

Opening Statement for Brock Dahl
Nominee for Legal Adviser of the Department of State
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
May 20, 2026

Chairman Risch, Ranking Member Shaheen, and distinguished Members of the committee. It is the privilege of a lifetime to appear today as the President's nominee to be the Legal Adviser to the Department of State. I want to thank President Trump and Secretary Rubio for their confidence in me.

I also just want to thank the family who has been so supportive over my career, and who are here today, including my wife, Jessica and our three children, my mother and father, my twin brother, and my mother and father in-law. I also want to thank the team at the Department who has helped me prepare for this opportunity. The prospect of working with such superb and dedicated people has demonstrated a key facet of why this position is so desirable.

It is always inspiring to see the accomplishments of those who have preceded one in a role and distinctly humbling to recognize how the events they influenced ultimately shaped the contours of your own career. I came to Washington, D.C. from Kansas after high school, where both my wife and I were raised, wanting to pursue a career in the government. Interested in international relations, in early September 2001 I applied for a National Security Education Program scholarship to study Turkish in Istanbul, which itself entailed an obligation to work for the government. Little did any of us know how the events of that month would reshape our lives. In large part because of these experiences, I was eventually granted the chance to pursue a master's in Arabic and Modern Middle Eastern studies at Oxford.

It was because of these investments in my own development that I felt duty bound, when then asked to do so, to fill a role in the Treasury Attaché's office at the US Embassy in Baghdad. I eventually returned to Treasury in DC and worked on the interagency group focused on Afghanistan before heading to law school. I share these experiences not to bore with a personal prehistory, but to highlight how my early career formed my impressions of peace and security, and the fundamental role of the rule of law, and credible institutions, in ensuring pathways to stable and prosperous coexistence.

What struck me then, and continues to ring true today, is the integral role of communal trust in the success of any public endeavor. A thriving society sits on a bulwark of predictable legal norms, and when it acts as a single community

externally, it must do so with conviction and credibility. The Legal Adviser's office is core to those functions, and I am humbled by the chance to occupy a role that so manifestly embodies the hard lessons of a past not unique to me but shared by all of us in different ways.

The Legal Adviser's office accomplishes its functions across an array of complex and intersecting legal regimes. Paramount, of course, is the delivery of accurate and objective legal advice to the Department and the Secretary on all legal and legal policy issues arising in connection with U.S. foreign policy activities and the work of the Department more generally. It has a distinct role, moreover, within the federal government in advising on and articulating the meaning of international law. That law, the scope and contours of which are seemingly debated endlessly in the public square, is not just a set of rules in the sense that some may conceive of law, but a framework for communicating our principles, expectations, and aspirations to the global community. The Department, then, grants to the Legal Adviser, in supporting the Secretary, a legal mouthpiece for conveying our values abroad and engaging in dialogue about how those values interact with those of other nations.

My legal career, spanning both government and private practice, informs how I understand the obligations of the Legal Adviser's office, the breadth of the Department's functions, and the wide array of talents and skills that the office brings to bear in advising on those functions. I have spent years advising clients on a variety of crisis management, international transactional negotiations, litigation, regulatory compliance, internal governance, and operational strategy issues. That experience also provides signals on how the office can continue to engage effectively with various communities of interest: across the Executive Branch, with Congress, with the American public, and with the world community.

For all these reasons and more, I am incredibly grateful to be considered by this committee, and if confirmed, would be deeply honored to continue to serve. But for now, I recognize we have much to discuss and I look forward to that engagement.