and Counterterrorism Act. This guidance has allowed the Department to be flexible and focus on risk acceptance at overseas facilities. If confirmed, I commit to the continued timely implementation of SECCA 2022. This bill gives the Department greater flexibility to balance diplomatic effectiveness with security. Likewise, I commit to supporting Department initiatives to train, encourage, incentivize, and enable thoughtful risk management.

Question. Embassy Construction and Risk Management: Do you support a greater risk tolerance within the Department, especially in senior leadership, to better allow our diplomats to get outside of embassy walls to advance U.S. national interests?

Answer. In support of U.S. national interests, the Department conducts diplomacy in challenging, austere, and dangerous locations. Smart risk management enables innovation and agility; Department leadership is committed to appropriate management and mitigation and acknowledges it is not possible to eliminate all risk. The Department has clear guidance for employees on smart risk management to ensure delivery of mission success. If confirmed, I commit to supporting Department initiatives to train, encourage, incentivize, empower, and enable thoughtful risk management.

Question. The recently enacted State Department Authorization Act included my legislation, the Mission in a Box Act. This bill requires that the Department reduce bureaucratic hurdles to build new embassies in the South Pacific and Caribbean faster to better compete with the PRC in those regions. Do you fully support implementing my Mission in a Box Act? If yes, would you promulgate guidance on doing so to relevant departmental bureaus under your purview within your first 90 days as Deputy Secretary?

Answer. Yes, I fully support the premise of the Mission in a Box Act and will commit to ensuring guidance is promulgated.

Question. State Department Authorization: We have successfully passed a State Department authorization bill for four straight years, following nearly two decades without any authorizations. We welcome your input on potential provisions for inclusion in this year's State Department authorization. However, over the past 4 years, the previous administration sent requests far too late, often several months into the process. Do you support the SFRC's responsibility to enact a State Department authorization?

Answer. Yes, I respect the role of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in considering and developing authorization legislation pertaining to Department operations. If confirmed, I am committed to working with the Committee to support its crucial role in passing a State Department authorization bill that supports the Administration's policies, budgets, and operations which align with the national interest of the United States.

Question. State Department Authorization: Do you pledge to ensure this committee is provided with any State Department requests for authorization relevant to your area of responsibility no later than April 1, 2025?

Answer. I understand the importance of providing the Committee with the necessary information in a timely manner. If confirmed, I will need some time to fully assess the needs and priorities within my area of responsibility before providing specific proposals. However, I do pledge that all relevant requests will be shared as soon as practicable. Further, I hope that, if confirmed, the Committee and I would maintain a continuous dialogue throughout my tenure to address ideas and ensure alignment with the Administration on important legislative matters moving forward.

Question. Global Health Security and Diplomacy Bureau: The Global Health Security and International Pandemic Prevention, Preparedness and Response Act of 2022 resulted in the creation of the Global Health Security and Diplomacy Bureau at the Department of State. The legislation envisioned that the head of that bureau would maintain both coordinating and budget authority over U.S. assistance for global health security, thereby ensuring strategic policy alignment between the Department and its implementing agencies (USAID and CDC), the elimination of redundancies, and the most efficient and effective use of American taxpayer dollars to prevent the next pandemic from crossing our borders. Unfortunately, the Biden administration failed to advance this vision and, instead, enabled USAID and CDC to exert control over budgetary resources for global health security. If confirmed, will you commit to ensuring that both coordinating and budget authority for global health security programs are aligned under the Department of State?

Answer. If confirmed, I will work with Secretary Rubio to thoroughly review the Department's operations and structures in line with relevant laws, Executive Orders, and Administration policies, including our global health security portfolio. If confirmed, I will prioritize using American taxpayer dollars efficiently and effectively to make the United States stronger, safer, and more prosperous.

Question. Office of Foreign Assistance: The Office of Foreign Assistance was created to serve as a one-stop shop to collect and share foreign assistance data, including in relation to the formulation of budget requests, managing the reclama process, and responding to data requests from Congress. It appears the office has since evolved into a foreign assistance policy shop, as well as a data hub. What is your understanding of the role and responsibilities of the Office of Foreign Assistance?

Answer. I understand the purpose of the Office of Foreign Assistance is to lead coordination of U.S. foreign assistance on behalf of the Secretary of State in order to advance U.S. national security and development objectives. The office strategically aligns foreign assistance resources to the foreign policy goals, measuring effectiveness, and promoting evidence-based policies, including budget formulation, justification, and execution.

Question. Office of Foreign Assistance: If confirmed, how will you coordinate with Deputy Secretary to ensure alignment of policy and resources?

Answer. If confirmed, I will work closely with Secretary Rubio, the Deputy Secretary, and other senior officials in the Department to ensure that it is best prepared to meet the challenges facing the United States. I believe this means ensuring the Department has the right people, with the right skills, doing the right things, in the right places so that the resources are in place to advance the foreign policy priorities identified by the President.

Question. Europe: Russia has created serious difficulties for our Embassy in Moscow to maintain day to day operations. While we need to make progress and im-

prove our diplomats' ability to do their jobs, we must make sure that there is reciprocity in diplomatic access with Russia. Over the past few years, Russia has placed much tougher burdens on Embassy Moscow than the previous Administration was willing to put on their embassy and consulates here in the United States. How will you work to support our diplomatic mission in Moscow while making sure Russia does not maintain an unfair advantage in terms of diplomatic presence?

Answer. I am committed to an America first foreign policy and that includes ensuring that Russia does not maintain an unfair advantage when it comes to embassy operations. Any agreements with Russia regarding diplomatic missions will first and foremost consider Embassy Moscow's needs and strictly ensure reciprocity. I understand talks in Istanbul February 27 identified concrete initial steps to stabilize bilateral mission operations, and talks will continue in order to enable Embassy Moscow to achieve the President's foreign policy goals.

Question. Bureau of African Affairs: What is your understanding of the specific acute staffing challenges facing the Bureau of African Affairs?

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

Question. Bureau of African Affairs: Do you commit to working with the Bureau of African Affairs and other relevant bureaus and State Department leaders to address the specific and acute staffing challenges faced by the Bureau of African Affairs?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to overseeing a holistic approach to recruitment for difficult to staff locations and to address the complexities of staffing posts in Africa. If confirmed, this would be fundamental to my supervision of the Bureau of Global Talent Management, which handles the recruitment and assignments.

Question. What steps will you take, if confirmed, to encourage experienced and qualified Ambassadors to bid on priority Ambassadorial posts in the Bureau of African Affairs?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to overseeing a holistic approach to recruitment for Ambassadors and to addressing the complexities of executive staffing at posts in Africa. If confirmed, this would be fundamental to my supervision of the Chief of Mission committee, which handles interviewing of nominee candidates.

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

Answer. As I am currently not at the Department, I do not have access to this information. If confirmed, I will review staffing levels throughout the building to ensure that the Department is best positioned to pursue U.S. national security interests and advance the President's agenda.

Question. Bureau of African Affairs: I understand that Sub-Saharan Africa is likely to see a reduction in U.S. physical presence—in terms of consulates and embassies—as part of the ongoing Global Presence Review. What is the potential reduction in presence in Sub-Saharan Africa? What specific consulates and embassies are being identified for elimination?

Answer. As I am currently not at the Department, I do not have access to this information. If confirmed, I will review the ongoing Global Presence Review you referenced to ensure that the Department is best positioned to pursue U.S. national security interests and advance the President's agenda, as well as evaluate its programs and operations to ensure the U.S. Government's limited resources are best deployed to meet America's most pressing challenges.

Question. Congressional Travel: Congressional Delegations (CODELs) and Staff Delegations (STAFFDELs) serve a critical oversight mission. However, the Department has repeatedly denied or pushed-back on CODELs and STAFFDELs. Do you pledge to support fully CODELs and STAFFDELs that seek to travel to U.S. missions?

Answer. The State Department supports and encourages congressional travel abroad. I understand the importance of meeting foreign counterparts to gain on-the-ground insights and cross-cultural perspectives. I also understand Congress's role

conducting oversight to ensure taxpayer dollars are spent wisely and further America's foreign policy. These visits are critical as Members of Congress advocate American values and can convey or echo Mission messages to foreign counterparts.

Question. Congressional Travel: Do you agree to support fully any CODEL or STAFFDEL, with exceptions only 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, I pledge to work with the Committee to ensure the Department is supporting travel to the greatest extent possible to help delegations meet their mission objectives and obtain engagements with officials.

