

NOMINATIONS

WEDNESDAY, JULY 27, 2022

U.S. SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS,
Washington, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 11:39 a.m., in Room SD-419, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Christopher A. Coons presiding.

Present: Senators Coons [presiding], Shaheen, and Young.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. CHRISTOPHER A. COONS, U.S. SENATOR FROM DELAWARE

Senator COONS. This hearing of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee will come to order.

We are here today to consider nominees for five important positions in North Africa and Central Asia: Mr. Puneet Talwar to be Ambassador to Morocco; Joey Hood to be Ambassador to Tunisia; Daniel Rosenblum to be Ambassador to Kazakhstan, Dr. Jonathan Henick to be Ambassador to Uzbekistan; and Lesslie Viguerie to be Ambassador to the Kyrgyz Republic.

Thank you, all, for your service, for your willingness to take on these roles, to your families and friends who are here supporting you.

We are about to have two votes on the floor of the Senate. So I apologize in advance that my ranking member today, Senator Young, and I will each depart in order to keep this confirmation hearing moving and yet allow us to participate in voting on a very important piece of legislation of which Senator Young was the leading Republican.

I understand Senator Shaheen will, first, be introducing nominee Joey Hood.

Senator Shaheen, please proceed.

STATEMENT OF HON. JEANNE SHAHEEN, U.S. SENATOR FROM NEW HAMPSHIRE

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member Young. I am delighted to be here this morning to introduce Joey Hood to this committee and want to congratulate all of the nominees who are here this morning and thank them all for their service to the country.

But my primary reason for being here this morning is to introduce Mr. Hood, who is a career member of the Foreign Service. He joined the State Department in 1998 and for the last 25 years he has worked diligently to advance U.S. interests around the world.

Yet, throughout his career, Mr. Hood has not shied away from hard problems. He has worked to advance human rights in Eritrea, to support our allies in Afghanistan and Iraq.

He has advocated for the Yazidis and the Iraqi Christians as they were being persecuted by ISIS. So he has been willing to take on some difficult challenges.

He has also forged strong ties with other countries and facilitated many congressional delegations in their work abroad. In fact, many on this committee, I know, as well as on the Armed Services Committee may know Mr. Hood from our foreign travel.

I had the honor of joining him at the embassy when I was in Iraq in 2019 and he put on a very nice spread for us and really filled us in on what was happening in Iraq at the time.

But not only is Mr. Hood a distinguished career Foreign Service Officer, he is a native of the great state of New Hampshire. Mr. Hood grew up in Hinsdale, New Hampshire, which is in the western part of our state. His mother drove a school bus and served as a substitute teacher and his father worked for the post office in Vermont for 40 years.

He still owns a home in Keene and his children have joined the storied New Hampshire tradition of going to summer camp at Stonewall Farm and Camp Dakota, and I am delighted to also this morning be able to welcome his wife, Anna, and his children, Fiona and Henry, so who are both staying in New Hampshire.

And as someone who has dedicated his life to serving the United States abroad, who has made the sacrifices that come with such service, I am so honored that he still considers New Hampshire his home and that he has raised a family who considers themselves Granite Staters.

I urge this committee to swiftly move his nomination forward as well as the nominations of all of those people we are hearing from this morning. I look forward to continuing to work with him in his new role as ambassador to Tunisia once we do.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Senator COONS. Thank you, Senator Shaheen.

I will make a brief opening statement regarding each of the five nominees, then turn to my ranking member, Senator Young, for his opening statement. Then we will turn to each of you in turn for your opening statements.

Mr. Talwar, it is a pleasure chairing your confirmation hearing to serve as U.S. Ambassador to Morocco. Our work together has been a highlight of my public service over many years.

Your service as Assistant Secretary of State for Political Military Affairs makes you very well suited for serving in one of our most important regional security partners, and I look forward to hearing what your priorities will be for the U.S.-Morocco relationship, if confirmed.

Mr. Hood, a Granite Stater, you have been nominated at a critical moment for Tunisia, which is facing systemic attempts to dismantle its fledgling democracy. The shuttering of the parliament, the firing of judges, and the series of constitutional changes of consolidated presidential authority gravely concern me.

You have, as Senator Shaheen just referenced, an impressive record of service including as Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary

for Near Eastern Affairs and I look forward to hearing how you will respond to democratic backsliding in Tunisia, if confirmed.

We also have three nominees before us for critical Central Asian countries at the crossroads of influence by China and Russia.

If I could, Ambassador Rosenblum, I welcome your nomination, your previous experience as ambassador to Uzbekistan. I look forward to hearing how you will help Kazakhstan, the region's largest economy, reduce its reliance on Russia.

Dr. Henick, I welcome your experience as Deputy Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asian Affairs. Uzbekistan is an important regional leader and distributor of humanitarian aid, including to Afghanistan. I look forward to hearing how you will support Uzbekistan's desired reforms and leadership on humanitarian aid.

And, finally, Mr. Viguerie, glad to see your nomination for Ambassador to the Kyrgyz Republic, which has until recently been known in Central Asia as one of the most democratic countries, and I know your experience as Deputy Assistant Secretary for Central Asia and Pakistan Affairs will be invaluable.

I look forward to hearing how each of you will address expanding PRC influence and, in your case, a faltering commitment to democracy.

I will now turn to my ranking member, Senator Young of Indiana.

**STATEMENT OF HON. TODD YOUNG,
U.S. SENATOR FROM INDIANA**

Senator YOUNG. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I, too, want to thank our five nominees today for their willingness and, in some cases, their continued willingness to serve the United States in these important positions.

I look forward to hearing from all our nominees today on how they will advance American leadership and interests in these countries.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine and our collective response have damaged its economy and demonstrated to its neighbors that it cannot be trusted nor depended upon.

China's domestic COVID-19 response has similarly demonstrated its unreliability as an economic partner. The weeks-long lockdown of Shanghai showcases how the Communist Party would prefer to jeopardize its own growth rather than admit failure.

Through this we have a unique opportunity to showcase the value of deepening partnerships with the United States and our allies in resisting the draw of these authoritarian regimes.

Now is a crucial moment for the United States to embrace the collective capabilities of our allies and partners as we turn our attention to strategic great power competition.

If we want to succeed in this competition we must find the best way forward to balance our interests while remaining the partner of choice for those around the globe.

Unlike in years past, these countries have options for economic and security partnerships. In the case of Morocco, we have a continued partner looking to us as we make good on our commitments. I also hope to hear how we can build upon the success of the Abra-

ham Accords and deepen ties between Morocco and Israel in addition to the United States.

In Tunisia, the world is waiting to see the path it will take as well as the impact on its people and fledgling democratic institutions. In the case of our Central Asian partners, Russia's unprovoked aggression has prompted a wholesale reassessment of each country's relationships with their neighbors and beyond.

Our task must be to enforce and uphold our standards while recognizing unattainable goals may drive our would-be partners to yield to the siren song of Chinese and Russian influence.

We cannot ignore the need to advance our diplomatic and humanitarian priorities, and if our policy actions drive our partners into the arms of Russia and China we will be undercutting these very priorities.

Our witnesses will be approaching all of these challenges from different perspectives, and I look forward to hearing their views on this conversation.

Thank you again to our nominees for their willingness to serve the United States in their respective roles. I look forward to our discussion this morning.

Mr. Chairman?

Senator COONS. Thank you, Senator Young.

We will now hear from each of today's nominees in the order in which they were noticed to this committee.

Please keep your opening remarks to no more than five minutes. Your written testimonies will be submitted in full to the record.

First up would be Mr. Puneet Talwar.

Puneet?

STATEMENT OF THE HON. PUNEET TALWAR OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, NOMINATED TO BE AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE KINGDOM OF MOROCCO

Mr. TALWAR. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for the kind words in your introduction. It has been a privilege to know you for so long and I cherish the time that I was able to spend in your office.

I have to say that your tenure here in the Senate has really been a model of public service and your cooperation with the ranking member, I think, has set the gold standard for bipartisan cooperation.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Young, who I know has had to leave for a vote, it has been an honor. It is an honor to return to the committee as President Biden's nominee to be the ambassador—U.S. Ambassador to the Kingdom of Morocco.

I want to thank the President and Secretary Blinken for the trust and confidence in me.

I have great respect for this committee. I have seen firsthand your strong commitment to advancing our national interests.

If confirmed, I look forward to consulting closely with you and, hopefully, welcoming you when you visit.

I am joined today by my wife, Sarosh, and my sons, Haris and Ilyas. My parents, brother, and sister are watching from home.

Mr. Chairman, Morocco is a longstanding and valued partner. Indeed, it was the first country to recognize American independence. With a strategic location, Morocco is a bridge between Europe, the Mediterranean, and Africa, regions that are critical to American national security.

Morocco is a leader on key regional and global issues. It is at the forefront of efforts to combat terrorism. It has taken bold steps on the climate crisis.

Morocco is also dedicated to economic development in Africa and last week it hosted the U.S.-Africa Business Summit.

I want to highlight Morocco's leadership on peace with Israel. The relationship between the two countries is blossoming. It now spans cooperation on investment, energy, aviation, and many other areas.

Morocco was the first Arab country to sign a defense cooperation agreement with Israel, and last week the chief of staff of the Israel Defense Forces made a landmark visit to Morocco.

In March, Morocco's foreign minister attended the inaugural meeting of the Negev Forum. The vision of a warm peace that has eluded the region for so long is finally coming into focus, thanks to the Abraham Accords and Morocco's growing ties with Israel.

If confirmed, I will support translating that vision into tangible improvements in the lives of ordinary people so that we can expand the circle of peace, something which ultimately serves American interests.

With respect to the conflict in western Sahara, last fall the United Nations Secretary General appointed a seasoned diplomat, Staffan de Mistura, as his personal envoy to work with the parties in a renewed push for peace.

He is someone I have known for many years and, if confirmed, I will support his efforts to promote a just and durable political solution.

Domestically, Morocco has an ambitious reform and development agenda that emphasizes expanding the private sector. If confirmed, I will support Morocco's reform program and I will strongly advocate for American exports. I will also support the advancement of human rights.

Mr. Chairman, I have been immersed in policy toward this region for 30 years. My formative years were spent in this very room on the benches behind you.

I have built on that experience at the National Security Council and in a senior diplomatic position as Assistant Secretary of State for Political Military Affairs. These roles have given me a reservoir of directly relevant experience to draw upon, should I be confirmed.

I would like to close with a few words about my family. I could not have made it this far were it not for the unconditional support and love of my wife, Sarosh, who steadfastly supported me through the long hours I have logged in public service. She did that even as she pursued her own career and raised the two fine gentlemen you see behind me.

This is also an especially meaningful moment for my parents. It is the culmination of a journey that began 60 years ago when they took a leap of faith and left India for America with little more than their dreams.

They sacrificed and endured a great deal so that my brother, sister, and I would have opportunities they never had. We are forever grateful to them.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.
[The prepared statement of Mr. Talwar follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. PUNEET TALWAR

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Young—it is an honor to return to the committee as President Biden’s nominee to be the United States Ambassador to the Kingdom of Morocco.

I want to thank the President and Secretary Blinken for their trust and confidence in me.

I have great respect for this committee. I have seen first-hand your strong commitment to advancing our national interests. If confirmed, I look forward to consulting closely with you and hopefully welcoming you when you visit.

I am joined today by my wife Sarosh and my sons Haris and Ilyas. My parents, brother, and sister are watching from home.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Young, Morocco is a long-standing and valued partner. Indeed, it was the first country to recognize American independence. With its strategic location, Morocco is a bridge between Europe, the Mediterranean, and Africa—regions that are critical to American national security.

Morocco is a leader on key regional and global issues. It is at the forefront of efforts to combat terrorism. It has taken bold steps on the climate crisis. Morocco is also dedicated to economic development in Africa, and last week, it hosted the U.S.-Africa Business Summit.

I want to highlight Morocco’s leadership on peace with Israel. The relationship between the two countries is blossoming. It now spans cooperation on investment, energy, aviation, and other areas. Morocco was the first Arab country to sign a defense cooperation agreement with Israel. Last week, the Chief of Staff of the Israel Defense Forces made a landmark visit to Morocco. In March, Morocco’s foreign minister attended the inaugural meeting of the Negev Forum. The vision of a “warm peace” that eluded the region for so long is coming into focus thanks to the Abraham Accords and Morocco’s growing ties with Israel. If confirmed, I will support translating that vision into tangible improvements in the lives of ordinary people so that we can expand the circle of peace, something which ultimately serves American interests.

With respect to the conflict in Western Sahara, last fall the United Nations Secretary-General appointed a seasoned diplomat, Staffan de Mistura, as his Personal Envoy to work with the parties in a renewed push for peace. He is someone I have known for many years. If confirmed, I will support his efforts to promote a just and durable political solution.

Domestically, Morocco has an ambitious reform and development agenda that emphasizes expanding the private sector. If confirmed, I will support Morocco’s reform program, and I will strongly advocate for American exports. I will also support the advancement of human rights.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Young, I have been immersed in policy toward this region for 30 years. My formative years were spent in this very room on the benches behind you. I built on that experience at the National Security Council and in a senior diplomatic position as Assistant Secretary of State for Political-Military Affairs. These roles have given me a reservoir of directly relevant experience to draw upon should I be confirmed.

I would like to close with a few words about my family. I could not have made it this far were it not for the unconditional support and love of my wife Sarosh, who steadfastly supported me through the long hours I have logged in public service. She did so even as she pursued her own career and cared for the two fine gentlemen you see behind me.

This is also an especially meaningful moment for my parents. It is the culmination of a journey they began 60 years ago when they took a leap of faith and left India to come to America with little more than their dreams. They sacrificed and endured a great deal so that my brother, sister, and I would have opportunities they never had. We are forever grateful to them.

Thank you. I look forward to your questions.

Senator COONS. Thank you, Mr. Talwar.
Next, Dr. Henick?

STATEMENT OF DR. JONATHAN HENICK OF VIRGINIA, A CAREER MEMBER OF THE SENIOR FOREIGN SERVICE, CLASS OF MINISTER-COUNSELOR, NOMINATED TO BE AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE REPUBLIC OF UZBEKISTAN

Dr. HENICK. Mr. Chairman, Mr. Ranking Member, and distinguished members of this committee, I, too, am deeply grateful for the confidence President Biden and Secretary Blinken have entrusted in me with this nomination.

If confirmed, I will work closely with you to strengthen bilateral relations with Uzbekistan.

I, too, would like to thank my wife and partner, Dominique Freire, as well as my son and daughter, Oskar and Carmen.

As you know, Foreign Service families make enormous sacrifices over the course of our careers, and I simply could not have served our country without their steadfast support.

I am also forever in debt to my parents, Bette and Steve, for their support and for sparking my interest in international affairs and public service.

I regret that my father, a Marine Corps helicopter pilot and Vietnam veteran before spending a career opening foreign markets to U.S. commercial products, did not live to see this day. I know that he would have been proud.

This nomination is the culmination of my lifelong interest in this region. At university I majored in Soviet area studies with a focus on Central Asia. I spent a semester abroad and traveled to Uzbekistan before its independence.

When I joined the Foreign Service, I jumped at the opportunity to do my very first overseas assignment at our newly established embassy in Tashkent. I have also spent much of my career working in and with this region, and I am beyond excited at the possibility to go back, if confirmed, in this new capacity.

Located at the heart of Central Asia, Uzbekistan is a country rich in history with a young and growing population and significant potential for a prosperous future.

A strong U.S. relationship with Uzbekistan has implications that extend beyond our bilateral agenda to the other countries of Central Asia, to Afghanistan, Turkey, and the Indo-Pacific region.

At the core of this relationship, now just over 30 years old, is the United States' steadfast support for Uzbekistan's independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity.

Uzbekistan has become an increasingly dynamic player in Central Asia since adopting a broad-based program of political, economic, and social reforms in 2016. We welcome these developments and have partnered with Uzbekistan to implement reforms that advance respect for human rights, foster democratic governance, and promote equitable economic growth.

As a career diplomat, I have seen firsthand the power of building relationships and engaging in public diplomacy, and how this can benefit individuals and civil society.

If confirmed, I will work to continue and improve upon already significant initiatives to strengthen Uzbekistan's educational system and to facilitate exchange opportunities.

These impressive efforts are a testament to the strengthening bilateral relationship between the United States and Uzbekistan.

I will also work to expand and deepen our cooperation with the Government of Uzbekistan to stay the course on reforms. I will encourage the development of accountable democratic institutions, a flourishing civil society and independent media, the strengthening of rule of law, and the protection of human rights for all, especially those who are most vulnerable and marginalized, including women, religious minorities, and LGBTQI+ persons.

Uzbekistan has also made progress modernizing its economy, aiming to rebuild the international connections that place the country at the center of historic trade routes. Uzbekistan's natural resources, as well as its manufacturing and agricultural capacity, are attracting growing interest from American companies, including those seeking alternatives to Xinjiang-sourced cotton.

Uzbekistan has also become a regional leader on green economic initiatives with its ambitious plans for renewable energy and as one of only two Central Asian countries to sign the Global Methane Pledge. A prosperous greener Uzbekistan that generates jobs for its people and diversifies its international trade is very much in the interests of the United States.

As the Government continues its preparations for accession to the World Trade Organization, I will underscore the importance of improving the investment climate and institutionalizing international labor standards.

I will also prioritize the expansion of the U.S. security partnership. Uzbekistan has long been an important partner in supporting Afghanistan stability and, if confirmed, I look forward to strengthening bilateral and regional security cooperation including on law enforcement matters, border security, and counterterrorism.

Finally, I would endeavor to foster an inclusive work environment at our embassy consistent with the administration's and this committee's vision of a State Department workforce that values collegiality, teamwork, and respect.

The diversity of the American people is our greatest strength and it is important that U.S. embassies model that diversity, especially in places like Uzbekistan where our values are not widely understood or, worse, are actively misrepresented by malign actors.

