

Statement of Todd P. Haskell
Nominee to be Ambassador to the Republic of Congo
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
April 26, 2017

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

It is an honor to appear before you today as President Trump's nominee to be the U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Congo (ROC). If confirmed, I will work closely with this committee and other interested Members of Congress to advance U.S. interests and values in the Congo, and to help all Congolese achieve the bright future they deserve.

Accompanying me here today is my wife Jennifer, who has traveled to be with us today from South Africa where she serves as Management Counselor at our Embassy in Pretoria, and two of my three children, Michael and Jonah, who have come from Texas and New York respectively. My third son Seth is currently teaching English in Chengdu China.

The Republic of Congo, with a population of about 4.5 million people, sits in a strategically important position on the oil-rich Gulf of Guinea. It is the fourth largest oil producer in sub-Saharan Africa. Approximately 500 U.S. citizens live in the Republic of Congo, and U.S. businesses are active in the petroleum business and other industries.

President Denis Sassou N'Gusso has played a valuable role as mediator in regional crises. Under his leadership, Congo has sent peacekeepers to the Central African Republic for more than a decade now, and is hosting approximately 35,000 refugees from that country. Congolese troops deploying to the Central African Republic receive U.S. government-sponsored training, and the Congo military also participates in the International Military Education and Training program.

U.S. policy seeks to promote the development of democratic institutions and the long-term stability of the Congo. President Sassou has been in power for 33 of the last 38 years. He overcame constitutional term limits through a referendum in

October 2015, and was reelected president in March 2016. Our public statements criticized the flawed electoral process and the arrests of opposition leaders following the vote, while praising the people of Congo for their active participation in the election. If confirmed, I will continue to emphasize the need for good governance and effective institutions that serve the citizens of Congo.

The United States is one of many countries addressing a broad range of health issues in ROC, such as poor child nutrition, HIV, malaria, and tuberculosis. U.S. assistance in the health sector also focuses on identifying emerging infectious diseases such as Ebola. Embassy Brazzaville also coordinates with several U.S. government agencies to assist the Congo on natural resource management and the protection of the Congo's forest and fauna, including lowland gorillas and forest elephants.

Mr. Chairman, if confirmed, I will bring the collective experiences of my 31 years in the Foreign Service to advance U.S. interests, to ensure the safety and welfare of all Americans and U.S. Government employees, and to strengthen bilateral relations with and promote long-term stability in the Republic of Congo. I look forward to working with the committee in furtherance of these goals, and I am happy to answer any questions you might have.