

## NOMINATIONS

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THURSDAY, MARCH 30, 2023

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

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:19 a.m., in Room SD-419, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Chris Van Hollen, presiding.

Present: Senators Van Hollen [presiding], Kaine, Duckworth, and Ricketts.

Also Present: Senator Sullivan.

### OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. CHRIS VAN HOLLEN, U.S. SENATOR FROM MARYLAND

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Good morning, everybody. The nominations hearing of the Foreign Relations Committee will come to order.

I am very pleased to be joined by the ranking member for today's hearing, Senator Ricketts, and pleased to serve with him on this committee. Congratulations to all four of you on your nominations to be our Ambassadors to different and important countries around the world. Congratulations to your family and loved ones. As someone who grew up in a Foreign Service family, I know this requires the support of other members of the family and friends. All of you have distinguished records within the career Foreign Service. I am looking forward to today's hearing. Your nominations are to countries in different parts of the world, as you know, from East Asia to South America to Europe, so we are going to try and cover a lot of territory.

In the interest of time, and we do not have a lot of time this morning, I am going to forgo any opening remarks about each of the countries to which you have been nominated to be Ambassadors. I do look forward to using that time during the question period, and, of course, I will introduce each of you fully in a moment. Let me now turn it over to Senator Ricketts for any opening comments he may have.

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

Senator RICKETTS. Great. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Well, I appreciate the brevity of your opening remarks, and I will match it. [Laughter.]

Senator VAN HOLLEN. All right.

Senator RICKETTS. So I just, again, want to congratulate all the nominees on this opportunity, and thank you very much for your previous service to our country and your willingness to be able to serve this as well. And I would also like to echo the chairman's remarks with regard to your families. I know that you all have loved ones who support you, and you would not be able to do this without that, so we appreciate the sacrifices of your family as well.

As governor, I had the opportunity to do a number of trade missions around the world and visit with Embassy staff, and I was always impressed by the quality of the people and the sacrifices they were willing to make for us. So I just wanted to add my thanks to that as well, and with that, Mr. Chairman, I am going to turn it back over you, and we can started.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you, Senator.

Senator RICKETTS. Yeah.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you, and, again, congratulations to all of you. So let me introduce each of our nominees to the committee, and then we will begin with the statements from each of you.

We have here today Ms. Nicole Theriot, who is the current U.S. consul general in Karachi, Pakistan. In her over 2 decades of experience representing the United States, Ms. Theriot has also served as the Deputy Chief of Mission and Chargé d'Affaires at the U.S. Embassy in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, the director for immigration and visa security at the U.S. National Security Council, and U.S. consulate general in Casablanca, Morocco, among many other assignments that have earned her numerous State Department awards.

Ms. Ann Marie Yastishock serves as the USAID senior deputy assistant administrator for Asia, and before her current role, she served as USAID's mission director in Vietnam, a country to which I will be heading next week as part of an official congressional delegation. In 2021, she came home from that overseas assignment to expedite the transition of the Biden-Harris administration as chief advisor to the acting administration and chief operations officer for USAID. Ms. Yastishock's service was invaluable in jump-starting USAID's operations internationally and bringing back the United States as a force for service in the world. Congratulations to you.

Mr. David Kostelancik is—currently serves as the foreign policy advisor to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Milley. He has held posts across Eastern Europe and the Balkans, including Deputy Chief of Mission and Chargé d'Affaires at the U.S. Embassy in Budapest, Hungary, also as director of the Office of South Central European Affairs and director of the Office of Russian Affairs, both in the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs. Congratulations to you.

Finally, Ms. Robin Dunnigan is the deputy assistant secretary overseeing Central and Eastern Europe for the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs. She has also served as Chargé d'Affaires and Deputy Chief of Mission of the U.S. Embassy in Austria and Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Department of State's Bureau of Energy Resources. She first joined the State Department in 1992, and her 3 decades of experience are complemented by her master's degrees in national security strategy from the National War College

and the Foreign Service Institute at Georgetown University. Congratulations.

Congratulations again to all of you. Why do I not now turn it over? We will just go down the dais in order. I chair the East Asia Subcommittee. We will start with Ms. Theriot.

**STATEMENT OF NICOLE D. THERIOT, OF LOUISIANA, A CAREER MEMBER OF THE SENIOR FOREIGN SERVICE, CLASS OF COUNSELOR, NOMINATED TO BE AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE CO-OPERATIVE REPUBLIC OF GUYANA**

Ms. THERIOT. Good morning. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member Ricketts. I am honored to appear before you today as President Biden's nominee to be the next U.S. Ambassador to the Cooperative Republic of Guyana. I am grateful for the confidence the President and Secretary Blinken have placed in me and am thankful to you for considering my nomination. If confirmed, I will work closely with you and all members of Congress to advance our national interests in Guyana and the broader Caribbean.

Over the past 24 years, I have been privileged to represent the United States in 10 countries on four continents. Any success I have had is due to the support of my family, so I would like to take this opportunity to thank them—my spouse, Tom Agnew; my father, Preston Terry Theriot; my mother, Brenda Foti Theriot, who passed away in September; and my sister, Tiffany Theriot—for their steadfast support and unstinting love. And I actually learned of my nomination two days after my mom passed away, so I am quite sure she had something to do with it.

Two of my previous assignments have been in the Caribbean—Haiti and Barbados—and others have been in countries with incredible potential for economic growth, so I am familiar with both the challenges and opportunities in Guyana. I have worked on programs dealing with increasing bilateral trade and investment, strengthening security, combatting trafficking, increasing sustainable energy and climate resilience, and countering corruption, all while enhancing critical people-to-people ties that give us an important advantage over others operating in the region, including the PRC. Given my service in the Caribbean and in countries ripe for economic advancement, such as Morocco and Pakistan, I am particularly honored to be considered for this important position.

Guyana is experiencing rapid transformation and has tremendous potential, but it also faces challenges, including climate change, crime, poverty, and corruption. If confirmed, I will work with the Guyanese Government and people to address these challenges and proudly champion U.S. values in an ethnically, religiously diverse Guyana. I will work with the Government to continue responsibly leveraging the country's newfound oil revenues to expand economic opportunities, develop reliable infrastructure, and increase social services. I will work to grow trade and investment and to promote the many exciting opportunities for U.S. companies. I will support the Guyanese in building upon gains in democratic

governance and will help them continue to address humanely the influx of Venezuelan and other migrants.

A secure, democratic, and prosperous Guyana will remain an important U.S. ally in the region.

As Secretary Blinken's representative to CARICOM, I will work with regional partners, especially through the new U.S.-Caribbean Partnership to Address the Climate Crisis, or PACC 2030, as well as on regional security, human rights, and food and energy security. I sincerely thank you for this opportunity and look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Theriot follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF NICOLE D. THERIOT

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Ricketts, and distinguished Members of the Committee, I am honored to appear before you today as President Biden's nominee to serve as the next U.S. Ambassador to the Co-operative Republic of Guyana. I am grateful for the confidence the President and Secretary Blinken have placed in me and am thankful for your consideration of my nomination. If confirmed, I will work closely with you and all Members to advance our nation's interests in Guyana and the broader Caribbean.

Over the past 24 years, I have been privileged to represent the United States in 10 countries on four continents. Any success I have had was made possible by my family, so I would like to thank my spouse, Tom Agnew, my father, Preston Terry Theriot, my mother, Brenda Foti Theriot, who passed away in September, and my sister Tiffany Theriot for their unstinting love and steadfast support.

Three of my overseas assignments have been in the Western Hemisphere, including two in the Caribbean—Haiti and Barbados—and others have been in countries with incredible potential for economic growth, so I am familiar with the challenges and opportunities that exist in Guyana. I have worked on programs dealing with security and the professional development of law enforcement; on increasing bilateral trade and investment; on creating stronger military-to-military ties for regional security; on combating drug, weapons, and human trafficking; on increasing sustainable energy and bolstering climate resilience, and on combatting corruption, all while enhancing critical people-to-people ties that give us an important advantage over others operating in the region, including the People's Republic of China. Given my service in the Caribbean and in countries ripe for economic advancement such as Morocco and Pakistan, I am particularly honored to be considered for this important position in Guyana.

Guyana is experiencing rapid transformation. It has tremendous potential, with large oil reserves and mineral resources, fertile agricultural lands, virgin rainforests, a large U.S. diaspora, close ties to the United States, and significant opportunities for modernization of infrastructure, policies, and processes. It also, however, continues to face significant challenges, including climate change, crime, poverty, corruption, and trafficking of several types. If confirmed, I will work with the Guyanese Government and people to address these challenges and bolster and diversify economic growth, strengthen democracy and governance, improve respect for human rights, and promote opportunity for all Guyanese.

If confirmed, I will proudly champion U.S. values in ethnically, religiously diverse Guyana. I will work with the Government to continue responsibly leveraging the country's newfound oil revenues to expand economic opportunities, develop reliable infrastructure, and improve and expand social services. I will work diligently to increase transparent, reciprocal trade and investment and to promote the many exciting opportunities for U.S. businesses. I will support the Guyanese Government and people to build upon their gains in democratic governance and rule of law. I will help them to continue addressing humanely the influx of Venezuelan and other migrants, all while respecting Guyana's sovereignty. If confirmed, I will work to identify immediate opportunities to support Guyana's efforts to strengthen democratic institutions across every sector, including being a central partner on regional security. A secure, democratic, and prosperous Guyana will remain an important ally to the United States in the region.

Guyana is experiencing a period of unprecedented growth, with the IMF designating it one of 2022's highest growth economies. With its extensive oil reserves, Guyana must carefully guard against the "resource curse" by diversifying its economy, capitalizing on gains in good governance, and strengthening its civil society in

an equitable, inclusive manner. The Guyanese Government has recently begun to tap into its oil wealth to improve critical infrastructure, health, and education. If confirmed, I will help build upon this productive path that wisely leverages Guyana's new wealth and encourage continued partnerships with both the public and private sectors to make sure Guyana's transformation benefits all.

If confirmed, I will work closely with the Guyanese to help them reach their laudable goals of greater security, good governance, and economic prosperity, all while enhancing bilateral relations. As Secretary Blinken's representative to CARICOM, I will work to increase U.S.-Caribbean collaboration, especially through the new U.S.-Caribbean Partnership to Address the Climate Crisis (PACC 2030), and in the areas of regional stability, security, human rights, food and energy security, and climate resilience.

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

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you very much for that statement, and I apologize the confusion. You, of course, are the nominee to Guyana. I had my order mixed up here.

Ms. THERIOT. No worries.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Now to—now to East Asia and to our nominee to Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu, Ms. Yastishock. Please proceed with your testimony.

**STATEMENT OF ANN MARIE YASTISHOCK, OF PENNSYLVANIA,  
A CAREER MEMBER OF THE SENIOR FOREIGN SERVICE,  
CLASS OF MINISTER-COUNSELOR, NOMINATED TO BE AM-  
BASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY OF  
THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE INDEPENDENT  
STATE OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA, AND TO SERVE CONCUR-  
RENTLY AND WITHOUT ADDITIONAL COMPENSATION AS AM-  
BASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY OF  
THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE SOLOMON IS-  
LANDS AND AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENI-  
POTENTIARY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE  
REPUBLIC OF VANUATU**

Ms. YASTISHOCK. Thank you, Senator. Chairman Van Hollen, Ranking Member Ricketts, good morning. I am honored to appear before you as President Biden's nominee for Ambassador to the Independent State of Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, and the Republic of Vanuatu. I am grateful for the confidence shown by the President and Senator Blinken in nominating me, and I am privileged to represent the United States. If confirmed, I look forward to working with Congress to strengthen our ties with our Pacific neighbors, advance United States' interest in a free and open, connected, prosperous, resilient, and secure Pacific region. I aim to achieve this by listening to and learning from our Pacific partners and finding a path forward together that celebrates the Pacific Way.

I want to thank the most important people in my life: my family. Joining me here are my son, Dmitri; my brother, Daniel; my sister, Betsy; and brother-in-law, John. Although my parents are not here, I know they are looking down today with pride. As the youngest of seven children from a long line of public servants, my family inspired me to love this country that has given us and me so much. If not for their love, support, and encouragement, I would not be sitting here today.

My passion for international affairs began when I served as a volunteer American Bar Association lawyer in Central Asia and continued as a Foreign Service officer with USAID. Overseeing USAID's Pacific expansion as the senior deputy assistant administrator has required a broad-based skill set, which, if confirmed, I will bring to our work in Micronesia. As a Pacific nation, the United States shares much with these proud countries, and World War II bonded us together. I will build upon this legacy.

First, I will prioritize the Embassy community's well-being, including for our invaluable local staff, so that we can better support our commitment to the safety and security of U.S. citizens in these islands. Second, we will be very present, leveraging our growing footprint, including the elevated USAID presence and returning Peace Corps volunteers. In Papua New Guinea, together with local and international partners, we will advance the 10-year whole-of-government effort under the U.S. Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability. In Solomon Islands, we will address the legacy of war by shaping the future through improved natural resource stewardship.

