

Opening Statement of Michel Issa
Nominee for U.S. Ambassador to the Lebanese Republic
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
July 29, 2025

Chairman Hagerty, Ranking Member Murphy, distinguished Members of the committee, it is the honor of a lifetime to sit before you today as President Trump's nominee to serve as U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Lebanon. My presence here is a testament to the enduring promise of the American dream, which allowed a young man born in Beirut to become a banker, a businessman, and now, a public servant. If confirmed, I will devote myself fully to advancing American interests and values in Lebanon.

I was born in Beirut and educated in France, but I have spent most of my adult life in the United States. I understand firsthand the complexity of Lebanese society. My deep knowledge of the country's intricate sectarian composition - its communities, its history, and its tensions - will guide my efforts to build bridges, promote unity, and support democratic institutions that serve all Lebanese citizens.

If confirmed, it will be an honor to return to the land of my birth to serve the United States, the nation that gave me every opportunity. I have remained closely connected to Lebanon over the years and have witnessed its people's resilience despite being too often undermined by corruption, economic mismanagement, and the violent influence of Hezbollah and its Iranian backers.

Today, we stand at a crossroads. The recent war between Israel and Hizballah, while devastating, has opened a narrow but meaningful window for progress. Since the United States successfully brokered the Cessation of Hostilities last November, we've seen promising developments: a President and a Prime Minister who are independent, reform-minded, and committed to charting a different path for their country. The Iran-Israel escalation is a reminder of how delicate an opportunity this is, that could be squandered if Iran drags Lebanon back down the path of conflict. The government has made clear it will not tolerate any violations of the Cessation of Hostilities

and since implementation they have begun to curb Hizballah's influence, but more must be done urgently. The full disarmament of Hizballah is not optional; it is essential. The time to act is now.

The United States must also continue to lead efforts to seize a real historical opportunity to demarcate the boundaries between Israel and Lebanon, and to bring about the normalization of ties between Lebanon and Israel.

But opportunity cannot come without transparency. Lebanon's economy has been decimated, not only by war and instability but also by opaque financial practices and a lack of public trust. Rebuilding Lebanon must go hand in hand with serious reforms that ensure the transparent distribution of aid and investment. The country does not need more donor dependency; it needs honest governance that attracts real, sustainable investment. If confirmed, I will work closely with our international partners to promote financial accountability and support long-term economic recovery and growth.

The estimated \$11 billion required for reconstruction must not repeat the failures of the post-2006 period, when Hizballah and its backers hijacked rebuilding efforts to expand their grip on the south. This time, we must empower the legitimate Lebanese state and civil institutions to rebuild responsibly with integrity, and without interference from malign actors.

The Lebanese Armed Forces will be central to this mission. Over the years, the LAF has proven itself to be a reliable partner. Thanks to U.S. support, it is now taking tangible steps to enforce the Cessation of Hostilities and dismantle Hizballah's infrastructure in the south. More is needed, but these efforts show the value of our continued security cooperation. If confirmed, I will work with President Aoun, the Lebanese government, and the LAF to ensure Lebanon's sovereignty is fully restored.

Let me be clear: my commitment to this mission, and to serving the United States, is absolute. To avoid any potential conflict of interest and to demonstrate that my loyalty lies solely with the United States, I have voluntarily renounced my Lebanese citizenship. This decision was not made

lightly. It was not only a matter of legal compliance, but a personal testament to my duty to serve the American people and uphold the interests of the United States above all else.

Finally, I would like to close on a personal note. None of this would be possible without the unwavering love and support of my family. My wife of 45 years, Lillian, has been my anchor and my partner through every chapter of our lives. My two sons, Sebastien and Gabriel, have inspired me with their strength and character. Their belief in me has carried me to this moment. I am here today because of them.

Thank you for your consideration of my nomination. I look forward to your questions and am deeply grateful for the opportunity to serve the American people at such a pivotal time for Lebanon, the region, and our shared future.