

Marc J. Sievers
Ambassadorial Nominee to the Sultanate of Oman

Chairman Corker, Ranking Member Cardin, and members of the committee, I am honored to appear before you as President Obama's nominee to serve as Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman. I am deeply grateful to President Obama and Secretary Kerry for the trust they have placed in me, and if confirmed, I look forward to working closely with you and other Members of Congress to advance the interests of the United States in Oman. I would like to pause for a moment to recognize my wife Michelle Huda Raphael, our son Samuel, my daughter Miriam, and my son David, who are here with me today. They have provided unwavering support throughout my career and I am very grateful for their love and understanding.

Mr. Chairman, I have spent much of my 34-year Foreign Service career working in the Middle East, including assignments in Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Israel. My previous assignments have provided me with an extensive background in economic and counter-terrorism issues that are essential to our partnership with Oman, and a deep appreciation for the importance of political and economic reform to long-term stability. If confirmed as U.S. Ambassador to Oman, my highest priority will be protecting the safety and security of the dedicated men and women at our mission, as well as all Americans living in and visiting Oman. I will work with our Omani partners to ensure that American businesses realize the full benefits of the U.S.-Oman Free Trade Agreement. I will engage with a wide range of Omani citizens so that Oman may continue to make strides in establishing an independent civil society and preventing trafficking in persons. Rest assured, I will employ the full range of diplomatic tools to deepen our cooperation with Oman on counterterrorism, maritime security, and counter-piracy issues.

The United States and Oman share a long history of friendship and trade. The bilateral relationship was formalized in an 1833 Treaty of Amity and Commerce. Oman was the first Arab Gulf state to host the United States at its military facilities, and Oman has supported United States forces during almost every U.S. military operation in the region since 1980.

Oman plays a helpful role in multilateral diplomacy. As a member of the Gulf Cooperation Council, the Arab League, and the United Nations, Oman

maintains close ties with American allies in the region. Oman has helped advance the interests of the United States by serving as a mediator with other countries in the region. In recent years, Oman has demonstrated the value of its relationship to the United States by helping to facilitate nuclear negotiations with Iran, securing the release of American detainees in Yemen, and the young American hikers held by Iran, and finally, by assisting the evacuation of American government personnel from Yemen. Since 1997, Oman has hosted the Middle East Desalination Research Center, an institution that brings Israelis and Arabs together to address regional water challenges through science and knowledge-sharing.

Bordering Yemen, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, and overlooking the Strait of Hormuz, Oman collaborates with the United States to promote security and freedom of navigation in a region through which approximately 30 percent of seaborne global oil exports flow. Oman provided critical logistical support during both Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom. The United States maintains excellent security cooperation on counterterrorism, counter-smuggling, and counter-piracy to ensure the Strait of Hormuz remains open to international trade. As the situation in Yemen has deteriorated, the United States and Oman have worked together to prevent destabilizing non-state actors such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and Al Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula from exploiting Yemen's porous border and coastal areas. If confirmed, my priority will remain the safety and security of Americans. Maintaining a strong relationship with Oman on border and maritime security and counterterrorism will keep Americans in Oman and the United States safer.

Economic cooperation between the United States and Oman continues to grow. Since the implementation of the United States-Oman Free Trade Agreement in 2009, U.S. private industry has received broad access to the rapidly developing Omani market. The United States held a billion dollar trade surplus with Oman in 2014, and economic cooperation continues to expand. American businesses such as General Cable and GlassPoint Solar have benefited from access to a diversifying Omani economy. If confirmed, I will work to ensure American private industry enjoys free access to an Omani market eager to purchase American goods and services, and benefit from the world's best quality, customer service, and corporate social responsibility programs.

Oman has made dramatic gains since emerging as a modern state shortly after Sultan Qaboos bin Said came to power in 1970. The 2010 U.N. Human Development Report listed Oman first of 135 countries in human development from 1970 to 2010. Omanis have benefited from dramatic increases in access to education, quality healthcare, and improved living standards. As Oman moves to further diversify its economy in the coming decades, American private industry is well-suited to provide the technical expertise necessary to expand the scope of prosperity in the United States and Oman.

Oman has increased the number of opportunities available to women in recent years. Omani women serve in political offices and have held cabinet-level positions in government. Oman was the first Arab state to appoint a woman, the Honorable Hunaina al-Mughairy, as Ambassador to the United States. Omani women now constitute over 30 percent of the workforce. Oman should maximize the role of women as it builds a modern, diversified economy. If confirmed, I will encourage the development of more opportunities for women in Omani private enterprise, government, and civil society. I will also prioritize our efforts to combat and prevent human trafficking. Human trafficking violates fundamental rights and corrodes a society from within. Oman is primarily a destination and migrant country for men and women who are subjected to forced labor, but Oman is working hard to improve its response to human trafficking. If confirmed, I will partner with Oman to improve its record by prosecuting and convicting human trafficking offenders, identifying and protecting trafficking victims among vulnerable populations, and allowing broader victim access to government shelter care.

Sultan Qaboos has gradually increased the level of representation Omani citizens hold in government. Following Arab Spring-related protests in 2011, Sultan Qaboos empowered the popularly elected portion of the legislature to draft laws. He also appointed members of the elected Council into cabinet positions. If confirmed, I will support the efforts of the people and government of Oman to establish a more inclusive and transparent government and strengthen civil society.

Approximately 50,000 American tourists visited Oman last year. Oman also serves as a model for tolerance and peaceful coexistence in the region. If confirmed, I look forward to welcoming members of Congress and Congressional staff to Oman. Oman is an important partner for the United

States in the region, and I hope to have the opportunity to work to expand the scope of our cooperation.

Finally, I would like to once more express my appreciation for this opportunity to appear before the committee today. I have served in a number of war and conflict zones during my career and I can assure the committee I do not take lightly the responsibility an Ambassador holds to protect the men and women serving our country overseas. If confirmed, my highest priority will always be the safety and security of every American in Oman, as well as the advancement of our national interests, and I pledge to carry out these duties to the best of my ability. I welcome the opportunity to answer any questions you might have. Thank you.

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