

## NOMINATIONS

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TUESDAY, APRIL 1, 2025

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

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:35 a.m., in room SD-419, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. James E. Risch presiding.

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

Also present: Senators Kelly, Boozman, and Cotton.

Senator RISCH. The committee will come to order.

Thank you all for being here today.

As usual, I want to welcome everyone in the audience, our guests. For those of you this may sound a little strange but we have guests that interrupt us sometimes.

So any of those that may show up—does not look like there is any here today—we have a zero tolerance. Any type of communication or attempt to communicate with the committee or witnesses will be dealt with severely. You will be arrested and banned from the committee for a year.

So with that, on a happier note, we are glad to see all of you here today who have agreed to be with us and to take on these difficult positions that you have been nominated for.

And we are going to consider the nominations of Mr. Warren Stephens to be United States Ambassador to the United Kingdom, Mr. Tom Barrack to be Ambassador to Turkey, and Mr. Tilman Fertitta to be Ambassador to Italy.

Ordinarily, we make opening statements. However, we have Senate members who would like to introduce some of our nominees.

So let us start. Senator Hagerty, you have the floor.

### STATEMENT OF HON. BILL HAGERTY, U.S. SENATOR FROM TENNESSEE

Senator HAGERTY. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and I want to congratulate all of our nominees today.

It is an incredible honor to represent the greatest nation in the world, and it is an incredible honor for me to introduce one of my good friends, someone I have known for more than a decade, and that is Tom Barrack, who is our nominee to be U.S. Ambassador to Turkey.

Tom is an international business leader, and he is a true patriot whose nomination comes at a very important time for relations between the United States and Turkey.

When you consider Tom's background and his qualifications, you can see why President Trump wants him as our nation's chief diplomat in Ankara.

Over a century ago, Tom's grandparents immigrated to the United States from a place that we now call Lebanon, but back then it was part of the Ottoman Empire. While his family settled here, they did not forget their ties to a region where Tom is now being called to serve.

Tom himself had humble beginnings, growing up working in the grocery store that his parents owned in Southern California. By the time Tom went to college, he had a deep appreciation from his family for the significance of culture, service, and commerce.

So after graduating from law school, it is no surprise that Tom began his professional career helping to promote business ties between the United States and the Middle East.

Tom has built on this foundation in the decades since, showing he is an incredible leader with an exceptional ability to work across differences in culture and politics to both solve problems and to create value.

In fact, French President Nicolas Sarkozy recognized Tom with the rare Légion d'Honneur award in 2010 for Tom's contributions. Tom's proven success in bridging interests across the United States, Europe, Asia, and the Middle East make him uniquely qualified to serve as U.S. Ambassador to Turkey, a country that has long been at the crossroads of international relations.

But Tom's qualities do not stop there. He also served as under secretary of Interior for President Reagan and he is an avid philanthropist. In other words, Tom has the heart of a public servant intent on making our nation and our world a better place.

As a former ambassador myself, I believe strongly that America needs diplomatic leaders abroad who know how to make deals and how to stand firm in support of American interests.

If confirmed, Tom will make exactly that type of ambassador.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the chance to introduce Tom Barrack. I look forward to our hearing this morning, and I encourage all of my colleagues to support his nomination.

Senator RISCH. Thank you, Senator.

We will now hear from Senator Cornyn.

You have the floor.

**STATEMENT OF HON. JOHN CORNYN,  
U.S. SENATOR FROM TEXAS**

Senator CORNYN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Shaheen.

Thank you for holding this hearing on the nomination of my friend and fellow Texan Tilman Fertitta to be the next Ambassador to Italy and San Marino. And Tilman, I learned something this morning. San Marino's population is 33,860 so congratulations on your nomination.

I have had the pleasure of knowing Tilman for quite some time. We all know him as a successful entrepreneur and who was well

on his way to expanding his first two seafood restaurants in greater Houston into what would later become one of the largest dining and hospitality enterprises in the country.

But what I later learned is that Tilman is not only one of the nation's most prominent businessmen, he is also a visionary and a philanthropist who has dedicated much of his time and resources to bettering the community.

Over the years, I have witnessed Tilman make an incredible impact on the city of Houston and the entire State of Texas. He was born in Galveston, Texas, where his family had settled after immigrating from Sicily in the late 1800s.

His father owned a seafood restaurant on the island, which is how Tilman got his start in the business. After school he helped his father peel shrimp. Years down the road he would use the profits from that small family business to secure a small loan to acquire what would later become an empire.

That is one of the things you learn about Tilman, as I have. The man keeps striving and challenging himself. Tilman's realization of the American dream will serve him well as a voice for our nation's interest and as an advocate for a strong relationship between the United States and Italy.

His credentials extend beyond his prominent business career, though. He was first chosen by former Governor Rick Perry to serve on the Board of Regents for the University of Houston system in 2009, and the impact he is had on that system during his first 6 years was so positive that our current Governor, Governor Abbott, has reappointed him now to two additional terms.

After identifying an opportunity for the university's flagship campus to further Houston as one of the leading cities in the country and the world for medicine, he poured time and treasure to help in strengthening its relatively new school of medicine in 2022.

He has also invested in the growth of other facilities on the flagship university campus to raise the school's profile, including its basketball stadium.

Those of you who are following the March Madness will tell you that the Cougars are in the finals, and we are very proud of them, and I know Tilman is as well.

He has also served as the chair of the Houston Police Department Foundation where he helped ensure our men and women in uniform have the support that they need, and following the COVID-19 pandemic he used his unique experience and background to advise Governor Abbott on how to effectively and safely reopen businesses across the Lone Star State.

But these are just a few of the things that Tilman has done to better his community and our State. In short, Tilman will bring a wealth of experience to his service to the nation as Ambassador to Italy and San Marino.

He will have an opportunity to work not only with members of this committee but with the entire Senate to help shape our partnership with this critical ally, and I have no doubt he will do a stellar job as ambassador.

So it is my honor to support his nomination, and I hope others will do the same.

So thank you, Chairman Risch, thank you Ranking Member Shaheen and other members of the committee for allowing me the opportunity to introduce this exceptional Houstonian and Texan, and thank you, Tilman, you and your family for your willingness to serve.

Senator RISCH. Thank you, Senator Cornyn.  
Senator Kelly, welcome to the committee.

**STATEMENT OF HON. MARK KELLY,  
U.S. SENATOR FROM ARIZONA**

Senator KELLY. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member Shaheen. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to appear here today to introduce my friend—longtime friend, Tilman Fertitta.

The United States' relationship with Italy is an important one. It is grounded in centuries of diplomacy and exchange between our countries, including the millions of Americans who are tied to their Italian heritage.

Italy is a critical security partner, and it is critical to our national security. They are a founding member of NATO and host several U.S. military installations that are important to our interests in the region, and they are a key trading partner, buying machinery, military hardware, and technology from U.S. companies.

I was glad to see Tilman nominated for this job. He is the right person for this job.

Tilman and I have known each other for a long time, almost 25 years.

We became friends when I was living in Houston, Texas, assigned to the Johnson Space Center, and I think the best way for me to introduce Tilman is to tell a story of about how he was there for me and my family and my wife, Gabby, on the worst day of our lives.

On the morning of January 8, 2011, I got a call from Gabby's chief of staff, and she told me that while meeting with her constituents at what she called the Congress on Your Corner, a gunman had opened fire on her. It was at a Safeway store and that Gabby had been shot.

We hung up from this call, and I was in shock. Thought to myself, did this phone call just happen, and I called Gabby's chief of staff back, and she told me that this was real and that Gabby had not just been shot, but she was shot in the head.

My next phone call was to Tilman because I needed to figure out a way to get from Houston to Tucson as fast as possible, and I knew that Tilman would be there to help me.

Well, it was not just my next phone call, it was my next five or six phone calls was to him, and he was in a meeting, and when I when he first looked down and saw a missed call and saw that I called back he knew it must be something serious, and he called me back immediately, and he dropped everything, and within minutes he had a plan for me to get to Tucson.

It was a couple hours later during that flight that cable news reported that Gabby had died. And that was one of the darkest moments of my life.

But Tilman refused to believe it. And he refused to let me believe it. And he said to me on that trip—he said, Mark, there is no way that she is dead, and he kept saying it over and over again.

Of course, as we all know, he was right. Cable news was wrong. And thanks to him I arrived at Tucson Medical Center before she was even out of surgery.

Tilman's friendship meant everything to me and my family that day, and when I think of the worst moment of our lives and the impossible days and weeks and months that followed, Tilman is one of those people that got us through it and that I relied on—significantly relied on.

Tilman is a problem solver, he is a leader, and he is the right person for this job. And I am glad that all of you on this committee will have the opportunity to get to know him through this process and to get to know how he will serve our country.

So thank you again for having me.

Senator RISCH. Thank you very much, Senator. Certainly an impressive introduction and attribution for the nominee.

We know you are busy. You are welcome to stay, of course, if you would like, but understand the pressure we are all under.

Let us see. We will move to Senator Boozman.

You know, you have got a really wide circle of friends. I do not know how many introductions you have made to this committee so far this year. You may as well take a seat up here with us, you know.

In any event you are always welcome here and the floor is yours.

**STATEMENT OF HON. JOHN BOOZMAN,  
U.S. SENATOR FROM ARKANSAS**

Senator BOOZMAN. It is good to be back here with you, Chairman Risch and Ranking Member Shaheen, and good morning to my colleagues.

It is an honor to be here today with my friend and colleague Senator Cotton to introduce my friend and fellow Arkansan, Warren Stephens, President Trump's nominee for United States Ambassador to the United Kingdom.

I would also like to say hi to his family and friends that are here in attendance to support him. We are more than happy to have you.

For nearly four decades Warren Stephens has been part of the company he founded in 1933 on a handshake by his father and uncle. Since his humble beginnings, Stephens Inc. has become one of the our nation's largest investment banks not based on Wall Street, and we are proud that his home is still in Arkansas.

Under his leadership the business grew from employing 100 people at one location in Little Rock to now boasting over 1,000 employees in 28 locations domestically as well as in offices in London and Frankfurt.

Throughout his career, Warren has been devoted to the ethic instilled in him by his father and uncle to practice responsible debt management, and be prudent and resilient enough to be still in business the next day.

That stewardship helped Stephens Inc. weather the height of the Great Recession and actually add talent rather than lay off employees.

In his professional and personal capacities Warren has been a truly tireless crusader for capitalism, championing its ability to expand opportunity and help others realize the American dream.

Over three decades in the financial sector, he has rightfully earned a reputation as a thoughtful, respected leader in the U.S. and abroad.

He and his family have also distinguished themselves as pillars of central Arkansas community through a long history of civic and philanthropic engagement.

Their efforts have been a driving force for programs that support education and the arts, as well as working to revitalize our State's capital city and enrich the lives of others.

I have had the privilege of knowing Warren for many years, and I am confident he will bring as many talents, skills, and relationships to bear as our Ambassador to the United Kingdom, and I am thankful to President Trump for choosing him to fill this very crucial diplomatic role.

His extensive experience and expertise in the private sector and dedication to enhancing the relationship between our two nations will serve him well as he represents America's interest in this critical post. It is clear he is not only qualified but is extremely well suited to the role.

I strongly support his nomination and urge my colleagues to do the same.

Thank you.

Senator RISCH. Thank you, Senator Boozman, and we know all of us have other commitments. You are welcome to stay, but if you cannot we will understand.

So with that, Senator Cotton.

**STATEMENT OF HON. TOM COTTON,  
U.S. SENATOR FROM ARKANSAS**

Senator COTTON. Thank you, Chairman Risch, Senator Shaheen, and members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Good morning.

I am honored to introduce today a remarkable family man, businessman, philanthropist, patriot, not least my friend and fellow Arkansan Warren Stephens.

I have known Warren and his family for many years.

I would like to acknowledge his wife Harriet and his children Miles, John, and Laura and their spouses for their support during his confirmation process.

Along with his family and many other Arkansans who have the privilege to know Warren I am pleased to offer my full support for his nomination to serve as the next U.S. Ambassador to the United Kingdom.

For centuries, the United States and the United Kingdom have enjoyed what Prime Minister Winston Churchill originally termed a special relationship.

This friendship, forged on the front lines of two world wars and on the side of freedom during the cold war, is rooted in our two nations' shared history, culture, and democratic ethos.

Our 240 year diplomatic relationship is a bastion for freedom and peace worldwide. Warren is very well suited to deepen and strengthen the bonds with one of our best and oldest allies.

Inspired by the example of his father, who graduated from the Naval Academy, Warren has long aspired to serve his country full time. I am pleased that President Trump nominated him and that Warren was able to answer the call.

This commitment to service has guided Warren throughout his life and his career. At 29 he became president and CEO of Stephens Inc., a relationship based family owned financial firm that started with a handshake between his father Jack and his uncle Witt.

Since succeeding his father in 1986, Warren dedicated himself to building up Stephens in the United States and abroad including in London, where he has spent considerable time.

As the head of Stephens Warren has dedicated nearly four decades to strengthening business relationships throughout the United States and across the Atlantic while simultaneously forging relationships through service to his community.

In recent years, for instance, Warren and Harriet spearheaded a massive multiyear fundraising campaign to transform the Arkansas Art Center into the Arkansas Museum of Fine Arts.

The museum now hosts a 14,000 piece permanent collection, and features artists from Arkansas and across the United States. Thanks to Warren and Harriet's vision the museum has become the heart of its community, a place where children and students come to learn, where neighbors and friends gather, and where all those who love art can explore their creativity.

Warren is also the chairman and founder of the Jackson T. Stephens Cup named in honor of his late father. Launched in 2021 the JTS Cup showcases collegiate golfers from NCAA Division I schools, historically black colleges and universities, and the United States service academies on the nation's preeminent golf courses.

In addition to student athletes Warren actively supports numerous universities including his alma mater, Washington and Lee.

His dedication to and support for education also extends to the Episcopal Collegiate School in Little Rock where he serves as chair of the school's foundation board.

Time and time again Warren has answered the call to serve others, and now he has answered the call to serve his country in a critical role at a critical time.

Warren has spent a lifetime building and fostering strong relationships with his family, his clients, and his community.

I think he is exactly the person America needs to lead our strong, special relationship with the United Kingdom as our next Ambassador of the United States to the Court of St. James.

Thank you all, and I urge all of my colleagues to join me in supporting Warren's nomination.

Senator RISCH. Thank you, Senator Cotton.

What we are going to do now is I am going to make a few remarks and Senator Shaheen, and then we will go to a round of 5 minute questions from the senators.

Actually, what we will do first is hear from the nominees, and then I will make a few remarks.

But Senators, we you are welcome to stay, of course, but we understand everybody has got overlapping meetings and what have you. So thank you for coming.

So with that, we will hear from the nominees, and Mr. Stephens, we will start with you, please. So please keep your remarks to about 5 minutes. Anything you have to say, obviously, beyond that we will include within the record.

But the floor is yours.

**STATEMENT OF WARREN STEPHENS, OF ARKANSAS, TO BE  
AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY OF  
THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE UNITED KING-  
DOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND**

Mr. STEPHENS. Well, thank you, Chairman Risch, Ranking Member Shaheen, members of the committee. It is an honor to appear before you today as President Trump's nominee to be the Ambassador to the Court of St. James's.

I am truly grateful to President Trump for placing his confidence in me to fulfill the important duties and responsibilities of this position.

I commend President Trump's plan and taking decisive and purposeful action as he wastes no time in implementing his agenda. This will require all of us to not only work hard but thoughtfully as well.

If confirmed, I promise to advance the America First agenda throughout the United Kingdom and to build upon the special relationship that is so critical to both of our countries.

I want to thank my good friends Senator Boozman and Senator Cotton for their kind introductions. My home State of Arkansas is fortunate to have them represent us in the U.S. Senate because their subject matter expertise and their personalities are formidable complements.

As my Senators referenced in their introductions, I count my family as my greatest blessing in life. I want to thank my family for their steadfast support and love throughout this process.

I would like to introduce them to the committee. My wife Harriet and I have been married for 43 years, throughout which she has given me her unwavering support. She is the backbone of our family, and I love her dearly.

I am grateful that she is with me today and every day. Harriet and I have three adult children, Miles, John and Laura. All three of our children are married to wonderful people that Harriet and I consider to be our own—Katie, Mary Olive, and Cliff.

Our children have blessed us with six grandchildren: Harvey, Rollins, Lillian, Parker, Caroline, and Warren. I am delighted that our son John, our daughter Laura, and her husband Cliff Brookshire are also here with me today.

My father Jack and my uncle Witt instilled in me the value of hard work. These two brothers grew up on a farm in Prattville, Ar-



kansas, and eventually established an investment banking firm during the Great Depression, buying bonds in default at 10 cents on the dollar.

My dad and Uncle Witt instilled in all with whom they worked the effort required to achieve success.

When I was 29 my father named me the CEO of Stephens Inc. For nearly 40 years I worked to grow the family business into a global financial institution. It gives me great pride that our children are now managing the firm.

I am confident they will continue to grow the business while maintaining the important principle of focusing on relationships and not just transactions.

That same commitment to building and maintaining relationships has been a cornerstone of my career and will be a guiding principle if I am confirmed to serve as the Ambassador to the U.K.

The United Kingdom is one of our closest allies. Our special relationship is built on shared interests and values, mutual respect, and a commitment to global security and prosperity.

Our collaboration spans every area, from defense to trade to cultural exchanges. The U.K. is a strong partner in tackling the toughest challenges throughout the world as the U.K. is a top contributor to NATO.

If confirmed, I will encourage the U.K. to lead on advancing plans for viable, long term peace in Ukraine, which should be structured and paid for by Europe.

