

NOMINATIONS

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 2, 2020

U.S. SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS,
Washington, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 11:08 a.m., via video-conference, Hon. James E. Risch, chairman of the committee, presiding.

Present: Senators Risch [presiding], Menendez, and Cardin.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. JAMES E. RISCH, U.S. SENATOR FROM IDAHO

The CHAIRMAN. Well, good morning everyone. I apologize for the delay. We had a goodbye celebration for Senator Alexander on the floor today that Senator Menendez and I were participating in, but he is quicker at getting back to his office than I am. In any event, welcome to all of you.

Today we are going to hold a nomination hearing for five important overseas posts. Our nominees today are all career members of the Senior Foreign Service. In the COVID days, this is how we have to do it. They are awkward and difficult, but nevertheless, it has to be done.

First of all we have Mr. Kevin Blackstone, Class of Minister-Counselor, to be Ambassador to the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste; Ms. Cynthia Kierscht, Class of Counselor, to be Ambassador to the Islamic Republic of Mauritania; Mr. Brian D. McFeeters, Class of Minister-Counselor, to be Ambassador to Malaysia; The Honorable Geeta Pasi, Class of Career Minister, to be Ambassador to the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia; and The Honorable David Reimer, Class of Counselor, to be Ambassador to the Republic of Sierra Leone.

These are some important assignments that need to be done, and obviously there is at least one country in here that we have very significant concerns about. That, of course, is Ethiopia.

In any event, with that, before I recognize each of you to make your statements, I am going to recognize the Ranking Member, Senator Menendez.

STATEMENT OF HON. ROBERT MENENDEZ, U.S. SENATOR FROM NEW JERSEY

Senator MENENDEZ. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am pleased to see such a qualified panel of nominees before us today, with two former ambassadors as well as experienced State Depart-

ment personnel with sterling records of service, and I want to thank you and your families for your service to our country.

Ambassador Pasi, I look forward to hearing your views on Ethiopia, a country in the midst of a historic political transition whose outcome is of great consequence to U.S. interests. Like many others, I was impressed by the landmark political reforms implemented by Prime Minister Abiy, and while I still maintain hope that Ethiopia can build a stable, prosperous democracy, recent events raise some serious concerns.

Even before the conflict in Tigray, which I have condemned on the Senate floor, the levels of violence in Ethiopia were alarming. Political space has been closing for some time. Journalists and political opposition figures have been jailed, along with thousands of others. Ethiopia has a once-in-a-generation opportunity at democratic transformation, and the U.S. must do what it can to support a course correction.

Unfortunately, our diplomatic efforts thus far have been insufficient. I think we have to renew our efforts. We have to talk about how we are going to approach the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, which has a series of related countries that are also in the issue. And I would love to hear from you a fresh set of ideas how we engage with Ethiopia to advance both the interests of the United States and Ethiopians.

Ms. Kierscht, I love your background. It looks like an extension of your persona, the painting. You have been nominated to serve in a country that is making some notable progress. In 2019, Mauritania's president stepped down, making him the first Mauritanian leader to adhere to constitutional term limits. Mauritania was recently upgraded from tier three to tier two watch list, due to the Government's new anti-trafficking national action plan, as well as the conviction of five slaveholders. And remarkably, there has not been a terrorist attack in the country since 2011, considering that other countries in the subregion are experiencing significant increase.

However, challenges remain. There is still discrimination against the Haratin ethnic group and black Mauritians. Slavery remains a significant problem despite government efforts, and according to the 2020 Global Terrorism Index, terrorism is falling in some regions but it is rising in the Sahel. I hope you will provide us today with an overview of what the administration's strategy will be for combatting terrorism in the Sahel. In addition, I would like to know what steps you will take to improve democratic governance in Mauritania and to combat slavery. So I look forward to hearing from you.

Ambassador Reimer, I am glad that we will be spending such an experienced diplomat to Freetown. Sierra Leone is a country that one can deal with cautious optimism. With the help of the U.S. and the international community, Sierra Leone has made real progress in the end of its bitter civil war, including the fair and peaceful election of President Bio in 2018.

But the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic has tempered my optimism. Sierra Leone faces increasing economic pressures, which would make it more difficult to combat poverty and corruption and improve access to health care and education. I look forward to

hearing how the United States can help President Bio navigate these challenges.

I also look forward to hearing from Mr. McFeeters about how he plans to lead our embassy in Kuala Lumpur at a time when many countries in the region, including Malaysia, are looking to the United States for help against an increasingly aggressive China.

And finally, Mr. Blackstone, I have heard good things about your leadership at the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs during the COVID epidemic. I look forward to hearing from you about Timor-Leste, and particularly on the subject of development challenges, consolidating democratic institutions, and the risks posed by increased Chinese influence.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Menendez. We will now turn to our nominees. Your full statement from each of you will be included in the record, so if you could keep your remarks to about five minutes we would greatly appreciate that. And that will give us the opportunity to ask questions.

With that, let us start with Mr. Blackstone. Mr. Blackstone, the floor is yours.

STATEMENT OF C. KEVIN BLACKSTONE, OF VIRGINIA, A CAREER MEMBER OF THE SENIOR FOREIGN SERVICE, CLASS OF MINISTER-COUNSELOR, TO BE AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF TIMOR-LESTE

Mr. BLACKSTONE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to be sure you can hear me before I begin.

The CHAIRMAN. I can. I cannot see your picture but I can certainly hear you. That is all right. I had the same problems. There you go. Now you are back. I usually get one of my grandkids to come in and help.

Mr. BLACKSTONE. Okay.

The CHAIRMAN. Now you are off again. That is all right. We can hear you.

Mr. BLACKSTONE. Okay. Sorry. I am switching windows here. I apologize for that. I just have my notes with me.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, I am deeply honored to appear before you today as the President's nominee to be United States Ambassador to the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste. If confirmed, I look forward to working closely with this committee to advance our relationship with Timor-Leste, a young democracy and a promising friend of the United States.

With the Chairman's permission, I would like to begin by thanking the family, friends, and colleagues who have supported me through my nearly 30-year career. My wife, Alexandra, also a State Department employee; son, Benjamin, who has continued our family's tradition of public service as a U.S. Army officer; and daughter, Olivia, a college student, deserve equal credit for my professional success as we shared in the joys and challenges of the Foreign Service as a family. I also thank colleagues from the Department and across the interagency for their professionalism and support.

Mr. Chairman and members, the United States and Timor-Leste have enjoyed strong bilateral ties since Timor-Leste gained its sovereignty in 2002, and we remain committed to the success of Timor-Leste and celebrate its embrace of democracy. Our relationship is bound by mutual respect, shared values, and common interests.

Mr. Chairman, if confirmed I look forward to leading the dedicated mission team of Americans and local Timorese who work tirelessly to advance our bilateral relationship, and if confirmed I pledge to be a careful steward of the resources provided by Congress, both for the operation of our diplomatic platform and funds appropriated for development assistance.

Timor-Leste has shown that it is possible for a new country to emerge from years of conflict to establish a nation founded on democratic principles and a respect for human rights. The United States partners with Timor-Leste to strengthen security, governance, economic growth, health, agriculture, justice, and law enforcement. We implement our efforts through USAID, military-to-military engagement, the Peace Corps, Department of Agriculture, and a new Millennium Challenge corporation compact. The Timorese Government and people value U.S. assistance and welcome our cooperation and partnership.

The United States has also provided almost \$1.6 million for health assistance to the Timorese Government in its efforts to combat COVID-19, which has helped to limit the pandemic's impact there.

Our growing security partnership with Timor-Leste is focused on humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, maritime and border security, and professionalizing Timorese defense forces. For example, a rotating U.S. Navy Seabees detachment provides critical humanitarian assistance and infrastructure support to the Timorese people. In 2019, the Seabees marked their 100th construction project in the country. These projects benefit thousands of Timorese citizens and bolster the standing of the United States. As well, the Timorese recently joined the National Guard State Partnership Program, and the U.S. trains Timorese law enforcement personnel at our International Law Enforcement Academy in Thailand.

The U.S. and Timor-Leste enjoy strong people-to-people ties. With 74 percent of its population under 35 years of age, positive engagement with young people is essential to our future bilateral relationship. State Department-funded exchange programs, including the International Visitors Leadership and Fulbright programs, and the Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative, YSEALI, help shape a positive image of U.S. society and culture, especially among youth. If confirmed, I will continue to build these crucial people-to-people ties.

We recognize Timor-Leste's growing engagement on a wide range of key regional and global issues. In 2019, Timor-Leste and Australia ratified a historic maritime boundary treaty using a mechanism that could be a model for other countries seeking to solve such differences. Timor-Leste has applied to join ASEAN and the World Trade Organization, and seeks to strengthen its regional and global ties. Timor-Leste supports the rules-based order which is

fundamental to the region's security and prosperity and to a free and open Indo-Pacific region.

If confirmed, I will continue to underscore U.S. support for the sovereignty and dignity of Timor-Leste. During my Foreign Service career, Mr. Chairman, I have proudly served the United States both in Washington and abroad. If confirmed, I will use my experience to guide our mission in Dili, to strengthen our relationship as we continue to promote our interests in Timor-Leste and in the broader Indo-Pacific region.

I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today, and I am happy to answer questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Blackstone follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF C. KEVIN BLACKSTONE

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and members of the committee, I am deeply honored to appear before you today as the President's nominee to be United States Ambassador to the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste. If confirmed, I look forward to working closely with this committee to advance our relationship with Timor-Leste—a young democracy and promising friend of the United States.

With the Chairman's permission, I would like to begin by thanking my family, friends and colleagues who have supported me through my near 30-year career. My wife Alexandra, also a State Department employee, son Benjamin, who has continued our family's tradition of public service as a U.S. Army officer, and daughter Olivia, a college student, deserve equal credit for my professional success as we shared in the joys and challenges of the Foreign Service as a family. I also thank colleagues from the Department and across the interagency for their professionalism and support.

The United States and Timor-Leste have enjoyed strong bilateral ties since Timor-Leste gained its sovereignty in 2002. We remain committed to the success of Timor-Leste and celebrate its embrace of democracy. Our relationship is bound by mutual respect, shared values, and common interests.

Mr. Chairman, if confirmed, I look forward to leading the dedicated Mission team of Americans and local Timorese who work tirelessly to advance our bilateral relationship. And if confirmed, I pledge to be a careful steward of the resources provided by Congress, both for the operation of our diplomatic platform and foreign assistance.

Timor-Leste has shown it is possible for a new country to emerge from years of conflict to establish a nation founded on democratic principles and a respect for human rights. The progress of this young nation reflects the national spirit and determination of the Timorese people.

The United States partners with Timor-Leste to strengthen security, governance, economic growth, health, agriculture, justice, and law enforcement. We implement our efforts through USAID, military-to-military engagement, the Peace Corps, Department of Agriculture, and a new Millennium Challenge Corporation Compact. The Timorese Government and people value U.S. assistance and welcome our cooperation and partnership.

The United States has provided almost \$1.6 million for health assistance to the Government of Timor-Leste in its efforts to combat COVID-19, which has helped limit the pandemic's impact there.

Our growing security partnership with Timor-Leste is focused on humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, maritime and border security, and professionalizing Timorese defense forces. As one example, a rotating U.S. Navy Seabees detachment provides critical humanitarian assistance and infrastructure support to the Timorese people. In 2019, the Seabees marked their 100th construction project there. These projects benefit thousands of Timorese citizens and bolster the standing of the United States. The Timorese recently joined the National Guard State Partnership program and the United States trains Timorese law enforcement personnel at our International Law Enforcement Academy in Thailand.

The United States and Timor-Leste enjoy close people-to-people ties. With 74 percent of the Timorese population under 35 years of age, positive engagement with young people is essential to our future bilateral relationship. State Department-funded exchange programs—including the International Visitors Leadership and Fulbright Programs, and the Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative (YSEALI)—

help shape a positive image of U.S. society and culture, especially among youth. If confirmed, I will continue to build these crucial people-to-people ties.

We recognize Timor-Leste's growing engagement on a wide range of key regional and global issues. In 2019, Timor-Leste and Australia ratified a historic maritime boundary treaty using a mechanism that could be a model for other countries seeking to solve such differences. This is an important example for the region of countries peacefully settling boundary disputes according to international law.

Timor-Leste has applied to join the Association of Southeast Asian Nations—ASEAN—and the World Trade Organization and seeks to strengthen its regional and global ties. Timor-Leste supports the rules-based order which is fundamental to the region's security and prosperity and contribute to the preservation of a free and open Indo-Pacific region. If confirmed, I will continue to underscore U.S. support for the sovereignty and dignity of Timor-Leste.

During my Foreign Service career, Mr. Chairman, I have proudly served the United States both in Washington and abroad. If confirmed, I will use my experience to guide our mission in Dili to strengthen our relationship as we continue to promote our interests in Timor-Leste and the broader Indo-Pacific region.

I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today and am pleased to answer your questions.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Mr. Blackstone.

We will now turn to Cynthia Kierscht. Ms. Kierscht, the floor is yours.

STATEMENT OF CYNTHIA KIERSCHT, OF MINNESOTA, A CAREER MEMBER OF THE SENIOR FOREIGN SERVICE, CLASS OF COUNSELOR, TO BE AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF MAURITANIA

Ms. KIERSCHT. Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and distinguished members of the committee, it is an honor to appear before you today as the President's nominee to serve as the U.S. Ambassador to the Islamic Republic of Mauritania. I appreciate the confidence the President and Secretary of State have placed in me through this nomination.

Mr. Chairman, I would first like to express my deep appreciation for the love and support of my family, friends, and colleagues. In particular, I would like to recognize my mother, Marcia Kierscht, who has been an excellent role model and friend, and my late grandmother, Cynthia Selland, who, as a North Dakota public school teacher for 45 years, taught geography, and from whom I no doubt got much inspiration for this journey. I am also grateful for the love and support of my brother, Matthew, and his family.

In my 30 years of public service, it has been a privilege to represent the American people abroad. My experiences in North Africa, in Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco, have prepared me to recognize the strategic nature of Mauritania's unique geography, situated between the Maghreb and the Sahel, and its potential impact on our economic and security interests.

In my recent service as Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs, I have witnessed the power of citizens to bring change at the ballot box and the impact this can have on good governance, the rule of law, and human rights.

When I look at Mauritania I see potential, the potential for transformational progress on democratic governance, inclusion, and human rights; the potential for economic prosperity through bilateral trade and investment; and the potential to be a regional leader in security and counterterrorism. If confirmed, promoting Mauri-

tania's potential in these areas will be my primary objective, because it is in our interest to have a stable, democratic, and accountable Mauritania as a partner in the region.

Let me start with human rights. For far too long, Mauritania had a poor record on human rights that it hesitated to address. This is no longer the case. Since President Ghazouani's 2019 inauguration, Mauritania has made significant strides to address its legacy of slavery. The country is on the right track, and our engagement serves to encourage their better inclinations.

Tools provided by Congress, in the form of the African Growth and Opportunity Act eligibility criteria, and the trafficking in persons ranking restrictions help demonstrate the costs of undermining human rights. The Mauritanian Government's recent approval of new anti-trafficking legislation, establishment of a ministerial committee charged with implementing the TIP recommendations, and a doctrine of an anti-trafficking national action plan demonstrate its political will to address this issue.

Today we seem to have a partner in the Ghazouani administration to make real headway on longstanding human rights concerns, and if confirmed, I will seek to ensure this progress continues.

With progress on human rights comes the potential for increased economic prosperity through bilateral trade and investment. It is no secret that U.S. companies not only produce and sell high-quality goods and services, but they also improve the commercial climate when it comes to business ethics, transparency, and the development of local talent. Some of our hydrocarbon companies are already exploring opportunities in Mauritania with great success. U.S. businesses have also invested in the agricultural sector, but more can be done. Mauritanian fisheries are a potential market for U.S. investment and an area ripe for export to the United States. If confirmed, I will work with the U.S. interagency and private sector to promote mutual economic prosperity.

Finally, Mauritania has demonstrated great potential on the key issues of security and counterterrorism. A founding member and current president of the G5 Sahel and success story in countering violent extremism, Mauritania is willing and able to take on a leadership role to share its lessons learned within the region. In February, Mauritania hosted the FLINTLOCK exercise, comprised of 1,500 troops from 30 countries, working together to strengthen the ability of partner nations to counter violent extremist organizations, protect their borders, and provide security for their people.

Mauritania also recently joined the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, strengthening the coalition's efforts to ensure ISIS's enduring defeat in the region. Mauritania's whole-of-government approach to combatting terrorism has garnered U.S. support for both its military and law enforcement agencies tasked with pursuing terrorism.

If confirmed, I will continue to build on a relationship with the Mauritanian security forces and deepen collaboration with the G5 Sahel's secretariat, based in Nouakchott. Having served two tours in the Bureau of Counterterrorism, I understand the stakes at hand. I can also assure you that, if confirmed, the safety and security of all American citizens in Mauritania would be my highest priority.

In closing, Mauritania is a land of potential, both for its citizens and for the United States. If confirmed, I look forward to working with the embassy team, the interagency, Congress, American businesses, and nongovernmental organizations and our Mauritanian partners to ensure that this potential is fully realized to the benefit of all.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, members of the committee, I thank you for this opportunity to appear before you, and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Kierscht follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF CYNTHIA KIERSCHT

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and distinguished members of the committee, it is an honor to appear before you today as the President's nominee to serve as the U.S. Ambassador to the Islamic Republic of Mauritania. I appreciate the confidence the President and Secretary of State have placed in me through this nomination. Mr. Chairman, I would first like to express my deep appreciation for the love and support of my family, friends, and colleagues. In particular, I would like to recognize my mother, Dr. Marcia Kierscht, who has been an excellent role model and visited me at every post, and my late grandmother, Cynthia Selland, who, as a North Dakota public school teacher for 45 years taught geography, among other subjects, and from whom I no doubt got much inspiration for this journey. I am also grateful for the love and support of my brother, Matthew, and his family.

In my thirty years of public service, it has been a privilege to represent the American people and to support and protect American citizens and interests abroad. My experiences in North Africa—in Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco—have prepared me to recognize the strategic nature of Mauritania's unique geography, situated between the Maghreb and the Sahel, and its potential impact on our economic and security interests. In my recent service as Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs, I have witnessed the power of citizens to bring about positive change at the ballot box and the impact this change can have on the important issues of good governance, the rule of law, and human rights.

When I look at Mauritania, I see potential: the potential for transformational progress on democratic governance, inclusion, and human rights, the potential for economic prosperity through bilateral trade and investment, and the potential to be a regional leader in security and counterterrorism. If confirmed, promoting Mauritania's potential in these areas will be my primary objective because it is in our economic and security interest to have a stable, democratic, and accountable Mauritania as a partner in the region.

Let me start with human rights. For far too long, Mauritania had a poor record on human rights that it hesitated to address. Not only was it the last country in the world to outlaw slavery, but government officials continued to deny its very existence until fairly recently. This is no longer the case. Since President Ghazouani's 2019 inauguration, Mauritania has made significant strides to address its legacy of slavery. The country is on the right track and our engagement serves to encourage their better inclinations. Tools provided by the U.S. Congress in the form of the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) eligibility criteria and the Trafficking in Persons (TIP) ranking restrictions helped demonstrate the costs of undermining human rights. The Mauritanian Government's approval of new anti-trafficking legislation, establishment of a ministerial committee charged with implementing the TIP recommendations, and adoption of an anti-trafficking national action plan demonstrate its political will to address this issue. Today, we seem to have a partner in the Ghazouani administration to make real headway on longstanding human rights and governance concerns and, if confirmed, I will seek to ensure this progress continues.

With progress on human rights comes the potential for increased economic prosperity through bilateral trade and investment. It is no secret that U.S. companies not only produce and sell high-quality products and services, but they also improve the commercial climate when it comes to business ethics, transparency, and development of local talent. Some of our hydrocarbon companies are already exploring opportunities in Mauritania, with great success. U.S. businesses have also invested in the agricultural sector, but more can be done. Mauritanian fisheries are a potential market for U.S. investment and an area ripe for export to the United States. If confirmed, I will work with the U.S. interagency and the U.S. private sector to promote mutual economic prosperity.

Finally, Mauritania has demonstrated great potential on the key issues of security and counterterrorism. Regional efforts to ensure stability should focus on countering violent extremism and recruitment in the Sahel and denying terrorists a base of operations from which they can pose a threat on a more global scale. A founding member and current president of the G5 Sahel and a success story in countering violent extremism, Mauritania is willing and able to take on a leadership role to share its lessons learned with the region. In February, Mauritania hosted the FLINTLOCK exercise, comprised of 1500 troops from 30 countries, working together to strengthen the ability of partner nations to counter violent extremist organizations, protect their borders, and provide security for their people. Reaffirming its commitment to countering terrorism, Mauritania recently joined the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, strengthening the coalition's efforts to ensure ISIS's enduring defeat in the region. Mauritania's whole-of-government approach to combating terrorism has garnered U.S. support for both its military and law enforcement agencies tasked with pursuing terrorism. If confirmed, I will continue to build upon the relationship we have with the Mauritanian security forces and deepen collaboration with the G5 Sahel Secretariat based in Nouakchott. Having served two tours in the Bureau of Counterterrorism, I personally understand the stakes at hand. I can also assure you that, if confirmed, the safety and security of all American citizens in Mauritania would be my highest priority.

In closing, Mauritania is a land of potential, both for the Mauritians and for the United States. If confirmed, I look forward to working with the Embassy team, the interagency, Congress, American businesses and non-governmental organizations, and our Mauritanian partners to ensure that this potential is fully realized to the benefit of all.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, members of the committee, I thank you for this opportunity to appear before you and look forward to your questions.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you so much. We appreciate that.

Now we will turn to Mr. McFeeters, the nominee for Ambassador to Malaysia.

STATEMENT OF BRIAN D. McFEETERS, OF VIRGINIA, A CAREER MEMBER OF THE SENIOR FOREIGN SERVICE, CLASS OF MINISTER-COUNSELOR, TO BE AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO MALAYSIA

Mr. McFEETERS. Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I am honored to be the President's nominee to serve as the United States Ambassador to Malaysia.

With your permission, Mr. Chairman, I would like to recognize my wife, Melanie, who has not only worked at the posts where we have served but has also ensured that our three children thrived, including when we were evacuated and during periods when I was serving overseas unaccompanied. I would also like to recognize my parents, my father, James, who served as a U.S. Air Force officer for 30 years, including leading a fighter squadron in Vietnam, and my mother, Nancy, who taught elementary school for 30 years.

If confirmed as Ambassador to Malaysia, I will draw on my 29 years of experience as a Foreign Service Officer, including leadership positions as Deputy Chief of Mission in Baghdad and Jakarta, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Bureau of Economic and Business Affairs, and Senior Advisor to the Counselor of the Department.

In recent years, Mr. Chairman, the United States and Malaysia have greatly expounded defense and law enforcement cooperation to promote the safety and security of citizens in both of our countries. We cooperate in combatting terrorism and transnational crime, and countering violent extremist narratives to keep both our

borders and our skies safe. If confirmed, I intend to work with Malaysia to deepen our close security and law enforcement cooperation, particularly in shared priority areas such as maritime security, counterterrorism, and cybersecurity.

The United States has recovered and assisted in the recovery of more than \$1.2 billion in assets associated with the 1MDB international money laundering and bribery scheme. The Department of Justice continues to trace and recover these stolen assets so that they can be returned to the benefit of the Malaysian people. If confirmed, I intend to continue supporting our mutual commitment to combat corruption.