Question. Performance Evaluations: The methods used by the State Department to conduct performance evaluations in the civil and foreign service have, for some time, been outdated, out of touch with tangible metrics, and difficult to uniformly assess. The current state of performance evaluations at the Department creates a clear obstacle to ensuring it is staffed by the most qualified and effective workforce possible. Do you support the notion that effective performance evaluations are a critical piece of ensuring a top-notch workforce at the Department?

Answer. I support strong accountability measures for our workforce with work commitments that demonstrate a clear connection to the Administration's priorities and metrics to evaluate success. If confirmed, I will ensure that employee performance systems make meaningful distinctions among levels of performance, encourage performance excellence, and strengthen mechanisms to remove under-performing employees.

Question. Performance Evaluations: Do you pledge to take efforts to reform the performance evaluation system at the Department and keep this committee updated as to your progress?

Answer. Yes. If confirmed, I will make strengthening the Department's performance system a priority through the implementation of Executive Order "One Voice for America's Foreign Relations" and will provide updates to this committee on the Department's progress.

Question. Office of Sanctions Coordinator: In December 2020, President Trump signed into law a provision that I spearheaded which re-established an Office of Sanctions Coordinator within the State Department. This office is intended to coordinate in three main ways: 1) within the Department itself; 2) across the executive branch and the interagency; and 3) for foreign countries for questions concerning U.S. sanctions policy. If confirmed, do you commit to provide this office the attention, support, and resources needed to ensure its success and the fulfillment of its statutory mandate?

Answer. If confirmed, I look forward to working closely with this Committee to ensure the Office of Sanctions Coordinator at the State Department has the attention, support, and resources it needs, both within the Department and in the Interagency to fulfill its statutory mandate.

Question. Office of Sanctions Coordinator: If confirmed, do you commit to work with my office and this committee to ensure that this office succeeds and fulfills its statutory mandate?

Answer. If confirmed, I look forward to working closely with this Committee to ensure the Office of Sanctions Coordinator at the State Department has the attention, support, and resources it needs, both within the Department and the broader Administration to fulfill its statutory mandate.

Question. Office of Sanctions Coordinator: If confirmed, do you commit to direct the State Department to brief my office and this committee in a timely fashion with respect to sanctions policy developments as they occur?

Answer. Yes. If confirmed, I commit to ensuring your office and this committee are briefed regularly on sanctions developments and policy.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO MICHAEL RIGAS BY SENATOR JEANNE SHAHEEN

Question. Mr. Rigas, if confirmed, you will oversee the Office of Foreign Assistance at the Department of State. Is it your understanding you will have the authority to approve or disapprove the decisions of that office?

Answer. It is my understanding that the Deputy Secretary of State for Management and Resources oversees the Office of Foreign Assistance and assists the Secretary in carrying out his authority and responsibility for the overall direction, coordination, and supervision, of interdepartmental activities of the U.S. Government abroad.

Question. Do you agree that the U.S. Government has an obligation to pay for services rendered pursuant to a contract?

Answer. Yes.

Question. If confirmed, will you work to ensure that contractors and implementing partners are reimbursed pursuant to the U.S. Government's obligations?

Answer. Yes.

Question. Syria: Given multiple crises in the Middle East and growing demand for U.S. leadership in Syria, how will you protect the personnel and funding needed for America to achieve its foreign policy and national security interests in the Middle East?

Answer. The United States seeks a stable Syria that is not a threat to its neighbors, nor is a platform for Iran, Russia, ISIS, Hizballah, and Hamas. Syria needs governance that accounts for the rights and interests of all Syrians. It is also a critical moment to replace Iranian and Russian elements of political, military, and economic influence and support. If confirmed, I will ensure the United States achieves its foreign policy and national security interests and that U.S. foreign assistance is fully aligned with the President's foreign policy.

Question. Syria: Will you guarantee that there are sufficient security personnel to protect Americans and our embassies and consulates?

Answer. Ensuring the safety and security of Americans serving in high-risk environments remains my highest priority, and I am committed to leveraging all available resources to that end. The U.S. Embassy in Damascus suspended operations in 2012 due to escalating threats, political unrest, and the civil war leading to the departure of all official American personnel. From December 20, 2024, to January 15, 2025, the Diplomatic Security Service coordinated and supported secure trips into Damascus facilitating key leader engagements with Syrian Interim Authorities.

RESPONSE TO AN ADDITIONAL QUESTION FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO MICHAEL RIGAS BY SENATOR BILL HAGERTY

Question. Do you commit that you and your Department will fully support the work of the bipartisan Commission on Reform and Modernization of the Department of State ("Commission") as described in the laws that authorize and provide appropriations for it, and closely cooperate with the Commission?

Answer. If I am confirmed, I will fully support and cooperate with the work of the Commission on Reform and Modernization and ensure all relevant laws and authorities are followed. I am committed to working closely with Congress on this matter.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO MICHAEL RIGAS BY SENATOR BRIAN SCHATZ

Question. The laws that fund the U.S. Department of State and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) are clear on how resources must be spent, and where flexibility exists to legally reprogram funds, the administration must notify Congress. Despite this, the U.S. Department of State has both illegally withheld funds it is required to spend as Congress directed and described its programmatic cuts as "savings" not to be spent elsewhere, which is also clearly illegal. As nominee for Deputy Secretary of State for Management and Resources, do you agree that annual appropriations bills for the U.S. Department of State and foreign operations set minimum funding levels?

Answer. As stated in my testimony, "Congress has the power of the purse . . . but my understanding is the executive has a role in how those moneys are spent." I am committed to ensuring the effectiveness of U.S. taxpayer dollars; driving efficiencies; and ensuring funding is used to make America safer, stronger, and more prosperous consistent with applicable statutes.

Question. Do you agree that the annual appropriations bills prohibit the creation of new programs, the suspension or elimination of existing programs, and changes to agencies without prior consultation with and notification to Congress?

Answer. If I am confirmed, I commit to act in a manner consistent with applicable statutory congressional consultation and notification requirements. The Department has historically exercised its authority to adapt and modify its programs to meet its foreign policy goals. If confirmed, I am committed to ensuring that U.S. taxpayer dollars are spent effectively; driving efficiencies; and ensuring funding is used to make America safer, stronger, and more prosperous.

Question. The Administration's termination of contracts for fuel and food for the U.S. Department of State and USAID in South Sudan put U.S. personnel in danger before these contracts were thankfully resumed. According to the U.S. Department of State's sworn statement to the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia, Secretary Rubio made a final decision on cutting each individual program, including, presumably, this contract. Is an oversight like the one described for the program in South Sudan an example of the U.S. Department of State and USAID working more efficiently?

Answer. I am not familiar with the specific situation you describe. As a general matter, clear coordination and close oversight of all elements of America's presence abroad is fundamental to the Department. This is particularly important when it comes to our personnel overseas. The President and the Secretary have been clear, the safety and security of Americans is the Administration's highest priority. Ensuring the safety of our personnel—including the Civil and Foreign Service and the contractors and locally employed staff—will be among my highest priorities if I am confirmed.

Question. If the termination of a program is supposed to lead to better stewardship of taxpayer dollars and act in the interest of the United States, what is your assessment of the process that led to this initial cancellation?

Answer. I am not familiar with the details of this specific situation. However, if I am confirmed I will ensure the security of our personnel is paramount and that taxpayer dollars are effectively used.

Question. Secretary Rubio provided assurances during his confirmation hearing regarding his commitment to work with Congress, but has not been responsive to numerous pending questions and requests for briefings that my staff and I have submitted. What assurances can you provide that if you are confirmed to be the highest-ranking official in the foreign affairs enterprise after Secretary Rubio, you will change course?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to cooperating with this Committee and working to ensure the Department is responsive to questions and requests for briefing and information from this Committee, with the understanding that any such engagement will be organized with the Department of State's Bureau of Legislative Affairs and conducted in accordance with the Department's legal obligations and longstanding Department and executive branch practice.

Question. Should members of executive branch agencies be able to ignore routine requests for information?

Answer. If confirmed, I intend to ensure that the Department is cooperative with the Committee and responsive to requests for information and briefings, consistent with the Department's legal obligations and longstanding Department and executive branch practice. If confirmed I will work closely with Congress on recommendations to better reflect America First priorities.

