

Statement of Michelle Wingshan Kwan
Nominee for U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Belize
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
May 18, 2022

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and distinguished members of the Committee, it is an honor to be here today as President Biden's nominee as the U.S. Ambassador to Belize. I want to thank President Biden for placing such trust in me, and I would like to thank my friends, family, and colleagues for all their support.

I want to give a special thank you to my parents Danny and Estella Kwan, who have sacrificed so much for me.

Throughout my life, I have worn many different hats and I believe there is no higher honor than serving our country. As an athlete, I was proud to win five world championships and two Olympic medals while representing the United States. I also served as a Special Olympics board member, an author, and a diplomat, having worked as a senior advisor and public diplomacy envoy with the Department of State. Service has always been a calling and, if confirmed, it will continue to guide me as I serve our country as the U.S. Ambassador to Belize.

The United States and Belize share strong bilateral relations. Over one million tourists from the United States visit Belize annually and approximately 30,000 U.S. citizens live in Belize. More than 85,000 Belizeans live in the United States. The roots of both our government and people-to-people ties run deep. Belize is a vibrant democracy with a commitment to upholding shared democratic values. Its geo-strategically important position bridges Central America and the Caribbean.

Belize has challenges exacerbated by the ongoing pandemic. The economy shrank by about 16 percent in 2020, particularly hitting the tourism sector – Belize's lifeblood. The Belizean government works to manage the spread of COVID-19 effectively, and it has contained the spread of the virus better than most countries. Still, Belize has felt its crippling effects.

We are working together to tackle this and other challenges. The United States has donated 228,150 doses of vaccine to Belize, provided \$300,000 in COVID-19 assistance and has assisted Belize with more than \$4 million worth of COVID mitigation projects together with Baylor University. Belize joined the United States on May 12 in co-hosting the Second Global COVID-19 Summit as the CARICOM Chair, demonstrating the Government of Belize's success in managing the COVID-19 pandemic. And here's another example of working together: in December 2021, the Millennium Challenge Corporation selected Belize to develop a five-year compact, a partnership that could inject hundreds of millions of dollars to improve infrastructure, reduce poverty, and create a brighter future for all Belizeans. In November 2021, the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation provided \$610 million in political risk insurance to support an innovative debt conversion that not only cut Belize's sovereign debt burden in half,

but also supported projects to protect 30 percent of its ocean through a “Blue Bond” financial deal.

Belize and the United States enjoy a strong partnership on security cooperation, and Belize cooperates closely with the United States in efforts to deter and disrupt narcotics and human trafficking and other illicit activity by transnational criminal organizations. The United States assists Belize through programs to improve border security, professionalize police, and strengthen the rule of law. If confirmed, I will work to continue and expand these efforts for the benefit of Belizean citizens and the many U.S. citizens who reside in and visit Belize. Building upon our shared regional efforts to address migration, I will also work to strengthen cooperation with Belize on humane migration management and protection.

While we work with Belize to confront the challenges the country faces, we should also seize opportunities to advance our mutual interests. Belize’s ties with Taiwan are an example. If confirmed, I will continue to encourage strong ties with Taiwan, a stalwart partner that shares our democratic values.

The United States and Belize also have mutual interest in bolstering its energy sector, which presents opportunities for U.S. investment that can benefit both our countries.

With the average age of Belizeans as 25 years, we must work together to create new learning and economic opportunities. If confirmed, I plan to lean on my international experience to encourage robust educational, sporting, and other exchanges between the United States and Belize to enhance the bilateral relationship on all levels.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, Mr. Ranking Member, Members of the Committee, if confirmed, I will take on my role as Ambassador with the same work ethic, persistence, and determination I have used to achieve results for my country. I will advance U.S. interests and promote American democratic values. I will be a strong champion of service to others while working to advance this important bilateral relationship.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear here today. If confirmed, I look forward to working closely with this Committee. I look forward to your questions.