

NOMINATIONS

THURSDAY, MAY 15, 2025

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

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:32 a.m., in room SD-419, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. James E. Risch, Chairman of the committee, presiding.

Present: Senators Risch [presiding], Ricketts, Hagerty, Lee, Paul, Cruz, Scott, Shaheen, Murphy, Kaine, Van Hollen, Duckworth, and Rosen.

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

Senator RISCH. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee will come to order.

We welcome all of our guests today.

We have an important agenda, as usual, with two different items. One is voting on five nominees that we've already heard, and then proceed to hearings on the three gentlemen that are before us today.

As usual, I will tell our audience that we welcome you. This is an open hearing. It's public. On the other hand, there'll be no audience participation of any kind. By now, everyone knows we have a zero tolerance on that. There'll be an arrest and expulsion for a year.

So, with that, I think what we will do is have some other committees meeting and having business meetings right at the top. So, I think, Senator Shaheen and I have talked about this, and the way we will proceed. We'll go ahead with the hearing on the nominees that are here before us, and then when we get the others who are on the committee, we will proceed to vote on the business aspect of what we need to do today.

So, with that, Senator Shaheen and I will make our opening statements on this.

So, I'll start first, and I want to thank our nominees and their families for being here today, and particularly for your willingness to serve. Your efforts are sorely needed as America faces threats from around the world every single day. In the Middle East, tensions are high. Hezbollah remains a disruptive presence into the real possibility for reform in Lebanon. Lebanon has moved forward substantially, but there's still Hezbollah presence, and they're working on it.

Baghdad must disarm the Iranian backed militias. We are all hoping to see change out of Al-Sharaa's government in Syria, and there is an opportunity to isolate Iran, reinforce our Gulf and Israeli partners, and permanently roll back Iranian influence.

Mr. Rayburn, as Assistant Secretary for Near East Asia, you'll be integral in helping President Trump and Secretary Rubio as they work to secure a more stable Middle East for a safer America. President Trump is committed to isolating Iran, the root of all problems in the region. His maximum pressure is working. As assistant secretary, I hope you'll work to ensure that, above all else, Iran never possesses a nuclear weapon, and that you work with our allies to continue supporting our friend, Israel.

America also faces challenges in Europe. Over the last decade, and particularly in the last 3 years, Putin's aggression has created the largest security crisis in Europe since the Second World War. President Trump is working diligently to help bring an end to this conflict, and we need to continue to work with our European allies to confront the security challenges facing Europe.

Mr. Pratt, when you take the helm as Assistant Secretary for Political-Military Affairs, you'll need to work with our allies in Europe, Asia, Latin America, and beyond to counter our shared adversaries. It's no secret that hostile powers have formed an authoritarian axis bent on weakening the United States.

Armed sales help us collaborate with partners as we confront these authoritarian actors. The Administration has prioritized addressing the bureaucratic delays and burdensome regulations plaguing our foreign military sales process. I hope you'll work to reform the PM Bureau so we can provide our closest allies with weapons they need faster than what we have been doing.

China will present a particular challenge to you. Its military is rapidly modernizing, its ship building capacity makes us look weak, and its development of dual use artificial intelligence is growing more advanced by the day. In this dangerous security environment, we and our allies need to help ourselves by improving burden sharing, increasing defense spending, and building joint capabilities.

The Chinese government also aggressively encroaches on its neighbor's territory and wields its large economy, backed by state subsidies, and IP theft, to gain unfair advantages. China's united front actors undertake malign influence operations that seek to bend countries around the world to the CCP's will.

Mr. DeSombre, as Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, I look forward to hearing how you will oversee changes in the EAP Bureau to position it to counter China's aggression. If we don't, China's malign influence will only continue to spread.

I'd like to thank all of you, again, for being here with us today, your willingness to serve, and your family's willingness to help you serve. We have moved the number of nominees to our committee this year, and I look forward to the three of you joining their ranks.

With that—I'm told we have a quorum.

[Proceeded to other business.]

Senator RISCH. So, let's we'll hear now from the from the nominees.

Senator SHAHEEN. You have got to hear from me first.

[Laughter.]

Senator RISCH. Did you want to say something?

Senator SHAHEEN. Yes.

Senator RISCH. I apologize.

I want to recognize Senator Shaheen for her opening statement.

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

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And welcome to the nominees, and to your family, and supporters who are here today.

Of all the recent events in the Middle East, one of the most consequential is the fall of the Assad regime in Syria. Assad not only killed and tortured countless Syrians and forced millions more into exile, but the regime precipitated the rise of ISIS, and allowed Putin and Iran to project military influence across the Middle East.

The collapse of the Assad regime created a once in a generation opportunity, a chance to deny our adversaries, Iran, Russia, and China, not to mention ISIS, a base for operations, and a chance for the Syrian people to retake their country and chart their own future.

The Syrian government has done a lot of what we've asked, the new Syrian government that is, working to eliminate chemical weapons, clamping down on the Captagon gun drug trade, and helping to search for missing Americans. So, I was very pleased, and Senator Risch and I did a statement in support of President Trump's announcement earlier this week that he would lift U.S. sanctions on Syria.

Mr. Rayburn, if confirmed, you'll be charged with overseeing U.S. policy on Syria, among other things. So, I'd like to hear how you will ensure that we make the most of this moment. It's imperative that the Administration ensures all sanctions and restrictions on Syria are lifted, assuming Syria continues to move in the positive direction.

I think it's also important to facilitate a sustained dialogue with Syrian officials to ensure that they stay on the right path. And we need to move quickly because we're seeing efforts by Russia and Iran to move in. Too many Syrians have lost their lives fighting oppression to let this window of opportunity pass.

What's happening in Syria is not an isolated event. It's part of a global competition for influence with our adversaries. Unfortunately, the cuts to foreign aid by the Administration and to other programs that counter China are leaving our allies and partners isolated and vulnerable. This puts additional pressure on countries like Vietnam or Indonesia to hedge their bets against the United States.

And many nations in the Indo-Pacific region are longstanding American allies. And yet, right now we risk pushing them into China's hands.

So, Mr. DeSombre, I hope you'll talk about how you would work to bolster our ties across East Asia and the Pacific to counter PRC influence.

And finally, Mr. Pratt, you've been nominated to serve as the Assistant Secretary of State for Political-Military Affairs. In this role, you'd be charged with overseeing arms sales and the process of no-

tifying Congress on arms sales. As you're aware, this committee takes very seriously its role in reviewing arms sales, and we expect the State Department to uphold its obligation to closely consult with both the Chair and Ranking Member of this committee on all military sales.

I would just point out there was a really interesting hearing in the Armed Services Committee earlier this morning on this very issue that I'm sure you would find instructive, if confirmed.

Mr. Pratt, I'd like to add that I understand that today you have been particularly transparent and expressed a willingness to build a relationship with this committee, and I want you and all the nominees to know that those efforts are noticed. So, thank you very much for that.

I look forward to hearing from each of our nominees today. Thank you all.

Senator RISCH. Thank you very much, Senator Shaheen.

Before we hear from the nominees, Senator Hagerty, I understand you want to make a couple of introductions. Is that correct?

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

Senator HAGERTY. Well, thank you very much, Chairman Risch, and Ranking Member Shaheen, for holding this hearing.

It's a great honor for me today to introduce two exceptionally gifted professionals, and two very good friends, Joel Rayburn, and Ambassador Michael DeSombre. I'm going to start with Joel, but before I do, and I've done this before, I'd like to direct some comments to the staff that's sitting along the wall.

Joel Rayburn served on my staff. He's one of the most outstanding professionals I've ever worked with. And his time here in the U.S. Senate, I think, is going to serve him very well in the role that I hope he's confirmed to play. And I hope that all of you take this as an inspiration. And I hope that all of you'll consider doing something like Joel is preparing himself to do right now.

So, I just want to make that comment to each of you. I know you work your hearts out. I know you spend long hours and weekends here, but that will put you in a position to do what someone like Joel Rayburn is about to do. And I just wanted to remind you of that.

Back to the case at hand; Joel Rayburn. Joel's nomination comes at a pivotal time for the United States, and the Middle East, and North Africa. And while there are many challenges in the region, including Iran, Hamas, Hezbollah, and other foreign terrorist organizations that Iran sponsors, our nation also has enormous opportunities to strengthen our relationships with key allies and partners, as the President's trip to the Middle East this week has powerfully illustrated.

At this juncture, I believe no one is better qualified to be the Assistant Secretary of State responsible for this region than Joel Rayburn. As an avid historian who has served in a variety of leadership roles related to the Middle East, Joel is an expert in the region's culture, its history, and the many other factors that will determine the success of our policy there.

Joel is a proud military veteran who's shown he's committed to public service on behalf of our great nation. After graduating from West Point in 1992, Joel went on to serve as an artillery and intelligence officer in the U.S. Army for over 26 years. During his distinguished military career, Joel was deployed to the Middle East multiple times, giving him the opportunity to hone his knowledge of the region and his languages as well as his diplomatic skills.

From 2007 to 2011, for example, Joel worked for General David Petraeus as a strategic intelligence advisor in Iraq and Afghanistan. In President Trump's first term, Joel served on the National Security Council as Senior Director for Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon. Joel then served as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Levant affairs, and concurrently a Special Envoy for Syria from 2018 to 2021.

So, Ranking Member Shaheen, I think there's no one better to address the questions that you raised about Syria than Joel Rayburn.

Most recently, Joel served on my Senate staff as my Advisor for Middle Eastern Affairs, and I was able to see firsthand just why the military and the White House trusted Joel so much. Joel's sound advice born from his lifetime of focus on the region helped me immensely, as I know it will help the State Department and the people of the United States. More important, I saw Joel as a wonderful father, someone with a heart, and the humility to pay it forward for the next generation through his own selfless public service.

Joel could not be better qualified to be the next Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, and I urge my colleagues in this committee to move quickly on his nomination.

Let me now turn to another colleague and friend, Ambassador Michael DeSombre. I'm excited that President Trump tapped Michael as his nominee to be the Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and Pacific Affairs. Michael and I both served as U.S. Ambassadors in Asia during President Trump's first term.

The Trump administration rightly identifies the Indo-Pacific region as a top priority for U.S. foreign policy. This region contains 4.3 billion people, about 60 percent of the world's population, and it's responsible for almost two-thirds of global maritime trade. The region's also home both to some of America's closest allies and partners, as well as to many of our most serious threats.

If confirmed, Michael will be at the forefront of U.S. efforts to address the significant challenges in the region while also pursuing tremendous opportunities critical to our economic prosperity and to our national security. As someone who's worked in East Asia as both a businessman and a diplomat, I speak from experience when I say that Michael is the right person for this role.

Building on his education at Stanford and Harvard in Economics Law and East Asian studies, Michael's significant experience in the region makes him exceptionally qualified for this role. As a business leader in Asia, Michael advised multinational corporations on complex cross border transactions and worked issues related to U.S. national security. And as a philanthropist, Michael led initiatives focused on the education, healthcare, and protection of kids that benefited tens of thousands of children in the region.

In addition to his success as a businessman and a philanthropist in Asia, Michael is also a successful diplomat. As U.S. Ambassador to Thailand during President Trump's first term, Michael used his business background and skill set to create mutual economic opportunities that brought the American and Thai economies closer together.

In all, Michael has spent more than two decades of his life in Asia. He speaks Mandarin fluently and is also familiar with both Korean and Japanese languages. If confirmed, Michael will once again use his experience and knowledge to strengthen our diplomatic relationships and to advance our nation's interest in the region.

Mr. Chairman, thank you again for the opportunity to introduce my friends and former colleagues, Joel Rayburn, and Michael DeSombre. I encourage this committee to support their nomination.

Senator RISCH. Thank you, Senator Hagerty. Your opinion, obviously, means a lot to all of us, so thank you for sharing it with us. We appreciate that.

We'll now hear from each of the nominees. We'd ask you that you keep your remarks to about 5 minutes. If you have further you want to add, we'll be more than happy to add them to the record when the hearing is over.

Mr. Rayburn, we'll start with you. The floor is yours.

STATEMENT OF MR. JOEL RAYBURN, OF OKLAHOMA, NOMINATED TO BE AN ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NEAR EASTERN AFFAIRS

Mr. RAYBURN. Chairman Risch, Ranking Member Shaheen, and distinguished members of the committee, thank you for the privilege of coming before you today as the President's nominee to serve as Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs at the U.S. Department of State.

It's a time of rapid change in the Middle East, presenting the United States with opportunities of historic proportion. The first area of opportunity lies with Iran. Israel's military successes in 2024, coupled with the departure of the Assad regime, crippled Hezbollah and brought the Iranian sponsored axis of resistance to its weakest point in decades.

We now have the opportunity to use our diplomacy to capitalize on these changes so as to neutralize the threat Tehran has posed U.S. interests and allies since 1979, including by ensuring the Iranian regime can never develop or obtain a nuclear weapon.

We also have the opportunity to ensure that the Iranian regime can no longer use Lebanon and Syria as platforms for destabilizing the region, thereby giving those beleaguered countries a chance for a more promising future.

Second, there is a concurrent opportunity to promote peace and prosperity in the region by building on the landmark Abraham Accords, both by deepening the existing agreements reached in 2020, and by helping to forge new accords with new peace partners as well. The Gulf region where the United States is growing its strategic partnerships and becoming the partner of choice will naturally be a major focus of this effort. As the President's trip shows, the United States will benefit enormously by increasing our com-

petitiveness in that region and providing opportunities for U.S. companies to help drive regional integration.

I support the Administration's commitment to strengthening the existing partnerships between Israel, and the UAE, Bahrain, and Morocco, while also promoting normalization between Israel and Saudi Arabia, and other Arab states. Not only are these peace and normalization initiatives imperative for regional security and economic integration, but they also create opportunities for us businesses, thereby expanding our trade and helping to make our country more prosperous.

The President's first international trip during this Administration proves it is time we expand on our relationships in the Gulf, expand them from security to prosperity.

Third, the developments in Syria and the weakening of the Iranian regime's terrorist proxies regionwide are creating another specific opportunity across the northern Middle East. The potential to end the conflict between our NATO ally, Turkey, and the PKK, a conflict that has been a source of violence and instability for almost half a century.

The parties to that conflict are signaling an openness to end it, and the United States has a strong interest in using our diplomatic influence and tools to help bring that about. Resolving the conflict would be game changing for the people of Turkey, Iraq, and Syria, in particular.

Alongside these opportunities, there are some risks and dangers to our interests. First, the conflict that began with Hamas' October 7, 2023, attacks on Israel must be brought to a conclusion in which the hostages are returned home and Hamas no longer poses a significant military threat.

The President has been clear: Hamas cannot continue as a military or government force. The President also envisages a better future for the Palestinian people. That is why the Administration has been working with Israel and many of our Arab allies to support these goals.

Another danger to addressing the region is the threat of jihadist terrorist groups such as ISIS and Al-Qaeda. We and our allies defeated the ISIS caliphate in Iraq and Syria, but we must remain vigilant to ensure its remnants cannot exploit regional political conflicts to try and make a comeback.

Finally, our relationships in the region must be a bulwark against efforts by China to extend its influence. This includes engaging partners in the public and private sectors on the dangers of employing Chinese origin technology and why joining our trusted technology ecosystem is beneficial. The United States has a strong interest in ensuring that our Gulf allies integrate into U.S. led technology, economic, and security ecosystems, and preventing permanent Chinese security presence in the region.

I know that Secretary Rubio is clear eyed about the challenges of the region: conflict, terrorism, economic integration, and Iran's continuing attempts to destabilize its neighbors, but I also know he recognizes the potential for breakthroughs that would have enormous benefit for America and for international security.

If confirmed, I look forward to helping guide U.S. diplomacy to the accomplishment of these national goals, and also to working with the committee on these issues.

Thank you for your time, and I look forward to your questions. And I want to offer specific thanks to Senator Hagerty for his very kind and generous introduction.

Thank you, sir.

**Senate Foreign Relations Committee
Additional Nominee Questions**

1. Do you agree to appear before this Committee and make officials from your office available to the Committee when invited?

Answer: Yes

2. Do you commit to keeping this Committee fully informed about the activities under your purview in a timely manner?

Answer: Yes

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

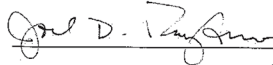
Answer: Yes

4. Do you commit to responding to requests for briefings and information requested by the Committee and its designated staff as soon as practicable?

Answer: Yes

5. Do you agree to ensuring that Chiefs of Mission fully support CODELs and STAFFDELS, with exceptions only for simultaneous or overlapping visits by the President or First Lady of the United States, the Vice President, or the Secretaries of State or Defense?

Answer: Yes



Printed Name: JOEL D. RAYBURN

Date: 5/15/2025

[The prepared statement of Mr. Rayburn follows:]

Prepared Statement of Joel Rayburn

Chairman Risch, Ranking Member Shaheen, and distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for the privilege of coming before you today as the President's nominee to serve as Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs at the U.S. Department of State.

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The first area of opportunity is Iran. Israel's military successes in 2024, coupled with the departure of the Assad regime, crippled Hizballah and brought the Iranian-sponsored Axis of Resistance to its weakest point in decades. We now have the opportunity to use our diplomacy to capitalize on these changes so as to neutralize the threat Tehran has posed to U.S. interests and allies since 1979, including by ensuring the Iranian regime can never develop or obtain a nuclear weapon. We also have the opportunity to ensure that the Iranian regime can no longer use Lebanon and Syria as platforms for destabilizing the region, thereby giving those beleaguered countries a chance for a more promising future.

Second, there is a concurrent opportunity to promote peace and prosperity in the region by building on the landmark Abraham Accords, both by deepening the existing agreements reached in 2020 and by helping to forge new accords with new peace partners as well. The Gulf region, where the United States is growing its strategic partnerships and becoming the partner of choice, will naturally be a major focus of this effort. As the President's trip shows, the United States will benefit enormously by increasing our competitiveness in that region and providing opportunities for U.S. companies to help drive regional integration. I support the Administration's commitment to strengthening the existing partnerships between Israel and the UAE, Bahrain, and Morocco while also promoting normalization between Israel and Saudi Arabia and other Arab states. Not only are these peace and normalization initiatives imperative for regional security and economic integration, but they also create opportunities for U.S. businesses, thereby expanding our trade and helping to make our country more prosperous. The President's first international trip during this administration proves—it is time we expand our relationships in the Gulf from security to prosperity.

Third, the developments in Syria and the weakening of the Iranian regime's terrorist proxies regionwide are creating another specific opportunity across the northern Middle East: the potential to end the conflict between our NATO ally Turkey and the PKK, a conflict that has been a source of violence and instability for almost half a century. The parties to that conflict are signaling an openness to end it, and the United States has a strong interest in using our diplomatic influence and tools to help bring that about. Resolving the conflict would be game-changing for the people of Turkey, Iraq, and Syria.