With regards to our friends in Northern Ireland, I will work closely with the U.K. government and all stakeholders as we abide by our promise to ensure Northern Ireland remains peaceful and stable to build upon the Good Friday Agreement.

Our partnership is clearly demonstrated by our deep economic relationship. The U.K. is a major bilateral economic partner with the United States.

However, it is critical that the American people receive the full benefit of this partnership. As Ambassador, I will work to make this relationship fair, our ties even stronger, and ensure the Americans continue to be the people the U.K. depends upon as trusted business partners.

For decades I have been a proponent for a trade agreement with the United Kingdom, and post-Brexit I believe it is even more critical that we arrive at such an agreement.

Any agreement should include public and private methods of raising capital. Our depth of capital markets and legal frameworks are very real assets and a great advantage we both have over the rest of the world, and we should take advantage of it.

Our partnership with the U.K. is ripe with opportunities to make Americans safer and more prosperous, and I am eager to strengthen those connections.

I am deeply humbled by this nomination. I recognize the incredible legacy of the Americans who have been Ambassadors to the Court of St. James, five of whom later became U.S. presidents.

So let me close with the words of the first of those appointees, John Adams, who said, quote, "Our obligations to our country never cease but with our lives."

Chairman Risch, Ranking Member Shaheen, thank you again for this opportunity to appear before your committee, and I welcome your questions.

#### NOMINEE COMMITMENT QUESTIONS

*Question.* Do you agree to appear before this Committee and make officials from the Department of State available to the Committee and designated staff when invited?

*Answer.* I commit to cooperating with the Senate Foreign Relations committee and its designated staff as appropriate.

*Question.* Do you commit to keep this Committee fully and currently informed about the activities under your purview?

*Answer.* I commit to keeping the Senate Foreign Relations Committee fully informed.

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

*Answer.* I commit to consulting with the Committee as appropriate.

*Question.* Do you commit to promptly responding to requests for briefings and information requested by the Committee and its designated staff?

*Answer.* I commit to responding to Committee requests in a timely manner.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Stephens follows:]

#### Prepared Statement of Warren Stephens

Chairman Risch, Ranking Member Shaheen, Members of the Committee:

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I commend President Trump's plan in taking decisive and purposeful action as he wastes no time in implementing his agenda. This will require all of us to not only work hard, but thoughtfully, as well.

If confirmed, I promise to advance the America First agenda throughout the United Kingdom and to build upon the special relationship that is so critical to both of us.

I want to thank my good friends, Senator Boozman and Senator Cotton, for the kind introductions. My home State of Arkansas is fortunate to have them represent us in the U.S. Senate because their subject-matter expertise and their personalities are formidable complements.

As my senators referenced in their introductions, I count my family as my greatest blessing in life. I want to thank my family for their steadfast support and love throughout this process. I'd like to introduce them to the Committee.

My wife, Harriet, and I have been married for 43 years throughout which she has given me her unwavering support. She is the backbone of our family. I love her dearly. I am grateful that she is with me today and every day.

Harriet and I have three adult children—Miles, John, and Laura. All three of our children are married to wonderful people that Harriet and I consider to be our own—Katie, Mary Olive, and Cliff. Our children have blessed us with six grandchildren—Harvey, Rollins, Lillian, Parker, Caroline, and Warren.

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When I was twenty-nine, my father named me the CEO of Stephens Inc. For nearly 40 years, I worked to grow the family business into a global financial institution. It gives me great pride that our children are now managing the firm. I am confident that they will continue to grow the business while maintaining the important principal of focusing on relationships, and not just transactions.

That same commitment to building and maintaining relationships has been a cornerstone of my career and will be my guiding principle if I am confirmed to serve as the Ambassador to the UK.

The United Kingdom is one of our closest allies. Our special relationship is built on shared interests and values, mutual respect, and a commitment to global security and prosperity. Our collaboration spans every area from defense, to trade, to cultural exchanges.

The UK is a strong partner in tackling the toughest challenges throughout the world as the UK is a top contributor to NATO. If confirmed, I will encourage the UK to continue to lead on advancing plans for viable, long-term peace in Ukraine, which should be structured and paid for by Europe.

With regard to our friends in Northern Ireland, I will work closely with the UK government and all stakeholders as we abide by our promise to ensure Northern Ireland remains peaceful and stable to build upon the Good Friday Agreement.

Our partnership is clearly demonstrated by our deep economic relationship. The UK is a major bilateral economic partner with the United States, however, it is critical that the American people receive the full benefit of this partnership. As Ambassador, I will work to make this relationship fairer, our ties even stronger, and ensure that Americans continue to be the people the UK depends upon as trusted business partners.

For decades, I have been a proponent for a trade agreement with the United Kingdom. And, post-Brexit, it is even more crucial that we arrive at an agreement.

Any such agreement should include public and private methods of raising capital. Our depth of capital markets and legal frameworks are very real assets and a great advantage that we both have over the rest of the world. We should take advantage of it.

Our partnership with the UK is ripe with opportunities to make Americans safer and more prosperous, and I'm eager to strengthen those connections.

I am deeply humbled by this nomination. I recognize the incredible legacy of the Americans who have been Ambassadors to the Court of St. James's—five of whom later became U.S. presidents. So let me close with the words of the first of those appointees, John Adams, who said, "Our obligations to our country never cease but with our lives."

Chairman Risch, Ranking Member Shaheen, thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you today. I welcome your questions.

Senator RISCH. Thank you, Mr. Stephens.  
Mr. Fertitta.

**STATEMENT OF TILMAN FERTITTA, OF TEXAS, TO BE AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE ITALIAN REPUBLIC, AND TO SERVE CONCURRENTLY AND WITHOUT ADDITIONAL COMPENSATION AS AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE REPUBLIC OF SAN MARINO**

Mr. FERTITTA. Thank you so much.

Thank you so much, Senator Cornyn, Mark Kelly. Thank you for those kind words.

Senator Cruz, always thank you for your guidance and leadership and advice even as late as 11 o'clock last night. So I very much appreciate it.

Chairman Risch, Ranking Member Shaheen, members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, it is an honor to be with you today. I am President Trump's nominee to be the United States Ambassador to Italy and San Marino.

For this opportunity I am eternally grateful to President Trump, and I am honored, if confirmed, to represent all Americans in such an important role.

I am joined today by my wife Lauren and family and so appreciate the support of my five children.

When my ancestors immigrated to the United States from Italy at the turn of the last century, there is no way they could have en-

visioned the opportunities that would come to our family as a result of hard work and determination.

From my very first restaurant I continued to grow, becoming a national leader in the industry with more than 60 award winning concepts such as Catch, Mastro's, Martin's, Del Frisco's, The Palm, Oceanaire, and many more that I hope you all dine at, some of them here in Washington, DC.

And today my company, through its hotels, entertainment and gaming divisions, I own approximately 600 properties in 36 States and 15 countries.

I am one of the largest employers in the nation with more than 50,000 employees, and today I am fortunate to be the sole shareholder of one of the largest privately held companies in America.

I am also the proud owner of the Houston Rockets NBA basketball team, which is currently second in the Western Conference.

During my lifetime in business I have taken two companies public, acquired six other public companies, and done over 40 major M&A transactions, as well as starring in the CNBC show "Billion Dollar Buyer," and also appearing regularly as a financial expert on many networks.

Along the way I have been guided by a pair of important life lessons. First, know your numbers. Numbers do not lie. This is particularly relevant when addressing the United States' \$44 billion trade deficit with Italy, which I will work closely with businesses in both countries to help close this gap.

And second, I do not ever think that your position is too high to teach others. I still teach every single day, and perhaps even more important I learn as much, if not more, from others every day.

I am currently serving my twelfth year as chairman of the Board of Regents at the University of Houston system, where I have been so fortunate enough to give nearly \$90 million to create the Fertitta College of Medicine and the Fertitta Center where the men's and women basketball teams play and where we get to watch the Houston Cougars in the Final Four this weekend.

We have been blessed to visit Italy numerous times over the years, and I have long been an admirer of the country's culture, food, fashion, and true patriotic spirit, and no description of Italy would be complete without acknowledging the country's important role in the history of Western civilization, which has made it one of the most visited places in the world to this day.

The bond between our two countries is as strong as ever. The country is led by a phenomenal prime minister in Giorgia Meloni, who I have had the pleasure of meeting.

More than 2,500 American companies do business in Italy, making Italy a key economic ally, and the military and defense support we have received from the Italians over the decades has made Italy a key strategic ally.

Italy has provided robust support for Ukraine throughout the war and will host the Ukraine recovery conference in July.

If confirmed, one of my top priorities is to continue to encourage Italy to be fully engaged and aligned in the President's efforts to end the bloodshed in Ukraine and to build a sustainable peace.

Italy is a major investor in the Western Balkans with over \$10 billion in regional investments and is a key contributor to the European peacekeeping mission along with sending many troops.

If confirmed, I will encourage the government of Italy to continue its robust engagement in the Western Balkans to ensure regional stability.

Distinguished members of this committee and the full Senate, if confirmed I take the responsibility of being an ambassador at this crucial moment in history as the most important job of my life.

You have my commitment and America has my commitment to always represent the United States and President Trump with dignity, pride, friendship, and strength, and I hope I can earn your support today.

Thank you all so very much.

#### NOMINEE COMMITMENT QUESTIONS

*Question.* Do you agree to appear before this Committee and make officials from the Department of State available to the Committee and designated staff when invited?

Answer. If confirmed as Ambassador to Italy, I commit to appear before this Committee when invited.

*Question.* Do you commit to keep this Committee fully and currently informed about the activities under your purview?

Answer. If confirmed as Ambassador to Italy, I commit to keeping the Committee fully and promptly informed about all activities under my purview.

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

Answer. If confirmed as Ambassador to Italy, I commit to engaging in meaningful consultation while policies are being developed, and as appropriate.

*Question.* Do you commit to promptly responding to requests for briefings and information requested by the Committee and its designated staff?

Answer. If confirmed as Ambassador to Italy, I commit to responding swiftly to requests for briefings and information from the Committee and its designated staff.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Fertitta follows:]

#### Prepared Statement of Tilman Fertitta

Chairman Risch, Ranking Member Shaheen, members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee . . . it's an honor to be with you today.

My name is Tilman Fertitta, and I am President Trump's nominee to be the United States Ambassador to Italy and San Marino.

For this opportunity, I am eternally grateful to President Trump, and I am honored, if confirmed, to represent all Americans in such an important role.

I am also thankful to the Senators I've been able to meet in advance of today, learning your thoughts on issues specific to Italy, the EU, and NATO—and most important, restoring the peace and prosperity that we enjoyed as a nation and as a world during President Trump's first term in office.

I'm also joined today by my wife Lauren and family.

When my ancestors immigrated to the United States from Italy at the turn of the last century, there is no way they could have envisioned the opportunities that would come to our family as a result of hard work and determination.

From my very first restaurant, I continued to grow, becoming a national leader in the industry, with more than 60 award-winning restaurant concepts such as Catch, Mastro's, Morton's, Del Frisco's, The Palm, Oceanaire, and many more.

We've also expanded into the hospitality, entertainment, and gaming industries, adding to our company's hotel portfolio 5-star hotels such as the Post Oak Hotel in Houston, and the Montage in Laguna Beach, as well as eight Golden Nugget Hotel and Casinos.

Today, through my restaurant and hospitality company, Landry's, we own nearly 600 properties in 36 States and 15 countries. We're also one of the largest employers in the Nation, with more than 50,000 employees.

I'm also the proud owner of the Houston Rockets NBA basketball team, which is having a great breakout season and currently second in the Western Conference.

During my lifetime in business, I've taken two companies public, acquired six other public companies, and done over 40 major M & A transactions.

I also starred on the hit CNBC show "Billion Dollar Buyer," and I've appeared regularly as a financial expert on networks such as CNBC, Bloomberg and Fox Business, and I am the sole shareholder of one of the largest privately held companies in America today.

Along the way, I've been guided by a pair of important mantras.

First, "Know Your Numbers. Numbers Don't Lie." This is particularly relevant when addressing the United States' \$44 billion trade deficit with Italy, which I'll work closely with businesses to help close this gap.

And Second, "Don't Ever Think That Your Position Is Too High To Teach Others. I Still Teach Every Single Day, And Just As Important, I Learn As Much As I Teach Others," every day.

I'm currently serving my twelfth year as Chairman of the Board of Regents at the University of Houston system. In 2022, my family gave \$50 million to the University of Houston's College of Medicine, naming the school the Tilman Fertitta College of Medicine, bringing in a new era of innovation for Houstonians.

In 2016, our family contributed \$20 million dollars to help fund the University of Houston Basketball arena to be named "The Fertitta Center," and in the last 6 years, the Houston Cougars men's basketball team has won more games than any other men's college basketball team, including six consecutive Sweet 16 appearances in the NCAA tournament.

I also serve as Chairman of the Board for both Houston Children's Charity and the Houston Police Foundation.

As a long supporter of law enforcement, we donated \$3 million in 2019 to help build a Tactical Training Center, helping the city's officers and recruits with a state-of-the-art training center.

We've had the chance to visit Italy numerous times over the years, and I've long been an admirer of the country's culture, food, fashion, and true patriotic spirit.

And no description of Italy would be complete without acknowledging the country's important role in the history of Western Civilization, which has made it one of the most visited places in the world to this day.

The bond between our two countries is as strong as ever.

The country is led by a phenomenal Prime Minister in Giorgia Meloni.

More than 2,500 American companies do business in Italy on a daily basis, making Italy a key economically.

And the military and defense support we've received from the Italians over the decades has made Italy a key strategic ally.

If confirmed by members of this Committee and the full Senate—Undertaking this responsibility of being an ambassador at this crucial moment in history will be the most important job of my life.

You have my commitment—and America has my commitment—to always represent the United States, and President Trump, with dignity, pride, friendship, and strength, and I hope I can earn your support today.

Thank you.

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

I assure you that my colleagues work hard every day to keep your businesses open here in Washington.

[Laughter.]

Mr. FERTITTA. Thank you, sir.

Senator RISCH. Mr. Barrack.

**STATEMENT OF THOMAS BARRACK, OF COLORADO, TO BE AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE REPUBLIC OF TURKEY**

Mr. BARRACK. Thank you, Senator Hagerty. First of all, thank you for that gracious introduction, for an amazing friendship, and for the inspiration you provide to all of us every day.

Chairman Risch, Ranking Member Shaheen, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you

today. It is an honor to be nominated the United States Ambassador to Türkiye.

I am grateful to President Trump for the confidence and trust he has placed in me at this sensitive and challenging moment in a critically complex and globally important region that all of you deal with every day.

I would like to thank my family for their unrelenting support, love, and sacrifice which affords me the opportunity to assume these responsibilities if fortunate enough to be confirmed by this esteemed group in this very important post.

With me today are my four of my six children—Jodi, TJ, Brett, and Nicholas—and my two youngest, Alaia and Jayden, are cheering from afar.

The strength and purity of their character is a piercing and timeless reflection of the dedication and unrelenting values of their moms.

A brief snapshot of my own journey, which is nothing more than a tribute to the American dream, lends to a tiny modicum of success that I may have achieved but has everything to do with the selection by fate itself of the intersection of a free, democratic, and embracing America with the DNA from an ancient cultural elixir of Lebanese and amazingly Ottoman culture.

The story of my family's journey to America from the very region to which I may return, if fortunate enough to be confirmed, renders me humbled and grateful. The rest is the story of America.

My father, grandfather, and our family lived and worked together running a small neighborhood grocery store in Culver City, California. It is the story of immigrants, and it is the story of America.

Watching their lifetime of sacrifice and humility instilled in my sister and myself the gift of courage, resilience, compassion, gratitude, and a blind eye toward race or religion.

After a Jesuit education in law school I began working for a major U.S. law firm representing global engineering banks and construction companies in the Middle East.

I was based in the eastern province of Saudi Arabia, probably at a time before many of you were born. Each night I would go to a majlis of elders and sheepishly participate drinking gahwa, which is Arabian coffee, listening to men sharing stories of politics, water, access, tribal disputes in business in a dialect I could not understand.

It was in those years in the Middle East that I found my true north point, tolerance and the gift of immersion and understanding the un-understandable.

Over the ensuing years I found in my business cadence that that was the key to whatever success that I could achieve in the company and the teams that I built in Colony Capital, which was a New York Stock Exchange international private equity firm.

Along the road I was blessed to have a stint in government under the reins of President Reagan where I learned the importance of the intersection of the executive and the legislative branch and the brilliance of the people working in the bureaucracy, the civil servants and the Foreign Service officers.

Now about Turkey. Turkey itself is our valued NATO partner, sitting at the most strategic crossroads of Europe, Asia, and the Middle East.

Türkiye's NATO contributions are numerous: one of NATO's largest militaries and naval fleets; hosts NATO assets such as an air base in LANDCOM and Izmir; a valued partner fight against ISIS.

Türkiye has supported NATO's stance in support of Ukraine and has supply Ukraine with its well admired Bayraktar drones as well as mediated the Black Sea grain initiative.

Türkiye regulates passage through the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles under the Montreal Convention. Türkiye has met or exceeded President Trump's guidance for financial contributions for NATO.

Trade between our two countries can easily reach the shared goal of President Trump and President Erdogan to reach \$100 billion.

Turkey is a place of poetry, and I would like to close with a combined poem from America and Türkiye. It relates to my own round trip.

From Türkiye's sun-warmed Taurus Mountains to America's sprawling central plains, the cradle of our upbringing weaves a quiet tapestry of home, a breeze from the Bosphorus, hazelnuts dripping from the trees, tables of simit, cheese, and olives, the tangy taste of sumac, the scent of sage tea, the soft aroma of burning oud wood. Yet, we roam far from the first tender echo of our heritage, a refuge shaped by the ways we were raised, the smells that stir within us, the flavors of an ancient being that we can still savor, all because we are allowed to bask in this beautiful, unbelievable, free, prosperous, and secure America.

