

**Statement of Erin Elizabeth McKee  
Ambassador Nominee to the Independent State of Papua New Guinea,  
and the Solomon Islands, and to the Republic of Vanuatu  
Senate Foreign Relations Committee  
July 30, 2019**

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Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and Distinguished Members of the Committee, it is a great honor to appear before you today as the President's nominee to be Ambassador of the United States to Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu. I am grateful to the Members of the Committee for the opportunity to speak with you today about my qualifications and goals. If confirmed, I pledge to work with you to advance our nation's interests in these three Pacific Island nations.

With the Chairman's permission, I would like to quickly introduce my family. My father, Stu Kinder, my husband, Sean McKee, and my daughter Caitlin, are here with me today. Their unconditional love and support have been my rock throughout my public service career -- from Moscow to Lima -- from Baghdad to Jakarta, they have stood by my side and shared in the sacrifice and adventures of nearly 25 years in the Foreign Service. I am so pleased that they could join me today. I could have not made this journey without them, and for that I am truly grateful.

Since 1995, I have had the privilege of serving and representing the United States in eight overseas assignments, as well as here in Washington, D.C., with the U.S. Agency for International Development. It has been my honor to serve the American people and advance our country's interests, promote our values and principles, and offer host-country nations a model for hope, security, and prosperity across a variety of diverse contexts. I am currently serving as the USAID Mission Director to Indonesia and ASEAN, which I resumed after filling the role of Acting Deputy Chief of Mission of Embassy Jakarta last year.

Throughout my tenure in the Foreign Service, I have proven my ability to work with host countries to advance our shared goals and principles. In multiple posts, I have developed mission and host-country strategies, securing broad interagency support. I successfully led our interagency and mission partners to strategically plan and -- more importantly -- successfully execute our development and security assistance budgets. If confirmed, my technical

background and development expertise have prepared me well to guide my Country Team as they work on issues affecting Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu, and to tackle economic inequality, poor governance, and underdeveloped capacity, while furthering American partnerships.

Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu are important to U.S. national security and to peace and security in the Pacific. To enhance these countries' stability as U.S. partners and help them realize their full potential, we should continue to support their efforts to improve transparency and good governance, to combat trafficking in persons, to adapt to the impacts of climate change, to responsibly manage their rich natural resources, to protect and promote human rights and fundamental freedoms, to improve public health, and to promote gender equality.

If confirmed, I would work with the host countries, the interagency, and our many other partners to bolster environmental security, health systems, economic growth, and women's empowerment, among other critical areas. I am committed to advancing our vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific region, which we share with other democracies in the Pacific region, including Australia, New Zealand, Taiwan, and Japan.

The Solomon Islands is one of six Pacific Island nations that has diplomatic relations with Taiwan. I will stress the importance of maintaining cross-Strait relations and work with regional partners to support economic engagement initiatives.

Free, fair, and transparent economies are open, accountable, and rules-based, and governments must also be. Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu are young democracies. Our shared history provides us with opportunities we can further build upon to strengthen democratic systems, include civil society partners, combat corruption, protect and promote human rights and fundamental freedoms, and fortify institutions to help these nations attract high-quality private investment and secure their sovereignty.

However, we must also be realistic and operate with the understanding that competing models of assistance do not share our democratic values. China's relationships with Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu deepened dramatically over the past two years. The United States should increase its visibility and sustain its commitments to become a stronger

partner of choice for these three countries, as we did with our commitment to support the PNG Electrification Partnership (PEP), which aims to increase household electrification from the current level of 15% to 70% by 2030.

The United States offers a shared partnership and a wide range of tools to develop opportunities for the people of these countries, which are expanding thanks to this Committee. The long and distinguished history of the Peace Corps in the region, the Asia Reassurance Initiative Act (ARIA), and the Build Act further expand our tool kit. Together, these tools provide us the ability to deliver sustained engagement and action behind our declarations of support to these countries. We must also do more to support and promote private sector investment in the region. If confirmed, I will use these tools to expand our cooperation, promote fair and inclusive growth and increased opportunities for U.S. investment, strengthen our presence and amplify the message -- backed by concrete deliverables -- that the United States cares about the Pacific and is there to stay.

In every position that I have served, I ensured that the highest standards for accountability and integrity were set—and met. If confirmed, I will make taking care of my team and fostering a high-performing, healthy, and secure workplace a priority, with zero tolerance for misconduct, including sexual harassment. I will also prioritize the safety and security of all American citizens living in or visiting these island nations. I will work closely with our partners to promote peace and security, advance economic prosperity, and promote respect for fundamental freedoms and human rights, building an enduring presence and lasting partnership with our host-countries in the process.

Thank you for this invitation to appear before you, I welcome the opportunity to answer your questions.