As our Vanuatu friends know all too well, the Pacific faces increasing natural disasters and rising sea levels, and following President Biden's emphasis on the climate crisis, we will support local climate resilience adaptation and biodiversity. Success will depend on the strength, resilience, and vibrancy of our sovereign partners, which appreciate that democratic values, rule of law, and education underpin productive, inclusive, and connected societies. Together with allies and partners, if confirmed, my team and I will help these governments and civil society meet democracy's promises.

Mr. Chairman and Mr. Ranking Member, thank you again, and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Yastishock follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF ANN MARIE YASTISHOCK

Chairman Van Hollen, Ranking Member Ricketts, Members of the committee, good morning. I am honored to appear before you as President Biden's nominee for Ambassador to the Independent State of Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, and the Republic of Vanuatu.

I am grateful for the confidence shown by the President and Secretary Blinken in nominating me, and I am privileged to represent the United States. If confirmed, I look forward to working with Congress to strengthen our ties with our Pacific neighbors and advance the United States' interest in a free and open, connected, prosperous, resilient, and secure Pacific region. I aim to achieve this by listening to, and learning from, our Pacific partners and finding a path forward together that celebrates the "Pacific Way."

I want to thank the most important people in my life: my family. Joining me here are my son Dmitry, my brother Daniel, my sister Betsy and brother-in-law John. Although my parents are not here, I know they are looking down today with pride. As the youngest of seven children from a long line of public servants, my family inspired me to love this country that has given us and me so much. If not for their love, support, and encouragement, I would not be sitting here today.

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Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and Members of the committee, thank you again and I look forward to your questions.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you. Thank you for your testimony. Now, as we turn to Ms. Dunnigan, I am pleased that we are joined by our friend and colleague and the co-chair with—along with myself, of the Foreign Service Caucus. Senator Sullivan, the floor is yours.

Senator SULLIVAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Ricketts. It is a great pleasure and honor to be here today to introduce you to Robin Dunnigan, the President's nominee to be Ambassador to Georgia. Robin and I have known each other for more than 30 years, going back to our days at Georgetown where we were both in the Master of Science of Foreign Service Program. In fact, at that time, I was dating a beautiful, brilliant woman named Julie. Robin was dating a great guy named Harry. We were all good friends. Julie and I ended up getting married, best thing that ever happened to me, and Robin and Harry ended up getting married, best thing that ever happened to Harry.

[Laughter.]

Senator SULLIVAN. Both Robin and Harry ended up joining the Foreign Service. Our professional careers have intersected over the years, and we have all stayed very good friends.

Robin joined the Foreign Service in 1992. She has served with Harry in the Foreign Service, and I commend the State Department for taking care of a very exceptional couple in six different countries—Austria, Vietnam, Turkey, Chile, Cuba, and El Salvador—as well as multiple tours in D.C. In Austria, Robin was Chargé d'Affaires and DCM for 3 years.

Mr. Chairman, she has served our Nation with honor, distinction, and professionalism. And as you mentioned, Mr. Chairman, just a few weeks ago before this committee, I note that the reason you and I co-founded the Senate Foreign Service Officers Caucus was to highlight and promote the integrity, skill, and professionalism of those who have worked so hard, often at significant sacrifice to their families, to promote America's foreign policy interests. Robin embodies the type of Foreign Service officer that you, Mr. Chairman, and I had in mind when we started the caucus.

Robin is currently the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Central and Eastern Europe, which includes Ukraine. Her work over the last 18 months—no surprise—has been dominated by helping

Ukraine defend itself against the brutal Russian invasion and unprovoked war. It has been a 24-and-7 effort over at the State Department. As you can imagine, she has been deeply engaged in working with our allies in Central Europe in support of that effort. Other assignments that she has had include 3 years as Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Bureau of Energy Resources from August 2014 to August 2017. There, she was way ahead of the curve, encouraging European countries to diversify away from Russian energy.

Clearly all this experience, close to the Russian account, is going to serve her and America well in Georgia. In some ways, our current problems with Russia started in Georgia back in 2008 when Russia invaded Georgia. We talk a lot about how Russia's invasion of Ukraine was unprecedented in terms of scale and duration. It has been, but the world got its first taste of what was in store for Russian sovereign neighbors back in 2008 in Georgia. Robin is also an economic officer. She has spent much of her career advocating for U.S. companies and American workers around the globe. In addition to her Georgetown degree, Robin is a distinguished graduate of the National War College where she earned her master of science in national security.

Mr. Chairman, I can tell you it is very gratifying to be able to induce—introduce Robin Dunnigan this morning. She has done so much important work for our Nation, but I am sure Robin would agree that her most important work has been raising a wonderful family with Harry. Their two children, Andrew and Anna, as well as Harry are here today.

I urge all of my colleagues to strongly support Robin's confirmation. Thank you.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you. Thank you, Senator Sullivan. Thank you for your remarks and for being here today. Ms. Dunnigan, the floor is yours.

**STATEMENT OF ROBIN DUNNIGAN, OF CALIFORNIA, A CAREER MEMBER OF THE SENIOR FOREIGN SERVICE, CLASS OF MINISTER-COUNSELOR, NOMINATED TO BE AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO GEORGIA**

Ms. DUNNIGAN. Thank you for that kind introduction, Senator Sullivan, and thank you for your tremendous service to the United States as a Senator, a Marine, and Assistant Secretary of State, and many other positions. I would also like to thank you and Senator Van Hollen for your strong support of the Foreign Service, including as co-founders of the Senate Foreign Service Caucus.

Chairman Van Hollen, Ranking Member Ricketts, distinguished members of the committee, thank you for this opportunity. I am deeply honored to be President Biden's nominee to serve as U.S. Ambassador to Georgia, and I am grateful for the confidence the President and Secretary Blinken have placed in me. If confirmed, I look forward to working closely with this committee and all members of Congress to advance the interests of the United States in Georgia. It has been a privilege to represent the United States as a career Foreign Service officer for more than 30 years. I have promoted U.S. interests across the globe, working to promote Amer-

ican—protect Americans, expand our economic prosperity, and promote and defend the democratic values at the heart of who we are as a country.

If confirmed, I will focus on four priorities. First, my highest duty will be to ensure the safety and security of the team working at the U.S. Embassy and of all Americans in Georgia. Second, if confirmed, I will work with the Georgian Government and the people of Georgia to help them realize their dream of being firmly integrated with the EU, NATO, and the West. Not only will Euro-Atlantic integration benefit the citizens of Georgia, I deeply believe it is in the U.S. national interests. We want a democratic Georgia firmly integrated with the West, capable of defending its borders and able to withstand the pressure of Russian malign activities. Georgia has made remarkable progress over the last 30 years, but some concerning developments show there is more to do.

Third, I will strengthen bilateral trade and investment, including by increasing U.S. exports and opportunities for American companies in Georgia. My final priority will be to advocate for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity as Russia still occupies 20 percent of its territory. I will work with Georgia and our international partners to hold Russia to its commitments under the 2008 ceasefire agreement and the U.N. Charter.

Finally, I would like to thank and introduce my family: my husband of 30 years, Harry Kamian, who is also a Foreign Service officer, and our children, Andrew and Anna. As our careers have carried us around the world, Andrew and Anna—oh, sorry—have weathered multiple moves, adapting to new schools, new friends with remarkable humor and resilience. I am so proud of the young adults they have become. I would not be here today without the love and support of my family and my extended family. My dad, who was a small business owner, and my mom, who was a teacher, taught my siblings and me the value of integrity, honesty, hard work, and kindness—principles I try to live by every day.

Mr. Chairman, ranking member, thank you, and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Dunnigan follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF ROBIN DUNNIGAN

Thank you for that kind introduction, Senator Sullivan. And thank you for your tremendous service to the United States, as a Senator, a Marine, and an Assistant Secretary of State, among other positions. I would also like to thank you and Senator Van Hollen for your strong support for the Foreign Service, including as co-founders of the bipartisan Senate Foreign Service Caucus.

Chairman Van Hollen, Ranking Member Ricketts, and distinguished members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I am deeply honored to be President Biden's nominee to serve as U.S. Ambassador to Georgia, and I am grateful for the confidence the President and Secretary Blinken have placed in me. If confirmed, I look forward to working closely with this Committee, all members of Congress, and your teams to advance the interests of the United States in Georgia.

It has been a privilege to represent the United States as a career Foreign Service Officer for more than thirty years. I have promoted U.S. interests across the globe, working to protect American citizens, expand our economic prosperity, and promote and defend the democratic values at the heart of who we are as a country.

If confirmed, I will focus on four priorities. First, my highest duty will be to ensure the safety and security of the team working at the U.S. Embassy and of all Americans in Georgia. Having worked over the last 18 months to help keep our Em-

bassy team in Kyiv safe in a very challenging environment, I know this responsibility is sacred.

Second, if confirmed, I will work with the Georgian Government and Georgian people to help them realize their desire to further integrate with the EU, NATO, and the West, and to further their democratic future. Not only will Euro-Atlantic integration benefit the citizens of Georgia, I deeply believe it is in the U.S. national interest. We want a democratic Georgia firmly integrated with the West, capable of defending its borders and able to withstand the pressure of Russian malign activities, including Russian disinformation. Georgia has made remarkable progress over the last 30 years, but some concerning developments show more remains to be done. The European Union provided Georgia with a roadmap of reforms it should complete to achieve its aim of EU candidate status this year. If confirmed, I look forward to supporting Georgia as it pursues these reforms.

Third, I will strengthen bilateral trade and investment, including by increasing opportunities for U.S. companies in Georgia and for Georgian investment in the United States. I will vigorously promote U.S. exports and encourage reforms to foster a fair and transparent business environment. I will also work with the Georgian Government to defend against potential coercive economic practices, including from Russia and the People's Republic of China.

Russia's brutal war against Ukraine violates the U.N. Charter's most fundamental principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity. Georgians know this Russian playbook all too well, because they saw it happen in their own country in 2008 and experience it every day, as Russia still occupies approximately 20 percent of Georgian territory. My final priority will be to advocate for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity. I will commit to work with Georgia and our international partners to hold Russia to its obligations and commitments under the 2008 ceasefire agreement and the U.N. Charter.

Our partnership over the past 30 years has benefitted both the people of Georgia and the United States. Georgia has been a steadfast NATO Partner for Peace since 1994 and was the largest non-NATO contributor of forces to Afghanistan, standing side-by-side with American troops. We have tremendous people-to-people ties, with thousands of exchanges over the decades. If confirmed, I hope to build on this strong legacy of partnership and cooperation.

Finally, I would like to thank and introduce my family, who are with me here today. My husband of 30 years, Harry Kamian, who is also a Foreign Service Officer, and our children Andrew and Anna. As our careers carried us around the world, Andrew and Anna weathered multiple moves, adapting to new schools and new friends with remarkable humor and resilience. I am so incredibly proud of the young adults they have become. I would not be here today without the love and support of Harry, Andrew and Anna, and my extended family. My dad, who was a small business owner, and my mom, who was a teacher, taught my siblings and me the value of integrity, honesty, hard work and kindness, principles I try to live by every day.

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Ranking Member, thank you again for this opportunity and I look forward to your questions.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you, Ms. Dunnigan, and thank you and all those who have introduced, you know, members of the family and loved ones. As you said, it is a—it is a team effort.

So, Mr. Kostelancik of Illinois, who was appointed by the President—nominated by the President to be Ambassador to the Republic of Albania, the floors is yours.

**STATEMENT OF DAVID J. KOSTELANCIK, OF ILLINOIS, A CAREER MEMBER OF THE SENIOR FOREIGN SERVICE, CLASS OF MINISTER-COUNSELOR, NOMINATED TO BE AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA**

Mr. KOSTELANCIK. Thank you, Chairman. Chairman Van Hollen, Ranking Member Ricketts, it is a privilege to appear before you today. I am honored to be the nominee for U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Albania, and I thank President Biden and Secretary Blinken for their confidence in me.

I want to begin by recognizing those who have made it possible for me to be here today. First, I want to honor my wife, Trish, for her love, commitment, and support during 30 years of marriage. I want to thank our three sons—Tim, Dan, and Ben—for the sacrifices they have made growing up with frequent moves and the demands of life in the Foreign Service, and my sister, Kathi, and brother, Ken, for their steadfast support. Our parents are no longer with us, but their examples of hard work, sacrifice, and lifelong devotion to the Chicago Cubs made us what we are.

[Laughter.]

Mr. KOSTELANCIK. I am a career Foreign Service officer with over 30 years of experience. From 1992 to 1994, I had the unique opportunity of serving as the first political economic officer assigned to the newly-reopened U.S. Embassy in Albania, whose citizens rejected decades of communist dictatorship and embraced democracy and freedom. I saw the hope that sprang from people's desire for liberty, to revive the dormant links between our countries, and transform expectations for a better future into reality. Fast forward 30 years, Albania's progress as a young democracy is astonishing. Today, Albania plays an active role in supporting U.S. global priorities as a NATO ally and rotating member of the U.N. Security Council, and in 2022, Albania opened EU accession negotiations. Still, there is a great deal more we can and must do together.