Thank you for your time. Thank you for your attention. I will relentlessly pursue for the country, for President Trump, for all of you, the goal of peace, prosperity, and security should I have the good fortune of being confirmed by this body.

Thank you.

#### NOMINEE COMMITMENT QUESTIONS

*Question.* Do you agree to appear before this Committee and make officials from the Department of State available to the Committee and designated staff when invited?

Answer. Yes, I agree to appear before this Committee and make officials under my purview available to the Committee and designated staff when invited.

*Question.* Do you commit to keep this Committee fully and currently informed about the activities under your purview?

Answer. Yes, upon request I commit to keep this committee fully and currently informed about the activities under my purview.

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

Answer. Yes, I commit to engaging in meaningful consultation while policies are being developed.

*Question.* Do you commit to promptly responding to requests for briefings and information requested by the Committee and its designated staff?

Answer. I commit to promptly responding to requests for briefings and information requested by the Committee and its designated staff.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Barrack follows:]



### Prepared Statement of Thomas Barrack

Honorable Chairman Risch, Ranking Member Shaheen, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. It is an honor to be nominated to be the United States Ambassador to Türkiye. I am grateful to President Trump for the confidence and trust he has placed in me at this sensitive and challenging moment in a critically complex and globally important region. I would also like to thank my family for their unrelenting support, love and sacrifice which affords me the opportunity to assume these responsibilities, if fortunate enough to be confirmed for this important American post. With me today are four of my six children: Jodi, TJ, Brett and Nicholas and my two youngest Alaia and Jaden are cheering from afar. The strength and purity of their character is a piercing and timeless reflection of the dedication and unrelenting values of their mothers.

Now, a brief snapshot of my own journey which is nothing more than a tribute to the American Dream. Whatever tiny modicum of success that I have achieved has not much to do with me—it rather has everything to do with the selection by fate itself—of the intersection of a free, democratic and embracing America, with the DNA from an ancient and diverse civilization of Lebanon.

My grandfathers both immigrated to the USA around 1900. Youseff Abdullah (Joe), at the age of 12 and Khalil Shaheen (Kelly) at 14. Both were raised in the region now known as Lebanon, which had a long reputation from its Phoenician beginnings for a multicultural fabric of Arabic and Christian influences and was an administrative region within the Ottoman Empire. Joe was one of nine Maronite Christian children and the youngest of six boys living in Zahle, a town in the Bekaa valley. At that time there was a tremendous war raging between the Maronites and the Druzes and Joe's mother did not want to sacrifice her youngest son to this brutal and senseless clash. The Baraks were a merchant family of modest means and had no ability to maintain their large family or to aid any of their six sons to find solace or relief elsewhere. Zahle was governed by an Ottoman mayor known as a Mutasarrif. Mutasarrif was a non-Lebanese Christian selected by the Ottomans based in Constantinople (now Istanbul) who had absolute authority over the Christians and the Druze. Joe's mother was a household servant for Mutasarrif and asked for his help to allow her youngest son, Joe, to board a Cargo vessel that would eventually arrive in America. The cost at the time for "steerage class" was about \$20 in Turkish Lira which Joe's family did not have. The Ottoman Governor then benevolently gave Joe's mother the fare money and an Ottoman passport for Joe's travel and told her he was free to go. They walked hand in hand 34 miles to the Port of Beirut, where he first boarded the Ottoman postal steamship to Naples where he transitioned to the larger ship, the *SS Patria* for the 3-week journey to America. She believed she would never see him again or perhaps even know where he was ... only a mother could have that strength. He crawled into the filthy hole of that vessel with 13 Turkish Lira, one shirt, one pair of pants, and a note pinned to his shirt written in Arabic saying, "Thank you for accepting me."

The rest is the story of America. My father and my grandfather and our family lived and worked together running a small neighborhood grocery store in Culver City, California. Watching their lifetime of sacrifice and humility instilled in my sister and myself the gift of courage, resilience, compassion, gratitude and a blind eye toward race or religion.

My professional life has been dedicated to understanding the complexity of building and aiding teams in global financial markets, while administering the art of a cultural sixth sense, and carving a path upon which others have not traveled. After a Jesuit education and law school, I was privileged to work for a major USA law firm representing global engineering and construction companies in the Middle East. Fluor, Bechtel and Jacobs were giants of American ingenuity and engineering in a booming "black gold" driven Middle East. I was a finance lawyer and was sent to Saudi Arabia in 1973 to work on project finance on several large gas and oil production facilities in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia. Temperatures soared to 120 degrees, there was no internet, no TV, no movies, no books, very little English language, no Christian churches or Jewish synagogues, no hotels, no banks ... basically only an Aramco compound and a beautiful and pure Bedouin culture rooted in Islam. Each night I would go to a majlis of elders and sheepishly participate drinking gahwa (Arabic coffee), listening to men sharing stories of politics, water access, tribal disputes, and business in a dialect I could not understand. Breaking for salah (prayer) five times a day and visiting the mosque with my Sunni friends on Friday became the weekly routine. I had grown up in a Jewish neighborhood and while attending Catholic schools and had joined my friends' families weekly for Shabbat and now I was immersed in an adventure through Islam. It was in those

years in the Middle East that I found my true north point—"tolerance." This was a foundation stone in my role as Chairman and CEO of Colony Capital, a global private equity firm I founded in 1991, with offices in 19 countries, including the Middle East, and an investor constituency representing most continents.

The transition from business to government service at times can be a bumpy road and I was blessed as a young man to be appointed by President Ronald Reagan as Deputy Undersecretary of the Department of the Interior. It was there I gained an admiration for the dedication and competence of Civil Servants and Foreign Service Officers as well as the importance of a coordinated and transparent approach between the Executive and Legislative branches. If confirmed, I will lead my Mission with that respect and interaction.

Our partnership with Türkiye is grounded in a wide range of critically shared interests. Since Türkiye joined NATO in 1952, it has been a cornerstone of transatlantic security, admirably maintaining the defense of the Alliance's southern flank. There is no question that Türkiye is a significant and valued NATO ally.

Today, Türkiye fields the second largest military in NATO and answered President Trump's call to invest more in Europe's security and has met or exceeded NATO's guidelines. Türkiye supports our objectives in key areas like counterterrorism, a strong regional mediator, as it was in the Black Sea Grain Initiative with Ukraine and Russia and has been a contributing and continuing stabilizing force in Syria and the Eastern Mediterranean. There are also areas of tension between our two countries, but if confirmed, I will navigate these to ensure that through these challenges, our partnership endures as a pillar of transatlantic stability and mutual trust. If confirmed, I will advocate for Türkiye to use its influence in the region for stability and prosperity. I will encourage Türkiye to maintain constructive diplomatic engagement with Greece and, once and for all, solve these historic issues through negotiation and dialogue.

Türkiye is an essential partner in President Trump's maximum pressure campaign to counter Iranian influence across the Middle East and a key to Peace discussions between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Türkiye is also historically aware of the potential threat posed by Russia's aggression and has supported Ukrainian territorial integrity, sovereignty, and independence from the onset of the Russia-Ukraine War. Türkiye has also emerged as an alternative to China in emerging markets, particularly in Africa, where Turkish firms challenge their Chinese counterparts for crucial infrastructure development projects.

Türkiye is also a leader in the Global Coalition to defeat ISIS, a valued principal in crafting a stable Syria and seeks to prevent the resurgence of extremism. Continued cooperation in this realm will help keep the American homeland safe from terrorist threats.

Our nations' interests strongly converge in the economic sphere. Bilateral foreign direct investment between our countries totals over \$8 billion and bilateral trade is over \$40 billion, sustaining thousands of American jobs. Türkiye is a partner in sectors like aerospace technology and is a significant importer of American LNG. Türkiye also has untapped critical mineral reserves and could become a strategic partner as we diversify from Chinese supply chains. If confirmed, I will prioritize economic exchange to facilitate prosperity through partnership. With enough effort, we can and will reach President Trump's goal of \$100 billion in bilateral trade.

There are certainly challenges in this relationship, challenges that must be addressed. I believe we have a unique opportunity to partner in pursuit of shared objectives and to work toward an even greater partnership that will deliver peace, prosperity and security for both of our nations.

In closing I would like to share with you a mantra which I will use as a driving principle for my Mission should you elect to confirm me:

"I never apply the sword when the lash suffices, nor the lash when my tongue is enough. If there is even one thread binding me to my fellow man, I do not let it break. If he pulls, I loosen. If he loosens, I pull."

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and Members of the Committee, if confirmed, I am committed to working together with Congress to advance American national interests. Should the magical wand of destiny allow me to return to the root of this amazing American/Ottoman adventure, I will relentlessly pursue President Trump's goal of peace, prosperity and security for both America and Türkiye. I look forward to answering any and all questions that you may have.

Senator RISCH. Thank you, Mr. Barrack.

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

What we are going to do now is—remarks from Senator Shaheen. Then we will go to a round of questions, 5 minutes each.

This panel today is an important panel. It is one of the most important ones that we will see collectively.

Mr. Stephens, you will work with America's closest ally, and despite a few wars between us our culture and history are shared and deep during the most pressing challenges of the 20th century and since, the U.K. has been the indispensable and steadfast partner.

Going forward, we have a number of issues where we need to deepen our relationship. Better trade, as you have noted, and defense cooperation are chief among them.

Of course, the alliance between the U.S. and the United Kingdom remains special, and I recognize that the U.K. takes an enormous political and military risk on behalf of our collective interests.

But friends need to be candid with one another. While the U.K. has announced goals to spend 2.5 percent of GDP, European security requires a much higher level. While the U.K. can project meaningful combat power abroad, unlike most NATO allies, the British military is still too small.

The British defense industrial base is in disrepair, and its defense spending is too low. We need to improve both our spending and defense development. AUKUS Pillar II is designed to help address these concerns, but the Biden administration's failure to implement the laws on the books regarding AUKUS has undermined these efforts.

I expect you will help improve the situation. I hope you will.

I would also note that foreign basing is important to the U.S., and the ongoing negotiations over Diego Garcia and the U.K. surrender of sovereignty undermines deterrence, which I and many others have stressed to them. I hope you will join us.

Mr. Fertitta, like the U.K., Italy remains a close ally and important partner in Europe, and it is a special place for a lot of Americans. More U.S. college students study abroad in Italy than anywhere else.

But while there are deep cultural ties there are a number of areas where improvements are needed. On trade, U.S. producers have a hard time getting access to the Italian market in part because of EU regulations but also because domestic industries find creative barriers to keep U.S. products out. Not good.

In the security space Italy remains below NATO's 2 percent spending requirement. This is hard to understand based on both the challenges that Putin has created for European security but also due to the substantial security threats Italy faces from the Mediterranean and from North Africa.

While NATO should prioritize this area a bit more in NATO's planning, Italy should be spending more to help secure NATO's southern flank.

Mr. Barrack posed before us today Turkey is going to be the most challenging, which I am sure you probably already know. Turkey is a critical U.S. and NATO ally but has been far from lockstep with America in supporting our mutual interests, not the least of which, of course, was when we were—this entire committee was

trying to get Sweden and Finland into NATO. They were a real barrier, and believe me, we went round and round with them but finally got the job done.

While Turkey hosts NATO and American forces and has supported efforts toward peace in Ukraine it has troubling ties with Russia and Hamas.

Turkey also has a difficult track record on human rights and has repressed dissent both in and outside of its borders. The recent arrest of an opposition candidate and crackdown against protesters and journalists are particularly concerning, and Turkey's role in Syria's security remains a question.

We all know Turkey can help stabilize Syria but we must ensure its actions do not undermine U.S. counterterrorism efforts or endanger the lives of U.S. troops in the region. I am open to working with Turkey to address long standing American concerns and find a path forward, but Turkey must remove some of these irritants.

I would especially highlight its ownership of Russian S-400 missiles that remain in Turkey's arsenal.

Mr. Barrack, I look forward to hearing your perspective on how to work with the Turkish government and encourage it to enhance cooperation with our NATO allies. The world faces enormous security challenges as Russia, China, North Korea, and Iran work together to undermine the United States and our alliances.

We need all our allies including the United Kingdom, Italy, and Turkey rowing in the same direction to counter the threats we face.

Working alongside President Trump's administration I hope our witnesses today will work to rebuild a credible deterrence and further strengthen our alliances.

Thank you.

Senator Shaheen.

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

Senator SHAHEEN. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman, and welcome to our nominees today, and we are delighted to have your families here as well.

If confirmed, you will be representing the United States in Türkiye, Italy, and the United Kingdom—three countries that are important NATO allies, strong supporters of Ukraine, and key to advancing American interests.

As you know, one of our greatest security assets is our alliances, and I agree that we need to have our allies pay their fair share of defense spending.

To their credit, our allies have listened, at least most of them. More than 23 of 32 NATO allies are now meeting the 2 percent defense spending targets.

But U.S. support for these alliances is not charity. It is strategic investment in our own security.

Mr. Stephens, as you know, the U.S. and the U.K. share a historic and very special relationship, as you said in your opening statement. Today that alliance matters more than ever.

The U.K. is one of our biggest trading partners, and last year we had a trade surplus of nearly \$12 billion. The U.K. also plays a critical role in the AUKUS agreement with Australia, helping to

build our submarine base, which means high quality American jobs and a strategic edge over China in the Indo-Pacific.

The U.K.'s role in NATO is also critical. It serves as a bridge between the U.S. and Europe.

And so, Mr. Stephens, if confirmed I hope you will continue to build on the U.S.-U.K. alliance.

Mr. Fertitta, you have been nominated to Italy, which plays an important role in shaping Europe and the broader region. Italy backed sanctions against Russia after Putin invaded Ukraine.

It supported efforts to stabilize the Western Balkans, and from managing migration across the Mediterranean to confronting Russia's influence in Africa Italy plays a critical role in securing NATO's southern flank.

As you pointed out, Prime Minister Meloni has a good relationship with the Trump administration. She was the only European leader to attend President Trump's inauguration.

And so if confirmed I hope you will continue to strengthen the ties between the United States and Italy.

Finally, Mr. Barrack, your nomination to lead our mission in Türkiye comes at a very delicate time, as we discussed when we met.

Many of us are concerned by the Turkish government's arrest of the mayor of Istanbul, who is a Presidential candidate. We must continue raising issues like the detention of journalists and the violent crackdown on protesters.

You will also need to be attentive to Türkiye's interest in Syria. The Syria that emerges from the rubble of the Assad regime must be stable and inclusive. It cannot be allowed to become a launching ground for terrorist attacks against the U.S. and our allies.

And whether confronting Putin's aggression or managing the conflict in the Middle East, Türkiye is a critical ally. It controls access to the Black Sea, and it has been vital in helping Ukraine such as facilitating the first Black Sea grain deal.

Mr. Barrack, if confirmed you certainly will have your work cut out for you.

I look forward to hearing the thoughts and insights from all our nominees today.

Thank you.

Senator RISCH. Thank you, Senator Shaheen.

We will do a round of 5 minute questions now.

I want to start, Mr. Stephens, with you. I do not know how familiar you are with the AUKUS agreement, but it has been kicking around here for a while, and there is a lot of us who worked hard to get where we are with it.

It has really breathed some life into our relationship with the Aussies and certainly underscored the importance of our relationship with Great Britain.

Can you give me your thoughts on AUKUS? I really think that in decades to come people will look back at AUKUS because I really think it has the potential of becoming a NATO like agreement for the Indo-Pacific.

Your thoughts.

Mr. STEPHENS. Senator Risch, thank you for that question.

I would agree with you. I think AUKUS has great potential. Now, what I have read about it is unclassified.

I know in my preparation for this hearing I have learned a lot of acronyms, one of them being—I believe it is ITAR, the transfer of technology, and that seems to be, let us say, a roadblock to helping that AUKUS really get going.

I know there is very sensitive things involved in it, and if I am confirmed I look forward to learning more about that and helping find ways that we can address those issues.

But I agree with you. I think AUKUS has great, great potential not only for the U.S.-U.K. shipbuilding industry and the Australian shipbuilding industry but as a deterrent in the Pacific.

Senator RISCH. You are right about ITAR. It is caused some difficulty that it should not be causing. It is a rub between what we believe—we, the first branch of government—believes ITAR is and what the previous second branch of government—previous Administration thought it should be.

There is a lot of classified information you will get after you are confirmed in that regard, and I hope you will put it to good use and get those barriers out of the way so we can continue to move AUKUS forward.

Mr. Barrack, Turkey is the most challenging ally, and I use that word cautiously when talking about Turkey. They are doing some things that are just awful.

I have gone round and round with Erdogan head to head on things that he has done, not the least of which is putting the S-400s in his country. I personally held up the F-35s that he purchased. They are still sitting here in the United States. They have been paid for.

But I have told him they are not moving until those S-400s are gone from Turkey. When we have given him a couple of off ramps which he has not taken. They are a real problem, and they are a member of NATO, and we have to deal with them.

I wish you well as you go forward with them. We have had a number of ambassadors that have been interesting from Turkey as we have gone along.

Have you had any contact with the Turkish government over your career or in recent times as you are getting ready for this?

Mr. BARRACK. Thank you, Senator Risch.

Yes, I have had contact dealing as a businessman within Türkiye where I gained great respect, by the way, for the entrepreneurs, for the business, for our trade opportunities. It is the Spice Road. It has a history of dealing with other cultures.

I think the key to all of this is for us to once and for all look at the opportunity as a one government process, not an event picking away at various issues.

