

Statement of Alina L. Romanowski
Nominee to be U.S. Ambassador to the State of Kuwait
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
October 31, 2019

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and distinguished Members of the Committee:

I am honored to appear before you today as President Trump's nominee to serve as Ambassador to the State of Kuwait. I am grateful to the President and to Secretary Pompeo for the trust and confidence they have placed in me to undertake this important role. If confirmed, I pledge to work closely with members of the Committee to advance U.S. national security interests and American values in Kuwait and to ensure Kuwait remains a strong regional partner for the United States.

I would first like to express my deepest gratitude to my family and friends. Without their love and support, I would not be here today. As a first generation American, I must recognize my father who came to the United States from Poland in 1946. He enlisted in the U.S. Army, served in Korea, and became an accomplished professor of high-energy physics. My mother came to the United States from Canada and gave back to our community as a high school French teacher. They instilled in me a strong sense of service, respect, and humility and are always with me in spirit.

I would also like to recognize my husband and my children who are here with me today. My husband, Bill Matzelevich, served in the U.S. Navy for 24 years as a submariner and has provided me with steadfast support throughout my career. Our two sons, Nicholas and Eric, have brought tremendous pride and joy to me. My sister, Dominique, could not be here today, but is watching the live stream from California. I also thank the many friends and colleagues who have played important roles in my career – some of them are here today.

Mr. Chairman, this November will mark almost 40 years of my service with the U.S. government, almost half of it as a career Senior Executive focused on the Middle East in positions with the Departments of State and Defense, the U.S. Agency for International Development, and the intelligence community, where I began my career. If confirmed, I will draw on that broad experience and my leadership to continue to advance American objectives in Kuwait and the region, focusing not only on security and economic issues, but also on democracy, human rights, and the rule of law.

Kuwait hosts U.S. military forces that are critical to stability and security in the Middle East and essential to our national security interests. If confirmed, I look forward to building on a partnership I have directly supported since the 1990 Gulf War to advance U.S. national security interests.

The U.S. military and diplomatic partnership with Kuwait has been essential to increasing pressure on Iran and containing its malign activities throughout the region. Through its proxies, Iran has sown violence against U.S. allies and U.S. interests across the Middle East and beyond. The September 14 attacks against critical oil infrastructure in Saudi Arabia represent a dangerous escalation in Iran's behavior. Iranian attacks against international oil tankers in the Gulf threaten freedom of navigation in one of the world's most critical seaways. Through its support of the Houthis in Yemen, Bashar al Assad's regime in Syria, and Hezbollah in Lebanon, Iran is working to destabilize the entire region. We must work together with key partners such as Kuwait to counter this threat.

Mr. Chairman, if confirmed, my highest priority will be the safety and security of all Americans in Kuwait. Over 45,000 U.S. citizens are working in Kuwait as military contractors, teachers, and businesspeople, in addition to U.S. government and military personnel.

Our strong people-to-people ties, however, go both ways. Last year over 12,000 Kuwaitis registered to study at universities across the United States – from Idaho to New Jersey to Utah to Connecticut. These students come to the United States on scholarships fully funded by the Kuwaiti government and represent an injection of more than \$1.2 billion into the U.S. economy each year. These students bring their life and cultural experience to the United States, and take back their knowledge and understanding of the United States to Kuwait. This exchange greatly strengthens the social and cultural ties between our two countries. This is a strong bond that we continue to build from generation to generation, with the recognition that relationships with our partners need to be nurtured and tended.

Kuwait's economy centers on oil. Kuwait currently produces 2.75 million barrels of oil per day and want to increase production to as much as 4 million in the near future. To meet this goal, Kuwait is benefitting from the technical expertise of U.S. oil services companies, as many countries in the region have. One recent example is the \$597 million contract that Halliburton signed to explore for offshore oil, a first for the Kuwait Petroleum Company. Significant opportunities for U.S. businesses to provide services and equipment also exist in the petroleum refining, petrochemicals, power generation and transmission, and water desalination industries. If confirmed, advocating for U.S. businesses will be one of my top priorities.

Kuwait must strengthen the rights of members of vulnerable populations in the country, namely: women, stateless Arabs known colloquially as the Bidoon, and Kuwait's large expatriate labor force. The United States can help. We know that our cooperation with Kuwait can drive this change because strong, sustained U.S. advocacy and partnership were critical to Kuwait's upgrade to Tier 2 status in the 2019 Trafficking in Persons report. Kuwait is already a leader in the region for allowing space for political expression, fostering an independent media, and encouraging participatory government. Kuwaitis have a well-functioning and empowered elected parliament. If confirmed, I will make these issues an important part of my discussions with Kuwaiti leadership, and I will continue a regular dialogue with Kuwaitis as they pursue advances in democratic, economic, and social development, as well.

Kuwait's importance to the United States goes beyond our bilateral relationship. Under the leadership of the Amir, His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Kuwait's foreign policy has encouraged peace and cooperation between our partners in the region. Kuwait has worked to develop stronger economic ties across its border with Iraq, as evidenced by its effort to normalize trade relations and modernize the primary border crossing at Safwan. Kuwait is a key member in the Coalition to Defeat ISIS. Together with the United States, Kuwait has demonstrated sustained leadership in calling for unity among Gulf Cooperation Council countries and to set aside the divisions between its members that only benefit the regime in Iran.

While our history with Kuwait is the foundation of the lasting friendship that we have today, our relations must not depend on what we have achieved in the past. Together, we must build a foundation for the future. The influence of younger generations of Kuwaitis, born after the liberation in 1990, grows every day.

Our relationship must continue to be rooted in our shared values, interests, and vision for the future. Since 2016, the U.S.-Kuwait Strategic Dialogue has served as the framework to expand the strategic partnership between our countries and strengthen our political, economic, cultural, and military ties. We will continue to strengthen cooperation across our governments in education, healthcare, transportation, and cybersecurity. If confirmed, I will ensure the United States continues to plan for what we can accomplish together in the years to come.

The United States and Kuwait enjoy an important strategic partnership that has withstood the test of time. We must continue to work together to confront the very real threats to the region from the Iranian regime and terrorist groups. If

confirmed, I will work tirelessly to ensure the next generation of Americans and Kuwaitis can be proud of our cooperation and shared values.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I look forward to taking your questions.