

Mr. Douglas A. Silliman
Nominee for Ambassador to Kuwait
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
February 13, 2014

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee, I am honored to appear before this Committee today, and gratified by the trust that President Obama and Secretary Kerry have shown by nominating me to serve as ambassador to the State of Kuwait. If you will permit me, I would also like to thank my family for their support throughout my career. My wife Catherine and younger son Zachary are here with us today.

I would also like to express my thanks to my friends and to the many colleagues across the U.S. government with whom I have worked during my nearly 30 years in the Foreign Service. I particularly want to acknowledge Ambassador Matt Tueller, sitting here at the table with me today, for his exemplary service as the U.S. ambassador in Kuwait over the past two and a half years. If confirmed, I will strive to follow his example as I pursue U.S. national interests. I also pledge to work closely with this committee and others in the Congress to sustain and enhance relations with Kuwait, and of course, we would welcome the opportunity to see you and your staff in Kuwait.

There are few U.S. friends or allies in the world as steadfast as Kuwait, particularly in the strategically important and always dynamic Middle East. Of

course, the strong foundation of this relationship was forged in the heat of battle during the first Gulf War and in the sacrifices of the brave men and women from the U.S. military and Kuwait who fought to liberate Kuwait from occupation. If confirmed, my mission will be to continue to deepen and broaden the strategic U.S.-Kuwait partnership, to include not just military-to-military ties but also substantial academic, commercial and cultural relations.

Foremost among my priorities will be the protection of American citizens in Kuwait – those working in the U.S. mission, U.S. military personnel deployed forward, and the numerous private Americans who live in, work in or visit Kuwait.

If confirmed, I will also seek to deepen U.S.-Kuwaiti cooperation on defense and security. This includes continued strong and concrete American support for the defense of Kuwait and the stability of the wider region, as evidenced by the presence of U.S. military personnel in Kuwait.

Of course, regional security is not only about military-to-military relations but also about ensuring strong diplomatic coordination. Fortunately, the United States and Kuwait share a very similar outlook on regional developments. During the visit of Amir Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad Al-Sabah to Washington this past September, he reviewed with President Obama and Vice President Biden the full range of regional issues that affect both of our nations -- including Syria, Iraq, and

Yemen, and efforts to secure Middle East peace. The two leaders agreed to continue to pursue shared objectives on these issues. Kuwait has also played a globally important role as a leading contributor to humanitarian assistance efforts for conflict victims and refugees fleeing the brutal war in Syria: in January it hosted for the second time a UN assistance conference that raised \$2.6 billion in new assistance for the humanitarian response, including a new Kuwaiti pledge of \$500 million.

I was fortunate to observe first-hand from Baghdad the courageous steps that Iraq and Kuwait took to finally and fully normalize relations, and Kuwait's rapprochement with Iraq now serves as the model for re-integrating Iraq into the immediate neighborhood, from which it was so long estranged, and the wider Arab world. Meanwhile, Kuwait's financial assistance to Yemen and support for its political transition have been important factors in our ongoing efforts to ensure long-term stability throughout the region. Significantly, our two governments are also working to strengthen our joint efforts to fight against terrorism and terrorism financing throughout the region.

Energy is another important issue in Kuwait. Kuwait holds about 7% of the world's proven oil reserves and will remain a significant producer of hydrocarbons for many years to come. If confirmed, I will promote U.S. technical assistance as an important tool to help Kuwait protect and modernize its oil and gas

infrastructure. There are also realizable opportunities to improve Kuwait's energy efficiency through simple steps such as further reducing the flaring of natural gas and increasing the energy efficiency of new buildings.

These priorities should also provide new commercial opportunities for American companies in Kuwait. According to the International Monetary Fund, Kuwait has run regular and large budget surpluses for more than a decade – including more than \$50 billion last year. At the same time, Kuwait's sovereign wealth fund is the region's oldest, controlling more than \$400 billion in assets. If confirmed, I will vigorously pursue commercial opportunities for U.S. businesses in Kuwait, particularly in Kuwait's rapidly expanding infrastructure and housing sectors. I will also work to attract more Kuwaiti investment into the United States, where Kuwait represents one of our country's fast growing sources of incoming foreign direct investment.

Kuwait stands out in the region for its vibrant politics and its outspoken press and I look forward to witnessing Kuwaiti politics first hand. The Kuwaiti constitution remains the framework for political discussion in all its forms, and Kuwait's National Assembly is an empowered legislative body with significant oversight authorities. Women have voted and run for office since 2006, and women currently sit in both the cabinet and parliament. If confirmed, I will continue the regular engagement we have long enjoyed with Kuwaiti politicians,

opinion leaders and the full range of Kuwaitis to highlight democracy in the United States and its impact on civil and human rights, increased protection for vulnerable populations, improved labor standards and providing better economic opportunities for all.

I will also devote my attention to Kuwait's important youth population. With nearly half of the country's population under the age of 25, many Kuwaitis coming of age today were not yet born when U.S. forces helped liberate their country. Because they are growing up in a fundamentally different world than previous generations, the United States must strive to tell these Kuwaitis our story and continue to establish new relationships that will last far into the future.

That is a task we can accomplish. American culture is as popular among Kuwaiti youth as it is elsewhere around the globe. They love to visit the United States, and they understand that speaking English and getting an American education teaches them how to connect, how to solve problems and how to be a world citizen in the new era of globalization. Right now, there are at least 6,500 Kuwaiti students enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities, with plans to expand their presence, and tens of thousands more Kuwaitis visit each year for tourism, medical, and business reasons, bringing with them billions of dollars to be injected into the U.S. economy.

The United States uses exchange programs, English language scholarships, and other opportunities to engage the rising generation of Kuwaitis. If confirmed, I will prioritize Mission engagement with younger Kuwaitis, emphasizing the fundamental American values of education, tolerance and inclusion that are the backbone of U.S. success.

Mr. Chairman, I have had the extraordinary privilege of serving the American people as a diplomat for nearly three decades. I began my career adjudicating visas in Haiti, where I quickly learned how fortunate we are to be American citizens. My time in the Middle East and South Asia taught me how compelling American values truly are. Throughout my career I have promoted human rights, countered terrorism, strengthened military-to-military ties and advocated on behalf of U.S. companies. Most recently, I served as the Deputy Chief of Mission in Iraq during the withdrawal of our troops and scaling-down of our Embassy; prior to that I served as Deputy Chief of Mission in Turkey. In these positions I was responsible for thousands of American direct hire personnel and many more thousands of contractors and locally engaged staff. Through it all, I have experienced first-hand the strong returns of investing in people, ensuring their personal security and that of their families, and prioritizing career development and mission morale. I am confident that during these past 30 years I have acquired the skills necessary to succeed as a Chief of Mission.

Mr. Chairman, thank you again for the opportunity to appear here today. I will be pleased to answer any questions you may have.