

Statement of Elizabeth M. Allen
Nominee for Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
March 15, 2023

Thank you, Chairman Murphy, Ranking Member Hagerty, and Members of the Committee. I am humbled to be here. And, having spent the majority of my career in public service, I am honored to be considered by the Senate for this important position.

The virtue of serving the American people runs deep in my family. I am the granddaughter of two veterans of World War II. I am the daughter of parents who taught me the importance of voting and civic participation, regardless of party. I am the sister of a United States Naval Academy graduate and U.S. Marine Corps veteran, and the sister-in-law of a civil servant at the Pentagon. I am the inspired friend of many others who've chosen to serve their country. I am joined here today by some of those family and friends – including my dad, Stephen, and my mom, Susan – and I am deeply grateful for their support.

I first joined the State Department as an intern under President George W. Bush and Secretary Condoleezza Rice, where I worked on international women's issues. I returned after college to work on combatting human smuggling and trafficking. Between my time in the Obama-Biden White House, I spent a year in the Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs under Secretary Kerry.

I believe deeply in the work of the State Department and its people.

This nomination to serve as Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy is the honor of a professional lifetime, and I thank President Biden for placing his faith in me as his nominee.

Over the past two years under Secretary Blinken, I have had the privilege of serving as Assistant Secretary of State for Global Public Affairs and as Senior Official for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs.

Those and other experiences, in and out of government, have reinforced my firm belief that U.S. public diplomacy is essential to shaping a more open, prosperous, and secure future.

Our audiences overseas – both in-person and online – are central to every major foreign policy issue and consequence. It's relationships between people – not just governments – that are shaping geopolitical developments. At the same time, the information space is an increasingly contested theater of competition for influence. The stakes have never been greater.

To meet this moment, we must be clear-eyed about the challenges we face. Repressive governments envision a future in which freedom of expression is criminalized and the flow of information is stymied, as we're seeing in Iran. The People's Republic of China and Russia vastly outspend us on what they call public diplomacy, and their growing alignment threatens to upend global norms.

But this is our opportunity. For the United States, the value proposition of our public diplomacy is different: it is about telling America's story, explaining our foreign policy, creating economic opportunity, developing the leaders of tomorrow, empowering independent media, and calling out foreign propaganda and foreign malign influence. In doing so, we build trust and credibility to realize an affirmative, forward-looking, dynamic vision for ourselves and our partners worldwide.

If confirmed, I am committed to harnessing the public diplomacy toolkit to address the challenges presented by our adversaries and seize opportunities made possible with American leadership.

This is exactly what the public diplomacy team did in the face of Russia's illegal, unjustified, full-scale invasion of Ukraine. We identified and analyzed Putin's lies. We worked alongside the interagency to declassify intelligence, exposing his plans and intentions. We conducted hundreds of media interviews to share the truth with the American people, the Russian people, and people around the world. We developed and deployed new, engaging digital products that highlighted stories of Ukrainian resilience and Putin's hypocrisy. We leveraged new platforms, technology, and content to reach Russian-speaking audiences. We worked with the Ukrainian government to protect cultural heritage, helping Ukrainians preserve their identity and democracy. This work was – and remains – fundamental to unifying our allies and laying out the facts for the world to see.

Public diplomacy benefits us here at home as well. International students added \$32 billion to the U.S. economy last year, and American exchange program participants are returning with marketable skills that make them more competitive for 21st-century jobs. International visitors on our programs engage communities across our country, while the Gilman Scholarship helps underserved Americans study abroad. And if confirmed, I want to better communicate the benefits of foreign policy to our fellow Americans – who deserve to know what the U.S. government is doing around the world, day in and day out, in their interest.

Finally, it would be my great honor to lead the more than 5,000 dedicated foreign service officers, civil service officers, locally employed staff, and contractors who comprise our public diplomacy workforce across the world. If confirmed – and in partnership with you – I commit to better equipping them with the tools, resources, training, and leadership needed to meet this critical moment.

Thank you for inviting me here today. I look forward to your questions.