Alongside these opportunities, there are some risks and dangers to our interests.

First, the conflict that began with Hamas's October 7, 2023, attacks on Israel must be brought to a conclusion in which the hostages are returned home, and Hamas no longer poses a significant military threat. The President has been clear: Hamas cannot continue as a military or government force. The President also envisions a better future for the Palestinian people. That is why the Administration has been working with Israel and many of our Arab allies to support these goals.

Another danger to address in the region is the threat of jihadist terrorist groups such as ISIS and Al Qaeda. We and our allies defeated the ISIS caliphate in Iraq and Syria, but we must remain vigilant to ensure its remnants cannot exploit regional political conflicts to try and make a comeback.

Finally, our relationships in the region must be a bulwark against efforts by China to extend its influence. This includes engaging partners in the public and private sectors on the dangers of employing Chinese origin technology and why joining our trusted technology ecosystem is beneficial. The United States has a strong interest in ensuring that our Gulf allies integrate into U.S.-led technology, economic, and security ecosystems and preventing permanent Chinese security presence in the region.

I know that Secretary Rubio is clear-eyed about the challenges of the region—conflict, terrorism, economic integration, and Iran's continuing attempts to destabilize its neighbors—but I also know he recognizes the potential for breakthroughs that would have enormous benefit for America and for international security. If confirmed, I look forward to helping guide U.S. diplomacy to the accomplishment of our national goals, and also to working with you on these issues. Thank you for your time and I look forward to your questions.

Senator RISCH. Thank you, Mr. Rayburn.
Mr. Pratt, the floor's yours.

**STATEMENT OF MR. CHRIS PRATT, OF UTAH, NOMINATED TO
BE AN ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF STATE FOR POLITICAL-
MILITARY AFFAIRS**

Mr. PRATT. Thank you, sir.

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

I am honored by President Trump's nomination to serve as the Assistant Secretary of State for Political-Military Affairs, and very grateful for Secretary Rubio's support. If confirmed, I'm committed to working hand in hand with this committee and with Congress to advance our nation's security priorities, particularly in foreign military sales reform, technology licensing, security cooperation, and export controls.

Throughout my career in public service, I have worked at the intersection of diplomacy, security, and national interests. At the State Department I served as Deputy Special Presidential Envoy for Hostage Affairs, where I was privileged to lead efforts that brought wrongfully detained Americans home. That experience underscored the importance of collaboration across government agencies and with our elected representatives to protect and serve the American people.

Since my nomination, I've had valuable discussions with many of you and your staff regarding the national security challenges we face. For example, China continues to pursue policies that undermine U.S. interests across the globe. Iran remains a destabilizing force in the Middle East and beyond. North Korea continues to advance its weapon [unclear] actors persist in seeking ways to harm the United States and our allies.

In this complex environment, strengthening our relationships with key allies in order to advance our national interests remain paramount. One of our most critical and enduring partnerships is with Israel. As President Trump has unequivocally stated, the United States must remain a steadfast partner to Israel as it faces growing threats from terrorist organizations and hostile actors in the region.

If confirmed, I will work closely with Congress to ensure our security cooperation with our closest partners remains robust, and continues to serve our mutual strategic interest while addressing humanitarian rights issues and adherence to applicable humanitarian law.

Despite today's threats, I'm optimistic. I believe in the power of American diplomacy when supported by strategic alignment between the State Department, Congress, and our interagency partners. As Secretary Rubio has noted, the State Department must be a force multiplier advancing America First policies that make our Nation safer, stronger, and more prosperous.

If confirmed, I will ensure that the Bureau of Political Military-Affairs is a proactive and collaborative partner in that mission. If confirmed, a top priority will be to deepen the cooperation between the State Department and the Department of Defense. The PM Bu-

reau plays a central role in ensuring that U.S. diplomatic and military efforts are aligned and mutually reinforcing. This includes ensuring that U.S. military personnel abroad are secured with the agreements and legal frameworks necessary to operate with maximum protections and the full backing of our civilian leadership.

Another key focus area is improving the efficiency and effectiveness of U.S. foreign military sales. These programs are vital not only to strengthening our security partnerships abroad, but also to supporting the U.S. defense industrial base and American jobs at home. I'm committed to working with Congress and industry leaders to streamline processes, reduce unnecessary delays, and implement President Trump's recent executive order to reform foreign military sales with transparency and accountability.

Also, if confirmed, working with Congress to streamline regulatory processes will be a critical component of my agenda. I will work in close consultation with Congress to ensure that our regulatory frameworks remain rigorous while also enabling U.S. companies to compete and innovate in a rapidly evolving global defense marketplace.

In every area of responsibility, my approach will be rooted in partnership with Congress, with industry, with our allies, and across the U.S. Government. If confirmed, I will lead with transparency, engagement in a clear sense of purpose in advancing America's security and prosperity.

Thank you for this opportunity to appear before you. I look forward to your questions, and if confirmed, working closely with you.

And finally, in recognition of National Police Week, I just want to give a shout out to our brothers and sisters in law enforcement.

Thank you.

**Senate Foreign Relations Committee
Additional Nominee Questions**

1. Do you agree to appear before this Committee and make officials from your office available to the Committee when invited?

Answer: Yes

2. Do you commit to keeping this Committee fully informed about the activities under your purview in a timely manner?

Answer: Yes

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

Answer: Yes

4. Do you commit to responding to requests for briefings and information requested by the Committee and its designated staff as soon as practicable?

Answer: Yes

5. Do you agree to ensuring that Chiefs of Mission fully support CODELs and STAFFDELS, with exceptions only for simultaneous or overlapping visits by the President or First Lady of the United States, the Vice President, or the Secretaries of State or Defense?

Answer: Yes



Printed Name: Chris Matt

Date: 5/15/25

[The prepared statement of Mr. Pratt follows:]

Prepared Statement of Chris Pratt

Chairman Risch, Ranking Member Shaheen, and distinguished Members of the Committee: thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I am honored by President Trump's nomination to serve as the Assistant Secretary of State for Political-Military Affairs and very grateful for Secretary Rubio's support. If confirmed, I am committed to working hand-in-hand with this Committee and with Congress to advance our nation's security priorities—particularly in Foreign Military Sales reform, technology licensing, security cooperation, and export controls.

Throughout my career in public service, I have worked at the intersection of diplomacy, security, and national interest. At the State Department, I served as Deputy Special Presidential Envoy for Hostage Affairs, where I was privileged to lead efforts that brought wrongfully detained Americans home. That experience underscored the importance of collaboration across government agencies and with our elected representatives to protect and serve the American people.

Since my nomination, I have had valuable discussions with many of you and your staff regarding the national security challenges we face. For example, China continues to pursue policies that undermine U.S. interests across the globe. Iran remains a destabilizing force in the Middle East and beyond. North Korea continues to advance its weapons programs. And non-state actors persist in seeking ways to harm the United States and our allies.

In this complex environment, strengthening our relationships with key allies in order to advance our national interests remains paramount. One of our most critical and enduring partnerships is with Israel. As President Trump has unequivocally stated, the United States must remain a steadfast partner to Israel as it faces growing threats from terrorist organizations and hostile actors in the region. If confirmed, I will work closely with Congress to ensure our security cooperation with Israel remains robust and continues to serve our mutual strategic interests, while addressing human rights issues and adherence to applicable humanitarian law.

Despite today's threats, I am optimistic. I believe in the power of American diplomacy when supported by strategic alignment between the State Department, Congress, and our interagency partners. As Secretary Rubio has noted, the State Department must be a force multiplier—advancing America First policies that make our nation safer, stronger, and more prosperous. If confirmed, I will ensure the Bureau of Political-Military Affairs (PM) is a proactive and collaborative partner in that mission.

If confirmed, a top priority will be to deepen the cooperation between the State Department and the Department of Defense. The PM bureau plays a central role in ensuring that U.S. diplomatic and military efforts are aligned and mutually reinforcing. This includes ensuring that U.S. military personnel abroad are secured with the agreements and legal frameworks necessary to operate with maximum protections and the full backing of our civilian leadership.

Another key focus area is improving the efficiency and effectiveness of U.S. foreign military sales. These programs are vital not only to strengthening our security partnerships abroad, but also to supporting the U.S. defense industrial base and American jobs at home. I am committed to working with Congress and industry leaders to streamline processes, reduce unnecessary delays, and implement President Trump's recent executive order on Reforming Foreign Military Sales with transparency and accountability.

Also, if confirmed, working with Congress to streamline Regulatory processes will be a critical component of my agenda. Regulations play a crucial role in safeguarding national security, but they must be updated to reflect current realities and strategic needs. I will work in close consultation with Congress to ensure that our regulatory frameworks remain rigorous while also enabling U.S. companies to compete and innovate in a rapidly evolving global defense marketplace.

In every area of responsibility—whether it's facilitating arms transfers, supporting our military partners, or safeguarding sensitive technologies—my approach will be rooted in partnership: with Congress, with industry, with our allies, and across the U.S. Government. If confirmed, I will lead with transparency, engagement, and a clear sense of purpose in advancing America's security and prosperity.

Thank you for this opportunity to appear before you. I look forward to your questions and, if confirmed, to working closely with each of you in service to our nation.

Senator RISCH. Very appropriate, Mr. Pratt. Thank you very much.

Mr. DeSombre.

**STATEMENT OF HON. MICHAEL DESOMBRE, OF ILLINOIS,
NOMINATED TO BE AN ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF STATE
FOR EAST ASIAN AND PACIFIC AFFAIRS**

Ambassador DESOMBRE. Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Shaheen, and distinguished members of the committee, I'm honored to appear before you today as the President's nominee for Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs.

I'm grateful to President Trump and Secretary Rubio for their trust and confidence. I appreciate the time that the members and staff of this committee have spent with me. If confirmed, I look forward to working closely with each of you.

On a personal note, I would like to thank my wife and four children for their support of my desire to serve our great country. My wife, Jean, and I met and married while in law school, and have been married for over 32 years. Jean has always been my inspiration, and together we have built our respective professional careers, while together, raising four wonderful children, Winnona, Gabrielle, MichaelRay, and Phoenix.

Unfortunately, given the challenges of our large multi-career family, only my daughter Winnona, her husband Derek, and my son MichaelRay, are able to be here today. I also would like to thank my parents, Eugene and Nancy, for their support. Mom and Dad were not able to make it here in person, but I know they're watching the live stream back in Chicago.

Since a young age I've been motivated to serve our country. I believe that my experience in legal, economic, strategic, and diplomatic matters over the past 35 years is directly relevant to the position for which I've been nominated.

I'm excited to have the opportunity to work in the most consequential region of the world. I've been a student of strategic issues since late 1980s when I received my master's degree in East Asian studies, focused on Chinese military and foreign policy. I built on my academic background in my professional career as a transactional attorney and diplomat. I have seen firsthand the tremendous opportunities for America in Asia, as well as the challenges presented by China's economic and military modernization while living and working in Hong Kong and China over the past 28 years.

As head of Sullivan & Cromwell's acquisition practice for Asia, I've advised many Western corporations on complex transactions involving many different Asian countries. I've lived or worked in many of the countries within the EAP region and have advised clients on high stakes negotiations in those countries.

I was honored to have had the opportunity to serve as the United States Ambassador to the Kingdom of Thailand in 2020, where I led an outstanding inter-agency team on behalf of the American people. If confirmed, I will apply my background in law, commerce, strategic issues, and diplomacy in Asia to implement the President's foreign policy priorities in the Indo-Pacific. I will ensure that all foreign policy decisions follow the Secretary's test. Does this make us safer? Does this make us stronger? Does this make us more prosperous?

I believe our Indo-Pacific policy will entail a focus on three primary priorities. First, to promote U.S. strength and security by

working closely with our allies, partners, and friends in the Indo-Pacific to enhance deterrence and counter malign activities by our adversaries.

Second, to promote U.S. prosperity through robust commercial diplomacy and reciprocal trade relations with all countries in the Indo-Pacific. And third, make the United States safer by eliminating the flow of fentanyl and illegal immigrants into our country from Asia, and ensuring that all countries accept back their citizens that are illegally in our country.

When training corporations how to negotiate in Asia, I recommend a style of hard on the issues, soft on the people. Hard on the issues means in this context an unwavering commitment to focus exclusively on what is good for America. Putting America first. But soft on the people means that it's almost always useful to develop personal relationships to help achieve the best results on the issues.

If confirmed as assistant secretary, I commit to spend substantial time traveling the region to develop the necessary relationships to achieve results for the American people. I also am committed to leading the various embassies in EAP with a high touch method consistent with my practice in the private sector.

If confirmed, I would speak personally and often with ambassadors in the field to directly convey the President's and Secretary's foreign policy priorities and provide frequent opportunities for unfiltered feedback and information flow from the field.

In addition to promoting U.S. diplomatic and security interests, if confirmed, I will focus on expanding commercial opportunities, which in turn will reinforce our national security efforts. This was an area of my focus as ambassador, and if confirmed, I will ensure that all the embassies in EAP have strong commercial diplomacy teams, which we'll support from here in DC.

Chairman Risch, Ranking Member Shaheen, and members of the committee, I approach this nomination with a sense of excitement and responsibility. If confirmed, I look forward to working with you to make America safer, stronger, and more prosperous by addressing issues facing our nation in one of the most consequential regions of the world.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.

**Senate Foreign Relations Committee
Additional Nominee Questions**

1. Do you agree to appear before this Committee and make officials from your office available to the Committee when invited?

Answer: Yes

2. Do you commit to keeping this Committee fully informed about the activities under your purview in a timely manner?

Answer: Yes

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

Answer: Yes

4. Do you commit to responding to requests for briefings and information requested by the Committee and its designated staff as soon as practicable?

Answer: Yes

5. Do you agree to ensuring that Chiefs of Mission fully support CODELs and STAFFDELS, with exceptions only for simultaneous or overlapping visits by the President or First Lady of the United States, the Vice President, or the Secretaries of State or Defense?

Answer: Yes



Printed Name: Michael DeSombre

Date: May 15, 2025

[The prepared statement of Ambassador DeSombre follows:]

Prepared Statement of Michael DeSombre

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

I am honored to appear before you today as the President's nominee for Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs. I am grateful to President Trump and Secretary Rubio for their trust and confidence. I appreciate the time that the Members and staff of this Committee have spent with me. If confirmed, I look forward to working closely with each of you.

On a personal note, I would like to thank my wife and four children for their support of my desire to serve our great country. My wife Jean and I met, and married, while in law school and have been married for over 32 years. Jean has always been my inspiration and together we have built our respective professional careers while together raising four wonderful children—Winnona, Gabrielle, Michael Ray and Phoenix. Unfortunately given the challenges of our large multi-career family, only my daughter Winnona and my son Michael Ray are able to be here today.

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I am excited to have the opportunity to work in the most consequential region in the world. I have been a student of strategic issues since the late 1980s when I received my Masters degree in East Asian Studies focused on China's military and foreign policy. I built on my academic background in my professional career, as a transactional attorney and diplomat. I have seen firsthand the tremendous opportunities for America in Asia as well as the challenges presented by China's economic and military modernization while living and working in Hong Kong and China over the past 28 years.

As head of Sullivan & Cromwell's acquisitions practice for Asia, I have advised many Western corporations on complex transactions involving many different Asian countries. I have lived or worked in many of the countries within the EAP region and have advised clients on high-stakes negotiations in those countries.

I was very honored to have had the opportunity to serve as the United States Ambassador to the Kingdom of Thailand in 2020 where I led an outstanding inter-agency team on behalf of the American people.

If confirmed, I will apply my background in law, commerce, strategic issues and diplomacy in Asia to implement the President's foreign policy priorities in the Indo Pacific. I will ensure that all foreign policy decisions follow the Secretary's test: does this make us safer? Does this make us stronger? Does this make us more prosperous? I believe our Indo-Pacific policy will entail a focus on three primary priorities. First, to promote U.S. strength and security by working closely with our allies, partners and friends in the Indo Pacific to enhance deterrence and counter malign activities by our adversaries. Second, to promote U.S. prosperity through robust commercial diplomacy and reciprocal trade relations with all countries in the Indo Pacific. And third, make the United States safer by eliminating the flow of fentanyl and illegal immigrants into our country from Asia and ensure that all countries accept back their citizens that are illegally in our country.

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In addition to promoting U.S. diplomatic and security interests, if confirmed, I will focus on expanding commercial opportunities, which, in turn, will reinforce our national security efforts. This was an area of my focus as Ambassador and, if confirmed, I will ensure that all of the Embassies in EAP have strong commercial diplomacy teams which we will support from here in Washington DC.

Chairman Risch, Ranking Member Shaheen, and members of the Committee—I approach this nomination with a sense of excitement and responsibility. If confirmed, I look forward to working with you to make America safer, stronger, and more prosperous by addressing issues facing our nation in one of the most consequential regions of the world.

Thank you and I look forward to your questions.

Senator RISCH. Thank you, Mr. DeSombre. Appreciate that.

We'll now do a round of 5 minute questions. And I'm going to start first, and I'm going to start with Mr. DeSombre and Mr. Rayburn.

You know, when President Trump left office, we had Iran down to under 200,000 barrels of oil a day that they were able to sell, which was really putting the hurt on them appropriately. And after that, it's gone up to almost 2 million barrels a day. And now, the President wants to turn the screw on Iran again, and I'm all with him.

Mr. DeSombre, Mr. Rayburn, both of you, I'd like to get your understanding. You haven't taken office yet, but I'd like to get your thoughts on that and how you might go about assisting in that regard. And again, I appreciate that you haven't taken office yet, but your thoughts, if you would, starting with you, Mr. Rayburn.

Mr. RAYBURN. Senator, thank you for that question. This is an important issue. The President has made it clear it's his policy to bring a maximum pressure approach back on the Iranian regime particularly on its revenue streams driven by its oil exports.

You are correct. In the first Trump administration, I was part of generating the apparatus that enforced those sanctions and was able to cut the flow of Iranian oil exports. That's by, for example, disrupting the ghost fleet of vessels that the Iranian regime uses, and then by engaging with our allies and partners, and with the insurance sector, with the flagging countries, for example, in order to make it so that it's very difficult for the Iranian regime to physically move the oil, in addition to also enforcing sanctions on the financial side, so they're unable to move the money that goes along with those transactions.

We had great results there, Senator, and I think that we can ramp that enforcement apparatus back up and repeat the performance.

Senator RISCH. It's good news. We hope you can dust off that apparatus, and hopefully, crank it up a little bit and put the maximum pressure as possible.

Mr. DeSombre, your thoughts.

Ambassador DESOMBRE. Mr. Chairman, thank you very much for that question.

Clearly implementing the maximum pressure campaign is something that does require efforts around the world. I believe 90 percent of oil exports from Iran go to China, and thus, obviously, stopping those exports and affecting that is something of critical importance.