My goal would be that we create what our priorities are, what the message is. Understand from the Türkiye government what their priorities and message is, and we create a firm and structured process to actually get those things done.

I think the President's message of peace, prosperity, and security is also a message for the Türkiye population. We have lots of wood to cut, and my hope is that a combined executive-legislative basis

will allow our teams—our mission on the ground—to do what they do best in diplomacy.

Senator RISCH. I do not think the Turkish population is the problem, to be honest with you. I think the problems and the issues there go to a lot higher level than what the population is.

But I wish you well. You have quite a challenge.

Senator SHAHEEN.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Stephens, I understand and the committee understands that there are some pending issues regarding your taxes. I appreciate your willingness to cooperate and provide additional details prior to confirmation.

Do I have your commitment to continue to work with the committee on that?

Mr. STEPHENS. Well, thank you, Senator for that question, and absolutely you have my commitment to continue to work with that or any other issue that comes to your office or to this committee.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you.

Mr. Fertitta, you mentioned in your opening statement the Western Balkans, an issue near and dear to my heart. As you pointed out, Italy has been an important U.S. partner in dealing with issues in the Western Balkans, and they are a member of the Quint—the U.S., U.K., France, Germany, and Italy.

The Quint often plays a pivotal role in aligning U.S. and European approaches to crises in the Western Balkans.

Now, understanding that the Administration is somewhat skeptical of multilateral diplomacy, if confirmed will you commit to doing your part to maintain this important informal mechanism for diplomatic coordination?

Mr. FERTITTA. Thank you for that question, Senator.

Absolutely. For sure we know how important the Western Balkans is to Italy, but it is also important to the United States of America, and I will for sure continue to make sure that America supports the Western Balkans along with the Republic of Italy.

Senator SHAHEEN. And given the tensions that are heightened right now between Serbia and Kosovo and also in Bosnia-Herzegovina, having as much diplomacy and interest and focus on what is happening there as possible is important. Would you agree?

Mr. FERTITTA. Totally agree, and America appreciates Italy's stepping up because when other countries step up sometimes it makes it where we do not have to step up everywhere like America so often has to do. So we are very thankful for them stepping up like they have in this situation.

Senator SHAHEEN. I agree.

Mr. Barrack, as I said, we had a very helpful meeting yesterday and I found out that your story and your family's story is very much like my husband's family's story. So I certainly appreciated the connection to Türkiye and the story about the journey to America and the ability to build on the American dream.

I also raised an issue that we have been paying attention to in New England because it involves a Tufts student from Turkey who is a graduate student at Tufts who was arrested in the middle of the day by two ICE agents who were masked. They took her into custody and whisked her off to a prison in Louisiana.

Now, if you are confirmed as Ambassador and you are in Türkiye, and the Turkish authorities arrest an American student living legally in Türkiye in that way, what would be your response as Ambassador?

Mr. BARRACK. Senator, first of all, thank you for being so generous with your time and your staff's time. It was informative, illustrative, and inspirational. I really appreciate it.

Hypothetical questions are very difficult. My emotional and compassionate response to everybody who is in the midst of what we are finding in these very difficult immigration issues everywhere is that personal consequence is something that I cannot opine over because I do not have access to all the facts.

But I can tell you that if an American is violated in any aspect with any of their rights, duties, and freedoms in any country, especially if I have the great opportunity to represent America, it is just unacceptable.

Senator SHAHEEN. Well, let me ask you, though, Mr. Barrack, because I and some other members of this committee worked on a case of Pastor Brunson who was a North Carolina pastor—I think he was a Presbyterian pastor—who had been living legally in Türkiye for over 20 years. Had been practicing his faith with the church, and he was arrested by Türkiye, I believe, unlawfully.

He was held for, I think, almost years in a prison in Türkiye, and I and a lot of people on this committee and throughout the Senate and the government of the United States worked very hard to get him released because he was inappropriately being held.

Do you not agree that it is important for us to ensure that American citizens are protected when they are in other countries and that if they are unlawfully detained that they should be—that we should advocate for their release?

Mr. BARRACK. Senator, absolutely, and I think in that particular instance you and President Trump did a fantastic job of drawing a very hard line to the Türkiye government, and the result was fantastic.

My attitude is that it is a process on all of these humanitarian rights that has to constantly be enforced. It is not an event.

It takes a strong hand from all of you, from President Trump, who absolutely has strong two hands, and I look forward to the opportunity of being able to be an intermediary in delivering that message.

Senator SHAHEEN. And as ambassador you will speak up for human rights in Türkiye and certainly for the rights of American citizens, I assume?

Mr. BARRACK. Senator, I will speak up always for the Constitution, for peace, prosperity, and security, and I will do the best that I can in whatever capacity that I am in to protect the rights of American citizens in Türkiye.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you.

I have questions for our other nominees, but I will save those for the next round.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator HAGERTY [presiding]. Thank you, Ranking Member Shaheen.

Next, I am going to call on Senator McCormick.



Senator McCORMICK. Thank you, Senator Hagerty and Ranking Member Shaheen, and congratulations to the three of you and to your families, and thank you for your willingness to serve.

Mr. Barrack, good to see you. We have known each other for a long time, and I think you are taking on a particularly challenging assignment.

And I remember more than 30 years ago traveling throughout Turkey and then traveling across the border—after I left the Army, across the border from Turkey into Syria at Antakya and what you see are these incredibly porous borders, of course, and enormous borders.

And we see that playing out today with Türkiye and proxy forces having a significant presence in Syria, and those forces have aligned themselves, as you know, with the new Syrian government, the governing authority in Damascus, which is led by a U.S. designated foreign terrorist organization.

So how can the United States leverage its relationship with Türkiye to address our counterterrorism concerns in Syria?

Mr. BARRACK. Thanks, Senator McCormick, and as you know, I have been a great fan, and I am honored to be here with you today.

I think out of chaos comes opportunity. What we all agree upon is that the receding of the Assad regime in Syria provides an opportunity to rid ourselves of a Shi'a crescent on Israel's behalf, on America's behalf, on Türkiye's behalf, and to eliminate Islamic State.

But the Rubik's cube of issues with which we are confronted is enormous. We have 10,000 ISIS prisoners. We have 35,000 members of their families.

We have the confusion of a YPG, which consists of a portion of the PPK, which both Türkiye and we have assigned as a terrorist group but has been instrumental in helping us in eliminating ISIS.

We have Israel and the Golan Heights who has a vested interest in making sure that that border and the protection of its Druze population is not infiltrated by Russia, by Iran, or in fact, by Türkiye.

So I intend to try and cause a discussion amongst ourselves and others to create the architecture of a Syria policy. Quite honestly, we do not have one at the moment.

And in that regard, again, I think we have an opportunity in which all of the surrounding countries, all the vested interests in Gaza, Israel, Ukraine, and Russia, present an opportunity for everybody to sit at a table and say, this is the moment, and that is my hope.

Senator McCORMICK. Thank you.

Mr. Stephens, welcome, and the Stephens family, welcome.

You are taking on an assignment here where both President Trump and the prime minister have spoken about the opportunity for further economic ties, growing the economic relationship.

You spend a lot of time in London, a lot of time in the U.K. Where do you see the most promising opportunities for deepening those economic ties?

Mr. STEPHENS. Senator McCormick, thank you for that question, and I also want to thank you for the time you have given me in preparing or since this process started.

One of the things I have been told by friends and colleagues in Britain is their biomedical research is probably ahead of ours. They have been able to do some things that we have not been able to do, and I think there could be a great opportunity to explore there.

There is also a movement—not a movement. There is an opportunity to mine tin in Cornwall, which was historically the backbone of that economy. They think with new and improved methods they can restart that industry. They, obviously, will need investment to do that and I think that is an opportunity for U.S. companies to help provide that capital, if not provide it.

But those two come to mind. I mentioned in my opening statements the ability to raise capital both in the U.S. and in the U.K. and that we should take advantage of that. I have mentioned that to several people in the Administration or incoming into the Administration and they seem to think that is a great idea. So those three I think are the ones that come to my mind right away.

Senator McCORMICK. Very good.

When you are thinking—when you are over there in your new posting, and you are thinking about bio sciences, life sciences, and opportunity I want you to think about Pennsylvania.

Pennsylvania has an enormous life sciences industry. Southeast Pennsylvania, it is really a hotbed of innovation. There is opportunity there.

Thank you very much.

Mr. STEPHENS. Thank you, sir.

Senator HAGERTY. Senator Rosen, please.

Senator ROSEN. Well, thank you, Senator Hagerty.

I want to thank Chair Risch, Ranking Member Shaheen, for holding the hearing today. I want to thank all of our witnesses for your willingness to serve and for being here today as well.

Mr. Barrack, I want to start with you first. As you may know, Turkey refused to condemn Hamas for its horrific terror attack on Israel. It does not consider Hamas a terrorist organization and has provided safe haven for senior Hamas leadership.

What is more important is that Turkey's relationship with Israel has deteriorated significantly under President Erdogan, who weaponizes anti-Semitism and anti-Israel sentiment to advance his domestic policy interests.

So, Mr. Barrack, given all of this, how would you if confirmed work to ensure that Turkey stops being a sanctuary for Hamas and take steps to improve the security environment in the broader region including by taking steps to improve its relationship with Israel?

Mr. BARRACK. Senator, thank you for that piercing and complex question.

If I were given the opportunity, my attitude is to provide constant dialogue, constant pressure, constant, consistent focus of what our desire is with the Türkiye government.

The policies and practices that are set forth are to be implemented, if I am fortunate enough to be in that position, by our mission. That direction, those practices, those policies, will be governed by the President of the United States and by this esteemed body.

Senator ROSEN. Well, let me expand on this a little bit about Turkey's role in Syria.

So according to multiple reports Turkey is continuing to assess the suitability of locations inside Syria to potentially establish a military base.

I am concerned that a more robust Turkish presence in Syria will pose significant challenges for Israel and for our Kurdish allies, and must be addressed.

So how will you work to address the Turkish presence in Syria?

Mr. BARRACK. Senator, at this point I only have available to me what I read in nonclassified information, and I am not evading the question. I am trying to be responsive. I just do not have the facts yet.

Senator ROSEN. Would you be willing to work with us on that?

Mr. BARRACK. Absolutely, Senator.

Senator ROSEN. Thank you.

I want to get to you now, Mr. Stephens, to talk about the Five Eyes.

I have asked a very similar question to Ambassador Hoekstra earlier this month. I would like to hear your thoughts as well.

The Five Eyes alliance is one of the most successful intelligence sharing alliances in the world. It has been key. It has been key to the success of our military responses including in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan.

And yet, the Trump administration has taken actions that have caused our allies to reconsider what information can be shared with the United States.

So, Mr. Stephens, the Five Eyes alliance is based on a high level—a high level—of mutual trust. So do you think it makes us safer, stronger, or more secure if our partners and allies decide to scale back the intelligence they share with us out of concern that they cannot trust the United States?

Mr. STEPHENS. Well, thank you, Senator, for that.

Senator ROSEN. I will ask you the follow up, too. How will you make sure that we are resilient and Five Eyes remains operational?

Mr. STEPHENS. Well, I am not aware of our allies in Five Eyes in particular scaling back any of the information they share with us, but I am—

Senator ROSEN. What would you base that on? Because it appears that they have been a little nervous about sharing information with us in light of recent events.

Mr. STEPHENS. Well, I was referring to, perhaps something, that is classified that I have not been able to read.

All I have been able to read is the unclassified importance of Five Eyes, and I think the Five Eyes goes back, basically starting with the U.K. and the U.S., to World War II and was critical and in the allies prevailing, and I think both the U.K. and the U.S. realize that that is one of the key components of our special relationship, and I hope I can help strengthen that.

I am unaware of any reluctance to share intelligence in the Five Eyes. But if that turns out to be the case, I would certainly do what I could to not—to assure them that they do not need to be withholding any information, or they should not.

Senator ROSEN. Well, I think that will be something that we will have to talk about probably once you are confirmed.

I just want to talk, Mr. Fertitta, just a little bit about infrastructure in the Mediterranean. The Mediterranean Sea contains an array of underwater cables.

They connect Europe, Africa, and Asia, and as the competition across the region intensifies we really have to protect this critical infrastructure from malign actors—Russia, the PRC. It is more important than ever.

So if confirmed how will you work with the Italians, who play a critical role in the Mediterranean, to strengthen their military capabilities and support of bolstering deterrence along NATO's southern flank?

Mr. FERTITTA. Italy and the United States both realize how important this is, and so much moves underwater today as it does in space, and America realizes that not only Italy but all of the NATO countries how important it is to continue to be so supportive of this and protecting it from our enemies.

And I will truly work hard with the Italian government to assure how important it is to America, and we will make sure that if there is any issues whatsoever I will be on top of it.

Senator ROSEN. Thank you.

Senator HAGERTY. Senator Daines.

Senator DAINES. Chairman, thank you.

I am just struck by the quality of the nominees that President Trump has put forward to be our ambassadors across the board and you—the three of you are examples, again, of extraordinarily qualified business leaders with business experience to represent our great country around the world. So thank you. Thank you for doing this.

I will start with Mr. Barrack. One of the primary responsibilities of an ambassador is working to develop a positive trade and economic relationship between the United States and their assigned post.

If confirmed, how do you plan to work with Turkey to advance U.S. trade relations?

Mr. BARRACK. Thank you, Senator. Thanks for the time that you spent with me to visit. I really enjoyed it, and I am looking forward to visiting the Bozeman stampede.

Türkiye is a great opportunity. It was the pulse beat and the heartbeat of the Spice Road and the Silk Road. It was always the center of interconnection of cultures, of religions, of races, and trade that was going from East to West and vice versa, and my belief is that it can once again be a new Spice Road in energy, transport, manufacturing, and defense.

As Senator Risch indicated, we have lots of issues that we have to chop through in order to get there, energy being one of the key starters.

Türkiye itself is at a deficit of energy but has been a large importer of liquefied natural gas, which originally came through Russia through three specific pipelines.

With the current war and upsets in Ukraine, it started to rely on the U.S. So 60 percent of the LNG is now coming from Cheniere, Exxon, and Mobil from the U.S.

Amazingly, Türkiye as a new Spice Road can be a reshipping terminal through its free floating gas distribution terminals as a hub

for more gas to Europe, which also provides Europe with another shield to Russian intervention.

Defense, aerospace, media are all areas that in partnerships with American companies, which is also a strategic international interface to keep China and the Belt and Road Initiative away for a while, is the opportunity.

So I believe that we can reach the stated goal of President Trump and President Erdogan to try and get to \$100 billion in shared trade on a bilateral basis a year. We are at about \$40 billion today.

Senator DAINES. Mr. Barrack, thank you.

Mr. Fertitta, Mr. Barrack brought up energy, and I want to talk about that a little bit as it relates to Italy. But I will say I was very happy to see Prime Minister Meloni's recent comments dismissing—dismissing—the idea that Italy has to choose between President Trump and Europe.

I completely agree that Italy can cultivate a better relationship with the United States and with Europe at the same time, and I think that will be an important role that you will have as our ambassador, if confirmed.

But regarding energy, Italy has several floating storage and regasification units. Probably—maybe it is only fitting or divine providence that a guy from Houston, arguably one of the energy capitals of the world anymore, will be our next Ambassador to Italy.

How could Italy partner with the United States to ensure energy security?

Mr. FERTITTA. First off, thank you so much for that, Senator. Prime Minister Meloni continues to speak out and show what an ally of the United States that she is, and we truly appreciate that as a country.

Next, from an energy standpoint we would love for Italy to do a lot more business with our American companies and not buy so much energy from Libya and other countries, and this is something that, you know, I have thought about tremendously and in talking to Houston oil companies.

I look forward to bringing the two together, knowing so many of the CEOs that are in the Houston area, to meet with the Italian government and their energy department to see what we can do to create more business and take that trade gap from \$45 billion to make it a lot less.

We should be doing a lot more business with the Italian government, sir.

Senator DAINES. Thanks for that answer. You know, we have seen what has happened in Europe, certainly, since the Ukraine invasion how important energy security is and ties right to national security, and the world to be a lot safer if that relation with the United States and these other countries is stronger at least to energy and trade.

My final question here for Mr. Stephens. The U.K. has long been one of the U.S.' closest defense and intelligence partners. Their partnership truly is a force multiplier for our capabilities around the world.

I am about out of time here, so I will make my question short. Could you please speak to the importance of the United States fulfilling its commitments to the U.K. foreign military sales?

Mr. STEPHENS. Well, thank you, Senator Daines, and again, I appreciate the time you have given me as this process has gone on.

The U.S. and U.K.—and Chairman Risch mentioned it with AUKUS—I mean, we are doing our best as a country, I think, and I think the Trump administration is, to grow closer militarily to the U.K.

I know the—I do not know the specifics of our commitments to provide the British military with their needs.

I know just from reading what I can the British military says while they are trying to increase their defense spending to two and a half percent of GDP it should be three. I know President Trump thinks it should be more, and I would not argue with that.

But in my view, Senator, unless it involves some double secret, triple secret technology that we just do not want to share I would urge the United States to fulfill every commitment it has to provide the U.K. with the weapons and the systems that it needs.

Senator DAINES. Thank you.

Senator HAGERTY. I will take the next question round, Ranking Member Shaheen.

First, I just want to make a very basic point and that is the responsibilities that you all will bear if you are confirmed as our U.S. Ambassadors to each of your respective countries is one of the greatest weights you will ever carry on your shoulders because you will represent the greatest nation in the world.

You will be the senior American in your host country, and again, those countries are looking to you to represent America.

First, I would like to start with you, Tom, to talk about Turkey. I think Turkey finds itself at a very interesting crossroads.