If confirmed, I will seek to advance U.S. interests and enhance our strategic partnership with Uzbekistan by strengthening our bilateral security, people-to-people ties, economic ties, and promoting the democratic values that we share.

Thank you again for the opportunity to appear here today. I welcome your questions.

[The prepared statement of Dr. Henick follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF JONATHAN HENICK

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Ranking Member, and distinguished members of this committee, I am deeply grateful for the confidence President Biden and Secretary Blinken have entrusted in me with this nomination. If confirmed, I will work closely with you to strengthen bilateral relations with Uzbekistan.

I would like to thank my wife and partner—Dominique Freire—as well as my son and daughter, Oskar and Carmen. As you know, Foreign Service families make enormous sacrifices over the course of our careers. I simply could not have served our country without their steadfast support. I am also forever in debt to my parents,

Bette and Steve, for their support and for sparking my interest in international affairs and public service. I regret that my father—a Marine Corps helicopter pilot and Vietnam veteran before spending a career opening foreign markets to U.S. commercial products—did not live to see this day. I know that he would have been proud.

This nomination is the culmination of my lifelong interest in this region. At university, I majored in Soviet Area Studies with a focus on Central Asia. I spent a semester abroad and traveled to Uzbekistan before its independence. When I joined the Foreign Service, I jumped at the opportunity to do my very first overseas assignment at our newly established Embassy in Tashkent. I have also spent much of my career working in and with this region. I am beyond excited at the possibility to go back, if confirmed, in this new capacity.

Located at the heart of Central Asia, Uzbekistan is a country rich in history, with a young and growing population, and significant potential for a prosperous future. A strong U.S. relationship with Uzbekistan has implications that extend beyond our bilateral agenda to the other countries of Central Asia, Afghanistan, Turkey, and the Indo-Pacific region. At the core of this relationship—now just over 30 years old—is the United States’ steadfast support for Uzbekistan’s independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity.

Uzbekistan has become an increasingly dynamic player in Central Asia since adopting a broad-based program of political, economic, and social reforms in 2016. We welcome these developments and have partnered with Uzbekistan to implement reforms that advance respect for human rights, foster democratic governance, and promote equitable economic growth.

As a career diplomat, I have seen firsthand the power of building relationships and engaging in public diplomacy, and how this can benefit individuals and civil society. If confirmed, I will work to continue and improve upon already significant initiatives to strengthen Uzbekistan’s educational system and to facilitate exchange opportunities. These impressive efforts are a testament to the strengthening bilateral relationship between the United States and Uzbekistan.

I will work to expand and deepen our cooperation with the Government of Uzbekistan to stay the course on reforms. I will encourage the development of accountable, democratic institutions; a flourishing civil society and independent media; the strengthening of rule of law; and the protection of human rights for all, especially those who are most vulnerable and marginalized, including women, religious minorities, and LGBTQI+ persons.

Uzbekistan has also made progress modernizing its economy, aiming to rebuild the international connections that placed the country at the center of historic trade routes. Uzbekistan’s natural resources, as well as its manufacturing and agricultural capacity, are attracting growing interest from American companies, including those seeking alternatives to Xinjiang-sourced cotton. Uzbekistan has also become a regional leader on green economic initiatives with its ambitious plans for renewable energy and as one of only two Central Asian countries to sign the Global Methane Pledge. A prosperous, greener Uzbekistan that generates jobs for its people and diversifies its international trade is very much in the interest of the United States. As the Government continues its preparations for accession to the World Trade Organization, I will underscore the importance of improving the investment climate and institutionalizing international labor standards.

I will also prioritize the expansion of the U.S. security partnership. Uzbekistan has long been an important partner in supporting Afghanistan’s stability. If confirmed, I look forward to strengthening bilateral and regional security cooperation, including on law enforcement matters, border security, and counterterrorism.

Finally, I would endeavor to foster an inclusive work environment at Embassy Tashkent, consistent with the administration’s and this committee’s vision of a State Department workforce that values collegiality, teamwork, and respect. The diversity of the American people is our greatest strength, and it is important that U.S. embassies model that diversity in places like Uzbekistan, where American values are not widely understood or worse, are actively misrepresented by malign actors.

If confirmed, I will seek to advance U.S. interests and enhance our strategic partnership with Uzbekistan by strengthening our bilateral security, people to people, and economic ties, and promoting the democratic values we share.

Thank you again for the opportunity to appear here today. I welcome your questions.

Senator COONS. Thank you.
Mr. Viguerie?

STATEMENT OF LESSLIE VIGUERIE OF VIRGINIA, A CAREER MEMBER OF THE SENIOR FOREIGN SERVICE, CLASS OF MINISTER- COUNSELOR, NOMINATED TO BE AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY OF THE UNITED STATES TO THE KYRGYZ REPUBLIC

Mr. VIGUERIE. Good morning, Chairman Coons. I am grateful to have the opportunity to speak with you today, and thank you for considering my nomination to serve as U.S. Ambassador to the Kyrgyz Republic.

I would like to start by thanking my family: my wife, Kathryn, who is here with me today, and my three children, William, George, and Clara. They have been my support through hardship posts, lengthy periods of separation, and frequent moves. They have also shared with me the honor of serving our country abroad, an honor for which I have always been deeply grateful.

I would also like to thank all the friends and colleagues who have supported me over my 30-year career in the Foreign Service. Their examples showed me the best aspects of leadership, including the importance of building strong teams and morale, valuing diversity, and mentoring the next generation of U.S. diplomats.

These values guide me today and, if confirmed, I will have no higher priority than the safety and security of the embassy community.

The United States and the Kyrgyz Republic recently marked 30 years of diplomatic relations. Much has happened in this time. The United States has been a strong partner to the Kyrgyz Republic from the beginning, providing generous support, including more than \$10.4 million in COVID-related aid during the pandemic.

U.S. assistance helped Kyrgyz efforts to develop the country's democratic institutions, its vibrant civil society, and its independent media.

Since 1993, we have supported the American University of Central Asia, where tens of thousands of the region's best and brightest have received U.S. accredited degrees.

If confirmed, I will work to build on the progress of the last three decades and ensure that our relationship fulfills its potential.

The United States and the Kyrgyz Republic share many goals and a mutual interest in working together to achieve them. The Kyrgyz Republic has stated its commitment to fighting corruption and organized crime.

In this effort, it will find no better partner than the United States. We hope to strengthen security cooperation to address challenges such as disaster preparedness and countering transnational threats.

The United States is committed to supporting Kyrgyz economic resilience, connectivity, and diversification beyond its traditional partners by developing the country's knowledge economy in which a thriving IT sector drives job creation and connection to the global economy.

The Kyrgyz Republic has demonstrated environmental leadership in Central Asia as the first in the region to join the Global Methane Pledge.

The United States is also committed to supporting human rights and democratic institutions in the Kyrgyz Republic. Kyrgyzstan

has a unique record in this region. We are proud of our long-standing support for the Kyrgyz Republic's energetic civil society and its efforts to build accountable democratic institutions and strengthen the rule of law.

It is critical that Kyrgyz leadership safeguards the gains made over the last 30 years and upholds media freedom, elevates the role of civil society, protects the human rights of all its people, including members of all minority groups, and strengthens judicial independence.

If confirmed, I will advocate for Kyrgyz civil society and speak out against erosion of democratic governance, corruption, and threats to freedom of speech and association, in accordance with the values we share with the Kyrgyz people.

For 30 years the United States has stressed our support for the sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity of the Kyrgyz Republic.

If confirmed, I will emphasize the importance of holding Russia to account for its aggression in Ukraine, including the enforcement of sanctions on Russia.

I will also advocate for Kyrgyz leadership to promote accountability for the PRC's use of forced labor as well as its genocide and crimes against humanity against Uyghurs and members of other ethnic and religious minority groups, including ethnic Kyrgyz, in Xinjiang.

Mr. Chairman, there is ample potential in the U.S.-Kyrgyz bilateral relationship. If confirmed, I look forward to partnering with this committee and Congress to reinvigorate our ties and achieve mutual objectives that benefit not only our two countries but the whole of Central Asia.

Thank you again for considering my nomination and I look forward to answering any questions you might have.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Viguerie follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF LESSLIE VIGUERIE

Good morning, Chairman Coons, Ranking Member Young, and honorable members of this committee. I am grateful to have the opportunity to speak with you today and thank you for considering my nomination to serve as U.S. Ambassador to the Kyrgyz Republic.

I would like to start by thanking my family, my wife Kathryn, who is here with me today, and my three children, William, George, and Clara. They have been my support through hardship posts, lengthy periods of separation, and frequent moves. They have also shared with me the honor of serving our country abroad, an honor for which I have always been deeply grateful.

I would also like to thank all the friends and colleagues who have supported me over my 30-year career in the Foreign Service. Their examples showed me the best aspects of leadership, including the importance of building strong teams and morale, valuing diversity, and mentoring the next generation of U.S. diplomats. These values guide me today and, if confirmed, I will have no higher priority than the safety and security of the Embassy community.

The United States and the Kyrgyz Republic recently marked 30 years of diplomatic relations. Much has happened in this time. The United States has been a strong partner to the Kyrgyz Republic from the beginning, providing generous support, including more than \$10.4 million in COVID-related aid during the pandemic. U.S. assistance helped Kyrgyz efforts to develop the country's democratic institutions, its vibrant civil society, and its independent media. Since 1993 we have supported the American University of Central Asia, where tens of thousands of the region's best and brightest have received U.S.-accredited degrees. If confirmed, I will work to build on the progress of the last three decades and ensure that our relationship fulfills its potential.

The United States and Kyrgyz Republic share many goals and a mutual interest in working together to achieve them. The Kyrgyz Republic has stated its commitment to fighting corruption and organized crime. In this effort it will find no better partner than the United States. We hope to strengthen security cooperation to address challenges such as disaster preparedness and countering transnational threats. The United States is committed to supporting Kyrgyz economic resilience, connectivity, and diversification beyond its traditional partners, by developing the country's knowledge economy, in which a thriving IT sector drives job creation and connection to the global economy. The Kyrgyz Republic has demonstrated environmental leadership in Central Asia as the first in the region to join the Global Methane pledge. Our countries share an interest in solving the climate crisis and can do much together to reduce emissions and build our ability to respond to the impacts of climate change.

The United States is also committed to supporting human rights and democratic institutions in the Kyrgyz Republic. The Kyrgyz Republic has a unique record in the region. We are proud of our longstanding support for the Kyrgyz Republic's energetic civil society and its efforts to build accountable, democratic institutions and strengthen the rule of law. It is critical that Kyrgyz leadership safeguards the gains made over the last 30 years and upholds media freedom, elevates the role of civil society, protects the human rights of all its people, including members of all minority groups, and strengthens judicial independence. If confirmed, I will advocate for Kyrgyz civil society and speak out against erosion of democratic governance, corruption, and threats to freedom of speech and association, in accordance with the values we share with the Kyrgyz people.

For 30 years the United States has stressed our support for the sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity of the Kyrgyz Republic. If confirmed, I will emphasize the importance of holding Russia to account for its aggression against Ukraine, including the enforcement of sanctions on Russia. I will also advocate for Kyrgyz leadership to promote accountability for the PRC's use of forced labor as well as its genocide and crimes against humanity against Uyghurs and members of other ethnic and religious minority groups—including ethnic Kyrgyz—in Xinjiang.

Mr. Chairman, there is ample potential in the U.S.-Kyrgyz bilateral relationship. If confirmed, I look forward to partnering with this committee and Congress to reinvigorate our ties and achieve mutual objectives that benefit not only our two countries, but the whole of Central Asia.

Thank you again for considering my nomination and I look forward to answering any questions you might have.

Senator COONS. Thank you, Mr. Viguerie.

STATEMENT OF THE HON. DANIEL N. ROSENBLUM OF MARYLAND, A CAREER MEMBER OF THE SENIOR EXECUTIVE SERVICE, NOMINATED TO BE AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN

Ambassador ROSENBLUM. Thank you. Good morning, Chairman Coons.

I am honored to be here today as the President's nominee for U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Kazakhstan, and I am pleased that my wife, Sharon, and son, Jonah, are with me as well.

The journey that led me here started in the Cleveland suburb of Middleburg Heights, Ohio. My mother was a teacher who modeled the values of respect, empathy, and tolerance. My father worked for 30 years as a NASA scientist while, in his spare time, organizing a grassroots movement to advocate for the rights of Soviet Jews.

My parents' example inspired me to pursue a career in public service and international affairs. I studied Russian history, language, and literature as an undergraduate and later pursued a master's degree in Soviet studies.

In between, I worked for and was inspired by an outstanding public servant, Senator Carl Levin of Michigan. He took this chamber's oversight role seriously and in that spirit, if confirmed, I look

forward to collaborating closely with the U.S. Congress and particularly with the members of this committee to promote U.S. interests and values in our relationship with the Republic of Kazakhstan.

In my four years as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Central Asia and currently as Ambassador to Uzbekistan, I have often been asked why the United States cares about this region. What U.S. national interests are served by devoting time, attention, and resources to these faraway countries?

My answer is straightforward. We care because what happens there directly affects the security of the United States and its citizens.

We want these countries to develop as stable, prosperous, and friendly U.S. partners because we know that if they do not we will pay the price here at home.

At the same time, it is not in our long-term security or economic interest for a single power to dominate this region. We are much better off having mutually beneficial relations with a diverse group of sovereign countries, both big and small, in Eurasia and Central Asia.

The Government and people of Kazakhstan have appreciated America's steadfast support for their independent sovereignty and territorial integrity since 1991.

My goal, if confirmed, will be to partner with the Government and people of Kazakhstan to ensure that they remain free to determine their own policies and chart their own future.

After centuries under the rule of external powers and 30-plus years now as citizens of an independent nation, the people of Kazakhstan understand full well why the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity are critical to the maintenance of a stable international order.

If confirmed, I will emphasize the importance of holding Russia accountable for its aggression against Ukraine. I will also advocate that Kazakhstan promote accountability for the PRC's atrocities against Uighurs and members of other religious and ethnic minority groups, including a million and a half ethnic Kazakhs living in Xinjiang.

Mr. Chairman, the U.S.-Kazakhstan bilateral relationship is already strong. If confirmed, I hope to deepen and broaden it even further in ways that not only benefit our two countries but the whole of Central Asia.

Kazakhstan has long been a leader in efforts to better integrate the five Central Asian nations. If confirmed, I will continue to seek new ways to promote such regional cooperation including through the C5+1 diplomatic platform.

My number-one priority, if confirmed, will be to ensure the safety and health of my embassy and consulate teams as well as any and all American citizens in Kazakhstan.

I also intend to make it a priority to, first, deepen our security and law enforcement partnership to pursue our shared goals in the region including countering terrorism and other transnational threats; second, to encourage Kazakhstan to implement the sweeping reforms it initiated in the wake of serious civil unrest in January.

It is critical that Kazakhstan's leadership live up to its pledges to uphold media freedom, elevate the role of civil society, strengthen judicial independence, and protect the fundamental rights and freedoms of all its people.

And, third, to increase people-to-people interactions and expand our economic, educational, scientific, and cultural ties. Nothing will help solidify the foundations of a U.S.-Kazakhstani partnership more than creating strong connections between the people of our two nations.

Mr. Chairman, if confirmed, I pledge to work closely with you to support America's growing strategic partnership with Kazakhstan. [The prepared statement of Ambassador Rosenblum follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. DANIEL N. ROSENBLUM

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Ranking Member, and members of this committee, I am honored to be here today as the President's nominee for U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Kazakhstan.

The journey that led me here started in the Cleveland suburb of Middleburg Heights, Ohio. My mother was a teacher who modeled the values of respect, empathy, and tolerance. My father worked for 30 years as a NASA scientist, while, in his spare time, advocating for the rights of Soviet Jews. My parents' example inspired me to pursue a career in public service and international affairs, and taught me to embrace diversity, equity, inclusiveness, and access, because society is richer, and organizations are more effective when everyone participates.

I studied Russian history, language, and literature as an undergraduate, and later pursued a master's degree in Soviet Studies. In between, I worked for and was inspired by an outstanding public servant: Senator Carl Levin of Michigan. He took this chamber's oversight role seriously, and in that spirit, if confirmed, I look forward to collaborating closely with the U.S. Congress—and particularly with the members of this committee—to promote U.S. interests and values in our relationship with the Republic of Kazakhstan.

In my four years as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Central Asia, and currently as U.S. Ambassador to Uzbekistan, I have often been asked why the United States cares about this region. What U.S. national interests are served by devoting time, attention, and resources to these faraway countries? My answer is straightforward: we care because what happens there directly affects the safety and security of the United States and its citizens. We want these countries to develop as stable, prosperous, and friendly U.S. partners because we know that, if they don't, we will pay the price here at home.

At the same time, it is not in our long-term security or economic interests for a single power to dominate this region. We are much better off having mutually beneficial relations with a diverse group of sovereign countries, both big and small, in Europe, Eurasia and Central Asia. The Government and people of Kazakhstan appreciate America's steadfast support for their sovereignty since 1991, when we were the first to recognize their independence. My goal, if confirmed, will be to partner with the Government and people of Kazakhstan to ensure that they remain free to determine their own policies and chart their own future.

After centuries under the rule of external powers, and thirty plus years as citizens of an independent nation, the people of Kazakhstan have a deep appreciation for the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity; they fully understand why these principles are critical to the maintenance of a stable international order. If confirmed, I will emphasize these shared values, and the importance of holding Russia accountable for its aggression against Ukraine. I will also advocate that Kazakhstan promote accountability for the PRC's atrocities against Uyghurs and members of other religious and ethnic minority groups—including ethnic Kazakhs—in Xinjiang.