I believe just yesterday, the Secretary of State or Department of State sanctioned individuals and entities in China and Hong Kong for their support of missile technology also in Iran. So, that's also an area where there's an interplay between China and Iran. So, these are critical issues, and it's an area where, hopefully, if I'm

confirmed, and if Joel Rayburn is confirmed, we can work together on these issues to deal with the nexus between China and Iran.

Senator RISCH. We look forward to it. Thanks so much.

Mr. Rayburn, I want to talk about Syria for a minute. You know, on December 8 when Assad fell, we all partied and felt well about it till we found out who it was that took over. Obviously, that new administration has a checkered past. Having said that, it is quite a ways in the past, number one. And number two, they started saying the right things and indeed doing the right things mostly since they took over.

I think it's—I don't want to speak for the Ranking Member, but she and I have talked about this at some length, and we think this is an opportunity really to get in there. We've discussed this. We met with the foreign minister, the new Syrian foreign minister, in Munich earlier this year and talked with him about their thoughts and plans and what have you.

We have been pursued by all sides, myself and this committee and Senator Shaheen, we're all instrumental in getting the Caesar sanctions put in place that we think we're at least helpful in bringing Assad down. We were under pressure to do the opposite of that and start removing them. We had actually written the President and asked him to relieve the sanctions. And now he has done that a little more robustly than we had in mind.

Nonetheless, we're still in a wait and see. And those sanctions that were taken off, they can be put back on. And we're going to continue to watch this. We really hope this works out. Syria's a proud country, long history, they have the ability to do this. Whether they can do it or not, remains to be seen. But in any event, your thoughts on where we're headed there?

Mr. RAYBURN. Senator, thank you for raising this. I think the President is giving the Syrian people and the Syrian interim authorities a golden opportunity; a chance to rebuild after half a century under oppressive rule, and especially the debilitating war that they went through and where the people suffered largely at the hands of the Assad regime, and it's Iranian, and Russian, and Hezbollah allies.

He's giving them a chance to turn the page on that and chart a new course. He's also been very clear, as has Secretary Rubio, that there are expectations. As we move along the path, as the United States moves along the path of giving them this opportunity, the President has certain expectations.

Secretary Rubio has laid out certain expectations that they're going to do, move and turn the page commensurately, including by a normalization agreement with Israel, including by deporting Palestinian terrorists, by telling foreign terrorists, foreign fighters that they have to leave Syria, by assisting in the U.S. led international campaign against ISIS to make sure ISIS doesn't make a resurgence. And then also to take responsibility for the ISIS detention centers in northeast Syria.

So, I think these are parallel tracks, and both sides have a golden opportunity to move that country into a much brighter future.

Senator RISCH. Well, thank you, Mr. Rayburn. And by the way, that administration is well aware of our expectations, the list that you just described. I discussed this with both the President and

Marco, Secretary of State Marco Rubio, and laid out the expectations Senator Shaheen and I laid out in Munich to the foreign minister. We got no pushback from him at all.

I might add one more important item on there that is important to us. And I think both President and Secretary of State Rubio feel the same way. And that is, we have an expectation that the tolerance for the various religions, and it is a complex society, both ethnically and religious wise.

That tolerance is critically important to the success of that country. The Syrians tell us that they are well experienced in this since they've been doing it for hundreds of years, and we're going to have to wait and see if they continue with that because that is going to be critical to their success.

So, with that, Senator Shaheen.

Senator SHAHEEN. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And Mr. Rayburn, just to follow up on Chairman Risch's comments. If confirmed, will you commit to swiftly moving to ensuring that the sanctions are lifted in a positive way in Syria?

Mr. RAYBURN. Senator, thank you for that question.

If I'm confirmed, I will carry out the President, Secretary Rubio's instructions to implement the policy guidance that the President has laid out, yes.

Senator SHAHEEN. Yes, I appreciate that. And I have been concerned by some rumors that I have heard in some circles that have been repeated to me by people from the Middle East that they have heard in foreign policy circles of the Administration, that one option that's been suggested is assassinating the new leader of the Syrian government, Mr. Ahmed al-Sharaa. Can you just talk about what the implications of that kind of action would mean for Syria and for the region?

Mr. RAYBURN. Senator, I'm not familiar with efforts like that, but I think that's clearly not the in line with the President's intention that he stated or his description of Mr. al-Sharaa in the past couple of days.

Senator SHAHEEN. I agree. His meeting sounded like it was very positive, and that's good news. Well, again, I think one of the things that was pointed out to us by King Abdullah was that a change in leadership of that kind would create an all out civil war in Syria that would not be good to take advantage of the opportunity that we currently have to move that country forward.

I was surprised that when you were talking about opportunities that we have, that you didn't mention Lebanon in your opening statement. Because I would argue that we also have that kind of opportunity in Syria, we have in Lebanon right now as well, with the new leadership there. And one of the important challenges there is to ensure that the Lebanese Armed Forces can continue to do the work that they need to do to help clear Hezbollah out of southern Lebanon, and to disarm many of the armaments that have been brought into the country.

So, can you talk about how, if confirmed, you would look at supporting the LAF and helping to ensure that Lebanon continues to move forward?

Mr. RAYBURN. Senator, thank you for raising that. Actually, in my statement, I did name Lebanon as an area where there's a golden opportunity to—

Senator SHAHEEN. Oh, good. I'm sorry, I missed it.

Mr. RAYBURN [continuing]. To build on the Iranian regime and Hezbollah's being on the back foot and having suffered some strategic setbacks in order to make sure that those can be a region that's—so that, for example, what I stated was Syria and Lebanon can no longer be used by the Iranian regime as a platform to try to destabilize the neighboring region.

I think the new Lebanese government has a golden opportunity to take advantage of that. And I know that the Administration is working very closely with the Lebanese authorities to help empower them to be able to take advantage of that opportunity.

The Lebanese Armed Forces is part of that. Is part of the plan for following up on the ceasefire in southern Lebanon in order to try to stabilize the Lebanon-Israel border in a way that hasn't been true for more than 40 years. So, I think it is a very good opportunity.

It's on the Lebanese authorities now, the new Lebanese government under President Aoun, the Lebanese Army. They need to seize the opportunity. I think in the past, they've had some capacity problems. There's also been a problem, political will. It seems like things are changing in Beirut now, so there's an opportunity for them to move forward in a way that I think hasn't been possible before.

Senator SHAHEEN. And so, again, and if confirmed for your new role, how can you support that effort?

Mr. RAYBURN. If I'm confirmed, Senator, I think we use our diplomacy. We use our—my colleague here, if he's confirmed, that we'd work together to try to make sure that Lebanese authorities have what they need to have in order to do their part of enforcing the ceasefire, stabilizing the southern border, and ensuring that Hezbollah or any other malign group can't use that Lebanese territory against Israel or any of their neighbors.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you.

Mr. Pratt, we talked a little bit about—in your opening statement, talked about foreign military sales, and the importance of those, and how to better put in place a process that works to support our allies.

One of the other areas that has been a real challenge for our allies and for our own defense industrial base has been the International Traffic and Arms Regulation, or ITAR. So, how would you work in your new position, if confirmed, to ensure that we can make that process work both for American industry, but also to continue to safeguard sensitive U.S. technology?

Mr. PRATT. Yes, ma'am. Thank you, Senator, for that question.

Indeed, a fun fact about when the President of the United States nominates you to be Assistant Secretary for Political-Military Affairs, I would estimate a good 70 percent of all human interaction thereafter involves complaints about ITAR.

[Laughter.]

Mr. PRATT. So, very familiar, ma'am.

Senator SHAHEEN. That sounds right.

Mr. PRATT. Yes. In fact, literally just last week Deputy Secretary Landau summoned me to his office at State Department. And I won't reveal the contents of the discussion, but I assure you I have a very clear mandate to deal with ITAR. And as you point out, it's very important to keep our most exquisite technology out of the hands of our enemies. But there is a lot of work to be done to make it more efficient and more effective. And I look forward to working with this committee to make that happen.

Senator SHAHEEN. Well, thank you. I'm out of time, but I look forward to hearing more about what you think we should be doing there.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator RISCH. Thank you.

Mr. Pratt, you underlined how important this issue is. You know, myself, and Senator Shaheen, and her counterparts on the other side are able to stop military sales. We whine a little bit about that, but it's the other side trying to move it along and get stuff in the hands of people faster.

I think part of it is it's just that they have these Arcadian rules that are—that overlay everything. And it seems to me every time I've been involved in this, that a case by case basis is a much better way to handle those rather than some overall policy. But anyway, I know you're up to the task, and we'll chat again about it sometime into your time.

So, with that, Senator Ricketts.

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

Mr. Rayburn, President Trump has been very clear that when it comes to Iran, he's talking about a deal that involves total disarmament of their nuclear program. That means no enrichment, no plutonium processing, no centrifuges, nothing like that.

Allowing Iran to be able to enrich at any level would give them the opportunity to be able to use that then to create weapons grade uranium for a nuclear weapon, that it would be dangerous not only to us, but our allies like Israel. And that's just one of the reasons why President Trump was right to withdraw from the Iranian nuclear deal before.

And I might point out that Iran doesn't even use the uranium it's enriching in its nuclear reactors. It's powering those nuclear reactors with Russian uranium. So, that means that everything that's enriching is actually going toward this program to create nuclear weapons.

Yesterday, Senator Cruz, myself, and Tom Cotton, along with 49 of our Republican colleagues, wrote a letter to the President reinforcing that Iran cannot be allowed to have a nuclear program. They need to have total nuclear disarmament. And I really appreciate my colleagues in joining me with that. And the whole goal is to really strengthen the President's stand when he is negotiating with the Iranians.

Do you agree with Special Envoy Witkoff that any enrichment program can never exist in the state of Iran ever again?

Mr. RAYBURN. Senator, thank you for raising that.

I do agree with Special Envoy Witkoff. And the President, Secretary Rubio have been very clear about it as well.

Senator RICKETTS. Does Iran need a domestic enrichment program to have a domestic power—nuclear power program?

Mr. RAYBURN. No, Senator. There are literally dozens of countries in the world that have civil nuclear programs where the countries don't have their own enrichment capability. They buy the fuel from third parties, nor do they reprocess the spent fuel.

Senator RICKETTS. Given Iran's previous history of deception and not allowing us to verify, how important is it to have a really strong verification program for any deal that we would be able to do with Iran?

Mr. RAYBURN. Senator, it's essential because I think the Iranians have not operated in good faith even under the terms of the previous—of the JCPOA. They've exceeded limits they even were allowed under the JCPOA as well. The rest of the pattern of their behavior since 1979 indicates there has to be very stringent controls, oversight of whatever is agreed with them.

Senator RICKETTS. The IAE has said they've lost control and can't even count for anything they've gotten in Iran right now. Do you think that really only total disarmament of their program is the only way we can truly know that they do not have a nuclear weapons program?

Mr. RAYBURN. Senator, I think that's in line. I think that is the President, Secretary Rubio, Special Envoy Witkoff's position. I think it's wise that Iranians don't need and should not have their own enrichment capability. If civil nuclear power is really what they're interested in or medical research, they can buy the fuel from third parties. They don't need to have their own enrichment capability.

Senator RICKETTS. Great. Thank you.

Last month—I'm going to switch gears a little bit. Last month, I led a CODEL with Senator Coons and Senator Budd to Taiwan. And the impression that was left on all of us is that we needed partners willing to do what's necessary for self-defense in the face of increasing aggression from Beijing. President Lai's whole of society resilience effort, through that effort, Taiwan citizens are being galvanized, prepared for an invasion and resistive coercion from the Communist government in China.

The government also really is focused on military reforms, including enhancing its reserve force, and on defense spending, Taiwan's legislature recently approved the largest ever national defense budget. Now, Taiwan has still got a lot of work to do on all these fronts, and must do it quickly to be able to deter Communist China.

But we got to do better as well, whether it's howitzers, or stinger missiles, or tanks, or F-16s, these are all experiencing multi-year delays. And of course, Xi Jinping has told his military to be ready to invade Taiwan by 2027. We've kind of hit a upon on this already, Mr. Pratt, but my understanding is that these delays were a result of both industrial base that is struggling to meet demand, and bureaucratic hurdles and delays in arms sales process.

If confirmed, what actions can you do to help Taiwan get more of the backlog that we've already agreed to provide to them and ensure more timely delivery?

Mr. PRATT. Thank you for that, Senator.

Certainly, Taiwan is our most important partner, certainly, the most important partner in the region. Perhaps it faces the most asymmetric threat in the history of the world and its northern neighbor there. So, we're certainly very committed. And I can't speak to the existing problems that are, that you mentioned, but I'm certainly very committed, if confirmed, to taking a comprehensive review of how we can help Taiwan and increase our support thereof.

Senator RICKETTS. Great. So, one of the actions Congress could take is elevate Taiwan into the NATO Plus category for shorter congressional notification timelines and higher threshold values when it comes to FMS and DCS. I recently introduced a bill, the PORCUPINE Act with Senator Coons and Cornyn that would do just that. Mr. Pratt, if confirmed, what do you think of that idea? Would you support that effort?

Mr. PRATT. I'm very familiar with that effort, sir, and I'm very supportive of taking a hard look and to figure out the best way forward with that.

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

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator RISCH. Thank you.

Senator Murphy.

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

I was very interested to hear Senator Ricketts exchange with you, Mr. Rayburn, regarding the ways in which the Trump administration is thinking about a deal with Iran. It seems pretty muddled to many of us on this committee. You likely heard Vice President Vance yesterday suggest that, in fact, the Trump administration would be open to Iran being able to enrich. The President himself posted on social media an article that outlined a deal that would allow Iran to have enrichment capabilities. So, I look forward to this continued conversation.

If in the end, a deal gets struck in which Iran makes promises never to obtain a nuclear weapon, but is given the ability to enrich to a certain level, that sounds a lot like the JCPOA. What a tragedy would be to have thrown out the window to then just reenter a deal on very similar parameters.

I also appreciated the answer you gave on the President's decision to remove Syria's sanctions. But I'm interested in your views because there's a *Washington Post* report this morning that says some of Trump's own officials are mounting a quiet but determined rear guard action to undermine President Trump's Syria policy, which is to lift all sanctions.

I actually think the President is right that it's time for us to lift these sanctions and give the Syrian regime a shot. But there is reporting that there are members of his team that are seeking to undermine that decision.

Are you part of the group that is described here, that is trying to convince the President not to lift sanctions on Syria?

Mr. RAYBURN. Senator, thank you for that question.

Senator, as a private citizen, I'm not in the U.S. Government. I'm not a part of the of the policy system, and the President has been very clear with his policy guidance. So, if I'm confirmed, I'm going

to implement the President's policy as handed to me also by Secretary Rubio. And that's been very clear.

Senator MURPHY. But you've obviously, you know, thought and written extensively on this topic. Do you want to share your personal views with us on whether the President is right to pursue a release of these sanctions?

Mr. RAYBURN. Senator, I support the President's goals and his initiative as he laid out just within the last 48 hours. I think it offers, as I said to Senator Shaheen and Senator Risch, it offers a golden opportunity to turn the page on more than half a century of Syria being a source of instability, a failed state, its people suffering.

The President is taking a bold move to give the Syrians an opportunity to grasp that. He has expectations that he's also laid out. So, I think that this is a policy—if I'm confirmed, that's the policy that I'll be implementing.

Senator MURPHY. Listen, help us understand the advice you are going to give the President regarding the investments that are being made by Gulf nations in the President's businesses and the direct gifts that are being made to the President. I disagree with the President's decision to do business deals with foreign nations, and sovereign wealth funds, and companies that are controlled by foreign governments while he's in office. And I think the American people agree.

I think the reason that the announcement on the gift of the plane was so shocking is because this was different. This wasn't an investment in a Trump business. This was just a gift of a \$400 million luxury plane. Not to the U.S. Government, but apparently, to Trump himself because he was going to be allowed to take it with him to his library, whatever that is going to be after he's out of office.

So, help us understand what the line is here. I think the American people don't really understand what's ethical, what is not. What advice you, as his chief advisor for the Middle East, are going to give him. Is it OK—if it's OK for the President to get investments in his businesses, if it's OK for the President to get a gift to the Presidential library, what's not OK? Would it be OK for a foreign government to hand him an envelope of cash? Explain to the American people what the line is here.

Mr. RAYBURN. Senator, thank you for the opportunity to address this. Of course, I'm not in the system, so I'm not part of the review process at this stage. I'm not privy to the engagements either within our system or—

Senator MURPHY. But you've obviously seen the—you know what the debate is here. I think on this issue, it's important to hear your personal views. Where do you think the line exists? Could you give an example of a gift or a payment to the President of the United States that would be unethical, or illegal, or that you would advise against?

Mr. RAYBURN. Senator, my personal view, and in my experience, the White House and President Trump are going to follow all applicable laws and ethical guidelines that govern the reception of gifts. I have no doubt that that process is going to be followed to the letter.

Senator MURPHY. And you don't believe that the gift of the plane violates, at the very least, the emoluments clause of the Constitution.

Mr. RAYBURN. Senator, again, I'm not involved. I'm not in the system. I'm not involved in that process, but I am confident that the White House, that the President are going to follow all the applicable laws and ethical guidelines governing the reception abuse.

Senator MURPHY. Yes, that is not terribly confidence inspiring.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Senator RICKETTS [presiding]. OK. So, next we have Mr. Paul, please.

Senator PAUL. Mr. Rayburn, you were proceeded as U.S. Envoy to Syria by James Jeffrey. What do you think of the job he did as U.S. Envoy?

Mr. RAYBURN. Senator, thanks for that question.

Our objective—and I served as his de facto deputy also with the title of Special Envoy for Syria. We were working very hard to bring pressure, in particular, on the Assad regime, to try to come to an end to the conflict. We didn't succeed in that by the end of the Trump administration, but I thought we got pretty close to bringing enough pressure to bear on the Assad regime.

Senator PAUL. Do you share his worldview?

Mr. RAYBURN. His, excuse me, Senator?

Senator PAUL. Do you share his worldview?

Mr. RAYBURN. Senator, I have my own worldview. Ambassador Jeffrey had—

Senator PAUL. Do you consider him to be a role model, or a mentor, or someone that you admired?

Mr. RAYBURN. He was a very close colleague, Senator. I worked more closely with Ambassador Jeffrey than with almost anyone else I've worked with my government career. This is true.

Senator PAUL. In your close work with him, when President Trump asked that the troops be removed after the defeat of ISIS, James Jeffrey has admitted that we were always playing shell games to not make it clear to our leadership how many troops we had there. Were you aware of that at the time?

