

Opening Statement of Sean O'Neill
Nominee for U.S. Ambassador to the Kingdom of Thailand
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
July 29, 2025

Chairman Hagerty, Ranking Member Murphy, and distinguished Members of this Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.

I am honored to be President Trump's nominee to serve as the United States Ambassador to the Kingdom of Thailand and am grateful for the trust and leadership of President Trump and Secretary Rubio.

I am joined today by my wife Sachiyo, who has been with me throughout our nomadic Foreign Service career. We have been a team through many moves across the Indo Pacific and back and I am grateful for her love and support.

I'd like to recognize my two goddaughters Kara and Sienna, and my extended family, many of whom are watching today and all of whom have been a tremendous source of support and love over the years.

Finally, I would not be here without the guidance and love of my parents Jim and Keiko O'Neill. They have both passed away, but I know they are with God and the example they set for me guides me to this day.

I began my professional career as a capital markets attorney in New York and Tokyo, but joined the Foreign Service in the wake of 9/11 to serve our country. I recognized then that American strength in defense of our interests around the world is essential to the security and prosperity of our country.

That is not an academic concept for me. I literally would not exist if it were not for American strength and leadership in the Indo-Pacific. My mother was born in Japan and my father in America, both before World War Two. As children, they witnessed that war from opposite ends of the Pacific. But

as an adult, my mother moved to New York to begin her career. She and my father met there, married and raised a family. My parents loved this country and gave me a great life. That would not have been possible were it not for American strength and the peace and prosperity it guaranteed.

Diplomacy is an important component of American strength, and the purpose of any U.S. diplomatic Mission is to promote American interests. And I know from my two tours in Bangkok and Chiang Mai that America has some very significant interests in Thailand. If confirmed, it would be my honor to work with the men and women of Mission Thailand and our Thai partners to promote Secretary Rubio's objectives of making the United States safer, stronger, and more prosperous.

Making America safer means first serving and protecting the well-being of over 80,000 American citizens who live in Thailand and over one million who visit each year. That was my first priority as Consul General in Chiang Mai and if confirmed it would be my first priority as Ambassador.

Combatting transnational crime is also essential to American and Thai safety. The rise of cyber scam centers in Southeast Asia threatens American citizens and those of our ally Thailand. It is estimated these transnational criminal enterprises scammed Americans out of \$10 billion in 2024 and these criminals traffic Thai and other citizens into their compounds where they are forced to engage in criminal activity. If confirmed, I will focus on strengthening our already robust law enforcement cooperation with Thailand to shut down these scam centers and continue to go after narcotics and human traffickers in the region.

Our alliance with Thailand makes America stronger. Thailand is one of five treaty allies in the Indo-Pacific, a major non-NATO ally, and our only ally in Mainland Southeast Asia. We participate in numerous joint military exercises and exchanges with Thailand including COBRA Gold, the largest joint and combined exercise in the Indo-Pacific. Thailand purchases U.S. military equipment and employs U.S. military doctrine. All of this improves our interoperability and deterrence in defense of our two nations.

If confirmed, I would promote American prosperity through robust commercial diplomacy and promoting President Trump's objective of making our trade relationships fair, free and reciprocal. Trade has been an important part of our relationship with Thailand since our two countries first entered into a Treaty of Amity and Commerce in 1833. Unfortunately, our trade relationship with Thailand and so many other nations has fallen out of balance in recent decades, but I am optimistic that we can build on what President Lincoln described as our "great and good friendship" to forge a balanced and fair-trade relationship that benefits both American and Thai citizens.

Finally, if confirmed it would be my privilege to work with the men and women of Mission Thailand. I have served two tours in Thailand during my Foreign Service career and have seen firsthand the dedication and skill of our American and local colleagues there as they work each day to keep us safe, strong, and prosperous. It would be my honor to rejoin them as the United States Ambassador.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and Members of the Committee, I am deeply honored to be nominated and am grateful to this committee for its consideration. I look forward to your questions. Thank you.