Question. Effective foreign policy cannot be shaped or advanced separate from the personnel and programs required to implement it. While we can have differences of opinion on the level of resources and how they are aligned, this Administration's decision to illegally cut USAID by 92 percent and the U.S. Department of State by 60 percent and rapidly plan for a global retreat of staff and presence, all without engaging Congress, indicates that it is not interested in having necessary discussions on these complex issues. Given your past experience with the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), is it your assessment that it is normal and legal to do these cuts at USAID and U.S. Department of State without consultation or notifications to Congress?

Answer. I have not been part of discussions or actions to date regarding the management of the Department or USAID. If I am confirmed, I will work closely with the Committee to ensure that the resources of the Department are best used to ad-

vance administration policy and the U.S. national interest, consistent with applicable statutory requirements.

Question. If confirmed, what assurances can you give to ensure that you will follow the law as you pursue potential realignments?

Answer. If I am confirmed, I commit to act in a manner consistent with applicable statutory requirements regarding any potential realignments of the Department.

Question. Does this commitment include regular notifications to Congress and congressional approval concerning actions that redirect or stop the execution of appropriated dollars?

Answer. If I am confirmed, I am committed overseeing the Department of State consistent with applicable statutes, and to be a good steward of the resources entrusted to the Department by American taxpayers.

Question. The U.S. Department of State has not released funds that it already owes organizations for running exchange programs overseas, including Fulbright, which my constituents and those from practically every State participate in. These participants are now in danger of not receiving their next stipend for basic expenses, leaving them without money and stranded in another country. According to U.S. Department of State guidance, these programs were never part of the foreign assistance review, but are now tied up in the illegal freeze of payments. Will you commit to following up with me, if confirmed, on the scope and justification for the review of the U.S. Department of State and USAID spending?

Answer. Yes.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO MICHAEL RIGAS BY SENATOR JACKY ROSEN

Question. State Department Collaboration with Congress: If confirmed, you will play an important role in communicating with Congress on behalf of the State Department on a range of budget, workforce, and management issues. As a result, I want to better understand your vision for Congress' role in your work.

When the State Department is required by law to consult with Congress, do you believe this means that you are required to engage in a discussion, or to simply notify us of a decision that's already been made?

Answer. I recognize and appreciate that working together to develop a more responsive Department is an important process premised on close and transparent communication, including to facilitate oversight and keep Congress fully informed of State operations. If confirmed, I am committed to engaging and working with the Congress on a range of budget, workforce, and management issues, consistent with applicable requirements, to ensure the United States reaches our national security and foreign policy objectives while and taking care of our employees both domestically and abroad.

Question. Workforce Recruitment: If confirmed, you will play a critical role in overseeing the Department's workforce. State Department and USAID staff that serve our country overseas often do so at great sacrifice, with several hundred having died in service. But the Administration's treatment of USAID's foreign service officers has sent chills throughout the workforce. There have been countless stories of American USAID staff being left in some of the most dangerous places in the world without ways to communicate with the agency, without access to medical evacuations, and, in some cases, without a way to get home. Do you agree that it should be the Department's top priority to ensure the safety and well-being of these individuals, and how do you think recent events will impact the Department's foreign service recruitment efforts?

Answer. If I am confirmed as Deputy Secretary of State for Management and Resources, I will support the Department's efforts to recruit and hire top talent to carry out the Administration's priorities and to ensure the safety and security of those representing America abroad.

Question. State Department Foreign Assistance: Given USAID's expertise, the State Department has not frequently implemented foreign assistance programs. However, as it appears, the Administration is intent on moving all foreign assistance responsibilities under the State Department, and I am interested in understanding how the Department plans to approach this enormous task. If confirmed, how would you recommend the Department manage USAID functions required for

effective foreign assistance like financial management systems; reporting; monitoring and evaluation; and partner vetting? Will this require an increase in staffing at the Department? Is it safe to assume this would lead to increased costs, both in terms of workforce and training?

Answer. Appropriate financial management, reporting, monitoring and evaluation, and vetting of all U.S. foreign assistance must be a priority for the Department of State and for all other entities that manage such taxpayer funds. If confirmed, I will ensure that all functions that are my responsibility are done effectively, and efficiency will be a priority.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO MATTHEW WHITAKER BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

NATO and European Allies

Our European allies and the European Union are signaling that they want to play a greater role in defense, and have begun to mobilize multilateral resources to address the gaps in their defenses. While we encourage our Allies to do more, these efforts must not come at the cost of U.S. national security priorities in NATO.

Question. How will you ensure that NATO remains the paramount policymaking and standard-setting institution on all multilateral defense efforts, and prevent the EU regulations from undermining our collective defense posture?

Answer. The United States supports enhanced NATO-EU cooperation, as reaffirmed in recent NATO and U.S.-EU Summits. If confirmed, I will continue to encourage NATO and the EU to forge stronger institutional links and leverage each institution's unique capabilities and strengths to accomplish common objectives while avoiding duplication and waste of scarce resources.

Question. How will you coordinate with the U.S. mission to the European Union in Brussels to protect NATO's role as the paramount institution in defense matters?

Answer. If confirmed, I will coordinate closely with the U.S. mission to the EU to ensure NATO remains the paramount European defense institution.

NATO Modernization

Allied contributions to NATO are not just measured in dollars spent. To truly support our collective defense, we must see Allies bolster defense production capacity, adopt innovative warfighting technologies, and expand recruitment and basing to match the sheer size of our adversaries.

Question. How will you engage Allies to not only increase spending but to modernize their militaries and adapt to emerging threats?

Answer. President Trump has been clear: NATO Allies must spend more on defense. Two percent is not enough. The President has called on Allies to spend 5 percent and if confirmed, I will work to ensure Allies increase their defense spending to achieve 5 percent. I will also work to strengthen both U.S. and Allied defense industrial capacity, innovation and modernization efforts, and NATO's cyber and hybrid defenses while ensuring the Alliance's resilience and responsiveness to these threats.

Defense Industrial Base

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has exposed the fragile state of the West's defense industrial base. Our European allies must strengthen their own defense industrial bases to pull their own weight in the alliance, but our strongest collective position is one where the US and its superior defense industrial base continue to have a central role.

Question. If confirmed, how will you work with our NATO allies to address shortfalls in our collective Western defense industrial base?

Answer. NATO is playing an increasingly important role in enhancing NATO's defense industrial base on both sides of the Atlantic and working to ensure that our industry can deliver the needed military capabilities to meet national and NATO military requirements. Since President Trump took office, Europeans have already committed to increasing defense spending, and we expect them to do even more. If confirmed, it will be my priority to push our Allies to take the lead responsibility for continental defense and to contribute more to the Alliance.

Question. How should the U.S. approach implementation of the NATO-Russia Founding Act in 2025?

Answer. The 2022 NATO Strategic Concept identified Russia as the most significant threat to Europe. If confirmed, I will work with our Allies to improve our ability to deter and defend against any threat to the Alliance, including by increasing European Allies' defense spending and capabilities.

China

NATO's primary mission is to deter and defend against Russian aggression. However, China's rampant influence in Europe is starting to harm NATO interests. I published a report on this last year.

Question. What are your thoughts in this regard, and, if confirmed, how do you plan to counter China's impacts on NATO?

Answer. China's stated ambitions and coercive policies continue to challenge Allies' interests, security and values. Thanks to President Trump's first term initiatives, countering the systemic challenge of China is now embedded throughout various NATO workstreams. If confirmed, I will work closely with Allies to communicate President Trump's strong concerns regarding China's actions and other unreasonable and unfair behavior that impact the United States as well as Europe. I will push our Allies to take the lead on addressing these issues within Europe.

Question. How will you guide Allies to more effectively address China's threats in Europe.

Answer. The Alliance has done a great deal of work on assessing the threat that China poses and that is not going away. Our Allies must take their security more seriously and that includes the threats emanating from China. If confirmed, I will push for the President's priorities on China amongst Allies, ensuring they understand and deter against the threat China poses to American and European security and economic interests.

Nuclear Mission

Russian aggression and Putin's nuclear sabre rattling have renewed focus on NATO's nuclear mission. New NATO allies like Sweden have also expressed interest in contributing to the nuclear mission.

Question. In your perspective, is NATO a nuclear alliance?

Answer. Yes. Strategic nuclear forces, particularly those of the United States, are the supreme guarantee of the Alliance's security. NATO relies on U.S. forward-deployed and controlled nuclear weapons.