The U.S.-Kazakhstan bilateral relationship is already strong. If confirmed, I hope to deepen and broaden it even further, in ways that not only benefit our two countries, but the whole of Central Asia. Kazakhstan has long been a leader in efforts to better integrate the five Central Asian nations. I will continue looking for new ways to promote such regional cooperation, including through the C5+1 diplomatic platform.

My number one priority, if confirmed, will be to ensure the safety and security of my Embassy and Consulate teams, as well as all American citizens in Kazakhstan. Beyond that, I intend to make it a priority to:

- Deepen our security and law enforcement partnership with Kazakhstan to pursue our shared goals in the region, including countering terrorism and other transnational threats.
- Encourage Kazakhstan to implement the sweeping reforms it initiated in the wake of serious civil unrest last January, and provide technical assistance and training as needed and requested. It is critical that Kazakhstan's leadership live up to its pledges to uphold media freedom, elevate the role of civil society, strengthen judicial independence, and protect the fundamental rights and freedoms of all its people. We stand ready to continue assisting the Government and people of Kazakhstan to make these pledges a reality.
- Broaden engagement between the citizens of Kazakhstan and the United States by increasing people-to-people interactions and expanding our economic and business, educational, scientific, and cultural ties. Nothing will help solidify the foundation for long-term U.S.-Kazakhstani partnership more than creating and maintaining strong connections between the people of our two nations.

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, if I am confirmed, I pledge to work closely with you to support America's growing strategic partnership with Kazakhstan. I look forward to your questions.

Senator COONS. Thank you very much, Ambassador Rosenblum.
Mr. Hood?

STATEMENT OF JOEY R. HOOD OF NEW HAMPSHIRE, A CAREER MEMBER OF THE SENIOR FOREIGN SERVICE, CLASS OF MINISTER-COUNSELOR, NOMINATED TO BE AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE REPUBLIC OF TUNISIA

Mr. HOOD. Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I want to thank Senator Shaheen for that wonderful introduction.

I am honored by President Biden's and Secretary Blinken's trust in me and by the support of my wife, Anne, and children, Fiona and Henry.

If confirmed, my most important priority as ambassador would be the safety and security of Americans living in and visiting Tunisia. My next priority would be to help put Tunisia on a more stable and prosperous trajectory.

A long-standing U.S. partner and major non-NATO ally, Tunisia now finds itself suffering the global repercussions of Putin's brutal aggression in Ukraine, grappling with rising food prices and spiking energy prices.

Putin's war of choice has exacerbated Tunisia's economic crisis, and quick action is needed to reverse this trajectory.

If confirmed, I would promote a vision of inclusive and open economic growth. The Government is negotiating an agreement with the IMF and this could be a step toward reforms that would benefit all Tunisians.

Tunisia could also improve its investment in climate by focusing on infrastructure and secure technology. If confirmed, I would advocate for U.S. companies to help provide these.

As Tunisians grapple with these economic challenges they have experienced an alarming erosion of democratic norms and fundamental freedoms over the past year, reversing many hard-fought gains since they overthrew a dictator in 2011.

President Kais Saied's actions over the past year to suspend democratic governance and consolidate executive power have raised serious questions. The United States, both on our own and in coordination with our Group of Seven partners, has advocated for a swift return to democratic governance.

We have urged an inclusive democratic reform process, emphasized continued protection of fundamental freedoms, and insisted on respect for judicial independence and rule of law.

I would continue this engagement, if confirmed, and encourage Tunisia's leaders to rapidly reestablish a democratic government accountable to their people.

Tunisians have made clear that their demands for greater economic prosperity must not come at the expense of their hard-won democracy or human rights.

I agree with that and ascribe to the administration's view that the U.S.-Tunisia bilateral relationship is strongest when there is a shared commitment to democratic values, human rights, and fundamental freedoms.

We continue to review our assistance programs to assure that they align with our values and interests. If confirmed, I would use all tools of U.S. influence to advocate for a return to democratic governance and mitigate Tunisians suffering from Putin's devastating war, economic mismanagement, and political upheaval.

Tunisian leaders' recognition that a vibrant civil society is a partner, not an adversary, has been a key reason for its democratic success. Civil society has demonstrated dynamism and resiliency in representing the aims and demands of the Tunisian people.

If confirmed, I would continue to support civil society and engage regularly with the Government to protect fundamental freedoms.

I would also urge that political reforms and parliamentary elections announced for later this year are transparent and inclusive.

Amid this political upheaval, I understand that the Tunisian military has remained an apolitical and professional force that reports to civilian leaders.

If confirmed, I would work to ensure this remains the case and look for new avenues of collaboration on U.S. security priorities, particularly against global terrorist threats, while further strengthening human rights protections.

The normalization of relations with Israel, including through the historic Abraham Accords, has led to greater peace and security in the region and deepened opportunities for expanded economic growth and productivity.

If confirmed, I would support further efforts to normalize diplomatic and economic relations with the State of Israel in the region.

Thank you, Mr. Ranking Member, members of this committee, for this opportunity.

If confirmed, I look forward to leading the team of professionals at our embassy and working with you to advance U.S. interests and strengthen our shared values in Tunisia.

I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Hood follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF JOEY R. HOOD

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Ranking Member, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I am honored by President Biden's and Secretary Blinken's trust in me, and by the support of my wife Anne and children Fiona and Henry.

If confirmed, my most important priority as ambassador would be the safety and security of Americans living in and visiting Tunisia.

My next priority would be to help put Tunisia on a more stable and prosperous trajectory. A long-standing U.S. partner and major non-NATO Ally, Tunisia now finds itself suffering the global repercussions of Putin's brutal aggression in Ukraine, grappling with rising food insecurity and spiking energy prices. Putin's war of choice has exacerbated Tunisia's economic crisis, and quick action is needed to reverse this trajectory.

If confirmed, I would promote a vision of inclusive and open economic growth. The Government is negotiating an agreement with the IMF, and this could be a step toward reforms that would benefit all Tunisians. Tunisia could also improve its investment in climate by focusing on infrastructure, and secure technology. If confirmed, I would advocate for U.S. companies to help provide these.

As Tunisians grapple with these economic challenges, they have experienced an alarming erosion of democratic norms and fundamental freedoms over the past year, reversing many hard-fought gains since they overthrew a dictator in 2011. President Kais Saied's actions over the past year to suspend democratic governance and consolidate executive power have raised serious questions. The United States, both on our own and in coordination with our Group of Seven partners, has advocated for a swift return to democratic governance. We have urged an inclusive democratic reform process, emphasized continued protection of fundamental freedoms, insisted on respect for judicial independence and rule of law.

I would continue this engagement, if confirmed, and encourage Tunisia's leaders to rapidly re-establish a democratic government accountable to their people. Tunisians have made clear that their demands for greater economic prosperity must not come at the expense of their hard-won democracy or human rights. I agree with that and ascribe to the administration's view that the U.S.-Tunisia bilateral relationship is strongest when there is a shared commitment to democratic values, human rights, and fundamental freedoms.

We continue to review our assistance programs to ensure they align with our policy goals and deliver value to the American taxpayer while preserving our long-term partnership and progress made through our past assistance to Tunisia. If confirmed, I would use all tools of U.S. influence to advocate for a return to democratic governance and mitigate Tunisians' suffering from Putin's devastating war, economic mismanagement, and political upheaval.

Tunisian leaders' recognition that a vibrant civil society is a partner, not an adversary, has been a key reason for its democratic success. Civil society has demonstrated dynamism and resiliency in representing the aims and demands of the Tunisian people. If confirmed, I would continue to support civil society and engage regularly with the Government to protect fundamental freedoms. I would also urge that political reforms and parliamentary elections announced for later this year are transparent and inclusive.

Amid this political upheaval, I understand that the Tunisian military has remained an apolitical and professional force that reports to civilian leaders. If confirmed, I would work to ensure this remains the case, and look for new avenues of collaboration on U.S. security priorities, particularly against global terrorist threats, while further strengthening human rights protections.

The normalization of relations with Israel, including through the historic Abraham Accords, has led to greater peace and security in the region and deepened opportunities for expanded economic growth and productivity. If confirmed, I would support further efforts to normalize diplomatic and economic relations with the State of Israel in the region.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and members of the committee for this opportunity. If confirmed, I look forward to leading the team of professionals at our Embassy and working with you to advance U.S. interests and strengthen our shared values in Tunisia. I look forward to your questions.

Senator YOUNG [presiding]. I thank all of our nominees for their statements.

Mr. Rosenblum, Kazakhstan has been a steadfast partner with the United States on a number of issues, from our use of its space

port for our astronauts to access the International Space Station to its commitment to protect our personnel and consulate during political unrest in Almaty.

However, Kazakhstan has thus far taken a neutral stance on Ukraine, declining to support either side in this war of Russian aggression.

Kazakhstan's commitment of humanitarian aid to Ukraine as well as its additional defense spending indicate anxiety about Russian geopolitical ambitions. This is despite continuing military partnership per media reporting on Kazakhstan's participation in upcoming Russian military exercises.

Sir, what steps would you take to encourage Kazakhstan to take more decisive steps to counter Russian aggression?

Ambassador ROSENBLUM. Senator Young, thank you for that question.

It will definitely be at the center of my attention, as it is for all of us now, the effects of the war in Ukraine and the region.

First of all, I want to say that our support, as I mentioned in my statement, for Kazakhstan's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and independence has been consistent and remains strong, and that will be an organizing principle of everything I do in Kazakhstan, if confirmed.

Secondly, we do recognize the reality of Kazakhstan's geographical and historical and economic position in the region. They share a 4,700-mile border with Russia. Russia is their main trading partner, main source of investment, and that is a reality that they have to deal with.

As you pointed out, Kazakhstan has remained neutral in the conflict with respect to Russia's invasion of Ukraine and, at the same time, have stated publicly and clearly that they will not recognize the independence of the so-called Luhansk and Donetsk Republics.

They have also stated publicly that they will do everything in their power to not undermine the sanctions regime against Russia and have worked very closely with us to make sure that they do not cross that line.

And they have also said that they will not support the deployment of any Kazakhstani troops through the Collective Security Treaty Organization with Russian-led alliance that they belong to—military group.

So all of those things we take as positive steps and, if confirmed, when I go I will reinforce that, the importance of them remaining, at a minimum, neutral and also reinforce what the Kazakhstani leadership itself has said, which is they recognize they are too dependent on Russia, especially for their trade and their oil exports, and need to diversify, and anything we can do to help them diversify we will.

Senator YOUNG. Sir, I think you have done a very good job of contextualizing the diplomatic and economic and other challenges the country faces on account of its geography and history and other factors. I do think that it is a positive. You laid out many positives and, perhaps, that is something we can build on as well as it relates to the situation in Ukraine.

How would you ensure further, sir, that Kazakhstan does not fall into China's sphere of influence as it seeks closer ties with other nations?

Ambassador ROSENBLUM. So, again, there are realities that Kazakhstan faces with respect to China, and China is a very important source of investment in their oil and gas sector, one of their major trading partners.

At the same time, Kazakhstan practices and they publicly declare what they call multivector diplomacy, and multivector to them means that they have to maintain important relationships and mutually beneficial relations with lots of partners, not just Russia, not just China. The United States, Europe—they want all of that to be part of the picture.

So, if confirmed, my goal would be to help them in that—in their own goal, to reach their own goal of strengthening these other vectors. We can do that in a number of ways, including by promoting a better investment climate in Kazakhstan so that more U.S. investment in business can enter and they can diversify their trading relationships.

We can also, with respect to oil, in particular—oil and gas—have them diversify from their heavy dependence on that sector of their economy because it is the oil and gas that especially ties them closely both to Russia and China, both for export routes and, in the case of China, as a customer.

There is a number of ways that we can work on that. I am committed, if confirmed, to doing so, and the important thing, I think, here is that it is the Kazakhstanis' own goal. That is, we are helping them to achieve their own goal of not being overly dependent on their neighbors.

Senator YOUNG. Thank you much, Mr. Rosenblum.

From one Stan to another, Mr. Henick, you have been nominated to be our ambassador to Uzbekistan. As it relates to the Ukraine crisis, State Department has repeatedly engaged the Central Asian governments this year to reaffirm U.S. support for Uzbek independence and territorial integrity as well as the C5+1 strategic partnership.

Secretary Blinken reiterated the administration's position during Foreign Minister Kamilov's visit to Washington in March while also condemning Russia's unprovoked actions in Ukraine.

I note that Tashkent registered businesses have recently been hit by sanctions for engagement with Russian entities on the Treasury Department's sanctions list.

If confirmed, how would you encourage our Uzbek partners to avoid such dealings as well as take a stronger stance against Russian aggression?

Dr. HENICK. Thank you, Senator, for that question.

Uzbekistan finds itself, I think, in a very similar situation to Kazakhstan. They do not have the luxury of simply being able to cut off their relationship with Russia, which remains their largest trading partner, major investor; obviously, there are historical cultural ties.

At the same time, Uzbekistan has proven to be a strong partner of the United States and has been sensitive to the concerns that we have expressed, certainly, about Russian aggression and I

think, Senator, you—as you mentioned in your opening statement, there is a reassessment going on in the region about their relationship with Russia in light of Russia’s aggression against Ukraine.

And so we have found that we are having a productive dialogue with the Government of Uzbekistan. I think the key, going forward, will be to be as cooperative and transparent as possible about the nature and the specifics of the sanctions that we are levying, to hear from the Uzbeks about which of these sanctions, if any, are very difficult or impossible for them to comply with and to, when necessary, as you have pointed out, Senator, to designate companies that are in violation of those sanctions to send a clear message to other private sector entities in Uzbekistan about the dangers of doing business with Russia.

Thank you, Senator.

Senator YOUNG. Thank you, sir.

Mr. Viguerie, COVID-19 and economic sanctions have battered the Russian economy, presenting an opportunity to encourage Central Asian countries to rethink their relationships with Moscow.

As their governments warm to the idea of greater regional integration and partnerships with the U.S., the door may also be open to exploitation by other actors, particularly China.

How would you characterize the Kyrgyz reaction to U.S. engagement on this issue, particularly as we also call on the host nation to respect human rights and freedom of expression?

Mr. VIGUERIE. Thank you for the question, Senator.

Kyrgyzstan is in an unusual position. Many of the factors that my two colleagues outlined also hold true for Kyrgyzstan. But in addition, Kyrgyzstan relies for about a third of its economy on remittances from Russia. So that has a colossal economic impact on Kyrgyzstan.

The jury is still out on how much of an influence the Russian economic situation is going to have on those remittances.

I take your point on China. China owns about a third or more of Kyrgyzstan’s debt so it, too, exercises a huge amount of economic influence on the country.

The United States has been very active in engaging Kyrgyzstan to participate in regional organizations. Some, through our assistance, organize electrical transmission through Karim and CASA-1000. Others support general connectivity. There is an interest in Kyrgyzstan in pursuing these opportunities but there is a concern in Kyrgyzstan about their two big neighbors as well.

Thank you.

Senator YOUNG. Thank you.

Thank you to all the nominees who have spoken to these issues. I have learned quite a bit about that region just in your presentations today. So thank you.

I will look forward, should you be confirmed, to working with all of you on some of these challenges.

Mr. Talwar, as you know, I was one of the lead co-sponsors of the Israel Normalization Act to strengthen and expand normalization between Israel and a number of countries in the region, including Morocco.

I was encouraged to see other countries also begin taking baby steps toward fully integrating Israel into the regional framework

such as Riyadh's recent approval of Israeli use of Saudi airspace for commercial overflights.

Do you consider the Abraham Accords to be a success that we should endeavor to build upon and do you believe it is in the United States interest to see other countries pursue normalization with Israel?

Mr. TALWAR. Senator, thanks very much for the question.

I believe that the answer is yes. I believe that the Abraham Accords have put us on the cusp of a potentially historic transformation in the region.

And as it relates to Morocco and Israel, that relationship is going full bore and you have seen, literally, dozens of memorandums of understanding signed between the two countries in sectors ranging from agriculture to energy to supply chains.

Just yesterday there were two ministers in Rabat from Israel who signed an agreement on judicial and legal cooperation and, if confirmed, this is going to be one of my highest priorities.

I think working in two dimensions, first, to help buttress and support in any way we can and consistent with the law that you mentioned—the Israel Normalization Act—Israel Relations Normalization Act—to see what we can do to support the further building out and cementing of that relationship, and then second, there is the regional dimension that you referenced to connect this to the Negev Forum so that we can expand the circle of peace and so that people throughout the regions begin to see and feel the tangible benefits of peace with Israel.

Senator YOUNG. Thank you.

So just—so you will be encouraging, should you be confirmed, the Moroccan Government to, in turn, encourage other African and Middle Eastern nations to normalize relations with Israel. Is that accurate?

Mr. TALWAR. Senator, yes, that is accurate, and Morocco has a great deal of influence. It really considers itself as a North African country and that will be one of the things I will work on, if confirmed.

Senator YOUNG. Yes, sir.

Given the reality we have seen in the last two years of the implementation and expansion of the Accords, maybe you could speak with a little more specificity as—about the role they might have in the political and economic development of the region.

Mr. TALWAR. Sure, Senator.

I think the next phase here, really, is to translate the agreements that have been made into actual benefits that people can feel so that these are not just abstract agreements sitting out there which are negotiated in fancy rooms but actually translate into benefits economic, first and foremost, things that transform society and make them—improve them.

People-to-people ties, which Morocco is really a leader on, you now have tourism booming between the two countries. Of course, there is an historic and long-standing Jewish community, which is very much recognized as part of the fabric of Morocco, which stands as one of the pillars in that relationship and there are maybe half a million Israelis of Moroccan descent, perhaps more. So that is one dimension of it.

But to the extent that you can show benefits on the economic front, commercially, in terms of other standards of living that start to rise in the region because of this, I think you will have a bandwagoning effect that will just bolster moderates across the region.

Senator YOUNG. Thank you, sir.