If confirmed, I will focus on the following priorities. My primary responsibility will be the welfare and safety of U.S. citizens in Albania. Second, I would continue work with Albanians to strengthen democratic and judicial institutions. President Biden identified fighting, corruption, and organized crime as part of our national security strategy, key tasks in the Western Balkans. Advancing legal and judicial reforms also will advance Albania's EU ambitions.

Third, I would build on our defense partnership. My work with the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff has reinforced for me the importance of allies. Iran's cyberattack against Albania in 2022 showed the need to develop a multifaceted approach to investing in allies' defensive infrastructure and training. Finally, I would continue strengthening the business climate. U.S. interests are served by promoting a rules-based, transparent marketplace in Albania. Albania's progress on these objectives advances our own national priorities.

If confirmed, I look forward to working with Congress to address these challenges. I would be honored to build on 30 years of hard work in and with Albania. Thank you for considering my nomination. I would be pleased to take your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Kostelancik follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT FOR DAVID J. KOSTELANCIK

Chairman Van Hollen, Ranking Member Ricketts, distinguished Members of the committee. It is a privilege to appear before you today. I am honored to be the nominee for U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Albania, and I thank President Biden and Secretary Blinken for their confidence in me. If confirmed, I look forward to working closely with Congress to advance U.S. interests in Albania.

I want to start by recognizing those who have made it possible for me to be here today. First, I want to honor my wife, Trish, for her love, commitment, and support for over 30 years of marriage. I want to thank our three sons—Tim, Dan, and Ben—for the sacrifices they have made growing up with frequent moves and the demands of life in the Foreign Service. I want to thank my sister Kathi and brother Ken for

their steadfast support every step of the way. Our parents are no longer with us, but their examples of hard work and sacrifice still inspire us.

I am a career Foreign Service Officer with over 30 years of experience. It has been my privilege to work on broadening and deepening our bilateral ties with a range of partners and allies. I have served in Albania, Turkey, Russia, Hungary, at NATO and the OSCE. Much of my career has focused on supporting close relationships between the United States and Allies and partners as well as defending and advancing respect for human rights. I have also always prioritized the welfare and safety of U.S. citizens abroad, and if confirmed I will continue to do so in Albania.

From 1992-94, I had the unique opportunity of serving in Albania as the first Political/Economic officer assigned to the newly re-opened U.S. Embassy after a 52-year break in diplomatic ties. I found myself in a rapidly changing country, whose citizens rejected decades of communist dictatorship and enthusiastically embraced democracy and freedom. I traveled throughout Albania and saw the hope that sprang from people's desire for liberty—to revive the dormant links between our countries and transform expectations for a better future into reality.

Fast-forward 30 years. Albania's progress as a relatively young democracy is astonishing. Today, Albania plays an active role in supporting U.S. global priorities. Albania is a NATO Ally and contributes humanitarian and military assistance where needed. Serving as a rotating member on the United Nations Security Council, it has been a close U.S. partner and our co-pen holder on resolutions to hold Russia accountable for its war in Ukraine. In July 2022, Albania opened European Union accession negotiations, a major step toward EU membership and a reflection of Albania's progress on democratic and judicial reforms. There is still a great deal of work to do, however, and if confirmed, I will focus on the following three priorities.

First, I would continue work with Albanians to strengthen democratic and judicial institutions. President Biden identified fighting corruption and organized crime as part of our National Security Strategy, an essential endeavor in the Western Balkans. We will work with Albanians to further their efforts to make their judicial system more equitable and trusted. We need to continue providing guidance and resources for Albanians to succeed in their EU ambitions.

Second, I would build on our defense partnership bilaterally and at NATO. My work with the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff has reinforced for me the importance of allies. Iran's cyberattack against Albania in 2022 showed the need to develop a multifaceted approach to investing in our allies' defensive infrastructure and training. I am proud of our coordinated response to Iran's attack and, if confirmed, look forward to working with Congress to address critical emerging threats and to show the world the United States stands with our Allies.

Third, I would continue strengthening the business climate in Albania. Albania needs our help developing an economic ecosystem that creates jobs and opportunities in both our countries, eliminating corruption that limits quality of life. We can serve U.S. interests by promoting a rules-based and transparent marketplace in Albania.

U.S. partnership and assistance are vital to Albania as it implements domestic reforms, attracts foreign direct investment, contributes to regional stability, and remains active in global matters. Albania's progress on these objectives advances U.S. national priorities. If confirmed, I would build on 30 years of hard work in, and with, Albania.

Thank you for considering my nomination. I would be pleased to take your questions.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you very much for your testimony. Thank all of you. So we will now begin the rounds of questioning, and I am going to start with Papua New Guinea and the other Pacific Islands to which you have been nominated.

Let me—let me ask you about the Pacific partnership Strategy that was outlined by the White House in September 2022. And as you, I am confident, hope you will be confirmed, as you take on these new responsibilities, how are you going to achieve the goal of ensuring that what we see as the growing geopolitical competition in the region does not undermine the sovereignty and the security of the Pacific Islands, and, specifically, those to which you have been nominated to be our Ambassador?

Ms. YASTISHOCK. Thank you, Senator, very much for that question. I think the growing competition is probably one of our major concerns in the Pacific Islands and ensuring the sovereignty of each of the countries, particularly Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu. I think, first of all, we need to look at what we bring. It does not start with the question of the PRC but what we bring to the table, and that is, we bring the advancement of transparency, democratic values, also working with civil societies, but also, as I mentioned in my statement, listening and learning from our Pacific partners under the Pacific Way.

I think, you know, the other part about it is, is that we want to ensure that our countries are not trapped into these predatory economic opportunities, that they build the capacity and the resilience of each of the countries, not just relying on imported labor to build infrastructure but making sure that they meet the high standards that are required and what we want to see under the Indo-Pacific Strategy. So it is really working with our countries to ensure that we are building the resiliency, building the capacity, shining the light on those activities that are not in compliance with what their development goals are, as well as what their vision is for their development.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you, and I may come back to you for some further questions in a moment. But to Ms. Theriot, in Guyana, as you know, there have been relatively recent discoveries of significant oil reserves. And I know the new President is committed to try to make sure that these are developed in a responsible way, a transparent way, and where the proceeds are invested to benefit the people of his country. But we often hear that as the goal at the outset, and in many countries we have—we have not seen those different goals followed.

So what can you do as our Ambassador to try to help Guyana ensure that there is a responsible development of these reserves? And I also understand the President is committed to try to invest some of the proceeds in renewable energy. If you could just talk about that.

Ms. THERIOT. Absolutely. Thank you very much for that question. You are absolutely correct that we have seen the “resource curse” harm of other countries, and I believe that, if confirmed, my role would be to provide guidance and support to the Ali Government, to the current Guyanese Government, in making sure that they do follow very sustainable, appropriate ways of developing their oil and gas sector. I think that is something that U.S. companies bring to the table.

U.S. companies provide quality, reliability, and sustainability, and the Guyanese have shown that, because of their newfound oil wealth, they no longer have to always go with the lowest bidder for important infrastructure and other projects. Instead, they can now go to the quality, reliable company, and they have shown that. In November of 2022, the largest tender ever awarded in Guyana went to a U.S. consortium, even though that consortium’s bid was higher than the other bidders, and that is because they bring what Guyana is now looking for to the table. They also bring a robust CSR package, which helps the people of Guyana.

So I do believe that with their partnership with the United States and with U.S. companies, we can ensure that the resource curse is not going to be an issue for Guyana.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you, and just in my remaining time, one of the issues, as you know, in Guyana is their neighbor, Venezuela. And the dictator in Venezuela, Nicolas Maduro, has made threatening remarks against Guyana over a territorial dispute dating back to the 19th century. Can you confirm just for the record that the Biden administration and you will stand by Guyana in this territorial dispute?

Ms. THERIOT. Absolutely, Mr. Chairman. We will continue to respect and support the current boundaries of Guyana as laid out in the 1899 arbitral award, unless or until a competent legal body, like the ICJ, decides otherwise, and we really hope for a peaceful resolution to this issue.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you. Senator Ricketts?

Senator RICKETTS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Well, Mr. Kostelancik, I am sure you know today is opening day for the Cubs. We have the Brewers at home, so hopefully we start off the season well.

On a more somber note, all of you are going to face the challenges that the Chinese Communist Party poses. President Xi has said that, essentially, he wants to be the world-dominating power by 2049, and I do not think that is in any of our interests anywhere around the world that that is going to be a good thing.

Ms. Theriot, I want to talk you a little bit about the—Guyana. You know, obviously they are a democracy and a friend, which is a welcome thing in that part of the—part of the world that is so close to us. And as mentioned, in 2015, ExxonMobil made a discovery of oil there, and I think that, on a per capita basis, that only Kuwait has more oil than Guyana now, and we certainly want to encourage that development in a responsible way. I think you said earlier that American companies provide that reliability, correct?

My understanding is Guyana Shore Base, a private company based in Georgetown, asked the Inter-American Development Bank—IDB—for help in upgrading the Guyanese infrastructure, and IDB proposed \$180 million in debt financing for the project. The Biden administration vetoed that, though, and the reasoning is they want to back oil and gas projects. And I think that is short-sighted given that China has no such restrictions and is aggressively signing contracts to build infrastructure in Guyana and around the world. And certainly, I think we would all agree that we are going to do a better job on that and, of course, contrasted with the administration then provided sanctions relief to Venezuela's authoritarian Maduro regime to boost oil production.

What are your thoughts on the Biden administration's decision to block the IDB loan?

Ms. THERIOT. Thank you very much, Mr. Ranking Member. That decision was made in March of 2022. I would say that things have changed significantly since the war on the Ukraine has dragged on, and energy security is a real concern and a significant issue. What I would do, if confirmed, is to make sure that there is a level playing field for U.S. companies in Guyana. I think that is our entree into ensuring that China does not take over this industry. I think

it is incredibly important that we remain the preferred partner in Guyana, whether it be the U.S. Government for security cooperation or U.S. companies for oil and gas development. That is something that I would work diligently to ensure.

Senator RICKETTS. So do you think blocking the IDB loan was against our strategic interests?

Ms. THERIOT. Blocking the IDB loan was in line with the current Biden administration—their priority to not contribute further to oil and gas development of fossil fuels. I think that because that vote is no longer an issue, that we can only move forward and work to ensure that U.S. companies are given a level playing field in the country.

Senator RICKETTS. So do you think given—what I hear you saying is because of the changing circumstances, you think that the—well, the world has changed since the invasion of Ukraine. Do you think if that were to come up again, that the Biden administration should allow that loan to go forward for a U.S. company to develop the resources there?

Ms. THERIOT. I would not want to speculate on that. I think we would have to see what the decision would be. Guyana's oil and gas sector is developing very well through private sector investment, and I cannot speculate on what the result of that vote would be, sir.

Senator RICKETTS. Do you know what Guyana's reaction to the decision to block the IDB loan was?

Ms. THERIOT. They were quite displeased.

Senator RICKETTS. Do you believe that Guyana views the U.S. as an unreliable partner and would turn to China because of that?

Ms. THERIOT. No, sir, I do not think that is the case, and they have shown time and time again that we are the preferred partner, both the U.S. Government and U.S. companies.

Senator RICKETTS. And maybe we will have some more time to follow up on some of the other things here as well, but I want to go to Ms. Yastishock with regard to, again, staying on the topic of the CCP and the Solomon Islands. My understanding is that China signed an agreement with the Solomon Islands with regard to the naval bases there, and this was a surprise to the Biden administration. What would you be able to do with regard to that agreement to be able to make sure that we continue to have a strong relationship with the Solomon Islands, and is there a way that we can—that's a 5-year agreement is my understanding. Is there a way that we can convince the Solomon Islands not to renew that because obviously having the Chinese navy so close to our allies in Australia and to shipping lanes is certainly a big issue?

Ms. YASTISHOCK. Thank you, Senator Ricketts, for that question. The agreement was signed, and Solomon Islands has confirmed and has stated that they are not going to be locating PRC bases in the country, but what we will be doing is providing additional security assistance through different ways. We have discussed a shiprider agreement with the Solomon Islands. We are looking at providing additional security capacity building, which we think is more sustainable and will ensure the sovereignty of the country rather than relying on foreign forces. So I think that there is a lot of discussion, and I am committed, if confirmed, to continue that discussion to

ensure the safety of the region but also ensuring that we become the partner of choice as well.

Senator RICKETTS. Thank you.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you. Senator Kaine?

Senator KAINE. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and congratulations to each of the nominees. You have very, very stellar backgrounds and are well positioned to serve in the positions for which you have been nominated. Ms. Theriot—am I my pronouncing it right—“THER-io?”

