

Statement of Tom Udall
Ambassador-Designate to New Zealand and the Independent State of Samoa
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
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Chairman Menendez, Ranking Member Risch, and members of the committee. It is an honor and a pleasure to meet with all of you again. As a former member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, I have great respect for the important work you are doing to consider the diplomatic nominations before you.

Today, I have exchanged my seat on the dais to sit as President Biden's nominee to serve as the United States Ambassador to New Zealand and to the Independent State of Samoa. After a career of public service in the state of New Mexico, including two terms as New Mexico's Attorney General, five terms as United States Representative, and two terms as United States Senator, I am grateful for the trust the President and Secretary Blinken have in me to represent the United States overseas.

The advice and consent role of the United States Senate is one of the most important roles granted to Congress by the Constitution – and I am honored by this committee's consideration of my nomination.

Chairman Menendez, with your permission, I would like to take a moment to introduce my wife Jill Cooper. She has been my partner and chief advisor during my 30 years of public service. She is an accomplished lawyer in her own right, and a strong advocate for the arts, having served as a member of the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities. While they are not here with me today in these chambers, I'd also like to recognize my daughter Amanda and son-in-law Judge Jim Noel.

In January I marked the conclusion of serving New Mexico in the U.S. Senate. New Mexico is a mountainous and rural state strong in its multiculturalism – including a vibrant indigenous culture. New Mexico is also rich in natural resources, and growing tech, space, and cinematic sectors, complete with a vital national security sector. In all these respects, New Mexico is very much like New Zealand.

Both are aiming for the stars. Both continue to invest in new space sectors advancing science, human progress and cinematic storytelling set in their unique geographies.

While there are numerous positive comparisons, it is no secret that New Zealand and Samoa, like New Mexico, face enormous threats from climate change.

As a Senator I made protection of the environment a priority, from championing the Thirty-by-Thirty proposal to conserve 30 percent of our lands and waters by 2030, to passing the landmark bipartisan Frank Lautenberg Chemical Safety Act. The President has made it clear “that climate considerations shall be an essential element of United States foreign policy and national security.” As Ambassador, I look forward to working with New Zealand, a country that shares my passion for the protection of our natural environment.

I also look forward to maintaining the strong political, military, and intelligence relationship we share with New Zealand: from World War II when tens of thousands of Americans were stationed in New Zealand, through the post-war Five Eyes intelligence alliance formed by the United States, Great Britain, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand; and from support for our forces in Afghanistan in 2001 as well as other peace-keeping missions, to formalizing our strengthened defense cooperation in the 2012 Washington Declaration.

Just last week, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern affirmed that recent developments in the Indo-Pacific do not change the security and intelligence ties of New Zealand to the Five Eyes alliance.

Members of this committee have been clear that the United States cannot challenge all the threats in the region alone. We need allies like New Zealand and we need to help them thrive despite those regional challenges.

We should not allow outside influences to drive a wedge in that relationship. As Ambassador, I will work to protect and grow the mutual goodwill between our nations.

Countering and competing with the People’s Republic of China (PRC) requires strong partnerships with countries throughout the region. Beijing continues to pressure countries that stand up to its human rights violations, to threaten freedom of navigation, and to violate international rules and norms.

To ensure stability and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region as a whole, it is important to note that our relations do not begin and end with security. As an island nation, New Zealand is not unique in its dependence on international trade.

It is also one of many countries that has felt the pressure of Beijing's attempts to coerce through punitive trade decisions.

The United States is one of New Zealand's top trading partners. And I know from experience that during Senate visits overseas many of us looked for ways to increase trade ties between many nations and our respective states. If confirmed, I will work to ensure that our trade relations continue to grow and that you or the companies you represent are welcome in New Zealand.

As Pacific nations with advanced economies, the United States and New Zealand have both an opportunity and responsibility to support the island nations in the Pacific. All of them are increasingly threatened by the immediate threat of COVID-19, but also the growing influence of the PRC, and the threats from climate change. The Independent State of Samoa, a small island country rich in Polynesian culture is not immune to these challenges. We need to continue to reinforce Samoa's independence with our Peace Corps and Fulbright initiatives.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Risch, and members of the committee, it was one of my great honors to serve on this committee and to serve the nation and the people of New Mexico. After a career in public service, I am honored by the President's nomination to represent the United States in New Zealand and Samoa.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. I am happy to answer any of your questions during this hearing or for the record.