

Statement of Michael Klecheski
Nominee to be U.S. Ambassador to Mongolia
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
December 4, 2018

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Markey, Members of the Committee:

It is my honor to appear before you as President Trump's nominee to be U.S. Ambassador to Mongolia. I am grateful for the support and confidence of the President and of Secretary Pompeo. Working these many years in the Foreign Service has been a privilege, most importantly because it has allowed me to serve my country, and I would be honored to do so again in this most important capacity.

I have been blessed by a supportive, loving family. My wife Eloisa, who I feel fortunate to have here with me today, and our three children, Stefan, Kara and Adam, have traveled the globe with me. I could not have done it all without them.

Last year we celebrated thirty years of diplomatic relations with Mongolia; it also marked the twenty-seventh year since Mongolia's peaceful transition from communism to democracy. Looking back, the United States takes pride in having assisted Mongolia's market-oriented reforms and expanded political, cultural, educational, and defense cooperation that has served both our countries' interests. Today, as an open, free-market society, Mongolia stands as a model for others in the region and around the world who wish to join the community of free, democratic countries.

We have built a close relationship with Mongolia on a foundation of shared values and common interests. Mongolia is an active member of the Community of Democracies, and recently participated, enthusiastically and constructively, in the Secretary of State's first-ever Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom. It has also announced the designation of its first-ever Ambassador at Large for Religious Freedom Issues for that purpose. Mongolia has also been with us in forging a safer, more just world: their soldiers have stood admirably alongside our own in Iraq and Afghanistan since 2003, all while sustaining one of the largest per capita UN Peacekeeping contributions.

President Trump has set forth a vision of an Indo-Pacific in which all nations are sovereign, strong, and prosperous; in this vein, Mongolia's continued independence and autonomy are clearly in the U.S. national interest. I would like to lay out the key lines of effort that, were I to be confirmed as Ambassador, I would seek to pursue to this end.

Trade, Business, and Economics

Mongolia's sovereignty stems, to a significant extent, from its free-market economy, and its notable economic growth and large reserves of coal, copper, gold, uranium, and other

minerals present many opportunities for U.S. firms and investors. If confirmed as Ambassador, I would continue to focus heavily on economic and commercial issues, including alerting the U.S. private sector of the vast opportunities Mongolia offers and advocating for American business, as well as supporting good governance that is so vitally important to Mongolia's economic future and that has been one of the hallmarks of U.S. programming in this area.

In these realms, there is much to build on. We already are engaged across a broad front to assist Mongolia in improving its business climate and protecting its economic autonomy, including by seeking full implementation of the U.S.-Mongolia Transparency Agreement; pushing for further improvements through the USTR-led Trade and Investment Framework Agreement discussions; helping Mongolia develop robust anti-money laundering capabilities in partnership with the U.S. Department of the Treasury; and boosting U.S. exports and commercial opportunities through Department of Commerce-led trade missions.

Mongolia's growth has reaped many rewards, but also placed significant strain on its infrastructure and environment. The challenge of ensuring the sustainable supply of water to the capital, Ulaanbaatar, is a striking example. Recognizing this hurdle to growth and challenge to the Mongolian capital's population, our Millennium Challenge Corporation has concluded an agreement to invest \$350 million in a new water supply system for the city. Not only will this support much-needed infrastructure, but it also will foster the development of new regulatory and institutional reforms to set Ulaanbaatar – and Mongolia – on a path to more sustainable development. The success of this project is a top priority, and if confirmed, I would work closely with my MCC colleagues to ensure it accomplishes its goals.

Security

As I noted previously, Mongolia has been a steadfast partner of the United States in some of the world's most troubled regions. Mongolian troops serve in concert with the NATO coalition in Afghanistan, and we were pleased that Mongolia's Prime Minister announced at his October 18 White House meeting that his country would extend its NATO commitment beyond 2018. Nearly one-thousand Mongolian soldiers are also currently active in the UN's peacekeeping missions in Sudan and South Sudan, where they have developed a reputation as an honorable and reliable force.

Mongolia reinforces its peacekeeping capabilities each year in its Khaan Quest Exercise, which the United States co-hosts. That exercise takes place at the Five Hills Training Facility, the construction and maintenance of which the United States proudly supports. The U.S. Indo-Pacific Command is a major actor in this, but it also is worth noting how tremendously constructive Mongolia's partnership with the Alaska National Guard has been, as part of one of the most successful partnerships of a state national guard abroad. Indeed, on peacekeeping as in other areas, Mongolia has shown itself a willing and able

security partner, and it is clearly a worthy investment to continue our efforts to improve its armed forces' capability and interoperability.

Shared Values

From the outset of our bilateral relationship, the ties between the people of the United States and Mongolia have served as a force for Mongolia's democratic development and the foundation of our friendship based on shared values. Deepening its ties not only to U.S. civil society, but also to international groups focused on democratic values and human rights, is essential to preserving Mongolia's political space, sovereignty, and independence.

Over 1,300 Peace Corps volunteers have served in Mongolia since 1991, including 97 at present; they play a vital role in many areas, including English-language education, thus helping address the hunger in Mongolia for knowledge of English. Support for English language education will strengthen our trade and investment opportunities and deepen people-to-people ties. If confirmed, I will also support continuing USAID's vital efforts in democratization and development as key foundations for Mongolia's sustained growth, orientation towards the West, and continued political and economic sovereignty. The USAID Leaders Advancing Democracy Project, or LEAD, connects young democratic leaders in Mongolia not only with their counterparts in the United States, but also in the region, building networks that improve their resilience and resourcefulness. We are already working with Mongolia to enhance border security and rule of law, and have launched an outreach campaign to promote responsible travel to the United States.

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee, the relationship between the United States and Mongolia has been strong and highly constructive, and there is every reason to be optimistic that we can build on what already has been achieved. It would be my great honor, were the Senate to confirm my nomination, to pursue that effort. Thus, I thank you for considering my nomination, and welcome your questions.