Ms. THERIOT. Sir, it is “TER-io.”

Senator KAINE. Theriot. Ms. Theriot, I want to follow up on Senator Ricketts’ points about the IDB loan because I had a chance to meet with President Ali last July, a few months after the U.S. had blocked their efforts to receive funding for energy sector improvements, and it is putting it mildly to say they were displeased. They were incredibly disappointed by this. And I have had similar discussions with other leaders in the region—Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago—who have energy resources, but they feel like the United States is standing in the way of them developing their own energy resources and stopping them from developing their own economies.

And the point that that President Ali made to me, and others have as well, is, okay, you say you are an ally. You should want us to be able to develop our economy just like you have developed yours. Yes, that is true. You say that you want to help nations wean themselves away from overreliance on petrol dictators, like Venezuela or Russia or Iran or Saudi Arabia, and have more available energy to backstop if they move away from petrol dictators. Yes, that is American policy. You are blocking us then from doing those things, developing our own economy, and creating a resource that can help people move away from reliance on petrol dictators, but you are blocking us in a foolish way because we can go to China and get these investments and without the strings attached.

I understand and share the administration’s priority in battling climate change, but as I have said at this committee before, there are sort of three goals right now that can be somewhat contradictory—battling climate change, helping our allies develop their economies, helping people wean themselves away from over-dependence on petrol dictators—and they can be in conflict. But what I have yet to hear from the administration is kind of how do we harmonize these things. Instead, it feels like there is a tug-of-war in the White House between the we got to help people wean themselves away from over-reliance on dictators versus we got to be against fossil fuel projects anywhere. And it is taking allies that are good allies and pushing them away from us.

I think there is a strategy that can be articulated by the administration that is probably a phasing strategy, that here we are during this this war and it is imposing significant challenges for nations that have relied on petrol dictators. We need to have a strategy that can, in time, move nations away. We do want to help allied nations develop their economies, be a partner in that. We do not want them to go to China to get resources when there are resources that are available that we can provide them with. I think—I think there is a phasing strategy on this.

And this is not for you, but I am just saying it because I hope somebody from the State Department or the administration is listening. You still have not come to Congress and explained these competing priorities and how you intend to manage them and phase them. But the cost so far has been to take nations that are allies of ours and make them angry with us and push them to over-reliance possibly on China, which is not a smart move long term. So I just want to put that on the record.

Let me ask you this. The Caribbean region can tend to be overlooked. We do recognize that—the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative. It is a bipartisan success. It is a regionalized cooperation that has demonstrated that the U.S. is remaining a partner of choice in the Caribbean. Senator Rubio and I have introduced the authorizing legislation for CBSI earlier this month, the companion bill on the House side by Representative Espaillat. If confirmed, how will you continue to encourage Guyana to fully implement provisions of the Inter-American Convention Against Corruption and increase resourcing for critically-important law enforcement and judicial institutions?

Ms. THERIOT. Thank you very much for that question, Senator Kaine. I am well aware of your and Senator Rubio's legislation, and I think it is very much needed. It is going to expand and enhance CBSI. I think what is important to bear in mind is that most of the security issues that Guyana faces are replicated throughout the Caribbean, whether it be the need to enhance citizen security; to counter the influx of weapons coming into the region; to counter narcotics trafficking; to bolster climate resilience, or to combat corruption as you just mentioned. Those are all problems that exist throughout the region, and a regional problem needs a regional solution. That is exactly what CBSI is. And we have been doing it for 10-plus years, so we have that expertise.

I am also very pleased to see Guyana becoming more actively engaged with some of the other multilateral and regional security organizations, like CARICOM IMPACS, including the Crime Gun Intelligence Unit, which we assist, and also RSS. They are also working more with other bilateral partners, including our European colleagues who bring other expertise to bear. So I think this is exactly the right approach to address these issues, and, if confirmed, I would work to harmonize these efforts and also to implement all aspects of the legislation that would allow for greater security in both Guyana and the greater Caribbean.

Senator KAINE. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you, Senator Kaine. So, Ms. Dunnigan, some questions on Georgia. I am sure you have been following the protests there earlier this month over the so-called foreign agents bill. And while the Georgian parliament ultimately dropped the bill after a massive public outcry, this still signals a worrying trend, not just in Georgia but other countries around the world, in terms of legislative and other crackdowns on NGOs and civil society. And I know in the eyes of the protesters in Georgia, it appeared to be an example of undue Russian influence.

If you could just talk a little bit about your perception of Russian influence in the Georgian political system today—obviously, they are a neighbor—but where that stands because we have been

watching that closely. And, of course, the EU has also been watching it closely and has expressed concerns about the state of democracy in Georgia, and it is one of the reasons they deferred EU candidate status. So if you could just talk about that set of issues.

Ms. DUNNIGAN. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, for the question. I did follow the protests in Georgia over the foreign agents law, and I think it is very—I think they were reflective of the Georgian people's desire to have their future firmly integrated with the West and the EU. We see this over and over again, the Georgian—people of Georgia's commitment to this path, and I think it is in our national interest to continue to support them in this path.

I do believe that Russia is implementing malign activities in Georgia, including disinformation, and that is having an impact on the country. It is why I think our assistance to help them implement their democratic reforms is so essential. The EU has laid out 12 reforms that Georgia needs to implement in order to obtain EU candidate status, and if confirmed, I would work closely with the Government to support them in implementing those reforms. And I share your concern, Senator, and if I were confirmed, I look forward to staying in close touch on this issue because I think it is an essential issue for the region and in Georgia.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Well, thank you. You mentioned disinformation and misinformation campaigns. One of those is the effort by a lot of Russian propagandists to suggest that the United States is trying to draw Georgia into Russia and Ukraine, which, of course, is not true. So thank you for your efforts that you are going to undertake there.

Mr. KOSTELANCIK. I was in the Munich Conference not too long ago. Senator Shaheen and I met with Prime Minister Rama. You mentioned in your opening statement the issue that he focused 75 percent of his time on, which is his really desperate need for the United States to support Albania's efforts to counter cyberattacks that have taken place against their infrastructure. I do not need to revisit the history of how we got to this point, but can you just emphasize how you will work with Albania to meet their concerns and help provide the resources necessary to protect their—them from these attacks?

Mr. KOSTELANCIK. Thank you for the question, Senator. Yes, those attacks were malicious and did a great deal of damage to Albania. I have been proud of the fact that since that time, not only the United States, but together with partners from the European Union, NATO, and other countries around the world, we have brought experts to Albania to help them to begin to mitigate, to repair the damage that was done, and to reinforce and to build a stronger, more resilient cyber system across sectors in Albania.

The United States has committed \$50 million in assistance to help Albania at this point, and our cooperation with them will continue in both the civilian and defense sectors to ensure that Albania can meet future threats and challenges that come not just potentially from Iran but from other malign activities actors in the cyber sphere.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Well, thank you because it was the issue that that he focused on during the meeting. We also talked about

the Open Balkan Initiative, and the prime minister was very positive about that as an alternative way to achieve economic development in the region as they—as they continue to press for EU membership. Finally, as you know, Albania has hosted a number of Afghan refugees, and, if confirmed, can you assure this committee that you will help provide Albania the support they need to continue in that effort?

Mr. KOSTELANCIK. Thank you, Senator. Yes, I will assure the committee, and I pledge that I will do all that I can, together with the Albanian Government, with the other parts of the U.S. interagency that are involved with the processing of Afghan SIVs through Albania, which has been a gracious host since the summer of 2021 to Afghans looking for a new home. We will work with the Department of Defense, Department of Homeland Security, and within the State Department to expedite the processing of those persons in Albania as quickly as possible.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you. Senator Ricketts?

Senator RICKETTS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Ms. Dunnigan, I want to go back to what we were talking about previously with the Georgian Dream and, of course, the influence of Bidzina Ivanishvili. Am I getting that name, really kind of ballpark, in the area? And I was wondering, so what—can you get more specific about what can we do to combat the influence of what is going on there with regard to the—what the Russians are trying to do to pull them, Georgia, closer to their sphere of influence?

Ms. DUNNIGAN. Thank you, Senator. It really is a critical question, and I deeply believe that our support to continue Georgia on this path to build its democratic institutions, to strengthen its independent media, to strengthen its judiciary, that these are all of the sorts of steps that help strengthen a society and make it more resilient to Russian malign activities or malign activities by the PRC.

So the work we do with Georgia in terms of security cooperation and economic cooperation, trying to integrate Georgia with the West, develop their middle corridor, through energy infrastructure and transport infrastructure, these are all of the steps that really do help cement Georgia's future with the West. And, if confirmed, I would continue to make this a priority because I think it is essential.

Senator RICKETTS. Do we need to take a harder line against some of these anti-democratic forces in Georgia?

Mr. KOSTELANCIK. Thank you. I believe it is imperative that we are frank with the Georgian Government about concerning steps that we have seen, and I would continue to be frank with the Government if confirmed. And so that is a conversation that I know we are having with the Government now and I would continue to have.

Senator RICKETTS. Okay. Thank you. And, Mr. Kostelancik, just how do you assess our cyber cooperation with Albania right now? Is there more that we need to do?

Ms. DUNNIGAN. Thank you, Senator, for the question. At the moment, we have marshaled resources from the Department of Defense, from civilian sources, and from the U.S. Government to provide as much expertise, and help, training to Albanians as they build out protections against future cyberattacks. We are working

very closely with the Albanian Government, and I am heartened as well by the help and assistance that is rendered by European partners, by others from around the world, as well as NATO through its Cyber Excellence Center. So there are a number of resources that are being applied to the challenge right now. If confirmed, I pledge to you that we will continue those efforts. They are important to securing Albania's cybersecurity, and as a NATO ally, that has great importance for us as well.

Senator RICKETTS. So do you assess that Albania is satisfied with our efforts?

Mr. KOSTELANCIK. I believe they are looking for us to continue to commit to do more. I will pledge to do all that I can, knowing that there are partners besides the United States that also have significant expertise and experience that are ready to provide that. Working all together, we hope that we can address Albania's needs.

Senator RICKETTS. Great. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you, Senator Ricketts, and, Senator Duckworth apparently is on the way, has some questions. So in the meantime, I will follow up with a few questions, and, Senator Ricketts, if you would like to as well, please feel free to do so.

I do want to mention that just today, the U.N. General Assembly adopted a resolution, led by Vanuatu, that calls upon the International Court of Justice to develop an advisory opinion clarifying the obligations of states to protect rights of future generations from adverse climate change, which does bring me, Ms. Yastishock, to a question that I did want to follow up with you on regarding the issue of the rainforests in Papua New Guinea.

Obviously, all these countries are directly threatened by rising sea levels and climate change. In the case of Papua New Guinea, they are also home to 13 percent of the world's rainforests, and I know that USAID has been working with them to try to develop plans to create alternatives to the current practice, which is cutting down a lot of the rainforests, but all of us know that that, you know, this is a race against time. So I am interested in your thoughts on how we can help the people of Papua New Guinea when it comes to making sure that their people can have a livelihood and, at the same time, make sure that we can protect the rainforests, which would, of course, be in their interest and the interest of the entire world when it comes to climate change and sea level rise.

Ms. YASTISHOCK. Thank you, Senator, for question. Yes, Papua New Guinea is rich in biodiversity, and the rainforest is—and tropical forests are one of the areas that USAID has been working on. We have entered into a bilateral agreement with Papua New Guinea on biodiversity adaptation as well as conservation efforts. Looking at where we have worked in other areas, we have adopted a number of livelihood programs that ensure the safe use and the resources of the rainforests and while also preserving the livelihoods of the people. So if confirmed, I will continue that work and build upon it so that we are preserving the natural resources of the country.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. All right. Welcome, Senator Duckworth, and the floor is yours.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you, Senator Van Hollen.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. And let me—let me also say the gavel is going to be yours because I do have to run to another meeting momentarily. I want to thank and congratulate, again, all of the witnesses for your nominations. I certainly look forward to supporting each of your nominations to be Ambassadors. Thank you for your service. Senator Ricketts, after Senator Duckworth goes, you are, of course, free to continue asking questions, but let me turn it over to Senator Duckworth.

Senator DUCKWORTH [presiding]. Wonderful. Thank you. It is opening day, by the way. All us Cubbies are super excited. Ms. Yastishock—did I pronounce that correctly—thank you for your statement today and for your lifelong dedication to public service.

Obviously, there is a significant concern about the growing PRC influence in the Pacific Islands region, particularly since the announcement of a security partnership between the PRC and the Solomon Islands. As you know, this committee has recently authorized additional diplomatic resources to be devoted to the region as a signal of our dedication and commitment, and I have been a strong supporter of those efforts. That said, my own regular travels through the Indo-Pacific have reinforced my belief that our engagement with regional partners cannot be built primarily or solely around a strategic competition with the PRC. Rather, I believe that we need to meet our partners where they are and to figure out how we work together to meet their needs as well as our own. We also need to figure out how to leverage our closest regional partners, such as Australia and New Zealand, in these efforts.

