

Testimony of Allan P. Mustard
Ambassador-Designate to Turkmenistan
before the
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
Washington, D.C.
July 17, 2014

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

It is a great honor to appear before you today as the nominee to serve as the next U.S. Ambassador to Turkmenistan. I am humbled by the confidence and solemn trust bestowed upon me by President Obama and Secretary Kerry by this nomination, and, if confirmed, I look forward to working closely with you to advance America's interests in Turkmenistan.

The United States and Turkmenistan have a growing relationship that spans a broad range of issues, from regional security to energy cooperation, to expanding economic engagement. Our nations share an abiding interest in Afghanistan's future, and Turkmenistan has been a strong partner in contributing to Afghanistan's stabilization and economic development, including by permitting humanitarian overflights for our military. Boeing and GE are just two examples of American companies that have experienced great success in the Turkmen market, and I believe there are many more opportunities to expand our commercial relations.

However, our bilateral relationship is constrained by significant human-rights concerns because the government seeks to exert control over the lives of its citizens. If confirmed, I will work actively with the government to address the full range of human-rights issues, including limitations on freedom of movement, freedom of expression, undue restrictions on religious practice, reports of arbitrary arrests and detention, and torture of prisoners. I believe that the sign of a mature bilateral relationship is one where we can have frank, open discussion with our counterparts on issues where we disagree and, if confirmed, I will ensure that we maintain a constructive dialog with the government of Turkmenistan across the full spectrum of issues, even these tough ones.

The United States has made clear to Turkmenistan our enduring support for its sovereignty and territorial integrity and the Administration has also emphasized that U.S. interest in the region is long-term. Central Asia stands at the crossroads of the New Silk Road, connecting Asian and European markets, and Afghanistan is integral to the effort to strengthen the region through economic cooperation. Turkmenistan has been an important contributor to Afghanistan's rebirth, providing discounted electricity, housing, hospitals, and other forms of humanitarian aid to its neighbor. Turkmenistan is also making major investments in infrastructure that will connect Afghanistan to the region and open its economy to western markets. If confirmed, I will encourage Turkmenistan to continue to provide all possible support to Afghanistan.

As Turkmenistan seeks to diversify distribution of its significant natural gas reserves, the Administration continues to encourage Turkmenistan to move forward with the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India, or

“TAPI,” pipeline which could strengthen economic ties between Central and South Asia. U.S. firms have the experience and expertise needed to put the Galkynysh gas field, which would supply the TAPI pipeline, into production. If confirmed, I would use my decades of experience in overseas commercial advocacy to support American companies in their efforts to invest in energy projects in Turkmenistan and, likewise, work with the top levels of the government in Ashgabat to ensure their clear understanding of international energy projects and markets.

As noted earlier, the United States has a growing commercial relationship with Turkmenistan and American companies are active across a growing range of sectors of the Turkmen economy, including energy, agriculture and civil aviation. If confirmed, I will apply my more than 30 years of analytical, marketing and trade policy expertise to advancing the interests of U.S. firms. I will also use my experience with Russia’s accession to the World Trade Organization to encourage Turkmenistan also to join the WTO.

I have spent 20 of my 29 years in the Foreign Service at U.S. missions overseas. Through my experiences abroad, I have come to believe that we make our greatest impact on a country through direct engagement with its people. My first job for the U.S. government was as a Russian-speaking exhibition guide in the USSR, explaining American culture and our way of life to citizens of a one-party state with state-controlled media and a command economy. Later, as an agricultural officer, I was privileged to have opportunities to drive deep into the hinterlands of Russia, Mexico, Turkey, Syria, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and other countries, both to observe local crop conditions and to talk to local residents about America and our democratic form of government. These experiences showed me the value of outreach at the grassroots level.

Public diplomacy programs – educational exchanges, cultural programming, and engagement through American Corner libraries – embody and convey our most cherished values, and build enduring people-to-people ties that are the foundation for so much of what we do. In a country like Turkmenistan, which remains one of the most closed societies in the world, public diplomacy efforts can have an outsized impact. I will make these programs a priority if confirmed as Ambassador.

Finally, I know that, if confirmed as Ambassador, I will ultimately be responsible for the safety and welfare of my Embassy colleagues and their families in a remote part of the world. Their safety, and the safety of all Americans in Turkmenistan, will be my top priority.

Thank you. I look forward to answering your questions.