The United States is among Malaysia's largest foreign investors. Last year, bilateral trade reached nearly \$60 billion, and Malaysia produces important PPE supplies and components used in our health sector. We are grateful for Malaysia's efforts to keep vital supply chains open during the global pandemic, and the fact that they facilitated export of critical PPE to U.S. frontline workers earlier this year.

The United States promotes the rule of law, transparency, and good governance, and freedom of expression in Malaysia. Human trafficking, including forced labor, remains a significant issue in Malaysia, and the Government has much work to do. If confirmed, I will urge Malaysian Government officials to significantly improve anti-trafficking efforts and investigate and prosecute allegations of forced labor. I will also coordinate with Malaysia and UNHCR regarding the safety and security of nearly 180,000 refugees and asylum seekers, including 100,000 Rohingya.

Our public diplomacy programs demonstrate the strong connection between the United States and Malaysia. The Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative is a vibrant part of our engagement, with nearly 500 emerging Malaysian leaders participating in programs last year. If confirmed, I intend to continue support for these people-to-people programs.

While Malaysia maintains close relations with China, Beijing is increasingly encroaching on Malaysian-claimed maritime areas in the South China Sea. The PRC's assertive and provocative activities are hampering Malaysia's longstanding efforts to pursue its interests in exploiting natural resources off its coast. The United States is concerned about China's actions and destabilizing presence in the South China Sea, and rejects Beijing's unlawful South China Sea maritime claims. If confirmed, I will support Malaysian and regional efforts regarding freedom of navigation and overflight and unimpeded lawful commerce in the South China Sea. I will also encourage Malaysia to pursue open and transparent investment in infrastructure deals to avoid negative Chinese economic influence.

Malaysia is a regional leader in combatting COVID-19, and has taken proactive measures to respond to the pandemic. As a result, the country is working to contain the spread of the virus. If confirmed, I will engage with the Government of Malaysia to partner on bilateral and regional initiatives to mitigate the spread of the disease.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, I thank you for this opportunity to appear before you, and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. McFeeters follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF BRIAN D. McFEETERS

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I am honored to be the President's nominee to serve as the United States Ambassador to Malaysia.

With your permission Mr. Chairman, I would like to recognize my wife Melanie, who has not only worked at the posts where we have served but also ensured that our three children thrived, including when we were evacuated and during periods when I was serving overseas unaccompanied. I would also like to recognize my parents: my father James, who served as a U.S. Air Force officer for 30 years including leading a fighter squadron in Vietnam, and my mother Nancy, who taught elementary school for even longer, both examples of public service whom I have sought to emulate.

If confirmed as Ambassador to Malaysia, I will draw on my 29 years of experience as a Foreign Service Officer, including leadership positions as Deputy Chief of Mission in Baghdad and Jakarta, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Bureau of Economic and Business Affairs, and Senior Advisor to the Counselor of the Department.

In recent years, the United States and Malaysia have greatly expanded defense and law enforcement cooperation in order to promote the safety and security of the citizens of both our countries. We cooperate on combatting terrorism and transnational crime and countering violent extremist narratives to keep our borders and skies safe. If confirmed, I intend to work with Malaysia to deepen our close security and law enforcement cooperation, particularly in shared priority areas such as maritime security, counterterrorism, and cybersecurity.

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Our public diplomacy programs demonstrate the strong connection between the United States and Malaysia. The Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative, or YSEALI, is a vibrant part of our engagement with nearly 500 emerging Malaysian leaders participating in programs last year. The Fulbright English Teaching Assistant program places recent American college graduates in underserved public schools throughout Malaysia to teach English. If confirmed, I intend to continue support for these people-to-people programs.

While Malaysia maintains close relations with China, Beijing is increasingly encroaching on Malaysian-claimed maritime areas in the South China Sea. The PRC's assertive and provocative activities are hampering Malaysia's longstanding efforts to pursue its interests in exploiting natural resources off its coast. The United States is concerned about China's actions and destabilizing presence in the South China Sea and rejects Beijing's unlawful South China Sea maritime claims. If confirmed, I will support both Malaysian and regional efforts regarding freedom of navigation and overflight, and unimpeded lawful commerce in the South China Sea. I will also encourage Malaysia to pursue open and transparent investment and infrastructure deals to avoid negative Chinese economic influence.

Malaysia is a regional leader in combating COVID-19 and has taken proactive measures to respond to the pandemic. As a result, the country is working to contain the spread of the virus. If confirmed, I will engage with the Government of Malaysia to partner on bilateral and regional initiatives to mitigate the spread of the disease.

Mr. Chairman, I thank you for this opportunity to appear before you and the other members of the committee. I look forward to your questions.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much.

We will now turn to The Honorable Geeta Pasi, who has been nominated for the ambassadorship to the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, certainly a country that is on all of our radars these days. So, Ms. Pasi, the floor is yours.

STATEMENT OF THE HON. GEETA PASI, OF NEW YORK, A CAREER MEMBER OF THE SENIOR FOREIGN SERVICE, CLASS OF CAREER MINISTER, TO BE AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE FEDERAL DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF ETHIOPIA

Ambassador PASI. Thank you very much. Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and distinguished members of the committee, I am deeply honored to appear as the nominee to serve as the U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia. I am grateful to the President and the Secretary of State for the confidence they have shown in nominating me for this position. If confirmed, I will work with this committee and the Congress to advance our country's interests in Ethiopia.

I would like to recognize my sisters, Usha and Rita, and my brother, Sunil Kumar, and their families, and thank them for their love and support. I am a naturalized American who came here as a child of immigrants. Serving my country as Ambassador is the highest honor. I would like to thank my friends, family, neighbors, and colleagues who have helped me reach this point.

Mr. Chairman, during more than 30 years as a Foreign Service Officer, I have had a variety of assignments, including in countries in transition. I have had the honor to serve as Ambassador twice, to Djibouti and Chad. Throughout my career, helping develop the strength and effectiveness of the State Department has been a priority, including when I served in the Bureau of Human Resources and now as Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Bureau of African Affairs. If confirmed, I will commit to continuing to support the development of my institution and my colleagues, including by recruiting and promoting the careers of a corps of professionals and leaders that reflect the strength and diversity of our great nation.

Mr. Chairman, our interests in Ethiopia are primarily in the areas of peace and security, democratic governance, and economic development, as well as promotion of U.S. business. The crisis in the Tigray region of Ethiopia is grave, with risks to life, Ethiopian and regional stability, and our national interests. The Government of Ethiopia has announced the end of military operations. The United States remains concerned about ongoing hostilities and the risks the conflict poses.

Throughout this crisis we have cautioned against creating an ethnic conflict, and have encouraged the Government of Ethiopia to engage with moderate to grand leaders to restore peace. The United States, the African Union, and other international partners are ready to assist with dialogue and reconciliation. We also con-

tinue to urge protection of civilians and facilitation of free, safe, and unhindered humanitarian access, which prioritizes safety and protection of American citizens in Ethiopia.

This is a critical moment for Ethiopia. Prime Minister Abiy made sweeping changes and made progress addressing longstanding democratic concerns, including human rights and press freedom. The complex issues that impede transition in Ethiopia include land tenure, ethnic tensions, and youth unemployment. The current Tigray crisis poses a threat to Ethiopia's reform agenda and national unity.

Also at risk is Ethiopia's leadership in promoting peace and stability and countering violent extremism in the region. Africa and the world need a stable, secure, and peaceful Ethiopia. If confirmed, I will work hard for peace and stability in the Horn.

The United States maintains strong relations with Ethiopia and aims to strengthen our partnership. While the security of Ethiopia and the region is front and center in our bilateral relationship, we also seek to promote democracy and good governance. If confirmed, I will also advocate for full respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

U.S. national interests lie in supporting Ethiopia's economic progress as well. If confirmed, I will work to promote a business climate in Ethiopia that encourages U.S. private sector activity and ensures a level playing field for American businesses.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, if confirmed as the next U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia, my top priority will be the security interests and welfare of American citizens, whether by ensuring responsive consular services or strengthening partnerships against terrorism, this priority will drive the Embassy's agenda.

Ethiopia is a dynamic nation with an extraordinary history. I am honored by your consideration of me to serve in such an important posting. I will draw on my experience to navigate our engagement with the current challenges, and as Ethiopia begins its next chapter, one that holds unlimited potential for Ethiopia, the Horn of Africa, and the United States.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, I thank you for the privilege of appearing before you today. I welcome any questions you might have. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ambassador Pasi follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. GEETA PASI

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and distinguished members of the committee, I am deeply honored to appear as the nominee to serve as the U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia. I am grateful to the President and the Secretary of State for the confidence they have shown in nominating me for this position. If confirmed, I will work with this committee and the Congress to advance our country's interests in Ethiopia.

I would like to recognize my sisters, Usha and Rita, and my brother, Sunil Kumar, and their families and thank them for their love and support. I am a naturalized American who came here as a child of immigrants. Serving my country as ambassador is the highest honor. I would like to thank my family, friends, neighbors, and colleagues who have helped me reach this point.

If confirmed as ambassador, I will promote and protect U.S. interests and values in Ethiopia. I would look forward to working closely with members of this committee and your staffs in that endeavor.

Mr. Chairman, during more than thirty years as a Foreign Service Officer, I have had a variety of assignments, including in countries in transition. I have had the

honor to serve as ambassador twice—to Djibouti and Chad. Overseas, I served in Ghana when the country had its first democratic elections and in Romania shortly after the fall of Nicolae Ceausescu. I was in Bangladesh when the caretaker government declared a state of emergency and helped steer the country to democratic elections. In Washington, I was the Afghanistan Desk Officer on September 11, 2001. I had covered the country for about six weeks when our country was attacked by the Afghan-based al Qaeda network. I served as Office Director for East African Affairs with broad policy and program responsibility for East Africa, including the Horn of Africa. Throughout my career, helping develop the strength and effectiveness of the State Department has been a priority, including when I served in the Bureau of Human Resources and now as Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Bureau of African Affairs. If confirmed, I am committed to continuing to support the development of my institution and my colleagues, including by recruiting and promoting the careers of a corps of professionals and leaders that reflects the strength and diversity of our great nation.

Mr. Chairman, if confirmed, I look forward to leading our embassy in Ethiopia in advancing the interests of the United States. Our team in Addis Ababa consists of Foreign Service and Civil Service personnel, military staff assigned to the Embassy, and the invaluable Foreign Service National employees. Our interests in Ethiopia are primarily in the areas of peace and security, democratic governance, and economic development, as well as the promotion of U.S. business.

The crisis in the Tigray region of Ethiopia is grave, with risks to life, Ethiopian and regional stability, and our national interests. While the Government of Ethiopia announced on November 28 the end of military operations, the United States is still concerned about ongoing hostilities and the risks the conflict poses.

During his call with Prime Minister Abiy on November 30, Secretary Pompeo called for a complete end to the fighting and constructive dialogue to resolve the conflict. Throughout this crisis we have cautioned against creating an ethnic conflict and have encouraged the Government of Ethiopia to engage with moderate Tigrayan leaders to restore peace. The United States, the African Union, and other international partners are ready to assist with dialogue and reconciliation. We also continue to urge protection of civilians and facilitation of free, safe, and unhindered humanitarian access. To date, more than 45,000 Ethiopian refugees have entered Sudan, stretching humanitarian operations there. We continue to work closely with our partners in the region to ensure the safety and protection of American citizens in the Tigray region.

This is a critical moment for Ethiopia. Popular desires for greater political freedom and civil liberties led to the selection of Abiy Ahmed as prime minister in 2018. Abiy made sweeping changes to Ethiopia, and made progress addressing longstanding democratic concerns, including human rights and press freedom. The complex issues that impede transition in Ethiopia include land tenure, ethnic tensions, and youth unemployment. The current Tigray crisis poses a threat to Ethiopia's reform agenda and national unity.

Also at risk is Ethiopia's leadership in promoting peace and stability and countering violent extremism in the region, if an outflow of refugees from Ethiopia, a stalled political process, and violence continue unabated. Africa and the world need a stable, secure, and peaceful Ethiopia. Ethiopia's significant contributions to the African Union's counterterrorism and peace support mission in Somalia and to the United Nations' peacekeeping efforts in South Sudan, as well as Ethiopia's leading role in the South Sudanese peace process are at stake. Ethiopia also contributes to regional stability as the third-largest host of refugees in Africa. If confirmed, I will work hard for peace and stability in the Horn.

The United States maintains strong relations with Ethiopia and aims to strengthen our partnership. While the security of Ethiopia and the region is front and center in our bilateral relationship, we also seek to promote democracy and good governance. If confirmed, I will work with you to represent the interests and values of the American people to the Government and people of Ethiopia at this critical juncture. I will also advocate for full respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as for reforms that strengthen democratic institutions. Ethiopia's respect for these values we share will enhance our partnership.

U.S. national interests lie in supporting Ethiopia's economic progress as well, because a sound business and investment environment can drive the growth needed to underpin long-term stability. These factors also create opportunities for American businesses, and if confirmed, I will work to promote a business climate in Ethiopia that encourages U.S. private sector activity and ensures a level playing field for U.S. firms.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, if confirmed as the next U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia, my top priority will be the security, interests, and welfare of

American citizens. Whether by ensuring responsive consular services, promoting American values, advocating for U.S. businesses, or strengthening partnerships against terrorism, this priority will drive the Embassy's agenda.

Ethiopia is a dynamic nation with an extraordinary history of independence and accomplishments as well as a future of enormous potential. I am honored by your consideration of me to serve in such an important posting and I will draw on the depth of my experience to navigate our engagement through the current challenges facing Ethiopia.

If confirmed, I will welcome input and advice from you and your staff on any aspect of the multifaceted relationship between the United States and Ethiopia. I will also be pleased, if confirmed, to receive you and your staff in Ethiopia and to keep you apprised of the activities of the U.S. Embassy in Addis Ababa.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, I thank you for the privilege of appearing before you today. If confirmed, I would welcome the challenge of protecting and advancing the interests of the United States in Ethiopia: It is a duty and responsibility I would be honored to accept. Thank you and I welcome any questions you might have.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Ms. Pasi.

Finally, we will turn to David Reimer, who has been nominated to Ambassador to the Republic of Sierra Leone. Mr. Reimer, the floor is yours.

STATEMENT OF THE HON. DAVID REIMER, OF OHIO, A CAREER MEMBER OF THE SENIOR FOREIGN SERVICE, CLASS OF COUNSELOR, TO BE AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE

Ambassador REIMER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Menendez, and members of the committee, thank you for this opportunity to appear before you and for your consideration of my nomination by President Trump to be the next U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Sierra Leone. I would like to thank President Trump and Secretary Pompeo for their trust in me to lead the U.S. Embassy and to maintain our strong relationship with Sierra Leone. If confirmed by the U.S. Senate, I will uphold that trust.

At this point I would like to recognize my wife, Simonetta Romagnolo, currently listening in, along with her family, in Italy—Simonetta is an employee of the U.S. Consulate in Milan—as well as my parents, Richard and Lois Reimer, in Kansas; my brother, Paul, and his family, in Illinois; and my sister, Sue, and her family, in Pennsylvania.

Sierra Leone has demonstrated progress, despite extreme adversity, in maintaining peace, strengthening democracy, and working toward an environment suitable for economic growth. The people of Sierra Leone have demonstrated resiliency and the capacity to rebuild after crises, including a devastating decade-long civil war, which ended in 2002, and the Ebola epidemic of 2014–2015, during which roughly 14,000 individuals contracted the disease and nearly 4,000 died.

Now Sierra Leone is responding to the COVID–19 pandemic and its severe health and economic impacts. The COVID–19 pandemic has tested the resilience of the Sierra Leonean people, and the U.S. Government is a primary partner in their response efforts. The pandemic is having a devastating impact on Sierra Leone's small and fragile economy. The GDP growth rate is projected to drop from +5.1 percent to -3.1 percent by the end of 2020. Lives and

livelihoods have been lost. And just as we stood with the Sierra Leoneans during the Ebola crisis, the United States will support Sierra Leone's recovery from COVID-19.

Even prior to the onset of COVID-19, Sierra Leoneans faced social and health challenges. The country ranks near the very bottom, at 181 out of 189 countries, on the UN's Human Development Index, with high rates of maternal mortality, child malnutrition, and malaria. Sierra Leone must allocate funds and resources to public health. Doing so will be crucial to the country's future progress. If confirmed, I will work with Sierra Leonean leaders to ensure that public health remains a top national priority.

If confirmed, I will continue our focus on strengthening democratic institutions and combatting corruption. Since 2002, Sierra Leone has held four successful presidential and legislative elections that were broadly judged to be free, fair, and transparent. Sierra Leone has an important presidential election in 2023. I will make it a priority in my first months to engage with political parties, civil society, and other stakeholders to advocate for continued dialogue and a free, fair, and peaceful election.

The Government has made progress in establishing a market-based economy and taken steps to protect worker rights. If confirmed, I would advocate to improve the investment climate for U.S. and foreign businesses, which would contribute to Sierra Leone's private sector growth and development. And at the same time, I will work closely with the U.S. business community to encourage greater trade and investment between our two countries to spur prosperity both for Americans and Sierra Leoneans. As an Economic-conned officer, this is an area of particular professional and personal interest.

We are starting off on a strong footing with our relationship with Sierra Leone. We have many shared goals, and if confirmed, I will enhance our strong bilateral relationship, while maintaining our principles of promoting democratic governance, respect for human rights, and the rule of law.

In addition to these policy aims, I hold paramount the safety and security of the hundreds of U.S. citizens resident in Sierra Leone, and the entire U.S. Embassy team, including U.S. citizen employees, their families, and our Sierra Leonean colleagues. If confirmed, I would do everything within my power to ensure the security of our Mission and oversee its smooth operation.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to appear before you today. I welcome your questions.

[The prepared statement of Ambassador Reimer follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. DAVID REIMER

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Menendez, and members of the committee, thank you for this opportunity to appear before you and for your consideration of my nomination by President Trump to be the next U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Sierra Leone. I would like to thank President Trump and Secretary Pompeo for their trust in me to lead the U.S. Embassy and to maintain our strong relationship with Sierra Leone. If confirmed by the U.S. Senate, I will uphold that trust. I would like to recognize my wife, Simonetta Romagnolo, who is listening in from Italy today. Simonetta is an employee of the U.S. Consulate in Milan, Italy. I would also like to recognize my parents, Richard and Lois Reimer, in Kansas; my brother Paul and his family in Illinois and my sister Sue and her family in Pennsylvania.

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Thank you, Mr. Chairman for the opportunity to appear before you today. I welcome your questions.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you so much. We want to thank all of you for the sacrifices and willingness to serve in these difficult positions, and particularly your families who share in that sacrifice. So our thanks to all of you.

On a note here, we have got voting starting in a little bit. We are going to stick with this as long as we can, maybe take a break if we have to, but now we are going to get the questions from members of the committee. And we will start with Senator Menendez.

Senator MENENDEZ. Mr. Chairman, did you call upon me? You faded out at some point.

The CHAIRMAN. I am sorry. I did call on you. I told everyone, of course, we have votes starting, but we are going to go through questioning, and you are first.

Senator MENENDEZ. Thank you very much. Thank you all for your testimony.

Ambassador Pasi, as you know the Horn of Africa is undergoing potentially tectonic shifts, given the possible transitions in Sudan and Ethiopia. That has significant implications for the strategic Red Sea Corridor, where the United States has an important set of national security interests.

In that vein, let me ask you the following. Does the administration have a comprehensive policy for the Red Sea Corridor, and if so, can you discuss with me what it is?

Ambassador PASI. Thank you, sir. We have an approach toward the Red Sea, and that is, actually we have engaged with the U.S. Institute for Peace and others in efforts they have had to discuss the Red Sea. We are engaging with our colleagues in the Near East and Near East Asia Bureau, because, of course, our interests are not—the Red Sea is not limited just to the Africa Bureau. We also have discussions with all of our chiefs of mission. We had a mission conference in February. I would say that we have an approach. We do not have a formal written document, but we definitely are focused on it. Similarly, we are looking other issues beyond the Red Sea, like China, and doing the same thing with East Asia Pacific.

Senator MENENDEZ. But an approach is not a comprehensive policy. Should we have a comprehensive policy for the Red Sea Corridor?

Ambassador PASI. Well, Senator, if I might speak frankly, I think it would be really very good. In the past, the State Department has often—the U.S. Government has often looked at countries bilaterally. But, you know, if you are the investor you only care about Djibouti, perhaps, but you cannot anymore, in 2020. We have issues with China or Russia. We are doing a great job, I think, on things like maligned influences from Russia or China or other countries, which I do not need to name. You are well familiar with them. But where we could do more, I think, is formalize this and start to think more broadly. Thank you.

Senator MENENDEZ. Is there—well, I appreciate that, and I think we should have a policy, and I look forward to working with the State Department to see if we can develop one. What formal mechanisms exist in the State Department to develop and coordinate policy and priorities between the African Bureau and the Near East Affairs?

Ambassador PASI. Senator, we interact very regularly on specific issues. For example, we have a special envoy for Sudan, as you know, Ambassador Donald Booth, when he travels to the region, and then he also goes to places like Saudi Arabia and elsewhere. Somebody from Near East Asia travels with him and supports that trip, because we realize that Sudan is on the border of Africa and Near East Asia, and there is a lot of dialogue that is important to take place, that must take place, not just in Washington, in Khartoum, but also in Dubai and other places.

Similarly, we are very coordinated on China with our colleagues in East Asia Pacific area. We meet regularly. We coordinate with our Under Secretary for Political Affairs and others. We even have people who are Chinese experts assigned to our Embassies. We have one now and we are adding two more this year who are going to be serving in African posts. One will be in Djibouti and one is in Kenya, a third is in West Africa, to help bring us closer together,

because there is a lot of expertise about these countries that we may not have in the Africa Bureau. But certainly NEA or EAP or our sister bureaus would have that.

Senator MENENDEZ. Let me ask you a country-specific question. As you know, in November, serious armed conflict broke out in Ethiopia's northern Tigray region, which pitted federal and allied forces against those of the Tigray People's Liberation Front. And while the full course of that conflict remains unclear, it is but the latest round of violent unrest that has beset the country since 2018, and exacted a serious humanitarian toll on the Ethiopian people.

On the floor of the Senate I have called upon the United States to take urgent diplomatic action to address this escalating conflict. What, in your view, are the drivers of this violence? What political issues have to be addressed in order to bring an end to the ongoing conflicts in Ethiopia and lead to a sustainable peace?

Ambassador PAST. Thank you, sir. We really appreciated your statement. I think that Ethiopia is a country that for many years was ruled by one small group, the Tigray, under the TPLF. The group that you mentioned has been in conflict with the federal government. It is hard to make a transition, I think, where a country was controlled by a small group and have an inclusive process.

I think the main issue that, if confirmed, I would stress to my interlocutors in Ethiopia, and I would hope that others in Washington would be raising this to you at different levels and through other channels, that the process of democracy cannot be about one person. It has to be about the institutions, civil society, all the group. So despite some groups feeling like they do not have certain rights or privileges, they have to be included in the democratic process.

Other issues that are really significant in Ethiopia are lack of ability to own land. Land tenure is a huge issue. Unemployment. Ethiopia has a very significant growth rate, over 6 percent, and down to about 3.5 now because of COVID, like many countries. But all that success is not reaching average Ethiopians. You know, we have talked about the fact that you cannot get in touch with the Tigray region because communications are cut off or do not work, but even every day of the week, every day of the year, communications are a problem, with lack of internet and so on.

I think economic progress is going to be essential, but not just a high growth rate but economic progress that really improves the lives of average Ethiopians. A lot of the frustration is about groups that feel like they have not gotten what they feel they deserve, and there is this lack of inclusiveness, which I think the prime minister welcomed when he first came. He has faced a lot of challenges now with Tigray and some other groups. I believe that we can help him work toward the democracy that he wants, the democracy that we want, and what is needed in Ethiopia. Thank you.