Mr. RAYBURN. Senator, I remember the incident you're talking about. He gave an interview to the media shortly after he left office, and he made some comments that were inaccurate. They were not correct. Did not characterize—

Senator PAUL. Were you aware at the time that there was a game being played with the numbers to try to trick Trump into thinking that the troops were 200? Ambassador Jeffrey would go on and on saying, "Yes, he thinks they're 200, but we're playing shell games. There's really a lot more." Were you aware at the time that this was going on?

Mr. RAYBURN. Senator, I think that was a very unfortunate comment by Ambassador Jeffrey, because among other things, as a State Department person, and me, as a State Department members, we had no role in reporting troop numbers to the President, and no role—

Senator PAUL. Were you aware of any deception on the part of James Jeffrey or others, or complicit in that deception as to how many troops there were in Syria?

Mr. RAYBURN. Absolutely not, Senator. Absolutely not. Never participated in any such thing. Never would've participated in any such thing. I never saw it. I don't think that——

Senator PAUL. Were you part of an email exchange discussing obscuring troop levels?

Mr. RAYBURN. Not to my knowledge, Senator.

Senator PAUL. Did you have any oral conversation with Jeffrey over underreporting the numbers in order to try to maintain troop levels against the wishes of Donald Trump?

Mr. RAYBURN. No, sir.

Senator PAUL. It bothers me, you know, quite a bit. I think what James Jeffrey did is, you know, tantamount to treason, basically, that this went on. I think this wasn't the first time he had displayed his colors. He signed a statement saying that Donald Trump was not qualified to be President, would be dangerous, lacks character, values, and experience, continues to display an alarming ignorance of international politics, and lacks the temperament to be President.

It's amazing that he was still there, but also amazing that you still consider him to be a close colleague. So, that does disturb me. And when he made these comments in 2019, did you make any public comments disavowing what he said, or saying that it was untrue, his comments regarding hiding troop levels from Donald Trump?

Mr. RAYBURN. Actually, Senator, I had to testify before the House Foreign Affairs Committee shortly after that, and I think I told—I received that question, and I believe I responded that it didn't happen. That in my experience, that what Ambassador Jeffrey unfortunately mischaracterized in a media interview absolutely did not happen.

Senator PAUL. No further question.

Mr. RAYBURN. It didn't happen, Senator. It did not happen.

Senator RICKETTS. OK.

Mr. Kaine.

Senator KAINE. Thank you to the witnesses.

I'm just going to pick up on Senator Murphy's questions or line of questions about the Qataris' offer of the plane. And it's not really a question for you, but it's really a message. If folks from Qatar are watching this, you've made a grievous mistake by putting this offer on the table.

If the offer had been because of delays in producing the next version of Air Force One, "We have a jet that we will make available to whoever the U.S. President is, until that next aircraft is complete," it would've raised a series of questions for the committee.

Is this an aircraft that can be used consistent with security protocols for the President? Can it be adequately defended? Need it be updated? How much is the update going to cost? There would've been some questions about whether this was trying to curry favor with the Trump administration. But if it had been an even handed offer, as long as there's a delay, here is something that the U.S. can use until the next iteration of Air Force One is complete, we could have had a debate about the details.

But the notion that, “Oh, by the way, it’s for President Trump,” and “when you are done in office, this is for you to take to the presidential library and use however you want”—Qatar is badly damaging any reputation you have for credibility on the Hill by making that offer.

Now, I read yesterday a story that said that on the Qatari side—the offer is still under consideration. I would urge you in the strongest possible terms to change the offer to make sure that it is not an offer to a particular individual like President Trump. Because by doing that, you will lead us to question your motivations for a very long time. You will damage your reputation.

And let’s be honest, Qatar has done a number of things that the U.S. has viewed as positive in terms of trying to help facilitate hostage release in Gaza. But Qatar has also done a number of things that caused members of this committee, based on previous statements, grave concern, including harboring Hamas leaders in Qatar.

So, I’m not going to try to give President Trump advice because he’s not going to follow my advice, but if Qatar wants a long term relationship with all branches of the U.S. Government, you are about to commit a grievous error that is likely to be a permanent stain on your ethical record, and you should reconsider it.

Second, Mr. Pratt, you were asked a question earlier and maybe in a back and forth with Senator Risch. You talked about how ITAR is going to be one of your big headaches, should you be confirmed. I would just encourage you; Senator Shaheen and I were just in a really, I think, instructive Armed Services hearing about foreign military sales and ITAR.

And the witnesses were independent witnesses. They have experience at the Pentagon, but they were coming at it from the DOD side and talking about frustrations on the DOD side with the ITAR process. And I would just urge you and your team to take a look at that testimony in that hearing. Because I think there’s some good ideas in it that would help you solve this thing that I know is going to be a headache for you. But I appreciate your making it a priority.

And then just a question really either for Mr. Pratt, or maybe I’ll go to Mr. DeSombre first, which is about AUKUS. I’m a big supporter of AUKUS, I think the U.S., UK, Australia framework, Pillar One around sub production, Pillar Two, open ended. And it is something that can include other nations. If the Big 10 can have 16 teams, well, AUKUS can have more nations than the U.S., Australia, and the UK. Talk a little bit about the value that you see in AUKUS, and should you be confirmed, how you would want to make sure that we harvest the upside of that arrangement?

Ambassador DESOMBRE. Senator, thank you very much for that question. And thank you for making the opportunity for your staff to meet with me. I greatly appreciated that.

Obviously, this year we’re celebrating the 74th anniversary of our ANZUS Treaty with Australia. So, it’s been one of our longest allies in the region.

And AUKUS really gives us an opportunity to increase the strength of that relationship and what we can do in the region. Obviously, Pillar One with the conventionally armed nuclear powered submarine, but Pillar Two with regard to defense technology and

co-production, potentially co-development as well could be very valuable.

And my understanding, you know, that the administration is committed to AUKUS, and I believe it's a very important part of our Indo-Pacific strategy in a way to, as I indicated with one of my priorities, work with our allies and partners to enhance deterrence and counter malign activities of our adversaries.

Senator KAINE. I appreciate that. Look forward to working with you on it.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator RICKETTS. Senator Hagerty.

Senator HAGERTY. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Colonel Rayburn, I've known you as a soldier, as a gentleman, as a man whose integrity is beyond reproach. And I am more than willing to personally vouch for your character and your integrity here today for all of my colleagues. I am extremely troubled by any attempt to somehow use guilt by association with someone that you may have been as a soldier working with but certainly not responsible for comments they may have made to the media, et cetera. You have been one of the most loyal members of the former Trump administration and made significant contributions.

I'd just like to open the floor to you. What would you consider your greatest contribution during the first Trump administration to our national security?

Mr. RAYBURN. Senator, thank you for the opportunity to say that. You're absolutely right. In the first Trump administration, during the campaign for President, and during this the current Administration even in my capacity as a private citizen, I support the President's policies 100 percent. I supported the President's policies and his ideas for America since he first announced his candidacy in 2015.

I was very proud of the opportunity that I had during the first Trump administration to serve on the National Security Council staff to try to bring fresh eyes to the most critical national security problems that we faced.

Senator HAGERTY. I would just say that one of the greatest achievements that I think President Trump could point to in his first term were the Abraham Accords. And you played a critical role there. Could you give us and enlighten the committee here a bit about what you can say?

Mr. RAYBURN. Absolutely, Senator. I mean, there were many people who contributed and led on the Abraham Accords. I was proud to play a small part, both in the run up to the Abraham Accords, and then in my role at the State Department and the Near East Bureau at the time, in playing a supporting role including, Senator, taking the necessary step of implementing the President's policy to show that we were willing to neutralize the threat from the Iranian regime in order to create the political space for our other allies and partners to make the historic agreements to reach peace between Arab partners and our Israeli allies so that they could take the political—they could be confident and take the political risk that they had to take in order to make those concessions. To work with our Israeli allies, to work with our Arab partners, and allies to bring that about. I was very proud of that. And still am.

Senator HAGERTY. I am too. When I served as ambassador, I worked very hard to get secondary sanctions imposed in Iran. I did it with Japan. We stopped their purchases of energy from Iran. Maximum pressure actually worked. You worked on the prosperity piece of that equation. And the, the resolve that was demonstrated by America under President Trump, with your able assistance, I think made a massive contribution.

And I just want to be clear that those contributions should be viewed in light of who you are, and certainly any attempt to try to tie you to somebody else that is not you, someone you might have reported to, because that was the chain of command that you respect as a soldier, I think is wholly inappropriate. And again, I encourage my colleagues here in the committee to look at the fine person that's sitting before us and his qualifications as an individual.

Ambassador DeSombre, I'd like to turn to you. Your charge as head of East Asia Pacific Affairs, should you be confirmed, is going to be one of the most challenging parts of the world. I know that you've had a lot of time to consider this. You've lived in the region, you've worked in the region, you understand the culture.

But I'd certainly like to get your thoughts in terms of your priorities, specifically with respect to economic prosperity and how you might use that tool. LNG comes to mind, but other ideas that you may have in terms of strengthening our posture in the region.

Ambassador DESOMBRE. Senator, thank you very much for that question.

This was indeed one of my top priorities when I was Ambassador to Thailand, was to strengthen the economic partnership in Thailand and use the toolkit that we have at our availability, which a lot of that includes the strength of our U.S. companies and getting them to be able to find opportunities.

I actually rolled out a deal team process in Thailand where I took interagency people across four different industries, healthcare, pharma, technology and infrastructure, and aerospace and defense. And I guess the fourth one is technology again. And you know, I managed to push opportunities to really make sure that the deal team was looking at any opportunity for American companies to come into Thailand and opportunities for Thai companies to also come back to America for investments.

And you're absolutely right, LNG was actually an interest. One, they're actually in that case, natural gas, because there's a big gas field between Thailand and Vietnam that currently is not exploited because of overlapping claims issues between ownership of that between Thailand and Cambodia. And so, trying to solve those issues and helping them develop their own resources while using American companies like Chevron and others to be involved in that.

So, my plan is to roll out those sorts of initiatives across all of EAP and really make sure that we use commercial diplomacy to try to strengthen relationships between all Asian countries and America.

Senator HAGERTY. Thank you, Ambassador.

Senator RICKETTS. Senator Rosen.

Senator ROSEN. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Really appreciate everyone holding this hearing. I want to thank our witnesses for testifying today, your families, and friends that are here with you, your willingness to serve.

And Mr. Rayburn, thank you for meeting with me earlier this week. It was a really productive conversation.

So, I'm going to turn to you, Mr. Rayburn, and talk a little bit about Iran negotiations. While you've not been involved, I know, on the ongoing negotiations between the U.S. and Iran, the outcome of these talks will have a profound impact on political dynamics in the Middle East and on your role, if confirmed.

So, as you mentioned in our conversation earlier this week, while Iran is at its weakest point in decades, we need to ensure it doesn't rebound. So, I'd like to ask you about what you think a U.S.-Iran deal can and should look like, and how can we best take advantage of this historic low point for Iranian power in the region? And in addition to focusing on Iran's nuclear program, should a potential deal with Iran also address Iran's proxy support for terrorists and the use of ballistic missiles?

Mr. RAYBURN. Senator, thank you for the question, and I also appreciated the time that you gave to meet with you to discuss these issues the other day.

I think you're absolutely right. And the President, Secretary Rubio, and Special Envoy Witkoff have been quite clear that if there is to be a deal as they put it out their position. And again, as you said, I'm not part of the negotiations. I'm outside the government, so I can just observe. But it seems their position is clear that if there is to be an agreement, it needs to include a total dismantlement, as the President put it, of the Iranians nuclear program. That includes the facilities, that's the centrifuges and so on. And there are many technical ways that that can be accomplished.

And also, of course, both the President and others in the Administration have mentioned that yes, there will be a need for the Iranian regime to forego, to give up its sponsorship of its militant proxy terrorist network that has so destabilized the region. I think the President has made clear that October 7, in his view, would never have happened. And so, in order to prevent the threat of a future October 7 type of event, that that needs to happen.

I think, also, there's general consensus on the need for the Iranian ballistic missile and UAV programs, which are being proliferated now, for example, and being used in Ukraine to great detriment for those to be restricted as well.

Senator ROSEN. Thank you.

I'm going to stay on this topic a little bit and talk about the Abraham Accords expansion. Last week, it was reported that the United States is dropping its demand that Saudi Arabia normalize ties with Israel as a condition for progress on civil nuclear cooperation. And as you noted in your opening statement, normalizing relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel has been a bipartisan effort for years, and that would transform the Middle East.

So, as a leading champion of the Abraham Accords, I cannot push back on this news strongly enough. Needlessly giving up the greatest leverage we have at this critical moment I think would be a momentous mistake.

So, Mr. Rayburn, do you think it'd be wise to drop the demand for normalization from Saudi Arabia as a part of a deal to access civilian nuclear capabilities?

Mr. RAYBURN. Senator, thank you for the question.

I don't have visibility on the negotiations that have gone on, the engagement that's going on concerning normalization process. To my mind, just as a long time analyst, observer of the region, I think normalization between Saudi Arabia and Israel is going to happen. It's bound to happen because it makes so much sense. The logic is so strong for both sides, for the surrounding region, and for the United States. So, I think I have confidence that there can be a diplomatic path forward to making that happen and in the not too distant future.

Senator ROSEN. Thank you.

And I want to stay with you on this question, and I'll go very quickly, because we have to prevent the rise of extremism in Syria. We know that there are detention camps in northeastern Syria. I'm going to go very quickly. We have to repatriate people from the camps of these third party nationals. This must happen. It has to happen thoughtfully.

So, how can the U.S. work with Syria and other countries to thoughtfully repatriate the refugees in a way that promotes reintegration, ensures the youngest and most vulnerable in this group are protected not to be recruited from future threats, particularly the Al-Hol and Al-Roj detention camps?

Mr. RAYBURN. Senator, thanks for raising that. You are right. Those are the—in a lot of ways the people that are housed there are the remnants of the ISIS caliphate, and if it's not addressed, it constitutes sort of a ticking time bomb. It's something that has to be addressed. You're right. The deradicalization has to be part of that.

I think also there really has to be a redoubling. And again, I'm not involved in this, so I'm not trying to say this kind of diplomacy isn't happening right now. There really does need to be a ramping up, I think, of our diplomatic efforts to get third countries to accept the repatriation of their nationals back into those countries so that they're not there in northeastern Syria just sort of waiting as a danger that could happen.

Senator ROSEN. Thank you. I really appreciate it.

Who's—Senator Scott, I think you and I are the only ones here, so I will yield to you, my friend.

Senator SCOTT OF FLORIDA. Thank you, Senator Rosen.

Well, first off, congratulations on your nominations. Thanks for your willingness to serve.

Let me start with Ambassador DeSombre. So, as we know, Communist China has decided to be our enemy. Their government is despicable. They're sending fentanyl across our border, killing over 70,000 people a year. They've never complied with the trade agreement, the WTO, they steal our technology. Many of the things they send here are unsafe. If they violate any agreement, there's no way to get recourse in China against them.

So, what can you do in this new role to hold Communist China accountable? And I think if there's anybody that can get a deal that makes sense with them, it is probably President Trump. But I just

don't believe—I mean, they didn't even comply with the Trump trade deal in his first term. So, what do you think you can do to hold them accountable?

Ambassador DESOMBRE. Senator, thank you very much for that question. I think you've given a very good list of many of the challenges that we have with China. You're definitely correct in the fact that they've been calling us their adversary and enemy for a long period of time, and it's taken us a while to come to appreciate that. And we need to deal with that.

As I indicated in my opening remarks, working with our allies and partners to enhance deterrence and counter the malign activities by our adversaries, including China, is one of our top priorities. I further agree with you completely, that if we're going to reach agreements with China, we need to make sure that they actually follow them. And the way to do that is for them to actually show us what they're doing, not commit to what they're going to do. And that's a challenge that we need to face.

And I'll be eager to work, if confirmed, on trying to solve that issue. And I believe definitely putting pressure via our allies and partners of the region is one of the important elements.

Senator SCOTT OF FLORIDA. So, it's my understanding you've done quite a bit of business in Hong Kong. I have a friend, Jimmy Lai, who is a journalist, who was wrongfully detained by the Hong Kong authorities, which clearly is doing Xi's bidding. They've stripped Jimmy of his wealth. I think he's been in solitary confinement for over 4 years. Given your knowledge of and experience with Hong Kong, and the region, and Communist China, first, are you familiar with this situation, and what have you been able to do and what can you do to help Jimmy?

Ambassador DESOMBRE. Senator, thank you very much for raising that very important issue. I am very familiar with that. I'm very familiar with the fact that China is engaged in repeated violations of the Sino-British Joint Declaration that required them to maintain the high degree of autonomy, rule of law, and democratic freedoms in Hong Kong, which have not been so maintained. I'm aware of what has happened to Jimmy Lai, and I understand that President Trump has called for Jimmy Lai to be freed, and he should be freed.

Senator SCOTT OF FLORIDA. Is there anything else we can do?

Ambassador DESOMBRE. Thank you, Senator, for that question.

There probably are other things that we can do, and I definitely, if confirmed, will look into that. I think the situation in Hong Kong, I mean, from a personal note, is deeply troubling to me. I lived in Hong Kong from 1997 before the handover until 2020 when I moved down to assume the position as Ambassador to Thailand. And there's a reason why I didn't move back to Hong Kong after that. And it's really personally deeply troubling to see what's happened to Hong Kong. It's not the place that it was before.

Senator SCOTT OF FLORIDA. Mr. Pratt, I just got back from a trip to Europe, and I met with military and elected officials in Denmark, Finland, Estonia. To a person they complained about our foreign military sales and the fact that—I mean, they've, one, they just can't get an answer. They've watched what Putin is doing. Now, they're afraid that they're going to be invaded, so they want

to build up their military. So, one, they can't get a decision out of our government to allow them to buy the equipment they want to buy. And then number two, our manufacturers don't produce it on time. So, in this role, what can you do to change that?

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

Certainly, I'm familiar with those complaints, and certainly building up our partners in Scandinavia is critically important to countering the Russian influence. And I commit to, if confirmed, taking a thorough review of those issues and seeing how we can get those resolved.

Senator SCOTT OF FLORIDA. Will you put time into understanding—like there ought—I mean, it is pretty simple. There ought to be a streamlined way of getting this done. Say yes or no when—I'm a business guy. And what frustrates me about government is just tell me no if you're not going to sell. If you're not, let me do it, I'll go someplace else. But what we're doing is we don't tell them anything. We keep them in the dark. And then, even when they get approval, they have no idea whether our manufacturers are going to show up and provide it on any reasonable period of time. So, are you going to work with both trying to streamline the process and get our manufacturers to actually do their job?

Mr. PRATT. Yes, sir. And again, I'm familiar with those complaints and very much committed to addressing them. And as you point out, part of that is working with industry to figure out what the problem areas are. Part of that's working with the Department of Defense to figure out how they can be more engaged. And certainly, I commit to working with both those partners to resolve this problem.