Question. If confirmed, will you work with our NATO allies to strengthen NATO's nuclear mission?

Answer. Allies contribute aircraft, crews, and infrastructure to the nuclear mission. If confirmed, I will push Allies to commit more resources to NATO efforts, including modernizing and strengthening the nuclear mission.

Question. Do you commit to maintaining NATO's nuclear arsenal?

Answer. If confirmed, I will work with the Department of Defense to ensure that the NATO nuclear arsenal meets the needs of the transatlantic security environment to ensure NATO's continued ability to deter and defend against all threats.

Arctic

The high north is at risk of becoming a weak spot for NATO, as Russia and China expand their reach in the Arctic.

Question. How should NATO address security threats in the Arctic?

Answer. The Alliance must address growing security threats within and from the High North, including increasing activity by Russia and China. Securing our ability to access critical resources and maintain shipping routes will be vital to our future security. If confirmed, I will work with Allies to ensure NATO has an effective approach to the Arctic region. I look forward to consulting with the Congress and our colleagues in the Department of Defense.

Question. How can we engage other Arctic nations in NATO to individually address Arctic security threats?

Answer. Following the accession of Sweden and Finland to NATO, all Arctic nations except Russia are now NATO members. As the United States prepares to counter threats coming from its north, NATO and our Arctic Allies can be a part

of that task. If confirmed, I look forward to meeting with Arctic permanent representatives at NATO to work together to deter and defend against these threats.

Question. What specific initiatives can NATO pursue to address Arctic security vulnerabilities?

Answer. With the accession of Finland and Sweden, all Arctic nations besides Russia are members of NATO which presents an opportunity for further coordinated action on Arctic security. If confirmed, I look forward to consulting with the Department of Defense and our Arctic Allies to determine what security vulnerabilities exist in the Arctic and how NATO can contribute to addressing these gaps.

Black Sea

Black Sea security is a key aspect of NATO security.

Question. How will you encourage NATO to prioritize efforts with Black Sea littoral states to strengthen our defense and deterrence in the Black Sea?

Answer. NATO, and especially our littoral Allies Bulgaria, Romania, and Türkiye, have taken steps to increase cooperation in the Black Sea, including on maritime domain awareness, coastal defense, and demining. If confirmed, I will increase NATO's focus on its eastern flank, encourage European Allies to take greater responsibility for our collective security, and ensure our efforts to strengthen our deterrence and defense in the Black Sea are aligned with the President's priorities.

Question. What specific initiatives can NATO take to advance Black Sea security?

Answer. Our NATO Allies, specifically Türkiye, Romania, and Bulgaria, play an integral role in advancing Black Sea security at NATO. For instance, in 2024, these three Allies launched the Black Sea Mine Countermeasures Task Force Group to improve coordination and defend the Black Sea from the threat of floating mines. If confirmed, I will support the counter-mine initiative and encourage NATO to explore similar efforts in all domains of the Black Sea, and I will ensure our Allies take the lead in executing them.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO MATTHEW WHITAKER BY SENATOR JEANNE SHAHEEN

Question. Do you think Russia's views on NATO enlargement policy should matter to the Alliance?

Answer. Invitations for NATO membership, as enshrined in Article 10 of the Washington Treaty, are for all Allies to consider together for a consensus decision. Russia is not a NATO Ally.

Question. Do you believe Russia's defeat in Ukraine is a strategic priority for the United States?

Answer. Ending the Russia-Ukraine war is a strategic priority for the United States. President Trump has been clear: the fighting and killing must come to an end. The longer it continues, the greater the suffering. The United States is committed to a negotiated end to the Russia-Ukraine war that leads to an enduring peace, not just a temporary pause.

Western Balkans

Question. If confirmed, would you continue to support NATO's clear commitment to backstopping Operation Althea, formally the European Union Force Bosnia and Herzegovina (EUFOR), in Bosnia, if it were ever required?

Answer. Yes. The United States has remained committed to Bosnia and Herzegovina's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and multi-ethnic character since sealing the Dayton Peace Agreement in 1995. NATO has committed to backstopping EUFOR through its Kosovo Force (KFOR). Allies have also been clear that they will not allow a security vacuum to emerge in the Western Balkans. If confirmed, I will ensure that NATO's work to anchor a secure and prosperous Western Balkans fully supports our administration's foreign policy objectives.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO MATTHEW WHITAKER BY SENATOR JACKY ROSEN

Ukraine Electrical Grid: If confirmed, the war in Ukraine will hopefully be your top priority. Last week, it was announced that the State Department canceled a USAID program that helped to restore Ukraine's electrical grid from attacks by the Russian military.

Question. With Ukraine experiencing freezing temperatures and ongoing blackouts due to attacks from Russia, do you believe our NATO partners will support this decision?

Answer. NATO Allies closely track Ukraine's energy security given the implications to broader European security posture. If confirmed, I will work closely with Allies to ensure that European partners take the lead in establishing a durable security framework for Ukraine, including energy security. A strong, self-reliant Europe is in both their interests and ours.

Question. And could pulling our support for Ukraine's electrical grid threaten their military capabilities?

Answer. The greatest threat to Ukraine is the death and destruction from continuing this needless war. President Trump has been clear: the Russia-Ukraine war must come to an end. The longer it continues, the greater the suffering. The United States is committed to a negotiated end to the Russia-Ukraine war that leads to an enduring peace.

Question. I am deeply concerned by reports of a near total aid freeze to Ukraine, including projects supporting anti-corruption efforts, judicial reform, and civil society and independent media. Such support is critical as Ukraine battles against Russian attacks on all parts of its society.

Do you think cutting funding for these types of programs—especially anti-corruption projects—furthers U.S. interests?

Answer. The U.S. has provided substantial support to Ukraine over the last several years—including in the realms of security, economic, and other development assistance. I understand that this assistance is part of the administration's global review of all foreign aid. If confirmed I look forward to working with the committee on the appropriate uses of foreign assistance in Ukraine and worldwide.

2/27/25, 11:34 AM

An 'America First' transition: Ready on day one - Washington Times

Submitted by Senator Jeanne Shaheen

An 'America First' transition: Ready on day one

We know where the swamp hid their landmines and are prepared to staff a new government



A bird flies over the Eisenhower Executive Office Building on the White House complex at dusk, June 1, 2021, in Washington. There's been a fire at the Eisenhower Executive Office Building next to the White House, leading to the evacuation ... A bird flies over the Eisenhower ... more >

COMMENTARY

By Doug Hoelscher and Michael Rigas
Saturday, September 23, 2023

OPINION:

In theory, winning a presidential election should be the ultimate expression of the people choosing the direction of the executive branch of which policies they want to see enacted over the next four years. The idea is simple enough.

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In reality, however, an election is just the beginning. The enactment of the policies that define a presidency is often left to the whims of unelected bureaucrats who seek to slow-walk or stop the will of the people.

On Nov. 5, 2024, an incoming administration will have only 76 days — less than three months — to prepare for the inauguration and the start of a new presidency. This includes hiring a small army of appointees and developing a suite of mature policies.

But perhaps most importantly, a new America First presidency will have to confront an entrenched administrative state — the principal barrier to effectively carrying out a presidential policy agenda.

Of the major institutions created in the past 100 years, the administrative state is at once the most consequential and the most threatening. It usurps the power of the people and their elected officials and leverages knowledge of the bureaucratic process to pursue its own agenda.

This subversion of the Constitution used to occur mostly in the shadows, but in the last administration, we saw corrupt actors of the administrative state boldly and openly undermine the elected president in favor of their own policy goals.

The mission of the America First Transition Project is to ensure that any incoming administration is prepared to take over the reins of government by creating a plan for what they must do to rein in the administrative state and quickly advance an America First agenda.

MY TIMES

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Musk to attend Trump's first Cabinet meeting amid reports of growing rift
Helicopter crash into frozen Idaho reservoir kills Utah CEO, injures another

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Put simply, our work will help ensure the next administration is ready on day one. Delayed transition planning efforts benefit only the entrenched bureaucracy, the political elites and the status quo.

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Our work will help restore the relationship between the people and their government. As it stands, this relationship is broken. Overcoming the obstacles erected by entrenched liberal bureaucrats is too big a task for any one organization.

The work we're engaged in builds on the key strength of our organization — our people were on the ground last time.