Senator MENENDEZ. Mr. Chairman, I have questions for the other nominees but I see other colleagues. Let me just end, if I may, with one last question to you, Ambassador. The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam has been a source of conflict between Egypt, Ethiopia, and others. How do you see—what role do you see the United States—I know the role that has played so far, so far it has

not been very, I do not know if we can say it is constructive. What role do you see us playing in order to end up in a peaceful resolution of the issues?

Ambassador PASI. Thank you. It is complicated, you are right, and it involves Sudan, Egypt, and Ethiopia. We have played largely an observer role, and to date we have not reached the result that we had hoped for. I think we can encourage the parties, encourage Ethiopia, Sudan, as well as Egypt to work together. It cannot just be done from Addis. It has to be done with all parties, to try to get them to see the value.

South Africa has taken the lead on hosting meetings, and there have been a number of them, not just the meetings—there have been meetings over several months. But we have not moved forward. I think, ultimately, these three countries need to see the value in this for themselves. There is tremendous energy potential, water potential. I mean, it is a win-win for all the countries. I think we can recommend, we can suggest, we can ask other partners in the world who they might listen to, to help encourage. And I think that is what we can do right now to help move this process. Thank you.

Senator MENENDEZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you. Ms. Pasi, I am going to jump in real quick with a question on that subject, since it has been raised. As I meet with people from the region, almost all of them are unanimous in saying that the United States should weigh in more heavily on trying to resolve the issues surrounding the dam. Frankly, as I listen to the parties and listen to what their positions are, I am not sure that would be helpful. But what is your view on that?

Ambassador PASI. Thank you, sir. Well, we have weighed in, you know, and the foreign ministers have met the President of the United States on several occasions with the three countries. We have had high-level weigh-in.

I think, obviously, the current crisis in Ethiopia has sidetracked any possibilities to have meaningful talks with other countries for the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam. Really it is focused on the struggle right now in Tigray. I think we can encourage. I am not sure how you can force three countries, because it is not just Ethiopia, as I said. If I am confirmed as Ambassador to Ethiopia I commit that I will press them to do this. It is in their interest and the interest of the other countries. But, of course, there are two other parties involved in this equation.

So I think perhaps rethinking and trying to narrow down exactly what the issues are. There have been different issues of concern at different times. In recent discussions, I saw that Sudan raised concerns. You know, it is not just Ethiopia that might have concerns. So it is a three-way event and it is going to require a lot of coordination. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you. One of the reasons I reached the conclusion that I did that I am not sure it would be helpful is that reading between the lines of these people's requests, what they really mean is they want us, the United States, to take their side in the dispute. I think that is a code that they are using when they say they want us more involved in this. I agree with you it is complicated and certainly delicate, and thank you for your efforts.

Senator Cardin.

Senator CARDIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and let me just thank all of our nominees. You all have given your careers to public service, and we know that it is a sacrifice for your family and we thank you for very distinguished careers and your willingness to serve in challenging places around the world. And certainly these countries that are in today's hearing all have challenges. They are all trying to move towards more democratic states, and, therefore, our missions in these countries are going to be particularly important.

In regards to the Renaissance Dam in Ethiopia, I agree with the Chairman. The United States has to be somewhat neutral in how to resolve—how the issue should be resolved, but that it needs to be through consultation and negotiations between the affected states. And, of course, Ethiopia took some direct action, and then President Trump rolled in and said maybe Egypt should just bomb the dam. That, I do not think, is looked at as being neutral.

So I think we have some challenges to get to that position where we can facilitate a resolution of the conflict that is in the region. And I appreciate your diplomatic responses to both the Chairman and Ranking Member, but it is an issue that needs to be resolved for the stability in that region.

My question, and I think I will first direct it to Ethiopia but also in regards to Malaysia—these are countries that are attempting to move towards more democratic governments. And the question is how does our mission in country facilitate the type of progress being made in these countries towards democratic institutions, and how do we wrap our priorities around our mission to the values of good governance, and respect for human rights, respect for civil societies? How are you going to make that a priority? First of all, will you make that a priority, how are you going to make that a priority, and will you work with the members of our committee that are directly interested in expanding rights in each of these countries?

Ambassador PASI. Thank you, Senator. Yes, Ethiopia is certainly a country in transition, moving towards democracy. Ethiopia receives assistance from the United States that we use to support civil society, ensuring there is a platform for people to discuss their political views in the run-up to an election, which we believe will take place in mid 2021. It had been postponed because of COVID.

So I believe that the Embassy, as I see it from my position here in Washington as PDAS, is engaging in many, many ways, through USAID funding. There are many, many things that do that, either to provide funding, to provide platforms. When I visited Ethiopia, accompanied with Secretary, we met with the religious leaders in Ethiopia. They are very influential. They had a lot of views about human rights and democracy.

So there are many, many ways that the Embassy is currently engaging, and if I am confirmed, I commit that I will continue and look at ways that we can expand those efforts to reach areas that perhaps we are unable to reach as easily.

Senator CARDIN. Can I just follow up on that quickly? Will you ensure that our mission will always welcome civil societies that are

standing up for progress on human rights on behalf of the people of Ethiopia within Ethiopia?

Ambassador PASI. Yes, sir, I can confirm that I will do that. That is something I have always done in other posts and something that is very important in Ethiopia. Thank you.

Senator CARDIN. And, Mr. Chairman, if I could get a response in regards to Malaysia I would appreciate it.

Mr. MCFEETERS. The focus on democratic accountable government is something that I would clearly emphasize if I were confirmed. It is something that the Embassy has worked on.

I think as you know, Senator, Malaysia has a dynamic democracy. They have high voter participation. They have largely freedom of the press, although we have some concerns about pushback on freedom of the press lately, so that is an area where we would focus on.

On human rights, human rights in general are very important, particularly in Malaysia. The issue of human rights surrounding trafficking in persons is high on the list. More generally, issues surrounding foreign workers in Malaysia, about 20 percent of the workforce is foreign workers. Something 2 to 4 million of them undocumented, which makes them vulnerable. They have been exploited. There have been horrific crimes against these workers.

These are all areas that we support through our people-to-people programs, through our advocacy. We try to connect people with leaders on these issues back in the United States, through the International Visitor Leadership Program. So it is a central priority for U.S. mission in Kuala Lumpur now, and it would be if I were confirmed, to continue that.

Senator CARDIN. And I would just ask the same question I just previously asked as to our mission being available for civil societies so that they can represent the concerns about progress being made in the country in regards to human rights.

Mr. MCFEETERS. Yes, sir. When I served in Malaysia about ten years ago we had a number of close relationships with civil society organizations. They are great partners for what they do, and they also tell us a lot about what is going on in the country, so that would certainly continue.

Senator CARDIN. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you. I do not see any of our other members logged in. We had a number of members who have attended this meeting that were logged in. Anybody want to claim some time here? I do not see any.

Senator Menendez, anything else for the good of the order?

Senator MENENDEZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Ms. Kierscht, what would you describe as the administration's strategy for the Sahel?

Ms. KIERSCHT. Thank you for the question, Senator. As I understand, in response to the growing instability in the region, the Department of State adopted the diplomatic engagement framework earlier this year for the Sahel, which the goal is to improve internal and external coordination. Through that there was the appointment of the Special Envoy for the Sahel, Ambassador Peter Pham, who is charged with deepening engagement on the issues.

If confirmed, I would look forward to working with him as the Ambassador to Mauritania closely on Mauritania's role in promoting peace and security in the larger Sahel, particularly since Nouakchott hosts, of course, the G5 Sahel Secretariat, and currently holds its presidency.

Senator MENENDEZ. All right. Let me ask you, Mauritania—how active has Mauritania been in the G5 Sahel counterterrorism operations, and what accounts for their level of engagement?

Ms. KIERSCHT. We have a very active partnership with Mauritania as regards to counterterrorism within the Sahel. We share the common goal, obviously, of countering terrorism and denying conditions that are ripe for recruitment and radicalization.

I am very pleased to announce that Mauritania was just the most recent partner country to join the global coalition to defeat ISIS, on November 10th. They became the 83rd participant. And we look forward to engaging with them in order to work further on defeating ISIS in West Africa. They also have been a very strong partner with us in the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership, which is working within the Maghreb and the Sahel to improve security sector capabilities, border security, address the underlying issues of counterterrorism, as well as promoting moderate voices in vulnerable populations.

In particular, with Mauritania, we have worked through the TSCTP to help them monitor their border with Mali, and have sustained professional units during operations against al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb. Through TSCTP we have also worked on skills training for Mauritanian youth that are vulnerable to extremism.

But as you point out, regional cooperation is crucial for defeating terrorists, as they know no borders, which is why we also support the G5 Sahel Secretariat, which, as I mentioned, is located in Nouakchott, as well as the G5 Sahel Joint Forces, as an African solution to African issues. Thank you.

Senator MENENDEZ. Ambassador Reimer, President Bio ran on a promise to combat corruption, which is endemic in the Sierra Leone. Recently, former President Koroma was interviewed by an anti-corruption agency as part of an investigation into corruption during his tenure. How would you assess Bio's record on combating corruption?

Ambassador REIMER. Thank you for that question, Senator. I think the record so far is pretty good. I would say corruption is probably one of the biggest obstacles that Sierra Leone faces. In terms of economic and social development transparency, international ranked Sierra Leone, I think it was 119 out of 198 countries in the world, which is not very good. However, it is an increase in ten places over last year. As well, the MCC scorecards that come out every year, the last two years Sierra Leone has passed the corruption grades.

So I think it is fair to say that Sierra Leone, under President Bio, has made progress, but I also think it is fair to say that there is a lot more room to improve, and if confirmed, I look forward to working on that issue. Thank you.

Senator MENENDEZ. One other question for you. Women and girls continue to face violence and severe discrimination in Sierra Leone. A shocking 86 percent of women have undergone some form of fe-

male genital mutilation. What is the U.S. doing to combat gender-based violence in Sierra Leone? How serious is this new administration, meaning the Bio administration, about confronting GBV?

Ambassador REIMER. Thank you, Senator. Just recently I saw an interview with the President—I think it was just about two weeks ago—where the President, he himself brought it up during the interview as one of the priorities of his administration. So that is very encouraging to see that the Government gets it and the Government understands it.

My understanding, as well, is that USAID has been involved in funding efforts to prevent this practice, and again, as you say, this is a very important, very prevalent, and something that, if confirmed, I would continue to work on.

Senator MENENDEZ. Well, I hope those last two issues we discussed will be some of your focus upon your confirmation to the country.

And one last question. Mr. McFeeters, how would you analyze the current relationship between Malaysia and China?

Mr. MCFEETERS. China and Malaysia have longstanding ties, particularly on the economic side. China has been Malaysia's largest trading partner for the last 11 years. Their total trading with Malaysia is roughly twice the size of the U.S., so we just have to treat that as reality.

I would comment on two other areas. In terms of South China Sea, Malaysia is sort of equally concerned as we are about these illegal incursions by China into the waters. And because of our security cooperation, Malaysia has gotten better about defending its own interests. So they are able to pick up illegal fishermen, and they are able to block so-called Coast Guard vessels from China or fishing vessels from China that are harassing oil platforms.

So Malaysia, strong relationship with China, but Malaysia is increasingly speaking up for its own interests, with our help.

Senator MENENDEZ. So with that economic disparity that exists in terms of Chinese economic influence in Malaysia, how do you meet the challenges of promoting U.S. interests there?

Mr. MCFEETERS. It is a challenge, but on the U.S. side we have a very strong hand to play. We have 700 U.S. firms that are active in Malaysia, 250 members of the American Chamber of Commerce. Malaysia is the 38th largest economy in the world, but it is the U.S.'s 15th largest export site, because of high income.

So on the U.S. side we have a good story to tell, which is high-tech companies that are both exporting to Malaysia and invested in Malaysia, and we have, you know, high international standards in terms of lending and, you know, transparent business practices. So I think we can tout that at every opportunity.

I was proud that American companies or the American Chamber of Commerce in Malaysia raised \$7 million this year for COVID assistance to Malaysian society. So that is the kind of—I think, modeling those best practices is something that we can amplify from the Embassy's point of view.

Senator MENENDEZ. And if I may, Mr. Chairman, one final question. Mr. Blackstone, I do not like you to feel no affection here in terms of attention. Speaking in the same context, how would you assess Timor-Leste's relationship with China, and the risks of Chi-

nese investment in Timor-Leste, and what actions should we take in that regard?

Mr. BLACKSTONE. Thank you, Senator Menendez. I appreciate the opportunity to weigh in on that.

So as I understand it, China, the People's Republic of China, has an active diplomatic presence in country. They have also provided development assistance, primarily to date in the form of infrastructure, building some Timorese Government facilities and in some road building. I will just note that the U.S. focus so far in our program, around \$20 million a year, has been on promoting governance and what we believe are sustainable programs that the Timorese can carry forward themselves later.

Now as in regard to Chinese investment, I expect that you are referring to what is called the Tasi Mane, or South Coast development project. This is a multi-billion-dollar proposal that would bring onshore processing of liquified natural gas. And it has strong support from some elements of the Timorese leadership. However, Timor-Leste's petroleum investment partners and others, including diplomatic partners, have encouraged greater analysis of the potential economic viability of it.

The China piece, to my knowledge, involved a 2019 planned agreement between a Chinese state-owned entity and the Timorese Government for about \$1 billion. However, that plan was never implemented, and to my knowledge it has not progressed. The current governing coalition has taken a more skeptical approach to the entire complex, and has welcomed U.S. Government offers of assistance through our various tools, such as Asia EDGE or the Transaction Advisory Network for Infrastructure.

So I think the Timorese are appropriately wary, in particular, of obtaining large loans, single-country loans, in cases where it would require them to collateralize significant national infrastructure, and if confirmed, I will continue to keep a close eye on this, report on this, and, of course, engage senior Timorese Government leadership.

Senator MENENDEZ. Thank you very much. Mr. Chairman, I will submit the rest of my questions for the record.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Blackstone, for that report. That kind of an issue is happening all over the world, as we know, and it is good to have that kind of a granularity on one particular one. Indeed, there is some good news there, because we have certainly had lots of bad news over recent years.

Well, are there any other members of the committee on the call?

There being none, first of all, let me say that it is an honor to be able to preside over a meeting with five people with such in-depth credentials and deep understanding of each of the areas that you are going to, and long, long years of dedicated public service that you do on a nonpartisan basis, and carrying America's values to these far-flung places that do not see us as closely as they are going to see you. So thank you for that. Thank you for carrying those values for us, and we sincerely appreciate it. Again, we appreciate the sacrifice that you know is necessary in serving in these places, and that is especially true to your families. Whether they are with you or whether they are separated, they share in that sacrifice and we all appreciate that.

So with that, for the information of all members of the committee, the record will remain open until the close of business on Friday, December 4th, including members to submit questions for the record. When you get those, we would appreciate getting them back as quickly as you can get them back. And with that we will stand adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 12:11 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

Additional Material Submitted for the Record

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED
TO C. KEVIN BLACKSTONE BY SENATOR ROBERT MENENDEZ

Oversight

Question. If confirmed, do you commit that under your leadership, the U.S. Embassy will not take any action to support, promote, or participate in any matters related to, or that could be perceived as benefitting, the Trump Organization?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to comply with all relevant federal ethics laws, regulations, and rules and to raise any concerns that I may have through appropriate channels.

Question. Do you commit to make clear to all employees that retaliation of any kind has no place in federal government and will not be tolerated under your leadership? Do you agree that anyone found to have engaged in retaliation should be held fully accountable, up to and including losing their job?

Answer. Yes, I commit to making clear that prohibited personnel practices has no place in the federal government and will not be tolerated. I agree that anyone found to have engaged in prohibited personnel practices should be subject to accountability and discipline consistent with applicable laws, regulations, and Department policy.

Question. What will you do to promote, mentor, and support your staff that come from diverse backgrounds and underrepresented groups in the Foreign Service? In the Civil Service?

Answer. If confirmed, I will support and promote the efforts the Department is currently undertaking to ensure leaders under my direction are fostering a culture and environment of inclusion. I will promote habits and practices among the leadership that focus on inclusion as a key driver for recruiting and retaining diverse talent. I will promote diversity and best practices and tips for inclusive recruiting practices and standardized interview guidance. I will support the review of existing mentoring programs and how they can be bolstered. I will promote and encourage all employees to take courses on fostering an inclusive workplace.

Question. Do you commit to respond promptly to all requests for information by members of this committee?

Answer. Yes, with the understanding that any such response would be organized through the Department of State's Bureau of Legislative Affairs and conducted in accordance with long-standing Department and Executive Branch practice.

Question. Do you commit to appear before this committee upon request?

Answer. Yes, with the understanding that any such appearance would be organized through the Department of State's Bureau of Legislative Affairs and conducted in accordance with long-standing Department and Executive Branch practice.

Question. Do you commit to report to appropriate authorities, including the FBI, Inspector General, and Congress, any credible allegations of foreign interference in U.S. elections?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to comply with all relevant laws, regulations, and rules and to raising concerns that I may have through appropriate channels.

Question. Do you commit to report to appropriate authorities, including the FBI, Inspector General, and Congress, any attempts by foreign or private individuals to improperly influence U.S. foreign policy, particularly if you have reason to believe those efforts are adverse to U.S. interests?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to comply with all relevant federal ethics laws, regulations, and rules and to raise any concerns that I may have through appropriate channels.

Question. If you become aware of any suspected waste, fraud, or abuse in the Department, do you commit to report it to the Inspector General or other appropriate channels?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to comply with all relevant federal ethics laws, regulations, and rules and to raise any concerns that I may have through appropriate channels.

Democracy/Human Rights

Question. What are the most important actions you have taken in your career to date to support democracy and human rights? What has been the impact of your actions?

Answer. I served as a Provincial Reconstruction Team Leader in Wasit, Iraq from 2009-2010. In this role, I successfully advocated for increased funding for local NGOs that promoted Sunni-Shi'a reconciliation. I also engaged with provincial leadership on issues of religious freedom, helping to promote respect for human rights in a region of Iraq that had a large population of both Shi'a and Sunni.

Question. What issues are the most pressing challenges to democracy or democratic development in Timor-Leste? These challenges might include obstacles to participatory and accountable governance and institutions, rule of law, authentic political competition, civil society, human rights and press freedom. Please be as specific as possible.

Answer. The Timorese people are strongly committed to their young democracy and the United States, through USAID and other programming, has worked closely with the Government to support the rule of law, strengthen electoral and parliamentary systems, and strengthen democratic institutions to help ensure access to justice and services for all Timorese citizens. Long delays in trials and alleged mistreatment by police erode public confidence in the institutions intended to safeguard human rights and democratic principles. If confirmed, I would continue to support U.S. efforts to strengthen the rule of law and capacity of law enforcement officials.

Question. What steps will you take—if confirmed—to support democracy in Timor-Leste? What do you hope to accomplish through these actions? What are the potential impediments to addressing the specific obstacles you have identified?

Answer. Timor-Leste is a young nation committed to democracy and developing strong democratic institutions. If confirmed, my priority would be to continue U.S. assistance to government institutions responsible for protecting access to justice and human rights for all Timorese citizens. I would also prioritize continued U.S. support to civil society. An active and vibrant civil society is an important check on government's power. Development of human capacity will take time, but building a strong foundation for Timorese success is critical.

Question. How will you utilize U.S. Government assistance resources at your disposal, including the Democracy Commission Small Grants program and other sources of State Department and USAID funding, to support democracy and governance, and what will you prioritize in processes to administer such assistance?

Answer. The U.S. Government has played a key role in promoting democracy and governance in Timor-Leste, primarily through USAID. With USAID assistance, Timor-Leste held peaceful elections in 2017 and 2018 without international supervision and parliamentarians are learning best practices to effectively represent their constituents. If confirmed, I will use U.S. foreign assistance resources to continue this important work with Timor-Leste to promote governance goals in Timor-Leste, in alignment with the Indo-Pacific Strategy.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to meet with civil society members, human rights and other non-governmental organizations in the U.S. and with local human rights NGOs, and other members of civil society in Timor-Leste? What steps will you take to pro-actively address efforts to restrict or penalize NGOs and civil society via legal or regulatory measures?

Answer. If confirmed, I will commit to meet with civil society members, human rights and other non-governmental organizations in the United States, Timor-Leste-based human rights NGOs, and other members of civil society in Timor-Leste. If confirmed, I will also work with the Government to advocate for fair and transparent treatment of NGOs and civil society under the law.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to meet with democratically oriented political opposition figures and parties? What steps will you take to encourage genuine political competition? Will you advocate for access and inclusivity for women, minorities and youth within political parties?

Answer. The United States urges equal treatment for all that underscores our commitment to diversity and inclusion. If confirmed, I will work with the Timor-Leste Government, including with opposition figures and parties, to encourage political competition and will promote access and inclusivity for women, members of minority groups, and youth within political parties.

Question. Will you and your embassy team actively engage with Timor-Leste on freedom of the press and address any government efforts designed to control or undermine press freedom through legal, regulatory or other measures? Will you commit to meeting regularly with independent, local press in Timor-Leste?

Answer. The United States promotes respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including freedom of expression, around the world, including in Timor-Leste. Promoting these rights are key priorities of the Indo-Pacific Transparency Initiative. If confirmed, I am committed to engaging with civil society and the Government, as well as independent, local press in Timor-Leste, on the importance of these human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Question. Will you and your embassy team actively engage with civil society and government counterparts on countering disinformation and propaganda disseminated by foreign state or non-state actors in Timor-Leste?

Answer. Yes. If confirmed, I will actively engage with civil society and government counterparts on countering disinformation and propaganda disseminated by foreign state or non-state actors in Timor-Leste.

Question. Will you and your embassy teams actively engage with Timor-Leste on the right of labor groups to organize, including for independent trade unions?

Answer. Yes. If confirmed, I will work with the Timor-Leste Government, civil society, and other parts of the Timorese economy on the issue of the right of labor groups to organize.

Question. Will you commit to using your position, if confirmed, to defend the human rights and dignity of all people in Timor-Leste, no matter their sexual orientation or gender identity? What challenges do the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) people face in Timor-Leste? What specifically will you commit to do to help LGBTQ people in Timor-Leste?

Answer. Although Timor-Leste is a relatively tolerant society, LGBTI persons do not enjoy legal protections, which hinders full inclusion. The rights of LGBTI individuals and persons are a topic of importance in our conversations with the Timorese Government. If confirmed, I will continue to urge equal treatment for all and to promote diversity and inclusion by engaging not only with the Timorese Government, but also with civil society organizations, the private sector, and like-minded missions.

Development

Question. What will you do to help Timor-Leste achieve its development goals?

Answer. The United States is a strong supporter of Timor-Leste's development and has sought to partner with them on government priorities identified in the Timor-Leste Strategic Development Plan 2011-2030, including projects focused on health, education, water and sanitation, rural development, agriculture, and economic growth. USAID has led U.S. efforts to support Timor-Leste in achieving its development goals. Other U.S. Government agencies, such as the Department of Agriculture and the Millennium Challenge Corporation, also play key roles in meeting the country's development goals.

If confirmed, I would prioritize the United States' robust support of Timor-Leste's development goals as a means to ensuring Timor-Leste's prosperity, development, and economic sovereignty for future generations.

Question. What areas of the Timorese economy offer the best prospects for development and how can the United States help?