Before I move on to Mr. Hood for a short question, I just wanted to speak to the effort to counter China through your role, Mr. Talwar. I commend the work of the embassy and consulate in partnering with Morocco to advance our security and economic priorities.

With the 15th anniversary of our free trade agreement, Morocco continues to be a strong partner in the region. Confronting economic aggression from countries such as China requires robust partnerships and a sound strategy.

How should the United States continue to engage Morocco to counter China in North Africa, sir?

Mr. TALWAR. Thanks very much for the question, Senator.

If confirmed, this will be a high priority for me. China is beginning to make inroads in that region, including in Morocco, and I think we have to keep a very close eye on that.

Morocco does not have a comprehensive strategic partnership with Morocco, which is their highest level of relationship that they will bestow upon some of the countries.

Nonetheless, China has been active, particularly in the cultural space. They have three Confucius Institutes. They have been training people through Huawei academies.

We actually do more than they do in terms of Cisco being involved. They are training a lot of Moroccans. And they have also—we have also been doing a lot of work through the—recently through the Development Finance Corporation and that is one of the most effective tools that we have to counter the Chinese approach, which, of course, is very state centric, very nontransparent and they are beginning to move into areas, for example, joint ventures they have proposed in R&D, vocational training, things of that sort.

And I think that we have to be active early on and using the tools that Congress has provided to be able to work effectively against them.

Senator YOUNG. Thank you. I am glad you mentioned the Development Finance Corporation. I, of course, am in the presence of one of the founding fathers of that effort. That would be Senator Coons, for the C-SPAN2 cameras.

And I am also glad you mentioned our private sector partners. So thank you so much.

Mr. Hood, just a final question for you, sir. Seeing many parties' boycott of the referendum on President Saied's constitutional amendment, it appears Tunisia's democratic institutions are at risk.

If confirmed, how would you urge President Saied's administration to be responsive, transparent, and accountable to the Tunisian people?

Mr. HOOD. Thank you for the question, Senator.

First, I would like to thank Chairman Menendez, Ranking Member Risch, Chairman Meeks, and Ranking Member McCaul for the statement that they made yesterday, which was very helpful. I will read just part of it here.

“The United States will continue to support the Tunisian people and encourage efforts to return to a transparent and inclusive system of democratic governance. We urge President Saied to work constructively with all Tunisians and the state of emergency and take steps to restore Tunisia’s separation of powers, democratic institutions, and the rule of law.”

If confirmed, I would continue these efforts, not just through private meetings but also through our public support to civil society voices. One of the things that is unique about Tunisia and the region is that it has a very vibrant civil society and I think that is thanks due, in large part, to support from the United States and from other partners, and we would continue this because the voice of the people, ultimately, in a democracy and especially in Tunisia are the biggest levers on executive power.

And so, if confirmed, that is what I would focus on.

Senator YOUNG. Thank you, sir. Thank you all for—once again, for your commitment to serving our great country. I thank your families, some of whom—some family members are present, and I will look forward to doing some good together.

I am off to cast an important vote for a China competition bill.

Mr. Chairman?

Senator COONS [presiding]. And I appreciate the ranking member’s recognition of my hard work with then Chairman Corker on the DFC.

I just want to congratulate you, Senator Young, on very hard work on a critical piece of legislation that is about to be voted into law.

That is the single best thing we can do to strengthen American competitiveness and innovation, to prepare us to succeed in our global competition with China, and to make a stronger and more creative nation likely for the next generation.

So congratulations on what is a landmark piece of legislation. Thank you.

Senator YOUNG. Thank you, sir.

Senator COONS. I now look forward to one round of questions, at the conclusion of which we will likely close this hearing. So if there are staff of any members who are intending to come and question, make sure that I know now because by the agreement with the ranking member I am going to ask about five minutes of questions and we will wrap this up unless I hear otherwise from the staff of some committee member.

First, I have a series of questions which the Senate Foreign Relations Committee asks of, literally, every nominee and I note, Ambassador Rosenblum, you made reference to having served under Senator Levin.

Yes, he would be pleased to know that we continue to exercise a forceful oversight.

So a simple yes or no from each of the five nominees would suffice.

Do you agree to appear before this committee and make officials from your office available to the committee and designated staff when invited?

[All witnesses answer in the affirmative.]

Senator COONS. Do you commit to keep this committee fully and currently informed about the activities under your purview?

[All witnesses answer in the affirmative.]

Senator COONS. Do you commit to engaging in meaningful consultation while policies are being developed, not just providing notification after the fact?

[All witnesses answer in the affirmative.]

Senator COONS. And, last, do you commit to promptly responding to requests for briefings and information as requested by this committee and its designated staff?

[All witnesses answer in the affirmative.]

Senator COONS. Wonderful. Thank you, all.

Mr. Talwar, I will start with you.

I had the opportunity to speak with the President on my way back from the floor vote—he wishes you all the best—and we reminisced about how I first met you when you were in service to the then senator on, literally, this committee many years ago.

I appreciate your raising the DFC. I am a great believer in its capabilities, in particular, as an alternative pathway to development financing that allows for higher standards—labor standards, environmental standards, and transparency.

How do you imagine the DFC being helpful in your future role, if confirmed, as U.S. Ambassador to Morocco?

Mr. TALWAR. Thanks so much for the question, Senator, and, again, I do want to commend you and Senator Corker for having authored the bill that—and the act that created the DFC.

I think it is a powerful tool in terms of being able to promote development in a way that is consistent with our values, and the DFC actually is becoming more active in Morocco.

There are about three projects which have been financed valued at over \$100 million in areas like climate resiliency and sustainable business environment, and there are about 10 more projects—actually more than 10—which are in the pipeline now and those will be in areas such as health care and some others as well.

And I think this is just an incredibly powerful tool and it is coming exactly at the right time in terms of this upping of our game because, as in my exchange with Senator Young, I mentioned how China is really beginning to do the same thing.

And, of course, if you put the side by side, I think our approach and the DFC approach—free markets, transparency, environmental consideration, workers' rights—stands in sharp contrast to the Chinese approach of nontransparency, state centric, et cetera.

So I think this will be a very powerful tool and, if confirmed, I will absolutely be working closely with the DFC and I look forward to consulting with you on this as well.

Senator COONS. Thank you. I look forward to that.

I have visited Morocco several times, initially principally to advocate for the Clementine exports from Morocco to the Port of Wilmington, Delaware, but then later for a more expanded conversation about our security and values partnership, and I may return

to ask about the Abraham Accords. But I need to for now keep moving, if I might.

Mr. Henick, talk to me about how you will work to promote liberalizing political and economic reforms, and whether you see room for an expanded partnership between the United States and Uzbekistan in foreign assistance.

Dr. HENICK. Yes, Senator, absolutely I do see room for us to continue to deepen that partnership.

Uzbekistan is really at a critical juncture right now. The reform program that President Mirziyoyev instituted began six years ago and some of the reforms have been incredibly successful.

But I think they are now getting to the point where it is going to be more and more difficult to stay the course as you start to approach things like really strengthening civil society, strengthening independent media, implementing rule of law.

We have had under Ambassador Rosenblum's leadership a lot of success in partnering with the Government of Uzbekistan using our assistance programs, particularly in the area of rule of law, to start to strengthen these reforms and we are starting to see real results.

If confirmed, Senator, I would certainly continue to use those tools as well as, if I may offer, I think the Development Finance Corporation also can play a critical role in Central Asia where it does not have a large profile right now but three of your nominees on this panel have been working over the last several years to try to work with the DFC to make it clear to other outside investors in the region that we, too, are prepared to offer our own investments and investments that bring the kind of quality and represent our values and can be a real alternative to other countries in the region.

Senator COONS. Thank you, Mr. Viguerie. I do think—excuse me, thank you, Dr. Henick.

I do think one of our key challenges—you are going to tell me how much time I have—one of our core challenges is giving the DFC the resources that it needs and deserves to be able to grow to scale—I am trying to clear an annoying budgetary scoring rule that prevents them from fully utilizing equity—and to syndicate to partner with other nations that are also open societies and want to promote more transparent, more sustainable alternatives to Chinese financing.

I would be interested, if I could, Mr. Viguerie, about how you would see our working to provide alternatives to Chinese financing in Kyrgyzstan but also how do we support a resurgence of democratic governance?

Mr. VIGUERIE. Thank you for the question, sir.

On the question of economic alternatives, I understand the U.S. Embassy has already been focused through assistance on the interesting development of a potential IT sector in Kyrgyzstan, which I think reflects—the growth of this reflects the fact it is a more open society than some of its neighbors.

The embassy also has an English language program for professionals, which will also go far to promote this new sector.

On the DFC itself, I understand that the embassy has been in contact with Kyrgyz officials. There, the challenge is to find inter-

nationally bankable projects that the DFC will be interested in and that the Kyrgyz make available. Obviously, it will become a large focus for me, if confirmed.

On democracy itself, it has definitely been a unique aspect of Kyrgyzstan. We support it through assistance through small grants. I think, as an ambassador, one of my most important—if confirmed, my most important duties is to promote the expansion of rule of law and anti-corruption in Kyrgyzstan.

Senator COONS. Thank you.

If I might, Ambassador Rosenblum, just continue on that line.

How do we use the tools, both support for civil society, advocating for democracy—how do we succeed in holding the Chinese accountable for the gross human rights violations happening in Xinjiang and how would you advance our relationship with Kazakhstan?

I was struck at their hesitancy—their refusal to publicly embrace and endorse Russia's aggression in Ukraine, Russia's annexation attempts, recognition of the so-called independent republics in the Donbas.

How would you work to advance these core goals?

Ambassador ROSENBLUM. Senator, thank you for the question.

It is an ongoing challenge for Kazakhstan to be where it is, to share these big borders with China and Russia and also to be so dependent on them for its trade, its oil exports.

I think 80 percent of Kazakhstan's oil exports transit Russian territory and the Russians have shown recently, just in recent months, the ability to sort of turn that tap off when they want to, and it sent a very strong message recognized by President Tokayev of Kazakhstan, who has publicly said, we have to do something to diversify our oil exports and not to rely just on this pipeline.

And there are ways that we can support them in these efforts to diversify, to build its relations outside of its Russia and China neighbors. DFC was already mentioned. I think that could also play a role in Kazakhstan as well. Promoting more U.S. investment coming in, encouraging U.S. companies to locate there.

Sometimes it is difficult for U.S. companies to compete on price or on the financing terms they can offer. I found this in my service in Uzbekistan repeatedly.

We have to make a case helping—working with the companies that U.S. companies bring a value that others do not. It is a long-term value and it pays off in the long term both in the products they make and the investments they make in people. We have seen this repeatedly in Uzbekistan and I expect the same would be true in Kazakhstan, if I am confirmed.

You also mentioned the situation with the human rights abuses, the atrocities in Xinjiang and Kazakhstan's position on that. I think it is important to emphasize that, again, Kazakhstan faces the reality of having this big, powerful neighbor that it depends on for so much.

At the same time, there are a million and a half Kazakhs living in Xinjiang, many of whom have also been victims of the repression there and, as a result, Kazakhstan, in my view, has done what it can to protect people, for example, who escape, who cross the bor-

der, and they have consistently followed a nonrefoulement policy. They have not sent people back.

If I am confirmed, I will continue to press for that policy to continue as well as to allow victims of Chinese repression in Kazakhstan to organize and speak out freely, to highlight the human rights abuses there.

It is not always an easy issue to deal with in the context of Kazakhstan and, yet, I think we have a strong enough partnership that we can continue to promote accountability for the horrific human rights abuses in Xinjiang.

Senator COONS. If I might, for all three of you, I am grateful for the skill and the study and the experience and the diligence you will bring to these three absolutely critical Central Asian republics.

It is a part of the world that does not get the attention that it deserves here in the Congress but that is critical to the future. They were at the crossroads of commerce for centuries. They are at the center of renewed focus and attention by China and Russia, and our ability to show what free and open societies can do and what democracy can bring—forgive me, I am getting a call from the floor.

I just—I look forward to hearing from you and supporting you in your service in these nations.

Last, if I might, Mr. Hood, I remember well a visit to Tunisia around the time that the Quartet received the Nobel Prize. It was exciting. There was a vibrancy to the democracy and civil society there.

We met with a very wide range of leaders from parliament, from the judiciary, from the executive, and the striking backsliding, the transformation back to an authoritarian state in recent days is truly alarming.

I would be interested in how you think we can best strengthen civil society, how we can push back on Putin's misinformation. There is an active and successful disinformation campaign that is leading many on the continent to believe that it is American sanctions and actions, not Russia's aggression, that are causing skyrocketing food and fertilizer and fuel prices.

So how do we counter Russian disinformation, strengthen civil society, and maintain true to our values while also maintaining this critical strategic relationship?

Mr. HOOD. Thank you for the question, Senator.

I think, in a word, I would say engagement. I hope that we can welcome you back to Tunisia along with your colleagues because I think it is critical and powerful when representatives of our legislative branch visit us at our embassies overseas and engage with our foreign interlocutors.

I think that is all the more important in a place like Tunisia where they have been going through political turbulence and where Tunisians are calling out for change. They are hungry. They are tired. They are unemployed.

They want their country to have economic prosperity while also having the Government protect their fundamental rights, and that is exactly what I am going to try to help them to do, if I am confirmed, through our engagement, through our assistance programs, that we are shifting to focus more on amplifying the voices of civil

society and institutions and organizations that can hold accountable executive power no matter what the results of the referendum or the legislative elections that are projected for December.

With regard to the misinformation, I think we still have a very powerful voice in the United States of America and so I will use it. I will ask for help from the legislative branch and from other parts of Washington as well but as well our Group of Seven partners that the administration has been working with diligently for the past year to make clear what the world's democracies expect and hope to see in Tunisia, not just for the people but also for the Government.

Senator COONS. Thank you. Let me make a closing comment, if I might.

Every time I have the opportunity to visit one of our embassies overseas I try to visit with mid-level career Foreign Service Officers, civil servants, foreign nationals who work as part of our embassy teams, and ask for ideas and suggestions for ways that we could make the life of Foreign Service families, in particular, but the lives of all who serve with us as development and diplomacy professionals easier.

I do now chair the Subcommittee of Appropriations that funds the State Department and USAID. This committee will be considering an authorizing bill on August 3rd, and there are small but important things.

One of the things currently being debated is providing access to the internet as a utility in a way that in countries where it is incredibly expensive, to make it available without draining the household resources, ways that we can have dual career families where they work for different agencies or work in the public sector and private sector more successfully transition from post to post.

We talked in a hearing yesterday about the importance of having paid internships to promote diversity within the ranks of the Foreign Service.

All of this interests me intensely and I appreciate that several of you raised that, as an ambassador, the safety and the security and the vibrancy of the many people who serve our nation in the posts for which you will, if confirmed, be responsible encourage me because paying attention to the needs of those who dedicate their lives to representing us overseas is an important part, in my view, of your service and of mine.

Let me close by thanking Sarosh and Dominique, Kathryn, Sharon, and Anne for being here and for supporting your spouses and your families, and if I got this right and I probably did not, Haris and Ilyas, Oskar, Carmen and, I think, Fiona and Henry, William, George, and Clara.

Many of you cited your parents as inspiration for your taking this step forward—Puneet, talking about your parents taking the risk of coming to the United States—parents who served in our military overseas, parents who are not able to witness this today but who supported you, and then spouses and children who have been a part of your career of service.

Thank you all for what you do to represent our nation in difficult, distant, dangerous parts of the world and know that all of us in the Senate appreciate your service.

The record for this hearing will remain open until tomorrow, the close of business on Thursday, July 28th. So for any staff who are listening, make sure any questions for the record are submitted no later than Thursday.

And with that, this confirmation hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 12:50 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

Additional Material Submitted for the Record

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED
TO HON. PUNEET TALWAR BY SENATOR ROBERT MENENDEZ

Bilateral Relationship

Question. As U.S. Ambassador to the Kingdom of Morocco, you will be responsible for representing not only America's strategic interests and priorities, but also American values. One of the more contentious aspects of the U.S.-Morocco relationship is the issue of human rights.

- How do you plan on engaging with the Moroccan Government regarding human rights concerns, particularly as it pertains to free speech and the rights of activists in the Western Sahara?

Answer. If confirmed, I will prioritize human rights and directly engage the Government of Morocco to raise concerns including allegations of mistreatment of detainees by security forces; restrictions on the freedoms of expression, peaceful assembly, association, and religion; and discrimination against women. This will include human concerns in Western Sahara. The United States maintains a dialogue on human rights issues with the Government of Morocco and with members of Moroccan civil society. If confirmed, I will participate in these dialogues with other colleagues in the State Department. I also will meet regularly with civil society groups and advocates for human rights and encourage my team to do the same. The President and the Secretary have been clear that our relationships with all our partners will be more sustainable with improvements on human rights. If confirmed, I will continue to work closely with Moroccan leaders to protect human rights, in line with Morocco's international commitments.

Normalization with Israel

Question. Last week, Israel Defense Forces (IDF) chief Aviv Kochavi visited Morocco, building on normalization efforts between Morocco and Israel.

- As part of the administration's efforts to increase regional cooperation, how do you plan on working with both Moroccan and Israeli officials to enhance security integration and cooperation? How do you see relations between the two countries evolving?

Answer. Morocco-Israel ties have already created real benefits for both countries. Business relations are growing rapidly, and direct flights have started, making it easier for hundreds of thousands of Israelis of Moroccan descent to visit the land of their ancestors. Morocco became the first Arab country to sign a defense cooperation agreement with Israel and the Chief of Staff of the Israel Defense Forces recently made a landmark visit to Morocco. In March, Moroccan Foreign Minister Bourita joined with Secretary Blinken and foreign ministers from Bahrain, Egypt, and the UAE at the historic Negev Summit. The meeting launched the Negev Forum, a framework for regional integration and cooperation, including working groups on regional security, food and water security, education, health, tourism, and clean energy. If confirmed, I will look for opportunities to work with Morocco to further expand the circle of peace and cooperation with Israel in the region, including in the area of security integration and cooperation.

