

**Testimony of C. Kevin Blackstone**  
**Nominee to be Ambassador to the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste**  
**Senate Foreign Relations Committee**  
**Wednesday, December 2, 2020**

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.