Many of the America First Transition Project's staff and advisers were in the White House and government agencies. Our team includes nine former Cabinet officials and 20 former White House senior staff members, drawing on the real-world experience of more than 400 former senior leaders who served in the trenches of government, worked closely with an America First White House, and were in the Oval Office when decisions were made to put America First.

This group has experience that is unmatched by any previous presidential transition effort, and it has spent this past year building action plans for 30 departments and agencies.

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We know where the swamp bureaucrats hid the land mines and how they use their knowledge of the bureaucratic process to thwart the elected president and his appointees and advance their own agenda. We know what works and what doesn't, and we know what we need to do to get our government working for the American people again.

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Since 2021, we've seen three years of bad policies that have hurt Americans' economic prosperity and risked our national security. An America First administration must be ready to turn the tide immediately.

Hitting the ground running on day one of the next conservative administration will be no easy task. We have witnessed how unelected, unaccountable bureaucrats think they are in charge. And now, we know that conservatives must assemble a bigger and better-prepared team to tackle these challenges.

The next administration must bring a game plan to overcome the dangerous resistance to enacting the policy agenda of the elected president.

The clock is ticking. Americans think our country is moving in the wrong direction. It's going to take a lot of work with our partners to get our country back on track.

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Together with our partners in the conservative movement, we can make America's economy the greatest in the world; restore America's historic commitment to freedom, equality and self-governance; build the wall, end human trafficking, and defeat the cartels; deliver peace through strength; and return our nation to the ideals of its founding — that government works for us, the people, and not the other way around.

Day in and day out, the America First Policy Institute, through its America First Transition Project, seeks to tackle this incredibly difficult task.

• *Doug Hoelscher is a senior adviser at the America First Policy Institute and chair of the America First Transition Project. He previously served as assistant to the president and director of the White House Office of Intergovernmental Affairs under President Donald J. Trump. Michael Rigas is director of the America First Transition Project at the America First Policy Institute. He previously served as acting director of the Office of Personnel Management and acting deputy director for management at the Office of Management and Budget under President Trump.*

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Submitted by Senator Jeanne Shaheen

An America First Approach to U.S. National Security

12. The Right Team, Prepared to Meet Global Challenges and an Emboldened Administrative State

By Doug Hoelscher and Michael Rigas

The earlier chapters of this book clearly communicate the global challenges the next America First administration will face and document the dangers of the administrative state within the national security apparatus. Our colleagues underscore an America First approach, putting the American people and their interests first. The success of that approach is dependent on filling critical positions quickly and choosing the right leaders: those who are loyal to the next president's agenda and have demonstrated the competence to deliver on that agenda. The members of the next president's team need to be untethered from the interests of the administrative state, the foreign policy establishment, and global special interests (the global swamp). They must also subordinate their own career ambitions to the success of the President's national security policy agenda. In short, the individuals who step forward to public service in the next America First administration need to be bold change agents ready to disrupt the status quo so the government respects and honors the will of the American people.

As President Trump said in 2017, "As president, I have no higher duty than to protect the American people." To deliver on that solemn duty a president must appoint individuals to national security posts that share

his views and are willing and able to help him to faithfully implement his agenda.

The task of filling national security posts in a new presidential administration is more difficult than simply selecting the right people. Background checks for national security jobs are more intensive and invasive than for most civil service jobs. Presidential nominees or appointees for national security jobs may face a long process to obtain security clearances because of their finances, lengthy business careers, or foreign travel. Also, the pool of America First conservatives with experience in foreign affairs is not large which means there will be a learning curve for many new administration officials named to national security jobs.

In addition, as was discussed in earlier chapters, the America First approach to U.S. national security is a sea change from current U.S. policies. In the first Trump administration these policies were aggressively resisted by an entrenched national security bureaucracy, sometimes called the "deep state." Tactics included delay, ignoring administration policies and decisions, engaging in lawfare by filing baseless complaints and protests to human resources and inspectors general offices, undermining the administration by leaking information to the president's political opponents and the media, and even violating the law every federal official swears an oath to uphold by leaking intelligence, all to stop the implementation of President Trump's America First national security policies. Therefore, the men and women appointed and nominated to foreign policy jobs must be a special breed of leaders and fighters. They must be capable of working successfully with the bureaucracy but must also have thick skin and be prepared to take on those who have demonstrated they will do anything, including violating the law and their oaths, to stop an America First president.

If the past is prologue, appointees in an America First administration can expect to have to work hard for every inch of progress to overcome the inertia of the permanent national security bureaucracy as it fights to preserve their failed policies on the southern border, energy security, the Middle East, China, the environment, the United Nations, and other issues.

An America First Approach to U.S. National Security

While some take issue with the term “deep state” and either deny its existence or alternatively attempt to conflate it with the non-partisan civil service, it is important to note that is not what we mean when we use that term. We believe that most civil servants show up to work every day and do their jobs dutifully on behalf of the president and the American people. Many career officials have tremendous institutional knowledge and expertise and are a great resource to our government, and they serve our fellow citizens well.

What we refer to when we speak of the deep state is what Senator Chuck Schumer spoke of in 2017 when he said, “Let me tell you, you take on the intelligence community, they have six ways from Sunday at getting back at you.” Here we have one of the most powerful elected officials in our federal government publicly acknowledging that parts of the government are not only unaccountable to the people’s elected and constitutional leadership, but he seems to accept this reality rather than calling for reform. However, we should not despair. With effective leaders who are knowledgeable and courageous, the national security establishment can return to its traditional role of safeguarding national security. This is why we believe it is important that the president appoint and nominate competent and well-prepared leaders who are aligned with his policy agenda, to take control of these agencies, and will do the job the U.S. taxpayer is paying them to do and keep politics out of their work.

Over the past few years, the America First Policy Institute (AFPI) has been working on preparing the next America First administration to be ready on Day One (Inauguration Day). This means being ready to appoint a team that is larger, dedicated to the president’s policy agenda, competent, and ready to advance a robust suite of policies more quickly and effectively. This book is an example of AFPI’s efforts to prepare new America First national security officials. This work, under the umbrella of the America First Transition Project and in close coordination with AFPI’s Center for American Security and our other policy leaders, has been systematically documenting the policy actions, personnel actions, and management actions needed to quickly advance an America First agenda. This chapter discusses how our work will aid the next America

First administration to lead boldly and wrestle control away from the administrative state in the national security space.

A PRIMER ON ADMINISTRATION APPOINTEES

Estimates vary on the number of full-time positions subject to appointment by a president or his administration because each administration has some discretion on the number of appointees in each agency, and there is some variance in what positions are counted as appointees. Our estimate, based on an analysis of the last few administrations, puts the number of political appointees at approximately 4,800. Those 4,800 individuals are charged with aligning federal policies to the president's agenda and driving the implementation of those policies by actively managing approximately four million federal employees and military service members and perhaps over 10 million federal contractors.

Of those 4,800 appointees, approximately 1,200 are in national security-related positions. To align with the priorities of an America First administration, we broadly define national security positions. For example, we look beyond positions at the Department of Defense, the State Department, and the Intelligence Community to other positions that play key roles in advancing and protecting America's national security interests, such as critical positions in the Office of the United States Trade Representative, the Assistant Secretary for Investment Security and the Assistant Secretary for Terrorism Financing at the Department of Treasury, and the Under Secretary for International Trade at the Department of Commerce, to name just a few. Similarly, the general counsels, management officials, and chief financial officers in traditional national security agencies are also vital to national security. Such positions should be prioritized by an incoming administration to identify appointees for service and for the Senate to ensure timely confirmations for those positions that require Senate confirmation.

The individuals appointed to these critical positions that help protect our nation need to be clear on the president's priorities and how those priorities can be implemented in their specific purview. However, having clear policy objectives for each department is not sufficient—it is also vital that a new administration has mature plans on how to drive

An America First Approach to U.S. National Security

the president's priorities in the national security space. These officials must actively manage the bureaucracy, aggressively and consistently pull the levers of government, and align incentives for career employees to advance the president's policy priorities.

Knowing what you want to accomplish is the first step, but knowing how to get things done is the next critical step for sustained success. Political appointees must be willing and ready to be change agents with a relentless focus on advancing the president's agenda, fully leveraging the constitutional and statutory authorities granted to the president and other administration leaders. They must ask the right questions of the career bureaucracy and like any good leader, be willing to manage those individuals and know enough to question or reject faulty recommendations based on inaccurate or incomplete information. We know from the experience of many who served as appointees, and even from some career officials who publicly admitted as much, that career bureaucrats impeded progress and undermined the legitimate policy objectives all too often during the Trump administration.