Food Security

Question. Many countries in the Middle East and North Africa continue to experience surging prices and the shortage of essential food supplies as a result of Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine. Increasing prices have led to widespread anger and social unrest in the region many times before, most notably during the Arab Spring.

- What is your assessment of the current global food security crisis, particularly as it pertains to Morocco, and how can the U.S. mitigate the short and long-

term effects in the region? If confirmed, what role do you see yourself playing in mitigating these effects?

Answer. Morocco is currently suffering from what may be the worst drought in 30 years and the rise in the price of wheat as a result of Putin's invasion of Ukraine. Morocco is likely to increase its wheat imports from five million tons to six million tons but at this point the Government is confident there will be no disruptions to domestic supply or a reduction in wheat subsidies. Morocco received four percent of its wheat imports from Russia and 20 percent from Ukraine in 2021. If confirmed, I will carefully monitor the situation and work with colleagues in Washington to support Morocco's food security.

Anomalous Health Incidents

Question. I am very concerned about directed energy attacks on U.S. Government personnel (so-called Anomalous Health Incidents). Ensuring the safety and security of our personnel abroad falls largely on individual Chiefs of Mission and the response of officers at post. It is imperative that any individual who reports a suspected incident be responded to promptly, equitably, and compassionately.

- Do you agree these incidents must be taken seriously, and pose a threat to the health of U.S. personnel?

Answer. Yes.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to ensuring that any reported incident is treated seriously and reported quickly through the appropriate channels, and that any affected individuals receive prompt access to medical care?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed, I will have no higher priority than the safety and well-being of Mission personnel and will work in close partnership with the Department's AHI Coordinator, the Department's Health Incident Response Task Force, and the broader government-wide effort to ensure the full resources of the U.S. Government are brought to bear to get to the bottom of these incidents and to ensure access to needed care for those affected.

Question. Do you commit to meeting with medical staff and the RSO at post to discuss any past reported incidents and ensure that all protocols are being followed?

Answer. Yes. If confirmed, I would be committed to providing Mission Morocco personnel with the most up-to-date information available, as we learn more, including guidance on how to respond if they have concerns that they might have experienced an incident and how to access medical care.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO HON. PUNEET TALWAR BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

Policy Priorities

Question. Please outline your policy priorities and objectives as the United States Ambassador to Morocco.

Answer. Morocco's commitment to our strategic partnership undergirds U.S. security goals in the region and generates dividends across a range of U.S. national and regional security equities. If confirmed, ensuring the safety and security of the Embassy and Consulate teams and American citizens in Morocco, helping Morocco and Israel cement their growing relationship, support for a political solution for Western Sahara through a U.N.-led process, building on our strong security partnership, enhancing our economic ties including through advocacy for American business and exports, and increasing protection for human rights would be my policy priority areas.

Western Sahara

Question. The Trump administration reversed longstanding U.S. policy on Western Sahara in exchange for Morocco's entry into the Abraham Accords and normalization with Israel. Previously, the United States had recognized neither Morocco's claim, nor the self-declared government led by the independence-seeking Polisario Front.

- Do you consider the Trump administration's recognition of Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara a positive or negative development?

Answer. I believe that there is no substitute for a negotiated solution that can provide an enduring and dignified resolution for the people of Western Sahara and the region. In my judgment, it is positive that the U.N. relaunched a negotiations

process in 2021 led by U.N. Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General Staffan de Mistura; that the parties, neighboring states, and international partners have lent their full support to this political process and engaged with the Personal Envoy in good faith; and that violence that rekindled in 2020 with the suspension of the ceasefire has ebbed. The previous administration's statements are a historical fact, and if confirmed, I will place my emphasis on working in support of the U.N. and together with international partners to advance a credible political process able to garner broad international support.

Question. Do you consider the Trump administration's decision on Western Sahara as reversible?

Answer. On December 10, 2020, the previous administration issued a presidential proclamation that recognized Morocco's sovereignty over Western Sahara. While I am not in a position to offer a legal analysis, I am not aware of any restrictions that would in principle preclude the current or a future administration from evaluating a previously issued presidential proclamation. The previous administration's statements are a historical fact, and if confirmed, I would place my emphasis on fully supporting the U.N.-led diplomatic process for Western Sahara.

Question. As a consequence of the U.S. decision to grant Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara, what is an appropriate U.S. consulate presence? Brick and mortar, virtual or none at all?

Answer. My understanding is that Mission Morocco is able to fulfill its mission with the current posture of a U.S. Embassy in Rabat and Consulate-General in Casablanca. Personnel assigned to the Mission regularly travel to Western Sahara and directly engage with both Moroccan Government officials and non-government organizations, including civil society and human rights activists. In addition, we continue to host a virtual presence post for Western Sahara. If confirmed, I will work to ensure that the Mission is able to provide timely and accurate reporting on the full range of issues in Western Sahara.

Question. MINURSO efforts to find a political solution to Western Sahara have yielded uneven results. What is your characterization of MINURSO's effectiveness and how would you set conditions for a political solution?

Answer. As penholder at the U.N. Security Council for MINURSO and Western Sahara, the United States' focus is on ensuring that the mandate allows the U.N.-led process to advance a political solution that can deliver tangible results for the people of Western Sahara and the region. While my understanding is that the administration strongly supports the U.N.-led process and the efforts of the U.N. Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General for Western Sahara who leads it, no solution to the dispute can be imposed. My understanding is the administration aims to fully empower the MINURSO mission and the Personal Envoy to effectively carry out their roles in support of achieving a political solution. If confirmed, I will support the efforts of the Personal Envoy and work with the Moroccan Government to support the achievement of a political solution.

Question. What are the prospects and regional implications of a warm peace or detente between Algeria and Morocco?

Answer. The United States views Morocco and Algeria as valued partners and hopes that tensions can be reduced and diplomatic relations restored. Improving relations, while a long-term process, could eventually enable both countries to better address shared bilateral and regional issues such as terrorism, illegal migration, drug trafficking, and trade integration.

Abraham Accords

Question. Morocco's normalization with Israel has the potential to reap significant economic and security benefits.

- Please outline your thoughts on Morocco's normalization with Israel and plans to expand and strengthen this relationship.

Answer. Morocco-Israel ties have already created real benefits for both countries. Business relations are growing rapidly, and direct flights have started, making it easier for hundreds of thousands of Israelis of Moroccan descent to visit the land of their ancestors. In March, Moroccan Foreign Minister Bourita joined with Secretary Blinken and foreign ministers from Bahrain, Egypt, and the UAE at the historic Negev Summit. The meeting launched the Negev Forum, a framework for regional integration and cooperation, including working groups on regional security, food and water security, education, health, tourism, and clean energy. If confirmed, I will work to engage with Morocco, Israel, and other countries in the region to normalize

relations and look for other opportunities to expand integration and cooperation among countries in the region.

Mil-to-Mil Relationship

Question. Select members of Congress have sought to curtail the U.S.-Morocco mil-to-mil relationship over Western Sahara concerns—even as far as to reject Moroccan participation in AFRICOM’s capstone exercise African Lion.

- Please provide your perspectives on the mil-to-mil relationship with Morocco and implications for limiting that relationship.

Answer. Morocco has been a steadfast security partner. Morocco’s relationship with the United States encompasses nearly every U.S. security and strategic interest in the region. Morocco occupies a vital geographic strategic position, is one of AFRICOM’s most capable partners on the continent, participating in over 100 military-to-military engagements yearly, and hosts AFRICAN LION—the largest military exercise on the African continent. These military exercises strengthen interoperability between AFRICOM and more than 40 partner nations and enhance our collective readiness. In addition, Morocco continues to be a major customer for new U.S. equipment, with billions of dollars in planned purchases in the coming decade. If confirmed, I will work with AFRICOM to expand upon Morocco’s role as a security exporter for the region and enhance our already strong security cooperation.

Economy

Question. Many U.S. companies have bemoaned Moroccan barriers to entry that create an unfavorable economic environment to include excessive bureaucracy, intellectual property issues, and pursuit of criminal litigation against American companies.

- Please outline your understanding of Morocco’s economic state, barriers to entry for foreign investment, strategy to improve these conditions.

Answer. The World Bank ranked Morocco 53rd for ease of doing business in 2020. Morocco has made progress in implementing macro-economic policies, trade liberalization, investment incentives, and structural reforms to encourage foreign investment, particularly in export sectors. However, U.S. companies remain concerned about regulatory barriers, digital and intellectual property issues, and access to financing in Morocco. U.S. Government assistance supports Moroccan Government efforts to address these issues and increase transparency and accountability and Mission Morocco engages with key government and civil society actors in the field of anti-corruption. King Mohammed VI’s reform plan, the New Development Model, seeks to simplify administrative regulations and encourage foreign investment. If confirmed, I will make it a priority to identify new areas to help advance economic reforms in Morocco, and advocate for U.S. business and exports.

Human Rights, Democracy, and International Organizations

Question. In the State Department’s 2022 Trafficking in Persons Report, Morocco was identified to be Tier 2 for not fully meeting the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking. One key area of failure was a lack of proactive screening of migrants and other vulnerable populations and identification measures, which leave populations vulnerable to penalization for unlawful acts which traffickers compelled them to commit.

- How can you work with the host government and the Moroccan Security Forces to increase their capacity for proactive measures?

Answer. If confirmed, I will urge the Moroccan Government to increase its efforts to investigate and prosecute potential trafficking crimes, to proactively identify trafficking victims, and to provide specialized protection services catering to the needs of trafficking victims. Specifically, I will urge the Government to finalize, approve, and implement standardized victim identification procedures and a national victim referral mechanism.

Question. Both Spain and Moroccan Governments have identified trafficking groups as likely to have played an influential role in the recent border crossing incident at Melilla, what steps would you take as Ambassador to help Morocco improve its efforts to meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking?

Answer. If confirmed, I will work to identify ways the United States can support ongoing Moroccan efforts to address the challenges of migration, human smuggling, border security, and trafficking in persons.

Question. Morocco has deepened relations with Israel after normalization in 2020 through high level official visits. As a largely Islamic state, King Mohammed VI officially recognized the Jewish community as part of Moroccan culture.

- What is your assessment of the King's recognition and prospects of religious freedoms in Morocco?

Answer. The Moroccan constitution provides for freedom of worship and freedom of conscience. Morocco has a long tradition of religious tolerance and coexistence, particularly between Muslim and historic Jewish communities. When Secretary Blinken released this year's annual religious freedom report, he highlighted Morocco as an example of progress on religious freedom. He noted that Morocco launched an initiative to renovate Jewish heritage sites and to include Jewish history in the Moroccan public-school curriculum. If confirmed, I will support Morocco's efforts to respect the historic Jewish community in Morocco and encourage religious freedom for all faiths in the country.

Question. What actions would you take with the host government to continue to expand this opening of religious freedom in the country?

Answer. If confirmed, I will engage on this important issue in three key areas. First, I will work to identify ways the United States can support religious freedom. Second, I will engage with a wide variety of religious leaders in Morocco and maintains an active dialogue with the Moroccan Government on religious freedom issues. Third, I will stress the importance of the equal and transparent application of the laws governing religious organizations.

Question. In the State Department's 2021 Report on International Religious Freedom, only Sunni Muslims and Jews are recognized by the King. Many Shia Muslims and other minority groups fear registration for reprisals by the Sunni majority.

- If confirmed, how will you engage with the host government and civil society on strengthening the societal and governmental respect for international religious freedom?

Answer. belief for members of religious minority groups. I would meet with government officials, including from the Ministries of Interior (MOI) and Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs (MEIA), to stress the importance of religious freedom and tolerance, including the rights of minority communities. I would also hold regular meetings and discussions with members of religious minority and majority communities throughout the country and direct embassy and consulate-general representatives to highlight the importance of protecting members of religious minority groups and interfaith dialogue.

Question. In the State Department's 2021 Human Rights Report, Morocco was noted to have credible reports of significant human rights abuses such as torture or degrading treatment by security forces, serious restrictions on free expression, substantial interference of the freedom of assembly and association, and criminalization of LGBTQI conduct.

- If confirmed, what steps will you take to continue to address these concerns with the host government?

Answer. If confirmed, I will prioritize promoting human rights in my engagement, including respect for freedom of speech, assembly, and association. I will encourage legislative reforms to protect human rights, including freedom of expression, in line with Morocco's international commitments. I also will work with the Moroccan Government to address concerns regarding actions by members of the security forces and ensure it can fulfill its commitments and responsibilities to its people. The promotion of the human rights of LGBTQI+ persons will be one of my highest priorities, including the reduction of discrimination and violence against LGBTQI+ persons and working toward decriminalization of same-sex status and conduct. I would use Pride Month as an opportunity to promote LGBTQI+ rights.

Question. How will you direct your embassy to work with civil society organizations to improve the human rights situation on the ground?

Answer. If confirmed, promoting human rights will be among my highest priorities. I will meet regularly with human rights defenders, civil society activists, and other non-governmental organizations in the United States and in Morocco and I will direct members of the Embassy staff to do the same.

Question. The Office of Multilateral Strategy and Personnel (MSP) in the State Department's bureau of International Organizations is leading a whole-of-government effort to identify, recruit, and install qualified, independent personnel at the U.N., including in elections for specialized bodies like the International Tele-

communications Union (ITU). There is an American candidate, Doreen Bogdan-Martin, who if elected would be the first American and first woman to lead the ITU. She is in a tough race that will require early, consistent engagement across capitals and within the U.N. member states.

- If confirmed, do you commit to demarching the Moroccan Government and any other counterparts necessary to encourage their support of Ms. Bogdan-Martin?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to demarching the Moroccan Government in support of Ms. Bogdan-Martin and working to educate Moroccan Government interlocutors on the importance of her candidacy.

Question. If confirmed, how can you work with the International Organizations (IO) bureau and other stakeholders to identify, recruit, and install qualified Americans in positions like the Junior Program Officer (JPO) program at the U.N.?

Answer. The Junior Professional Officer program is one of the key opportunities offered by the U.N. to encourage young professionals interested in serving in international organizations, and it provides them with hands-on experience across various U.N. agencies. If confirmed, I will coordinate closely with my colleagues in the International Organization Affairs Bureau and other stakeholders to ensure we have sufficient resources, tools, and staffing to support more positions for American citizen JPOs in the U.N. system. With these resources, we can work strategically to increase the number of JPO opportunities funded by the U.S. Government into key agencies and bodies that work on U.S. priorities, expand our recruitment and outreach activities to ensure these opportunities are widely known and available to interested U.S. citizens, and provide tools and services to strengthen our competitiveness in placing qualified American citizens into the U.N. system.

Question. Morocco had a 21% rate of voting coincidence with the U.S. in the U.N. General Assembly and in the Security Council in 2021.

- What is your assessment of this issue?

Answer. If confirmed I will maintain close consultations with the Moroccan Government on issues at the United Nations and advocate for their support of U.S. positions. In my view, direct engagement with senior officials in capital can be an effective way to advocate for support at the United Nations.

Question. If confirmed, what concrete actions can you take to engage with the Moroccans on anticipated votes in the U.N. system that would increase their voting coincidence with the U.S.?

Answer. If confirmed, I will develop close coordination with our mission at the United Nations to enhance our direct messaging with the Moroccan Government interlocutors in Rabat and emphasize the importance of issues and votes at the United Nations.

State Department Management and Public Diplomacy

Question. Many U.S. missions have been under enormous stress over the last few years, in large part due to COVID.

- What is your understanding of morale throughout Mission Rabat?

Answer. My understanding is that morale throughout Mission Morocco is very good. Traditional indicators such as staff retention rates, support this understanding. If confirmed, I look forward to working closely with the entire Mission team to identify and resolve issues which adversely affect staff morale.

Question. How do you intend to improve morale at Mission Rabat?

Answer. If confirmed, I will stress open communication and inclusivity to ensure that we continuously identify and address the concerns of all Mission team members by utilizing every tool and resources available from the Department. Collectively, we will maintain a safe, supportive work culture that empowers and develops our colleagues.

Question. How do you intend to create a unified mission and vision at Mission Rabat?

Answer. If confirmed, I will make it a priority to create a shared vision and effort that advances U.S. interests consistent with the Integrated Country Strategy (ICS). I would engage with all components of the Mission to seek their input on priorities, and I would follow up regularly to ensure execution and to make any necessary adjustments.

Question. Management is a key responsibility for chiefs of mission. How would you describe your management style?

Answer. Over the course of my career in government, I have had the opportunity to lead diverse, talented, interagency teams. My style is inclusive, and I seek to impart values of respect, integrity, and collegiality while also setting high standards. I listen to team members who have expertise. I encourage fresh thinking and constructive debate. I believe in achieving outcomes, setting clear objectives, and empowering my team to accomplish our shared goals while ensuring that they understand their work is connected to the larger enterprise. I believe in recognizing team members for their work, and I believe in fostering their career development and personal growth.

Question. Do you believe it is ever acceptable or constructive to berate subordinates, either in public or private?

Answer. It is never acceptable to berate subordinates. If confirmed, I commit to building a positive and inclusive work environment that empowers employees.

Question. How do you envision your leadership relationship with your deputy chief of mission?

Answer. A successful relationship between an ambassador and a deputy chief of mission is critical to a successful diplomatic mission. If confirmed, I envision a relationship that features close coordination, partnership, and strong communication on the full range of mission issues, both internal and external.

Question. If confirmed, what leadership responsibilities do you intend to entrust to your deputy chief of mission?

Answer. If confirmed, I will forge a close partnership with my deputy chief of mission. I would empower her to be the chief operating officer of Mission Morocco. This extends beyond internal management. The deputy chief of mission must play an important policy, diplomatic, and strategic role, including stepping in for the ambassador when absent from post. She must be seen as empowered in the eyes of Mission team members and the Moroccan Government so that she is seen as speaking authoritatively for the Ambassador and the United States.