Senator SCOTT OF FLORIDA. Thank you.

Thank you, Chairman.

Senator RISCH [presiding]. Thank you, Senator Scott.

Senator, you're up.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ambassador DeSombre, thank you for coming to speak with me in my office yesterday. I'll jump right in to follow up with our conversation. If confirmed, it will be your responsibility to fight for the people and programs under EAP. And based on your past experience in the business world and as Ambassador to Thailand, I think you will be very well positioned to do so.

We talked about how your experience in Bangkok gives you particularly good insight into the value of the interagency presence in the region. Can you elaborate a little bit on some of your positive examples of leveraging that interagency effectively like the USTDA, the IC law enforcement, and how you'd like to empower our missions in the region to continue that work?

Ambassador DESOMBRE. Senator, thank you very much for the question, and again thank you for making yourself and your staff available to meet yesterday, and also obviously for your support last time when I was up for nomination. I appreciate that as well.

The nature of our presence overseas is very important, and the interagency aspect of that can be very valuable. Some examples in Thailand, for example, we have the International Law Enforcement Academy in Thailand, and very significant law enforcement co-operation in various different arms of both the Thai law enforce-

ment, but also regional law enforcement that come to Thailand to train at the ILEA academy is a great example of ways that we could increase connectivity and also promote more appropriate law activities by police officers and enforcement agencies.

On the economic front from the deal team perspective, I used it with USTDA quite substantially, particularly on the lines of effort on infrastructure, aerospace, and defense, and ways that we could get studies done that could show the feasibility of various different projects. And I mean, the list goes on and on.

There's lots of things that we can do together, and I believe that that will be my role in EAP, to really make sure that we do that in all the countries around EAP.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you.

Similarly, there's actually a quite a sizable American population throughout the Asia Pacific region, folks who need access to U.S. citizen services and American businesses who are trying to operate on a level playing field in the region.

How do you quantify the value of retaining an active presence across this large region and the economic value of business deals that are facilitated by our embassies and consulates? I mean, basically, how do we make sure that our foreign service professionals are given credit for the work they do that directly contributes to American prosperity?

Ambassador DESOMBRE. Senator, that's a very good question. And clearly, the safety and security of Americans overseas is one of the top priorities of the State Department, and ensuring that they have sufficient access to consular services and others is critically important, and is something that we need to ensure happens.

Obviously, some countries are more densely populated and have more Americans than others. And so, where we have those services is something that we obviously need to look at from time to time. But I definitely believe that that's important, both in terms of the services for the American citizens, but also for promoting the commercial activities of American businesses in those countries as well.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you.

Touching on another issue related to our nation's prosperity. A real economic issue that impacts folks here at home, although they may not all realize the connection, is the prevalence of these cyber scam centers that are targeting Americans. A lot of them are originating throughout Southeast Asia.

Can you talk about what types of existing authorities you can use to help address this issue, if confirmed, and any actions we can take on a multilateral or bilateral basis?

Ambassador DESOMBRE. Senator, thank you very much.

I'm very much aware of those cyber scams. Obviously, the countries, particularly Burma, Cambodia, and Laos, are where many of them occur, I understand that over \$10 billion has been lost to cyber scams by U.S. citizens. So, you're absolutely correct. This is a critical issue and something we need to try to address, and something I will, if confirmed, look into the best way of addressing it.

We clearly have ability to go after individuals that are violating, you know, laws and be able to do that. Obviously, sometimes that may not have a great effect if they're in a country that we—I can't do anything about them while they're there. But I think in those

countries, for example, greater cooperation in the law enforcement area, so they can improve their capacity to enforce their laws.

Because in many circumstances, these are happening either with or without the consent or approval of the relevant country. They're happening there. And sometimes increasing law enforcement cooperation to increase capacity could be one way that we might think about addressing it.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you. Look, the United States is a Pacific nation. People forget that. And EAP is full of critical allies and partners. I hope to see that reflected in how we prioritize our engagement and empower our people overseas. If you're confirmed, I hope you and I can work together to make that happen through strong coordination and collaboration between executive and legislative branches, and I hope that you'll make yourself available to me and my office once you're confirmed.

Ambassador DESOMBRE. Senator Duckworth, thank you very much for that. And I definitely will intend to cooperate with this committee on all matters, and I agree completely that EAP is a priority region, and I think as has been stated. I mean, China is the pacing threat and we need to address that.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you.

I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Senator RISCH. Thank you.

Senator Van Hollen.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and congratulations, gentlemen, on your nominations.

Mr. Pratt, let me start with you. The State Department's Civilian Harm Incidents Response Guidance, also known as CHIRG, is designed to track and reduce incidents of civilian harm linked to U.S. arms transfers and propose recommendations to prevent future harm. So, I have a very simple yes or no question for you, do you support the continued implementation of CHIRG?

Mr. PRATT. Thank you very much for that question, Senator. I do pledge to support all applicable laws. Thank you.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Well, just, I'm asking you about CHIRG, specifically, right? So, if you could just let me know whether you support the continued implementation of CHIRG. It should not be hard.

Mr. PRATT. Thank you, Senator.

I do pledge to support all applicable law and in particular the President's 2018 CAT, Conventional Arms Transfer policy, right? So, yes, sir.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Well, I understand that. I know about the Trump CAT policy from 2018, but people have built on that. This is obviously a separate question, but if you don't want to answer directly, I guess the record will show that.

Let me turn, if I could, then to another question related to U.S. arms transfers. In response to a question for the record, Mr. Thomas DiNanno, who's the nominee to be Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security, committed to abiding by the informal and formal congressional review process for arms sales and arms transfer. So, my question to you is, will you make the same commitment he did?

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

Yes, I will make that same commitment, and I look forward to working very closely with this committee on that process.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Excellent. Good. Obviously, there are people who have ideas of changing it, and reforming it. And welcome all ideas, but I hope we can all agree that that has to be done through the statutory process. And I take your answer is agreeing with that?

Mr. PRATT. Yes, sir.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Mr. Rayburn, when we met, I indicated that I supported the lifting of sanctions on Syria. I also indicated that given the current Syrian government's genealogy, I thought it'd be important to have snapback provisions to protect U.S. interests. Of course, the President announced that he was going to lift sanctions on Syria during this trip. I know others have asked about this, but my question to you is, are you—and I understand you've committed to moving forward to implement the President's decision. Is that right?

Mr. RAYBURN. Senator, thank you.

Yes, I have. Absolutely.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. So, look, I was very glad to see that through Steve Witkoff's efforts we secured the release of Edan Alexander. We need, of course, to secure the release of all the hostages. We also need to immediately end a 24 day long blockade by the Netanyahu government that has prevented the flow of shipments, of food, of water, of other supplies to 2 million civilians in Gaza.

And I have to say, I'm extremely disappointed that amidst a lot of the deals, the billion, trillion dollar deals going down right now on the President's trip, and despite all the talk about the Qatari plane that's going to be gifted to him, the President has not, to my knowledge, called for an end to that blockade. At least 55 children have now died as a result of malnutrition and related illnesses, specifically connected to this blockade.

Cindy McCain, who as you know, has been leading the World Food Programme, has said, and I quote, "Families in Gaza are starving while the food they need is sitting at the borders." So, my question to you, Mr. Rayburn, is would you agree that this is a violation of Section 6201 of the Foreign Assistance Act?

Mr. RAYBURN. Senator, thanks for the question. I also appreciated the chance to spend time with you and discuss these and other important regional issues.

Being outside the system I don't have access or visibility to the U.S. Government assessments of the situation on the ground, so I can't speak to the actual humanitarian assessment that would drive that kind of decisionmaking or analysis. So, I just don't know.

What I have seen just as an outside observer, as others have, is I think there's a desire, on the U.S. part, on Israel's part, to try to think creatively such as through the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation about ways to try to restore humanitarian assistance—

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Mr. Rayburn, no, I just—I was just asking you a direct question about 6201 of the Foreign Assistance Act.

Let me just say in closing, Mr. Chairman, that this seems to be a no brainer. If you look at the text of that law, U.S. law, which says that the United States should not provide security assistance

to any country that is indirectly or directly impeding the delivery of humanitarian assistance into a zone where U.S. weapons are being used. It's pretty straightforward. And a blockade obviously qualifies.

And I will just say with respect to this proposed new idea, I think we've seen the testimony of well respected international organizations, UNICEF, among others, that have said that the new plan would be terrible when it comes to human rights and the negative, harmful impact on children. So, I just hope as you discuss that and float that people will recognize that it's not a recipe for the problem we're engaged—we're dealing with right now.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator RISCH. Thank you, Senator Van Hollen.

Senator Shaheen.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I have a couple of more questions. I wanted to go back to Mr. DeSombre because I thought your comment about the importance of providing law enforcement training for some of our partners in the Indo-Pacific is an important point. I've had a chance to visit the International Law Enforcement Academy in Budapest, and was very impressed with the work that they do.

We're still trying to figure this out, but it's my understanding that the skinny budget the President sent over actually reduces that funding particularly with respect to Thailand, which I know given your experience there, you would have an interest in. So, I would hope that you would take a look at that and see how we can ensure that those programs that are doing a good job are actually funded.

Ambassador DESOMBRE. Thank you, Senator, for that question.

Obviously, I'm not involved in the reorganization and the plan, so I don't know what it is. But I do agree that ILEA and law enforcement training can be a useful part of our foreign policy.

Senator SHAHEEN. We also had a hearing, one of our first of this committee this year on the PRC in China. We didn't have any because it was so early in the Administration, we didn't have any witnesses from the Trump administration, but we did have outside experts.

And one of the things they testified to is the fact that right now, the PRC and China are spending over \$1 billion a year, billion with a B, on disinformation and misinformation efforts around the world focused, of course, in the Indo-Pacific. It's particularly concerning given that the Administration is shutting down the U.S. Agency for Global Media that provides for Radio Free Asia, Voice of America, all of those programs that allow us to counter that Chinese disinformation and misinformation that's going into the Indo-Pacific.

So, can you tell me whether you would be willing to advocate for a counter to what the PRC is doing, and how you envision that being done if we don't have any of the apparatus and the infrastructure to do that?

Ambassador DESOMBRE. Senator, thank you very much for that question, and I am in complete agreement that, you know, ensuring that people receive the truth and aren't subject to the misinformation from the Chinese is incredibly important. Again, I'm not aware

of exactly or involved with the way that things are being restructured, but I am confident that the State Department has other tools at its disposal to be able to ensure that we project American values and our views around the world.

Senator SHAHEEN. I think when you were Ambassador to Thailand the first time, what tools did you have that you used that were available through the State Department outside of some of those media efforts?

Ambassador DESOMBRE. Well, Senator, thank you again for that question.

We have, obviously, public diplomacy efforts in all of the missions and globally. And actually, at least a little bit that I understand about the organization is to empower more of the bureaus and the missions to ensure that our efforts are all aligned with our foreign policy. So, I think there's a lot of benefits to ensuring that the regional bureaus and the missions themselves are the ones taking over this effort. And I will advocate to ensure that we have sufficient resources in the Bureau and the missions to be able to do that.

Senator SHAHEEN. Well, I would look forward to having you come back to share with us how you intend to do that without an infrastructure to get the message out to people. Because I think we're agreed on the goal, and you know, if you don't like the way the U.S. Agency for Global Media is operating, then let's find a replacement for it. But to take it down and not have anything in its place seems to me to be very shortsighted, and to give—we're already seeing the advantages that that gives the PRC in the Indo-Pacific.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator RISCH. Thank you, Senator Shaheen.

We've been at this for a while. I'm going to introduce for the record, at the request of Senator Ricketts, an article from May 14, *Wall Street Journal*; "Republicans Unite to Thwart Iran." You wanted that put in the record. I'm going to do that.

[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 RISCH. We have one questioner left, and that's Senator Cruz. And I have to leave for a meeting, but I'm going to turn it over to Senator Cruz.

I want to thank you, all of you for your willingness to serve.

And Senator Cruz, if you would do just—one sec.

Senator Shaheen, did you have anything else you wanted?

Senator SHAHEEN. No.

Senator RISCH. OK.

All right. Senator Cruz, the floor is yours, and if you'd wrap it up for me—

Senator CRUZ. Sure.

Senator RISCH [continuing]. And put the usual matters in the record, I would appreciate it. Thank you very much. Thank you for being here.

Senator CRUZ. Very good. Thank you.

Mr. Rayburn, you were involved in withdrawing from the catastrophic Obama Iran nuclear deal during the first Trump administration. After that withdrawal, President Trump imposed a max-

imum pressure campaign that brought the regime to the brink of collapse and kept their nuclear program in a box.

President Biden functionally re-implemented the nuclear deal, providing all of the concessions so that Iran could build out its nuclear program and rebuild its oil exports. I used to ask Biden officials why they weren't cracking down on Iran, and the answer they used to give was essentially, there's nothing we can do.

President Trump and the current Republican Congress are committed to rebuilding that maximum pressure. Talk about what a maximum pressure campaign would look like and how you intend to pursue it.

Mr. RAYBURN. Senator, thanks for the question, and I appreciated you taking the time so that we can discuss these and other regional issues also offline.

Absolutely, it's not rocket science, Senator. I had a chance to participate and see what works. You have to build out an enforcement apparatus. It's one thing to have the sanctions on the books, you have to have the people, the organizations, the resources, the diplomatic engagement to actually enforce.

You have to engage with your allies. You have to disrupt the ghost fleet of vessels that the Iranian regime uses to illicitly transport its oil. You have to expose its financial dealings so that they can't benefit from the money that moves with those transactions. You have to warn maybe unwitting participants in those transactions.

You have to expose the beneficial ownership of the vessels of the front companies, of the financial houses. You have to engage the insurance sector so that they understand that they're potentially insuring IRGC tankers and things like that. And you have to engage with those who flag the vessels so that they understand what they're doing. When you do all those things, you can make a real dent in their oil exports.

At the same time, you also have to be politically isolating them. You have to make the Iranian regime an international pariah on the terms of its malign behavior, and do that with allies, with the coalition of political and economic pressure. And that's what works. I've seen it work.

Senator CRUZ. Well, I will say that was a thorough and comprehensive answer, and it is precisely the opposite of what the Biden administration did for 4 years, which is why Iran is on the verge of nuclear breakout.

As part of the maximum pressure campaign, President Trump is committed to ensure that Iran is never allowed to enrich uranium. He has called for what has been described as "complete dismantlement." Iran cannot be allowed to keep spinning centrifuges because under the Biden administration, they built out their program so much that any activity would allow them to cheat. You spoke about this earlier with Senator Ricketts, but I want to circle back to it. Talk about President Trump's red line of dismantlement and why it's so important.

Mr. RAYBURN. Yes, Senator. Thank you.

It's because the Iranians if civil nuclear power is the objective of the Iranian nuclear program, they do not need to be able to enrich their own uranium. There are almost two dozen—there are dozens

of other countries in the world that have similar civil nuclear power programs that do not have their own indigenous enrichment. They purchase the fuel from third parties. They also don't reprocess this—the spent fuel. So, there's no need for the Iranians to do that. And that is the President's position.

There needs to be a dismantlement of their facilities, of their centrifuges and so on. There are many technical ways that can be accomplished. Secretary Rubio has laid out the same; Special Envoy Witkoff has laid out the same, and it's because of the Iranian regime's demonstrated bad faith. It's that they don't operate in good faith when you strike an agreement with them. So, there has to be very strict restrictions and oversight.

Senator CRUZ. I think that's absolutely right. And I would note, at least from my perspective, I see no reason that the Iranians should have nuclear power generation either. They are literally swimming on a sea of oil. It's not like they are lacking for energy and sources of energy. And I feel confident the Ayatollah is not staying awake at night worried about climate change. And so, at least from my perspective, I'm not interested in anything radioactive being anywhere near a theocratic zealot who leads chants of death to America and death to Israel.

Mr. DeSombre, the Chinese Communist Party is working every day to erode Taiwan's status globally. For years, I've raised concerns over the State Department's deeply frustrating policy prohibiting our Taiwanese allies from displaying symbols of their sovereignty, including their flag on American soil. That was an Obama era policy that came about at the express behest of the Chinese embassy.

I fought against that policy. I pushed legislation reversing that policy language that has been repeatedly advanced and received bipartisan support in this committee. It is the repeated explicit policy coming out of this committee to reverse that policy. The Trump administration changed it, but the Biden administration immediately restored the prohibition.

Secretary of State Rubio, stated as part of his written testimony to this committee, that he's committed to working with the committee to strengthen our unofficial ties with Taiwan. I'm putting you on the spot here a little bit, but describe the importance of bolstering our Taiwanese allies.

Ambassador DESOMBRE. Senator, thank you very much for that question. And thank you for making your staff available to meet with me earlier this week.

On a personal note, Taiwan was the first foreign country I lived in after I graduated from Stanford, and I have had a deep experience there from a business perspective over the last 28 years. Our relationship with Taiwan is very important. They're a great partner of ours, and we should seek to strengthen that partnership, and also encourage our allies and partners to support Taiwan.

Senator CRUZ. Well, I agree with that, and I'm going to encourage you and your colleagues at State to go back to the previous Trump policy that allows the Taiwanese to display their symbols of sovereignty. The Obama, Biden caving to Communist China policy is not a good one and not one that the Trump administration should be following.

I want to thank each of the witnesses for providing us with the benefit of your testimony and responses.

Before closing, I'd like to ask unanimous consent to add any letters of support the committee has received to be added to the record. Without objection, so ordered.

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

Senator CRUZ. I'll also note, for the information of members, that the record will remain open until close of business tomorrow, May 16, including for members to submit questions for the record.

With the thanks of this committee, the hearing is now adjourned. [Whereupon, at 12:24 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

Additional Material Submitted for the Record

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO JOEL RAYBURN BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

Question. Do you commit to ensuring, where applicable, that foreign assistance programs coordinated through the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs are strategically aligned with U.S. foreign policy interests in the Middle East and North Africa region?

Answer. Yes. If confirmed, I commit to ensuring that U.S. foreign assistance programs coordinated through and managed by the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs advance the Trump Administration's foreign policy priorities in the Middle East and North Africa region.

Question. From your vantage point as the incoming Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs, what forms of foreign assistance programs do you hope to prioritize in the Middle East and North Africa region?

Answer. If confirmed, I intend to prioritize U.S. foreign assistance programs in the Middle East and North Africa region that make America safer, more secure, and more prosperous, per Secretary of State Rubio's direction.

As President Trump and Secretary Rubio have directed, if the United States is to conduct foreign assistance, that assistance must provide a clear return for the American people.

Question. What factors will you consider when determining whether a given foreign assistance initiative aligns with U.S. foreign policy interests in the Middle East and North Africa?