What do you see as the key challenges for the United States in our efforts to bring the Pacific Island countries into closer partnership with the United States, and, if confirmed, how would you work to address those challenges in Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu?

Ms. YASTISHOCK. Thank you, Senator. I think one that you put your finger on is that we need to be there, increasing our presence through our diplomatic efforts. We're elevating USAID's presence in Papua New Guinea to establish a country representative office, bringing back the Peace Corps to the region. Having our presence there is part of addressing that issue.

I think the other part that we need to focus on is really building the capacity of each of the countries. Our difference in the model that we bring as compared to others in the region, such as the PRC, is to really work with our partners, listening to them, learning from them, understanding what their needs are, and building their capacity. And we do that in conjunction and cooperation with our allied like-minded partners, including Australia, New Zealand, and Japan.

We can see that in some of the programs that we are already working on, for instance, in Papua New Guinea, on the electrification program, which is a joint effort between Papua New Guinea, U.S., Australia, New Zealand, and Japan. And so that is our difference. That is what we bring is to make sure that our partners have the capacity, able to make those decisions and decide their own paths forward.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you. I think there is also—you know, in addition to electrification, also healthcare opportunities there to do some joint—some joint missions as well.

My colleagues here have heard me speak time and again about my interest in elevating the U.S.-ASEAN relationship, which was bolstered last year by a special summit in May. As you know, last year, the Biden administration also hosted the first-ever U.S.-Pacific Island Country Summit here in D.C. in September. What role do you see ASEAN playing in the Pacific, especially a year like this year when Indonesia is the chair of ASEAN? Should we be doing more to encourage ASEAN or its members, particularly the major maritime states, like Indonesia and the Philippines, to engage regionally with the Pacific Island nations?

Ms. YASTISHOCK. Well, thank you again. I do agree that ASEAN could play a major role with building capacity of the Pacific Islands. They have a lot to offer as far as issues on IUU fishing, how to patrol, how to ensure and work on trafficking in persons, and also, as you mentioned, on healthcare, to be able to detect and prevent transnational threats through diseases. So I do think that there is a lot of synergy that can be between the ASEAN countries as well as the—as the Pacific Islands.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you. I am going to switch gears a little bit and look to Ukraine and Russia's invasion. You know, it has impacted every country in the world, none more so than the states that were formerly Russian—under Russian within the Soviet Union. While many of our Eastern Bloc allies are some of the fiercest advocates for Ukraine, others have hesitated to be too far off sides with Russia for various reasons.

Mr. Kostelancik and Ms. Dunnigan, for Albania and Georgia, respectively, can each of you speak to how those countries have been managing their responses to the war in Ukraine since the invasion last year, and identify some of your early priorities for engagement in this area, if confirmed?

Ms. DUNNIGAN. Thank you, Senator. The Georgian people overwhelmingly support Ukraine in this war, and the Georgians have taken important steps to support Ukraine. They have sent some critical energy equipment to help repair the energy grid that Russia has damaged when they started targeting civilian infrastructure. They welcomed thousands of Ukrainian refugees into Georgia. They have also welcomed many Russian dissidents, and activists, and journalists who fled Russia during the war. Unfortunately, Georgia knows all too well the threat that Ukraine is experiencing since Russia has occupied Georgia since 2008.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Mm-hmm.

Ms. DUNNIGAN. And if I am confirmed, I will continue to work closely with the Georgian Government and support their own sovereignty and territorial integrity, and help hold Russia accountable to its commitments under the 2008 ceasefire agreement and under the U.N. Charter, in the same way we are trying to do with Russia in relation to Ukraine.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you. Mr. Kostelancik?

Mr. KOSTELANCIK. Thank you for the question, Senator. Albania as a NATO ally has, since the beginning of the conflict—Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine—offered material, and non-lethal, and

lethal assistance to Ukraine. It has sent its forces to reinforce NATO, reinforcements in front-line states as a way of signaling to Moscow our strength as a NATO alliance that Albania is proudly part of. And quite significantly, as a rotating member of the U.N. Security Council and the co-pen holder with the United States on resolutions dealing with Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine, Albania has been enormously helpful to our diplomatic efforts there in New York and throughout the world in bringing attention to support Ukraine and to condemn Russia.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you. Senator Ricketts, did you have further questions?

Senator RICKETTS. Yeah, I just have—I just wanted to do a quick follow-up with Ms. Dunnigan. So you were just talking about Georgia's response to the invasion in Ukraine, and, of course, they initially condemned it as unacceptable and provided, as you mentioned, some of the resources there. But they have not imposed any sanctions on Russia, and there are concerns that Georgian businesses are being used to evade some of the sanctions we have put on Russia. Can you just talk a little about how do you see—again, you would think that the Georgians, as you said, were overwhelming in support of Ukraine.

You know, obviously they are very close regionally, and there are a lot of cultural ties there, but it seems like the—between Kiev and Tbilisi, there is tension. And so how do you see the Georgian Government's reaction of not being more helpful to Ukraine and less—you know, more condemning of Russia, and do you—do you think that we need to do more with regard to the sanctions, and are—you know, do you think Georgian business are helping to avoid the sanctions? I mean, just tell me how you think the Georgian Government thinks about this, and what about Georgian companies helping to evade the sanctions?

Ms. DUNNIGAN. Thank you, Senator. On the sanctions question, it is absolutely a priority of the United States to ensure sanctions compliance and implementation, or compliance if you have not—if you have not signed on to the sanctions yourself. And we are having that conversation directly with the Georgian Government, with the National Bank of Georgia, with the private sector of Georgia, and with the financial sector of Georgia. And the Georgian Government wants to comply with these sanctions. They have told us, and they have actually asked us for some more training to help them with implementation to ensure there is not evasion of sanctions with products going through Georgia.

And I absolutely agree with you. Georgia, more than—you know, Georgia absolutely should understand that we do not want to continue to fund, via sanctions evasion, Russia's war machine and its military for future aggression, so that is a conversation that we are having with Georgia. In fact, our special coordinator for sanctions and other interagency officials will be going to Georgia in the coming months to continue this important dialogue, and, if confirmed, I will certainly make this a priority.

As far as, you know, providing assistance, and what they have done, and why have they not done more, Georgia has also been very important in the international fora, as my colleague mentioned, both in the U.N. and other multilateral for a, like the

OSCE, in supporting this and supporting Ukraine, and talking—passing resolutions that really call out Russia for its aggression. And if I am confirmed, I would continue to work with the Government and help them keep doing that. Thank you.

Senator RICKETTS. Great. Thank you very much. Senator Duckworth?

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you. This hearing has now come to a close. Thank you to each of you for your service to our Nation and your continued willingness to serve on behalf of the American people. You obviously are not doing this for the glamour or the high pay, so you must do this because your heart truly is that of a servant to the people, so thank you. It is a tough job that you are each taking on, and I am so proud to have been able to make it back here to ask you questions.

For any members wishing to submit questions for the record, the hearing record will remain open until close of business tomorrow, Friday, March 31.

Senator DUCKWORTH. And the committee stands adjourned. Thank you.

[Whereupon, at 11:24 a.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

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### **Additional Material Submitted for the Record**

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD  
SUBMITTED TO NICOLE D. THERIOT BY SENATOR MARCO RUBIO

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

*Answer.* Under President Xi, the Chinese Communist Party has become more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad. We will defend U.S. national security and advance our values and prosperity; defend international law, agreements, principles, and institutions that maintain peace and security; protect the rights of individuals and sovereign nations; and make it possible for all countries to coexist and cooperate. If confirmed, I will continue our work with Guyana to strengthen democratic values and the commitment to a rules-based international order.

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

*Answer.* While the United States and the People’s Republic of China (PRC) are strategic competitors, it may be possible for the PRC to make constructive contributions toward solving challenges we and other countries face in common. Any PRC contributions must be scrutinized, however, to ensure they are neither springboards for narrow PRC economic interests nor platforms to create more permissive conditions for its own authoritarian model.

*Question.* Do you believe that there are any areas within which the Chinese Communist Party would constructively work with the United States in good faith?

*Answer.* While the United States competes vigorously with the PRC where we differ, the United States manages this competition responsibly. This includes maintaining openness to cooperation with Beijing where our interests may overlap and where our cooperation can advance solutions to transnational challenges, including possibly climate change, counter-narcotics, pandemic threats, non-proliferation, food

security, and macroeconomics. We will work with Beijing only if it secures American jobs, American values, and our way of life for future generations.

*Question.* If confirmed, will you approve any joint activity with organizations or representatives from the People's Republic of China in the country in which you will work?

*Answer.* In line with the Administration's approach on competition and cooperation with the People's Republic of China, if confirmed, I would maintain openness to U.S. involvement in cooperative efforts that involve PRC entities and third countries or international organizations in areas where it is in U.S. interests to do so. That said, I would scrutinize and encourage third parties to scrutinize any such arrangements to ensure they follow international norms, feature transparency, and delineate steps to verify regularly that all parties are working in good faith.

*Question.* Guyana is a founding member of the Caribbean community (CARICOM). Its current President, Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali, is working to unite Guyanese of all ethnicities, races, and religions in Guyana, which is a very much needed approach considering the history of tensions between different ethnic groups. How do you assess our current relations with Guyana?

*Answer.* U.S.-Guyana bilateral relations are excellent. Guyana is a steadfast partner and actively recruits U.S. investment. Visiting U.S. officials and trade delegations are received regularly by His Excellency President Ali, but also by members of the opposition, and on all sides, there is a diversity of race and religion. The Guyanese Government strongly supports U.S. Government priorities, activities, initiatives, and programs, and, if confirmed, I will search for more ways to include diverse audiences and beneficiaries so that Guyana's economic transformation includes everyone.

*Question.* If confirmed, what will be your main priorities as U.S. Ambassador in Guyana?

*Answer.* If confirmed, my priorities will be to protect U.S. citizens and U.S. interests in Guyana and to strive for a stronger bilateral partnership that supports improved governance, economic prosperity, and security in Guyana. Guiding our efforts will be diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility; ensuring climate concerns are incorporated into policy making; and emphasizing the importance of transparency and accountability at all levels of government. This path will provide opportunities for U.S. educational institutions, businesses, and citizens to partner with Guyana.

*Question.* How will you support deepening Guyana's relations with the United States?

*Answer.* If confirmed, I will work to strengthen our relationship and build on the momentum of President Ali's recent visits to Washington DC and of U.S. Government leadership to Guyana and the region. I will encourage cultural exchanges between our countries and will support frank discussion of how we can help modernize Guyana's systems and infrastructure, whether in the health care, agriculture, education, or other sectors. The United States and Guyana share a strong relationship based on the common values of openness, diversity, and democracy.

*Question.* In your previous role as Deputy Chief of Mission at the U.S. Embassy in Haiti, you worked through many challenges, including the increase in gang violence, lack of leadership and weak government institutions. How has your experience working in Haiti prepared you to serve as Ambassador in Guyana?

*Answer.* My time in Haiti was challenging, and I am grateful for that experience because it helped prepare me to weather crises. It taught me that security underpins everything. There can be no true economic growth or development without security. Guyana has weak borders and suffers from corruption and an under-resourced security sector. These deficiencies create opportunities for transnational criminal organizations. If confirmed, I will use my experience to build a stronger security sector, bringing to bear U.S. Government resources, including the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative.

*Question.* What is your assessment of the border dispute between Venezuela and Guyana?

*Answer.* Guyana's relationship with Venezuela is complicated, with Venezuela claiming nearly two thirds of Guyana's territory as its own. In the past few years, the United States and Guyana have solidified our partnership. If confirmed, I will expand this partnership and encourage a peaceful resolution of this dispute. The 1899 arbitral award determined the land boundary between Guyana and Venezuela

and should be respected unless or until otherwise determined by a competent legal body.

*Question.* What specific humanitarian support is the U.S. providing to support Guyana's efforts to host Venezuelan migrants?

*Answer.* The United States provided \$3.7 million in funding in FY 2021 to IOM, UNICEF, UNHCR, and the Pan American Development Foundation for multi-sector assistance to Venezuelan migrants. The Guyanese Government relies on international assistance to aid the Venezuelan population. If confirmed, I will strengthen Embassy efforts to support Guyana as it receives those fleeing from insecurity and economic hardship. One key opportunity is to continue supporting English language classes for migrants who want to work but struggle with the language barrier.

*Question.* China and Guyana have had a long history of diplomatic relations, dating to 1972. It was the first English speaking nation in the Caribbean to open relations with the PRC. The Chinese Communist Party has provided assistance and support to Marxist political parties through Guyana's history. What is your characterization of the existing relationship between Guyana and China?