Question. In order to create and continue employee excellence at the Department, accurate and direct employee evaluation reports (EERs) for Foreign Service Officers are imperative, though often lacking.

- Do you believe that it is important to provide employees with accurate, constructive feedback on their performances in order to encourage improvement and reward those who most succeeded in their roles?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to encouraging improvement in employee performance and recognizing achievement within Mission Morocco. The development of a motivated and effective workforce is critical for the effective diplomacy necessary to advance U.S. interests.

Question. If confirmed, would you support and encourage clear, accurate, and direct feedback to employees in order to improve performance and reward high achievers?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed, I will work closely with my deputy chief of mission, consul general in Casablanca, and management team to recognize the success of staff and identify and develop strategies where there are opportunities for growth and improvement. Accurate, constructive feedback and rewarding success are essential tools in improving performance.

Question. It is imperative that U.S. diplomats get outside of posts abroad to meet with local actors, including host government officials, non-government organizations, and fellow foreign diplomats stationed in Morocco.

- In your opinion, do U.S. diplomats get outside of our embassy walls enough to accomplish fully their missions?

Answer. I agree that it is imperative for U.S. diplomats be visible outside of diplomatic compounds to meet with the local actors in order to advance American interests and values. This includes engagement with a wide range of interlocutors including in rural and underserved areas, women, youth, and vulnerable populations. Our ability to engage these audiences is crucial to furthering our overall foreign policy goals and essential to fully accomplishing our mission. If confirmed, I will encourage Mission Morocco team members to engage widely and often outside of diplomatic compounds.

Question. How do you intend to improve the ability of U.S. diplomats to better access all local populations?

Answer. If confirmed, I intend to lead by example and will seek every opportunity to engage with local populations throughout the country. U.S. assistance and public diplomacy programs are focused on supporting rural populations, women, youth, and underserved populations, and I pledge to publicly support those programs through visits and direct engagement with beneficiaries, local NGOs, and local governments helping to support and implement these programs. In addition, Mission Morocco boasts a robust Peace Corps program, which will welcome sixty volunteers back to Morocco in September 2022 and will be hosting one of the largest Peace Corps programs worldwide in this challenging post-pandemic era. Throughout the Mission I will encourage staff to continue their engagement with local populations and in ensuring the best possible reporting accurately which reflects a wide variety of opinions throughout the country.

Question. Public diplomacy is an important aspect of U.S. foreign policy efforts.

- What is the public diplomacy environment like in Morocco?

Answer. Morocco is a major non-NATO ally, a Free Trade Agreement partner, an ally in countering violent extremism, and provides a supportive environment for U.S. engagement. A solid majority of the Moroccan public has favorable attitudes toward the United States and strong majorities support closer economic ties and security cooperation. Moroccans hold the U.S. education system, job creation, and U.S. technology in high regard. Morocco is home to one of State Department's Near East Asia Bureau's largest Fulbright programs and benefits from an extensive alumni network. The public diplomacy environment in Morocco is rich with opportunity to engage local populations through traditional media, social media, and local programming. Dar America, the American Space in Casablanca, plus the American Space in Oujda, are key platforms for engaging youth on U.S. society, entrepreneurship, values, and policies. If confirmed, I will take an active role in public diplomacy and encourage Mission Morocco team members to do the same.

Question. What public diplomacy challenges do U.S. diplomats face there?

Answer. My understanding is that local challenges include high unemployment, political disengagement, and general pessimism among youth which affect our capacity to fully engage those audiences. While older Moroccans have positive general attitudes toward the United States, they are more skeptical when it comes to specific policy issues such as trade with the U.S. or U.S. counterterrorism efforts. U.S. public diplomacy efforts in Morocco also face competition from the People's Republic of China (PRC), who have three Confucius Institutes in Morocco and sponsor academic scholarships and academies that provide technology training and education. If confirmed, I will work to expand and highlight Mission Morocco's efforts in these areas.

Question. How do you balance the importance of Main State versus the in-country mission when it comes to tailoring public diplomacy messages for foreign audiences?

Answer. If confirmed, I would direct that Mission Morocco's public messaging campaigns remain first and foremost centered around U.S. foreign policy objectives. I would seek to deliver clear messages in such a way that our local audiences understand our perspective and policy agenda. To ensure unity of messaging, I would ensure the Mission's public diplomacy team works closely with Washington public affairs teams to ensure that our official communication is clear and relevant for local audiences.

Question. "Anomalous health incidents," commonly referred to as "Havana Syndrome," have been debilitating and sidelining U.S. diplomats around the world for years. They have caused serious, negative consequences for U.S. diplomacy, yet many believe that the Department is not doing enough to care for, protect, and communicate to its personnel.

- If confirmed, do you commit to taking this threat seriously?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed, I will have no higher priority than the safety and well-being of Mission personnel and will work in close partnership with the Department's AHI Coordinator, the Department's Health Incident Response Task Force, and the broader government-wide effort to ensure the full resources of the U.S. Government are brought to bear to get to the bottom of these incidents and to ensure access to needed care for those affected.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to talking as openly as you can to Mission Rabat personnel?

Answer. If confirmed, I would be committed to providing Mission Morocco personnel with the most up-to-date information available, as we learn more, including

guidance on how to respond if they have concerns that they might have experienced an incident and how to access medical care.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED
TO HON. PUNEET TALWAR BY SENATOR MARCO RUBIO

Question. Whether we want it or not, the United States is currently engaged in a great power competition with the Chinese Communist Party. Officials from the past and current administrations have agreed that the CCP is the only power willing and able to challenge U.S. leadership on the global stage. In practice, this means undermining our open system here at home and undermining our alliances and credibility abroad. While CCP is most interested in becoming a regional hegemon in the Indo-Pacific, they have global aspirations. In January, Morocco became just the latest North African country to sign an agreement to join the CCP's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) through an implementation accord.

- Is the CCP a threat to the United States?

Answer. As Secretary Blinken said on May 26, we will compete with the People's Republic of China (PRC) to defend our interests and build our vision for the future. If confirmed, I will carefully monitor CCP activity and use the full range of tools provided by Congress to invest in our partnership with Morocco to ensure we remain the partner of choice on a range of economic and security issues. I will actively engage the Moroccan Government to highlight the risks associated with People's Republic of China (PRC) engagement that could impact Morocco's security and sovereignty as well as U.S. interests, and I will ensure that our vision of a positive partnership and regional security and prosperity competes successfully with the PRC.

Question. Is rising CCP influence in Morocco a threat to the United States?

Answer. The People's Republic of China (PRC) has increased efforts in recent years to deepen ties with Morocco. PRC companies are active in the technology and infrastructure sectors, and I believe these activities merit careful attention and action so that they do not undermine American interests. If confirmed, I will use the full range of tools provided by Congress such as the Development Finance Corporation to increase our engagement with Morocco to provide free-market, transparent, and sustainable solutions to Morocco's economic development needs. I will expand our efforts to promote a fair and equitable business climate for the benefit of U.S. investors and the security of our Allies and partners. I will also strive to engage and educate Moroccan public and private sector decision makers on the implications of PRC engagement in key areas such as 5G technology.

Question. Is the CCP expanding the Belt and Road Initiative to Morocco in order to be in a position to control trade flowing through the strategic Strait of Gibraltar? f
so, is this concerning?

Answer. The President has made it clear the United States views the People's Republic of China (PRC) as a strategic competitor that challenges the existing rules-based international order. Current direct investment from the PRC in Morocco totals \$380 million and is focused on infrastructure, communications, and fishing. This reflects an effort by the PRC to encourage large PRC companies to set up or invest in Morocco—particularly in automotive, aerospace, technology, agriculture, and technology sectors. If confirmed, I would promote a vision of inclusive, open economic growth and stronger ties with U.S. companies.

Question. If the CCP is in a position to control trade through the strait, how could that be used to strangle U.S. trade with Europe?

Answer. The Tanger-Med port, located directly in the Strait of Gibraltar, is the 27th busiest container port in the world and a major priority for growth for the Moroccan Government. The Development Finance Corporation (DFC) has recently worked with LixCap on the development of a cold storage facility at the Tangier-Med port that will have regional transportation implications. If confirmed, I will work with the DFC and others in the United States Government to advance opportunities for U.S. businesses in logistics, maritime shipping, and transportation and work to prevent the PRC from moving into a position in which they would control or significantly influence trade through the strait.

Question. Morocco is a signatory of the historic Abraham Accords, which the previous administration used to normalize relations between Israel and Muslim nations in the Middle East. Improving ties between Israel, our strongest ally in the region,

and other American partners is vital for our national security. A security coalition including Israel would be better able to take on the many counter-terrorism priorities in the Middle East and stand up to the Ayatollahs in Iran. If confirmed, how would you work to build upon the foundations of the Abraham Accords?

Answer. Building on the foundation of the Abraham Accords, the foreign ministers of Morocco, Israel, Bahrain, Egypt, the UAE, and Secretary Blinken met for the Negev summit in March. The participants agreed to form the Negev Forum, a framework for regional cooperation, including working groups on regional security, education, health, food and water security, tourism, and clean energy. If confirmed, I will prioritize Morocco's active participation in the Negev Forum and fully support the deepening ties between Morocco and Israel. Morocco became the first Arab country to sign a defense cooperation agreement with Israel and the Chief of Staff of the Israel Defense Forces recently made a landmark visit to Morocco. If confirmed, I will look for opportunities to work with Morocco to further expand the circle of peace and cooperation with Israel in the region, including in the area of security cooperation.

Question. What is the status of Morocco meeting its goals and commitments under the Abraham Accords?

Answer. Morocco-Israel ties have already created real benefits for both countries. usiness relations are growing rapidly, and direct flights have started, making it easier for hundreds of thousands of Israelis of Moroccan decent to visit the land of their ancestors.

Morocco and Israel have signed dozens of memorandums of understanding in a wide range of areas including defense, tourism, investment, culture, and energy. Seven Israel cabinet level officials have visited Morocco and in March, Moroccan Foreign Minister Bourita joined with Secretary Blinken and foreign ministers from Bahrain, Egypt, and the UAE at the historic Negev Summit. If confirmed, I will prioritize support for Morocco's deepening relationship with Israel.

Question. What can Congress do to further support improving ties between Israel and Morocco?

Answer. If confirmed, I will consult with your office and other members of the committee to identify opportunities for Congressional action, whether through engagement or legislation, on improving ties between Israel and Morocco. I believe that it is critical to translate diplomatic agreements into tangible benefits that are felt by ordinary people so that we can consolidate progress and further expand the circle of peace. If confirmed, I would welcome the opportunity to host you or members for your staff in Morocco to directly work together on this critically important issue.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED
TO HON. PUNEET TALWAR BY SENATOR TODD YOUNG

Question. How can we leverage the sustained success of the African Lion Exercise and deeper connections and interoperability with Morocco to encourage them to bring more to the counterterror fight in the Sahel and West Africa?

Answer. Morocco is a valuable partner in the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS and has contributed F-16s to the Coalition's efforts, as well as a field hospital that has treated more than one million Syrian refugees in Jordan. On May 9-11 Morocco hosted the D-ISIS Ministerial in Marrakech and is co-chair of the Africa Focus working group. Morocco is also co-chair of the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF) and supports the efforts of other partners in Africa to build their counterterrorism capacity. Morocco is one of AFRICOM's most capable partners on the continent, participating in over 100 military-to-military engagements yearly, and hosts AFRICAN LION—the largest military exercise on the African continent. These military exercises strengthen interoperability between AFRICOM and more than 40 partner nations and enhance our collective readiness. If confirmed, I will work with AFRICOM to expand upon Morocco's role as a security exporter for the region, including amplifying and encouraging Morocco's efforts on counterterrorism and security for the Sahel and West Africa

Question. What is your view of Western Sahara and the U.N.-led political process, and how would you plan to engage on this issue, if confirmed? Who do you believe is the driver of the political impasse there?

Answer. I believe that there is no substitute for a negotiated solution that can provide an enduring and dignified resolution for the people of Western Sahara and the region. In my judgment, it is positive that the U.N. relaunched a negotiations process in 2021 led by U.N. Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General Staffan de Mistura; that the parties, neighboring states, and international partners have lent their full support to this political process and engaged with the Personal Envoy in good faith; and that violence that rekindled in 2020 with the suspension of the ceasefire has ebbed. If confirmed, I will place my emphasis on working in support of the U.N. and together with international partners to advance a credible political process able to garner broad international support.

Question. If confirmed, how would you work with the Department to move forward on establishment of diplomatic presence in the Western Sahara?

Answer. My understanding is that Mission Morocco is able to fulfill its mission with the current posture of a U.S. Embassy in Rabat and Consulate-General in Casablanca. Personnel assigned to the Mission regularly travel to Western Sahara and directly engage with both Moroccan Government officials and non-government organizations, including civil society and human rights activists. In addition, we continue to host a virtual presence post for Western Sahara. If confirmed, I will work to ensure that the Mission is able to provide timely and accurate reporting on the full range of issues in Western Sahara.

Question. A Moroccan company with connections to the royal family is attempting to criminalize a civil dispute stems from the management of the Royal Mansour Hotel in Casablanca, which could subject American executives of the corporate owners of this hotel to potential criminal liability in Morocco, if prosecution continues. How would you engage the Moroccan Government on this matter to ensure a safe environment for the conduct of private business?

Answer. If confirmed, I look forward to being a strong advocate on these issues and would be an advocate for the U.S. business community directly with the Moroccan Government. I would strongly urge Morocco to avoid counter-productive actions and to improve the country's business climate and economic legislative framework, particularly for American companies doing business in Morocco and to promote further commercial opportunities for U.S. companies.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED
TO DR. JONATHAN HENICK BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

Question. Since its invasion of Ukraine, Russia has had somewhat diminished influence in Central Asia as it focuses its diplomatic efforts elsewhere. This has opened a window of opportunity for increased U.S. involvement in Uzbekistan.

- In what ways can the United States best take advantage of this opportunity and lay a foundation for continued and permanent progress in the U.S.-Uzbekistan relationship?

Answer. Support for Uzbekistan's independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity is the foundation of U.S. policy towards Uzbekistan. The Kremlin's war in Ukraine has already resulted in terrible human costs, and if Russia does not pay a heavy price for its actions, it will put the survival of other peaceful countries at risk. We welcome the Government of Uzbekistan's refusal to recognize the independence of the so-called Luhansk and Donetsk People's Republics in Ukraine. If confirmed, I will ensure that our shared understanding of Ukraine's sovereignty remains a key issue in our bilateral relationship.

Although the Russian Federation continues to be Uzbekistan's largest trade and investment partner and an important source of remittances, it is increasingly clear that Uzbekistan's ability to secure a more prosperous future rests on its ability to diversify its economic relationships. The United States is uniquely positioned to support Uzbekistan in this effort, which presents an historic opportunity to strengthen U.S. influence in Central Asia. U.S. support for Uzbekistan's accession to the World Trade Organization is particularly important in this regard. Finally, I will also underscore to Uzbekistani authorities the importance of working together to strengthen international sanctions and export controls introduced in response to Russia's further invasion of Ukraine.

Question. How will you work with Uzbekistan's Government and private sector to increase economic ties with the United States?

Answer. The United States is committed to supporting Uzbekistan's economic reform agenda, diversification of trading partners, and connections to the international economy. If nominated, I will urge Uzbekistani officials to strengthen intellectual property protections, combat corruption, improve the investment climate, and follow through on its stated goal of acceding to the WTO. The United States is helping increase the performance of small and medium enterprises throughout the country, with particular focus on women's empowerment, building Uzbekistan's ability to deliver prosperity to its people and to attract more direct foreign investment. The Department of State has also encouraged Uzbekistan to identify private sector projects suitable for U.S. Development Finance Corporation investments, which, if approved, will help build confidence in the viability of Uzbekistan's private sector.

Question. As Ambassador, how will you work to build people-to-people ties between the U.S. and Uzbekistan, particularly to counter Russian influence?

Answer. Uzbekistan enjoys a rich cultural history and is truly the gem of Central Asia. People-to-people ties over the last 30 years have helped build mutual understanding between the people of the United States and Uzbekistan. If confirmed, I look forward to expanding these ties. Since 2018, the United States has worked closely with Uzbekistan to dramatically expand English language instruction across the country. Our American Corners throughout the country offer cultural programs, educational resources, and information on studying in the United States to tens of thousands of people per year. I also look forward, if confirmed, to further expanding English-language programming in Uzbekistan, which will help to open Uzbekistani audiences to alternatives to Russian state media..

Question. Independent journalism that helps the public hold governments and corrupted elites accountable for their actions is under threat throughout Central Asia, and impacts the work of Congressionally funded international media outlets such as RFE/RL. Throughout the region, governments do not consistently respond to requests for comments and interviews on questions of interest to RFE/RL's audiences in the region, and local journalists working for RFE/RL are regularly targeted for retaliation for their journalistic work.

In Uzbekistan, the Government has blocked access to the website of RFE/RL's Uzbek Service. The Government has yet to provide accreditation to local journalists who would like to work for RFE/RL in the country, or to grant RFE/RL permission to open a local bureau. Additionally, RFE/RL journalists (including their relatives) periodically suffer from smear and harassment campaigns, especially following impactful investigations.

- If you are confirmed as U.S. Ambassador, what will you do to support the work of RFE/RL and ensure open access for Congressionally-funded international journalists at your new post?

Answer. A free press is vital to the healthy functioning of nations in transition to more democratic forms of government. If confirmed, I will underscore to Uzbekistani officials the importance of media freedom, in line with our shared values and international commitments as participating states in the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. I will call out the Government's ongoing crack-down on freedoms of expression, including for opposition bloggers, members of civil society, and journalists. We are proud of our growing support for Uzbekistani media, including support for the work of RFE/RL, and I will commit to continuing our efforts in this space.

