

Statement of Marc E. Knapper
Nominee to be U.S. Ambassador to Socialist Republic of Vietnam
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
July 13, 2021

Thank you Chairman Menendez, Ranking Member Risch and distinguished Members of this Committee for the opportunity to appear before you today. I am honored in the faith that President Biden and Secretary Blinken have placed in me.

I also want to express my deep love and gratitude to my wife, Suzuko, and our son, Alex, for their support and their sacrifice. They have repeatedly changed homes and schools and been distant from family and friends so that we could serve the United States overseas. Without them, as well as my parents Jay and Yolanda Saltsman, I would not be here today.

The U.S.-Vietnam relationship has undergone a profound transformation since the normalization of diplomatic relations 26 years ago. My own family history tracks the arc of the United States' relationship with Vietnam. My late father, Marine Colonel Roger Knapper, was a decorated Vietnam combat veteran, who often recounted difficult memories from his time at war. Yet, he also talked many times of his earnest wish to return to Vietnam and see that beautiful country at peace and thriving. This wish was fulfilled three times during my previous service at our Embassy in Hanoi. Although he will not make it back for a fourth visit, we will always be grateful for the efforts and sacrifices he and millions of other Americans have made during our long journey with Vietnam.

Our two countries have moved from a history of conflict to a Comprehensive Partnership that spans political, security, economic, and people-to-people ties. If confirmed, I will work to continue developing the U.S.-Vietnam relationship across a wide range of shared interests in four key areas.

First, security. Our two countries have significantly expanded security cooperation, including through U.S. support to strengthen Vietnam's maritime capabilities. Last year, Vietnam welcomed the *USS Theodore Roosevelt*, the second U.S. aircraft carrier to visit since we established diplomatic relations. The United States and Vietnam share an interest in upholding international law and resisting provocative behavior in the South China Sea and Mekong region, and if confirmed I will make every effort deepen our cooperation in this area.

Second, trade and investment. Bilateral trade with Vietnam has grown significantly, increasing from nearly nothing in 1995 to more than \$90 billion in 2020, benefiting American manufacturers, farmers and ranchers, and consumers. Despite the growth, challenges remain. If confirmed, I will advocate for a level playing field for U.S. companies and investors, including by urging Vietnam to maintain equitable market access for U.S. digital services and agricultural products.

Third, war legacy and humanitarian issues. Providing the fullest possible accounting for U.S. personnel missing from the Vietnam War era remains our most solemn duty. For decades, Vietnam has provided critical assistance to those efforts. Since 1993, the United States has contributed more than \$160 million to mitigate lingering threats posed by unexploded ordnance. Together with Vietnam, we successfully completed the remediation of dioxin contamination in Danang in 2018, and in 2019 we broke ground on the 10-year dioxin remediation project at the Bien Hoa airbase area. We have provided more than \$125 million since 1989 in humanitarian assistance, directly and indirectly supporting over a million persons with disabilities, regardless of the cause. Our cooperation on these issues continues to build a foundation of trust to expand our relationship.

Fourth, people-to-people ties. The bonds between the American and Vietnamese people are strong and growing. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, nearly 700,000 Americans traveled to Vietnam annually, including more than 1,200 American students. Here in the United States, we welcome 30,000 Vietnamese students each year. On the occasion of the 25th anniversary of U.S.-Vietnam relations last year, we signed an agreement to bring Peace Corps volunteers for the first time ever, a significant and symbolic milestone.

Our thriving relationship is not without its challenges. We remain deeply concerned about Vietnam's human rights record, in particular reports of the troubling trend of harassment, arbitrary or unlawful arrests, unjust convictions, and harsh sentences of journalists and activists. If confirmed, I will press the Government of Vietnam to respect the freedoms of expression, association, peaceful assembly, and religion or belief. Only when we see significant progress on human rights can our partnership reach its fullest potential.

As always, my number one priority will be protecting the safety and welfare of all United States citizens in Vietnam. I will also make the safety and welfare of Mission personnel a top priority.

The thriving U.S.-Vietnam partnership is the result of the courage, goodwill, and painstaking work of dedicated people in both countries, who believed in the possibility of peace and reconciliation between two former enemies. Our overarching goal remains to advance American interests and support the development of a strong, prosperous, and independent Vietnam that contributes to international security, and respects human rights and the rule of law.

Thank you for considering my nomination. I look forward to your questions.