On the one hand, given their location, they find themselves deeply involved in the Ukraine-Russia conflict, and on the other hand they are also playing a major role in the Middle East.

Specifically, we had conversations earlier about what is taking place in Syria. I think it is going to require a very deft approach, a very capable approach, and I would love to hear your comments about how you are looking forward to or how you envision managing the relationship in Turkey as you navigate these dual challenges.

Mr. BARRACK. Thanks, Senator. I hope that if I am fortunate enough to have that job that I could do it as elegantly as you conducted the ambassadorship in Japan.

The Türkiye situation in Ukraine is a great example or the push and pull of what we need to do.

Türkiye supplied Ukraine with its famous Bayraktar TB2 drones at the very beginning of the conflict. It negotiated and mediated the Ukraine grain deal, and it consistently maintains the Montreux Treaty on the access of ships, warships, cargo ships up and down the Black Sea.

Syria has been a constant thorn in the entire region's side. The policy that is in front of all of us with Syria is undecided. I do not have access to any classified information as to what our policy is, but I think the process has to be a total government solution, and

part of my job, if I am fortunate enough to be selected, is to bring all the counterparts together and say what is our policy with regard to all of these issues?

It is impossible agency by agency for the executive branch on one hand, the legislative branch on the other hand, to be negotiating these issues for decades.

So I think we have an opportunity out of all of the plethora of crises we have around us to have everybody feel an urgency to actually getting something done.

So my attitude is to serve at the will of President Trump and this body to try and stir and create an architecture of some thoughts of viable solutions along with all of the constituencies who have been delegated that responsibility, and then to execute swiftly and promptly with the idea that we do not have time. Diplomacy is the last stop between blood on the boots, and that would be my attitude.

Senator HAGERTY. Thank you.

I am going to move quickly to you, Warren.

First, I would like to comment on the issues that have been raised with the Five Eyes and to make a very clear and obvious statement. You have an incredible role to play in the relationship as ambassador. I would encourage you to do what I did when I was ambassador and have a regular meeting. I did it every month.

I had a breakfast every meeting with my Five Eye counterparts and worked very aggressively to make certain that we stayed united in a critical region at that time, which was the Indo-Pacific.

You will have the access to the information that you need, and you will have an ability to create that type of bond.

I will also say this. The United States has an incredibly disproportionate information advantage because of the breadth and extent of our defense posture around the world.

So we will be in a place where I think every one of our allies will want to cooperate with us, and I am certain that you can encourage that.

With respect to the Five Eyes piece as well, one concern I have specifically about the U.K., which I think has been addressed, but it has to do with information sharing, and that has been the integrity of their communication systems.

We talked extensively about the presence of Huawei, ZTE, and other similarly situated technologies. I would encourage you to take a very hard look and make certain that the systems are clean and capable of communicating with us.

Also, foreign military sales were raised. That is a tremendous opportunity for us to tighten our bonds with our allies like the U.K.

I would encourage you to go in as soon as possible, to get your arms around what the foreign military sales process looks like there, and look for ways to improve that in terms of collaborative efforts and activities.

And then, finally, with respect to AUKUS, I understand the question from Chairman Risch that you are limited in what you can say right now, but I would encourage you to support that every way you can, and if you see opportunities for us to be supportive back here on this committee, I think you have got broad support here for seeing that relationship thrive and grow, particularly

when it comes to procurement processes and joint R&D. To the extent we can be helpful back here to make that happen, I would encourage that.

And Tilman, I would like to come to you and just express a concern that came to me in 2019. I vividly recall the Italian ambassador to Japan coming to me to tell me that Italy was going to enter China's Belt and Road Initiative.

I think Italy suffered tremendously through the pandemic. I think Italy has had a very challenging time dealing with China.

Yet, at the same time in 2023 even though they pulled out of the Belt and Road Initiative—and I thought that was a wise move—they have now entered into some type of bilateral initiative with President Xi Jinping to deepen economic cooperation.

My concern is that creates yet another economic lever that the CCP can utilize either against an ally like Italy or against the EU, and I would look forward to any comment you might have with respect to how you are going to treat the China challenge in your new position should you be confirmed.

Mr. FERTITTA. Thank you so much for that comment, Senator.

You know, I was glad to see that they withdrew from the Belt and Road in 2023, and I am concerned that there is still 11 Chinese service centers set up around Italy, and they are not willing to speak too strongly against China.

But what I do feel is their number one ally is the United States of America. It is something that I am going to monitor extremely closely.

I think all countries, for some reason, want to keep their foot in the door with China. It is something that all countries besides Italy need to monitor very closely, and as ambassador over there if confirmed it is something that I will get up every single day and worry about to make sure we remain their number one ally.

Senator HAGERTY. Thank you, and thanks to the entire panel for their presence here today, and I wish you the very best of luck, and Godspeed should you be confirmed.

Senator Van Hollen.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you, Senator.

Congratulations to all of you.

Mr. Barrack, it was good to talk to you the other day in my office, and appreciate all the issues that we covered there.

One of the issues that we discussed was the fact that President Erdogan recently arrested his major political rival, the mayor of Istanbul.

He did it the very day the mayor of Istanbul declared that he was going to be a presidential candidate for the major opposition party. Thousands and thousands of people have taken to the streets, over 2,000 Turks detained there.

So I was looking to see if the Trump administration had said much of anything about this, and I saw that Secretary Rubio was asked about it, and frankly, his answer made it sound like he was channeling President Erdogan.

He did not talk about democracy. He did not talk about human rights. He talked about stability. We want stability.

Well, of course, we want stability, but stability is always the priority of authoritarian leaders. Stability is the priority of dictators,



and what has set America apart is that we have also been full throated in our support for democracy and human rights. To see him channeling President Erdogan's sort of defense of this action I found extremely troubling but maybe not surprising.

Donald Trump has called Erdogan a hell of a leader, and it appears that this is the kind of leader that Donald Trump appreciates, those that sort of disregard the law. And I was thinking—I know Senator Shaheen raised this—that if you are President Erdogan, and you are watching what is happening to this Turkish student at Tufts who is whisked off the street by individuals who have no identifying uniforms, some of them in masks, and literally disappeared to Louisiana because of something she said or wrote about what is happening in Gaza, this is something that Erdogan will see and say—he will be unhappy that it was a Turkish student, but he will say, you see, that is what they are doing right there in America, and it is hard to argue with him.

So I do not have a question on this part, Mr. Barrack, but I hope you will take that back because when we start channeling Erdogan's defense of locking up the mayor and say, this is all about stability—we just want stability, hell, those 2,000 demonstrators let us just lock them all up. That is not what United States has stood for, in my mind, and I do not think it is what we stood for in yours. I certainly hope not.

And whisking away a student—as you know, visitors to this country, yes, they are privileges but they are protected by the First Amendment, and there is no evidence that that First Amendment protection should not exist in this case.

So I know that the Chairman, Senator Risch, asked you about the F-35s, or made it very clear that it is a bipartisan position, has been, that Turkey under CAATSA should not get the F-35s because they have the S-400s. You understand that is a bipartisan view, right?

Just a simple yes or no.

Mr. BARRACK. Senator, there—and I am not evading the—and thank you, by the way, for the discussion we had because I found it stimulating and a lot to think about for all of this for sure.

S-400s has been an issue that you have dealt with, this body has dealt with, that the previous Administration has dealt with. It was dealt with since the acquisitions in 2016.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Mr. Barrack, I am interrupting you. I apologize. It was good to meet with you in the office so we could discuss these things at greater length but I have a very short amount of time.

So my question was whether you recognize that preventing the transfer of the F-35s pursuant to CAATSA was a bipartisan view. I will let it lay if you do not want to give a direct yes or no.

Mr. BARRACK. No, Senator, I am aware that CAATSA 231 specifically requires very detailed legislative intervention and is not simply an executive decision.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. I appreciate that, because I wanted in my remaining time to talk about Syria, and we had a good conversation with Syria.

As I said, I think the risks of not trying to seize this opportunity are great. We can always reimpose sanctions, and obviously, Tur-

key has a major role to play, including with respect to the Syrian Kurds.

So my final question to you is would you agree that our Syrian Kurdish allies have been essential partners for the United States in the fight against ISIS?

Mr. BARRACK. Senator, quite honestly, I do not really have any information to affirm or deny any of it, and it is such a sensitive issue that I would defer to the executive branch and the policies, practices, and procedures of this body, to make those determinations. It is not within my wheelhouse.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Which one? I am sorry. The Syrian——

Mr. BARRACK. The determination—to repeat your question, for me to render an opinion on the value of whichever Kurdish entity we are talking about if I could ask you to be——

Senator VAN HOLLEN. The SDF. Syrian Democratic Forces.

Mr. BARRACK. Yes. I just do not have the information to take that apart.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. OK. Well, thank you, and I see my time is out. But I think, again, on a bipartisan basis it is a shared view.

Certainly, I have teamed up with Senator Graham on legislation on this, that we need to make sure that we do not throw our Syrian Kurdish friends and allies and partners under the bus.

Mr. BARRACK. Yes, sir.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you.

Senator HAGERTY. Senator Shaheen, I will turn to you.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you.

I know we are running long but I do have a few more questions, and to follow up on the Syrian Democratic Forces I did have a chance to visit Syria in 2018 with Senator Graham and during the first Trump administration, and we heard very strongly from our military leaders in Syria about the importance of the SDF to our mission there.

So I do not—again, I think that is something that generally has bipartisan support and agreement and—agreement from our military leaders. So I do not think we should feel uncomfortable about acknowledging that.

I had the opportunity to say that also to President Erdogan, and while he did not agree with me he listened to what I had to say.

I want to go back to you, Mr. Stephens, because if confirmed you would serve as the Ambassador to the United Kingdom. But President Trump has also appointed a special envoy, Mark Burnett, someone who is reported to also be a close personal friend of the President, to serve as a special envoy.

So, if confirmed, can you talk a little bit about how you would work with Mr. Burnett and President Trump to ensure that you are not overlapping efforts and duplicating the work that you are trying to do with the U.K.?

Mr. STEPHENS. Well, thank you, Senator.

I think both Mark Burnett, the special envoy that you mentioned——

Senator SHAHEEN. Do you know Mr. Burnett?

Mr. STEPHENS. I have met him. We are not friends, but I have met him briefly. He, frankly, seems very nice. We have stayed in touch as much as we can.

But the bottom line is we both—if I am confirmed, we both will be representing the President and the United States, but I will be the ambassador.

I am nominated to be the ambassador, and I am confident that I can work with, really, all of the embassy in the U.K. and Special Envoy Burnett to further the U.S. agenda and the President's agenda.

Senator SHAHEEN. Well, thank you, and I have no doubt that that is the case, given your history of running your business. I guess my concern is more how you envision the responsibilities being delineated between those two roles so that the British are not confused about what we are doing.

Mr. STEPHENS. Well, thank you again for that, Senator.

I really do not know what the special envoy has been doing, but I do not envision divvying up of responsibilities.

I envision it to be my responsibility, and to the extent Mark has been working on things and can be helpful and useful I will certainly engage him with that. But I will also use all of the members of the staff at the embassy to do the same.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you.

The United Kingdom has consistently shown leadership on Ukraine since Russia's illegal invasion, and I think especially true now as there is a concern about how negotiations roll out in ending that war.

Can you speak to what you believe is the importance of Ukraine's future to the U.K. and the rest of Europe?

Mr. STEPHENS. Well, Senator, I think the first order of business is to stop the killing in Ukraine, and it has been a vicious, vicious war. I think any time any country can attack another one and get away with it it sets a very bad example for the rest of the world.

And so I think finding a way to end the conflict as quickly and as equitably as we can will allow the rebuilding process in Ukraine to begin, and the U.K. has been a leader not only in providing them with weapons and support—military support—but also humanitarian aid and others. But they have also taken the lead on these reconstruction talks that are beginning.

And so I think U.K. and all of Europe see Ukraine as a very, very important part of their future, and how this ends is extremely important to them as it is to the United States.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator HAGERTY. Thank you, Ranking Member Shaheen.

Next, I will call on Senator Ricketts.

Senator RICKETTS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, Ranking Member, for this hearing.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to submit a March 20 *Economist* article entitled, "Europe needs to spend more on defence, not pretend to."

Senator HAGERTY. Without objection.

[EDITOR'S NOTE.—The information referred to above can be found in the "Additional Material Submitted for the Record" section at the end of this document.]

Senator RICKETTS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Lately, one of the things that I have heard, a common theme in Europe is that Europe recognizes they have to do more for their own defense.

Certainly, Poland and the Baltic states have been doing that for years, and currently countries like Germany have taken bold steps to be able to start spending more on their own defense.

However, we still have not gotten the message out to some countries. As the EU grapples with exempting member states' defense spending from fiscal restrictions, some appear more concerned by what they can reclassify as defense spending rather than actually spend on military readiness.

Spain, for example, has argued that defense spending should include broader civil defense costs such as climate change while Italy has said that measures related to economic competitiveness should count.

Last time I checked you actually need hard assets like bullets to be able to shoot. You cannot shoot climate change at anybody.

Now, I realize defense spending is not just a matter of percent of GDP. It is not the only panacea. For example, Italy hosts 30,000 military personnel and their families as well as the Navy's Sixth Fleet in Naples.

However, when countries which still have not met the 2 percent NATO target that was set over a decade ago resort to accounting tricks to weaken our collective defense it makes my position in support of the transatlantic alliance more difficult.

Mr. Fertitta, President Trump has called on our NATO allies to get to 5 percent of their GDP on defense. If confirmed, what actions will you take to ensure Italy not only meets but exceeds the 2 percent NATO target and is committed to making serious investments in their defense capabilities?

Mr. FERTITTA. Thank you so much for that question, Senator.

Italy, like so many of the NATO countries, are trying to use some fuzzy math to get to their 2 percent, and I hope one day we could get them all to 5 percent.

Italy has always been one that—has been an ally that was one of the first to always send troops when we need them, to send them somewhere, and they like to count that. And I do respect that from Italy that they step up, and we should give them some credit for that.

They were at 1.5 percent. They are at 1.6 percent. They also spend a lot on migration with the issues of having Tunisia and Libya, and even having an island just 70 miles off the coast of Tunisia where they have had to set up processing centers in Albany and put so many patrol boats in that area to stop the migration, but protects all of Europe, not just Italy.

So where I understand some of their elements of saying our 1.6 percent is maybe enough, it is absolutely not enough, and it is something with—I have got to sit down with their government and work with them and understand their budget more so, especially their defense budget if they will share it with me and help them to increase their 1.6.

We have got to get it at 2 percent. It is something in my term there that is a personal goal of mine to get them from the 1.5, 1.6

to 2 percent by the time that I have served the government there for the United States.

So I just want you to know it is on my radar screen, and I plan to do whatever I can do to help get us there.

Senator RICKETTS. Great. Thank you, Mr. Fertitta. I appreciate that. I certainly agree with the other comments you made about Italy, but we do need them to be giving 2 percent.

Diego Garcia is the largest island in the Chagos Archipelago. Has been home to a strategic joint U.S.-U.K. military base for decades.

Given its key location, and it is in British territory, the base is critical to U.S. air and naval operations in the Indo-Pacific. In fact, just last week we deployed B-2 stealth bombers from Diego Garcia to deter further Iranian malign aggression.

Despite this and with the backing of the Biden administration the U.K. struck a deal last October to transfer Chagos to Mauritius.

The deal was sold as protecting British and American interests under the guise that the U.K. would retain control of Diego Garcia for an additional 99 year period.

However, Communist China is expanding its presence in the Indian Ocean, and its close relations with Mauritius means the deal could be—would put our base under their threat.

If the deal is ratified it could allow Communist China to be able to maneuver ships and planes near Diego Garcia for intelligence gathering or even potentially allow Beijing to acquire militarized nearby items in the Chagos like it has done in the South China Sea.

Mr. Stephens, U.K. Foreign Minister Lammy said, “If President Trump does not like the deal, the deal will not go forward.” While negotiations are still ongoing do you believe the pending U.K.-Mauritius deal is in our best interest?

Mr. STEPHENS. Well, thank you, Senator.

What I know is what I read in the press about the negotiations there. Just as a person who can obviously read a map that is a very key base for the United States. I know we have—the military has used it for many missions for many years, and I would think—I know the Administration is considering it, and I am confident that they will come to the right decision on whether to approve that deal or not.

But you know, just it is a very—it is a critical little piece of land for both the U.K. and the U.S., but I have to believe that the Administration will come to the proper conclusion, and we will go forward from there.

Senator RICKETTS. OK. And do you share my concern about Communist China and the threats around there, that they are—

Mr. STEPHENS. Senator, I share your concerns about China not only around there but everywhere. So that is very much at the forefront of, I think, all of our minds.

Senator RICKETTS. Well, I do think that, again, this is a bad deal for us and that the Administration should work with the U.K. to make sure that we retain that possession there.

And I just hearken back to President Trump seems to be very unhappy with the Panama Canal treaty, and this seems like another version of that.

So thank you, Mr. Chairman, for indulging me to let me go longer.

Senator HAGERTY. Thank you, Senator Ricketts.

Next I will call on Senator Cruz.

Senator CRUZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Welcome to all three of you. I will say the three of you all have had exceptionally successful business careers, and I appreciate your willingness to serve.

I appreciate your willingness to go and represent the United States of America in three critically important countries, and I appreciate your service to the country.

Mr. Barrack, I want to start with you. As you know, the International Criminal Court has issued arrest warrants against Israeli officials including Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to punish Israel for its campaign against Hamas.

Those warrants are disgraceful, they are illegitimate, and they are breathtakingly dangerous to America's national security interests.