Question. Corruption at all levels continues to be a problem in Uzbekistan.

- Do you think that the use of the State Department's 7031(c) visa ban authorities could be a useful tool for fighting corruption in Uzbekistan? Why or why not?

Answer. Endemic corruption remains one of the most significant obstacles to the full realization of the Government of Uzbekistan's reform agenda. While many Uzbekistani officials appreciate the severity of the situation and the need for remedial action, there are many with vested interests in the status quo. If confirmed, I will ask Embassy's Country Team to keep all options on the table for combatting corruption, including 7031(c) visa restrictions, and related USAID and INL assistance programs, public messaging campaigns, as well as close interagency cooperation between the Departments of State, Treasury, and Justice.

Question. If confirmed, how will you promote democratic and anti-corruption reforms in Uzbekistan, and in what areas of government is progress most viable?

Answer. The United States continues to encourage Uzbekistani leaders to stay the course and make more substantial progress on the program of reforms that began in 2016. Over the last six years, Uzbekistan has made significant progress modernizing its economy and ending the systematic practice of forced labor in the cotton harvest. However, much remains to be done to strengthen democratic institutions, the rule of law, and expand human rights protections. If confirmed, I will work to advance the rule of law and democratic governance and speak out against corruption and the Government's crackdown on freedoms of expression and association. Continued USAID and INL assistance programming is particularly valuable to making gains in this space.

Question. On July 4, 2022, massive unrest turned violent in the autonomous region of Karakalpakstan concerning its sovereignty and right to secede. Eighteen were killed, 243 wounded, and over 500 were detained. To this day, an estimated 300 people remained detained from the incident.

- What is your assessment of this situation and how might you work with the Uzbek Government to resolve tensions in the region?

Answer. I welcome the Government of Uzbekistan's assurances of a transparent investigation under the auspices of a Parliamentary Commission led by the Office of the Ombudsman. The United States is very interested in the results of the Commission's work but also hears the concerns of civil society that it will not be impartial or fully empowered. It is important that the Commission conduct its work in a manner that is inclusive, thorough, and transparent. If confirmed, I will encourage the Government of Uzbekistan to also invite international human rights experts to review the Commission's investigation. Additionally, we have not lost sight of the fact that concerns over proposed reforms to Uzbekistan's constitution prompted the protests in Karakalpakstan in early July. Accordingly, we have urged the Government of Uzbekistan to invite an Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) Needs Assessment Mission to observe the referendum on the proposed reforms.

Question. In the State Department's 2022 Human Rights report, Uzbekistan was noted for significant human rights abuses such as unlawful or arbitrary killings, torture, politically motivated reprisals, serious restrictions of expression and assembly, inability of the people to change their government peacefully, restrictions of political participation, trafficking in persons, criminalization of same-sex conduct, and significant restrictions to workers freedom.

- If confirmed, what steps would you take with the host government to address these issues?

Answer. The United States is committed to the ongoing program of human rights-related reforms that began in Uzbekistan in 2016. If confirmed, I pledge to advocate for independent and credible investigations of human rights abuses. I will also urge greater political pluralism and space for civil society.

- I agree with President Biden that everyone is entitled to dignity and equality, no matter who they are, whom they love, or how they identify. With regards to the human rights of LGBTQI+ persons, our foremost concern is to keep LGBTQI+ persons—and their allies—safe. We engage on these issues led by the “do no harm” principle—in concert with local members of the LGBTQI+ community and human rights defenders' goals.
- If confirmed, I will remain committed to raising the human rights of LGBTQI+ persons in our engagements with Uzbekistani interlocutors. We will continue to engage with allies and partners to advance respect for the human rights of LGBTQI+ persons. Additionally, I will continue to press for repeal of sections of the Criminal Code that criminalize consensual sexual relations between men and under which dozens of people are currently detained.

Question. In the report, it was noted that prison conditions are, in some circumstances, harsh and life threatening due to food shortages, gross overcrowding, abuse, and inadequate sanitary conditions and medical care. Amidst the detaining of over several hundred additional prisoners, what would you do to address these conditions with the Uzbek Government?

Answer. If confirmed, I will urge the Government of Uzbekistan to address longstanding concerns about the harsh conditions of its prisons. I will urge the Government to invite in, cooperate with, and take on the recommendations of international prison monitoring experts and, to the extent resources are available, will offer U.S. technical assistance in addressing inadequate prison conditions.

Question. In the State Department's 2022 Trafficking in Persons report, Uzbekistan remained on Tier 2 for not fully meeting the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking. One key area of failure was local officials in certain areas impose cotton quotas against the national ban of the practice. This incentivizes mobilization into cotton harvest forced labor, which is currently an administrative violation at first offense.

- If confirmed, how can you work with government officials to increase the effectiveness of laws designed to inhibit these forms of forced labor and larger anti-trafficking work in country?

Answer. Although there is more work to be done, the Government of Uzbekistan has made steady and significant progress towards eliminating the systemic forced labor issues of the Karimov era. If confirmed, I will encourage Uzbekistan's continued close cooperation with USAID and INL on U.S. technical assistance programs that combat human trafficking, including forced labor. I will also review and urge action to address the U.S. recommendations in the Department of State's annual Trafficking in Persons Report with members of Uzbekistan's National Commission to Combat Trafficking in Persons.

Question. The report also notes that a lack of a victim-centered approach or victim/witness protections capabilities severely hinders efficient cooperation by victims and witnesses in investigations and prosecutions, if confirmed, what steps would you take with the Uzbek Government to improve upon these practices?

Answer. If confirmed, I will encourage Uzbekistani officials to prioritize the implementation of the Department of State's recommendation in the annual TIP report, including the recommendation to adopt a victim-centered approach. Existing U.S.-funded technical assistance relationships with Uzbekistan provide a valuable resource in helping Uzbekistan adopt this recommended approach. If confirmed, I will stress the importance of this recommendation to Uzbekistani officials.

Question. In the State Department's 2021 International Religious Freedom report, while Uzbekistan's constitution recognizes the freedom of religion, a new version of the law on "Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations" notes that while exercise of religious freedom is permitted, the process of registration is difficult and many minority non-Muslim religious groups state they continue to face societal pressure from the majority Muslim population, particularly against members of their religious group whom converted from Islam.

- What actions would you take with the host government to encourage the streamlining of these registration processes?

Answer. Uzbekistan today is at a crossroads. Under President Mirziyoyev, the Government has taken significant steps to improve its record on religious freedom over the last several years. Based on these steps, the Department of State did not re-designate Uzbekistan as a Special Watch List country for severe violations of religious freedom in 2020. However, we have recently seen a softening of resolve to uphold the human right of religious freedom or belief in Uzbekistan. If confirmed, I will press Uzbekistani officials at the highest levels to stay the course on human rights-related reforms. I will engage directly with representatives of minority religious groups to better understand their concerns and will press Uzbekistani lawmakers and Ministry of Justice to streamline onerous registration procedures for religious groups.

Question. The current religious laws outline that individuals in possession of authors deemed 'extremist' or any literature illegally imported or produced are subject to arrest and prosecution. What is your assessment of the Government attitudes towards minority religious groups and their ability to feel secure in their practices under these types of laws?

Answer. Uzbekistan's Soviet legacy casts a long shadow over its human rights reform efforts and societal tolerance of minority religious groups. Additionally, Uzbekistani officials openly admit that they defer to pressure from the Russian Orthodox Church not to register minority religious groups. If confirmed, I will underscore to Uzbekistani authorities the importance of freedom of religion or belief and more inclusive approaches to official treatment of minority religious groups.

Question. Multiple sources in the report note excessively degrading and torturous treatment of prisoners of minority religious groups, what steps would you pursue to improve the treatment of such prisoners?

Answer. If confirmed, pursuant to the administration's stated goals and policies, I will encourage Uzbekistani authorities to conduct credible and transparent investigations of allegations of torture and hold perpetrators accountable to ensure the

practice does not continue. I will see to it that individual cases of abuse are raised with senior Uzbekistani officials and will encourage the Government of Uzbekistan's cooperation with international human rights monitors and U.N. special rapporteurs. It is unacceptable for Uzbekistan, as a party to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and member of the U.N. Human Rights Council, to turn a blind eye to reports of torture.

Question. The Office of Multilateral Strategy and Personnel (MSP) in the State Department's bureau of International Organizations is leading a whole-of-government effort to identify, recruit, and install qualified, independent personnel at the U.N., including in elections for specialized bodies like the International Telecommunications Union (ITU). There is an American candidate, Doreen Bogdan-Martin, who if elected would be the first American and first woman to lead the ITU. She is in a tough race that will require early, consistent engagement across capitals and within the U.N. member states.

- If confirmed, do you commit to demarching the Uzbekistan Government and any other counterparts necessary to encourage their support of Ms. Bogdan-Martin?

Answer. Yes. If confirmed, I will do all that I can to encourage Uzbekistan's support for Ms. Bogdan-Martin's candidacy.

Question. If confirmed, how can you work with the International Organizations (IO) bureau and other stakeholders to identify, recruit, and install qualified Americans in positions like the Junior Program Officer (JPO) program at the U.N.?

Answer. The United States must play a leadership role at the United Nations and other international organizations. If confirmed, I will work with the Bureau of International Organization Affairs to support the recruitment and placement of qualified U.S. candidates in the U.N.'s Junior Professional Officers program.

Question. The Uzbekistan has a low rate of voting coincidence with the U.S. in the U.N. General Assembly and in the Security Council.

- What is your assessment of this issue?

Answer. Official Uzbekistani policy is to refrain from single-country U.N. resolutions, as the country has bitter memories of being singled out for such resolutions during the Karimov era. Additionally, Uzbekistan carefully assesses its position at the U.N. with a view toward maintaining stable relations with strategic bilateral partners, including the PRC, Russia, and the United States. Accordingly, Uzbekistan frequently chooses to abstain from votes that put it in the middle of disagreements between the United States and Russia or China.

Question. If confirmed, what concrete actions can you take to engage with the Uzbeks on anticipated votes in the U.N. system that would increase their voting coincidence with the U.S.?

Answer. If confirmed, I will remind Uzbekistani diplomats of Uzbekistan's obligations under the U.N. Charter and the importance of maintaining an international order in which larger countries respect Uzbekistan's independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity. With this in mind, I will urge Uzbekistan to demonstrate solidarity with Ukraine at the U.N. and to promote accountability for the PRC's genocide and crimes against humanity against Uyghurs and members of other ethnic and religious minority groups in Xinjiang.

Question. Peace Corps was forced to leave Uzbekistan in 2005 after the Andijon Massacre. Since the change of leadership in 2016, I understand that Peace Corps has begun to move towards re-establishing its work in Uzbekistan.

- If confirmed as ambassador, do you commit to working towards the return of Peace Corps to the Republic of Uzbekistan?

Answer. I am thrilled at the prospect of the Peace Corps' possible return to Uzbekistan after more than 15 years. If confirmed, I will enthusiastically support the return of Peace Corps Volunteers to Uzbekistan.

Question. If Peace Corps is able to return to Uzbekistan, in what sectors would you like to see volunteers be assigned to work? Where do you think they could be most useful, both to development in Uzbekistan, and to the U.S.-Uzbekistan relationship overall?

Answer. The specific menu of Peace Corps programming in Uzbekistan, should the organization decide to return, will ultimately be guided by priorities mutually agreed upon by the U.S. and Uzbekistani Governments. I see tremendous potential demand for English language education in Uzbekistan and agree with the Uzbekistan Government's belief and as expressed in their invitation letter, Peace Corps

Volunteers could make a significant and positive impact in supporting the Government of Uzbekistan's objective of expanding the number of fluent English speakers in Uzbekistan. Programming in this space would be mutually beneficial, to the extent that it would provide Uzbekistanis greater access to educational and business opportunities, as well as promoting a better understanding of Americans by Uzbekistanis and a better understating of Uzbekistanis by Americans, achieving the Peace Corps' second and third goals.

Question. What is your stance on the continued application of the Jackson-Vanik amendment on Uzbekistan?

Answer. The Department of State supports legislation that would authorize the U.S. President to determine that Jackson-Vanik should no longer apply to Uzbekistan.

Question. What benefits would the repeal of this amendment and the establishment of normal trade relations have for Uzbekistan and the U.S.?

Answer. First and foremost, the repeal of Jackson-Vanik for Uzbekistan would send a strong message to the Uzbekistanis that the United States no longer views Uzbekistan through the lens of the Soviet Union. Such a signal would strengthen Uzbekistani resolve to distance itself from Russia and its war of aggression in Ukraine. Similarly, Uzbekistan remains reliant on the PRC for trade and foreign direct investment, although it is interested in enhancing economic ties with the United States. We have signaled that we see expanded economic and trade ties as a long-term regional priority. Repeal of Jackson-Vanik, and the establishment of permanent normal trade relations, would provide a tangible sign that we are taking steps to back up our words with actions, and reciprocate Central Asian interest in diversifying trade relations in the region, pushing back on PRC efforts to establish itself as the region's dominant economic partner.

Question. Many U.S. missions have been under enormous stress over the last few years, in large part due to COVID.

- What is your understanding of morale throughout Mission Tashkent?

Answer. Despite the ongoing challenges of the pandemic, morale is high at Embassy Tashkent. I have served in Uzbekistan previously and am closely familiar with the strains that the local operating environment place on U.S. personnel. If confirmed, I will have no higher priority than the health, security, and well-being of the Embassy community.

Question. How do you intend to improve morale at Mission Tashkent?

Answer. I would endeavor to sustain high morale by fostering an inclusive work environment at Embassy Tashkent, consistent with the Biden administration's vision of a State Department workforce culture that values collegiality, teamwork, and respect.

Question. How do you intend to create a unified mission and vision at Mission Tashkent?

Answer. If confirmed, I will ensure clear lines of communications between my office, section management, and the broader Embassy community. I will set a strategic vision that underscores the common purpose of all Mission personnel. I will work closely with my deputy to ensure a workplace climate that values the contributions of our staff and encourages leadership and accountability at every level of the organization.

Question. Management is a key responsibility for chiefs of mission. How would you describe your management style?

Answer. I provide vision and focus on communication and building trust. I demonstrate confidence in my teams and spend a lot of time keeping morale up and supporting staff development. I strive for a positive workplace culture so that my team stays motivated, even when the going gets tough. I welcome honest feedback and understand that the Mission looks to me for decisive leadership. Embassy life can be stressful for employees and their family members. I seek opportunities to recognize the sacrifices we make in support of our public service mission.

Question. Do you believe it is ever acceptable or constructive to berate subordinates, either in public or private?

Answer. It is never acceptable to berate any colleague in any situation. I address underperformance directly and strive to give subordinates the tools they need to succeed.

Question. How do you envision your leadership relationship with your deputy chief of mission?

Answer. I am extremely grateful to have a highly experienced DCM at my side in Tashkent. I will look to my DCM to provide frank advice, to play devil's advocate, and to keep a finger on the pulse of Embassy operations

Question. If confirmed, what leadership responsibilities do you intend to trust to your deputy chief of mission?

Answer. I expect the DCM to devote special attention the goals in the Department of State's Strategic Plan for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA). I also expect my DCM to take seriously the traditional responsibilities of mentoring first and second tour officers and ensuring the strength of institutions that serve the Embassy community, most notably the Tashkent International School.

Question. In order to create and continue employee excellence at the Department, accurate and direct employee evaluation reports (EERs) for Foreign Service Officers are imperative, though often lacking.

- Do you believe that it is important to provide employees with accurate, constructive feedback on their performances in order to encourage improvement and reward those who most succeeded in their roles?

Answer. Constructive feedback is one of a manager's most important responsibilities to the subordinate, to the State Department, and to the American taxpayer. Employees cannot reasonably be expected to improve their performance absent constructive feedback. Failing to address performance issues does a disservice both to the employee and the institution.

Question. If confirmed, would you support and encourage clear, accurate, and direct feedback to employees in order to improve performance and reward high achievers?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed, I would champion clear, accurate, and direct feedback to employees and would celebrate excellent performance.

Question. It is imperative that U.S. diplomats get outside of posts abroad to meet with local actors, including host government officials, non-government organizations, and fellow foreign diplomats stationed in Uzbekistan.

- In your opinion, do U.S. diplomats get outside of our Embassy walls enough to accomplish fully their missions?

Answer. I fully agree that, as diplomats, we cannot fully succeed in our mission if we spend the majority of our time behind the walls of our Embassy. If confirmed, I will encourage my team to make every effort to build relationships with Uzbekistani interlocutors from all walks of life so that we can better understand the local context and, additionally, better craft our messages to local audiences. I will also encourage them to spend time visiting programs and grantees the Embassy supports and get to know alumni of our USG exchange programs.

Question. How do you intend to improve the ability of U.S. diplomats to better access all local populations?

Answer. Regional travel is a regular component of Embassy Tashkent operations and, if confirmed, I will continue to support such trips. I will encourage Embassy Officers to make use of our network of American Corners, as a platform for engaging populations outside of Tashkent, as well as to visit our Embassy supported English Language programs and Democracy Commission grantees. I will also urge them to build relationships with alumni of our USG exchange programs, who reside across the country.

Question. Public diplomacy is an important aspect of U.S. foreign policy efforts.

- What is the public diplomacy environment like in Uzbekistan?

Answer. Public diplomacy efforts in Uzbekistan are robust. In recent years we have seen a significant increase in applications to USG exchange programs, with total applications doubling, and in some cases tripling. English language programming continues to be an area of enthusiastic cooperation. Uzbekistan remains a welcoming environment for U.S. English teachers, and the network of American Corners and associated cultural programming continue to be exceedingly popular educational resources.

Question. What public diplomacy challenges do U.S. diplomats face there?