A Look Back at Personnel in the Trump Administration

The Trump administration had many great accomplishments that benefited the American people at home and abroad. However, those accomplishments could have been even greater had there been a different and more robust approach to personnel during the transition effort. In addition, if President Obama and his administration had acted in good faith rather than trying to undermine confidence in the 2016 election and the incoming administration with the Russia collusion hoax, the Trump administration would not have been immediately consumed with this false narrative and endless investigations.²³⁶ These actions from the intelligence community and the outgoing president and his leadership team undermined the incoming administration, particularly in its earliest days. The tumultuous transition of 2016/2017 did not serve President Trump and the nation well and slowed the advancement and implementation of his agenda.

Just one statistic helps illustrate the lack of preparation. Under the Presidential Transition Act, the nominees of the major national parties may receive pre-election resources from the federal government to

prepare for transition. It is not just office space, computers, and technology provided by the General Service Administration (GSA) to each of the major candidates, but also the opportunity to begin getting security clearances for individuals who are likely to serve in a new administration, if victorious. This can help a winning candidate and their team hit the ground running after election day as they go into departments and agencies to begin their reviews, and it is vital for officials serving in national security agencies on Day One of a new administration.

In this pre-election transition window in the summer and fall of 2016, the Hillary Clinton transition team submitted approximately 1,200 names to be cleared expeditiously after the election. The Trump transition team submitted 25. This mistake cannot be repeated; we must aim higher.

In addition, the Trump administration's decision to minimize the number of appointees in some areas of government and run a "lean" government by example meant that many of these critical leadership positions were filled by career officials. This undercut the advancement of the president's priorities. Although the aspiration driving that limitation was noble – that the career bureaucracy would salute and advance the policies of the new administration – it was deeply flawed. This is true for two reasons – first, career officials can serve in acting capacities, and do so quite often and serve honorably. But their role in these instances is to maintain the smooth operation of their department. It is not the culture of our government that a career official serving in an acting capacity be a change agent. Acting career officials maintain the status quo, making sure what happened yesterday happens today while they wait for political leadership to arrive to drive a new administration's change agenda. If that political leadership never arrives, neither does the driver for change. While many career officials are capable of carrying out the policy agenda of a new administration, without political leadership to drive that change, success can be elusive. And second, there are unfortunately a not insignificant number of career officials who have their own policy preferences and do not wish to carry out the policies of a new president. James Sherk has written about this in his paper "Tales from the Swamp," citing numerous

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troubling examples of career officials actively thwarting the lawful policy direction of the President's appointees.²³⁷

Furthermore, there was little to no training for new appointees as had been the case in administrations dating back to Reagan. A training program would have tremendously aided the new team, many of whom had accomplished private sector backgrounds but lacked previous government service. While the Presidential Transition Act provides funding for training for an incoming administration's appointees, these funds were not effectively deployed in the 2016 transition. This proved to be problematic in the Trump administration as some appointees were not prepared to actively manage a bureaucracy that was not always willing to carry out the President's lawful policy. For example, some appointees at the Department of State were not well served or worse, were undermined by the knowledgeable and experienced career officials upon whom they relied to carry out the foreign policy of the president.²³⁸ Getting the right team at the State Department and getting operational control within is critical to implementing the President's entire national security agenda. Without an aligned State Department aggressively working to implement the president's policy agenda, the administration will be mired in endless bureaucratic battles across the interagency. A training program that helps incoming officials understand how to successfully manage their departments, their budget, their personnel, and the interagency, among other things, will greatly benefit an incoming administration. These are things that even seasoned policy experts or people who have served in other capacities in Washington either on Capitol Hill or in think tanks would require training on as the rules and procedures that govern the executive branch are different than anything most people have experienced in other places in government or the private sector.

In addition, action plans and policies developed for the new team during the 2016/2017 transition – with few exceptions – were limited in depth and follow-through, further delaying policy implementation. In short, the new team was not empowered with the information it critically needed.

Early in the Trump administration, not enough care was given to changing the leadership in national security positions. For example, the

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Trump National Security Council leadership kept in place almost all the career detailees chosen by the Obama administration. Many of these detailees were named late in the Obama administration – some after election day – in what appeared to be an attempt to entrench the outgoing administration's policy preferences and undermine the choice by the American people to set a new policy direction.

What followed was an unprecedented number of leaks, including leaked transcripts of the President's conversations with world leaders and other actions designed to undermine the President's national security priorities. This can be avoided by replacing current detailees on the National Security Council with detailees of the new administration's own choosing and in whom they have confidence.

This same error was repeated in many key departments and agencies. For example, at the Department of Homeland Security, upwards of 30% of the members of the Senior Executive Service were either hired or transferred into their roles just before the new administration took office.²³⁹ These actions by the outgoing Obama administration demonstrated a level of sophistication and knowledge about how government works and an effort to cement their policy preferences within the bureaucracy by placing individuals aligned with their policy goals in key leadership positions across the government. An incoming team needs to closely examine such personnel placements made in the closing days of an administration to ensure that outgoing political officials are not working to undermine the incoming administration.

President Trump came into office with a foreign policy worldview that cut against the grain of the national security establishment. As noted in earlier chapters, this included revolutionary foreign policy initiatives such as the Abraham Accords Middle East peace agreement, moving the U.S. embassy in Israel to Jerusalem, and President Trump's personal diplomacy with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, all of which were opposed by the permanent national security establishment. President Trump also shook up the prior foreign policy establishment approach to U.S. national security by demanding reciprocal trade and ensuring our European and other allies paid their fair share to support our shared national security interests.

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Although the above initiatives were significant successes of the Trump administration, implementing them was difficult and time-consuming because of staffing problems. This, unfortunately, sometimes included actions by the administration's own appointees. To avoid such problems, a future America First administration must ensure that potential nominees and appointees to national security posts are fully on board with the president's agenda before they are offered positions. They must be mission-aligned and dedicated to driving change. The new administration also must name leaders to national security agencies who are willing and able to do the hard work to manage their bureaucracies to ensure that career officials do their jobs to carry out and implement the president's policies.

Ronald Reagan's presidency was preceded by decades of conservative thought leadership that laid a policy foundation for his agenda. President Trump's new foreign policy direction was both intellectual and instinctual, moving the nation in a new direction and breaking with the entrenched and outdated foreign policy establishment. This meant he did not have a cadre of aligned think tanks, academics, or policy leaders providing support for his change agenda. While President Trump had spent decades speaking clearly and consistently, as a businessman, an author, and a candidate for office about his views on trade and foreign policy, he and the American people were breaking with the failures of the permanent establishment in Washington D.C. that largely preferred the status quo, making the change he drove harder to achieve.

Despite these personnel, cultural, and readiness challenges, those leaders who were in place and aligned with the President's policy agenda overcame tremendous obstacles to achieve what can now only be seen in retrospect as nearly miraculous results given the unrelenting opposition of the entrenched, permanent interests in Washington. Imagine how much more could have been achieved if the professional experts who control these permanent power centers and bureaucracies in Washington had worked with the president instead of against him.

No Longer the Bureaucracy of 1981

President Reagan and his team are widely credited as being one of the more organized and better-prepared administrations as they entered office in 1981. However, the bureaucracy of today is not the bureaucracy of Reagan's time. While most career civil servants continue to be honest brokers in the implementation of a president's policies, too many have abandoned their responsibility to faithfully carry out the president's lawful policies. They were often cheered on by President Trump's political opponents, the media, and so-called good-government groups. As James Sherk has documented, we have witnessed the dangers of a small but not insignificant minority of career officials who actively obstruct and even undermine the policies of the elected president.²⁴⁰ Furthermore, as academic research has shown, the federal workforce has become more ideologically imbalanced. Increasing numbers of the civil and foreign service no longer reflect the views and values held by the American people.²⁴¹ While most civil servants show up every day and do a good job, this ideological imbalance between the people who administer the government and the people they serve is not healthy for our government or our country.

Conservative administrations have an inherent disadvantage in dealing with the ideological makeup of the bureaucracy they inherit – a challenge that has only grown in recent years.²⁴² According to academic research by Professors Brian Feinstein and Abby Wood of the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania and the University of Southern California Gould School of Law, the ideological makeup of the career bureaucracy has sharply shifted to the Left in recent years.²⁴³ While many career personnel can and still do set aside this ideological difference, too many do not, and too often, personal preferences contradict the priorities of the elected president. This means that the president's team needs to be more active in the management of the bureaucracy – this is especially true for the national security agencies. The ideological makeup of the career bureaucracy also makes a strong argument for the need for a bigger political team, one that possesses the executive management skills and experience to manage large organizations and shares a strong commitment to the president's policy.