Answer. First and foremost, if confirmed, I will ensure that U.S. foreign assistance initiatives in the Middle East and North Africa region bolster American safety, security, and prosperity. Any such initiatives must advance clear U.S. interests if they are to be supported by U.S. funding.

Question. Where do you see a need to more closely align U.S. foreign assistance programs with policy in the Middle East and North Africa region?

Answer. Closer alignment with U.S. foreign policy priorities is needed most in the economic and development assistance sphere. If confirmed, I commit to advancing the Trump Administration's vision to focus all U.S. foreign assistance on initiatives that directly advance U.S. foreign policy priorities and make Americans safer, more secure, and more prosperous.

Question. How do you hope to restructure the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs to take on new responsibilities pertaining to U.S. foreign assistance programs?

Answer. The Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs (NEA) and its Office of Assistance Coordination are well-placed to take on new responsibilities pertaining to the coordination and management of U.S. foreign assistance. As Secretary Rubio has described, the State Department's regional bureaus will be empowered henceforth to oversee U.S. foreign assistance and ensure all assistance programs align with U.S. foreign policy priorities in a way that makes Americans safer, more secure, and more prosperous. If confirmed, I will ensure NEA follows the approach Secretary Rubio has set out.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED
TO JOEL RAYBURN BY SENATOR JEANNE SHAHEEN

Syria

Question. If confirmed, will you commit to strengthening diplomatic channels with the new Syrian government and ensuring U.S. diplomats are able to meet with Syrian officials in Syria to help shape Syria's transition?

Answer. Yes. If confirmed, I commit to executing the President's directives and to carrying out his plans toward normalizing relations, including strengthening our diplomatic channels to support discussions with the new Syrian government. The administration has already taken a major step in this regard with Secretary Rubio's appointment of Ambassador Thomas Barrack as Special Envoy for Syria on May 23, and Ambassador Barrack's subsequent diplomatic engagements with leading Syrian interim authorities including Syrian President Ahmad al Sharaa.

As the President said, this is a historic opportunity for Syria and for the region, and the United States is committed to assisting the Syrian people and giving them a chance to develop a peaceful and prosperous country.

Question. Do you understand the President's directive to be to lift all U.S. sanctions and to lift other economic restrictions on Syria? What, specifically, do you expect this to include?

Answer. Yes, and the administration has already taken several major steps to implement the President's policy in this regard. On May 23, the Treasury Department issued General License 25 for Syria and also issued exception relief for the Central Bank of Syria under the USA PATRIOT Act. Also on May 23, Secretary Rubio issued a 180-day waiver under the Caesar Act. If confirmed, I commit to delivering further on the President's directive to deliver relief to the Syrian people as quickly as possible. I will work closely with the Departments of the Treasury and Commerce to identify additional mechanisms to deliver relief to allow Syria a "chance at greatness," as the President said in Riyadh.

Question. If confirmed, what sanctions would you prioritize to lift to ensure that Syria is on the right path and is set up for success?

Answer. The administration has already taken several high-priority steps to relieve sanctions on Syria in keeping with the President's guidance of May 13. On May 23, the Treasury Department and State Department issued a general license, a waiver to the Caesar Act, and a waiver to the USA PATRIOT Act that will deliver major sanctions relief to virtually all sectors of the Syrian economy.

If confirmed, I will work closely with the Departments of the Treasury and Commerce to ensure that sanctions relief prioritizes delivering benefits to the Syrian people. I will ensure close coordination across the U.S. interagency and with Congress to fulfill the President's vision and instructions. The private sector and foreign partners willing to support burden-sharing will also play critical roles in Syria's recovery.

Lebanon

Question. The Trump Administration sent a strong signal of support for the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) with the release of \$95 million in Foreign Military Financing this year. If confirmed, will you commit to supporting the LAF as it backfills areas formerly held by Hezbollah?

Answer. Yes. If confirmed, I will continue our partnership with the LAF to advance U.S. regional security objectives. Israel's military successes and the departure of the Assad regime have brought Hizballah to its weakest point in decades. Lebanon must seize this opportunity to completely disarm Hizballah, reassert the LAF and Internal Security Forces as the country's sole legitimate security actors, and ensure that Iran can no longer use Lebanon as a platform to destabilize the region. Since last November, the LAF has proved to be a more capable force than ever before.

Gaza

Question. Do you believe the provision of humanitarian aid to the people of Gaza should be contingent on a ceasefire or on Israel's military objectives?

Answer. If confirmed, I would continue to support the flow of humanitarian aid. As President Trump said regarding Gaza, "We've got to be good to Gaza . . . Those people are suffering," and "There's a very big need for medicine, food and . . . we're taking care of it." Safeguards are needed to ensure assistance is not diverted, looted, or misused by terrorist groups such as Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad.

Question. If not, what will you do to get this aid to the people who desperately need it as soon as possible?

Answer. If confirmed, I would continue to support the flow of humanitarian aid and would also support the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation's efforts to begin aid distribution with the proper safeguards in place to ensure it does not fall into the hands of terrorists. I would call upon the international community to work with the Foundation to provide critical assistance to civilians.

Question. The Administration inherited a ceasefire and yet allowed it to collapse. I was thrilled to see the release of Edan Alexander but the Administration needs to do more to reestablish a ceasefire and secure the release of all remaining hostages. If confirmed, what is your plan to accomplish this as soon as possible?

Answer. If confirmed, I will uphold the Administration's approach to reestablishing a ceasefire and securing the release of all remaining hostages.

I will particularly ensure the NEA bureau continues to support the vital efforts of Special Envoy Witkoff, who has worked tirelessly to reestablish the ceasefire despite Hamas' obstacles and resistance to multiple proposals. Hamas bears sole responsibility for the war, and for the resumption of hostilities.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED
TO JOEL RAYBURN BY SENATOR BRIAN SCHATZ

Secretary Rubio has stated that he will look to cut 15 percent of Department staff under State's Reorganization Plan.

Question. If confirmed, how would you plan to implement this workforce reduction policy within your bureau? What positions and responsibilities will be first to be removed and which do you assess are vital to the operations of NEA?

Answer. If confirmed, I would carry out the reorganization in compliance with instructions provided by the Secretary's and Department's guidelines by focusing on eliminating non-statutory offices that do not align with the Administration's priorities or have overlapping functions, while ensuring that positions and responsibilities vital to the operations of the NEA Bureau are preserved to maintain its core functions and mission.

Question. Since October 7th, 2024, Israel's military operations against Hamas have led to the death of over 170 journalists and over 400 aid workers.

What specific requests would you make of the Israeli government to ensure it is better protecting the safety of, and access for, journalists and aid workers to promote the U.S. strategic interests of preventing excessive civilian casualties that can prolong conflict and undermine the dissemination of factual information that can counter terrorist propaganda and other false narratives, if confirmed?

Answer. If confirmed, I would work with and support Israel's ongoing efforts to counter terrorists and other security threats, while continuing U.S. efforts to engage with Israel on civilian protection and navigating the difficulties of protecting journalists and aid workers in active conflict zones, particularly when Hamas hides among and behind legitimate actors.

Question. President Trump and Prime Minister Netanyahu have both proposed the relocation of Palestinians from Gaza to surrounding states. These countries have firmly rejected this proposal.

Do you commit to finding a diplomatic solution to the Gaza war without forcing Palestinians to permanently relocate from Gaza or the West Bank?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to working with Israel to implement President Trump's policy that would support voluntary departures of Palestinians from Gaza. It is important to stress the word voluntary.

If confirmed, I will work to pursue policies that ensure Hamas and other terrorists have no future in Gaza and Hamas never again poses as a security threat to Israel.

Question. The Office of the Security Coordinator (OSC), which was established by President Bush in 2005 and is widely regarded by the IDF Central Command as crucial to preventing terrorist threats against Israelis, is currently slated for elimination under the State Department reorganization announced by Secretary Rubio.

Do you believe the United States should continue play a role, through leadership of the OSC, in ensuring successful security coordination between the IDF and Palestinian Authority Security Forces to safeguard Israeli lives?

Answer. The State Department is currently undergoing a reorganization of several of its bureaus and offices. I understand that there are ongoing deliberations, and there has been no decision made yet regarding the office of the United States Security Coordinator (USSC). If confirmed, I will work to implement the administration's decision.

Question. What do you view as the U.S. role in Gaza once the fighting there concludes, including activities or engagement that support stability for Israelis and Palestinians?

Answer. The administration's policy is clear: Hamas and other terrorists have no future in Gaza, and Hamas must never again pose as a security threat to Israel. I look forward to working with Israel and our Arab allies and partners on reconstruction efforts as well as efforts to bring lasting peace and security that leads to a better life for both Israelis and Palestinians.

Question. How should the United States work with its allies and partners to ensure Israeli security, support the stabilization and reconstruction of Gaza, and provide Palestinian civilians with non-violent alternatives that would root out extremism and prioritize Palestinian well-being and peaceful existence alongside Israel?

Answer. The United States, its partners, and its allies should work together to ensure no terrorist group in Gaza poses a threat to Israel's security. Allies and partners should also support the swift delivery of humanitarian aid and reconstruction efforts in Gaza to give the people of Gaza a much better future. In addition, there are a number of steps that can be taken to counter extremism, such as providing new educational curricula that recognize Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state, underline coexistence with Israel, and provide learning materials to help students have the tools to succeed.

Question. How do you plan to advance stability in Syria and reestablish diplomatic ties with the Syrian government?

Answer. The United States is committed to assisting the Syrian people at this extraordinary moment and giving all Syrians a chance at a peaceful and prosperous country.

In keeping with the President's instructions, the administration has already taken significant steps to normalize relations with Syria and deliver sanctions relief to the Syrian people. These steps include major sanctions waivers and a general license issued by the Treasury Department and State Department on May 23 to implement the President's guidance. Another major step toward normalization took place on May 23 with Secretary Rubio's appointment of Ambassador Thomas Barrack as Special Envoy for Syria and with Barrack's subsequent launching of diplomatic engagement with Syrian interim authorities.

If confirmed, I will work to ensure the State Department continues to implement the President's directives concerning Syria, including increasing our diplomatic engagements with the new Syrian government and moving normalization efforts forward.

Question. President Trump recently announced the lifting of U.S. sanctions against Syria. If confirmed, how will you approach the rollback of sanctions, including to maximize the chances that the Syrian leadership governs in ways that support U.S. economic, diplomatic, and security interests?

Answer. The administration has already taken major steps to implement President Trump's policy by delivering sanctions relief to Syria. On May 23, the Treasury Department and State Department issued significant new sanctions waivers and a general license that will allow for extensive financial transactions and other previously prohibited activities.

If confirmed, I will work closely with the Departments of the Treasury and Commerce to ensure effective coordination across the interagency and with Congress on providing sanctions relief for Syria to fulfill the President's directive. The private sector and foreign partners willing to support burden-sharing will also play critical roles in Syria's recovery.

Question. What steps should Congress be taking, in coordination with the administration, to ensure that sectoral sanctions on Syria are fully lifted?

Answer. I respect Congress's legislative power and expect it will continue to review Syria-related legislation—including the Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act and the Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act—and make the adjustments appropriate to give the Syrian people the chance to recover and rebuild their country. If confirmed, I look forward to consulting with Congress on this and other matters.

Question. Following the lifting of all sanctions, what role should the United States play to support Syria's economic recovery and reconstruction efforts?

Answer. The United States should assist the Syrian people at this extraordinary moment and give all Syrians the chance to have a peaceful and prosperous country. In addition to providing sanctions relief, the United States should support transparent, internationally supervised assistance mechanisms to enable Syria's recovery and reconstruction, with appropriate burden-sharing by our allies and partners. The United States also should enable the U.S. private sector to contribute to Syria's recovery through commercial and investment ties and mitigate malign influence in Syria's economy.

Question. Your December 9, 2024 post on X stated, "I think Abu Muhammad al-Jolani must be delusional if he thinks that Syrians, having seen the departure of a 54-yr dictatorship yesterday, will sit still as he installs himself as another dictator in Assad's place." With the Trump Administration engaging in diplomatic relations with Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa (Abu Muhammad al-Jolani), how should the new Syrian government build trust with the Syrian people?

Answer. I believe it is in the interest of the United States, as well as in the interest of international security and stability, for Syria to have a government that protects the rights of all Syrians and is responsive to their needs. This includes following through on the Syrian government's commitments to clarify the fate and whereabouts of the missing and advance transitional justice and accountability for atrocities committed over the last 14 years, including, as Secretary Rubio has stated, recent violence against minority communities. The new Syrian government has a historic opportunity to make progress in these areas and turn the page on the previous abuses of the Assad regime, for the good of Syrians and in the interest of international security and stability.

Question. How do you plan to hold President Ahmed al-Sharaa and the Syrian government accountable during this rebuild process, especially in light of recent shocking, well-documented massacres by Syrian government-allied militias against religious minorities?

Answer. The Administration has been clear that perpetrators of abuses against civilians should be held accountable for their actions and families should receive meaningful justice. If confirmed, I will ensure the Department continues to monitor and encourage the Syrian government's progress on protecting the rights of all Syrians; advancing justice and accountability, including via the commission on transitional justice and the investigation committee on the coastal violence; and clarifying the fate and whereabouts of missing persons, including U.S. citizens. The new Syrian government has a historic opportunity to make progress in these areas for the good of Syrians and in the interest of international security and stability.

Question. In November, the United States brokered a ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah, but it remains tenuous in light of recent Israeli strikes on Beirut's southern suburbs and continuing Israeli occupation of five points in south Lebanon. Israel's continuing military aggression disempowers Lebanon's newly appointed moderate President and Prime Minister, and strengthens Hezbollah.

How would you, if confirmed, work to bring an end to the ceasefire violations, ensure that Israeli troops completely withdraw from Lebanese territory, and prevent a re-escalation of violence to help stabilize the country and facilitate Lebanon's potential political transition?

Answer. The Administration supports the full implementation of the cessation of hostilities that is consistent with Israel's security requirements. Israel has withdrawn from all of Lebanon's territory but maintains a presence in five remaining positions until its security concerns are addressed and the Lebanese Armed Forces has successfully deployed. Per the cessation of hostilities arrangement, the government of Lebanon is responsible for disarming Hizballah, but Israel has the right to act in self-defense, and the commitments do not preclude either Israel or Lebanon from exercising their inherent right of self-defense, which the United States fully supports.

Question. Last month marked the 2-year anniversary of the war in Sudan, which has resulted in the world's largest humanitarian crisis. The warring parties in Sudan are heavily backed by regional actors including the UAE, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar.

If confirmed, do you commit to engaging the NEA regional actors who are fueling the war, working with them and pressing them to urgently use their leverage over the warring parties to end the war and allow humanitarian access?

Answer. The war in Sudan has been catastrophic and is an enduring threat to regional stability. If confirmed, I will work to continue U.S. engagement with regional actors, including the UAE, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and others to press the Sudanese parties to cease hostilities, allow unhindered humanitarian access, and protect civilians. I will also underscore that external support to the warring parties only serves to prolong the conflict and should cease.

Question. What steps should the State Department take to address the UAE's support for the Rapid Support Forces?

Answer. If confirmed, I will work with U.S. allies and partners, including the UAE, to press the belligerents for a comprehensive cessation of hostilities in Sudan and increased, unhindered humanitarian access. The Administration has repeatedly called for an end to all external support to the warring parties. The best path to peace and stability is an immediate, durable cessation of hostilities so the processes of establishing a civilian government and rebuilding the country can begin.

Question. Please share why you believe the UAE is a trustworthy partner for increased collaboration on AI.

Answer. The UAE is taking significant steps to align its economic future with the United States, including \$1.4 trillion in proposed investments over 10 years that will focus heavily on artificial intelligence. Emirati companies are partnering with established and reputable U.S. tech companies, and sovereign wealth funds are contributing to the U.S. industrial base for artificial intelligence. Nevertheless, keeping our most trusted technology safe from our adversaries continues to be a primary concern. If confirmed, I will work with the Emiratis to verify that they have implemented policies that substantively strengthen their alignment with the Administration's stance toward China. If confirmed, I will ensure NEA continues to work with U.S. companies and the Emirati government to ensure we proceed in a way that ensures American AI dominance without sacrificing national security.

Question. What actions by the UAE would cause you to reconsider support for cooperation and collaboration on AI?

Answer. The Administration has been clear that any action by a U.S. partner that could provide our adversaries with access to our advanced AI technologies or the ability to strengthen their own AI capabilities would threaten our national security and would need to be raised with that partner in a serious way. The Administration's view is that the United States must be the dominant world leader in AI, with the most powerful AI data centers and the supply chains that support them.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED
TO CHRIS PRATT BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

Foreign Military Sales Reform

Foreign Military Sales (FMS) are a critical tool of foreign policy and also contribute to our domestic defense industrial base by expanding manufacturing capacity and extending production lines. There is still much work to be done to reform the process and expedite sales to our allies and partners, so that they are not waiting years on end for deliveries—or looking elsewhere for these capabilities.

Question. If confirmed, what are your top priorities for implementing President Trump's recently issued Executive Order to reform and modernize the foreign military sales process?

Answer. If confirmed, I look forward to a detailed discussion with the Secretary about how he envisions implementing the Administration's defense sales reform executive order. Arms transfers are a critical tool of foreign policy that I will ensure contributes to reinforcing peace through strength and making America safer, stronger, and more prosperous.

Question. How do you intend to work with our committee, which has jurisdiction over the arms sales process, to ensure responsible congressional oversight remains through the tiered review process?

Answer. If confirmed, I look forward to working with our committees of jurisdiction to ensure the notification process is working for all stakeholders.

Question. As this administration looks to streamline and reform defense acquisition to expand defense production capacity, what are some of your near-term goals

to deepen cooperation between the State Department and Department of Defense on these efforts?

Answer. If confirmed, one of my first tasks after swearing in is to develop relationships with my peers at the Department of Defense to broaden and deepen cooperation on a whole host of issues including defense sales reform.

Question. President Trump's Executive Order directs the Secretary of State and Secretary of Defense to review and update the list of defense items that can only be purchased through the FMS process (the FMS-Only List). Do you commit to sharing the FMS-Only list with this committee?

Answer. If confirmed, I look forward to advocating for maximum transparency with congressional committees and for sharing all documents under appropriate classification.

Question. President Trump's Executive Order directs the Secretary of State, in consultation with the Secretary of Defense, to develop a list of priority partners for conventional arms transfers. Do you commit to sharing this list of priority partners for conventional arms transfers with this committee?

Answer. If confirmed, I look forward to advocating for maximum transparency with congressional committees and for sharing all documents under appropriate classification.

AUKUS

AUKUS Pillar II was created with the intent to streamline defense co-operation between the U.S. and our closest allies, the UK and Australia, but technology sharing restrictions continue to limit our ability to deepen co-operation on advanced military technologies necessary to deter the PRC.