The warrants are disgraceful because Israel's war against Hamas is a legitimate campaign of self-defense in response to the October 7 terrorist attack, and I believe that our Israeli allies should not stop until they have utterly eradicated Hamas.

They are illegitimate because Israel is not a member of the ICC, and the ICC has no jurisdiction over Israel. And they pose an acute threat to the safety and security of Americans because the precedent being set would allow the ICC to prosecute American officials and American troops who are likewise outside the court's jurisdiction.

In response to this threat President Trump issued an executive order. It reads, quote, "The United States expects our allies to oppose any ICC actions against the United States, Israel, or any other ally of the United States that has not consented to ICC jurisdiction."

However, Turkey and Erdogan in particular have been active in boosting the ICC's campaign. Erdogan said, quote, "We support the arrest warrant."

Erdogan met with the ICC prosecutor responsible for the warrants, Karim Khan, and expressed support for the ICC's attack against Israel. Erdogan's position puts both him and Turkey on a collision course with President Trump and with the United States.

Please talk a little bit about how if confirmed you intend to approach this challenge.

Mr. BARRACK. Thank you, Senator.

My first advice would not be the welcome wagon to Senator Erdogan, but it would be please do not get on a collision course with President Trump. That would not be a wise direction.

My attitude and intention is simple. The practices and policies of the United States, of President Trump, of this body, are my GPS.

I am not a policymaker. I am an executor of policy, and I would intend to within the bounds of whatever diplomatic tools I have available enforce that and make it clear that that is our position.

Senator CRUZ. I think the executive order is an extremely important first step in countering the threats posed by the ICC.

It allows the President to impose powerful sanctions against anyone who directly engages in the effort by the ICC to detain Americans or our allies who are not subject to ICC jurisdiction.

Those sanctions were long overdue, and it is vital that they be enforced and widened. The prosecutor with whom Erdogan met has already been sanctioned.

Last year Turkish officials and lawyers sought to provide evidence to the ICC against Israel. One of those officials was a former Turkish lawmaker from Erdogan's party.

Are you concerned that officials linked to Erdogan and the Turkish government are directly boosting the ICC's attack against Israel?

Mr. BARRACK. Senator, thanks for the rendition of facts that I am actually not aware of in any classified format.

My intent is trying to get prepared to look forward on issues that are impending and that I will have some ability to actually dissect and understand.

So I cannot really render an opinion on facts I do not have in front of me.

Senator CRUZ. Well, I will follow up with you in writing and ask for more views.

Mr. Fertitta, you talked in your opening statement about the economic opportunities between the United States and Italy and expanding those opportunities.

Share your thoughts on the best opportunities for growth, for more trade and commerce between America and Italy.

Mr. FERTITTA. Well, there is a—thank you, Senator, so much.

There is 2,500 companies doing business in Italy from America, and we need to bring more companies over there, and we need to sell more goods to Italy.

It is not only Italy that has wonderful products but the United States of America does, too, and so one of my huge goals is going to be to get even more companies over there and at the same time find a way for the companies that are doing business there to do even more business with the Italian government and the citizens of Italy.

Senator CRUZ. Well, and I can personally attest that last night you were already doing your part with Senator Kelly and me and providing us both with some very fine Italian wine.

[Laughter.]

Senator CRUZ. So, for the record, that they do an excellent job of that.

Senator HAGERTY. Thank you, Senator Cruz.

Mr. FERTITTA. Thank you, sir.

Senator CRUZ. Thank you.

Senator HAGERTY. Senator Scott.

Senator SCOTT OF FLORIDA. Thank you, Chairman.

First off, congratulations to each of you. Congratulations. You are going to have a big opportunity to improve relations with the United States in each of your roles.

So, first off, Mr. Stephens—first off, congratulations. The U.S.-U.K. alliance is I think probably one of our most important alliances. It has been disappointing the Labour government's treat-

ment of one of our best allies, the state of Israel, our most important ally in the Middle East.

In England, the Labour Party treats Israel as a problem and not a solution even after October 7. So as the ambassador how are you going to go about trying to work with the British government to try to educate them or help them understand the importance of Israel?

Mr. STEPHENS. Well, thank you, Senator, and thank you for spending the time with me in your office before.

What I have read about that with the U.K. halting some of their shipments to Israel is certainly concerning, and I would do my part to encourage them to reinstate those permits and to try to get them, you know, what they need to continue the fight.

I am a little perplexed by why they did that, but I look forward to trying to help present our position, meaning the United States' position, and why they should be more supportive.

Senator SCOTT OF FLORIDA. Thank you.

Mr. Fertitta, congratulations on getting the nomination.

So you have done a lot of deals in your life. What do you think it is going to take for Italy to be more receptive to U.S. companies in a variety of areas? I assume there is opportunities in defense, there is opportunities in energy and other areas.

So, you know, with your background in doing transactions what is it going to take, do you think, for Italy to make it a better opportunity for American companies to do business in Italy?

Mr. FERTITTA. I do know this, Senator. The feedback that I have received from Italy is that they are very excited about having an American true entrepreneur come over there and work with them.

And when you look at the trade between the two of us there is so much more that can be done, and since we do not have some of the issues that my friend Mr. Barrack has, we should be able to concentrate more and concentrating on more trade between the two, and I truly believe that they are very, very receptive of doing a lot more business with the United States of America.

They recognize us as their number one ally, and I truly look forward to sitting down with them, if confirmed, and coming up with so many different ways and doing deals which, fortunately, I have had a lot of experience with that and finding ways through energy, manufacturing, pharmaceuticals—so many different ways—chemicals too—and food and beverage, to do so much more business together.

Even something that I know is important to some of you all, even getting more American beef over there from different parts of the United States.

Our products are very, very good in America, and more of the NATO nations need to enjoy more of them.

Senator SCOTT OF FLORIDA. Thank you.

Mr. Barrack, the relationship with Turkey has been pretty strained, whether the S-400, the role in Syria, Erdogan's publicly threatening to invade the state of Israel, warm offers to host Hamas leadership. That is a negative but they are a NATO ally.

So do you think you are going to be able to navigate to bring them back in to what we would perceive to be a great NATO ally, or do you think it is going to be impossible?



Mr. BARRACK. Senator, first, thanks for spending the time with me. I really enjoyed our conversation and our Texas roots.

I absolutely think that I can be a small hammer in chipping away at a consistent theme of letting them know that the best thing for them long term is to adhere to being a great NATO ally, and then all of the other interferences over time need to evaporate, and I think this is just part of what we are dealing in the Middle East.

It is a very complicated ZIP code and a Rubik's cube of complexity that needs to be taken as a whole. But I would not ever think of taking this very, very difficult position if I did not think with your help, with President Trump, with a very strong hand with the government of Turkey, including President Erdogan, and everybody searching for a solution at a very delicate moment between Israel, Palestinians, Ukraine, Russia, China, Syria, the Gulf, that everybody has got to step back and say maybe this is the moment for sanity. If I could be some litmus test in supplying some clarity to that I would be elated.

I just want to say I am so grateful to Tilman, though, for being the greatest foreign direct investment in Turkey by taking the best basketball player that Turkey, a number that I thought was buying a submarine.

Senator SCOTT OF FLORIDA. Thank you.

Thank you, Chairman.

Senator HAGERTY. Thank you, Senator Scott.

And I want to say thank you to these three nominees today for your testimony, for answering our questions.

I am looking behind you now to thank your families because you all will play an incredibly supportive role, particularly your spouses who play an incredibly important role in your effectiveness, and I just want to express my appreciation for all of them right now.

Before closing I would like to ask unanimous consent to add any letters of support the committee has received to the record.

[EDITOR'S NOTE.—The information referred to above can be found in the "Additional Material Submitted for the Record" section at the end of this document.]

Senator HAGERTY. I will also note for the information of members that the record will remain open until close of business tomorrow, Wednesday, April the 2nd, including for members to submit questions for the record.

And with thanks of the committee this hearing is now adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 12:35 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

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

#### **RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO WARREN STEPHENS BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH**

*Question.* As Ambassador, how will you engage the UK government to limit the influence of Russian oligarchs and officials who hold large amount of wealth in the United Kingdom, and how will you encourage the UK government to seize Russian sovereign assets and use them to support Ukraine?

*Answer.* The UK has been a critical partner in supporting Ukraine and I commit to engaging with the UK government to bring the Russia-Ukraine war to a swift and lasting end, and—should there be a settlement—ensure Europe leads on a dura-

ble security arrangement for Ukraine. Regarding Russian oligarchs, I note that following the escalation of the Russia-Ukraine war in 2022, in close coordination with the United States, the UK designated over 2,000 entities worldwide that support Moscow's aggression and Russia's defense industrial base. These include Russian nationals with assets in London.

On Russian sovereign assets, I note the UK has finalized its \$2.8 billion (2.26 billion pounds) contribution to the \$50 billion G7 "Extraordinary Revenue Acceleration" loans for Ukraine, to provide military aid and to be repaid using profits generated by certain immobilized Russian sovereign assets in Europe.

*Question.* U.S. and UK share a common position as both are members of NATO and not members of the EU. How will you support U.S.-UK cooperation to push back on EU defense policies that undermine the NATO's role as the primary security organization in the transatlantic and exclude U.S. companies from the European defense sector?

*Answer.* NATO is the cornerstone of European security, a fact that the United States, the UK, and the EU have acknowledged. However, the United States and the UK must ensure that EU policies do not weaken NATO's position in this regard. The United States is committed to providing our NATO Allies and partners with high-quality, American-made defense articles at a competitive price to support their self-defense requirements. The United States has shouldered the burden of Europe's defense for decades. The President welcomes recent efforts from our European Allies to strengthen their defense capabilities and take responsibility for their own security.

NATO Secretary General Rutte has warned about creating new barriers that exclude U.S. and Allied companies from European defense projects, which would increase cost, complicate production, and hamper innovation—and I agree. Transatlantic defense industrial cooperation makes the Alliance stronger. If confirmed, I will work with the UK to ensure that U.S. and Allied defense companies remain an integral part of Europe's industrial base and global supply chains; they bring advanced technologies, innovation, and competitive pricing that enhances Europe's defense capabilities with the necessary speed and scale.

*Question.* How will you engage the UK government to increase efforts to counter Chinese influence and increase scrutiny on UK-China economic ties?

*Answer.* I understand the UK is frequently critical of China's malign influence, human rights abuses, and market manipulation. I believe it is important that the UK further address and guard against the national security implications of a closer economic relationship with China. If confirmed, I will not conduct business as usual while China actively undermines our security. If confirmed, I will deepen the already close coordination with the UK on these issues.

*Question.* How will you engage with the UK government on any concerns with U.S. tariffs and other actions to balance U.S.-European economic relations?

*Answer.* As I understand, the Commerce Department and the United States Trade Representative are in discussions with the UK concerning a potential bilateral trade deal to advance U.S. interests. I agree with Secretary Lutnick that any future agreement must lower barriers for American companies and achieve President Trump's priorities of making America safer, stronger, and more prosperous.

*Question.* The UK has been a leader in convening a "coalition of the willing" to develop a European proposal to support peace in Ukraine. What expectations should the U.S. set for the European plan, and what should the U.S. do to support these efforts?

*Answer.* The UK has been a critical partner in supporting Ukraine.

I am heartened by the UK's efforts to assemble a "coalition of the willing." As the Secretary has said all along, Europeans have a vested interest in securing peace on their continent. It is critical that Europeans do more to invest in their security. If confirmed, I will work closely with the UK on efforts to end the war and—should there be a settlement—ensure Europe leads on a durable security arrangement for Ukraine.

*Question.* How will you support conversations between the U.S., UK and other European partners about how we should share responsibility for supporting peace between Ukraine and Russia?

*Answer.* If confirmed, I will work closely with the UK on efforts to bring the Russia-Ukraine war to a swift and lasting end and—should there be a settlement—ensure Europe leads on a durable security arrangement for Ukraine.

*Question.* The UK has been a leading voice on pushing back against Chinese investments and foreign influence that could threaten its national security, as well as calling out China's violations of internationally recognized human rights in Hong Kong. As Ambassador, how will you approach conversations with the UK regarding shared threats of foreign malign influence?

*Answer.* I understand the UK is frequently critical of China's malign influence, human rights abuses, and market manipulation. I believe it is important that the UK further address and guard against the national security implications of a closer economic relationship with China. If confirmed, I will ensure that it is not business as usual while China actively undermines our security.

The United States regularly engages the UK to discuss the need for a coordinated approach to counter China's economic coercion in critical areas such as supply chains and the civil-nuclear sector, as well as its human rights abuses. If confirmed, I will deepen the already close coordination with the UK on these issues.

If confirmed, I will also make sure that we are taking an approach to China that protects U.S. interests first. I am hopeful that the UK will be a valuable partner in this crucial effort.

*Question.* Will you commit to working with the UK to secure the release of Jimmy Lai, a political prisoner and UK citizen who has been targeted by the Hong Kong government for his longstanding democracy advocacy and connections with the U.S.?

*Answer.* President Trump and Secretary Rubio have publicly stated Jimmy Lai should be released, and, if confirmed, I will ensure this is a top priority in my work with UK partners, as Lai remains detained for exercising his fundamental freedoms. If confirmed, I will join the Secretary and other U.S. officials in ensuring we raise Jimmy Lai's case with Chinese officials whenever possible, and work with the UK to secure his release.

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RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED  
TO WARREN STEPHENS BY SENATOR JEANNE SHAHEEN

*Question.* If confirmed, what steps will you take with your British counterparts to sustain progress on AUKUS implementation?

*Answer.* If confirmed, I am committed to working with our UK counterparts to implement the Administration's policies. AUKUS is critical for advancing our military capabilities to counter coercion and aggression. I understand the UK government is reviewing steps it can take to accelerate AUKUS progress, including under Pillar II military capability cooperation. If confirmed, I will support U.S. military capability development through engagement with UK counterparts, including on AUKUS.

*Question.* In what ways can the U.S. leverage our partnership with the United Kingdom as both countries increase investments in our respective submarine industrial base, and develop best practices both countries can better coordinate on?

*Answer.* It is critical that the AUKUS partnership supports the revitalization of both the U.S. and UK submarine industrial bases. Continued facilitation of industrial connectivity across AUKUS nations will be useful to shore up supply chains, bolster resiliency, and identify new promising practices that sustain our competitive edge.

*Question.* How will you ensure that the Administration's tariffs strategy and other trade barriers do not negatively affect or impede progress on AUKUS?

*Answer.* The Administration's tariff policy is designed to rebuild our economy and bolster our national and economic security. The Executive Order on reciprocal tariffs provides that President Trump may decrease or limit the scope of tariffs if trading partners take significant steps to remedy non-reciprocal trade arrangements and align sufficiently with the United States on economic and national security matters.

*Question.* Please explain how you interpret the role of the Special Envoy to the United Kingdom. What is the current reporting structure of the Special Envoy and how will these two roles be differentiated to ensure that UK Government officials understand one another's remit?

*Answer.* President Trump named Mark Burnett to serve as Special Envoy to the United Kingdom to undertake immediate actions to enhance our partnership on areas of mutual interest including trade, investment opportunities, and cultural exchanges. The U.S.-UK relationship is multifaceted and has historically benefited

from special envoys to address unique issue areas that strategically bolster the efforts of the U.S. Ambassador in London. If confirmed, I will be the sole Ambassador to the UK. I will work with the special envoy during their temporary assignment as they carry out their specific duties for the mission. But ultimately, I will be the chief of mission for the US in country in order to ensure that there is no confusion of leadership at the Embassy.

*Question.* The Quint often plays a pivotal role in aligning U.S. and European approaches to crises in the Western Balkans, a region I believe is critically important to Europe's stability and U.S. national interests. Understanding that the administration is somewhat skeptical of multilateral diplomacy, if confirmed, will you commit to doing your part to maintain this important, informal mechanism for diplomatic coordination?

*Answer.* I recognize the pivotal role that the Quint plays in aligning U.S. and European approaches to crises in the Western Balkans. If confirmed, I commit to doing my part to maintain and support the Quint as an essential tool for diplomatic coordination and to ensure that our collective efforts contribute to regional stability and our shared objectives.

*Question.* If confirmed, will you commit to advocating within the interagency, as needed, to support UK efforts in support of Ukraine?

*Answer.* If confirmed, I will work closely with the UK in support of President Trump's efforts to bring the Russia-Ukraine war to a swift and lasting end, and—should there be a settlement—to ensure that Europe leads on a durable security arrangement for Ukraine.

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RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED  
TO WARREN STEPHENS BY SENATOR MIKE LEE

*Question.* The U.S. and U.K. share a special relationship. Even so, like many other European countries, the political climate in the U.K. has led to the erosion of basic principles, including free speech. What is the future of the U.S.-U.K. special relationship under the current U.K. government and, in particular, how can the U.S. work with an increasingly further-Left Labour Party to continue the development of our special relationship?

*Answer.* The UK is a steadfast partner of the United States in confronting the most pressing geopolitical issues. The U.S. Government cooperates with the UK daily—from the working level to top leadership—finding solutions to the hardest challenges. If confirmed, I commit to maximizing our partnership to advance our interests, providing security and economic benefits for the American people. I also commit to ensuring our relationship rests on shared values. As Vice President Vance underscored, the West should unite around free speech, halt censorship, and reject suppressing opposition.

*Question.* Earlier this week, the President reportedly approved the U.K.'s proposed transfer of sovereignty over the Chagos Islands to Mauritius, predicated on a 2019 opinion of the International Court of Justice. The U.S. and U.K. maintain a joint military base, Diego Garcia, on the archipelago's largest island. While the sovereignty-transfer agreement includes a 99-year lease on the base, to your knowledge, what safeguards are in place to protect the access and integrity of U.S. assets from potential Chinese influence in the base's periphery considering the Mauritius-China relationship?