Answer. The Timorese Government recognizes the critical need to diversify its economy to create jobs and economic opportunities for its citizens, as well as to generate revenue beyond the oil and gas sector. USAID has supported Timorese efforts to sustainably develop its agricultural, tourism, and information and communication technology sectors, as well as improve the efficiency of trade and transit by supporting reform to Timor-Leste's customs systems. Strengthening the Timorese pri-

vate sector and business enabling environment would further unlock the country's development and economic potential. By continuing support for technical and foreign assistance, the United States supports the Government and private sector to help ensure Timor-Leste builds a strong framework for domestic and foreign investment.

Question. What can the United States do to assist Timor-Leste in developing its economy in a sustainable manner?

Answer. Timor-Leste is a young nation and like many nations recovering from conflict, human resource capacity is a challenge. Through targeted technical assistance programs, the United States has helped strengthen the private sector while building the capacity of Timorese authorities. If confirmed, I will support programs that help develop Timor-Leste's economy and will explore the use of additional U.S. technical assistance tools, such as the Transaction Advisory Fund and AsiaEdge, to meet this goal.

Chinese Influence

Question. How do you assess Timor-Leste's relationship with China and the risks of Chinese investments in Timor-Leste? What actions would you take to mitigate such risks?

Answer. Timor-Leste maintains good relations with countries throughout the region, including China, which has active diplomatic engagement in Timor-Leste. China has longstanding foreign assistance programs in health and agriculture in the country, and PRC state-owned enterprises companies build roads and other infrastructure. Last year, China also announced it would digitalize Timor-Leste's national radio and television network.

Timor-Leste is a democracy, which underpins our shared commitment to good governance and human rights. U.S. engagement focuses largely on sustainable development and economic diversification as well as democracy and governance programs to bolster the country's democratic and economic institutions. This engagement helps strengthen our long-term bilateral partnership.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO C. KEVIN BLACKSTONE BY SENATOR BENJAMIN L. CARDIN

Human Rights

Question. What are your most meaningful achievements to date in your career to promote human rights and democracy? What has been the impact of your actions?

Answer. I served as a Provincial Reconstruction Team Leader in Wasit, Iraq from 2009-2010. In this role, I successfully advocated for increased funding for local NGOs that promoted Sunni-Shi'a reconciliation. I also engaged with provincial leadership on issues of religious freedom, helping to promote respect for human rights in a region of Iraq that had a large population of both Shi'a and Sunni.

Question. What are the most pressing human rights issues in Timor-Leste? What are the most important steps you expect to take—if confirmed—to promote human rights and democracy in Timor-Leste? What do you hope to accomplish through these actions?

Answer. The most significant human rights issues in Timor-Leste include violence against women and forced child labor. We also have concerns about corruption. The United States promotes respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms throughout the world, including in Timor-Leste. The Timorese share our values of promoting democracy and human rights. These values form the foundation of U.S. assistance to Timor-Leste.

Promoting these rights and freedoms is a key priority of the Indo-Pacific Transparency Initiative. If confirmed, I would continue to work with government leaders at the highest levels, as well as civil society and other advocates of freedom and democracy so that the bilateral relationship advances human rights for all people in Timor-Leste.

Question. If confirmed, what are the potential obstacles to addressing the specific human rights issues you have identified in your previous response? What challenges will you face in Timor-Leste in advancing human rights, civil society, and democracy in general?

Answer. I believe a primary challenge will be strengthening Timor-Leste's institutions that are designed to protect human rights, as well as increasing awareness

about what constitutes human rights so that society and government can work together to safeguard them.

If confirmed, I will lead the Embassy's efforts to raise awareness about human rights in Timor-Leste and work with the Government and civil society to strengthen institutions to protect those rights. I commit to conveying the importance the United States places on respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. If confirmed, I will work with civil society, the Government of Timor-Leste, partners and allies, and other stakeholders to advance human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Question. Are you committed to meeting with human rights, civil society, and other non-governmental organizations in the U.S. and with local human rights NGOs in Timor-Leste? If confirmed, what steps will you take to pro-actively support the Leahy Law and similar efforts, and ensure that provisions of U.S. security assistance and security cooperation activities reinforce human rights?

Answer. Vibrant civil societies are critical to healthy democracies, prosperous economies, and stable societies. If confirmed, I commit to engaging with human rights, civil society, and other non-governmental organizations in the United States and Timor-Leste, bringing attention to the challenges they face in Timor-Leste and advocating for their protection and empowerment. I will also ensure that all U.S. security assistance to Timor-Leste is provided consistent with applicable law, including the Leahy law, and that all security cooperation activities with Timor-Leste reinforce human rights and the rule of law.

Question. Will you and your embassy team actively engage with Timor-Leste to address cases of key political prisoners or persons otherwise unjustly targeted by Timor-Leste?

Answer. Timor-Leste boasts a multi-party democracy and active civil society in which opponents of the Government are able to express their political views openly. If confirmed, I will work with the Timor-Leste Government and civil society to promote human rights and fundamental freedoms, and to further strengthen Timor-Leste's developing institutions striving to protect those rights. If confirmed, I commit to engaging with the Timorese when democratic values are undermined, including those involving political prisoners.

Question. Will you engage with Timor-Leste on matters of human rights, civil rights, and governance as part of your bilateral mission?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to engaging with civil society and the Government of Timor-Leste on the importance of human rights, including civil and political rights, and good governance.

Diversity

Question. Research from private industry demonstrates that, when managed well, diversity makes business teams better both in terms of creativity and in terms of productivity. What will you do to promote, mentor, and support your staff that come from diverse backgrounds and underrepresented groups?

Answer. If confirmed, I will support and promote the efforts the Department is currently undertaking to foster a culture of inclusion and build a representative workforce. I will encourage promoting diversity and inclusion best practices, including recruiting efforts and standardized interview procedures, which are practices I have followed carefully in my previous positions within the State Department. I also commit to working with our locally employed staff to ensure their viewpoints and concerns are heard. I will learn from and listen to employees using mechanisms like the Open Conversations platform and the Department's new Centralized Exit Survey. I will promote and encourage all employees to take courses on fostering an inclusive workplace.

Question. What steps will you take to ensure each of the supervisors at the Embassy in Timor-Leste are fostering an environment that is diverse and inclusive?

Answer. If confirmed, I will support and promote the efforts the Department is currently undertaking to ensure supervisors under my direction are fostering a culture and environment of inclusion. I will promote habits and practices among leadership that focus on inclusion as a key driver for developing and retaining diverse talent. I will promote diversity and inclusion best practices and tips for inclusive hiring practices and standardized interview guidance. I will support the review of existing mentoring programs and with an eye on how they can be strengthened. I will support a requirement that all hiring managers to take, as appropriate, courses on fostering an inclusive workplace.

Conflicts of Interest

Question. Do you commit to bring to the committee's attention (and the State Department Inspector General) any change in policy or U.S. actions that you suspect may be influenced by any of the President's business or financial interests, or the business or financial interests of any senior White House staff?

Answer. I commit to comply with all relevant federal ethics laws, regulations, and rules and to raise concerns that I may have through appropriate channels.

Question. Do you commit to inform the committee if you have any reason to suspect that a foreign government, head of state, or foreign-controlled entity is taking any action in order to benefit any of the President's business or financial interests, or the interests of senior White House staff?

Answer. I commit to comply with all relevant federal ethics laws, regulations, and rules and to raise concerns that I may have through appropriate channels.

Question. Do you or do any members of your immediate family have any financial interests in Timor-Leste?

Answer. My investment portfolio includes diversified mutual funds, including foreign stock funds, which may hold interests in companies with a presence overseas, but are exempt from the conflict of interest laws. I am committed to following all applicable ethics laws and regulations and remaining vigilant with regard to my ethics obligations.

Corruption

Question. How do you believe political corruption impacts democratic governance and the rule of law generally, and in Timor-Leste specifically?

Answer. Corruption undermines democracy, good governance, and the rule of law. Transparency in political processes and government procedures are critical to the citizenry's confidence in its democratic institutions and the rule of law.

Timor-Leste is a young democracy that continues to develop and strengthen its democratic foundations. Further supporting these efforts and promoting transparency will be one of my top priorities if confirmed.

Question. What is your assessment of corruption trends in Timor-Leste and efforts to address and reduce it by that government?

Answer. Timor-Leste took an important step this year to address corruption by passing anti-corruption legislation. The new law provides the Anti-Corruption Commission with additional tools to more effectively combat corruption in Timor-Leste. This includes expanding the list of officials required to disclose their financial records.

Question. If confirmed, what steps will you take to strengthen good governance and anticorruption programming in Timor-Leste?

Answer. Our shared values of democracy, promotion of human rights, and upholding the rule of law continue to anchor our bilateral relationship. U.S. development assistance in Timor-Leste is targeted to help promote these ideals. If confirmed, I commit to engaging with civil society and the Timorese Government to stress these shared values.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED
TO CYNTHIA KIERSCHT BY SENATOR ROBERT MENENDEZ

Question. According to the Global Terrorism Index, while deaths from terrorism have fallen every year for the past five years, "Seven of the ten Countries with the largest increase in terrorism were in sub-Saharan Africa." That same report indicates that Burkina Faso, a member of the G5 Sahel, had the largest increase in terrorism. Mauritania has not suffered a terrorist attack since 2011:

- How much money has the U.S. provided to Mauritania over the past four years for counterterrorism assistance, and what specific activities are the funds supporting? Are these the correct activities? If not, where should we be investing?

Answer. Mauritania's relative success compared to its neighbors in confronting its domestic terrorism threat over the past decade is due first and foremost to Mauritanian initiatives, but the partnership with the United States and the support provided by programs from the State Department, USAID, and DOD have helped enable these positive results. The Government of Mauritania relies on a multi-fac-

eted counterterrorism approach that includes community outreach initiatives, religious dialogue, capacity improvements for security forces, and activities aimed at securing the country's borders. Over the past four years, the United States obligated more than \$31 million to provide counterterrorism and related security assistance to Mauritania through the U.S. Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP), and Antiterrorism Assistance (ATA). Through these programs, we work to increase Mauritania's security sector capacity, address the drivers of terrorism, increase the capacity of the criminal justice system to prevent and prosecute terrorists acts, and strengthen the voices of mainstream leaders to positively influence populations vulnerable to radicalization and violence.

If confirmed, I will commit to ensuring our counterterrorism and related assistance remains relevant to evolving terrorist threats in the region and will lead U.S. Government efforts to help Mauritania export its relative success to other countries in the region.

Question. What, in your view, accounts for the differing experiences of Burkina Faso and Mauritania in terms of the number and frequency of terrorist attacks? Is there something that Mauritania has done correctly that Burkina Faso has not, or is it simply a matter of luck?

Answer. Mauritania has not suffered a terrorist attack since 2011. With support from the United States and other international partners, Mauritania has focused on promoting development and good governance as foundations of state legitimacy while increasing its efforts to effectively secure its borders. Mauritania's cooperation with regional partners has also been crucial to disrupting attacks and denying terrorist groups the capability to plan and carry them out in the future. Its counter-radicalization efforts have been consistently applied. Mauritania recently joined the Global Coalition to Defeat-ISIS, showcasing its commitment in the battle against terrorism and willingness to help to defeat ISIS and other AQ-affiliated terrorist groups across West Africa and the Sahel. If confirmed, I will continue our partnership with Mauritania to address the drivers of terrorist radicalization and recruitment and strengthen its institutional capacity.

Question. When President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz stepped down in 2019, it was the first time a leader left office in accordance with constitutional requirements without being overthrown. That in itself represents a significant step in the country's political evolution. However, opposition figures were thrown in jail after protesting the election results, and the internet was shut down. Though opposition politicians were later released, their arrest was a worrying sign. Freedom House in its Freedom of the World 2020 report categorizes Mauritania as only 'partly free.'

- Do you agree with Freedom House's characterization of Mauritania? What steps could be taken to expand democratic space in Mauritania?

Answer. Mauritania's 2019 presidential election led to the country's first democratic transition from one elected leader to another. The election marked a true turning point in Mauritania's history and is an important example for other democracies. While this was an historic step, Mauritania has a strong authoritarian tradition which presents challenges to its democratic development. The Government must make concerted efforts to broaden the space for opposition politicians and civil society so that Mauritania can reap the benefits of a robust democracy. Encouraging further democratic and governance reforms will be among my highest priorities if confirmed.

Question. How much money has the United States invested in democracy and governance work in Mauritania over the past four years, and in what areas have we focused that investment?

Answer. The United States has used a wide range of tools to advance our democracy and governance agenda in Mauritania, including bilateral diplomacy, multilateral engagement, and public outreach. While some of our programming was limited by restrictions under the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) in Fiscal Years 2019 and 2020, U.S. programs have supported strengthening civil society, both by advancing legislation to remove restrictions on the activities of non-governmental organizations and working with certain prominent NGOs which have traditionally worked to change past restrictions. We have also invested in programs to support greater political participation by women and youth. With TVPA restrictions now lifted for FY 2021, if confirmed, I intend to seek greater U.S. Government support to help with efforts to professionalize Mauritanian Government institutions, including nascent local and regional elected bodies.

Question. Can political parties operate freely in Mauritania? How would you characterize media freedoms in Mauritania? What activities to support press freedom

has the United States supported this year? Is there space for civil society to carry out its work?

Answer. Mauritania has committed to expanding the political space, but much work remains to be done. After largely boycotting the previous two presidential elections, opposition parties participated in the 2019 elections, leading to Mauritania's first peaceful transfer of power from one elected leader to another. Nevertheless, they continue to face obstacles. Despite the country's vibrant media landscape, with several privately owned newspapers, television stations, and radio stations in operation, journalists can still encounter restrictions. Through initiatives such as the International Visitors Leadership Program, the United States has provided crucial opportunities and support for Mauritanian journalists.

We are encouraged the Government of Mauritania has taken steps to revise and update the 1964 Associations Law on NGOs and has signaled its intent to secure parliamentary approval this fall. If confirmed, I will commit to supporting Mauritania's ongoing efforts to become a freer and more open society.

Question. Mauritania abolished slavery by decree in 1981, but the practice was not criminalized until 2007. The constitution was amended in 2012 to declare slavery a crime against humanity, and parliament adopted a new anti-slavery law in 2015. However, few criminal cases have been brought to court:

- Does slavery still exist in Mauritania today? What assistance have we provided to help Mauritania investigate and prosecute this crime?

Answer. Slavery and slavery-like practices, which typically flow from hereditary slavery, still exist in Mauritania.

While much work remains to be done to ensure that all citizens can exercise their legal protection against forced labor, Mauritania has made significant strides to address its legacy of slavery since President Ghazouani's 2019 inauguration. Under the President's leadership, the country no longer denies that slavery exists. In November 2019, President Ghazouani created a new institution to intensify the Mauritanian Government's efforts to address the social and economic conditions that have left many citizens vulnerable to forced labor. This year the United States funded the participation of judicial and law enforcement officials in training to combat human trafficking and collaborated with the Mauritanian Government on the National Action Plan to address Trafficking in Persons (TIP) issues.

In 2020, the country's Human Rights Commission organized two "caravans" to travel to isolated regions of the country to educate citizens, local NGOs, and local officials directly about anti-slavery laws; these efforts had full government support and encouragement. Mauritania's conviction of five defendants involved in three separate slavery cases from previous years is another step in the right direction. The Government of Mauritania continues to take concerted actions towards ending the practice of slavery, including increased engagement with civil society groups.

If confirmed, I look forward to working with the Mauritanian Government to support Mauritania's progress to eradicate slavery, a crime under international law.

Question. If confirmed, what will you do to help Mauritania end this horrific practice for once and for all?

Answer. If confirmed, I look forward to working with the Government of Mauritania to support its eradication of slavery. This requires a sustained, and collective effort by the Government, religious, law enforcement, judicial, tribal, and civil society leaders, together with all Mauritania. The Government must also address economic dynamics that sustain the vulnerability of communities to de facto servitude, and the deep social divisions that are the legacy of centuries of slavery and that, as President Ghazouani has stated, threaten the country's development and stability. If confirmed, I will work to leverage programs and tools provided by the U.S. Congress, such as the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) eligibility criteria and the Trafficking in Persons (TIP) ranking and associated restrictions, where possible. I will encourage the Mauritanian Government to prosecute all individuals found to be supporting slavery practices to send a message that Mauritania is serious about eradicating this practice. I will also work with my State Department colleagues to identify additional programming to address this issue now that the TVPA assistance restrictions have been lifted.

If confirmed, I will work with all partners—the business community, local and international NGOs, and other donors—to provide active encouragement to meet the Government's stated intention to address the reality of hereditary slavery.

Oversight

Question. If confirmed, do you commit that under your leadership, the U.S. Embassy will not take any action to support, promote, or participate in any matters related to, or that could be perceived as benefitting, the Trump Organization?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to comply with all relevant federal ethics laws, regulations, and rules, and to raise concerns that I may have through appropriate channels.

Question. Do you commit to make clear to all employees that retaliation of any kind has no place in federal government and will not be tolerated under your leadership? Do you agree that anyone found to have engaged in retaliation should be held fully accountable, up to and including losing their job?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to make clear to all employees that prohibited personnel practices have no place in federal government and will not be tolerated under my leadership. I agree that any employee found responsible for engaging in a prohibited personnel practice should be held fully accountable, and subject to discipline consistent with applicable laws, regulations, and Department policy.

Question. What will you do to promote, mentor, and support your staff that come from diverse backgrounds and underrepresented groups in the Foreign Service? In the Civil Service?

Answer. If confirmed, I will endeavor at every opportunity to promote diversity in the workplace by recruiting and supporting a diverse team, promoting excellence, and mentoring staff of all backgrounds—including Foreign and Civil Service as well as locally engaged staff—on my team. Throughout my career, I have put particular emphasis on encouraging and supporting employees from diverse backgrounds, as I understand firsthand the many benefits of a workplace that represents diverse backgrounds and underrepresented groups and welcomes the views of all. If confirmed, I intend to lead by example and guide by encouragement, ensuring all of my staff know that diversity and inclusion are top priorities of mine. I will also ensure that supervisors at the Embassy are appropriately trained with regard to Equal Employment Opportunity, diversity, and inclusion, and are accountable. I will also make certain they know I am an advocate and available resource.

Question. Do you commit to respond promptly to all requests for information by members of this committee?

Answer. Yes, with the understanding that any such response would be organized through the Department of State's Bureau of Legislative Affairs and conducted in accordance with long-standing Department and Executive Branch practice.

Question. Do you commit to appear before this committee upon request?

Answer. Yes, with the understanding that any such appearance would be organized through the Department of State's Bureau of Legislative Affairs and conducted in accordance with long-standing Department and Executive Branch practice.

Question. Do you commit to report to appropriate authorities, including the FBI, Inspector General, and Congress, any credible allegations of foreign interference in U.S. elections?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to complying with all relevant federal ethics laws, regulations, and rules, and to raise any concerns that I may have through appropriate channels.

Question. Do you commit to report to appropriate authorities, including the FBI, Inspector General, and Congress, any attempts by foreign or private individuals to improperly influence U.S. foreign policy, particularly if you have reason to believe those efforts are adverse to U.S. interests?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to complying with all relevant federal ethics laws, regulations, and rules, and to raise any concerns that I may have through appropriate channels.

Question. If you become aware of any suspected waste, fraud, or abuse in the Department, do you commit to report it to the Inspector General or other appropriate channels?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to complying with all relevant federal ethics laws, regulations, and rules, and to raise any concerns that I may have through appropriate channels.

Democracy/Human Rights

Question. What are the most important actions you have taken in your career to date to support democracy and human rights? What has been the impact of your actions?

Answer. Promotion of the U.S. human rights and democracy agenda has been a key component of my career. Looking back, I assess my most meaningful achievements to be the following:

During my tour at U.S. Embassy Rabat, Morocco, King Mohammed announced sweeping changes to the family law greatly impacting women's rights and, in particular, their legal status regarding marriage and divorce. As leader of the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) Democracy pillar, I advocated for and managed a series of successful grant programs designed to inform (mostly illiterate) women of their newfound rights, including working with our Public Affairs section to reach the broadest possible audience. One particular program—an innovative play, which we sent throughout the country, explained how the reforms put women on par with men in matters of marriage, divorce, child custody and property ownership—became a model for other MEPI programs.

In Libya, as one of the first human rights officers to serve in the country following our restoration of relations in 2004 after a 25 year hiatus, I established (and re-established in some cases) relationships with key human rights interlocutors, and used their insights to provide some of the very first analysis of the tragic human rights situation in Libya. I also made the first-ever visit by a U.S. official to the African detention camps in Libya, highlighting a major human rights issue for the Department. Reaching out to key religious figures, I also authored the first International Religious Freedom report from Libya, providing the State Department with the first real assessment of religious freedom on the ground.

In Colombia, where Afro-Colombians continue to face significant economic and social discrimination, I worked to support social inclusion goals by designing programs to elevate the issue of diversity. My Culture Series program, which reached two million Colombians in 11 cities, was highlighted as a best practice at the U.S. Colombia Action Plan for Racial and Ethnic Equality.

Question. What issues are the most pressing challenges to democracy or democratic development in Mauritania? These challenges might include obstacles to participatory and accountable governance and institutions, rule of law, authentic political competition, civil society, human rights and press freedom. Please be as specific as possible.

Answer. Mauritania's main democratic challenges include its strong authoritarian tradition, which presents challenges to its democratic development, its legacy of hereditary slavery, and corruption. Too often in the past, coups d'état have served as the primary means of changing Mauritania's Government. However, the country is at a turning point. Mohamed Ould Cheikh El Ghazouani's election in 2019 as Mauritania's president marked the first democratic transition of power between two elected presidents since the country's independence in 1960. Both the United Nations and African Union observers considered the election to be relatively free and fair. While challenges to Mauritania's democratic development remain, early indications show that President Ghazouani is committed to strengthening democracy and democratic institutions.

Question. What steps will you take—if confirmed—to support democracy in Mauritania? What do you hope to accomplish through these actions? What are the potential impediments to addressing the specific obstacles you have identified?

Answer. If confirmed, I will prioritize human rights and democracy as fundamental parts of my job and the embassy's mission. Human rights, civil rights, and good governance will be key elements of my engagements with the Mauritanian Government. Mauritania stands to benefit greatly when its people are empowered, its civil society is encouraged, and its security forces are trusted because they uphold the rule of law.

Mauritania's human rights challenges stem from the legacy of centuries of slavery; deep-rooted divisions along ethnic, linguistic and tribal lines; and gender inequality. Improvements require strong political commitment—which President Ghazouani appears to have—as well as justice sector reform and increased resources to ensure the rule of law. A stronger civil society is also needed, and a new NGO law currently pending parliamentary consideration will be an important step. Mauritania will also need the support and encouragement of partners like the United States to help overcome these obstacles and achieve the president's stated goals of promoting national unity and access to justice and economic opportunities for all citizens.

If confirmed, I will reaffirm the United States' support for human rights and democracy and leverage programs and tools provided by the U.S. Congress in the form of the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) eligibility criteria, and the Trafficking in Persons (TIP) ranking restrictions as appropriate. Moreover, if confirmed, I will work with the Government, civil society, and NGOs to improve the space for civil society to operate and thrive so that all Mauritians can reap the benefits of a robust civil society.

My hope is that this, in addition to U.S. Government programming, will lead to sustained progress on human rights, good governance, and democracy

Question. How will you utilize U.S. Government assistance resources at your disposal, including the Democracy Commission Small Grants program and other sources of State Department and USAID funding, to support democracy and governance, and what will you prioritize in processes to administer such assistance?