Question. If confirmed, how do you intend to remove advanced technologies—such as hypersonics and artificial intelligence—from the Excluded Technologies List (ETL) to meet the congressional intent of AUKUS legislation?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to work with the interagency and our AUKUS partners to ensure the ETL supports the goals of AUKUS and furthers U.S. foreign policy and national security interests.

Question. Do you commit to a review of the ETL for the AUKUS ITAR exemption?

Answer. Yes. If confirmed, I commit to a review of the Excluded Technologies List (ETL) and to work with the interagency and AUKUS partners to ensure the ETL supports the goals of AUKUS and furthers U.S. national security and foreign policy interests.

Question. If confirmed, how will you work to update the Excluded Technologies List (ETL) to meet the congressional intent of AUKUS legislation?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to work with the interagency and our AUKUS partners to ensure the ETL supports the goals of AUKUS and furthers U.S. foreign policy and national security interests.

Question. Is there a need to provide funding in support of AUKUS Pillar II?

Answer. It is essential that we accelerate concrete progress on Pillar II projects to deliver the military capabilities we need to create a geopolitical and strategic balance in the Indo-Pacific and beyond through deterrence. If confirmed, I commit to working with the Secretary's AUKUS Senior Advisor, the interagency, and our trilateral partners to achieve U.S. objectives through AUKUS. This includes the Department of Defense, which is the cabinet agency that manages Pillar II project funding and execution.

Question. On August 20, 1 year will have passed since the Department published its interim final rule on the AUKUS ITAR exemption. If confirmed, what steps will you take to ensure industry makes full use of the ITAR exemption?

Answer. The success of the trilateral defense trade licensing exemptions created by the U.S., UK and Australia relies on both an appropriate list of eligible technologies and a broad pool of trusted, eligible, and knowledgeable participants in the U.S., UK and Australia. If confirmed, in addition to reviewing the ETL and conducting outreach to the defense industrial bases within the U.S., UK, and Australia, I will work with trilateral partners to expand the list of authorized exemption users and advocate for their use of the exemption to the greatest extent possible.

Question. The MTCR is in dire need of revision in an era of great power competition. The U.S. has long had the strictest interpretation of MTCR requirements of any signatory to the agreement, limiting our international cooperation on both space

and unmanned systems. If confirmed, how do you intend to adapt and reform the MTCR to meet current and future challenges?

Answer. If confirmed, I will work closely with the Bureau of International Security and Nonproliferation and other USG stakeholders to ensure that our implementation of our MTCR commitments allows us to effectively cooperate with our closest allies in critical areas, such as space and unmanned systems. I am committed to implementing recently updated U.S. missile export policy to increase flexibility to support our allies and MTCR partners missile, UAS, and space launch vehicle programs.

Question. Our Indo-Pacific allies depend on the U.S. nuclear umbrella to counter threats from China and North Korea. They are not only concerned by China's rapid nuclear build up, but also North Korea's plan to expand its already diverse nuclear arsenal. How can the United States enhance extended deterrence in the Indo-Pacific to reassure our allies in light of China and North Korea's aggression?

Answer. The United States has long worked to prevent additional states from acquiring additional nuclear weapons and capabilities. America's commitment to the defense of our allies in the Indo-Pacific is unwavering and, if confirmed, I will partner with others in the Department of State to pair diplomatic assurances and allied access to U.S. conventional military technology with a robust, modernized U.S. nuclear force, which is essential to strengthening extended deterrence.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED
TO CHRIS PRATT BY SENATOR JEANNE SHAHEEN

Arms Sales

Question. The President's new Executive Order tasks State and Defense to identify a list of "priority" countries for arms sales. Do you have a view of what countries should be on this list, and by what criteria?

Answer. If confirmed, I look forward to meeting with the team tasked to complete this important work to understand their approach. I will work to ensure arms transfers will contribute to peace through strength and making America safer, stronger, and more prosperous.

Question. Is there a maximum limit in the number of countries that should be prioritized in arms sales?

Answer. I am not yet aware how the Department is approaching the prioritization of partners for arms sales directed by the President.

Question. To have priority countries inherently means that there are countries that are non-priority countries; what are likely fallouts for U.S. arms sales and influence from this second list of presumably disappointed countries?

Answer. The President intends to ensure the defense industrial base can deliver for all of our allies and partners in a timely manner, regardless of whether those countries are formally prioritized. However, the United States government has historically found it necessary to prioritize certain countries for arms transfers. Indeed, Congress, through legislation, expressly prioritizes some countries over others. Thus, formalizing prioritization in the executive branch is fitting and will improve speed and accountability in the defense sales process.

Question. What role should the bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (DRL), which under the proposed State Department re-organization is set to be significantly reduced, play in the review of proposed arms sales?

Answer. I look forward to working with Secretary Rubio to implement the proposed State Department re-organization. At a minimum, the role of the bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (DRL) in the review of proposed arms sales should align with applicable law.

Question. Do you believe that the misuse of U.S.-produced military systems in human rights abuses can have a negative impact on U.S. foreign policy and national security objectives?

Answer. Yes, and the President's Conventional Arms Transfer policy specifically seeks to avoid such outcomes.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED
TO CHRIS PRATT BY SENATOR BILL HAGERTY

On Foreign Military Financing in the Indo-Pacific

A Free and Open Indo-Pacific is a foreign policy priority for the Trump Administration. U.S. Allies and partners in the region like Japan, the Philippines, South Korea, and Taiwan host U.S. forces, participate in our exercises, and project power in response to threats from countries like North Korea and China. The Foreign Military Financing (FMF) program helps support the capability, capacity, and readiness of these Allies and partners, and orients their military posture toward investments that benefit U.S. defense manufacturers. However, the FMF program needs continued attention as President Trump and Secretary Rubio work to reorient U.S. Foreign Policy toward core national security and economic interests.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to reviewing the state of the Foreign Military Financing program to ensure that our Allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific are adequately supported?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to reviewing the state of the Foreign Military Financing program to ensure our allies and others in the Indo-Pacific are adequately supported. I will work across the Department and government to meet the President's goals of supporting our defense partners and allies in this key region.

On International Traffic in Arms Regulations (ITAR) Restrictions

America's commercial space companies are leading the world in a number of areas including launch, exploration, and satellite services. Yet many of these companies regularly contend with dated and burdensome regulatory processes, including ITAR. Both ITAR and Export Administrative Regulations (EAR) have eased and eliminated regulations for raw data in some areas related to space services. However, more can and should be done to ease restrictions on data downlinking services from satellites, particularly on the ground infrastructure that enables receiving and processing data from space but is not sensitive by itself. Some companies wait months for ITAR approvals each time they sell one of these products to our Allies, delays that impact not only our Allies' access to world-leading American space services, but also the companies' overall competitiveness.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to review International Traffic in Arms Regulations (ITAR)-related restrictions on the export of defense articles that enable the downlink of commercial satellite data, which are not inherently sensitive yet are essential for the flow of critical space based services to Allies and partners?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to review this matter and further ongoing efforts to ensure our defense trade system is fit for purpose and meets President Trump's goals, as outlined in his executive order on increasing speed and accountability for U.S. defense trade. I will also work to ensure our ITAR restrictions are applied appropriately to prevent our technology from being transferred to our adversaries.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED
TO CHRIS PRATT BY SENATOR BRIAN SCHATZ

Secretary Rubio's Department Reorganization Plan envisions a 15 percent cut to Department staff.

Question. If confirmed, how do you plan to implement this workforce reduction policy within your bureau?

Answer. Thank you for your question. If confirmed, I will ensure that any workforce reduction policy is implemented consistent with the guidelines set forth by the Department and in a manner that makes the United States stronger, safer, and more prosperous. My approach will prioritize transparency, fairness, and adherence to all applicable regulations and procedures. I will work closely with all stakeholders, including this Committee, to ensure a smooth transition.

Question. What positions and responsibilities will be first to be removed and which do you assess are vital to the operations of PM?

Answer. Thank you for your question. At this stage, it would be premature to specify which positions and responsibilities might be affected. Any decisions regarding workforce adjustments will be made following a thorough review and analysis of the bureau's operational needs and priorities. Our goal will be to ensure that es-

sential functions and critical operations are maintained while aligning with the Department's strategic objectives of making the United States stronger, safer, and more prosperous. We will engage in a careful and transparent process to make informed decisions that best support the mission of the bureau.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED
TO MICHAEL DeSOMBRE BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

Question. China has stepped up its coercive military activities and more covert efforts to undermine the government of Taiwan particularly in the wake of President Lai's election, and the U.S. Department of Defense is focused on preparing for a possible conflict over Taiwan.

If confirmed, what will be your priorities for supporting Taiwan to harden its resilience and counter increasing pressure from China?

Answer. Maintaining peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait is a priority of this Administration and is in line with longstanding U.S. policy. If confirmed, I commit to continuing to support Taiwan in the face of China's military, economic, informational, and diplomatic pressure campaign. This includes publicly highlighting China's dangerous and provocative actions and the continued provision to Taiwan of defense articles and services necessary for it to maintain a sufficient self-defense capability, commensurate with the threat it faces.

Question. What steps will you take to prevent or manage a potential crisis in the Taiwan Strait?

Answer. Consistent with the Taiwan Relations Act, the United States is committed to supporting Taiwan and to enable it to maintain a sufficient self-defense capability. The provision of support and security assistance is essential for Taiwan to maintain the capacity to deter aggressive action and resist any resort to force or other forms of coercion that would jeopardize the security, or the social or economic system, of the people on Taiwan. If confirmed, I intend to accelerate our diplomatic efforts to expand the coalition of allies and partners willing to support Taiwan, speak out against CCP intimidation and coercion against Taiwan, and oppose unilateral changes to the status quo.

Question. The Chinese Communist Party subsidizes and protects PRC chemical companies that export fentanyl precursors and related chemicals used to produce drugs sold illicitly in the U.S. My BUST Fentanyl Act, which recently passed out of SFRC, expands sanctions authorities to target foreign facilitators of opioid trafficking, including Chinese government-backed financial institutions.

If confirmed, what steps will you take to get China to stop subsidizing the manufacture and trafficking of synthetic opioids?

Answer. President Trump expects China to end the illicit export of deadly fentanyl precursors to drug cartels in the Americas and to prevent illicitly manufactured drugs from flowing to the United States. If confirmed, my top priority will be holding China accountable and ending American deaths from fentanyl and synthetic opioid poisoning. President Trump has levied a 20 percent tariff on imports from China until the CCP stops exporting chemical precursors to North America. If confirmed, I am committed to working with you and Congress to ensure President Trump has the right authorities to target those in China responsible for the deaths of over 200 of our fellow Americans every day and end this crisis once and for all.

Question. China has doubled down on its "no-limits" partnership with Russia, which is based on closely aligned ideological interests, even as it tries to maneuver for a role in a Russia-Ukraine peace process that would benefit its own interests.

Do you see a role for China in a Russia-Ukraine peace process?

Answer. We welcome constructive contributions to the peace process, but I do not see China contributing anything constructive to negotiations.

Question. If confirmed, how will you engage with Chinese counterparts to hold them accountable for their support for Russia's war against Ukraine?

Answer. China is a major enabler of Russia's war in Ukraine. China provides nearly 80 percent of the dual-use items Russia needs to sustain the war. Continued cooperation between these two nuclear powers will only further contribute to global instability and make the United States and other countries less safe, less secure, and less prosperous. The United States has designated approximately 300 China-based targets enabling the continuance of the Russia-Ukraine war. If confirmed, I

will continue to work to hold Chinese actors accountable for contributing to the Russia-Ukraine war.

Question. China has provided tacit cover for the deepening Russia-DPRK alliance, and it coordinated with Russia to effectively end U.N. oversight of multilateral sanctions against North Korea last year.

If confirmed, how will you work to address North Korea's rapid pursuit of nuclear capabilities, its growing cyber-attack capabilities, and its threats to regional security?

Answer. The DPRK is continuing to develop its WMD and ballistic missile programs in violation of multiple U.N. Security Council resolutions. In response, the President is pursuing the complete denuclearization of North Korea. If confirmed, I will prioritize addressing the threat the DPRK poses to global peace and stability.

In recent years, the DPRK has increasingly turned to cybercrime to circumvent international sanctions and fund its unlawful weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missile programs. On February 26, the FBI attributed to North Korea the theft of nearly \$1.5 billion in virtual assets from Bybit, a centralized cryptocurrency exchange. If confirmed, I will support the U.S. government's multi-faceted efforts to combat DPRK cybercrime and cryptocurrency theft, including through sanctions, law enforcement actions, and international cooperation.

Question. Will you commit to working with partners to hold North Korea accountable for its human rights violations and countering its threats to regional security?

Answer. Yes.

Question. China is expanding its offensive cyber capabilities and targeted U.S. Government personnel and systems through campaigns like Salt Typhoon and Volt Typhoon.

How will you engage with Chinese counterparts to hold them accountable and respond to cyberattacks that have targeted U.S. elections, critical infrastructure systems, and government officials?

Answer. As the Director for National Intelligence has said, China is the foremost cyber threat to the United States. This administration has been clear about its concerns related to prepositioning on critical infrastructure for attack or intrusions into U.S. telecoms for espionage. Holding civilians at risk and compromising their communications is not the act of a responsible actor in cyberspace. If confirmed, I am committed to using all foreign policy tools to hold China accountable for this dangerous cyber activity.

Question. How will you improve cooperation and information sharing on cyber with key allies in the region, given growing commercial and espionage threats from China and North Korea?

Answer. The CCP and DPRK continue to threaten the national and economic security of the United States and our allies and partners through cyber espionage and ransomware attacks. China also targets U.S. critical infrastructure via cyber intrusions. If confirmed, I will work with our allies and partners to bolster cyber resilience by deepening intelligence-sharing frameworks, strengthening our collective allied cybersecurity capabilities, and expanding joint cybersecurity exercises.

Question. Increasing technology cooperation with partners in the Indo-Pacific will be key to preventing China's acquisition of advanced semiconductors, securing supply chains, and maintaining the U.S. lead in AI competition.

How will you coordinate with partners like South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan to limit the transfer of critical technologies to China?

Answer. China is pursuing a whole-of-government effort to boost indigenous innovation, promote technological self-reliance, and advance its military capabilities by any means necessary, including intellectual property theft, forced technology transfer, and opaque investments. If confirmed, I will work with partners in the Indo-Pacific to strengthen key tools, including export controls and investment screening, to limit the transfer of critical technologies to China.

Question. How will you work to encourage countries in the Indo-Pacific to move away from reliance on Chinese technologies in digital governance, telecommunications, and other key sectors?

Answer. The CCP uses companies based in China to spy, steal data, create strategic dependencies, and manipulate multilateral organizations. As Vice President Vance warned, partnering with adversarial authoritarian regimes means, "chaining your nation to an authoritarian master that seeks to infiltrate, dig in, and seize your information infrastructure." If confirmed, I will emphasize these risks to coun-

tries in the Indo-Pacific and encourage them to protect their infrastructure and technology by only allowing trusted suppliers.

Question. The U.S. relies on partners like the Philippines, Japan, South Korea, and Australia to maintain its force posture in the Indo-Pacific.

If confirmed, what will be your priorities to modernize our partnerships and alliances with each of the above countries to fit current geopolitical challenges?

Answer. Our alliances in the Indo-Pacific are our greatest strategic asset in the face of China's aggressive actions to assert its economic, diplomatic, and military dominance and challenge our vital interests in the region. If confirmed, I will work with allies and partners, including the Philippines, Japan, South Korea, and Australia, to deter conflict and promote a free and open Indo-Pacific where the rule of law, sovereignty, and territorial integrity are upheld.

If confirmed, I will bolster defense and deterrence through supporting exercises with Japan and South Korea and strengthening the capabilities of Japan Self-Defense Forces and U.S. and ROK Armed Forces. I will stand with the Philippines in upholding international law and deepen our robust security partnership, including through our Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement. With Australia, I will continue to support security cooperation through AUKUS and bilateral and multilateral defense initiatives.

Question. Our security partnerships in the Indo-Pacific will be critical for confronting China's regional aggression. Just as important, however, will be laying the economic foundation for enduring ties with U.S. partners in the Indo-Pacific.

If confirmed, how would you strengthen our economic engagement with countries the Indo-Pacific?

Answer. If confirmed, I will protect our core national security interests and address any vulnerabilities to sectors critical to our own economy and defense. We value our alliances and partnerships and believe fair and reciprocal economic relationships will benefit their long-term interests as well as ours. Our policy will reset the economic rules of engagement for the region by ensuring reciprocal treatment for American companies that have endured unfair practices by China and other nations for too long. If confirmed, I will ensure our Embassies have strong economic and commercial diplomacy teams to unlock new opportunities for American workers, manufacturers, farmers, ranchers and businesses.

Question. Following Beijing's unilateral imposition of the Hong Kong National Security Law in 2020, the U.S. determined that the Special Administrative Region of Hong Kong is no longer sufficiently autonomous to justify differential treatment from the People's Republic of China.

What additional measures would you recommend the U.S. take to hold Beijing and the Hong Kong authorities accountable for their violations of internationally recognized human rights and actions undermining political autonomy and rule of law in Hong Kong?

Answer. If confirmed, I would recommend the United States use accountability tools to impose costs on Beijing and Hong Kong authorities who violate internationally recognized human rights and whose actions undermine political autonomy and rule of law in Hong Kong. Secretary Rubio's March announcement of sanctions on Beijing and Hong Kong officials for abuses in Hong Kong and the United States and for degrading Hong Kong's autonomy is an example of actions I would support.

Question. Do you commit to making the release of political prisoners in Hong Kong such as Jimmy Lai a priority, and raising their cases with Hong Kong and Beijing authorities at every opportunity?

Answer. Yes. President Trump and Secretary Rubio have publicly stated Jimmy Lai should be released. If confirmed, this will be a top priority as Lai remains imprisoned and has been targeted for exercising his fundamental human rights. If confirmed, I will join the Secretary and other U.S. officials in raising Jimmy Lai's case with Chinese officials whenever possible and work with other governments on the shared goal to secure his release. If confirmed, I will continue to call for the release of all unjustly detained political prisoners in Hong Kong.

Question. Under the first Trump administration, the U.S. determined that China has committed ongoing crimes against humanity and genocide against Muslim Uyghurs and other ethnic and religious minority groups in Xinjiang.

If confirmed, will you commit to pressing for the unrestricted access of U.S. diplomats, journalists, and civil society to Xinjiang and hold China accountable for its violations of internationally recognized human rights?

Answer. Yes. China, under the direction and control of the Chinese Communist Party, continues to commit genocide and crimes against humanity targeting predominantly Muslim Uyghurs and members of other ethnic and religious minority groups in Xinjiang.