*Answer.* The joint U.S.-UK base on Diego Garcia plays a critical role in maintaining regional and international peace and security. I understand that the Administration is committed to ensuring our partnership with the UK, including via this agreement, ensures the long-term, secure, and effective operation of the joint U.S.-UK military base on Diego Garcia and addresses a range of security challenges in the Indo-Pacific, including threats such as terrorism and piracy.

*Question.* During the last Trump administration, there were multiple rounds of negotiations surrounding a bilateral U.S.-U.K. free trade agreement, that were then stalled under the Biden administration. To what extent do you anticipate renewed negotiations being a priority during your tenure as Ambassador and, absent an agreement on an FTA, what other avenues are available to enhance to U.S.-U.K. trade relationship?

*Answer.* The UK is an invaluable trade and investment partner for the United States. If confirmed, I would engage with the UK government to increase UK im-

ports from the United States across a variety of sectors, including energy and tech. I would also encourage greater UK investment in the United States. I understand there are ongoing discussions regarding the future of U.S.-UK trade relations. If confirmed, I would ensure my team works closely with the United States Trade Representative to ensure that a future agreement will level the playing field for American companies and achieve President Trump's priorities of making America safer, stronger, and more prosperous.

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RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED  
TO TILMAN FERTITTA BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

*Question.* As Ambassador, how will you push Italy to fulfill its commitment to spend 2 percent of its GDP on defense?

*Answer.* As the President and Secretary Rubio have noted, we want NATO to be stronger, and the only way NATO can get stronger is if our partners have more capability. Prime Minister Meloni has acknowledged the need for Italy to do more on defense. If confirmed, I will work closely with the Prime Minister and her government to rapidly meet and exceed the 2 percent Wales pledge and agree to a new 5 percent commitment. Moreover, I will work with Italy to ensure expenditures meet NATO capability needs and reinforce interoperability.

*Question.* How will you engage the Italian government to increase efforts to counter Chinese influence and increase scrutiny on Italy China economic ties?

*Answer.* Italy understands the threat posed by growing Chinese influence and made the right decision to leave China's Belt and Road Initiative. If confirmed, I intend to hold regular engagements with Italian political, business, and media leaders to foster a better understanding of the challenges posed by China and forge partnerships with them to counter these challenges. I will engage the government to scrutinize Chinese attempts to increase its investments in and control over critical infrastructure and technologies.

*Question.* How will you engage with the Italian government on any concerns with U.S. tariffs and other actions to balance U.S.-European economic relations?

*Answer.* If confirmed, I will work closely with Italian counterparts to identify and promote sectors where mutual economic benefits can be achieved, such as technology, energy, and agriculture. I will prioritize efforts to address trade barriers and seek opportunities to boost U.S. exports to Italy. I will work closely with U.S. companies to address the substantial non-tariff barriers Italy and the EU have in place that hinder U.S. business opportunities.

*Question.* How will you push back against excessive EU regulations that limit U.S. economic relations with Italy?

*Answer.* If confirmed, I would instruct my country team to identify regulations that limit U.S. economic relations with Italy and make a renewed push with the senior-most levels of Italy's government to have those regulations changed or eliminated. Italy has a strong voice in the EU, and I would work closely with President Meloni and her government to ensure U.S. concerns are addressed bilaterally, and that Italy uses its influence to help resolve concerns we have with European Union policy.

*Question.* Italy has joined other European countries in forming the "coalition of the willing" to create a plan for how Europe will support a potential peace agreement in Ukraine. What expectations should the U.S. set for this European plan, and what should the U.S. do to support these efforts?

*Answer.* President Trump has sought to end the bloodshed in Ukraine and has made clear his expectation that Europe does more to take responsibility for its own security. If confirmed, I would support the President's efforts to achieve peace and work closely with Italy to support these efforts.

*Question.* How will you support conversations between the U.S., Italy and other European partners about how we should share responsibility for supporting peace between Ukraine and Russia?

*Answer.* President Trump has made it clear that European partners must take on more responsibility for supporting peace between Ukraine and Russia. Italy is already an active contributor, including by hosting the Ukraine Recovery Conference in July. If confirmed, I would work closely with the Italian government to encourage

Italy to do even more to support and make vital contributions toward the peace efforts.

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RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED  
TO TILMAN FERTITTA BY SENATOR JEANNE SHAHEEN

*Western Balkans*

*Question.* The Quint often plays a pivotal role in aligning U.S. and European approaches to crises in the Western Balkans, a region I believe is critically important to Europe's stability and U.S. national interests. Understanding that the administration is somewhat skeptical of multilateral diplomacy, if confirmed, will you commit to doing your part to maintain this important, informal mechanism for diplomatic coordination?

*Answer.* I recognize the pivotal role the Quint plays in coordinating U.S. and European approaches to crises, including in the Western Balkans. If confirmed, I commit to doing my part to maintain and support the Quint as an essential tool for diplomatic coordination and to ensure that our collective efforts contribute to regional stability and our shared objectives.

*Defense Spending*

*Question.* Please outline your initial thoughts on how the United States could encourage Italy to reach the 2 percent defense spending target, which was agreed to at the 2014 NATO Summit in Wales.

*Answer.* Prime Minister Meloni has publicly acknowledged the need for Italy to do more on defense spending. If confirmed, one of my top priorities is to work closely with Italy to ensure it fulfills its commitment to spend at least 2 percent of GDP on defense, as agreed upon at the 2014 NATO Summit in Wales, and move quickly toward 5 percent of GDP in defense spending. I will encourage Italy to acquire more cutting-edge U.S. defense articles to strengthen Italy's defense capabilities and increase its contributions to NATO.

*Ukraine*

*Question.* If confirmed, will you commit to advocating within the interagency, as needed, to support Italy efforts in support of Ukraine?

*Answer.* Italy has been steadfast in its support for Ukraine, contributing \$4 billion in economic, humanitarian, and military aid in recent years. Italy will host the Ukraine Recovery Conference in Rome July 10–11. Strengthening our collaboration with Italy to bring the Russia-Ukraine war to a swift and durable end will be one of my priorities if confirmed. I will work diligently to ensure that our interagency efforts are aligned and support our joint efforts with Italy to establish a sustainable peace.

*Tariffs*

*Question.* With the Trump Administration's recent announcement of a 20 percent tariff on all goods originating from Italy, how do you plan to increase trade between the United States and Italy?

*Answer.* If confirmed, I will engage with the Italian government to increase Italy's imports from the United States across a variety of sectors, including energy, as well as encourage investment in the United States. In coordination with U.S. companies, I will also address trade barriers in Italy to ensure a level playing field for American companies and achieve President Trump's priority of bringing balance to our trade ties with Italy.

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RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED  
TO TILMAN FERTITTA BY SENATOR TED CRUZ

*Energy and the Mediterranean*

*President Trump has determined that it is a vital national security priority of the United States to establish energy dominance. The Mediterranean will be a critical theater for deepening those policies.*

*Question.* What are your assessments of the geopolitical and economic conditions which affect American energy exports to the Mediterranean?

*Answer.* The Russia-Ukraine war forced Europe to diversify its energy sources, as reflected by a significant increase in U.S. liquefied natural gas (LNG) imports through terminals in Italy and around the continent since 2022. This has led to record U.S. LNG exports to Europe over the first 2 months of 2025. Affordability of energy supplies will be a key economic driver in future years. If confirmed, I will work with U.S. companies to secure long-term contracts for LNG exports that will help Italy and Europe mitigate price risks.

*Question.* What challenges do Russian exports to Europe pose to U.S. energy dominance?

*Answer.* Russian natural gas, which can be transported by ship or pipeline to Europe, competes with U.S. liquefied natural gas exports for the European market. Italy and the EU have been clear that there will be no return to business-as-usual with Russian energy suppliers. The United States has positioned itself as the most reliable energy partner for Europe and if confirmed, I will prioritize the promotion of the United States as Italy's energy partner.

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RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED  
TO TILMAN FERTITTA BY SENATOR BRIAN SCHATZ

*Question.* If confirmed as U.S. Ambassador, how would you work with Italy to counter PRC malign influence in the country and protect Italy's strategic infrastructure?

*Answer.* Italy left China's Belt and Road Initiative under PM Meloni's leadership. Though Italy still seeks to expand its economic and trading relationship with China, Italy and the United States are fundamentally aligned in ways that China and Italy are not. If confirmed, I will work closely with Italy to address the significant challenges China poses to both our countries' interests, including countering malign influence and protecting strategic infrastructure.

*Question.* As Ambassador, would you speak out if the PRC attempted to use its diplomatic or commercial influence to cow the Italian press or politicians?

*Answer.* There are good reasons to be concerned about China's use of coercion. If confirmed, I would instruct my country team to continue to closely monitor any efforts by China to coerce Italy. I intend to engage Italian political, business, and media leaders to foster a better understanding of the challenges posed by China and forge partnerships to address them. I would not hesitate to speak out if the PRC attempted to use its diplomatic or commercial influence against the Italian press or politicians, and I would make clear that the United States will have Italy's back in the face of any coercion by China.

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RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED  
TO TILMAN FERTITTA BY SENATOR MIKE LEE

*Question.* Despite a resurgence of political will and a desire for self-sufficiency, Italy still fails to meet its NATO spending commitments. If confirmed, how do you intend to ensure that Italy follows through on its NATO spending commitments? Should we reconsider our U.S. force posture in Italy as a point of leverage?

*Answer.* As the President and Secretary Rubio have noted, we want NATO to be stronger, and the only way NATO can get stronger is if our partners have more capability. Prime Minister Meloni has acknowledged the need for Italy to do more on defense. If confirmed, I will work closely with the Prime Minister and her government to rapidly meet and exceed the 2 percent Wales pledge and agree to a new 5 percent commitment. Moreover, I will work with Italy to ensure expenditures meet NATO capability needs and reinforce interoperability.

*Question.* Italy's Prime Minister Meloni seems poised to be an ally of the Trump administration, but may be constrained by the fact that Italy, like many others, has ceded a degree of its sovereignty to the European Union. How can you, and the Trump administration, work to differentiate our relationship with Italy from our concerns with the European collective?

*Answer.* Italy has a strong voice in the European Union. If confirmed, I would work closely with Prime Minister Meloni and her government to ensure that U.S.

concerns are addressed bilaterally, and that Italy uses its influence to help resolve concerns we have with European Union policy.

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RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED  
TO THOMAS BARRACK BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

*Question.* As Ambassador, do you commit to protecting the safety and security of U.S. mission personnel, including locally employed staff who may face persecution from the Turkish government due to their affiliation with the U.S. diplomatic mission?

*Answer.* If confirmed, I would oppose the prosecutions of U.S. locally employed staff in Türkiye based on unsubstantiated charges related to their official duties. I would press Türkiye to ensure there are no additional prosecutions of, or judicial restriction on, our staff.

*Question.* Do you commit to keep Congress apprised about any negotiations between the U.S. and Turkey to resolve the impasse over Turkey's ownership of the Russian S-400 missile system and the U.S. hold on F-35 sales and imposition of CAATSA sanctions?

*Answer.* If confirmed, I would ensure any proposed sales serve the U.S. national interest and would welcome discussions with Congress. As a NATO Ally, our forces serve side by side, and we need to remain interoperable while also protecting sensitive U.S. technology. If confirmed I would ensure CAATSA sanctions are fully implemented.

*Question.* How will you engage the Turkish government on ensuring that their military activities in Syria do not introduce risks to U.S. personnel and allies conducting counterterrorism operations in the region?

*Answer.* Türkiye is a NATO Ally and strategic partner in a complex region. U.S. strategic interests overlap with Türkiye's in many ways, including countering terrorism, supporting a unified Syria, and deterring malign influence in the region. If confirmed, I would work with Türkiye to further U.S. strategic interests. I would not shy away from discussing areas of disagreement and would strongly advocate against any actions inconsistent with U.S. interests.

*Question.* How will you engage Turkey on its relationship with Russia, including on concerns for Russia sanctions evasion in Turkey, Turkey's dependence on Russian energy and the role Turkey may have in efforts to support peace between Russia and Ukraine?

*Answer.* I'm aware that Türkiye has significantly deepened its economic cooperation with Russia in recent years. If confirmed, I would work with Türkiye to further U.S. strategic interests, including addressing sanctions evasion and diversifying Türkiye energy suppliers. I would seek to explore additional U.S. opportunities in the energy sector. Türkiye also wants peace between Russia and Ukraine, and if confirmed, I would encourage Türkiye to support President Trump's plan for peace.

*Question.* How will you work with other U.S. Ambassadors, officials and envoys who are also operating in countries and organizations that are involved with Turkey?

*Answer.* If confirmed, I would actively coordinate with other U.S. Ambassadors and officials to ensure a whole of government approach toward Türkiye, a NATO Ally and strategic partner in a complex region.

*Question.* How will you engage the Turkish government about its support for Hamas? In particular, how will you address terror financing issues in Turkey, to include fundraising and money transfers to U.S. designated foreign terrorist organizations?

*Answer.* Hamas is a U.S.-and EU-designated terrorist organization, and I would continue to press Türkiye for action and intervention. The presence of designated terrorists in Türkiye is of great concern to the United States and its impact to Israeli-Palestinian peace. It also undermines Turkish interests and harms Türkiye's standing internationally. It is critically important that we continue to hold Hamas accountable for its destabilizing activities, including any fundraising, in the region. I understand that the United States and Türkiye do not see eye to eye on every issue, but if confirmed, I would press for Turkish action and intervention against Hamas.



If confirmed, I also look forward to working with Turkish officials to address U.S. concerns about terrorist financing, including Iran's continued destabilizing efforts to finance its proxies through countries across the region.

*Question.* Turkey has expressed it wants to play a positive role in Syria's transition to a new government, which I am cautious about. Turkey's actions in Northern Syria must not introduce any additional risks to U.S. troops conducting counter-terrorism missions in the region. As Ambassador, how will you engage Turkey about interference in U.S. military operations in Syria?

*Answer.* The United States and Türkiye share many common interests in Syria but also disagree over some issues. If confirmed, I would work with Türkiye toward shared objectives and to address areas of disagreement. As an Ally, I would expect Türkiye to ensure the safety of U.S. forces. I would also encourage Türkiye to continue to work with the United States to ensure Syria does not become a base for international terrorism.

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RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED  
TO THOMAS BARRACK BY SENATOR JEANNE SHAHEEN

*U.S. Embassy Ankara*

*Question.* If confirmed, what do you envision as your legacy in your role as U.S. Ambassador to Türkiye?

*Answer.* Our partnership with Türkiye is grounded in a wide range of critically shared interests. Today, Türkiye is a valued NATO Ally, partner in counterterrorism, and interlocutor with regional partners. It is also a valued economic partner that I will work closely with to reach President Trump's goal of reaching \$100 billion in bilateral trade. There are certainly challenges in this relationship, challenges that must be addressed. I believe we have a unique opportunity to partner in pursuit of shared objectives and to work toward an even greater partnership that will deliver peace, prosperity and security for both of our nations.

*Question.* How would you characterize your management style and how would you divide responsibilities between you and your Deputy Chief of Mission?

*Answer.* The transition from business to government service at times can be a bumpy road and I was blessed as a young man to be appointed by President Ronald Reagan as Deputy Undersecretary of the Department of the Interior. It was there I gained an admiration for the dedication and competence of Civil Servants and Foreign Service Officers as well as the importance of a coordinated and transparent approach between the Executive and Legislative branches. If confirmed, I will lead my Mission with that respect and interaction.

*Human Rights*

*Question.* If confirmed for this role, will you commit to registering concern with the Turkish government when the human rights of U.S. citizens are violated?

*Answer.* It is in the U.S. national interest for Türkiye to be a stable, democratic, rights-respecting, and prosperous ally and partner. If confirmed, my first responsibility is to protect the lives and safety of U.S. citizens in Türkiye. I would urge Türkiye to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms and reinforce the importance of democracy and human rights to our bilateral relationship.

*Question.* If confirmed for this role, will you commit to registering concern with the Turkish government when the human rights of Turkish individuals, particularly opponents, journalists and journalists, are violated?

*Answer.* If confirmed, I would underscore the importance of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and emphasize the important role played by a free and independent press. I would urge the government to revise laws and policies that restrict freedom of expression and engage with journalists, independent media outlets, and civil society across Türkiye.

*Russia and Ukraine*

*Question.* If confirmed, will you commit to advocating within the interagency, as needed, to support Turkish efforts in support of Ukraine?

*Answer.* Türkiye played a crucial role early in the Russia-Ukraine conflict by supporting Kyiv with weapons and brokering the Black Sea Grain Initiative. If confirmed, I will encourage the Turkish government to support President Trump's plan

for peace between Ukraine and Russia and will work with the interagency to that end.

*Question.* I required by law the development of a U.S. strategy for the Black Sea region. The strategy outlines U.S. strategic objectives in the region, including helping reduce regional dependence on Russian energy, countering information manipulation and strengthening democracy in the region. Will you commit to implement the Black Sea Security Strategy?

*Answer.* NATO Allies such as Türkiye have taken steps to increase cooperation in the Black Sea. If confirmed, I would encourage Türkiye to support deeper engagement in furthering our collective security in the Black Sea and will urge Türkiye to support U.S. and Allied military operations in the Black Sea, in line with its Montreux obligations.

#### *Tariffs*

*Question.* With the Trump Administration's recent announcement of a 10 percent tariff on all goods originating from Türkiye, how do you plan to increase trade between the United States and Türkiye?