Answer. If confirmed, I will lead the U.S. Government in its efforts to strengthen the capacity of Mauritania's national and local governments to be more inclusive and responsive to public needs and to improve service delivery so as to address the underlying grievances and cultural drivers that can lead to insecurity. I will work with the Department and USAID to identify and program all funding available to support democracy and governance in Mauritania, including utilizing the Department's Small Grants program.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to meet with civil society members, human rights and other non-governmental organizations in the U.S. and with local human rights NGOs, and other members of civil society in Mauritania? What steps will you take to pro-actively address efforts to restrict or penalize NGOs and civil society via legal or regulatory measures?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to meet with human rights, civil society, and other non-governmental organizations in the United States and with local human rights non-governmental organizations in Mauritania. I will continue to engage civil society actors that seek to hold government institutions accountable for improved governance and rule of law and discourage the Government from restricting or penalizing NGOs and civil society via legal or regulatory measures.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to meet with democratically oriented political opposition figures and parties? What steps will you take to encourage genuine political competition? Will you advocate for access and inclusivity for women, minorities and youth within political parties?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to meeting with the broad range of democratically-oriented political parties and actors, to include the main opposition parties. If confirmed, I will encourage the ruling government to continue to engage the opposition as it aims to implement comprehensive economic and political reforms based on social inclusion. If confirmed, I will advocate for access and inclusivity for women, minorities, and youth within political parties.

Question. Will you and your embassy team actively engage with Mauritania on freedom of the press and address any government efforts designed to control or undermine press freedom through legal, regulatory or other measures? Will you commit to meeting regularly with independent, local press in Mauritania?

Answer. Mauritania ranks 97 out of 180 according to the 2020 World Press Freedom Index. If confirmed, I will continue to lead our Embassy in advocating for press freedom in Mauritania and discourage any effort to control or undermine press freedom. If confirmed, I will also commit to meeting regularly with independent, local press in Mauritania and using public opportunities to defend and protect freedom of expression, including for members of the press, as a necessary tenet of a healthy, functioning democracy.

Question. Will you and your embassy team actively engage with civil society and government counterparts on countering disinformation and propaganda disseminated by foreign state or non-state actors in Mauritania?

Answer. Disinformation and propaganda disseminated by violent extremist organizations and foreign governments are an issue across the Sahel region. If confirmed, I will direct my team to track, monitor, and counter any such disinformation and propaganda campaign disseminated by foreign state or non-state actors in Mauritania. If confirmed, I will also actively engage with civil society and government counterparts to counter such disinformation and propaganda.

Question. Will you and your embassy teams actively engage with Mauritania on the right of labor groups to organize, including for independent trade unions?

Answer. Protecting workers' rights, especially the freedoms of association and collective bargaining, is essential to building durable democracies, as well as achieving sustainable growth and a level playing field for prosperity. If confirmed, I will commit to engaging with Mauritania on these important rights. Our efforts to advance good governance and democracy align with the Government of Mauritania's efforts to address long-standing human rights issues and root out corruption. Under President Ghazouani's leadership, the country is on the right track and our engagement serves to encourage their better inclinations. The current political environment makes Mauritania a natural partner for the United States.

Question. Will you commit to using your position, if confirmed, to defend the human rights and dignity of all people in Mauritania, no matter their sexual orientation or gender identity? What challenges do the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) people face in Mauritania? What specifically will you commit to do to help LGBTQ people in Mauritania?

Answer. Mauritania does not formally recognize lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) persons and as a result, they are not legally protected in Mauritania. LGBTQ persons live in perpetual fear of being driven out by their families and rejected by society in general. As a result, they do not publicly attend or participate in public activities due to fears of retribution and violence. If confirmed, I commit to using my position to defend human rights and dignity for all Mauritians including to protect members of the LGBTQ community from harmful societal stigmas.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED
TO CYNTHIA KIERSCHT BY SENATOR BENJAMIN L. CARDIN

Human Rights

Question. What are your most meaningful achievements to date in your career to promote human rights and democracy? What has been the impact of your actions?

Answer. Promotion of the U.S. human rights and democracy agenda has been a key component of my career. Looking back, I assess my most meaningful achievements are the following:

During my tour at U.S. Embassy Rabat, Morocco, King Mohammed announced sweeping changes to the family law greatly impacting women's rights and, in particular, their legal status regarding marriage and divorce. As leader of the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) Democracy pillar, I advocated for and managed a series of successful grant programs designed to inform (mostly illiterate) women of their newfound rights, including working with our Public Affairs section to reach the broadest possible audience. One particular program—an innovative play, which we sent throughout the country, explained how the reforms put women on an equal par with men in matters of marriage, divorce, child custody and property ownership—became a model for other MEPI programs.

In Libya, as one of the first human rights officers to serve in the country following our restoration of relations in 2004 after a 25 year hiatus, I established (and re-established in some cases) relationships with key human rights interlocutors, and used their insights to provide some of the very first analyses of the tragic human rights situation in Libya. I also made the first-ever visit by a U.S. official to the African detention camps in Libya, highlighting a major human rights issue for the Department. Reaching out to key religious figures, I also authored the first International Religious Freedom report from Libya, providing the State Department with the first real assessment of religious freedom on the ground.

In Colombia, where Afro-Colombians continue to face significant economic and social discrimination, I worked to support social inclusion goals by designing programs to elevate the issue of diversity. My Culture Series program, which reached two million Colombians in 11 cities, was highlighted as a best practice at the U.S. Colombia Action Plan for Racial and Ethnic Equality.

Question. What are the most pressing human rights issues in Mauritania? What are the most important steps you expect to take—if confirmed—to promote human rights and democracy in Mauritania? What do you hope to accomplish through these actions?

Answer. The 2019 inauguration of President Ghazouani has presented an opportunity to make real positive change on longstanding human rights and governance concerns in Mauritania. If confirmed, I look forward to collaborating with the Government of Mauritania, which has already made strides to address the vestiges of

slavery, and to making progress on our mutual democracy, human rights, and governance priorities—to include combatting trafficking in persons, rooting out corruption, reforming the judiciary to improve access for all Mauritians, and increasing economic opportunities for all historically marginalized groups.

If confirmed, I will reaffirm the United States' support for human rights and democracy and leverage both development assistance programs and tools provided by the U.S. Congress, such as the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) eligibility criteria and the Trafficking in Persons (TIP) ranking and associated restrictions, as appropriate. Moreover, if confirmed, I will work with the Government, civil society, and NGOs to improve the space for civil society to operate and thrive so that all Mauritians can reap the benefits of a robust civil society. My hope is this will lead to sustained progress on human rights and democracy.

Question. If confirmed, what are the potential obstacles to addressing the specific human rights issues you have identified in your previous response? What challenges will you face in Mauritania in advancing human rights, civil society, and democracy in general?

Answer. Since the August 2019 inauguration of President Ghazouani in the country's first fully democratic presidential transition, U.S. cooperation with Mauritania on human rights issues has improved. Mauritania's human rights challenges stem from the legacy of centuries of slavery, which despite Mauritanian Government efforts, has not been entirely eradicated, plus deep-rooted divisions along ethnic, linguistic and tribal lines, as well as gender inequality. Improvements require strong political commitment—which President Ghazouani appears to have—as well as judicial reform and increased resources to ensure access to justice for all Mauritians. A stronger civil society is also needed and a new NGO law currently pending parliamentary consideration will be an important next step. Mauritania will need the support and encouragement of partners like the United States to help overcome these obstacles and achieve the president's stated goals of promoting national unity and justice for all citizens.

Question. Are you committed to meeting with human rights, civil society, and other non-governmental organizations in the U.S. and with local human rights NGOs in Mauritania? If confirmed, what steps will you take to pro-actively support the Leahy Law and similar efforts, and ensure that provisions of U.S. security assistance and security cooperation activities reinforce human rights?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed, I commit to meet with human rights, civil society, and other non-governmental organizations in the U.S. and with local human rights non-governmental organizations in Mauritania.

If confirmed, I will ensure that the Embassy continues to vet all potential candidates for U.S. assistance. In doing so, I will aim to ensure no U.S. assistance is provided to any security forces unit where there is credible information that the unit has committed a gross violation of human rights, as required under the Leahy Law. It is imperative the United States make clear that respect for human rights is a prerequisite for U.S. security assistance and participation in security cooperation activities.

Question. Will you and your embassy team actively engage with Mauritania to address cases of key political prisoners or persons otherwise unjustly targeted by Mauritania?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed I will actively engage with the Mauritanian Government to address cases of individuals who have been unlawfully or arbitrarily detained in Mauritania.

Question. Will you engage with Mauritania on matters of human rights, civil rights, and governance as part of your bilateral mission?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed, I will engage on the issues of human rights, civil rights, and governance with the Government of Mauritania and other stakeholders. I will ensure that embassy personnel and U.S. Government programming addresses and promotes these issues as well.

The United States plays a critical role in advocating for democracy and human rights in Mauritania through diplomatic and other engagement, which I will ensure continues if confirmed as Ambassador.

Diversity

Question. Research from private industry demonstrates that, when managed well, diversity makes business teams better both in terms of creativity and in terms of productivity. What will you do to promote, mentor, and support your staff that come from diverse backgrounds and underrepresented groups?

Answer. If confirmed, I will endeavor at every opportunity to promote diversity in the workplace by recruiting and supporting a diverse team, promoting excellence, and mentoring staff of all backgrounds on my team. Throughout my career, I have put particular emphasis on encouraging and supporting employees from diverse backgrounds, as I understand firsthand the many benefits of a workplace that represents diverse backgrounds and underrepresented groups and welcomes the views of all.

Question. What steps will you take to ensure each of the supervisors at the Embassy in Mauritania are fostering an environment that is diverse and inclusive?

Answer. If confirmed, I intend to lead by example and guide by encouragement, ensuring all of my staff know that diversity and inclusion are top priorities of mine. I will ensure that supervisors at the Embassy are appropriately trained with regard to Equal Employment Opportunity and diversity and inclusion and are accountable. I will also ensure they know I am an advocate and available resource.

Conflicts of Interest

Question. Do you commit to bring to the committee's attention (and the State Department Inspector General) any change in policy or U.S. actions that you suspect may be influenced by any of the President's business or financial interests, or the business or financial interests of any senior White House staff?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to complying with all relevant federal ethics laws, regulations, and rules, and to raise concerns that I may have through appropriate channels.

Question. Do you commit to inform the committee if you have any reason to suspect that a foreign government, head of state, or foreign-controlled entity is taking any action in order to benefit any of the President's business or financial interests, or the interests of senior White House staff?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to complying with all relevant federal ethics laws, regulations, and rules, and to raise concerns that I may have through appropriate channels.

Question. Do you or do any members of your immediate family have any financial interests in Mauritania?

Answer. My investment portfolio includes diversified mutual funds, which may hold interests in companies with a presence overseas, but which are exempt from the conflict of interest laws. I am committed to following all applicable ethics laws and regulations and remaining vigilant with regard to my ethics obligations.

Corruption

Question. How do you believe political corruption impacts democratic governance and the rule of law generally, and in Mauritania specifically?

Answer. Political corruption erodes state legitimacy and ultimately degrades the rule of law. Corruption can also undermine support for democracy and must be addressed in order to consolidate Mauritania's democratic gains, attract additional U.S. investment to Mauritania, and encourage economic growth.

Question. What is your assessment of corruption trends in Mauritania and efforts to address and reduce it by that government?

Answer. Corruption continues to be a problem in Mauritania and throughout the region. In late January 2020, Mauritania's parliament launched an investigative committee to review longstanding allegations of corruption and embezzlement concerning ten major government tenders that occurred during the tenure of former President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz. In late July 2020, the parliament completed its well-documented report and submitted it to law enforcement for further action. The ongoing investigation is a positive sign that the current Ghazouani administration is focused on rooting out corruption within its system.

Question. If confirmed, what steps will you take to strengthen good governance and anticorruption programming in Mauritania?

Answer. If confirmed, I will encourage the Government of Mauritania to intensify its efforts to address systemic corruption and to continue its good governance and anti-corruption efforts. If confirmed, I will also leverage development assistance programs and facilitate business connections to motivate Mauritania to address corruption within its system. This will enhance the economic environment and make it more attractive to U.S. companies seeking to do business in Mauritania.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED
TO BRIAN D. MCFEETERS BY SENATOR ROBERT MENENDEZ

Oversight

Question. If confirmed, do you commit that under your leadership, the U.S. Embassy will not take any action to support, promote, or participate in any matters related to, or that could be perceived as benefitting, the Trump Organization?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to comply with all relevant federal ethics laws, regulations, and rules and to raise any concerns that I may have through appropriate channels.

Question. Do you commit to make clear to all employees that retaliation of any kind has no place in federal government and will not be tolerated under your leadership? Do you agree that anyone found to have engaged in retaliation should be held fully accountable, up to and including losing their job?

Answer. Yes, I commit to making clear that prohibited personnel practices have no place in the federal government and will not be tolerated. I agree that those found to have engaged in unlawful retaliation should be subject to accountability and discipline consistent with applicable laws, regulations, and Department policy.

Question. What will you do to promote, mentor, and support your staff that come from diverse backgrounds and underrepresented groups in the Foreign Service? In the Civil Service?

Answer. If confirmed, I will support and promote the efforts the Department is currently undertaking to ensure leaders under my direction are fostering a culture and environment of inclusion. I will promote habits and practices among the leadership that focus on inclusion as a key driver for recruiting and retaining diverse talent. I will promote diversity and inclusion best practices, including inclusive recruiting practices and standardized interview guidance. I will support the enhancement of existing mentoring programs and Embassy Kuala Lumpur's robust Diversity and Inclusion Council.

Question. Do you commit to respond promptly to all requests for information by members of this committee?

Answer. Yes, with the understanding that any such response would be organized through the Department of State's Bureau of Legislative Affairs and conducted in accordance with long-standing Department and Executive Branch practice.

Question. Do you commit to appear before this committee upon request?

Answer. Yes, with the understanding that any such appearance would be organized through the Department of State's Bureau of Legislative Affairs and conducted in accordance with long-standing Department and Executive Branch practice.

Question. Do you commit to report to appropriate authorities, including the FBI, Inspector General, and Congress, any credible allegations of foreign interference in U.S. elections?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to comply with all relevant laws, regulations, and rules and to raising concerns that I may have through appropriate channels.

Question. Do you commit to report to appropriate authorities, including the FBI, Inspector General, and Congress, any attempts by foreign or private individuals to improperly influence U.S. foreign policy, particularly if you have reason to believe those efforts are adverse to U.S. interests?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to comply with all relevant federal ethics laws, regulations, and rules and to raise any concerns that I may have through appropriate channels.

Question. If you become aware of any suspected waste, fraud, or abuse in the Department, do you commit to report it to the Inspector General or other appropriate channels?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to comply with all relevant federal ethics laws, regulations, and rules and to raise any concerns that I may have through appropriate channels.

Democracy/Human Rights

Question. What are the most important actions you have taken in your career to date to support democracy and human rights? What has been the impact of your actions?

Answer. When I served as Political Counselor in Kuala Lumpur nearly 10 years ago, I worked with the Embassy team to develop strong relationships with the Malaysian Government and civil society organizations to support Malaysia's democracy and human rights. In addition, while serving as Deputy Political Counselor in Seoul in an earlier assignment, I worked with South Korean Government officials to ensure North Korean defectors were treated well.

Question. What issues are the most pressing challenges to democracy or democratic development in Malaysia? These challenges might include obstacles to participatory and accountable governance and institutions, rule of law, authentic political competition, civil society, human rights and press freedom. Please be as specific as possible.

Answer. Human trafficking, including forced labor, remains a significant issue in Malaysia, and the Government has much work to do to improve protections for trafficking victims and to hold traffickers and complicit officials accountable. If confirmed, I will work tirelessly to urge Malaysian Government officials, at all levels, to significantly improve anti-trafficking efforts, including investigating and prosecuting allegations of forced labor. I am also concerned about the erosion of press freedom in Malaysia, as national security and media laws are at times used by the Government against journalists, media outlets, and Malaysian citizens exercising their right to freedom of expression. If confirmed, I will engage with civil society and the Malaysian Government on the importance of human rights and fundamental freedoms to our shared vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific. If confirmed, I will support programs under USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives that aim to increase the effectiveness and role of civil society and citizen voices in the Malaysian political environment.

Question. What steps will you take—if confirmed—to support democracy in Malaysia? What do you hope to accomplish through these actions? What are the potential impediments to addressing the specific obstacles you have identified?

Answer. The United States promotes the rule of law, transparency and good governance, and freedom of expression in Malaysia. If confirmed, I pledge to continue the United States' partnership with Malaysia underpinned by our shared values and importance we place on good governance, respect for sovereignty, democratic institutions, and the rule of law. I am committed to engaging with civil society, the Malaysian Government, and other stakeholders to stress the importance of these democratic norms.

Question. How will you utilize U.S. Government assistance resources at your disposal, including the Democracy Commission Small Grants program and other sources of State Department and USAID funding, to support democracy and governance, and what will you prioritize in processes to administer such assistance?

Answer. The USAID Office of Transition Initiatives is supporting efforts by the Government of Malaysia, civil society, and other stakeholders to enhance good governance and improve transparency, accountability, and public responsiveness. The Indo-Pacific Transparency Initiative also encompasses over 200 programs developed by a range of U.S. Government agencies focused on anti-corruption and fiscal transparency, democracy assistance, youth and emerging leader development, media and internet freedom, and protecting fundamental freedoms and human rights. If confirmed, I will use U.S. foreign assistance resources to work with Malaysia to promote governance goals in the Southeast Asia region, as outlined in the Indo-Pacific Strategy.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to meet with civil society members, human rights and other non-governmental organizations in the U.S. and with local human rights NGOs, and other members of civil society in Malaysia? What steps will you take to pro-actively address efforts to restrict or penalize NGOs and civil society via legal or regulatory measures?

Answer. If confirmed, I will commit to meet with civil society members, human rights and other non-governmental organizations in the United States, Malaysia-based human rights NGOs, and other members of civil society in Malaysia, and raise the profile of their efforts, where appropriate. If confirmed, I will also actively work to address any efforts to intimidate, restrict, or penalize NGOs or civil society.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to meet with democratically oriented political opposition figures and parties? What steps will you take to encourage genuine political competition? Will you advocate for access and inclusivity for women, minorities and youth within political parties?

Answer. The United States urges equal treatment for all and underscores our commitment to diversity and inclusion. If confirmed, I will work with the Malaysian Government, including with opposition figures and parties, on these important issues and will promote access and inclusivity for women, members of minority groups, and youth within political parties.

Question. Will you and your embassy team actively engage with Malaysia on freedom of the press and address any government efforts designed to control or undermine press freedom through legal, regulatory or other measures? Will you commit to meeting regularly with independent, local press in Malaysia?

Answer. The United States promotes respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including freedom of expression, across the globe, including in Malaysia. I am concerned about the erosion of press freedom in Malaysia. National security and media laws are at times being used by the Government against journalists, media outlets, and Malaysian citizens exercising their right to freedom of expression. Promoting these rights are key priorities of the Indo-Pacific Transparency Initiative. If confirmed, I am committed to engaging with civil society and the Government, as well as independent, local press in Malaysia, on the importance of these human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Question. Will you and your embassy team actively engage with civil society and government counterparts on countering disinformation and propaganda disseminated by foreign state or non-state actors in Malaysia?

Answer. Yes. If confirmed, I will actively engage with civil society and government counterparts on countering disinformation and propaganda disseminated by foreign state or non-state actors in Malaysia. Embassy Kuala Lumpur already has programs aimed at countering this problem and if confirmed, I will support and enhance these efforts.

Question. Will you and your embassy teams actively engage with Malaysia on the right of labor groups to organize, including for independent trade unions?

Answer. Yes. If confirmed, I will work with the Malaysian Government, civil society, and other parts of the Malaysian economy on the issue of the right of labor groups to organize.

Question. Will you commit to using your position, if confirmed, to defend the human rights and dignity of all people in Malaysia, no matter their sexual orientation or gender identity? What challenges do the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) people face in Malaysia? What specifically will you commit to do to help LGBTQ people in Malaysia?

Answer. Same-sex sexual conduct between consenting adults is illegal in Malaysia, and courts have sentenced both men and women to jail and caning as punishment. If confirmed, I will continue to urge equal treatment for all in Malaysia, including LGBTI individuals, and to underscore our commitment to diversity and inclusion by engaging not only with the Malaysian Government, but also with civil society organizations, the private sector, and like-minded missions.

Development

Question. What will you do to help Malaysia achieve its development goals?

Answer. The United States and Malaysia have strong economic ties, and Malaysia is our third largest trading partner in Southeast Asia, with bilateral trade in goods and services last year reaching nearly \$60 billion. Moreover, the U.S. Government implements many capacity and technical assistance programs with Malaysia, including in the areas of judicial training, public health, and anti-trafficking efforts that directly contribute to Malaysia's development goals. If confirmed, I will work with U.S. businesses and the Malaysian Government to strengthen our trade and investment relations and help Malaysia achieve its development goals.

Question. What areas of the Malaysian economy offer the best prospects for development and how can the United States help?

Answer. There are many key economic sectors where American firms provide a positive presence in Malaysia, including energy, financial services, healthcare, high tech manufacturing, R&D centers, artificial intelligence and cloud computing. American firms are widely-known in Malaysia to be excellent business partners, highly-regarded employers, and models of corporate social responsibility. The United States and Malaysia enjoy a strong and cooperative trade relationship, including through the bilateral Trade and Investment Framework Agreement. If confirmed, I plan to work with U.S. businesses and the Malaysian Government to strengthen our economic relationship.

Question. What can the United States do to assist Malaysia in developing its economy in a sustainable manner?

Answer. The United States, through its Indo-Pacific Strategy, advances fair and reciprocal trade and promotes commercial engagement that follows international best practices of transparency, environmental and occupational safety standards, and financial sustainability. Over 700 U.S. companies are operating in Malaysia and modeling these best practices. If confirmed, I plan to work with U.S. businesses and the Malaysian Government to strengthen our economic relationship.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED
TO BRIAN D. MCFEETERS BY SENATOR BENJAMIN L. CARDIN

Diversity

Question. Research from private industry demonstrates that, when managed well, diversity makes business teams better both in terms of creativity and in terms of productivity. What will you do to promote, mentor, and support your staff that come from diverse backgrounds and underrepresented groups?

Answer. If confirmed, I will support and promote the efforts the Department is currently undertaking to foster a culture of inclusion and build a representative workforce. I will encourage diversity and inclusion best practices, including through targeted recruiting efforts and standardized interview procedures.

Question. What steps will you take to ensure each of the supervisors at the Embassy in Malaysia are fostering an environment that is diverse and inclusive?

Answer. If confirmed, I will support and promote the efforts the Department is currently undertaking to ensure leaders under my direction are fostering a culture and environment of inclusion. I will promote habits and practices among the leadership that focus on inclusion as a key driver for recruiting, developing, and retaining diverse talent. I will promote diversity and inclusion best practices and tips for inclusive hiring practices and standardized interview guidance. I will support the review of existing mentoring programs and with an eye on how they can be strengthened.

Conflicts of Interest

Question. Do you commit to bring to the committee's attention (and the State Department Inspector General) any change in policy or U.S. actions that you suspect may be influenced by any of the President's business or financial interests, or the business or financial interests of any senior White House staff?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to comply with all relevant federal ethics laws, regulations, and rules and to raise concerns that I may have through appropriate channels.

Question. Do you commit to inform the committee if you have any reason to suspect that a foreign government, head of state, or foreign-controlled entity is taking any action in order to benefit any of the President's business or financial interests, or the interests of senior White House staff?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to comply with all relevant federal ethics laws, regulations, and rules and to raise concerns that I may have through appropriate channels.

Question. Do you or do any members of your immediate family have any financial interests in Malaysia?

Answer. My investment portfolio includes diversified mutual funds, including a foreign stock fund, which may hold interests in companies with a presence overseas, but are exempt from the conflict of interest laws. I am committed to following all applicable ethics laws and regulations and remaining vigilant with regard to my ethics obligations.