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One should not underestimate the powerful corrupting influence of the foreign policy establishment on career officers and political appointees. John Ranelagh, in his authoritative 1986 book *The Agency: The Rise and Fall of the CIA* wrote that the CIA's Vietnam analysts during the Vietnam War slanted their work because they "especially wanted to maintain their image with academia, where they one day might seek future jobs."²⁴⁴ This is what we referred to earlier when we said those who serve should have the national interest first and be untethered to the interests of the global swamp or ambitions for their next career move.

Abram Shulsky and Gary Schmitt drew a similar conclusion about CIA analysts in a 1995 article, finding that:

... government service, below the very top levels, is not very prestigious. Those engaged in it who have any intellectual pretensions do not wish to be seen as "Neanderthal" or "out of it" by those in the much more prestigious realms of academia or the mainstream, national-level media. This tends to reinforce a tendency toward the "conventional wisdom," it is distressing how often highly classified assessments of political issues closely resemble op-ed pieces.²⁴⁵

Another challenge for any new administration is security clearances. The security clearance process and a labyrinth of classification levels and programs controlled by career federal employees can make it difficult for an insurgent America First president to get control of national security agencies. Although the ability to grant security clearances is a presidential authority, it is delegated to agency heads and then further delegated to career employees. The experience of the Trump administration, where clearances appeared to be delayed, sometimes indefinitely, must be addressed. As part of the America First Transition Project, careful attention is being paid to this important function to ensure the president's appointees have their security clearance investigations and adjudications handled in an expeditious manner.

In addition, a new administration must ensure its national security leadership has full visibility into the classified information and activity for which they have ultimate oversight and responsibility. These programs reside in thousands of classification compartments and senior officials in a new administration often do not even know to ask to see such information because they do not know this information, or these compartments even exist. Political appointees need to know enough to ask the right questions when they walk in the door because career officials will not always volunteer important information during the transition.

Political appointees need to be willing to do the necessary, but hard work that is required in any large organization to manage the bureaucracy and drive change. Appointees to national security agencies need to quickly be told every critical thing their organizations are doing and be provided access to all classified programs and compartments over which they have ultimate responsibility. If some compartments are too sensitive to be shared with appointed agency officials, they must be immediately briefed to appointed officials cleared for such intelligence, such as the National Security Advisor.

Too often, appointees fail to actively manage career officials who are not faithfully and effectively advancing presidential policy priorities. A frequent error is not clarifying the administration's priorities quickly and incorporating those priorities into the plans and documents that the career bureaucracy oversees – such as individual performance plans, agency strategic plans, and larger governmentwide strategic plans. For national security, it is crucial that the National Security Council issue a National Security Strategy and key national security directives as soon as possible in a new administration and ensure that these strategies are incorporated as priority policies for national security agencies.

These documents must reflect the president's policy priorities and his "commander's intent" such that if the president were to read them himself, they would be documents he would agree with and endorse. For national security, the National Security Strategy should clearly explain the new president's America First approach to issues and challenges facing the United States around the world.

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Another occupational hazard for any administration's political appointees is when they unwittingly become captive to the interests of their agency over the advancement of presidential policy priorities. This can result in appointees at different agencies representing the interests of their bureaucracies in intra-executive branch turf wars rather than focusing on how best to get results quickly for the president and the American people. This has often been the case in foreign policy agencies that have large and entrenched bureaucracies that are determined to maintain the status quo and maximize their influence and power. Fighting for change in any organization is difficult and time-consuming because the bureaucracy knows numerous ways to delay, appeal, and protest decisions and policies with which they disagree. This is especially true in government.

Political appointees also must have the integrity and courage not to be coopted by the prestige, glamour, and trappings of their office. While this occupational hazard exists for appointees across the board, foreign policy jobs can include travel to exotic destinations, luxurious embassies and offices, elaborate dinners and social events, and meetings with famous foreign officials and experts.

Furthermore, political appointees in foreign policy posts are under heavy pressure to side with prestigious foreign policy establishment institutions on policy issues, over the policies of their president. All too often, political appointees have given in to this pressure to increase their chances of success for their next hoped-for career move with a big corner office in academia or corporate America. America First appointees and nominees to foreign posts must resist these pressures and temptations and loyally advance the president's policy priorities and the interests of the American people.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO PUT THE RIGHT (AND PREPARED) NATIONAL SECURITY TEAM ON THE FIELD

The New Team Needs to Clarify, Relentlessly Communicate, and Keep a Laser-Like Focus on the President's Priorities

Assembling a national security team is a more difficult challenge for a new president than filling positions for other government agencies. Like

presidential nominees and appointees to other government agencies, those named to serve in national security agencies must be competent, loyal to the president's policy agenda, and prepared to do the challenging work to implement it. But they also must be capable of mastering the complexities of U.S. foreign policy and an entrenched government bureaucracy resistant to change. Members of the president's national security team must know how to navigate the bureaucracy, ensure the analysis of intelligence is not being politicized, and serve the president by bringing him the best information and analysis he needs to successfully advance his foreign policy and national security agenda.

To ensure that the national security team of a new America First president fully supports his foreign policy agenda, a comprehensive framework for America First national security policies must be developed. Long before election day, work must be done to define presidential policies on a wide range of national security challenges, including border security, the Middle East, the war in Ukraine, China, energy security, the environment, and other issues. There also must be extensive plans on how to better manage and staff all national security agencies to ensure that they implement the president's policies and keep politics out of their work.

None of this work can wait until after election day. Potential presidential nominees and appointees for national security positions cannot be asked to serve in a new America First administration before a framework is established defining and explaining America First national security policies and priorities. Potential officials named to a new administration must be fully versed in this framework and declare that they will fully support it.

Given the shift in policy represented by an America First national security agenda, many officials from prior administrations may not be the best source of talent to fill national security jobs in a new administration because these former officials hold views that are inconsistent with an America First approach to national security. An America First administration should ensure that any former appointees who wish to serve are clearly aligned with the president's policy agenda. They must also ensure that those who do not have prior government

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service are competent with good management skills, political acumen, aligned with the president's agenda, and able to learn on the job. In addition, former military officers and some former Federal employees who are aligned with the president's policies could be good sources of personnel for these important positions.

Given the size and scope of government, a new administration needs individuals with solid executive management skills who can drive the president's agenda. Like other government agencies, presidential appointees and nominees to national security agencies should have a demonstrated track record and the capability to productively manage large bureaucracies to ensure their organizations fully implement presidential policies. This means knowing how to ask the right questions, setting clear expectations, and holding people accountable. Good leaders also know how to leverage the knowledge and abilities of those with subject matter expertise. Because secrecy, classification issues, and leaks to the media by those opposed to the president's agenda can make managing these agencies much more difficult, an America First administration will need exceptionally qualified and well-prepared candidates to manage these agencies.

Once governing, some actions are simple, such as immediately updating performance plans to align with the new administration's priorities rather than waiting until month nine at the end of the first fiscal year of the administration, or worse, simply approving a performance plan drafted by the career incumbent that is not sufficiently updated to reflect the new administration's policy priorities.

Agency leaders should also move swiftly to update strategy documents that guide agency officials, such as the National Security Strategy, the National Defense Strategy, and key national security directives. Agency budgets and funding should be shifted, to the maximum extent allowable by law, to reflect and support the new administration's policy priorities. Agency heads should review delegations of authority to ensure they are comfortable with who is exercising authority on their behalf or should rescind such delegations as they see fit to retain such authority for themselves. All authorities within each department and agency flow from the constitutional powers of the president or via statute through the president's appointees.

Appointees must boldly protect those authorities and ensure they are fully leveraged to advance the priorities of the duly elected president.

The transition team overall, including the national security personnel, needs to be hyper-disciplined to align their work to the policy priorities of the nominee/president-elect. Having mature policy documents prepared in advance allows the newly elected president's team to have a head start on developing, coordinating, and implementing the president's preferred policies faster to better serve the American people and respect their will as expressed in the election.