If confirmed, I will consider the full use of accountability tools to impose costs on Chinese authorities perpetrating atrocities and abuses in Xinjiang. I will also press for unrestricted access of U.S. diplomats, journalists, and civil society to Xinjiang, in line with the broad access Chinese diplomats and journalists enjoy in the United States.

Question. Do you commit to raising the case of detained Uyghurs like Ekpar Asat at every opportunity, and pressing Beijing for their immediate and unconditional release?

Answer. If confirmed, I will publicly and privately press Chinese authorities to grant the immediate and unconditional humanitarian release of Ekpar Asat and other Uyghurs who are unjustly detained or imprisoned, including those with U.S. citizen or lawful permanent resident family members.

Question. The Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues is a position authorized by statute to be held at the under secretary level. The role has typically been held by the individual serving as the Under Secretary of Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights.

Do you commit to preserving the current level of seniority of the position of Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues and providing the position with the appropriate resourcing?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to advancing U.S. interests with regard to Tibet, whether the Special Coordinator for Tibet Issues role is held by an Under Secretary, or by a bureau Assistant Secretary as was done in the first Trump administration. More broadly, in line with Secretary Rubio's February and March statements, if confirmed, I will work to protect the human rights of Tibetans and support their efforts to preserve their distinct heritage, and I will press Chinese authorities to allow U.S. diplomats and others unrestricted access to the Tibet Autonomous Region of China.

Question. The security situation in Burma has grown increasingly unstable, and the humanitarian crisis has gone worse. Amid its continuing international isolation, the military junta has grown more dependent on Chinese and Russian support.

What should be the U.S. government's priorities for addressing political instability in Burma?

Answer. In the 4 years since the coup d'état, the crisis and conflict have worsened, creating instability across the region with negative impacts on the United States. The United States is a strong supporter of ASEAN's efforts to address the situation in Burma. The U.S. Government will work with ASEAN and regional partners to promote initiatives aimed at enhancing the Burmese people's resilience to CCP influence. If confirmed, I will continue to join partners and call on the international community to speak with one voice in calling on the Burma military regime to cease its violence against civilians, allow humanitarian access, and engage in genuine and inclusive dialogue with all stakeholders.

Question. If confirmed, will you commit to using new authorities granted by Congress under the 2022 BURMA Act to provide non-lethal assistance to groups including the National Unity Government (NUG) and ethnic armed organizations?

Answer. The military regime's actions in Burma and the humanitarian crises undermine regional stability and security. The people of Burma have made clear that they do not want to live under a military dictatorship. The Department has called on the regime to stop the violence, especially airstrikes that harm civilians. If confirmed, I commit to taking a close look at what tools under my purview that the United States could use to best support ending the conflict in Burma.

Question. Both Secretary Rubio and Secretary Hegseth have voiced strong support for AUKUS, with Rubio calling the initiative a "blueprint" for how the U.S. can work with partner nations to confront global challenges. At the same time, expected delivery of nuclear submarines under Pillar One has been delayed, and there are also issues with implementing Pillar II.

In your view, what must be done to implement AUKUS Pillar II effectively?

Answer. Achieving progress on Pillar II is critical to developing the advanced capabilities our militaries need to build deterrence while boosting innovation, providing opportunities for U.S. defense companies, and scaling up our trilateral defense industrial base. If confirmed, I will work across the Department of State and the U.S. interagency, and with AUKUS partners, to achieve these goals.

Question. If confirmed, how will you work to update the Excluded Technologies List (ETL) to meet the congressional intent of AUKUS legislation?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to a review of the Excluded Technologies List (ETL) and to work with the interagency and AUKUS partners to ensure the ETL supports the goals of AUKUS and furthers U.S. national security and foreign policy interests.

Question. As the Administration and Congress work to build a more efficient, effective, and accountable foreign assistance system within the Department of State, regional bureaus will play a pivotal role in aligning U.S. assistance with American policy interests. Assistant Secretaries will now be charged with overseeing enhanced coordination of foreign assistance programs and priorities within their respective regional bureaus.

Do you commit to ensuring, where applicable, that foreign assistance programs coordinated through the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs are strategically aligned with U.S. foreign policy interests in the region?

Answer. Yes, I commit to ensuring, where applicable, that foreign assistance programs coordinated through the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs are strategically aligned with U.S. foreign policy interests in the region.

Question. From your vantage point as the incoming Assistant Secretary for East Asia and the Pacific, what forms of foreign assistance programs do you hope to prioritize in the region?

Answer. If confirmed, I hope to prioritize foreign assistance programs that align with the priorities of the Administration. This includes countering the CCP's malign activities by strengthening partner resilience to China's aggressive and coercive actions, advancing maritime and regional security, and promoting U.S. economic growth and protecting U.S. economic security.

Question. What factors will you consider when determining whether a given foreign assistance initiative aligns with U.S. foreign policy interests in East Asia and the Pacific?

Answer. Foreign assistance initiatives undertaken by EAP must align with U.S. foreign policy. I will follow Secretary Rubio's guidance when considering whether a foreign assistance initiative aligns with our foreign policy interests: The initiative must make America safer, make America stronger, and make America more prosperous.

Question. Where do you see a need to more closely align U.S. foreign assistance programs with policy in East Asia and the Pacific?

Answer. All U.S. foreign assistance programs in the East Asia and Pacific region must align with American foreign policy. Our allies and partners in the East Asia and Pacific region vary significantly in their capabilities. As such, we should prioritize foreign assistance to partners that best advances U.S. priorities, especially as it pertains to countering China's influence in the region.

Question. How do you hope to restructure the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs to take on new responsibilities pertaining to U.S. foreign assistance programs?

Answer. I have not been involved in reorganization discussions. If confirmed, I intend to ensure that we have the appropriate structure in place in the EAP Bureau and in U.S. missions in the region to ensure all assistance is aligned with U.S. foreign policy.

Question. The most recently enacted State Department Authorization Act included my legislation, the Mission in a Box Act. This bill requires that the Department reduce bureaucratic hurdles to build new embassies in the South Pacific and Caribbean faster to better compete with the PRC in those regions.

Do you support opening new micro-missions in the Pacific to outcompete the PRC?

Answer. I have not been involved in operational planning regarding our overseas diplomatic posture. However, if confirmed I would support a diplomatic presence in the Pacific that advances the administration's foreign policy objectives. If confirmed, I would work with my colleagues in the Department to examine whether the establishment of new micro-missions in the Pacific region would serve as an effective tool to expand U.S. diplomatic influence in support of our national objectives, particularly in strategically significant countries with limited or no existing U.S. presence.

Question. If yes, do you support fully and quickly implementing my Mission in a Box Act?

Answer. I understand the Department is appreciative of this legislation and, if confirmed, I would work with my Department colleagues to timely implement the Mission in a Box Act.

Question. Where should the Department open new missions in the Pacific?

Answer. I understand the Department continues to evaluate regional priorities and geopolitical dynamics to determine optimal locations for new missions. Based on these assessments and in line with congressional support, if confirmed, I would examine whether to open a new Mission in Kiribati where no U.S. embassy currently exists. Additionally, I would assess whether increased presence in Tuvalu, Nauru, and Samoa, aligns with strategic objectives to close diplomatic gaps and counter PRC influence.

Question. Congressional Delegations (CODELs) and Staff Delegations (STAFFDELS) serve a critical oversight mission. However, the Department has repeatedly denied or pushed-back on CODELs and STAFFDELS.

Do you pledge to support fully CODELs and STAFFDELS that seek to travel to U.S. missions in East Asia and the Pacific?

Answer. Yes.

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

Answer. Yes.

Question. If Missions push back on congressional travel beyond the higher-level visits described above, do you pledge to address the issue immediately with EAP chiefs of mission to ensure that Congress can provide oversight?

Answer. Yes.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED
TO MICHAEL DESOMBRE BY SENATOR JEANNE SHAHEEN

Question. Under the Biden administration, the U.S. committed to a \$500 million surge in Foreign Military Financing (FMF) for the Philippines, which I understand received a waiver to continue, despite the administration's foreign assistance pause. How do you plan to support longer-term efforts to bolster the Philippines' security as it faces increasing threats from China in the South China Sea?

Answer. The Philippines bears the brunt of China's attempts to impose its unlawful maritime claims, including through dangerous and destabilizing activities, in the South China Sea. If confirmed, I commit to supporting efforts to enhance the Philippines' security, particularly as it relates to the South China Sea.

Question. I understand that most U.S. security assistance programs have resumed for the Philippines, including prior year INCLE funding. However, the fiscal year 2026 budget proposal seeks to reduce INCLE funding for the entire Department by approximately \$1.2 billion to only \$125 million total, which could impact the United States' ability to support the Philippines maritime domain awareness and maritime security in the South China Sea. Do you commit to re-examining this proposed significant reduction in INCLE funding?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to working with State's INL Bureau on programming in support of the Philippines for its maritime domain awareness and maritime security and will look to apply other security assistance programs and authorities as required.

Question. Do you commit to continuing U.S. support for the Philippines maritime security?

Answer. Yes.

Question. I understand that there are seven (7) INCLE-funded projects related to cooperation with Philippines Coast Guard that are currently paused as part of the administration's ongoing "foreign assistance review." What will happen to these programs?

Answer. Although I have not been involved in the foreign assistance review process, the Department has informed me the Secretary of State has completed the full-scope programmatic review of individual grants, contracts, and other foreign assist-

ance awards at the State Department and USAID. The Department will continue, as necessary and consistent with relevant authorities, to align its activities and programs with the foreign policy priorities of the President and the Secretary.

I understand the OMB-led process is focusing on the longer-term reform of foreign assistance in tandem with the fiscal year 2026 President's Budget Request. The Administration has stated its objective is to create a more agile foreign assistance framework that better advances America's foreign policy priorities.

I understand the future of INL programming will be shaped by the results of both of these review processes, and the Department will also leverage other security assistance programs and authorities as required.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED
TO MICHAEL DESOMBRE BY SENATOR BRIAN SCHATZ

Question. The near-elimination of USAID and large-scale termination of assistance and other programs has had a significant effect on Indo-Pacific countries, to include examples of discontinued U.S. efforts supported by various Pacific Island governments, the PRC takeover of formerly U.S.-funded demining efforts in Cambodia, and slow and minimally staffed U.S. disaster assistance provision after a devastating earthquake in Burma. This is especially relevant as State Department regional bureaus, including EAP, are expected to take over foreign assistance functions retained from USAID.

If confirmed, what development priorities will you advocate for in the EAP region?

Answer. If confirmed, I will advocate for foreign assistance programs that align with the foreign policy priorities of the Administration. This includes countering the CCP's malign activities by strengthening partner resilience to China's aggressive and coercive actions and promoting U.S. economic prosperity.

Question. How do you think the sudden cut off of these programs affects our relationship with partners and would-be partners in EAP, the world region most fiercely contested with the PRC?

Answer. Secretary Rubio has clearly stated that the ongoing foreign assistance review is designed to reprioritize our programs and ensure that every program makes Americans safer, more secure, or more prosperous. I believe this assistance review and reform will enhance American security and prosperity by better aligning our foreign assistance spending with our foreign policy priorities.

If confirmed, I will work to continue to develop our relationships in the region as a Pacific nation. The Indo-Pacific is the fastest growing region in the world, holding half the world's population and two-thirds of the world's economy; it is the center of global economic growth, and it is in our national interest to ensure that developments in the region are consistent with America's interests.

Question. Do you commit to raising your concerns with Secretary Rubio and the White House if you encounter obstacles to overseeing foreign assistance and other aspects of your mission created or exacerbated by the administration's program terminations and reductions in staff?

Answer. I have not been part of discussions or actions to date regarding the management of the Department or USAID.

If I am confirmed, I will work closely with Secretary Rubio, the Deputy Secretary, and other senior officials in the Department to ensure that our foreign assistance and our foreign policies are appropriately aligned and we are best prepared to meet the challenges facing the United States.

Question. Korea and Japan are world leaders in shipbuilding, an area where the United States is being severely outpaced by the PRC on both commercial, and crucially, military, vessels.

If confirmed, how would you support DoD efforts to increase our partnerships with these countries to address our urgent need for a faster rate of construction of naval vessels?

Answer. The ROK and Japan—two key Indo-Pacific allies—have advanced shipbuilding capabilities we can leverage to help accelerate the President's mandate to revitalize American shipbuilding. If confirmed, I would support a push for defense industrial cooperation that integrates allied manufacturing know-how and workforce development expertise. I would also work to attract trusted investment in U.S. shipyards, in line with the Administration's vision. Strengthening these partnerships reinforces Indo-Pacific security amid our strategic competition with China.

Question. The administration is attempting to shut down the U.S. Agency for Global Media (USAGM) and its subsidiary grantees, including Radio Free Asia, a move celebrated by PRC state media.

How can the United States reach audiences with credible, fact-based information in closed, repressive societies in the EAP region that will tangibly support U.S. interests, in lieu of U.S.-sponsored media outlets?

Answer. If confirmed, I would ensure that the United States engages with the EAP region through the many public diplomacy channels developed by our missions abroad, including our exchange program participants, who frequently move on to positions of influence in their own country, as well as the USA Pavilion at Expo Osaka, which opened last month showcasing American excellence for millions of foreign visitors, including from China.

I also intend to leverage our media hub in Bangkok, embassy websites, social media accounts, and our press and strategic communications teams overseas and in Washington to engage with foreign audiences, as well as ensure comprehensive messaging plans with all missions in the region on policy priorities to ensure our diplomats speak with a unified voice and stay ahead of false narratives.

Question. With USAGM agencies crippled or liquidated, how will you, if confirmed, advance press freedom in a region increasingly in the grip of PRC propaganda?

Answer. Protecting and promoting freedom of expression and countering propaganda with the truth represent our best response to adversaries like the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), which spends billions each year on influence and information operations, as well as censorship activities.

If confirmed, I will encourage an agile and proactive approach to strategic messaging (including social media) that is dynamic, engaging, and serves American interests. The Department can also leverage affirmative and sustained communications campaigns, including using AI tools, to promote American priorities and values and build resilience against China's malign influence.

Question. The AUKUS security partnership will necessitate a significantly increased U.S. military presence in Perth, in Western Australia, where the U.S. currently operates a small consulate.

How can the State Department support the continued advancement of the AUKUS agreement, including by upgrading staffing at Consulate General Perth?

Answer. As a major security partnership, AUKUS requires whole-of-government cooperation and participation. The State Department has a longstanding presence in Perth and Western Australia, where Submarine Rotational Force-West will be established in 2027. If confirmed, I will work closely within the Department of State, the Department of Defense, and the Australian government to address all significant operational and policy issues related to AUKUS.

Question. The Pacific Island Countries (PICs), especially, but not limited to, the Freely Associated States, include close U.S. partners who are located across highly strategic waters critical for U.S. national security.

If confirmed, how will you look to strengthen U.S. ties with these countries, including by supporting their priorities such as countering illegal drugs, increasing infrastructure and other environmental resilience, enhancing maritime domain awareness, upgrading port management, and boosting economic development?

Answer. The United States has an especially close relationship with the Freely Associated States as reflected in part by our Compacts of Free Association. If confirmed, I am committed to continuing that relationship and working with the interagency to ensure implementation of U.S. obligations under our international agreements and U.S. law.

Question. Do you commit to engaging with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to highlight the importance to U.S. national security interests in the Pacific Islands of ensuring the VA substantially improves the availability of health care for U.S. military veterans in the Freely Associated States, to which they are entitled, a high priority for these countries where the governments are seeking ways to more closely align with the United States?

Answer. As you know, citizens of the Freely Associated States serve at higher rates per capita in our armed forces than any U.S. State. If confirmed, as the co-chair for the Compact of Free Association (COFA) Interagency Group, I will engage the interagency, including the VA, on all issues regarding the Freely Associated States.

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Submitted by Senator Pete Ricketts

Republicans Unite to Thwart Iran

No nuclear enrichment for the ayatollahs, not even in a 'joint venture.'

By The Editorial Board [Follow](#)

May 14, 2025 5:44 pm ET



A handout photo made available by the Atomic Energy Organization (AEOI) of Iran shows centrifuge machines in the Natanz uranium enrichment facility in 2019. PHOTO: AEOI HANDOUT/SHUTTERSTOCK

The Republican majority in Congress has a message for Iran: There can be no deal that keeps open the country's path to a nuclear weapon. Its message to President Trump? Stand his ground.

That's what we take from a [letter](#) on Wednesday signed by 52 GOP Senators—all save Rand Paul—and 177 House Republicans. Led by Sen. Pete Ricketts (R., Neb.) and Rep. August Pfluger (R., Texas), the GOP Members ask President Trump to “reinforce the explicit warnings that you and officials in your administration have issued that the regime must permanently give up any capacity for enrichment.”

If Iran has centrifuges, it can enrich uranium to make nuclear bombs. Without centrifuges, it can't. Tehran works hard to obfuscate this basic point, but Republicans aren't buying that the regime can be trusted to enrich only a little.

<https://www.wsj.com/opinion/congress-republicans-iran-nuclear-letter-pete-ricketts-august-pfluger-donald-trump-6a8e50b9>

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Republicans Unite to Thwart Iran - WSJ

The lawmakers note that Iran has advanced too far in secret for inspectors now to verify compliance with merely partial enrichment limits. The 3.67% enrichment for civilian energy is two-thirds of the way to weapons-grade. Tehran has all the oil it needs. If it wants civilian nuclear energy, it could safely import low-enriched uranium as 23 other states do, from Canada to the United Arab Emirates.

Iran wants nuclear weapons, which is why its negotiators now float more complex ways to hang on to domestic enrichment capability. The latest is a “joint nuclear-enrichment venture” with Arab states and U.S. investment. The New York Times [hyped](#) the idea Tuesday as a “novel path” to a deal.

The joint-venture language may be meant to appeal to Mr. Trump and his envoy Steve Witkoff, but the idea isn’t new. Iran’s Foreign Minister floated it in 2007 as a “nuclear consortium,” and regime mouthpieces propose it every few years. The scam is that enrichment would still take place on Iranian soil. That means Iran would retain operational control and a path to a bomb.

The Trump team’s position was [stated clearly](#) last week by Mr. Witkoff, who said “an enrichment program can never exist in the state of Iran ever again. That’s our red line.” He added that “Natanz, Fordow, and Isfahan—those are their three enrichment facilities—have to be dismantled.”

“They cannot have centrifuges. They have to downblend all of their fuel,” Mr. Witkoff said, “and send it to a faraway place.” Unlike under Barack Obama’s deal, “there will never be a deal where obligations are allowed to sunset.”

The lawmakers cheer these positions and seek to hold the Trump Administration to them. Iran would be wise to heed the message.

Further Reading

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