

**Statement by Peter M. Haymond**  
**Nominee for U.S. Ambassador to the Lao People's Democratic Republic**  
**Senate Foreign Relations Committee**  
**October 31, 2019**

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, Members of the Committee, thank you for giving me the honor of this opportunity to appear before the Committee today. I also want to thank the President and the Secretary of State for the confidence they have shown in me by nominating me as the next U.S. Ambassador to the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

I am joined today by my wife Dusadee, my companion and closest partner over the past 30 years. Also by my daughter Faye, who knows well the challenges of growing up in the frequent-moving Foreign Service life – Faye had already attended five different schools in four countries by the time she reached 2<sup>nd</sup> grade.

I am proud to have devoted almost 29 years to the service of the American people as a Foreign Service Officer. I believe my multiple previous diplomatic assignments in Laos – and multiple assignments in two of Laos' most important neighbors, China and Thailand, most recently as Deputy Chief of Mission and Charge d'Affaires in Bangkok – have prepared me well for this lofty assignment, should the Senate confirm my nomination.

Today, I am happy to say that the U.S.-Laos relationship continues to develop beyond the heights reached in 2016 with Laos' successful tenure as ASEAN chair and the first-ever visit to Laos by a U.S. president, which included the announcement of our Joint Comprehensive Partnership. The Administration remains steadfast in its commitment to this comprehensive partnership as the roadmap for further deepening ties with Laos. If confirmed, I will diligently explore new ways to deepen the burgeoning relationship with Laos, based on common interests and a shared desire to heal the wounds of the past.

In addition to a growing bilateral partnership with the United States, Laos is a member of the 10-nation Association of Southeast Asian Nations, or ASEAN. The Administration's vision for a Free and Open Indo-Pacific has ASEAN at its core, and is built on principles that are widely shared in the region: ensuring the freedom of the seas and skies; insulating sovereign nations from external pressure; promoting market-based economics, open and transparent investment environments, and free, fair, and reciprocal trade. It also supports good governance and respect for human rights. These values and policies have helped the Indo-Pacific region grow and thrive.

Laos is the geographic connective tissue of Mainland Southeast Asia, sharing over 3,000 miles of land borders with China and four other ASEAN countries, including sub-regional leaders Thailand and Vietnam. More of the strategic Mekong River flows through and along Laos than through any other Southeast Asian nation. Laos is also one of the weakest countries in ASEAN economically, making it potentially more vulnerable to external pressure. If confirmed, working to empower Laos as a sovereign nation will be a top priority.

Our sustained engagement with and support for Laos, including increased senior official visits in recent years, has engendered greater trust and enabled progress on U.S. strategic priorities. We are currently joining with Japan, Australia, South Korea, and the European Union as partners endeavoring to facilitate Laos' further integration into the ASEAN Economic Community and global economy.

The Lao government is enthusiastic about American investment in energy, which Laos sees as its most promising natural resource. Hydropower dominates the sector, but solar and wind power generation are promising and receiving growing interest from American business. In August, Secretary Pompeo announced an additional \$29.5 million dollars in support of the Japan-U.S. Mekong Power Project or JUMPP to meet growing energy demands in the Mekong. With timely support from the State Department, USAID, the Department of Commerce, the U.S. Trade and Development Agency (USTDA), and the upcoming Development Finance Corporation, the U.S. government and U.S. companies can help Laos diversify its economic relations and lessen its dependence on any one country.

Together, with like-minded partners, we are seeking a Laos that is more prosperous and better governed, protecting and promoting the human rights of those in Laos; we are engaging with emerging reform-minded leaders; and we are encouraging Laos to maintain its sovereignty and be a constructive member of the rules-based international order.

Although the emerging U.S.-Lao relationship holds promise, significant roadblocks remain. The Lao People's Revolutionary Party remains the ultimate authority in this one-party state, and many of the Indochina War-veteran leaders who are still in charge of the Party and government first dealt with the United States in a very different and difficult era in our relations. With American help and encouragement, however, we are embarked on a new and positive era in our ties. As one example, we have been assisting as the Lao government grapples with the many challenges of transnational crime, including trafficking of narcotics and wildlife; human trafficking; money laundering; and cases of official corruption that have helped enable the other crimes. To fight human trafficking, for instance, Laos **last year** took notable new steps, though there is still great room for improvement. If confirmed, I will actively work with the Lao in their efforts to more effectively fight transnational crime.

If confirmed I would plan to focus on our forward-looking comprehensive relationship with Laos, but I also pledge to continue addressing challenges remaining from the past. I will do everything I can to support the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency's efforts to achieve the fullest possible accounting for the remaining 286 U.S. personnel still missing in Laos from the Indochina War, including acknowledging the Lao government's important role in successfully returning our heroes home. The United States is currently the number one donor in the effort to remove unexploded ordinance (UXO) that remains from the war, having contributed some \$200 million since 1995. U.S. funding supports UXO clearance, risk education, survivor's assistance, and capacity building. The Lao government has committed as part of its strategic development goals to eliminate UXO as a barrier to national development by 2030 – the Administration supports that goal and believes it is achievable.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, Members of the Committee, if confirmed, I will devote all my ability and experience to advancing U.S. objectives in Laos, a country that is seeking more engagement with the United States, and is an important link in the Administration's Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy. I would look to work closely with the Congress in that effort, and hope to welcome many Members of Congress to Vientiane, should I be confirmed.

I look forward to your questions.