The Senate Should Do Its Job (But a President Must Act in Its Absence)

In the last few decades, the number of Senate-confirmed positions has continued to grow despite periodic efforts to reduce that number.²⁴⁶ The Senate confirmation process has slowed to a point where a new president waits months and even years for his full team to be in place. This key failure was recognized in the 9/11 Commission report as a national security vulnerability. The Senate attempted to address this in the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 by committing to confirmation votes on national security positions at the undersecretary level or above within 30 days of the nominations.²⁴⁷ This problem appeared to worsen during the Trump administration which saw lengthy delays in confirmations for national security posts or ambassadorships. Delays of over a year were common.

Because of the importance of national security posts, it is incumbent that an incoming administration identify, vet, and nominate their key national security personnel quickly. In addition, the administration must hold the Senate publicly accountable to its commitment to hold a confirmation vote on those positions within 30 days.

While we can hope the Senate acts quickly to confirm the president's nominees, hope is not a strategy. Indeed, the experience of administrations of both parties is that their nominees will routinely wait months, if not years, to be confirmed. As such, it is incumbent upon the president to act with energy, beginning on January 20th by filling critical senior non-Senate-confirmed positions in the executive branch with appointees to advance presidential policy priorities. This will allow

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serve to deter our adversaries by showing them the new president has a competent and aligned team in place in national security positions. Therefore, we recommend the formal transition team have robust plans for both Senate nominations and non-confirmed appointments on Day One. Conservatives can no longer focus only on Senate-confirmed positions during transition planning. The Biden administration did not. We must play by the new rules and reality.

Robust Plans for Needed Management Actions

Getting the right team in place is the key foundational action, but by itself is insufficient to advance the president's policy agenda. Appointees also need to have clear action plans that outline the priority management, budget, and policy actions required to wrestle control away from the administrative state and advance an America First agenda. This is what is groundbreaking about AFPI's America First Transition Project. We are leveraging the experience of our nearly 700 volunteers, who have worked in nearly every department and agency in the federal government, to develop a level of depth and sophistication into the planning of how departments and agencies work, so that the leadership of a new administration can successfully implement its agenda. AFPI has paid special attention to management, budget, and policy actions in the national security space.

To the credit of many conservative administrations, the ethos of a government led by ordinary citizens who hail from outside the capital still prevails. While some appointees have had prior experience serving in the federal government, as explained earlier, many appointees are needed for national security posts who lack government experience but who are successful and accomplished in other walks of life. However, inexperienced officials who may not be aware of the unique rules and culture that prevail in Washington or know when they are being given inaccurate or incomplete information can quickly get themselves into trouble.

Such missteps, however innocent, can derail their appointments and the president's policy agenda. This is why the America First Transition Project is developing in-depth training and orientations for future executive branch appointees about their statutory authorities,

obligations, rules and regulations, and other fundamentals of how the executive branch works. Like the action plans we are developing for every department and agency, this training program is being developed by subject matter experts with substantial experience as political appointees and will be handed off to a formal transition team for it to deploy. By preparing an incoming team in this way, a new administration can take successful citizens and leaders from across the country and position them for success as change agents in the executive branch and for the American people.

Increase the Focus on Implementation

The next America First administration also has an opportunity to increase the focus on the implementation of the president's policy priorities. Doing so is even more important in the national security space as implementation is solely the responsibility of the federal government, whereas implementation of domestic priorities is often a shared responsibility with state, local, tribal, and even private sector entities. The need to enhance the focus on aggressive implementation of policy priorities should be a key factor when selecting appointees – each team should ensure that there are strong implementors driving change on behalf of the president. This is a key component of AFPI's America First Transition Project. As part of our personnel management effort, we have worked with prior leadership at every department and agency to identify the key personnel positions that must be filled (or created) on Day One to ensure that the new administration's team controls each department's personnel, budget, spending, policymaking, and policy implementing apparatus.

Having the right people in key personnel positions is the first step to successful implementation. Knowing that America First policies are ascendant also informs the action plans we are developing. These plans are informed by individuals with deep knowledge of these departments and agencies who know from experience how things get done and understand the obstacles to doing so. This will empower a new America First administration to implement the new president's policy agenda quickly.

**CONCLUSION: A FULL TEAM OF NATIONAL SECURITY
CHANGE AGENTS READY TO DRIVE THE PRESIDENT'S
POLICY PRIORITIES**

Tremendous work has been done by AFPI and other organizations to better prepare the next America First administration to advance the duly elected president's policy priorities. That work boils down to having a larger team of appointees that is better prepared, aligned to the president's policy agenda, in place quickly, ready to be relentless change agents for the president's policy agenda, and having a more robust suite of policies and action plans ready to execute on behalf of the new president. Implementing such change will be difficult but even more important in national security agencies charged with protecting the American people and our homeland. Transition preparedness is about being ready to govern effectively on Day One by learning from the past and planning for the future. The American people deserve nothing less, as the status quo has not served them well.



Beijing announces \$4.4 million in funding for landmine clearance in Cambodia

The grant comes just after the U.S. suspended aid to global demining programs, including projects in Cambodia.

By RFA Khmer
2025.02.10



A warning sign marks an area as Cambodia Mine Action Center workers clear a minefield in Preytotoeung village, Battambang province, Cambodia, Jan. 19, 2023. (Heng Sinith/AP)

The Chinese government will provide \$4.4 million to Cambodia for landmine clearance in an announcement this week that comes two weeks after the United States froze nearly all foreign aid.

The Jan. 24 decision from the U.S. State Department was followed by a [suspension](#) of global demining programs, including grants to the Cambodian Mine Action Center, or CMAC, which said on Jan. 31 that it was halting operations in eight provinces for 85 days.

China's embassy in Phnom Penh informed the Cambodian government of its grant last Wednesday. The \$4.4 million will fund a year-long project to clear mines and unexploded ordnance. Beijing has provided funding to Cambodia for similar projects since 2018.

Cambodia is one of the most heavily mined territories in the world, with millions of landmines and other items of unexploded ordnance that has caused tens of thousands of casualties.



A Cambodian demining expert works near the Cambodia-Thailand border, in Cambodia's Pailin province, a former Khmer Rouge stronghold, on Nov. 27, 2011. (Heng Sinith/AP)

The ordnance is left over from the Vietnam War, when U.S. forces heavily bombed parts of neighboring Cambodia, but also include Chinese and Russian mines from the Khmer Rouge era in the 1970s and the Cambodian civil war of the 1980s.

Last month, the Trump administration said it was pausing U.S. foreign aid to give the State Department time to review programs “to ensure they are efficient and consistent with U.S. foreign policy under the America First agenda,” according to the announcement [notice](#).

The U.S. halt on funding demining programs in Cambodia is likely to set the government back in its goal to be mine-free by the end of the year.

CMAC’s director general, Heng Ratana, told Radio Free Asia last month that the center [plans to furlough 210 members](#) of its approximately 1,700 workforce nationwide. The agency receives about \$2 million a year from the U.S. government.

“It is a complete shutdown. It is like a forced shutdown,” he said.

It was unclear if this week’s funding from Beijing would allow CMAC to reverse the furloughs. Heng Ratana said on Facebook on Thursday that some of the funding will be used for training and education.

RFA was unable to reach the Chinese Embassy in Phnom Penh for comment.

Beijing’s opportunity

Assistance to Cambodia from China usually comes in the form of loans, international affairs expert Em Sovannara said. But the U.S. suspension of aid has given Beijing an opportunity to build on its close ties with Phnom Penh.

“I would like to emphasize that the United States should not change its policies too much regarding small countries,” he told RFA. “Otherwise, small countries may turn to other countries such as China.”

Earlier this week, 17 former U.S. ambassadors to Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam signed an open letter asking U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio to end the 90-day suspension of U.S. assistance for mine clearance programs.

“Demining not only saves lives but provides a measurable benefit by making contaminated land usable for agricultural activities and infrastructure building, boosting their economies and promoting self-sufficiency – [relying less on aid from the U.S.](#) and other funders,” the ambassadors said.

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U.S. involvement in the region on mines and unexploded ordnance clearance has “helped heal past wounds” from the Vietnam War era and has also fostered cooperation in defense and economic growth, they said.

“As former ambassadors, we can attest that these programs helped us advance U.S. interests by generating goodwill and providing access to senior government officials,” they wrote.

The signatories included Charles A. Ray, Kenneth M. Quinn and Charles H. Twining – all former U.S. ambassadors to Cambodia.

Translated by Yun Samean. Edited by Matt Reed.

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