

Statement of Donald Wright MD MPH
U.S. Ambassador-Nominee to the United Republic of Tanzania
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
December 17, 2019

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and distinguished members of the Committee, I am honored to appear before you today as the nominee for Ambassador to the United Republic of Tanzania. I am deeply appreciative of the confidence that the President and the Secretary of State have placed in me by this nomination.

At the outset of this hearing, I want to acknowledge family members that have played pivotal roles in my professional journey. First and foremost, is my wife, Kathy Wright, who has been the source of unending encouragement and support. I would also like to acknowledge my parents, who I believe are watching from above. From them, I inherited a strong work ethic and a commitment to life-long learning.

Trained in the disciplines of Family Medicine, Occupational Medicine and Public Health, I spent the first 17 years of my professional life as a practicing physician in Central Texas. In 2003, I moved to Washington to serve as the Director of the Office of Occupational Medicine at OSHA in the Department of Labor. This relocation began my 16 years as a career civil servant: a career devoted to improving the health and safety of the American people. With a personal passion for prevention, it has been a privilege to lead the Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion for almost eight years.

Over 30 years ago, at the dawn of my medical career, I landed in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania to serve as a volunteer physician at a public hospital in Zanzibar. Alongside a British physician, I treated children with malnutrition, malaria, parasites, and tuberculosis. During that memorable summer, I developed a deep admiration for the Tanzanian people; they were warm, generous and treated strangers like family.

If confirmed, it would be an honor to come full circle and serve in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania three decades later as the United States Ambassador.

The United States has a long-standing commitment to Tanzania's development as a stable, reliable, democratic partner, capable of growing its economy sufficiently to support the health, education and ambitions of its people, while also becoming a market for US exports and investment. Tanzania provides vital stability in the region and contributes to peacekeeping in Central Africa, Sudan, and South Sudan.

If confirmed, I will focus broadly on three priorities: people, health, and trade.

As a medical doctor, my career has focused on the lives of people. My first priority will likewise focus on the lives of people: American and Tanzanian. Ensuring the safety and security of embassy staff and the American expatriate community will be a top priority. For the Tanzanian citizens, continuing deterioration of democratic norms has restricted their personal liberties, including free association and assembly. I am committed to working with the host government, like-minded missions, civil society and international organizations to address this trend.

Furthermore, Tanzania's national elections will be held in October 2020. If confirmed, I look forward to continuing the work of our embassy to encourage a fair, free, transparent and inclusive election. Lastly, I will work with the host government to improve the prevention and prosecution of human trafficking.

Almost 80 percent of the development assistance provided by the American taxpayer to Tanzania is directed to improving the health of the Tanzanian people. Efforts to reduce the burden of HIV, malaria, and tuberculosis are bearing fruit. If confirmed, I am committed to leveraging American investments to produce continued improvements in health outcomes. Utilizing the expertise of the Global Health Security Agenda, which includes U.S. government agencies, international partners, and private stakeholders, we will continue to train Tanzanians in the prevention, detection and response to deadly viruses that are endemic to the region, such as Ebola.

The current challenging business environment has impeded U.S. business investment, yet Tanzania has been one of Africa's fastest-growing economies. If confirmed, I look forward to expanding American business community opportunities in Tanzania, and to improving the overall investment climate.

It is difficult to imagine a greater honor than returning to Tanzania as the U.S. Ambassador. If confirmed, my preeminent goal will be to strengthen this important bilateral relationship. I thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today and look forward to answering your questions.