Corruption

Question. How do you believe political corruption impacts democratic governance and the rule of law generally, and in Malaysia specifically?

Answer. Corruption is toxic to democracy and is an issue of concern in Malaysia. If confirmed, I pledge to continue the United States' partnership with Malaysia underpinned by our shared values and importance we place on good governance, re-

spect for sovereignty, democratic institutions, and the rule of law. This will help achieve the overarching governance goals outlined under the Indo-Pacific Strategy.

Question. What is your assessment of corruption trends in Malaysia and efforts to address and reduce it by that government?

Answer. The United States and Malaysia share a commitment to fight against corruption, and Malaysia has been working to strengthen democratic governance. If confirmed, I would continue to underscore the importance of transparency, accountability, and adherence to the rule of law, all key to ensuring confidence in Malaysia's judicial system, democracy, and economy.

Question. If confirmed, what steps will you take to strengthen good governance and anticorruption programming in Malaysia?

Answer. The principles of good governance, the rule of law, and economic opportunity continue to anchor our partnership with Malaysia. The USAID Office of Transition Initiatives is supporting efforts by the Government of Malaysia, civil society, and other stakeholders to enhance good governance and improve transparency, accountability, and public responsiveness. If confirmed, I am committed to engaging with civil society and the Malaysian Government to further these efforts.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED
TO BRIAN D. McFEETERS BY SENATOR JEFF MERKLEY

Question. The current Government of Malaysia promised to repeal the much-abused sedition act, a broadly-worded law that continues to be used against those voicing criticism of Malaysia's royalty or unpopular opinions on topics related to race and religion. However, after over two years in office, they have yet to fulfill on that promise or other commitments to repeal oppressive laws. As Ambassador, how will you advocate for the Government to repeal the sedition act and fulfill other human rights promises which have yet to be addressed?

Answer. I am concerned about the erosion of press freedom in Malaysia as national security and media laws are at times being used by the Government against journalists, media outlets, and Malaysian citizens exercising their right to freedom of expression. If confirmed, I will engage the Government and civil society on the importance of human rights, rule of law, and fundamental freedoms, including for members of the press.

Question. Over 150,000 refugees and asylum seekers, most of whom come from Burma, are registered with the United National Commission for Refugees in Malaysia. In most cases, asylum seekers have not been granted legal status and remain unable to work, travel or enroll in government schools while their cases are being processed. The country has taken little action to investigate mass graves found in remote jungle camps, and human rights organizations report on police abuse of refugees. As Ambassador, how would you engage with the Government of Malaysia to ensure that refugees in Malaysia are safe and have access to the rights guaranteed under the UN's Refugee Convention?

Answer. The United States has expressed concerns about the treatment and status of refugees and asylum-seekers in Malaysia. We work closely with Malaysia, other ASEAN members, the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, and like-minded nations to advocate for the rights of refugees and asylum seekers in the region, ensure access for NGOs and the U.N. to persons of concern, and to advocate for the safe disembarkation of Rohingya refugees traveling on boats in the Andaman Sea.

If confirmed, I will continue to make accountability and protection a priority and will work tirelessly to maintain pressure on Malaysia to address serious concerns about trafficking in persons, release the Royal Commission of Inquiry report on the horrendous mass graves at Wang Kelian on the Malaysia-Thai border, and hold culpable officials accountable.

Question. China has become the largest investor into Malaysia's manufacturing and infrastructure sectors. Given the sheer volume of projects and amounts of capital flowing into Malaysia right now, how can the United States and other donors stay competitive and relevant? In addition to monitoring the flow of capital, how would you direct your team to monitor and push back on the sheer volume of information and disinformation that China is pushing into the Malaysian marketplace?

Answer. Malaysia maintains robust economic relationships with both the United States and the PRC. While Malaysia shares some of our concerns about the PRC's behavior in the region, as a nation heavily dependent on trade, it balances these

concerns with its extensive economic and investment ties to China. The United States, through its Indo-Pacific Strategy, advances fair and reciprocal trade and promotes commercial engagement that follows international best practices of transparency and financial sustainability. The over 700 U.S. companies operating in Malaysia model these best practices, many in high value-added industries that create skilled jobs. If confirmed, I will engage with Malaysian counterparts at all levels, both government and non-government, to discuss our concerns about the PRC's malign influence and how we can work together to counter it.

If confirmed, I will also encourage Malaysia to pursue open and transparent investment and infrastructure deals to avoid malign Chinese economic influence. If confirmed, I will also work with U.S. companies to highlight the benefits and best practices responsible investors bring to Malaysia.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO HON. GEETA PASI BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

Question. Do you believe that Prime Minister Abiy remains committed to democratic reform and inclusive governance? If so, why? If not, what policies can the United States pursue to ensure that Ethiopia's citizens' aspirations for reform that precipitated Prime Minister Abiy's rise to power are met?

Answer. The United States supports Prime Minister Abiy's efforts to implement a reform agenda to align Ethiopia with democratic and free market principles that will pay long term dividends for the Ethiopian people and strengthen our bilateral relationship based on common shared values. If confirmed, I will continue U.S. policies that support these long-term goals.

Question. Can free and fair elections be held in Ethiopia next year as Prime Minister Abiy has suggested, notably when many of the most prominent political leaders have been arrested or otherwise detained in the last six months? What is the United States doing to press for these prisoners' release?

Answer. Despite delays, Prime Minister Abiy and the electoral commission have publicly and privately committed to holding national elections with broad political participation as soon as possible. The United States believes that holding free, fair, credible, and inclusive elections is critical to Ethiopia's democratic future. The United States continues to provide the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia, civil society, and the media with resources and training to support the planned elections in 2021. The United States continues to press the Ethiopian Government to ensure that all prisoners are treated in accordance with Ethiopian law and that the Government support elections with inclusive and broad political party participation.

Question. Ethnic targeting has increased at an alarming rate. U.S. citizens of Tigrayan heritage have been detained and prevented from leaving the country. What is the United States doing to address the rise of ethnic targeting, including of American citizens?

Answer. The safety and security of U.S. citizens around the world is the top priority of the U.S. Government. U.S. Embassy Addis Ababa worked closely with Ethiopian authorities to ensure those detained at Bole airport because of their Tigrayan ethnicity-including American citizens-have been able to board their flights and depart Ethiopia safely.

The United States is deeply concerned about the reported targeting of Tigrayans or those of Tigrayan origins by the Ethiopian authorities, and has repeatedly warned against casting this crisis as one grounded in ethnicity. The United States has called for the protection of civilians at the highest levels of Ethiopia's leadership and has made clear that targeting civilians of Tigrayan origin will undermine the Government's stated goal of "winning the peace" once the conflict ends. We have urged the Government to reject publicly and firmly all such action based on ethnicity, and to respect all obligations under international law.

Question. There are credible reports of Eritrean ground forces participating in Tigray's military campaign against the TPLF. What degree of influence do you believe Eritrea now exerts in Ethiopia, and how does this affect the prospects for genuine democratic reform in the country?

Answer. The United States is aware of reports that Eritrean ground forces are participating in the conflict in Tigray.

Question. There are reports of Amhara militia having fought alongside the ENDF, and refugees in Sudan have suggested these militias have committed atrocities. How do you assess the role these militia played? What does the U.S. intend to do to ensure accountability for the abuses committed by all sides?

Answer. The United States is aware of reports that Amhara militia fought alongside the ENDF and allegations that they committed atrocities. We have categorically protested against all human rights violations or abuses. We have called on the Ethiopian Government to request and support independent investigations into these alleged atrocities. The U.S. Government interagency Atrocities Early Warning Task Force is evaluating appropriate measures to support international efforts to investigate and respond to any such allegations. The United States is prepared and committed to work with the international community to promote accountability for those culpable in these attacks.

Question. The Ethiopian Government has removed ethnic Tigrayans from its AU and U.N. deployments in Somalia and South Sudan and a civilian security officer at AU. It has leveled severe allegations at WHO Director-General Tedros and requested a list of ethnic Tigrayans at the WFP.

- Do you regard this as a threat to multilateralism and a potential human rights violation, as suggested by an UNMISS spokesman? What steps will you take to protect these institutions and prevent a dangerous precedent from taking hold?

Answer. The United States is deeply concerned about the reports that Tigrayan personnel attached to African Union (AU) and United Nations (UN) deployments in Somalia and South Sudan have been relieved of their duties. We have urged the Government of Ethiopia to avoid punitive or arbitrary action based on ethnicity and actions that could undermine stability in other parts of the Horn of Africa, including Somalia, Sudan, and South Sudan. The Ethiopian Government has indicated that it will continue to deploy forces in support of African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and its other regional security commitments. If confirmed, I will publicly and privately encourage respect for human rights and advocate strongly against targeting of any ethnic group including ethnic Tigrayans.

Question. Given the ongoing assistance pause, which effectively has put a stop to obligations of previously appropriated funds intended to support Ethiopia's fragile democratic transition, do you believe it is appropriate to divert frozen democracy assistance toward broader "countering China" initiatives?

Answer. The United States is committed to supporting Ethiopia's democratic transition using a myriad of tools. Some of these tools counter Chinese influence while simultaneously meeting some of our broader goals such as job creation.

Question. In your role as PDAS for the AF Bureau, you would have direct knowledge of the role the Bureau played in the decision to pause unobligated, non-life-saving foreign assistance to Ethiopia. Kindly explain in detail the role AF Bureau leadership played in making this decision. Do you believe the policy process considered the AF Bureau's input, and how was this reflected in the final decision? Did the U.S. Mission in Addis Ababa have input into this decision? If so, what specific input did they provide? If not, why not?

Answer. The Secretary of State decided to pause temporarily certain assistance for Ethiopia until Ethiopia makes demonstrable progress working with Sudan and Egypt to reach agreement on the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) in a manner beneficial to all parties. Notably, the Secretary approved certain exceptions to the pause, for the continuation of certain humanitarian aid, assistance for HIV/AIDS, assistance related to the provision of ventilators in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and certain funding for the Development Finance Corporation.

Question. What is the impact of the Ethiopia assistance pause on food security? The U.S. invested billions of dollars in boosting resilience and lessening dependence on lifesaving humanitarian aid? What is the impact of the assistance pause on the enabling environment for economic growth?

Answer. The temporary pause on certain foreign assistance for Ethiopia does not apply to humanitarian assistance, which continues unabated in order to ensure food security and to assist those affected by conflict, drought, displacement, COVID-19, and other challenges. Funding for non-humanitarian agriculture programs that was not obligated before the pause is subject to the pause.

Question. How has the conflict in Tigray affected U.S. military cooperation with the ENDF, both generally and in Somalia's operations? Has the U.S. conveyed to the Government of Ethiopia that reports of shelling of civilian areas in Tigray, and

other abuses attributed to government-aligned forces, could affect security cooperation?

Answer. Lines of communication remain open between the United States and the ENDF about military-to-military cooperation in general and on Somalia operations specifically. Ethiopia remains an essential troop contributing country to the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). On August 22, 2020, Secretary Pompeo approved a temporary, partial pause on the obligation and sub-obligation of certain foreign assistance funds for Ethiopia, including the related reprogramming of expiring resources planned for Ethiopia for other activities, and authorized communication of this decision to relevant stakeholders, including Congress and the Government of Ethiopia.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO HON. GEETA PASI BY SENATOR ROBERT MENENDEZ

Question. Ms. Pasi, as you know, in November, serious armed conflict broke out in Ethiopia's northern Tigray region, which pitted Federal and allied forces against those of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). While the full course of that conflict remains unclear, it is but the latest round of violent unrest that has beset the country since 2018 and exacted a serious humanitarian toll on the Ethiopian people. On the floor of the Senate, I have called on the administration to take urgent diplomatic action to address this escalating conflict.

- At this stage, what role should the United States play in terms of conflict prevention and resolution? What strategies should we pursue? More specifically, how can we foster dialogue between Ethiopia's rival stakeholders?

Answer. To achieve an end to the conflict in Tigray, there must be a complete end to fighting and the parties must engage in constructive dialogue. The United States has been working with the international community, the African Union, and regional leaders to urge Ethiopian authorities and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) to immediately de-escalate the conflict, end the current fighting, and undertake dialogue. We have called on all parties to ensure full, safe, and unhindered humanitarian access to facilitate rapid supply and delivery of life-saving assistance, the protection of civilians, and an immediate restoration of communication services to the region. We have also strongly stressed the need to avoid ethnicization of the situation. U.S. officials continue to urge neighboring countries to keep their borders open to asylum-seekers and avoid internationalization of the hostilities. If confirmed, I would ensure that Embassy Addis Ababa remains intensely engaged to support dialogue between the GOE and TPLF, including urging the Ethiopian Government to work with Tigrayan leaders to ensure that there is constructive, credible Tigrayan governance in the region, and to press for the protection of civilians and refugees and full, safe, and unhindered humanitarian access.

Question. I have a number of questions about the trajectory of democratization efforts in Ethiopia. As I noted earlier, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed initiated a number of laudable reforms when he took power in 2018, which did much to broaden political space in the country. But we have seen backsliding for the last year, with the arrest of opposition leaders and journalists, and reports of abuses by security forces.

- How concerned are you about the trajectory of democratization efforts in Ethiopia? Is the country on track for free and fair polls next year and the establishment of a viable multi-party democracy?

Answer. The ability of the Government of Ethiopia to successfully implement political reforms and hold national elections, sustain its important role in promoting regional stability and countering terrorism, and its strong potential to serve as a key partner for U.S. commercial engagement in Africa, rests upon Ethiopia's ability to maintain its own internal stability and development as a strong democratic partner. This, in turn, is contingent upon Ethiopia's capacity to address public pressure for greater democratic inclusion, civil liberties, and economic opportunity. Despite delays, Prime Minister Abiy's administration and the electoral commission have publicly and privately committed to holding national elections with broad political participation as soon as possible. Prime Minister Abiy recently met with political parties and the Government has stated elections will take place in mid-2021. The United States is supporting the National Election Board of Ethiopia and training political parties, as well as civil society and the media to play a constructive role in the electoral process. We also continue to message publicly and privately our support for free and fair elections.

Question. What would be the consequences of a reversion to autocracy-for Ethiopia, the Horn of Africa region, and U.S. interests?

Answer. Ethiopia, with a population of over 100 million, is the second most populous nation in Africa. Ethiopia is strategically positioned in the Horn of Africa, where threats by al-Shabaab and violent extremist organizations associated with ISIS are present, and our engagement with the Government of Ethiopia allows us to reduce the United States' direct military role. Ethiopia also hosts hundreds of thousands of refugees, enhancing regional stability. Democratic backsliding in Ethiopia would be detrimental for the Ethiopian people, the Horn of Africa and broader U.S. policy in the region. Prime Minister Abiy has pledged to oversee democratic reforms and under his administration, and we have seen an opening of democratic space for the political opposition, the media, and civil society. His ambitious reform agenda has the potential to transform Ethiopia into a more democratic country, with a Western-style, free market economy that would afford opportunities to the people of Ethiopia, and would align more closely with our values and policy interests. As such, if confirmed, I would prioritize continued U.S. engagement to encourage continued attention to good governance, democracy, and promotion of human rights and continued advancement of political and economic reforms in Ethiopia.

Question. What have been the limits of our approach to Ethiopia since the country's political transition began in 2018, specifically as it relates to supporting democracy?

Answer. Ethiopia's political and economic reform agenda will take time to fully implement, given the years of political repression and corruption. Our efforts to support reforms must occur at all levels of government, society, and communities in Ethiopia, and must include support for government efforts that improve democracy and governance. One major obstacle to Ethiopia's political transition has been the capacity of civil servants in new government offices created to advance those reforms when Prime Minister Abiy took power. Since 2018, we have provided training and support to ministries responsible for justice, security and public finance management and the National Election Board of Ethiopia. We have also supported nascent civil society organizations, and political parties, as well as the Ethiopia Human Rights Commission. Although many positive changes have happened at the federal level as a result of this support, this has not yet been the case at the state and local levels. We are working with local community leaders and civil society organizations at the local level to encourage civil participation and promote dialogue to mitigate long standing ethnic tensions.

Question. As I noted earlier, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed initiated a number of laudable reforms when he took power in 2018, which did much to broaden political space in the country. But we have seen backsliding for the last year, with the arrest of opposition leaders and journalists, and reports of abuses by security forces.

- What can the U.S. Government do to better support democracy and human rights in Ethiopia in the coming years?

Answer. This is a critical moment for Ethiopia. The United States has strong partnerships with Ethiopia to support health, education, food security, and economic growth. Popular desires for greater political freedom and civil liberties led to the selection of Abiy Ahmed as Prime Minister. Prime Minister Abiy made sweeping changes to Ethiopia, many of which addressed long-standing issues, including press freedom and other human rights issues. The complex issues that impede transition in Ethiopia remain and include land tenure, ethnic tensions, and youth unemployment. Discontent with the reforms and growing ethnic tensions may jeopardize the gains of the past as the current government has relied at times on the heavy-handed tactics it sought to erase. If confirmed, I will advocate for full respect of the rights guaranteed under Ethiopia's constitution, as well as for reforms that strengthen democratic institutions. I will also encourage the development and capacity building of civil society organizations which can now take advantage of legislation that has lifted constraints to their functioning and activities that were in place until recently. Such steps would not only support Ethiopian's own aspirations for stability and development, as well as its efforts against violent extremism in the region, but they would also strengthen the foundation for the U.S.-Ethiopia partnership in areas of vital interest to both nations.

Question. I have a number of questions about the trajectory of democratization efforts in Ethiopia. As I noted earlier, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed initiated a number of laudable reforms when he took power in 2018, which did much to broaden political space in the country. But we have seen backsliding for the last year, with the arrest of opposition leaders and journalists, and reports of abuses by security forces.

- Can I have your commitment to place democratization and human rights at the forefront of your engagement with Ethiopian authorities, and to take a firm stand when you see behavior inconsistent with democratic practice and norms?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to place democratization and human rights at the forefront of my engagement with Ethiopian authorities and to take a firm stand when I see behavior inconsistent with democratic practice and norms.

Question. How involved has State Department been in the GERD negotiations to date?

Answer. While Treasury has been the lead agency within the U.S. Government for GERD negotiations, the State Department has coordinated closely with Treasury. The Department has remained engaged with Ethiopia, Sudan and Egypt throughout all GERD negotiations to date, including the most recent set of discussions coordinated by the African Union (AU).

Question. What is your assessment of the current state of the GERD talks and the main impediments to a deal?

Answer. Our understanding is that the AU-sponsored talks are now paused due to Sudan's decision not to participate without a change in format, particularly with regard to allowing AU experts to play a more active role in facilitating negotiations. We encourage all three countries to find a compromise that would allow negotiations to resume.

Question. What have been the consequences of our pause on development assistance to Ethiopia, in terms of the bilateral relationship?

Answer. Our substantial investment to Ethiopia over the past year made the United States, once again, Ethiopia's largest bilateral development partner. We continue to engage with the Government of Ethiopia on areas of mutual interest, including the country's ambitious political and economic reform efforts, and continue to provide life-saving humanitarian assistance to populations in need. The GERD is only one aspect of our relationship with Ethiopia.

Question. What, in your view, are the elements of a U.S. Government strategy for supporting successful GERD negotiations?

Answer. The U.S. Government has consistently taken the position that it is up to the three countries involved—Ethiopia, Sudan, and Egypt—to negotiate an agreement that meets the needs of all three countries. The United States should continue its role as a neutral party and press all three countries to return to good-faith negotiations in order to reach an agreement on the GERD.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit that under your leadership, the U.S. Embassy will not take any action to support, promote, or participate in any matters related to, or that could be perceived as benefitting, the Trump Organization?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to complying with all relevant federal ethics laws, regulations, and rules, and to raise concerns that I may have through appropriate channels.

Question. Do you commit to make clear to all employees that retaliation of any kind has no place in federal government and will not be tolerated under your leadership? Do you agree that anyone found to have engaged in retaliation should be held fully accountable, up to and including losing their job?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to make clear to all employees that prohibited personnel practices has no place in federal government and will not be tolerated under my leadership. I also agree that anyone found to have engaged in prohibited personnel practices should be held fully accountable, up to and including losing their job.

Question. What will you do to promote, mentor, and support your staff that come from diverse backgrounds and underrepresented groups in the Foreign Service? In the Civil Service?

Answer. As I have done in the past, I plan to recruit a highly diverse team and to mentor and support all the people on my team. Our embassies must have a workforce that reflects the rich composition of our citizenry. If confirmed, I commit to an inclusive workplace in which every employee is treated with dignity and respect and feels empowered to serve the American people. I will outline my expectations clearly to my Country Team members, hold them accountable, and lead by example. Throughout my career, I have put a particular emphasis on encouraging employees from diverse backgrounds to remain in the Foreign Service and in the Civil Service, part of which means supporting them to find the best possible onward assignments

that will make them competitive for promotion and advancement. If confirmed, I plan to ensure that the entire embassy promotes and supports diversity and inclusion, and that the entire embassy has regular discussions on the tools we are using to achieve that goal. This includes diversity in the Ethiopian context, by ensuring the inclusion of underrepresented groups among our locally engaged staff members.

Question. Do you commit to respond promptly to all requests for information by members of this committee?

Answer. Yes, with the understanding that any such response would be organized through the Department of State's Bureau of Legislative Affairs and conducted in accordance with long-standing Department and Executive Branch practice.

Question. Do you commit to appear before this committee upon request?

Answer. Yes, with the understanding that any such appearance would be organized through the Department of State's Bureau of Legislative Affairs and conducted in accordance with long-standing Department and Executive Branch practice.

Question. Do you commit to report to appropriate authorities, including the FBI, Inspector General, and Congress, any credible allegations of foreign interference in U.S. elections?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to comply with all relevant laws, regulations, and rules and to raising concerns that I may have through appropriate channels.

Question. Do you commit to report to appropriate authorities, including the FBI, Inspector General, and Congress, any attempts by foreign or private individuals to improperly influence U.S. foreign policy, particularly if you have reason to believe those efforts are adverse to U.S. interests?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to comply with all relevant federal ethics laws, regulations, and rules, and to raise concerns that I may have through appropriate channels.

Question. If you become aware of any suspected waste, fraud, or abuse in the Department, do you commit to report it to the Inspector General or other appropriate channels?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to comply with all relevant federal ethics laws, regulations, and rules, and to raise concerns that I may have through appropriate channels.

Question. What are the most important actions you have taken in your career to date to support democracy and human rights? What has been the impact of your actions?

Answer. The most important actions I have taken to support democracy and human rights in my career relate to political transitions. Bangladesh risked becoming an ungovernable space in 2007. As Chargé d'Affaires, a.i., my public and private messages encouraged the caretaker government to restore democracy, promote respect for human rights, and hold free and fair elections. In Ghana from 1995 to 1997, I promoted political discussion between multiple political parties in advance of its first democratic elections, providing necessary space for political dialogue. After the fall of Ceausescu in Romania, I documented the challenges faced by ethnic and religious minorities, especially the Roma, providing a roadmap for the new Romanian Government to improve its performance in this area. As Ambassador, I showcased the human rights aspects of our significant assistance to professionalize Chad's security forces and stressed the need to hold security personnel accountable for violations. When reporters were detained for asking questions about the deaths of prisoners being transported by police, I led the effort among like-minded ambassadors to issue a joint statement that publicly expressed our concerns, leading to the release of the reporters. As PDAS in the Africa Bureau, I have coordinated our efforts to support elections and promote human rights across the continent.

Question. What issues are the most pressing challenges to democracy or democratic development in Ethiopia? These challenges might include obstacles to participatory and accountable governance and institutions, rule of law, authentic political competition, civil society, human rights and press freedom. Please be as specific as possible.