*Answer.* Guyana is a 2018 signatory to the Belt and Road Initiative, and China National Offshore Oil Corporation has a 25 percent stake in the ExxonMobil-Hess offshore oil venture. Other PRC-linked SOEs have undertaken large infrastructure projects in the past. Prior to the influx of oil wealth, the Ali administration generally sought lowest cost bidders for large projects, but it has been vocal in the press recently about the delays and cost overruns by PRC-linked SOEs, especially on the international airport project.

*Question.* Are there concerns with their existing relationship? If so, by whom?

*Answer.* While Guyana has historic ties to the PRC through a small community of Guyanese descendants of Chinese indentured laborers, many Guyanese are concerned about the PRC's poor investment practices. In some sectors like mining infrastructure, PRC-linked companies were a partner of necessity in a country with limited revenue. However, with more oil revenues, the Guyanese Government is increasingly looking to invest in high quality goods and services offered by U.S. companies.

*Question.* Are you concerned with media reports indicating that Guyana's Vice President, Bharrat Jagdeo, has received bribes from Chinese companies?

*Answer.* Guyana recently scored 39/100 on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index. Without strong anticorruption efforts, businesses will be at a disadvantage when competing for permits and contracts in Guyana, and both Guyanese and international businesses care deeply about transparency. If confirmed, this will be one of my top priorities for cooperation with the Government of Guyana. I will work with the relevant authorities to build Guyana's capacity to identify, investigate, and prosecute corruption.

*Question.* The U.S. is a leading importer of Guyana's oil, with China and India following. Guyana's total oil exports earned more than \$1 billion in revenue to the Government of Guyana in 2022 and benefits both the U.S. and Guyana. Unfortunately, the Biden administration wants to stop America's use of fossil fuel energy sources such as coal, oil, and natural gas. This will hurt American's pocketbooks with increased fuel prices, but also assist's China's attempt to achieve energy dominance and will force Guyana to partner with the CCP for its economic livelihood. In your estimation, which industry or sector outside of oil exports in Guyana would result in \$1 billion a year in revenue for Guyana?

*Answer.* Guyana's leadership has been very clear that they will continue to develop their energy resources even as they seek to make investments in greener and renewable energy. U.S. businesses are key leaders in this effort, and we are glad they continue to be chosen to partner with Guyana in its development. Guyanese officials emphasize the need to diversify its economy. Aside from its historical strength in mining and continued exploration efforts for gold and other key minerals, it is pushing hard to develop its agriculture, eco-tourism, health care, and technology sectors.

*Question.* Do you support increased U.S. investment in developing Guyana's energy industry, including in fossil fuels?

*Answer.* Guyana's energy sector offers extensive economic opportunities for U.S. firms in both conventional and renewable energy, including in decarbonization and methane reduction. If confirmed, I will work to ensure a level playing field for American companies to compete fairly and transparently. I will work with the Guya-

nese Government to ensure U.S. firms' contracts and assets continue to be respected. Finally, I will partner with the U.S. Export Import Bank, Development Finance Corporation, and other agencies to promote the use of high-quality U.S. goods and services.

*Question.* Do you agree with the Biden administration's decision last year to vote against a proposal presented to the Inter-American Development Bank to build a port that would support Guyana's oil and gas industry?

*Answer.* The decision by the Inter-American Development Bank to not call for a vote on the port expansion project because of the U.S. policy at the time is understandable. My understanding is that the project was not voted on or vetoed by the United States, rather it was never brought to a vote. That said, energy security is a priority, particularly in the Caribbean, and we are glad that the oil and gas produced in Guyana is easier and more environmentally friendly to refine than most.

*Question.* Are you worried that an absence of American investment in Guyana's energy industry presents an opening for the Chinese Communist Party to increase its role in Guyana's economy?

*Answer.* I am encouraged by growing U.S. private sector interest in Guyana. Our Embassy is constantly hosting trade delegations, briefing U.S. businesses, and supporting Guyanese businesses looking for high-quality partners, products, or services. In the last six months, the U.S. hosted large and diverse delegations from across the United States representing small, medium, and large firms. If confirmed, my job will be to make sure we remain responsive to our private sector and to the needs of Guyana moving forward in a spirit of true partnership.

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RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD  
SUBMITTED TO ANN MARIE YASTISHOCK BY SENATOR ROBERT MENENDEZ

*China*

*The security pact signed by China and the Solomon Islands last year raised concerns about Beijing infringing on the Solomon Islands' sovereignty as well as the possibility that the PRC could establish a more permanent military presence in the area.*

*Question.* If confirmed, how will you respond to, monitor, and push back on an increased presence of the PRC?

*Answer.* I will work closely with the Governments of Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu as well as our Pacific Island neighbors to build greater stability, security, and economic opportunity throughout the region. U.S. security cooperation activities include the building, training, and equipping of countries' security forces, and joint maritime law enforcement initiatives. I will make use of all available tools within the U.S. Government to counter propaganda and disinformation through capacity-building training, proactive work to expose problematic PRC influence, and arrangement of provision of open media sources for the region.

*Question.* What changes has the framework agreement yielded so far?

*Answer.* The broad nature of the Solomon Islands-PRC bilateral security agreement could still leave the door open for the deployment of PRC military forces to Solomon Islands. Additionally, we have concerns over the expansion of the PRC's internal security and surveillance apparatus beyond its own borders. The signing of the agreement does not change our commitment to a strong relationship with the region and our efforts to strengthen our longstanding bonds with the people of Solomon Islands.

*Question.* What should the priorities be for the diplomatic team in Honiara as the Department seeks to establish a permanent diplomatic presence there?

*Answer.* In furtherance of U.S. policy in the Pacific, our diplomatic team has sought to build our bilateral relationship by prioritizing the needs of the people of Solomon Islands, being responsive to requests from the Government of Solomon Islands and coordinating our efforts with allies and partners. If confirmed, I will continue to promote cooperation on unexploded ordnance, the dispatch of the USNS Mercy hospital ship to address public health, the return of the Peace Corps, climate change initiatives, and strengthened people-to-people ties.

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RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD  
 SUBMITTED TO ANNE MARIE YASTISHOCK BY SENATOR MARCO RUBIO

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

*Answer.* Under President Xi, the Chinese Communist Party has become more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad. We will defend U.S. national security and advance our values and prosperity; defend international law, agreements, principles, and institutions that maintain peace and security; protect the rights of individuals and sovereign nations; and make it possible for all countries to coexist and cooperate. If confirmed, I will continue our work with our Pacific Island partners to strengthen democratic values and the commitment to a rules-based international order.

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

*Answer.* While the United States and the People’s Republic of China (PRC) are strategic competitors, it may be possible for the PRC to make constructive contributions toward solving challenges we and other countries face in common. Any PRC contributions must be scrutinized, however, to ensure they are neither springboards for narrow PRC economic interests nor platforms to create more permissive conditions for its own authoritarian model.

*Question.* Do you believe that there are any areas within which the Chinese Communist Party would constructively work with the United States in good faith?

*Answer.* While the United States competes vigorously with the PRC where we differ, the United States manages this competition responsibly. This includes maintaining openness to cooperation with Beijing where our interests may overlap and where our cooperation can advance solutions to transnational challenges, including possibly climate change, counter-narcotics, pandemic threats, non-proliferation, food security, and macroeconomics.

*Question.* If confirmed, will you approve any joint activity with organizations or representatives from the People’s Republic of China in the country in which you will work?

*Answer.* In line with the Administration’s approach on competition and cooperation with the People’s Republic of China (PRC), if confirmed, I would maintain openness to U.S. involvement in cooperative efforts that involve PRC entities, our Pacific Islands partners, and third countries or international organizations in areas where our collective interests align. That said, I would scrutinize and encourage third parties to scrutinize any such arrangements to ensure they follow international norms, feature transparency, and delineate steps to verify regularly that all parties are working in good faith.

*Question.* In March 2022, the Solomon Islands and China signed a security agreement to address “internal threats” and included protection for Chinese-owned businesses in the country. The week before the agreement was signed, the State Department released a report attacking the Solomon Islands for their stance on same-sex marriage, alienating our Solomon Islander partners. The nation’s Prime Minister declined to participate with U.S. representatives during a WWII memorial marking the Battle of Guadalcanal, as well as temporarily barring U.S. naval vessels from docking at its seaports. Is exporting an overly progressive social policy in alignment with our national security priorities?

*Answer.* We promote American values, such as democracy and human rights, through diplomatic activities all over the world. Likewise, we advance national security through diplomatic engagement as well as military presence, multinational training, combined exercises, and equipment exports.

I believe the report you may be referring to is the Human Rights Report (HRR), which the Secretary of State is required to submit annually to Congress. The HRR captures facts about the observance of and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. The HRR does not contain analysis, makes no judgments, and

makes no statements or determinations as a matter of domestic or international law. Promoting respect for human rights is a U.S. foreign policy priority that furthers our national interests and security. Societies that respect and defend human rights and fundamental freedoms, democratic institutions, and the rule of law are more stable and secure.

*Question.* As much as we hate to confront this fact, American power and influence has limits in what it can achieve. We face real tradeoffs in the objectives we need to pursue. We do not necessarily live in a world where we can both confront the growing Chinese Communist Party influence and transform traditional culture in the South Pacific to adopt the same social norms as Los Angeles. So, in the Solomon Islands, what should our priority be—containing the CCP's influence or promoting a progressive social agenda?

*Answer.* In Solomon Islands, we seek to build our bilateral relationship by prioritizing the needs of the people of Solomon Islands, being responsive to requests from the Government of Solomon Islands and coordinating our efforts with allies and partners. If confirmed, I will support locally owned and driven development that is sustainable and elevates gender equity and women's economic empowerment. We can showcase that supporting good governance and increasing the strength of democratic institutions delivers for people, enhancing fairness, transparency, and prosperity. If confirmed, I will work to increase American influence in this way.

*Question.* In your assessment, will the Solomon Islands agreement with the CCP result in a permanent military presence?

*Answer.* The Government of Solomon Islands stated privately and publicly that it will not allow the PRC to build a military base. The prime minister said publicly he would like to release more details if the PRC agrees. It is up to the PRC to show if it can be transparent on security matters that have raised concerns throughout the region from many Pacific Island countries. The United States encourages vigilance in the face of Beijing's strategy to increase its influence regionally through ambiguous, incremental, and escalatory tactics in furtherance of its authoritarian aims.

*Question.* How do you plan to counter the CCP's strategic agenda in the South Pacific as it relates to their bilateral agreements, increased presence, and overtures for military bases in the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, and PNG?

*Answer.* I will work closely with the Governments of Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu as well as our Pacific Island neighbors to build greater stability, security, and economic opportunity throughout the region. U.S. security cooperation activities include the building, training, and equipping of countries' security forces, and joint maritime law enforcement initiatives. The Solomon Islands Government has said both privately and publicly that it will not allow the PRC to build a military base.

*Question.* Should the U.S. be doing more with its allies in the region regarding shared interests? How do you envision coordinating allied efforts if confirmed?

*Answer.* Over the past year, the United States has demonstrated our deep and enduring partnership with the Pacific Island countries and expanded our diplomatic, development, and people-to-people efforts, including through the launch of the Partners in the Blue Pacific and the U.S.-Pacific Island Country Summit. As a continual part of our diplomatic and development activities, we regularly coordinate with allies and partners in the region as well as multilateral organizations in the advancement of shared interests. If confirmed, I will continue to engage with our allies and partners to coordinate and partner on policy, development and people-to-people initiatives in Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu.

*Question.* If confirmed, what steps will you take to promote U.S.-led and international projects to develop energy resources and infrastructure as an alternative to Chinese-backed projects?

*Answer.* The PRC's involvement in the region has grown, we have seen a range of increasingly problematic behaviors, including its assertion of unlawful maritime claims and the ongoing militarization of disputed features in the South China Sea, predatory economic activities including illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, and investments that undermine good governance and promote corruption. We must provide positive development alternatives and be visible in our programs and engagements with Pacific Island countries. For example, if confirmed I will continue efforts to work with the Government of Papua New Guinea, Australia, Japan and New Zealand to implement the Papua New Guinea Electrification Project to expand access to energy.

*Question.* Is there a role for the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation in facilitating U.S. investment in PNG, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu?

*Answer.* U.S. International Development Finance Corporation has two active projects in Papua New Guinea. Reflecting our commitment to help build a stronger Pacific region through investment in infrastructure, DFC, along with the Japan Bank for International Cooperation, each will provide \$50 million USD in credit guarantees to Export Finance Australia to support the acquisition of Digicel Pacific. If confirmed, I will work with the DFC to support negotiation of an Investment Incentive Agreement (IIA) with Vanuatu and Solomon Islands to catalyze private sector activity, spur economic growth, and advance inclusive development. Without an IIA, DFC is unable to finance projects in Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands. DFC is eager to work in both markets.