*Answer.* Türkiye and the United States maintain a diversified bilateral trading relationship which has reached almost \$40 billion. If confirmed, I would engage with the Turkish government to increase Türkiye's imports from the United States across a variety of sectors as well as encourage investment in the United States and business ties that make America stronger and more prosperous. I will work to ensure a fair trade and investment environment for American companies. I also see opportunities for U.S. industry including civil nuclear technology and aviation.

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#### RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO THOMAS BARRACK BY SENATOR TED CRUZ

##### *International Criminal Court (ICC)*

*The International Criminal Court (ICC) has issued international arrest warrants against Israeli officials, including Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. This decision poses an acute threat to the safety and security of Americans because the precedent being set would allow the ICC to prosecute American officials and troops, who are also outside the Court's jurisdiction. In response to this threat, President Trump issued Executive Order (EO) 14203. EO 14203 includes an assessment that "The United States . . . expects our allies to oppose any ICC actions against the United States, Israel, or any other ally of the United States that has not consented to ICC jurisdiction."*

*The government of Turkey and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan have boosted the ICC's campaign. Erdogan said, "we support the arrest warrant" and he met with the ICC prosecutor responsible for the warrants, Karim Khan. Turkish officials and lawyers—including officials linked to President Erdogan's party—have sought to formally provide evidence to the ICC against Israel. This posture and these actions put the government of Turkey and President Erdogan on a collision course with President Trump and the policy of the United States.*

*Question.* Please evaluate the degree to which the ICC investigation against Israel poses a threat to the national security interests of America.

*Answer.* I have been nominated to serve in Türkiye and will maintain my focus on that aspect of our bilateral relationship. Turkish-Israeli relations have served as a pillar of stability in the past, and it is important to see productive diplomatic relations restored. If confirmed, I will continue to urge constructive Turkish-Israeli relations.

*Question.* Do you assess that any Turkish officials, including President Erdogan, are providing support to the ICC's investigation against Israel?

*Answer.* I do not have any personal insight into the actions of Turkish officials in this matter. If confirmed, I will continue to urge constructive Turkish-Israeli relations.

*Question.* To what degree are you concerned that officials linked to Erdogan and the Turkish government are directly boosting the ICC's attacks against Israel?

*Answer.* I do not have any personal insight into the actions of Turkish officials in this matter. If confirmed, I will continue to urge constructive Turkish-Israeli relations.

*Terrorism Sanctions*

*Turkey is straightforwardly one of Hamas's most significant state supporters. The Biden administration did not enforce sanctions against Turkey for hosting Hamas. The Biden administration refused to enforce sanctions against Turkey for hosting Hamas. Last Congress, I authored the Hamas Sanctions Act, which sought to block safe havens for Hamas in places like Turkey and Qatar.*

*Question.* What is your assessment of Turkey's relationship with Hamas?

*Answer.* Hamas is a U.S.-and EU-designated terrorist organization and the presence and financing of Hamas, in Türkiye is of great concern to the United States and does nothing to contribute to Israeli-Palestinian peace. It also undermines Turkish interests and harms Türkiye's standing internationally. It is critically important that the United States continues to hold Hamas accountable for its destabilizing activities in the region. I understand that the United States and Türkiye don't see eye to eye on every issue, but if confirmed, I would press for Turkish action and intervention against Hamas.

*Question.* What is your understanding of how the State Department assesses Turkey's relationship with Hamas?

*Answer.* Hamas is a U.S.-designated terrorist organization and there is no confusion over that fact. The presence of designated terrorists in Türkiye is of great concern to the United States and does not contribute to Israeli-Palestinian peace. It also undermines Turkish interests and harms Türkiye's standing internationally.

*Question.* If American sanctions were imposed against Turkish individuals or entities for supporting Hamas, please assess how you believe those sanctions would affect the Turkish government's support for Hamas.

*Answer.* If confirmed, I would press for Turkish action and intervention against Hamas. I would also press Turkish officials and businesses to comply with U.S. sanctions and export controls and underscore the risks to Turkish citizens and businesses.

*Turkey and the S-400 Deal*

*As discussed during the hearing, Turkey's acquisition of S-400's from Russia poses a deep challenge to U.S.-Turkish relations and to American national security interests. It is part of Turkey's pivot away from the U.S. and our allies—and indeed away from NATO's core mission—and toward Russia, China, and Iran.*

*Question.* Do you agree that Turkey should have to give its S-400's before they can reenter the F-35 program?

*Answer.* If confirmed, I would urge Türkiye to get rid of the S-400 system and to refrain from purchasing any additional Russian military equipment. I would also support vigorously implementing the CAATSA sanctions imposed in 2020 on Türkiye's primary defense procurement entity (SSB) and four of its officers. The terms of U.S. CAATSA sanctions and the requirements for Türkiye to procure the F-35s are well known.

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RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED  
TO THOMAS BARRACK BY SENATOR BRIAN SCHATZ

*Question.* You and your companies have had wide-ranging commercial interests in the Middle East, including with the UAE, Qatar and other countries.

What steps have you taken to divest or distance yourself from Middle East-related business and how would you ensure impartiality in your dealings as Ambassador, if confirmed?

*Answer.* In my ethics agreement with OGE I have agreed to liquidate my interests in DBRG. I have been impartial to all Middle East Countries with the common theme of my ability to navigate these complex cultures with the thread of USA tolerance and cultural sixth sense. For over 4 decades my reputation amongst most countries has been that of a transparent and trustworthy emissary to USA business interests. Türkiye itself has various complex relationships with the Gulf States and other Middle East countries. The key to my success as a diplomat is trust and confidence that my partiality and representation is to the USA.

*Question.* President Erdogan and his family have vast, corrupt commercial entanglements throughout Turkey and even internationally.

If confirmed, how would you encourage the President and his family to hold themselves to a high standard in terms of corruption, real and perceived?

Answer. I have no personal insight to this matter. However, it is in the U.S. national interest for Türkiye—a key player on regional issues—to be a stable, democratic, rights-respecting, and prosperous ally and partner. If confirmed, I would stress the importance of rule of law to maintaining a strong bilateral economic and security relationship.

*Question.* The Turkish military and allied militias continue to attack the Syrian Democratic Forces, our counter-ISIS allies, in northeastern Syria, which also puts remaining U.S. forces there at risk.

With the toppling of the Assad regime, how can we encourage Turkey to play a more productive role in Syria, especially given the Justice and Development Party (AKP)'s broad ideological alignment with the new government?

Answer. The United States and Türkiye share many common interests in Syria, but we also disagree over some issues. The Syrian Democratic Forces remain the United States' local partner on the ground in northeast Syria to ensure the enduring defeat of ISIS in Syria. If confirmed, I would work with Türkiye toward shared objectives and to address areas of disagreement. I would also encourage Türkiye to work with the United States to ensure Syria does not become a base for international terrorism.

*Question.* President Erdogan's AKP has been in power since 2002 and Freedom House has rated Turkey as "not free" since 2019. In March, Istanbul mayor and chief Erdogan political rival Ekrem Imamoglu was jailed on what are widely perceived as politically motivated corruption and terrorism charges.

If confirmed, what would you do as Ambassador to push for the release of Imamoglu and help shift Turkey back toward a democratic path?

Answer. It is in the U.S. national interest for Türkiye to be a stable, democratic, rights-respecting, and prosperous ally and partner. If confirmed, I would urge Türkiye to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms and reinforce the importance of democracy and human rights in our bilateral relationship. I would stress the importance of rule of law to maintaining a strong bilateral economic and security relationship.

*Question.* Turkey has been expanding bilateral relations with the People's Republic of China (PRC), to include advancing discussions on potential military cooperation and PRC defense production in Turkey.

If confirmed, how, specifically, would you seek to address growing PRC influence in Turkey that is inimical to U.S. interests?

Answer. China has increased its economic influence in Türkiye in recent years, particularly in the automotive and telecommunications sectors. Türkiye and China are largely exporting competitors in third country markets. If confirmed, I would share U.S. concerns about Chinese commercial practices. I would also encourage Türkiye to diversify its supply chains and investment sourcing by increasing cooperation with the U.S. and other likeminded partners.

*Question.* Hawaii is not covered by the geographical parameters set out in Article 6 of the North Atlantic Treaty, NATO's founding document. Article 6 of the Treaty defines the bounds of the protected territory for the purposes of Article 5, which commits all members to collective self-defense. Under Article 6, an armed attack would trigger a response if one were to occur "on the territory of any of the Parties in Europe or North America, on the Algerian Departments of France, on the territory of Turkey or on the Islands under the jurisdiction of any of the Parties in the North Atlantic area north of the Tropic of Cancer," thereby excluding Hawaii.

If confirmed, do you commit to raise the issue of Hawaii's exclusion from Article 6 of the North Atlantic Treaty with the Turkish government?

Answer. If confirmed, I would work with Türkiye to further U.S. strategic interests as defined by the President.

*Question.* Turkey has served as a transshipment location for dual-use goods that benefit Russia's efforts to defeat Ukraine on the battlefield.

If confirmed, how will you help enable the U.S. government's efforts to get Turkey to reduce the flow of dual-use goods to Russia's military?

Answer. If confirmed, I would press Turkish officials and companies to comply with U.S. sanctions and export controls and underscore the risks to Turkish citizens and businesses.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED  
TO THOMAS BARRACK BY SENATOR MIKE LEE

*Question.* Turkey operates in a unique geopolitical context spanning the Middle East and Europe. Despite being a member of NATO, Turkey often challenges or outright acts in contravention of the alliance interests. This includes support for Hamas, purchasing the Russian S-400 missile system, and taking an active role in Syria. Even so, the Biden administration permitted the sale of American F-16 jets to Turkey in order to win their vote to approve Sweden's membership to NATO. How would you propose to reassess Turkey's alliance with the U.S. and access to U.S. weapons?

*Answer.* Türkiye is a long-standing NATO Ally with the second-largest military in the Alliance and is a significant contributor to the Alliance's operations and missions. If confirmed, I will seek cooperation with Türkiye on common priorities and engage in dialogue to address disagreements.

*Question.* As the Trump administration pursues an agenda of peace and normalization across the Middle East, grounded in a need to balance against Iran. However, Turkey has ended diplomatic relations with Israel, our most important regional ally and the lynchpin for an effective balancing coalition. Turkey is also a consistent, and growing, customer for Iran's energy sector. What actionable steps do you suggest to ensure that Turkey is not a hindrance to the President's policies in the Middle East?

*Answer.* Turkish-Israeli relations have served as a pillar of stability in the past, and it is important to see productive diplomatic and trade relations restored. If confirmed, I would urge constructive Turkish-Israeli relations.

I see great opportunities for U.S. companies in the LNG, renewables, and small, modular nuclear reactor (SMR) fields. If confirmed, I would encourage these opportunities for U.S. companies as a way to move Türkiye off Iranian energy and boost American prosperity.

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Submitted by Senator Pete Ricketts

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# Europe needs to spend more on defence, not just pretend to

There's no such thing as a free tank

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ILLUSTRATION: PETER SCHRANK

Mar 20th 2025

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AS THE BRITISH government drew up its annual budget in 2015, the sums came out wrong in a troubling way. Cuts across departments meant that spending on defence would come out just shy of 2% of GDP for the first time since the 1930s. That wouldn't do: only a year earlier Britain had hosted NATO leaders as they formally agreed on the 2% figure, in response to Russia's first crack at invading Ukraine. A clever way was soon found to spare politicians' blushes. A few billion pounds of spending that had not in previous years been included in the defence budget was discreetly shuffled into it, in what was politely dubbed a "revised accounting strategy" (also known as "shifting the goalposts"). With the stroke of a pliable accountant's pen, Britain's defence budget now included pension payments to war widows and defence-ministry staff, as well as some intelligence spending and contributions to far-flung UN peacekeeping missions. The tactic helped nudge the all-important figure back above the desired threshold.

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Given further Russian aggression and American isolationism, the 2% figure is no longer enough. At a summit of NATO leaders in June its 32 members will have to agree to spend well over 3% of GDP on defence (the latest betting is on 3.7%). No amount of accounting fudges will bridge such a gap. But this has not stopped some politicians from

attempting a turbo-charged variant of the British trick. On March 13th Pedro Sánchez, prime minister of Spain, proposed a novel way to boost his country's defence spending, NATO's lowest at a feeble 1.28% of GDP. The wheeze is not *actually* to spend more on the armed forces, but to adopt a "360-degree" vision of security instead. For one thing, the real peril to Spain comes not from Russian tanks trundling over the Pyrenees—why worry about that? The threats posed by a changing climate in the Mediterranean basin mean that efforts to curb carbon emissions should be counted as akin to military expenditure, alongside cybersecurity and combating terrorism. Several percentage points of GDP can thus be re-imagined as defence spending, and whatever target NATO sets easily met. *¡Dicho y hecho!*

Italy has its own defence-washing plans in mind, arguing that measures relating to economic competitiveness—itsself a nebulous concept—should also be thought of as somehow part of its defence efforts. But why stop there? With a bit more creativity, even larger slices of government outlay could be re-imagined as part of this expanded security budget. Since a citizen in ill-health can hardly be expected to serve in the armed forces, surely public hospitals should be included as defence spending too? Soldiers need to be able to read, and travel to military bases; including the education and transport budgets as a subset of the military makes perfect sense. The list is just about endless.

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For the 23 NATO members who are also in the European Union, the incentive for creative defence accounting has recently grown stronger still. As taxes in most EU member countries are already high and social spending seemingly sacrosanct, the easiest way for national governments to quickly pay for more defence is to borrow the money first. For some, notably in the south, adding to the national debt pile would mean they fall foul of the EU's fiscal rules, which normally limit annual budget deficits to 3% of GDP. Plans are afoot to loosen these strictures by allowing countries to run up additional deficits of 1.5 more percentage points without facing sanctions from Eurocrats, so long as the money is spent on defence. Anything that can be shoehorned into that category probably will be, to Mr Sánchez's delight.

Spain and Italy are not the only ones tempted by creative thinking. There are plenty in Europe, including in Paris and Berlin, who think setting up state-owned banks which defence contractors could borrow from will help ramp up production of drones and shells. This is appealing to politicians: a little seed money to start a bank can be "leveraged" into big amounts that look nice in press releases. But credit facilities merely help private arms-makers sort out the financial mechanics they need to operate. Ultimately governments will still have to find real cash to buy the lethal stuff once it is made. There's no such thing as a free tank.

#### **Does sunscreen count as defence spending?**

European diplomats are privately spluttering at the Spanish and Italian approach. They are right. Obfuscation on military funding represents a spectacular failure to rise to the occasion. For one, it is likely to prove self-defeating. "If you lump too much into defence spending that isn't really related to defence, you will just end up with a far higher target to hit," says Fenella McGerty of the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London. In other words, forget 3.7%; the NATO

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target might come out closer to 6%.

What is worse, Mr Sánchez's idea is premised on a fallacious notion: that NATO countries abutting Russia need to invest in tanks and infantry to be shot at, while those further away do their bit by running IT helpdesks. That is offensive to the very idea of an alliance. "A government can't say 'I'm doing this but I'm not going to do that': NATO cannot work that way," says Edward Hunter Christie, a former NATO official now at the Finnish Institute of International Affairs. Burden-sharing means everyone must have skin in the game, including a fair share of the dangerous bits.

Yes, convincing voters to trim public services or pay more tax is hard. That is what political leadership is for. Germany is showing the way by shelving its sacrosanct "debt brake" to fund its armed forces. The Baltics have raised all sorts of taxes, including on tobacco ("Smoke a Marlboro, stop the Russians!"). Denmark even nixed a public holiday. A lot more will be needed. For their part, southern Europeans should remember how much they have benefited from being part of both NATO and the EU. And that for alliances to work, solidarity must flow both ways. ■

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This article appeared in the Europe section of the print edition under the headline "There's no such thing as a free tank"

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*Submitted by Senator James E. Risch*

AMERICAN ITALIAN  
FOOD COALITION

March 31, 2025

The Honorable James Risch and Jeanne Shaheen  
Chairman and Ranking Member  
U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee  
423 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Risch and Ranking Member Shaheen,

On behalf of the American Italian Food Coalition (AIFC), we write in support of Tilman Fertitta's nomination as the next U.S. Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to the Italian Republic and the Republic of San Marino. We commend President Trump on this important nomination and urge the Senate Foreign Relations Committee as well as the full United States Senate to approve Mr. Fertitta's appointment as soon as possible.

The AIFC is an alliance of more than 500 companies, manufacturers, and trade associations dedicated to ensuring American consumers continue to have access to high-quality, affordable, imported Italian products including coffee, pasta, biscuits, and wafers. The products our member organizations make contribute to the strong cultural identity of many of America's great cities, and support American jobs and prosperity. AIFC members support 5.9 million jobs; \$422.9 billion in economic output; \$94.78 billion in taxes; and \$1.8 billion in manufacturing.

We know Mr. Fertitta respects the full political, economic, historic, and cultural connections that make the U.S.-Italy relationship so critical to both nations. Additionally, as an accomplished businessman and restaurateur of Italian descent, we are confident Mr. Fertitta appreciates the importance of uniquely Italian food products – such as those produced by our members – for American consumers.

If confirmed, we look forward to working together with Mr. Fertitta and the Trump Administration to ensure Americans continue to have access to the high-quality Italian food products they know and love, and to build on the strong relationship between our two great nations.

Best Wishes,



**Hon. Susan Molinari**  
American Italian Food Coalition, Co-Chair



**Lucy Calautti**  
American Italian Food Coalition, Co-Chair



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AMERICAN ITALIAN  
FOOD COALITION

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*The American Italian Food Coalition is an alliance of more than 530 Italian companies, manufacturers, and trade associations dedicated to ensuring American consumers continue to have access to high-quality, affordable imported Italian products including pasta, coffee, biscuits, and wafers.*