Answer. The most serious impediments to democracy or democratic development in Ethiopia include ethnic divisions, repression of independent media, certain restrictions on political participation, weak national and regional governance institutions, and the lack of capacity of civil society and government security forces and unemployment. The detention of certain political party members and journalists by

security forces has been a source of critical concern, both inside and outside the country. If confirmed, I will use my leadership and voice, both publicly and privately, to make clear that respect for human rights is essential for Ethiopia's future prosperity, stability and security. I will engage Ethiopian authorities, international partners, civil society organizations, and business and religious leaders to work together toward these goals. I will also ensure strong U.S. Government engagement with human rights activists and civil society in Ethiopia, as well as organizations and agencies charged with advancing and protecting human rights such as the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission.

Question. What steps will you take—if confirmed—to support democracy in Ethiopia? What do you hope to accomplish through these actions? What are the potential impediments to addressing the specific obstacles you have identified?

Answer. If confirmed, I will actively engage leading government officials, including the Prime Minister on U.S. Government concerns about governance and human rights issues. I will meet regularly with leadership from domestic and international human rights organizations, political opposition groups and their leaders, and civil society organizations working on issues of democracy and governance. I will also engage with all levels of government in Ethiopia and actively seek out views of local civil society representatives. Additionally, I will use public platforms to voice support for democracy, respect for individual freedoms and good governance. I will also ensure that U.S. Embassy Addis Ababa officers meeting regularly with representatives of Ethiopian civil society and human rights organizations and that the U.S. Embassy Addis Ababa prioritizes support for good governance and human rights in its Integrated Country Strategy and related programming.

Question. How will you utilize U.S. Government assistance resources at your disposal, including the Democracy Commission Small Grants program and other sources of State Department and USAID funding, to support democracy and governance, and what will you prioritize in processes to administer such assistance?

Answer. U.S. assistance to Ethiopia advances democracy and governance, both through funds dedicated specifically for those issues and through cross-sectoral programming in areas such as health or education. Through our development assistance, the United States improves the resilience and capacity of nascent civil society organizations in the face of, at times limited, democratic space, supports Ethiopian partners to advance their advocacy priorities related to human rights, enhances the professionalism of independent media, and seeks to improve the transparency of democratic processes. Additionally, the United States supports the introduction and expansion of good governance, which bolsters transparency, citizen participation, and accountability within the justice sector. To complement and expand these efforts, I will continue to engage within the State Department and with USAID to ensure appropriate resources are available to advance U.S. interests in Ethiopia.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to meet with civil society members, human rights and other non-governmental organizations in the U.S. and with local human rights NGOs, and other members of civil society in Ethiopia? What steps will you take to pro-actively address efforts to restrict or penalize NGOs and civil society via legal or regulatory measures?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed, I commit to meet with civil society members, human rights and other non-governmental organizations in Ethiopia and the United States. Human rights, civil society organizations, and other non-governmental organizations, regardless of where they are registered or operate, play an important role in advancing democratic governance, and respect for fundamental freedoms and human rights. If confirmed, I am committed to engaging with any individual or organization that supports U.S. values, and will do all I can to support and promote their efforts to strengthen Ethiopia's democracy.

I will also speak out publicly about U.S. values including respect for human rights, and continue to support the Ethiopian Government's efforts to reform its legal framework to ensure respect for human rights, including as the freedom of expression and the right to peaceful assembly.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to meet with democratically oriented political opposition figures and parties? What steps will you take to encourage genuine political competition? Will you advocate for access and inclusivity for women, minorities and youth within political parties?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed, I commit to meeting with diverse representation of democratic political figures and parties. I will ensure that U.S. Embassy Addis Ababa continues to engage with representatives from diverse political and ethnic perspectives, including government and opposition parties. I will advocate for demo-

cratic values and extend support through existing instruments to organizations that promote the active participation of women, youth, and other marginalized populations in political activities. I will also support all Mission programs and activities that support voter education and citizen engagement in the democratic process.

Question. Will you and your embassy team actively engage with Ethiopia on freedom of the press and address any government efforts designed to control or undermine press freedom through legal, regulatory or other measures? Will you commit to meeting regularly with independent, local press in Ethiopia?

Answer. Freedom of expression, including for members of the press, is fundamental to an open, just, and democratic society. If confirmed, the embassy team and I will actively engage with the Ethiopian Government on press freedom. I will speak openly and honestly with the Government and civil society about any efforts designed to control or undermine freedom of expression, including blocking Internet and mobile communications, and commit myself to meeting regularly with independent and local press in Ethiopia in support of their efforts.

Question. Will you and your embassy team actively engage with civil society and government counterparts on countering disinformation and propaganda disseminated by foreign state or non-state actors in Ethiopia?

Answer. If confirmed, I will encourage my Embassy team to actively engage with civil society and government counterparts, as well as with local media, to counter disinformation and propaganda disseminated by foreign state or non-state actors.

Question. Will you and your embassy teams actively engage with Ethiopia on the right of labor groups to organize, including for independent trade unions?

Answer. If confirmed, I will proudly engage on matters of labor rights with leadership in government and civil society. I will engage U.S. companies and non-governmental organization (NGO) partners to encourage the Government to adopt and enforce practices and legal reforms that uphold workers' freedom of association, collective bargaining, acceptable working conditions, and the right to a minimum wage.

Question. Will you commit to using your position, if confirmed, to defend the human rights and dignity of all people in Ethiopia, no matter their sexual orientation or gender identity? What challenges do the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) people face in Ethiopia? What specifically will you commit to do to help LGBTQ people in Ethiopia?

Answer. If confirmed, I am committed to protecting the fundamental rights and freedoms of all citizens, including historically marginalized populations. Homosexuality is illegal in Ethiopia, and LGBTI communities continue to face discrimination. If confirmed, I will support the development of local voices in support of LGBTI rights. I will also raise LGBTI issues in the context of larger human rights concerns wherever possible.

Of course, the safety and security of LGBTI people, as well as all individuals, is of the utmost importance; therefore, if confirmed, I will ensure our approach in Ethiopia, first and foremost, does no harm. I will regularly engage with local LGBTI community and civil society partners so that we can avoid sending messages or taking actions that might be counter-productive or dangerous to the community.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO HON. GEETA PASI BY SENATOR BENJAMIN L. CARDIN

Question. Research from private industry demonstrates that, when managed well, diversity makes business teams better both in terms of creativity and in terms of productivity. What will you do to promote, mentor, and support your staff that come from diverse backgrounds and underrepresented groups?

Answer. As I have done in the past, I plan to recruit a highly diverse team and to mentor and support all the people on my team. Our embassies must have a workforce that reflects the rich composition of our citizenry. If confirmed, I commit to an inclusive workplace in which every employee is treated with dignity and respect and feels empowered to serve the American people. I will outline my expectations clearly to my Country Team members, hold them accountable, and lead by example. Throughout my career I have put a particular emphasis on encouraging employees from diverse backgrounds to remain in the Foreign Service and in the Civil Service, part of which means supporting them to find the best possible onward assignments that will make them competitive for promotion and advancement. If confirmed, I

plan to work to ensure that the entire embassy promotes and supports diversity and inclusion, and that we have regular discussions on the tools we are using to achieve that goal. This includes diversity in the Ethiopian context, ensuring the inclusion of underrepresented groups among our locally engaged staff members.

Question. What steps will you take to ensure each of the supervisors at the Embassy in Ethiopia are fostering an environment that is diverse and inclusive?

Answer. If confirmed, I plan to speak regularly with my team—both collectively and individually—about our objectives for recruiting a diverse team and for promoting an inclusive environment. I will ensure that all employees have participated in relevant training and will consult with and seek a visit (or a video conference for all staff) by the Office of Civil Rights and the Bureau of Global Talent Management's Diversity and Inclusion Unit. I will encourage the workforce to engage in inclusive conversations on and efforts to promote diversity and inclusion. I will ensure that all my staff know that diversity and inclusion are top priorities of mine and welcome input from them on how to improve diversity and inclusion efforts.

Question. Do you commit to bring to the committee's attention (and the State Department Inspector General) any change in policy or U.S. actions that you suspect may be influenced by any of the President's business or financial interests, or the business or financial interests of any senior White House staff?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to comply with all relevant federal ethics laws, regulations, and rules, and to raise concerns that I have through appropriate channels.

Question. Do you commit to inform the committee if you have any reason to suspect that a foreign government, head of state, or foreign-controlled entity is taking any action in order to benefit any of the President's business or financial interests, or the interests of senior White House staff?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to comply with all relevant federal ethics laws, regulations, and rules, and to raise concerns that I have through appropriate channels.

Question. Do you or do any members of your immediate family have any financial interests in Ethiopia?

Answer. My investment portfolio includes diversified mutual funds, including foreign stock funds, which may hold interests in companies with a presence overseas, but which are exempt from conflict of interest laws. I am committed to following all applicable ethics laws and regulations and remaining vigilant with regard to my ethics obligations.

Question. How do you believe political corruption impacts democratic governance and the rule of law generally, and in Ethiopia specifically?

Answer. Corruption undermines democracy and rule of law, destabilizes nations, hinders economic growth, and provides openings for dangerous groups, such as traffickers and terrorists. Anticorruption efforts seek to 1) make it harder for criminality and terrorism to take root and spread, 2) promote more stable and accountable governments, and 3) level the playing field for U.S. business to compete in every region around the world. In Ethiopia, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's efforts to build Ethiopia's capacity to protect democratic inclusion, promote civil liberties, and build economic opportunities are being challenged by opposition groups, including former officials who have been charged with corruption. In the past, the lack of democratic traditions and values, as well as restrictions on the operations of non-governmental organizations and civil society, have hampered democratic reforms and development in Ethiopia. Long held grievances and anger at the central government have fueled protests and civil unrest and have undermined Ethiopia's democratic transition. However, Ethiopia's recent reform efforts have made positive strides to provide a greater voice to civil society, establish a more professional and independent justice sector free from political interference, and strengthened the security sector by building the capacity of police and security forces.

Question. What is your assessment of corruption trends in Ethiopia and efforts to address and reduce it by that government?

Answer. While corruption remains an issue in Ethiopia, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed has made tremendous strides to modernize and establish a more professional and independent justice sector free from political interference. Prime Minister Abiy has opened and broadened political space, pursued justice sector reform, and strengthened adherence to the rule of law. In 2019, the investigations and over forty charges brought against former Director General of the National Intelligence and

Security Services (NISS) Getachew Assefa, and 25 additional former officials and staff at NISS, is a testament to the Government's seriousness in combatting corruption.

The Government has also undertaken important legal reforms, including changes to the laws governing the activities of civil society and protections for media and commercial sector. In February 2020, the Ethiopian Attorney General's Office opened a new and consolidated Anti-Corruption Directorate to recover "stolen assets and fight corruption." The plan is to have the Directorate oversee not only the investigation phase but the subsequent trial and conviction phases, as well as the recovery of assets or ill-gotten gains. The goal is for Ethiopians to understand these reforms and help the populace perceive the judiciary as being efficient, independent, fair, and accessible.

Prime Minister Abiy's reforms are slowly becoming more entrenched at the federal level, but challenges to implementing Prime Minister Abiy's reformist vision at the regional and local levels remain.

Question. If confirmed, what steps will you take to strengthen good governance and anticorruption programming in Ethiopia?

Answer. If confirmed, I will work with the interagency members and explore further opportunities for increased U.S. engagement on good governance and anticorruption programming. I plan on continuing U.S. support to Ethiopia's Attorney General's office, Supreme Court, and other rule of law actors at the national level to draft, adopt, and implement policy legal and justice reforms, as well as build investigation capacity to advance the Government's anticorruption efforts, human rights, and counterterrorism investigations.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO HON. GEETA PASI BY SENATOR JEFF MERKLEY

Question. The United States has long depended on Ethiopia as a net contributor to regional stability, a role clearly in question now. If not contained soon, what impact might the ongoing fighting around Tigray have on the Horn of Africa region? What actions would you take as Ambassador to ensure that Ethiopia maintains its stabilizing role?

Answer. There must be a complete end to fighting and constructive dialogue to resolve the crisis in Tigray. Ethiopia contributes to regional stability through a host of ways. Ethiopia is the third-largest host of refugees in Africa. Ethiopia is a significant contributor to regional peacekeeping and counterterrorism efforts and is a key partner in the African Union Mission in Somalia's peacekeeping and counterterrorism efforts and to the United Nations' peacekeeping efforts in South Sudan. Ethiopia also plays a leading role in the South Sudanese peace process. The United States is gravely concerned about the situation in Tigray. Ethiopia's role in promoting peace and stability in the region and countering violent extremism will be undermined if the Tigray crisis does not end. If it persists, Ethiopia risks creating instability and further ethnic violence, which could derail development and market reforms and stall progress on democracy. If confirmed, I would work hard for stability in the Horn of Africa and in Ethiopia by continuing to urge the Government of Ethiopia and the Tigray People's Liberation Front to restore peace and pursue reconciliation. I would also continue to work to advance Ethiopia's efforts to regional peace and security and engage with partners on ongoing security reform efforts in Ethiopia to mitigate and prevent conflict and promote political and economic reforms.

Question. Many international voices are calling for dialogue between the Government of Ethiopia and the Tigrayan rebels to end the current conflict. What is the role of the Embassy in promoting dialogue and ensuring access for humanitarian actors? How would you approach fulfilling that role, given the current push-back from both sides of the conflict?

Answer. There must be a complete end to fighting and constructive dialogue to resolve the crisis in Tigray. U.S. Embassy Addis Ababa and the Department have been working with the international community, the African Union, and other regional leaders to urge Ethiopian authorities and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) to immediately de-escalate the conflict and end the current fighting. U.S. Embassy Addis Ababa has been in communication with the Government of Ethiopia and TPLF leaders and called on all parties to ensure full, safe, and unhindered humanitarian access to facilitate rapid supply and delivery of life-saving

assistance, the protection of civilians, and an immediate restoration of communication services to the region. The United States has also stressed the need to avoid ethnicization of the situation. Embassy and Department officials continue to urge neighboring countries to keep their borders open to asylum-seekers. If confirmed, I would ensure that U.S. Embassy Addis Ababa remains intensely engaged to support dialogue between the GOE and TPLF, including urging the Ethiopian Government to work with Tigrayan leaders to ensure that there is constructive, credible Tigrayan governance in the region, and to press for humanitarian access and protection of civilians.

Question. Human rights organizations have expressed concern that the Ethiopian Government is using COVID-19 restrictions as a pretext to restrict the rights of citizens, including curtailing freedom of speech and internet access. How has the United States responded to the uptick in arbitrary arrests and prosecutions of journalists and government critics? How would you continue to address this issue as Ambassador?

Answer. U.S. Embassy Addis Ababa and Department officials continue to urge Ethiopia to support fundamental freedoms and rights, and principles of good governance. For example, U.S. Embassy Addis Ababa and Department officials have expressed grave concerns to Ethiopian officials over the recent communication black-out in the Tigray region and pressed for the restoration of these services, particularly as the lack of services has hampered our ability to communicate with U.S. citizens and coordinate humanitarian response with international partners. We also continue to work with human rights groups to call for transparent and independent investigations into human rights abuses and violations in Ethiopia. U.S. Embassy Addis Ababa continues to support the efforts of the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) and has been in close contact with Commissioner Daniel Bekele since his tenure began in 2019. We supported the promulgation of recent legislation that gave the EHRC more autonomy and more funding to perform investigations. The United States has pressed the Ethiopian Government to undertake transparent, fair judicial processes in accordance with Ethiopian law for all those detained, including the recent arrest of journalists in Ethiopia. If confirmed, I will continue to call for respect for freedom of expression, including that of members of the press. I would also continue supporting and collaborating with the EHRC and civil society organizations to ensure the rights of all Ethiopians are respected and upheld.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO HON. GEETA PASI BY SENATOR CORY A. BOOKER

Question. The most destabilizing external actions in the Horn of Africa and those that undermining prospects for successful democratic transitions in Sudan and Ethiopia are not in fact U.S. adversaries like Russia and China, but U.S. allies and security partners in the Middle East, who have exported their rivalries into the Horn. What is the U.S.'s strategy for mitigating the destabilizing influence from the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Qatar on the Horn?

Answer. Strengthening security and stabilization are core components of the administration's Africa policy. The Horn of Africa is of great strategic importance to the United States and we work with our partners to bring stability, peace, and prosperity to the region. In Somalia, for example, we provide significant support for the Federal Government and Member States as they create Somali-led election model that will be critical for stability. The U.S. Government also created the Friends of Sudan to help stabilize that country, and included the participation of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt, Qatar, and Ethiopia. We will continue to encourage countries to invest productively in the region in a manner that promotes stability and peace.

Question. Is there an effort underway involving not just the Africa Bureau but the Near East Bureau and other relevant offices to develop a multi-year regional strategy for the Horn that accounts for the increasingly aggressive influence of Middle Eastern countries in this important region?

Answer. The administration's Africa strategy supports efforts to counter threats to American and African Security. The Bureaus of African Affairs (AF), Near East Affairs (NEA), and Counterterrorism work closely to coordinate our engagement in the Horn of Africa that advance our overarching U.S. national security interests. This approach allows us to respond flexibly as needs arise to balance our foreign policy priorities. In recognition of the increased overlap between AF and NEA and to elevate coordination, while I served as Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for

AF, we co-hosted a joint session with NEA during the 2020 Chiefs of Mission Conference to discuss Red Sea issues among our ambassadors. Further, when crises emerge between our regions as was the case during the 2019 political crisis in Sudan, our Special Envoy to Sudan and a NEA Deputy Assistant Secretary made a joint trip to the region to shore up a unified regional position. We also seek the input from the think-tank community as the State Department sent an AF Deputy Assistant Secretary to the USIP and National Defense University-organized Red Sea Forum events in Jordan and Washington, DC, which assembled regional and interested countries and non-governmental experts.

Question. The humanitarian situation created by the crisis in Ethiopia is deteriorating. The U.N. estimates that two million people are in need of assistance in and around Tigray, and one million have been displaced by the fighting. Forty-four thousand refugees from Ethiopia have flooded into Sudan, which is dealing with its own precarious political transition. UNHCR has said that approximately 96,000 Eritrean refugees in Tigray camps have essentially run out of food. Ethiopia and the U.N. have reportedly agreed to a deal by which U.N. air workers will be granted “unimpeded” access to government controlled areas of Tigray.

- What can the United States do to ensure the Federal Government of Ethiopia lives up to its end of this agreement?

Answer. The U.N. and Government of Ethiopia (GOE) have signed a coordination framework that affirms humanitarian principles and the importance of access, and establishes a UN-GOE committee that creates a clearance and approval processes for humanitarian activities. We will monitor the implementation of this agreement closely and strongly press for a streamlined process and full, safe, and unhindered humanitarian access. Significant barriers remain to full, safe, and unhindered humanitarian access. Most notably, fighting continues throughout parts of the Tigray region, and access will likely remain limited until humanitarian organizations can successfully negotiate access with all parties to the conflict or until the fighting ends.

The United States is closely aligned with other donor governments in this regard and is engaged at all levels to advocate for safe, sustained, and unhindered access to ensure that those impacted by this conflict can receive the assistance they need. We are steadfast in our support for the U.N. and humanitarian partners to provide assistance as access improves.

Question. What remedies would the United States propose if the TPLF refuses to allow the same levels of access to areas it controls?

Answer. It is vital that continued advocacy and engagement for safe, sustained, and unhindered access take place at all levels to ensure that those impacted by this conflict can receive the assistance they need. We are aligned with other donor governments in these efforts and in supporting the U.N. and our partners to provide assistance as humanitarian access and the security situation improve. We will also explore options for coordinating with moderate actors within the Tigray’s People Liberation Front (TPLF) to secure greater access by humanitarian works to vulnerable and impacted communities. The United States is also exploring a variety of potential actions and tools available if parties to the conflict jeopardize Ethiopian citizens by refusing humanitarian access.

Question. What resources should the U.S. provide to Sudan to enable local communities to absorb refugees, and enable a safe return back to Ethiopia?

Answer. The United States was the largest humanitarian donor to Sudan in FY 2020 providing over \$320 million to a number of international partners. U.S. humanitarian assistance provides refugees and IDPs in Sudan with shelter, access to clean water and sanitation, health care, food, and other lifesaving support. Our partners are already deploying some of this assistance to respond to the urgent needs of the newly arrived Ethiopian refugees. The U.N. released an Inter-Agency response plan for the Ethiopian refugee influx in East Sudan in late November, which called for \$147 million to respond to an anticipated Ethiopian refugee population of up to 100,000 over the next six months. We are currently evaluating this appeal to determine our contributions. We are looking to provide additional funding to support USAID emergency in-kind food assistance in Sudan.

Question. International humanitarian organizations have credibly reported that both federal government forces and the TPLF have committed serious human rights abuses during the conflict, including the indiscriminate killing of civilians and possible war crimes.

- What steps is the U.S. Government prepared to take to help investigate these potential abuses and crimes?

Answer. We have subject matter experts embedded with the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission and are assisting in the development of action plans and investigations into reported abuses and atrocities. Through the Atrocities Early Warning Task Force, we are also developing an action plan to respond to reports of human rights violations or abuses of civilians or refugees. Along with our international partners, we have called for transparent, independent investigations into these reports. We have also called for the restoration of communication services to better support civilians and refugees in the Tigray region. The U.S. Government is also prepared to support the work being done by the Office of the High Commission of Human Rights (OHCHR) who is gathering information and incident accounts from refugees who have fled to Sudan. We are also deeply concerned about the reports of Ethiopian authorities taking actions against Tigrayans, such as reported detentions and harassment based on their ethnicity. U.S. diplomats in Washington and Addis Ababa raised the need for the protection of all civilians with the highest levels of Ethiopia's leadership, and made clear that taking action against civilians of Tigrayan origin based on their ethnicity will undermine Ethiopia's stated goal of "winning the peace" once the conflict ends. We have urged the Government to reject publicly and firmly all such action based on ethnicity, and to respect all its obligations under international law.

Question. The U.S. Government has placed a great deal of effort, time, and money into rebuilding our relationship with Ethiopia and with Prime Minister Abiy in particular. PM Abiy, however, has shunned diplomatic efforts to mediate the conflict, including those of the United States.

- How will the U.S. Government respond if the Federal Government of Ethiopia is found to have committed serious human rights abuses?

Answer. The U.S. Government, including the Atrocities Early Warning Task Force, has closely reviewed and examined the conflict as it has evolved and is determining options the U.S. Government might take to advance the goal of ensuring the protection of civilians, including refugees. The United States is also exploring a myriad of 'carrots and sticks' that may be used to respond as reports of human rights violations and abuses are being investigated, to include enhanced diplomatic engagement and potential consequences. This includes actions that could be taken against individuals implicated in human rights abuses and violations. Perpetrators of human rights abuses and violations must be held accountable. Promoting and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms is a high U.S. priority, as are preventing atrocities, protecting civilians, and ensuring accountability.

Question. Has PM Abiy done irreparable harm to the U.S.-Ethiopia relationship? Is he not the leader the world thought he was when he won the Nobel Peace Prize and was being lauded for seeking to take Ethiopia in a new direction?