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RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD  
SUBMITTED TO ROBIN DUNNIGAN BY SENATOR ROBERT MENENDEZ

*Georgian Democracy*

*The recent image of Georgian police firing a water cannon at a protestor fearlessly waving the flag of the European Union epitomizes the current moment in Georgia. Georgia's people and civil society remain committed to their European future, but the Government still must grapple with de-oligarchization and polarization to progress on their Euro Atlantic path.*

*Question.* If confirmed, how will you work to support Georgia in the necessary reforms to move forward with EU accession, while also holding the Government accountable when they betray the will of the Georgian people and threaten civil society, as they did with their recently proposed foreign agent law?

*Answer.* The people of Georgia overwhelmingly support EU integration, and, if confirmed, I will prioritize helping Georgia implement the necessary reforms to achieve EU candidate status. I will engage the people and the Government of Georgia and align our assistance programming to help further Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration. Georgia has made remarkable progress, but some concerning developments show there is more to do. I will engage the Government frankly on this topic and will welcome cooperating with you and other members of Congress on these issues.

*LGBTQ Rights*

*The 2021 attack on Tbilisi Pride, which targeted members of the LGBTQ community in Georgia, as well as journalists covering the event, was a stark reminder that the authorities in Georgia have neglected to protect vulnerable groups.*

*Question.* How will you use your platform to stand up for Georgia's LGBTQ community if confirmed?

*Answer.* If confirmed, I will reiterate our solidarity with the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex (LGBTQI+) community in Georgia. I will stress that the Government of Georgia is responsible for safeguarding the right to peaceful assembly, preventing discrimination and violence, and ensuring that in Georgia, everyone's rights and safety are duly protected. I will also urge the authorities to bring all instigators, organizers, and perpetrators of the 2021 violence at Tbilisi Pride to justice.

*Occupied Territory*

*Twenty percent of Georgian territory remains under Russian occupation. That is why I firmly believe that as we push the Georgian Government to advance the democratic will of the Georgian people, we must also support it in further developing the means to defend itself.*

*Question.* How can the United States best support Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity as Russia's war in Ukraine sends shockwaves through the South Caucasus?

*Answer.* If confirmed, I will prioritize advocating for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity. I will work with Georgia and our international partners, including through the Geneva International Discussions, to hold Russia to its commitments under the 2008 ceasefire agreement and the U.N. Charter. I will continue to support programming that brings together people from across Administrative

Boundary Lines. I will also support assistance that will help Georgia defend its borders, deter Russia, and prevent Russia from expanding its influence in the region.

*Question.* What are the risks and opportunities created by this moment?

Answer. Russia's unprovoked war against Ukraine has shown why it is essential we help strengthen the democratic, economic, and security resilience of those facing Russian aggression and malign activities. This moment is a tremendous opportunity for the Georgian Government and the people of Georgia to realize their desire to further integrate with the EU, NATO, and the West. If confirmed, I will prioritize supporting Georgia's further Euro-Atlantic integration, which in the national interest of Georgia, as well as in the national security interest of the United States.

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RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD  
SUBMITTED TO ROBIN DUNNIGAN BY SENATOR MARCO RUBIO

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

Answer. Under President Xi, the Chinese Communist Party has become more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad. We will defend U.S. national security and advance our values and prosperity; defend international law, agreements, principles, and institutions that maintain peace and security; protect the rights of individuals and sovereign nations; and make it possible for all countries to coexist and cooperate. If confirmed, I will continue our work with Georgia to strengthen democratic values and the commitment to a rules-based international order.

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*Question.* Do you believe that there are any areas within which the Chinese Communist Party would constructively work with the United States in good faith?

Answer. While the United States competes vigorously with the PRC where we differ, the United States manages this competition responsibly. This includes maintaining openness to cooperation with Beijing where our interests may overlap and where our cooperation can advance solutions to transnational challenges, including possibly climate change, counter-narcotics, pandemic threats, non-proliferation, food security, and macroeconomics.

*Question.* If confirmed, will you approve any joint activity with organizations or representatives from the People's Republic of China in the country in which you will work?

Answer. In line with the Administration's approach on competition and cooperation with the People's Republic of China, if confirmed, I would maintain openness to U.S. involvement in cooperative efforts that involve PRC entities, Georgia, and third countries or international organizations in areas where our collective interests align. That said, I would scrutinize and encourage third parties to scrutinize any such arrangements to ensure they follow international norms, feature transparency, and delineate steps to verify regularly that all parties are working in good faith.

*Question.* Since the 1990s, Georgia's relations with Russia have been tense, resulting in Russia invading in 2008, and supporting secession movements in the regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. There have been significant concerns that Russia continues to influence Georgian affairs. Most recently, the Government's attempts to enact a "foreign agent" bill that is inspired by Russia's foreign agents law. Georgia has experience firsthand what an attack and occupation is like from Russia. In

light of Russia's aggression in Ukraine, have you noticed a change in the Georgian Government's current approach towards Russia?

Answer. The ruling party's attempt to pass a "foreign agents" bill was concerning. The people of Georgia made it clear this type of legislation is incompatible with their Georgian and Euro-Atlantic values. Georgia's citizens overwhelmingly support Ukraine and know the danger Russia poses, as it continues to occupy approximately 20 percent of Georgia's territory. The vast majority of Georgians understand it is not in Georgia's interest to move closer to Russia. If confirmed, I will prioritize advocating for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as its further Euro-Atlantic integration.

*Question.* What is your view regarding Georgia's prospects to conduct the reforms needed to become a candidate for EU membership, as well as prospects for NATO membership?

Answer. The people of Georgia overwhelmingly support EU integration, which will help improve the lives and security of every Georgian. If confirmed, I will prioritize helping Georgia implement the necessary reforms to achieve EU candidate status.

I support Georgia's NATO aspirations. If confirmed, I will continue to work with Georgia on strengthening its interoperability with NATO and its defensive capabilities, while also promoting the vital democratic reforms that are essential for NATO accession.

*Question.* Has Russian aggression against Ukraine accelerated Georgia's processes to join the EU and NATO? Why or why not?

Answer. Russia's unprovoked war against Ukraine has shown why it is essential we help strengthen the democratic, economic, and security resilience of those facing Russian aggression. At the 2022 NATO Summit, Allies endorsed additional support for Georgia as one of NATO's partners most directly affected by external threats. Also in 2022, the EU recognized that Georgia has a "European Perspective" and set out the reforms Georgia needed to implement to obtain EU candidate status.

*Question.* What are your views on the imprisonment of Georgia's former president Mikheil Saakashvili and journalist Nika Gvaramia?

Answer. The United States has emphasized to the Georgian Government its responsibility to provide the medical care former President Saakashvili needs and to ensure his human rights are respected, including his right to privacy. If confirmed, I will continue to follow this issue closely.

As the State Department noted in the 2022 Human Rights report, Georgia's Public Defender and human rights organizations have criticized Mr. Gvaramia's prosecution, conviction, and sentence. If confirmed, I will continue to urge the Government to respect freedom of expression and to strengthen the justice system in line with its own aspirations and goals.

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RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD  
SUBMITTED TO ROBIN DUNNIGAN BY SENATOR JEANNE SHAHEEN

*Question.* With respect to the Georgian Parliament's decision to withdraw the controversial "foreign agents" law, why did the Parliament even consider legislation that would have clearly ended their consideration for EU membership?

Answer. The ruling party's attempt to pass a "foreign agents" bill was concerning, and the people of Georgia made it clear this type of legislation is incompatible with their Georgian and Euro-Atlantic values. Georgia's citizens overwhelmingly support EU integration, which will help improve the lives and security of every Georgian. If confirmed, I will prioritize helping Georgia implement the necessary reforms to achieve EU candidate status.

*Question.* Do you think that our funding levels are appropriate to meet our objectives in place? Should the United States consider recalibrating their funding levels or conditioning specific funds to help encourage meaningful movement on the twelve-point plan outlined by the EU?

Answer. Georgia has made remarkable progress over the past 30 years, but there is more to do. If confirmed, I will prioritize helping Georgia implement the necessary reforms to achieve EU candidate status. I am concerned that by conditioning our assistance we could undermine our support for the people of Georgia and the democratic institutions we want to strengthen. If confirmed, I would welcome consulting with you and other members of Congress to ensure U.S. assistance is help-

ing achieve our objectives of supporting Georgia's further integration with the EU, NATO, and the West.

*Question.* If confirmed, how do you see this initiative supporting your efforts to advance Georgia's economic potential, strengthen its democratic institutions and increase its regional cooperation with other Black Sea partners?

*Answer.* The State Department is working together with the interagency on a comprehensive Black Sea Security strategy that promotes greater regional political engagement, security coordination, economic cooperation, energy security, and democratic resilience, all of which are critical for Georgia. If confirmed, I would work in the context of this broader strategy to support Georgia's efforts to develop a middle corridor, including in the transportation and energy sectors, as well as regional security cooperation.

*Question.* Does the United States support a long-term observer mission to ensure that next year's elections are free and fair, and reflective of the wishes of the Georgian people?

*Answer.* The United States supports OSCE election observation missions throughout the OSCE region. If confirmed, I will prioritize helping to ensure the 2024 parliamentary elections meet the standards of the OSCE, including by working with Georgian civil society organizations, international organizations, and partner countries. I would support an OSCE election observation mission and would encourage the Government of Georgia to welcome OSCE election observers, as they have in the past. I would also welcome engagement by you and other members of Congress on this issue.

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RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD  
SUBMITTED TO DAVID J. KOSTELANCIK BY SENATOR ROBERT MENENDEZ

*Question.* I was pleased to see the EU open accession negotiations with Albania, and USAID notify last year of its strategic re-engagement with Albania in order to support accession. The EU obviously has a large role to play in supporting Albania's accession too. How would you see your role in managing donor coordination, and what type of assistance should the United States specifically be providing to help Albania fulfill its EU aspirations?

*Answer.* U.S. assistance helps Albania deter threats, strengthen its democratic institutions, and push the necessary reforms to advance Albania's Euro-Atlantic integration. I support efforts to combat transnational organized crime and counter terrorism, strengthen judicial and other government institutions, bolster civil society and independent media, promote government transparency, and stiffen the fight against corruption. If not remedied, rule of law deficits and corruption in the judiciary will constrain Albania's EU membership progress, as well as its economic development and democratic consolidation.

With U.S. Government assistance, Albania established in 2016 the Special Anti-Corruption Body (SPAK), a specialized anti-corruption and organized crime entity. SPAK consists of a Special Anti-Corruption and Organized Crime Prosecutor's Office (SPO) and a National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) modeled on the FBI. SPAK has arrested former ministers, sitting members of Parliament, judges, police, prosecutors, mayors, and organized crime kingpins.

If confirmed, I will work to ensure U.S. resources accelerate Albania's EU integration through targeted investment in areas not addressed by the EU's growing assistance.

This includes, for instance, USG assistance to improve the role of women in the local decision-making process by strengthening their technical capacity to interact with local government officials and advocate effectively for improved public services; to strengthen the capacity of local civil society organizations in developing government oversight, anti-corruption efforts, human rights, gender equality, and other USG priorities; and to develop independent investigative reporting skills to expose corruption and highlight human rights issues.

*Question.* What do you see as the remaining obstacles in addressing good governance and judicial reforms?

*Answer.* The multi-year vetting process in Albania, in which all judges and prosecutors are assessed for ties to organized crime, unexplained wealth, and professional competence, is vital to restoring public trust in the rule of law, removing compromised actors, and strengthening good governance. U.S. assistance and moni-

toring efforts are supporting the vetting and selection of trusted new public officials and mitigating adjudication backlogs stemming from the vetting process.

Albania's main political parties tend to support U.S. policy and positions and advocate for Albania's EU aspirations, though political figures often are motivated by personal or partisan motives. The Albanian political class has been sluggish to enact reforms that could threaten their personal financial interests, power, and patronage networks, particularly justice reform and electoral reform. If confirmed, I will support efforts to combat corruption and focus the Government of Albania's efforts to meet EU accession goals.

*Question.* Iran has launched cyber-attacks on NATO member Albania for providing safe haven to the MEK at the request of the United States. What should be the response to a cyberattack on a NATO ally?

Answer. NATO is the strongest military alliance in history, as critical to ensuring the safety of the American people today as at any time since its founding more than 70 years ago. NATO is the unique, essential, and indispensable Transatlantic forum to consult, coordinate, and act on matters related to our individual and collective security. The Administration is working with NATO to strengthen our defenses in cyber space and to produce and secure the technologies of the future. NATO joined the United States and other partners making public statements of support for Albania in the wake of the attack.

If confirmed, I will continue work to strengthen the Alliance's capacity to address all threats to transatlantic security, including the malign use of emerging and disruptive technologies, malicious cyber and hybrid operations (including misinformation, disinformation, and weaponized corruption), and other challenges to the rules-based international order.

*Question.* While we have seen OFAC designate those responsible and we have condemned the attacks, have we done enough to support Albania in bolstering its cybersecurity and holding Tehran to account?

Answer. The Biden administration places alliances at the center of U.S. foreign policy and is actively working to ensure these alliances reflect and respond to the world we face, in order to make us stronger and safer.

