

Statement of Ann Marie Yastishock
Nominee for U.S. Ambassador to the Independent State of Papua New
Guinea, Solomon Islands, and the Republic of Vanuatu
U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
March 30, 2023

Chairman Van Hollen, Ranking Member Ricketts, Members of the Committee, good morning. I am honored to appear before you as President Biden’s nominee for Ambassador to the Independent State of Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, and the Republic of Vanuatu.

I am grateful for the confidence shown by the President and Secretary Blinken in nominating me, and I am privileged to represent the United States. If confirmed, I look forward to working with Congress to strengthen our ties with our Pacific neighbors and advance the United States’ interest in a free and open, connected, prosperous, resilient, and secure Pacific region. I aim to achieve this by listening to, and learning from, our Pacific partners and finding a path forward together that celebrates the “Pacific Way.”

I want to thank the most important people in my life: my family. Joining me here are my son Dmitry, my brother Daniel, my sister Betsy and brother-in-law John. Although my parents are not here, I know they are looking down today with pride. As the youngest of seven children from a long line of public servants, my family inspired me to love this country that has given us and me so much. If not for their love, support, and encouragement, I would not be sitting here today.

My passion for international affairs began when I served as a volunteer American Bar Association lawyer in Central Asia and continued as a Foreign Service Officer with USAID. Overseeing USAID’s Pacific expansion as Senior Deputy Assistant Administrator has required a broad-based skill set, which, if confirmed, I will bring to our work in Melanesia.

As a Pacific nation, the United States shares much with these proud countries, and World War II bonded us together. I will build upon this legacy,

First, I will prioritize the embassy community’s well-being, including for our invaluable local staff so that we can better support our commitment to the safety and security of U.S. citizens in these islands.

Second, we will be very “present,” leveraging our growing footprint, elevated USAID presence, and returning Peace Corps Volunteers. In Papua New Guinea and together with local and international partners, we will advance the 10-year, whole-of-government effort under the U.S. Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability. In Solomon Islands, we will address the legacy of war while shaping the future through improved natural resource stewardship.

As our Vanuatu friends know all too well, the Pacific faces increasing natural disasters and rising sea levels, and following President Biden’s emphasis on the climate crisis, we will support local climate resilience, adaptation, and biodiversity.

Success will depend on the strength, resilience, and vibrancy of our sovereign partners, which appreciate that democratic values, rule of law, and education underpin productive, inclusive, and connected societies. Together with allies and partners, if confirmed, my team and I will help these governments and civil society meet democracy’s promises.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and Members of the Committee, thank you again and I look forward to your questions.