Answer. The United States-Ethiopia relationship is important, complex, and focused on our shared interests. PM Abiy's efforts to implement much needed political and economic reforms should be lauded. However, a failure to peacefully resolve the Tigray conflict and address the ongoing humanitarian concerns and protection of civilians will undermine his reform efforts.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO HON. DAVID REIMER BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

Question. Honoring commercial contracts is an essential element of the rule of law, which Sierra Leone must strengthen to develop its economy, as we'd all like to see. According to international arbitration rulings, a U.S.-funded company, SL Mining, is in an active dispute with the Government of Sierra Leone, which has violated its contract with SL Mining. The administration has rightly made aggressive commercial diplomacy a priority, but promoting U.S. trade and investment in Africa has been a longstanding, bipartisan priority. What would you do as ambassador to advance the rule of law in Sierra Leone, mainly as it affects this U.S.-funded company? How would a potential Millennium Challenge Corporation compact impact your advocacy for Sierra Leone?

Answer. Although the Government of Sierra Leone has a generally favorable attitude toward foreign direct investment and generally treats foreign companies in a non-discriminatory fashion, investors face obstacles, including corruption, low human capital development, poor infrastructure, and intermittent contract enforcement challenges stemming from the weak enforcement of the rule of law. Ultimately, a country's success will depend to a large extent on its ability to foster an

environment for the private sector to drive economic growth and opportunity. I understand that the Embassy continues to engage on investment climate issues broadly and this case specifically. If confirmed, I will continue to advocate with the Government of Sierra Leone—both bilaterally and with others in the international community—for the types of policy actions needed to maintain the country's improved performance on the Millennium Challenge Corporation scorecard and advancement in the World Bank's Doing Business rankings, which specifically includes dynamics related to the enforcement of contracts. If confirmed, my team and I will continue to support the interests of U.S. firms, including engaging on the SL Mining case directly with the Government of Sierra Leone, to improve on these investment climate issues to strengthen Sierra Leone's economy and make the country a more attractive location for American investment.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO HON. DAVID REIMER BY SENATOR ROBERT MENENDEZ

Question. Sierra Leone is facing a possible recession amid the global economic downturn, with the IMF predicting in June that GDP will contract by 3.1 percent.

- How will this affect development in Sierra Leone?

Answer. The COVID-19 pandemic has tested the resilience of the Sierra Leonean people and is negatively affecting economic development in Sierra Leone's small and fragile economy. However, just as we stood with the Sierra Leoneans during the Ebola crisis, the United States will support Sierra Leone's recovery from COVID-19. The U.S. Government is a primary partner in the response efforts of the Government of Sierra Leone. If confirmed, I will work with USAID and international donors to support Sierra Leone's economic recovery. I will work with USAID and CDC to implement sustainable investments across the health sector and encourage the Government of Sierra Leone to invest more heavily to create the jobs necessary to boost the economy and combat poverty.

Question. What can the United States do to reduce poverty and promote private sector investment?

Answer. Sierra Leone's economy has significant potential, with abundant mineral resources, large areas of fertile land, well-stocked fisheries, and beautiful beaches. If confirmed, supporting U.S. companies for the benefit of both Americans and Sierra Leoneans would be among my top priorities to capitalize on the significant potential of the Sierra Leonean economy. As an economic-coned officer, this is of particular interest to me. Although the Government of Sierra Leone has a generally favorable attitude toward foreign direct investment, investors face obstacles, including corruption, low human capital development, and poor infrastructure. If confirmed, I would urge the Government of Sierra Leone to improve on these investment climate issues to strengthen their economy and make it a more conducive environment for private sector-led growth and a more attractive location for U.S. firms. I would continue the Embassy's work with the private sector and relevant Government of Sierra Leone leaders to help diversify Sierra Leone's economy and encourage U.S. investments and the growth of small and medium enterprises that can employ Sierra Leone's burgeoning youth population.

Question. Are you concerned about Chinese investment in Sierra Leone?

Answer. Yes. I understand that Chinese engagements in Sierra Leone are expanding. If confirmed, I would encourage socially responsible foreign investment—particularly U.S. investment—in Sierra Leone that promotes sustainable development and respect for human rights of all individuals. I would also encourage investments in line with internationally accepted best practices, such as those spelled out in the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, and the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights. I would not hesitate to speak out if I saw Chinese investment or business practices that exploit or are not in the best interest of Sierra Leone.

Question. Although there have been at least 74 deaths from COVID-19 in Sierra Leone, the country does not seem to have suffered as serious an outbreak as other African countries. Still, the pandemic remains a serious health threat—one among many in Sierra Leone. The country became a focus country for the Presidential Malaria Initiative in 2017, and was the epicenter of the West Africa Ebola outbreak:

- Among the many health challenges facing, Sierra Leone, which should be the priority for United States assistance?

Answer. Even prior to the onset of COVID-19, Sierra Leoneans faced serious health challenges. The country ranks near the very bottom, at 181 out of 189 countries, on the UN's Human Development Index, with high rates of maternal mortality, child malnutrition, and malaria. Sierra Leone must allocate funds and resources to public health; doing so will be crucial to the country's future progress. If confirmed, I will work with Sierra Leonean leaders to ensure that public health remains a top national priority. I would encourage continuation of the U.S. health initiatives and continued engagement with Sierra Leonean officials to address health threats both thought focused attention on specific maladies as well as more generalized improvements to strengthen health systems.

I understand that the Government of Sierra Leone's ability to respond effectively to COVID-19 is largely due to the sizable investment from the U.S. Government during and after Ebola, particularly under the Global Health Security Agenda. If confirmed, I would continue to use our strong public health presence and resources to help the Government of Sierra Leone respond to the numerous of health challenges facing the country.

Oversight

Question. If confirmed, do you commit that under your leadership, the U.S. Embassy will not take any action to support, promote, or participate in any matters related to, or that could be perceived as benefitting, the Trump Organization?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to comply with all relevant federal ethics laws, regulations, and rules, and to raise concerns that I may have through appropriate channels.

Question. Do you commit to make clear to all employees that retaliation of any kind has no place in federal government and will not be tolerated under your leadership? Do you agree that anyone found to have engaged in retaliation should be held fully accountable, up to and including losing their job?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to make clear to all employees that prohibited personnel practices have no place in the federal government and will not be tolerated under my leadership. I agree that anyone found to have engaged in prohibited personnel practices should be held fully accountable and subject to discipline consistent with applicable laws, regulations, and Department policy.

Question. What will you do to promote, mentor, and support your staff that come from diverse backgrounds and underrepresented groups in the Foreign Service? In the Civil Service?

Answer. Throughout my career, I have worked to promote diversity in the State Department workforce. I have personally mentored Foreign Service and Civil Service employees from diverse backgrounds to strengthen retention and make them competitive for promotion and advancement. I intend to continue this practice if confirmed as Ambassador to Sierra Leone. As an example of my efforts, at my current post as Ambassador to Mauritius and the Seychelles, I directed our Deputy Chief of Mission and one other Embassy Officer to personally interview every single applicant for which we have open positions. This is an involved process due to the volume of applicants; however, I believe that it is essential to ensure that everyone gets a fair and equal opportunity to serve and that no one is overlooked. I intend to take this practice to my next post, if confirmed.

Question. Do you commit to respond promptly to all requests for information by members of this committee?

Answer. Yes, with the understanding that any such response would be organized through the Department of State's Bureau of Legislative Affairs and conducted in accordance with long-standing Department and Executive Branch practice.

Question. Do you commit to appear before this committee upon request?

Answer. Yes, with the understanding that any such appearance would be organized through the Department of State's Bureau of Legislative Affairs and conducted in accordance with long-standing Department and Executive Branch practice.

Question. Do you commit to report to appropriate authorities, including the FBI, Inspector General, and Congress, any credible allegations of foreign interference in U.S. elections?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to comply with all relevant laws, regulations, and rules and to raising concerns that I may have through appropriate channels.

Question. Do you commit to report to appropriate authorities, including the FBI, Inspector General, and Congress, any attempts by foreign or private individuals to improperly influence U.S. foreign policy, particularly if you have reason to believe those efforts are adverse to U.S. interests?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to comply with all relevant federal ethics laws, regulations, and rules, and to raise concerns that I may have through appropriate channels.

Question. If you become aware of any suspected waste, fraud, or abuse in the Department, do you commit to report it to the Inspector General or other appropriate channels?

Answer. I commit to comply with all relevant federal ethics laws, regulations, and rules, and to raise concerns that I may have through appropriate channels.

Democracy/Human Rights

Question. What are the most important actions you have taken in your career to date to support democracy and human rights? What has been the impact of your actions?

Answer. During my career, I have taken advantage of many opportunities to promote democracy and human rights, most notably during my time as the Director of the Office of West African Affairs and while serving in Mauritania, Iraq, and Haiti. I believe my most meaningful achievements occurred while serving in Baghdad, Iraq as the Embassy's Senior Refugee Coordinator. In that job, I had the opportunity to hear directly from refugees and non-governmental organizations and elevate their concerns to the senior levels in the Iraqi Government. I advocated repeatedly with the minister in charge of refugee affairs to provide better treatment of internally displaced persons and to treat all internally displaced persons equally, regardless of whether they were Sunni, Shia, Christian, or Kurd. I believe that through my advocacy efforts, we were able to increase Iraqi Government attention and assistance to these victims of conflict.

Question. What issues are the most pressing challenges to democracy or democratic development in Sierra Leone? These challenges might include obstacles to participatory and accountable governance and institutions, rule of law, authentic political competition, civil society, human rights and press freedom. Please be as specific as possible.

Answer. The most pressing democracy and human rights challenges in Sierra Leone are official corruption; harsh and life-threatening prison conditions; and criminalization of same-sex sexual conduct. Other concerns include: insufficient access to justice; violence and societal discrimination against women and girls, including female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C); early and forced marriage; and discrimination against persons with disabilities and LGBTI persons.

If confirmed, I will continue our embassy's advocacy in support of democratic institutions and governance, as well as human rights and fundamental freedoms for all. I will engage directly with the Government to strengthen democracy and will build strong relationships with all stakeholders from a diverse range of perspectives, including civil society, the media, and marginalized groups. I will do so in order to better understand their challenges, promote the free and open exchange of ideas, and advocate on their behalf.

Question. What steps will you take—if confirmed—to support democracy in Sierra Leone? What do you hope to accomplish through these actions? What are the potential impediments to addressing the specific obstacles you have identified?

Answer. I understand that democracy concerns in Sierra Leone derive in part from limited government capacity to enforce the rule of law or ensure access to justice. Widespread corruption also poses a major challenge. If confirmed, I would work with our embassy, interagency colleagues, and international partners to help overcome these challenges by building the capacity of Sierra Leone's democratic institutions. Our efforts would continue to help Sierra Leone to improve democratic governance through targeted investments in civil society and persistent engagement in support of democracy, respect for human rights, and access to justice. I recognize that addressing endemic corruption is a long-term challenge. If confirmed, I would engage the Government of Sierra Leone and civil society to capitalize on President Bio's stated commitment to fighting corruption and recent progress to address this pressing issue.

Question. How will you utilize U.S. Government assistance resources at your disposal, including the Democracy Commission Small Grants program and other

sources of State Department and USAID funding, to support democracy and governance, and what will you prioritize in processes to administer such assistance?

Answer. The United States has a robust assistance partnership with Sierra Leone. If confirmed, I would continue this partnership to promote development in Sierra Leone for the benefit of Sierra Leoneans and Americans alike. Our ongoing democracy and governance activities work to progressively build the capacities of civil society, media and government, informing and empowering citizens, especially women, to advocate effectively for their interests while holding officials accountable for their performance. These, and other lines of U.S. effort, will continue contributing toward Sierra Leone's democratic growth and good governance.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to meet with civil society members, human rights and other non-governmental organizations in the U.S. and with local human rights NGOs, and other members of civil society in Sierra Leone? What steps will you take to pro-actively address efforts to restrict or penalize NGOs and civil society via legal or regulatory measures?

Answer. Human rights, civil society, and other non-governmental organizations all play an essential role in advancing democratic governance, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and assisting Sierra Leone to develop into a stable, secure, and prosperous partner for the United States. If confirmed, I commit to meeting with any individual or entity that can advance U.S. goals related to human rights. It is essential that non-governmental organizations and civil society are afforded freedom to express their opinions and conduct their activities. If confirmed, I would advocate this position to government, non-governmental, and civil society leaders. I would also facilitate connections between government and civil society organizations to build trust and mitigate unhelpful restrictions on civil society or non-governmental organizations.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to meet with democratically oriented political opposition figures and parties? What steps will you take to encourage genuine political competition? Will you advocate for access and inclusivity for women, minorities and youth within political parties?

Answer. Yes. If confirmed, the United States Embassy will continue to engage with representatives from across the political spectrum, including the ruling party and opposition parties, under my leadership. I understand that the Embassy has joined international partners in calling for an increased commitment to issues-based politics and dialogue and cooperation among political parties on issues of national interest. If confirmed, I will continue this practice as well as the Embassy's advocacy for access and inclusivity for women, minorities, and youth within political parties.

Question. Will you and your embassy team actively engage with Sierra Leone on freedom of the press and address any government efforts designed to control or undermine press freedom through legal, regulatory or other measures? Will you commit to meeting regularly with independent, local press in Sierra Leone?

Answer. Yes. I am committed to supporting media freedom and strengthening journalistic professionalism. If confirmed, I will continue the Embassy's practice of engaging with the media, like-minded partners, civil society, and non-governmental organizations to underscore the importance of an independent, professional, and open media to a free and democratic society. If confirmed, I would also support expanded educational and exchange opportunities for local media. I understand that in the past, the embassy has hosted these exchanges to raise awareness on trafficking in persons, domestic violence, gender-based violence, child abuse, and children's education. If confirmed, I would seek to continue those efforts as soon as public health conditions permit.

Question. Will you and your embassy team actively engage with civil society and government counterparts on countering disinformation and propaganda disseminated by foreign state or non-state actors in Sierra Leone?

Answer. Yes. The U.S. Embassy in Sierra Leone supports media freedom and is committed to strengthening journalistic professionalism, integrity, and accuracy. If confirmed, I will engage with like-minded missions, civil society, and international partners to counter disinformation and propaganda. If confirmed, I will continue to underscore the importance of a credible, independent, professional media to a free and democratic society.

Question. Will you and your embassy teams actively engage with Sierra Leone on the right of labor groups to organize, including for independent trade unions?

Answer. If confirmed, I will continue our embassy's efforts to promote labor rights. I understand that the Government of Sierra Leone generally protects the right to bargain collectively. If confirmed, I would advocate for continued improvements in this area as well as fair and consistent enforcement of labor laws.

Question. Will you commit to using your position, if confirmed, to defend the human rights and dignity of all people in Sierra Leone, no matter their sexual orientation or gender identity? What challenges do the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) people face in Sierra Leone? What specifically will you commit to do to help LGBTQ people in Sierra Leone?

Answer. Some of the greatest challenges facing the LGBTI community in Sierra Leone include the criminalization of same-sex sexual conduct and social discrimination against LGBTI persons. The U.S. Embassy continues to support upholding human rights and the dignity of all individuals in Sierra Leone, no matter their sexual orientation or gender identity. I am committed to promoting human rights for all in Sierra Leone, including members of the LGBTI community. If confirmed, the U.S. Embassy under my leadership will engage with civil society organizations working to advance equal rights, opportunities, and protection for LGBTI people to understand their priorities and identify measures how the United States can support our shared objectives and lead international partners in such efforts.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO HON. DAVID REIMER BY SENATOR BENJAMIN L. CARDIN

Human Rights

Question. What are your most meaningful achievements to date in your career to promote human rights and democracy? What has been the impact of your actions?

Answer. During my career, I have taken advantage of many opportunities to promote human rights and democracy, most notably during my time as the Director of the Office of West African Affairs and while serving in Mauritania, Iraq, and Haiti. I believe my most meaningful achievements occurred while serving in Baghdad, Iraq as the Embassy's Senior Refugee Coordinator. In that job, I had the opportunity to hear directly from refugees and non-governmental organizations and elevate their concerns to the senior levels in the Iraqi Government. I advocated repeatedly with the minister in charge of refugee affairs to provide better treatment of internally displaced persons and to treat all internally displaced persons equally, regardless of whether they were Sunni, Shia, Christian or Kurd. I believe that through my advocacy efforts, we were able to increase Iraqi Government attention and assistance to these victims of conflict.

Question. What are the most pressing human rights issues in Sierra Leone? What are the most important steps you expect to take—if confirmed—to promote human rights and democracy in Sierra Leone? What do you hope to accomplish through these actions?

Answer. The most pressing human rights issues in Sierra Leone are official corruption; trafficking in persons; harsh and life-threatening prison conditions; criminalization of same-sex sexual conduct; and child labor. Other human rights concerns include: insufficient access to justice; violence and societal discrimination against women and girls, including female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C); early and forced marriage; official and societal discrimination against persons with disabilities; and discrimination against LGBTI persons.

If confirmed, I will continue our embassy's advocacy in support of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all. I will build strong relationships with all stakeholders from a diverse range of perspectives, including civil society, the media, and marginalized groups, to better understand their challenges, promote the free and open exchange of ideas, and advocate on their behalf. I will use my, and the Embassy's, positions of influence to raise awareness, advocate for improvements, and target assistance resources to build capacity and systems to help improvements last.

Question. If confirmed, what are the potential obstacles to addressing the specific human rights issues you have identified in your previous response? What challenges will you face in Sierra Leone in advancing human rights, civil society, and democracy in general?

Answer. I understand that some human rights concerns in Sierra Leone derive from limited government capacity to enforce human rights legislation or hold to account individuals responsible for human rights violations and abuses. If confirmed, I would work with our embassy, interagency colleagues, and international and local partners to help overcome these challenges by building the capacity of Sierra Leone's democratic institutions. I would continue to help Sierra Leone to improve democratic governance through targeted investments in civil society and persistent engagement in support of democracy, respect for human rights, and access to justice.

Question. Are you committed to meeting with human rights, civil society, and other non-governmental organizations in the U.S. and with local human rights NGOs in Sierra Leone? If confirmed, what steps will you take to pro-actively support the Leahy Law and similar efforts, and ensure that provisions of U.S. security assistance and security cooperation activities reinforce human rights

Answer. Human rights, civil society, and other non-governmental organizations all play an essential role in advancing democratic governance, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and assisting Sierra Leone to develop into a stable, secure, and prosperous partner for the United States. If confirmed, I am committed to meeting with any individual or entity that can advance U.S. goals related to human rights, improving livelihoods, and human dignity. I am also committed to working to ensure that security force personnel or units do not receive U.S. assistance if there is credible information that they have committed a gross violation of human rights.

Question. Will you and your embassy team actively engage with Sierra Leone to address cases of key political prisoners or persons otherwise unjustly targeted by Sierra Leone?

Answer. I am fully committed to engaging with the Government of Sierra Leone on guaranteeing political freedoms. As it does in all cases, the Department of State urges governments to ensure all defendants are afforded fair trial guarantees and timely due process for any crimes for which they have been charged.

Question. Will you engage with Sierra Leone on matters of human rights, civil rights, and governance as part of your bilateral mission?

Answer. Promoting greater respect for human rights, civil rights, and democratic governance in Sierra Leone is a central component of our bilateral relationship. I believe that improved governance and respect for human rights in Sierra Leone supports the country's stability and assures the long-term viability of our bilateral relationship. To this end, our embassy and high-level U.S. Government officials regularly stress the importance of democracy and good governance, access to justice, and economic and political inclusion with Sierra Leonean officials, opposition groups, civil society, the media, and the general public. If confirmed, I would continue to highlight the vital importance of democracy and human rights as instrumental to fostering long-term peace, stability, and equitable economic growth.

Diversity

Question. Research from private industry demonstrates that, when managed well, diversity makes business teams better both in terms of creativity and in terms of productivity. What will you do to promote, mentor, and support your staff that come from diverse backgrounds and underrepresented groups?

Answer. Throughout my career, I have worked to promote diversity in the State Department workforce. I have personally mentored individuals from diverse backgrounds to strengthen retention and help my staff to find the best possible onward assignments that will make them competitive for promotion and advancement. I intend to continue this practice if confirmed as Ambassador to Sierra Leone. In my current position as Ambassador to Mauritius and the Seychelles, I have directed our Deputy Chief of Mission and one other Embassy Officer to personally interview every single applicant for which we have open positions. This is an involved process due to the volume of applicants; however, I believe that it is essential to ensure that everyone gets a fair and equal opportunity to serve and that no one is overlooked. I intend to take this practice to my next post, if confirmed.

Question. What steps will you take to ensure each of the supervisors at the Embassy in Sierra Leone are fostering an environment that is diverse and inclusive?

Answer. If confirmed, I plan to speak out early and often about the importance I place on diversity. In my current post, I discussed my belief in inclusion, diversity, and respect at the very first Country Team meeting I chaired. I have reinforced these themes in subsequent Country Team meetings and individually with my staff. Additionally, I have held Embassy Town Halls focused specifically on the importance of diversity in our workforce. If confirmed, I would continue this practice to actively promote diversity and inclusion from the outset and direct my staff to do the same to strengthen our workforce.

Conflicts of Interest

Question. Do you commit to bring to the committee's attention (and the State Department Inspector General) any change in policy or U.S. actions that you suspect may be influenced by any of the President's business or financial interests, or the business or financial interests of any senior White House staff?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to comply with all relevant federal ethics laws, regulations, and rules, and to raise concerns that I may have through appropriate channels.

Question. Do you commit to inform the committee if you have any reason to suspect that a foreign government, head of state, or foreign-controlled entity is taking any action in order to benefit any of the President's business or financial interests, or the interests of senior White House staff?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to comply with all relevant federal ethics laws, regulations, and rules, and to raise concerns that I may have through appropriate channels.

Question. Do you or do any members of your immediate family have any financial interests in Sierra Leone?

Answer. My investment portfolio includes diversified mutual funds, including a foreign stock index fund, which may hold interests in companies with a presence overseas, but are exempt from conflict of interest laws. I am committed to following all applicable ethics laws and regulations and remaining vigilant with regard to my ethics obligations.

Corruption

Question. How do you believe political corruption impacts democratic governance and the rule of law generally, and in Sierra Leone specifically?

Answer. In Sierra Leone, as is the case in many countries, efforts to foster broad-based economic growth, improve the delivery of public services, and pursue effective development policies continue to be stymied by corruption and disparities in economic and political power. These dynamics undermine public confidence, participatory policymaking, effective policy implementation, and service delivery. Public corruption undercuts all democratic nations' governance and rule of law and can pose an existential threat to nascent democracies. Although Sierra Leone has made improvements, corruption continues to pose a major challenge.

Question. What is your assessment of corruption trends in Sierra Leone and efforts to address and reduce it by that government?

Answer. Although corruption poses a major challenge in Sierra Leone, the U.S. Government's efforts to promote transparency have made advances. The country ranked 119 out of 198 in Transparency International's 2019 Corruption Perceptions Index, an improvement of 10 places from 2018. Sierra Leone passed the "Control of Corruption" indicator on MCC's annual scorecards in 2020, 2019 and 2018, after failing in 2017. Recognizing that addressing endemic corruption is a long-term challenge, if confirmed, I would work closely with the Government of Sierra Leone and civil society to capitalize on President Bio's stated commitment to fighting corruption and his administration's progress to address this pressing issue.

Question. If confirmed, what steps will you take to strengthen good governance and anticorruption programming in Sierra Leone?

Answer. If confirmed, I will continue the trend of our embassy and high-level U.S. Government officials regularly raising good governance and corruption concerns with Sierra Leonean officials. If confirmed, under my Ambassadorship the United States will continue to advocate for a comprehensive, systematic approach to combat corruption that empowers the people and promotes inclusive democracy and economic growth in Sierra Leone. I would continue to engage with the Government of Sierra Leone on strengthening their state institutions and implementing legislation to empower existing entities to once and for all establish a culture where corruption is not tolerated. I would press the Government of Sierra Leone to enact and enforce the statutes necessary for a transparent business investment climate that would encourage more U.S. business investments for the benefit of both the United States and Sierra Leone.