Since our October 2022 Strategic Dialogue, the U.S. has worked with Albanian and U.S. experts to refine Albania's cyber needs and establish a roadmap for a strong and resilient whole-of-government cyber ecosystem. The United States has committed approximately \$50 million in cybersecurity assistance to Albania's civilian and military sectors—one of our largest cyber support contributions to any individual country to date. This is not only a response to the recent attacks, but a continuation of long-standing U.S. support for Albania's cyber capacity development goals, a commitment I intend to carry into the future.

In September 2022, the United States designated Iran's Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS) and Iran's Intelligence Minister, Esmail Khatib, for engaging in malicious cyber-enabled activities against the United States and U.S. allies, including Albania.

*Question.* Albania has graciously hosted a large number of Afghan evacuees. If confirmed, how will you ensure that the United States provides Albania the support that they need as they continue to do this important work?

Answer. Albania was the first European country to offer to host at-risk Afghan travelers in August 2021, and it has provided temporary protective status for almost 3,000 Afghans and their families to date.

The U.S. continues to work across the interagency to provide care and sustainment for these individuals and their families as we evaluate their applications for resettlement to the United States or other suitable locations.

Albania has been an excellent partner in assisting our Afghan allies and has expressed a willingness to continue the partnership into the future.

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RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD  
SUBMITTED TO DAVID J. KOSTELANCIK BY SENATOR MARCO RUBIO

*Question.* In May 2022, Secretary Blinken said that the People's Republic of China is the "only country with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do it." The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) clearly holds all the reins of power in the People's Republic of China and has used this power to commit genocide in Xinjiang, flood our communities with fentanyl, and emit by far the largest quantity of greenhouse

gases in the world today. With their absolute control of Chinese society and industry, the CCP could stop all of these destructive actions tomorrow if they so choose. Is the Chinese Communist Party a threat to the United States?

*Answer.* Under President Xi, the Chinese Communist Party has become more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad. We will defend U.S. national security and advance our values and prosperity; defend international law, agreements, principles, and institutions that maintain peace and security; protect the rights of individuals and sovereign nations; and make it possible for all countries to coexist and cooperate. If confirmed, I will continue our work with Albania to strengthen democratic values and the commitment to a rules-based international order.

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

*Answer.* While the United States and the People's Republic of China (PRC) are strategic competitors, it may be possible for the PRC to make constructive contributions toward solving challenges we and other countries face in common. Any PRC contributions must be scrutinized, however, to ensure they are neither springboards for narrow PRC economic interests nor platforms to create more permissive conditions for its own authoritarian model.

*Question.* Do you believe that there are any areas within which the Chinese Communist Party would constructively work with the United States in good faith?

*Answer.* While the United States competes vigorously with the PRC where we differ, the United States manages this competition responsibly. This includes maintaining openness to cooperation with Beijing where our interests may overlap and where our cooperation can advance solutions to transnational challenges, including possibly climate change, counter-narcotics, pandemic threats, non-proliferation, food security, and macroeconomics.

*Question.* If confirmed, will you approve any joint activity with organizations or representatives from the People's Republic of China in the countries or organizations in which you will work?

*Answer.* In line with the Administration's approach on competition and cooperation with the People's Republic of China, if confirmed, I would maintain openness to U.S. involvement in cooperative efforts that involve PRC entities, Albania, and third countries or international organizations in areas where our collective interests align. That said, I would scrutinize and encourage third parties to scrutinize any such arrangements to ensure they follow international norms, feature transparency, and delineate steps to verify regularly that all parties are working in good faith.

*Question.* The U.S. and Albania maintain excellent relations and the U.S. enjoys favorable views from Albanian citizens. They agreed to host Afghan evacuees from the U.S. departure from Afghanistan and is a likeminded U.S. partner regarding Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Since the early 1990s, the U.S. has provided more than \$1 billion in assistance to Albania regarding development, bolstering civil society, and security assistance. How can the U.S. further strengthen bilateral cooperation with Albania?

*Answer.* Advancing reform of Albania's judiciary is a key U.S. priority. Albania has undertaken a major, sweeping justice reform effort to make progress toward EU membership and the future Albanians demand and deserve. Judicial reform will create a stable, more prosperous partner with healthy, strong democratic institutions and a better place for U.S. businesses to invest and do business. If confirmed, I will do my part to help our partner reach its full potential.

The United States has recently committed approximately \$50 million in cybersecurity assistance to Albania's civilian and military sectors—one of our largest cyber support contributions to any individual country to date.

The U.S.-Albania business relationship also continues to grow. More U.S. companies are interested in doing business in Albania primarily in priority sectors—energy, tourism, and Information and Communications Technology (ICT). Our trade volume with Albania is currently small, and there are opportunities to expand in several sectors, including energy, tourism, and ICT. If confirmed, I commit to helping the Government of Albania improve transparency, rule of law, and security and political functionality to further improve the investment climate.

*Question.* If confirmed, how will you mitigate external authoritarian influence in concert with Albania?

*Answer.* This Administration supports a free and active exchange of ideas that will strengthen democracy, expand good governance, enshrine the rule of law, and

cement independence and integrity in the judicial sector in Albania. These efforts help to close vulnerabilities to malign outside actors.

A well-informed citizenry is key to strong democratic institutions. If confirmed, I will use the full range of options, including exchange programs, investigative journalist training initiatives, English language education, media literacy programs, and grants to civil society to deepen our engagement in Albania, reinforce objective and independent analysis, strengthen the fight against combat corruption, and promote information literacy.

I will also press the Albanian Government and political parties to advance electoral reforms, especially those recommended by the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights to ensure free and fair elections. U.S. assistance to Albania's new justice institutions bolsters Albania's resilience not only against corruption, but also against malign influence.

*Question.* If confirmed, what are your plans to counter corruption and organized crime in Albania?

*Answer.* U.S. assistance helps Albania deter threats, strengthen its democratic institutions, and push the necessary reforms to advance Albania's Euro-Atlantic integration. I support efforts to combat transnational organized crime and counter terrorism, strengthen judicial and other government institutions, bolster civil society and independent media, promote government transparency, and stiffen the fight against corruption. If not remedied, rule of law deficits and corruption in the judiciary will constrain Albania's EU membership progress, its economic development, and democratic consolidation.

With U.S. Government assistance, Albania established in 2016 the Special Anti-Corruption Body (SPAK), a specialized anti-corruption and organized crime entity. SPAK consists of a Special Anti-Corruption and Organized Crime Prosecutor's Office (SPO) and a National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) modeled on the FBI. SPAK has arrested former ministers, sitting members of Parliament, judges, police, prosecutors, mayors, and organized crime kingpins. If confirmed, I will continue U.S. support for the SPAK.

*Question.* Last year, Albania suffered a cyberattack that the U.S. Government determined to have originated in Iran. The attack was so damaging that Albania considered invoking NATO's Article 5. These attacks are believed to be retribution for Albania's decision to host members of an anti-Ayatollah group, the National Council of Resistance to Iran. If confirmed, what will you do to ensure the United States supports Albania's efforts to strengthen its cyber security?

*Answer.* The Biden administration places alliances at the center of U.S. foreign policy and actively works to ensure these alliances reflect and respond to the world we face, in order to make us stronger and safer.

Since our October 2022 Strategic Dialogue, the Biden administration has worked with Albanian and U.S. experts to refine Albania's cyber needs and establish a road-map for a strong and resilient whole-of-government cyber ecosystem. The United States has committed approximately \$50 million in cybersecurity assistance to Albania's civilian and military sectors—one of our largest cyber support contributions to any individual country to date. This is not only a response to the recent attacks, but a continuation of long-standing U.S. support for Albania's cyber capacity development goals, a commitment I intend to carry into the future.

*Question.* How can the United States support Albania to stand up to future attempts by Iran to punish or coerce the Albanian Government?

*Answer.* NATO is the strongest military alliance in history, as critical to ensuring the safety of the American people today as at any time since its founding more than 70 years ago. The Administration is committed to working with NATO Allies to strengthen our defenses in cyber space and to produce and secure the technologies of the future. NATO joined the United States and other partners making public statements of support for Albania in the wake of the attack.

If confirmed, I will continue work to strengthen the NATO Alliance's capacity to address all threats to transatlantic security, including the malign use of emerging and disruptive technologies, malicious cyber and hybrid operations (including misinformation, disinformation, and weaponized corruption), and other challenges to the rules-based international order.

*Question.* Given this blatant attack on Albania, an American ally, do you support the Biden administration's continued attempts to negotiate a nuclear deal with Iran?

*Answer.* The Biden administration has made clear its commitment to never allowing Iran to acquire a nuclear weapon and believes diplomacy is the best way to

achieve that goal, which I support. The Administration's diplomatic efforts on Iran's nuclear program have gone hand in hand with pressure on the regime to curb its destabilizing activities. If confirmed, I will continue to advance strong U.S. support of our NATO Ally Albania to strengthen its defense in cyber space and guard against Iran's destabilizing behavior.

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RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD  
SUBMITTED TO DAVID J. KOSTELANCIK BY SENATOR JEANNE SHAHEEN

*Question.* If confirmed, how can the United States, through its U.S. assistance to Albania, support its EU membership aspirations? Are there particular areas where the United States can support Albania in addressing remaining reforms?

*Answer.* U.S. assistance helps Albania deter threats, strengthen its democratic institutions, and push the necessary reforms to advance Albania's Western integration. Our programs support combatting transnational organized crime and countering terrorism, strengthening judicial and other government institutions, and bolstering civil society (with an emphasis on youth) and independent media to promote government transparency and counter endemic corruption. Weak rule of law traditions and a corrupt judicial system are key constraints not only to EU membership, but also to economic development, democratic consolidation, and stability.

With U.S. Government assistance, Albania established in 2016 the Special Anti-Corruption Body (SPAK), a specialized anti-corruption and organized crime entity. SPAK consists of a Special Anti-Corruption and Organized Crime Prosecutor's Office (SPO) and a National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) modeled on the FBI. SPAK has arrested former ministers, sitting members of Parliament, judges, police, prosecutors, mayors, and organized crime kingpins.

U.S. resources help accelerate Albania's EU integration through targeted investment in areas left unaddressed by the EU's growing assistance, including through assistance with cyber security, COVID-19, wildfire emergencies, education, health, social support services to Afghan evacuees, and food security in the wake of the Ukraine invasion.

*Question.* If confirmed, how will you work with the Government of Albania, local organizations, and the individuals themselves to ensure that the remaining Afghans are able to transit safely to the United States?

*Answer.* Albania was the first European country to offer to host at-risk Afghan travelers in August 2021, and it has provided temporary protective status for almost 3,000 Afghans and their families to date.

I will continue our work with USG colleagues to provide care and sustainment for these individuals and their families as we evaluate their applications for resettlement to the United States or other suitable locations.

Albania has been an excellent partner in assisting our Afghan allies and has expressed a willingness to continue the partnership into the future.

*Question.* Can you outline how the United States has supported Albania in responding to the attacks, and if confirmed, how will you support Albania in strengthening their cyber defenses?

*Answer.* The Biden administration has placed alliances at the center of U.S. foreign policy and is actively working to ensure these alliances reflect and respond to the world we face, in order to make us stronger and safer.

Since our October 2022 Strategic Dialogue, the Biden administration has worked with Albanian and U.S. experts to refine Albania's cyber needs and establish a roadmap for a strong and resilient whole-of-government cyber ecosystem. The United States has committed approximately \$50 million in cybersecurity assistance to Albania's civilian and military sectors—one of our largest cyber support contributions to any individual country to date. This funding is not only in response to the recent attacks, but also a continuation of U.S. support for Albania's cyber capacity development goals, a commitment I intend to carry into the future.

*Question.* Can you provide an update on discussions with regard to Albania's offer of a NATO military port at Porto Romano?

*Answer.* Albania is a valued NATO ally, and we appreciate its contributions to regional security. NATO's ongoing refurbishment of Albania's Kucova Air Base will directly support NATO air operations in the region. Discussions on Porto Romano as we review, along with NATO, technical specifications and designs Albania pro-

vided. Any final decision regarding the Porto Romano offer, or any other offer to NATO, will be made by NATO Allies collectively.

*Question.* Can you offer your assessment of the Open Balkans initiative? Does the United States continue to support the Open Balkans Initiative?

*Answer.* We see the future of all the Western Balkan countries in the European Union, so advancing these countries European integration remains a U.S. priority. If confirmed, I will support all economic integration efforts, including the Open Balkans initiative, that advance the region's European path and benefit all citizens of the region.

*Question.* How does the Open Balkan Initiative fit within the domestic and foreign policy priorities for the Albanian Government?

*Answer.* Albanian Prime Minister Rama publicly advocates for the Open Balkan Initiative as a strong vehicle for regional integration and, eventually, Western Balkan integration into the European Union. The United States supports regional integration measures that align with EU accession priorities. Public support in Albania for EU integration remains around 90 percent, and the latest EU Commission report shows Albania progressing well on its accession process.

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