Answer. While many of the Embassy's programs operate smoothly, bureaucratic hurdles and slow responses continue to present challenges to public diplomacy programming. Additionally, Russian disinformation is prevalent in Uzbekistan, and

staff are forced to dedicate significant time to refuting and countering these false narratives.

Question. How do you balance the importance of Main State versus the in-country mission when it comes to tailoring public diplomacy messages for foreign audiences?

Answer. The Public Diplomacy Section has open communication with Main State on messaging guidance. Our diplomats overseas are experts on the local environment and are best placed to tailor messaging to Uzbekistani audiences.

Question. “Anomalous health incidents,” commonly referred to as “Havana Syndrome,” have been debilitating and sidelining U.S. diplomats around the world for years. They have caused serious, negative consequences for U.S. diplomacy, yet many believe that the Department is not doing enough to care for, protect, and communicate to its personnel.

- If confirmed, do you commit to taking this threat seriously?

Answer. Yes. If confirmed, I will have no higher priority than the security and safety of the Mission community. I will do everything possible to ensure that employees who report a possible AHI receive immediate and appropriate attention and care and the incident is reported through appropriate channels.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to talking as openly as you can to Mission Tashkent personnel?

Answer. Yes. If confirmed, I will work to build a culture of trust, respect, and transparency at the Mission, and talk as openly as I can to our Mission community

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED
TO DR. JONATHAN HENICK BY SENATOR MARCO RUBIO

Question. Uzbekistan is, by many measures, the most populous and economically significant country in Central Asia. As it has for much of its history, it sits at the crossroads of trade between Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. For the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Uzbekistan is critical in achieving the goal of binding the rest of Asia and Europe closer to China. In 2017, Uzbekistan’s relatively reformist president Shavkat Mirziyoyev signed 115 investment agreements worth more than \$23 billion.

- Is the CCP a threat to the United States?

Answer. As Secretary Blinken has noted, the ruling Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has become more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad, making the PRC the most serious long-term challenge to the international order. The PRC’s manipulative economic practices have cost American workers jobs and robbed American companies of their intellectual property. Beijing’s coercive tactics—from Lithuania to Taiwan—are deeply destabilizing and threaten U.S. interests across the globe.

The United States will counter the threat posed by the CCP by standing by our allies and partners against PRC intimidation. We will boost the resilience of U.S. supply chains by reshoring production and diversifying suppliers in sensitive sectors of the economy. And we will continue to support the sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity of our partners, including Uzbekistan.

Question. Does Uzbekistan’s increasing integration into BRI threaten the United States?

Answer. While the PRC has indeed made significant investments in Uzbekistan, especially in infrastructure, Uzbekistan has adopted policies to limit its external debt and requires the majority of workers on foreign-financed projects to be Uzbekistani nationals. Moreover, Uzbekistan is keenly interested in enhancing economic ties with the United States. We have signaled publicly and privately that we see expanded economic and trade ties as a long-term regional priority. Reciprocating the Government of Uzbekistan’s interest in diversifying its trade relationships will help support Uzbekistan and other Central Asian countries’ ability to pursue relationships with a variety of partners of its own choosing, in line with its own national interests.

Question. When President Mirziyoyev assumed power in 2016, many people assumed that he would be more reform-minded than his dictatorial predecessor, Islam Karimov, but still maintain Uzbekistan’s neutral foreign policy. Do you see ties between Uzbekistan and the PRC improving during his tenure?

Answer. Uzbekistani President Mirziyoyev's signature foreign policy, referred to as "neighbors first" or "good neighbors," reversed the tense relations between Uzbekistan and its Central Asian neighbors that characterized the Karimov regime. President Mirziyoyev has paid state visits to every neighboring country except Afghanistan, and every Central Asian leader has made official visits to Tashkent. Under Mirziyoyev's watch, Uzbekistan has resolved many tough and long-standing border and water resource-related disputes with its neighbors, particularly the Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan. The United States welcomes Uzbekistan's aspirations to serve as a champion of regional autonomy in Central Asia.

Uzbekistan's relationship with the PRC spans political, economic, cultural, and security assistance. This includes a number of scholarship and internship opportunities for Uzbekistani students in the PRC and, more recently, an aggressive vaccine diplomacy campaign. While relations between Tashkent and Beijing are good under President Mirziyoyev, Uzbekistan continues to demonstrate considerable skill in managing a multi-vector foreign policy, including with the United States, that ensures it is not overly dependent on a single outside power.

Question. What options are available to the United States to resist increasing CCP influence in Uzbekistan and Central Asia?

Answer. As Secretary Blinken has said, our diplomacy is based on partnership and respect for each other's interests. We will continue to support the sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity of our partners, including Uzbekistan. In addition to U.S. bilateral support to Uzbekistan's reform agenda, the United States contributes to international development finance institutions, which are making major investments Uzbekistan's infrastructure needs.

We know that many countries—including the United States—have vital economic or people-to-people ties with the PRC that they want to preserve. This is not about forcing countries to choose. It is about giving them a choice so that, for example, the only option is not an opaque investment that leaves countries in debt, stokes corruption, harms the environment, fails to create local jobs or growth, and compromises countries' sovereignty.

The PRC is an important trading partner and continues to make investments in Uzbekistan, especially in infrastructure linked to President Xi Jinping's signature Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Nonetheless, Uzbekistan's Government makes subtle efforts to manage PRC-led investment and market dominance, as has occurred in neighboring countries.

Uzbekistan's successful eradication of systemic forced labor in the cotton harvest—and the subsequent lifting of the boycott against Uzbek cotton—presents an opportunity for U.S. and European apparel companies to divest away from cotton sourced in Xinjiang. At a minimum, the Uzbek experience can serve as an example of how countries like the PRC can take steps to improve labor practices and open opportunities for trade and investment.

Question. We've seen increased chaos in the region following President Biden's haphazard withdrawal from Afghanistan. Countries in the region, including Uzbekistan, will have to contend with the threat of Islamic terrorism for years to come. Uzbekistan, which had increased its security cooperation with us to counter the threat of terrorism, now likely does not see us as a reliable partner. Did President Biden's decision to force a haphazard and disorganized withdrawal from Afghanistan endanger American security? Why or why not?

Answer. As President Biden has said, the United States will maintain the fight against terrorism in Afghanistan and in other countries. To that end, we will use our military capabilities and alliances, diplomatic tools, and unrivaled network of international intelligence and law enforcement partners. The United States has demonstrated that it does not require a protracted military footprint in Afghanistan to sustain these capabilities.

Question. What is the current security threat posed by the Taliban and Islamic State-Khorasan to Uzbekistan?

Answer. The Islamic State-Khorasan (ISIS-K) poses a security threat to Uzbekistan and other Central Asian countries bordering Afghanistan, as illustrated by recent cross-border attacks on Uzbekistan. ISIS-K claimed responsibility for an April rocket attack against an Uzbek military base in Termez, Uzbekistan from Balkh Province. Although the attacks caused little damage, ISIS-K media released videos of each attack, in an effort to boost the morale of the group's fighters and increase its appeal to potential Central Asian supporters.

Uzbekistani Government sources reported a second rocket attack against Termez in July, that resulted in damage to property, but no casualties. Although no one has claimed responsibility for the July attack, the frequency of the incidents underscores

the determination of violent extremists from Afghanistan to launch attacks on Uzbekistan. The Government of Uzbekistan maintains high-level ties with the Taliban and works with the Taliban to address the security threat to Uzbekistan from Afghanistan.

Question. If confirmed, what will you do to support maintaining security ties between Uzbekistan and the United States?

Answer. The Government of Uzbekistan remains interested in a broad-based security partnership with the United States. Law enforcement is a particularly promising area of cooperation, as highlighted by the first-ever bilateral Law Enforcement Working Group meeting in April. Uzbekistan has also continued to increase cooperation with the United States on counterterrorism and border security, to include the non-proliferation of nuclear materials.

If confirmed, I will seek to expand our security cooperation with Uzbekistan, with particular attention to building a shared understanding of terrorist threat from Afghanistan. To that end, I will work to ensure we are closely cooperating on information sharing and handling of classified information. I will encourage Uzbekistan's continued close cooperation with the Mississippi National Guard through the State Partnership Program. I will also emphasize the importance of Uzbekistan diversifying away from Russian defense articles for its own sovereignty and to avoid the risks of U.S. actions under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED
TO LESSLIE VIGUERIE BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

Question. Since its invasion of Ukraine, Russia has had somewhat diminished influence in Central Asia as it focuses its diplomatic efforts elsewhere. This has opened a window of opportunity for increased U.S. involvement in the Kyrgyz Republic.

- In what ways can the United States best take advantage of this opportunity and lay a foundation for continued and permanent progress in the U.S.-Kyrgyz relationship?

Answer. The United States and Kyrgyz Republic share many goals and a mutual interest in working together to achieve them. The Kyrgyz Republic has stated its commitment to fighting corruption and organized crime. In this effort it will find no better partner than the United States. We hope to strengthen security cooperation to address challenges such as disaster preparedness and countering transnational threats. The United States is committed to supporting Kyrgyz economic resilience, connectivity, and diversification beyond its traditional partners, by developing the country's knowledge economy, in which a thriving IT sector drives job creation and connection to the global economy. Our countries share an interest in solving the climate crisis and can do much together to reduce emissions and build our ability to respond to the impacts of climate change. We have continuously stressed that we support the Kyrgyz Republic's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity and, if confirmed, I will continue to do so.

Question. How will you work with Kyrgyz Government and private sector to increase economic ties with the United States?

Answer. The United States is committed to supporting the new Kyrgyz economy with job creation and diversification of trading partners and increased exports, driven by a thriving IT sector, opportunities for increased access to credit such as venture capital, public-private partnerships, and connections to the international economy through the English language. The Kyrgyz IT sector in particular has tremendous potential, and the United States is a main market for Kyrgyz IT services. The United States is helping increase the performance of small and medium enterprises throughout the country, building their ability to become part of the international economy and absorb more direct foreign investment.

The United States is committed to helping build the English skills of Kyrgyz children, university students, and professionals.

Question. As Ambassador, how will you work to build people-to-people ties between the U.S. and Kyrgyz citizens, particularly to counter Russian influence?

Answer. People-to-people ties have developed considerably over the last 30 years and, if confirmed, I look forward to expanding them. Since 1993, we have supported the American University of Central Asia, where tens of thousands of the region's

best and brightest have received U.S.-accredited degrees. Our American Center and seven American Corners throughout the country offer cultural programs, educational resources, and information on studying in the United States to tens of thousands of people per year. I also look forward, if confirmed, to working to expand ties between our private sectors to strengthen our economic ties.

Question. Independent journalism that helps the public hold governments and corrupted elites accountable for their actions is under threat throughout Central Asia, and impacts the work of Congressionally-funded international media outlets such as RFE/RL. Throughout the region, governments do not consistently respond to requests for comments and interviews on questions of interest to RFE/RL's audiences in the region, and local journalists working for RFE/RL are regularly targeted for retaliation for their journalistic work.

In Kyrgyz Republic, while RFE/RL has an active bureau and generally good relations with the government that extends to RFE/RL requests to open new bureaus focused on migrant issues and coverage of developments in the Ferghana Valley, RFE/RL journalists have also been targeted threats, harassment, and smear campaigns for their impactful investigative reporting involving both government officials and corrupt elites, such as its award-winning expose of a large-scale, cross-border money-laundering network centered in the country.

- If you are confirmed as U.S. Ambassador, what will you do to support the work of RFE/RL and ensure open access for Congressionally-funded international journalists at your new post?

Answer. If confirmed, I will never hesitate to call out threats to freedom of the press, in accordance with the values we share with the Kyrgyz people and our support for human rights. We are proud of our longstanding support for the Kyrgyz press, including support for the work of RFE/RL, and I will commit to continuing to do so.

Question. After two years, Kyrgyz authorities have failed to conclude an investigation into the death of human rights defender Azimjon Askarov, raising concerns over mistreatment and neglect in Kyrgyz prisons.

- If confirmed, how will you work with Kyrgyz officials to address detainment center conditions and facilitate a conclusion to the investigation into the death of Askarov?

Answer. Mr. Askarov dedicated his life to the defense of human rights and reconciliation and understanding between all peoples. If confirmed, I will continue to emphasize to Kyrgyz authorities the importance of upholding human rights and accountability, including a thorough, fair investigation into the death of Mr. Askarov.

Question. The 2022 State Department Report on Human Rights notes use of torture and harsh and life-threatening conditions in prison facilities as significant human rights issues. What steps would you take with the Kyrgyz Government to address these concerns?

Answer. The United States is committed to supporting the Kyrgyz Republic's democratic system of government, rule of law, and the human rights and freedoms the Kyrgyz people have won since independence. If confirmed, I pledge to regularly advocate for the Kyrgyz Government to improve conditions in prison facilities and will offer the Embassy's assistance to achieve this goal.

Question. In the State Department's 2022 Report on Human Rights, other significant issues involved restrictions of freedom of expression, violent threats to journalists over censorship, overly restrictive laws against NGO's or other civil society groups, and serious acts of government corruption. While the Government has taken steps to investigate and prosecute officials having committed human rights violations, official impunity has remained a problem.

- If confirmed, how will you work with Kyrgyz officials to reduce governmental corruption and increase individual freedoms?

Answer. President Japarov has publicly and repeatedly committed to combatting corruption, and we encourage his stated commitment, as anti-corruption is a priority we wholeheartedly support, including through programming in partnership with Kyrgyz law enforcement bodies and relevant local community stakeholders. Through this engagement, we seek to ensure that Kyrgyz anti-corruption initiatives are both effective and observant of the rule of law.

Question. In the State Department's 2022 Trafficking in Persons Report, Kyrgyz Republic remained Tier 2, largely through the Government's decreased investigations and prosecutions of trafficking cases, not securing any convictions of traffickers—including cases involving complicit officials.

What is your assessment of this situation and if confirmed, what would you do to assist in the improvement of the legal system to convict traffickers, including complicit officials?

Answer. Although there is more to be done, we are encouraged by the Kyrgyz Republic's upgrade in the 2021 Trafficking in Persons Report to Tier 2 after three years on the Tier 2 watchlist. If confirmed, I will offer the Embassy's full support for the Kyrgyz Republic's efforts to combat human trafficking, including assistance to initiate investigations into potential cases of official complicity, and develop and disseminate anti-trafficking training materials for police and prosecutors.

Question. The report additionally indicates a heavy reliance on international organizations for victim identification, what steps would you take as Ambassador to improve the Kyrgyz Government's ability to independently identify trafficking victims?

Answer. If confirmed, I will encourage and offer to help the Kyrgyz Republic to implement the prioritized recommendations as noted in the 2022 TIP report. We will work with our Kyrgyz partners to increase their capacity to investigate, prosecute, and convict persons complicit in human trafficking, including government officials, while respecting due process. We will also offer cooperation to increase Kyrgyz efforts to proactively identify and protect victims.

Question. In the State Department's 2021 Report on International Religious Freedom, the report indicates that the Kyrgyz Government claims Jehovah Witness texts as 'extremist,' that it has opened up a criminal case against them, and has conducted raids of the offices of Jehovah's Witnesses.

- If confirmed, what actions would you take to urge the Government to respect religious freedom and peacefully conclude the criminal allegations against Jehovah's Witnesses in the state?

Answer. The Kyrgyz Republic has a proud tradition of religious tolerance. If confirmed, I will emphasize the importance of the Kyrgyz Government upholding religious freedom for all, including religious minorities like the Jehovah's Witnesses.

Question. The Office of Multilateral Strategy and Personnel (MSP) in the State Department's bureau of International Organizations is leading a whole-of-government effort to identify, recruit, and install qualified, independent personnel at the U.N., including in elections for specialized bodies like the International Telecommunications Union (ITU). There is an American candidate, Doreen Bogdan-Martin, who if elected would be the first American and first woman to lead the ITU. She is in a tough race that will require early, consistent engagement across capitals and within the U.N. member states.

- If confirmed, do you commit to demarching the Kyrgyz Government and any other counterparts necessary to encourage their support of Ms. Bogdan-Martin?

Answer. Yes. If confirmed, I will do all that I can to encourage Kyrgyz support for Ms. Bogdan-Martin's candidacy.

Question. If confirmed, how can you work with the International Organizations (IO) bureau and other stakeholders to identify, recruit, and install qualified Americans in positions like the Junior Program Officer (JPO) program at the U.N.?

Answer. I believe a strong U.S. role at the United Nations and other international organizations is vital. If confirmed, I will work with the International Organizations Bureau to advance this objective however I can, including by identifying qualified U.S. candidates for the Junior Program Officer and other programs.

Question. Kyrgyzstan has a low rate of voting coincidence with the U.S. in the U.N. General Assembly and in the Security Council.

- What is your assessment of this issue?

Answer. The Kyrgyz Republic has longstanding ties with its regional partners. If confirmed, I will call on Kyrgyz leadership to uphold the U.N. Charter and condemn the Russian Federation's further invasion of Ukraine and gross violations of international law. I will also continue to encourage the Kyrgyz Government to promote accountability for the PRC Government's use of forced labor as well as its genocide and crimes against humanity against Uyghurs and members of other ethnic and religious minority groups in Xinjiang, including ethnic Kyrgyz.

Question. If confirmed, what concrete actions can you take to engage with the Kyrgyz Government on anticipated votes in the U.N. system that would increase their voting coincidence with the U.S.?

Answer. If confirmed, I will ensure Kyrgyz leaders that they will find no better and fairer partner than the United States to help them achieve their goals. I will

note our support for Kyrgyz environmental initiatives at the United Nations and offer further support in addressing the climate crisis. I will also reiterate our belief that all countries have a vital interest in defending the principles and values that keep us all safe, including the principle that no country may seize the territory of a sovereign state and no country has a veto over another's security partners or political path.

Question. If confirmed, how will you promote democratic and anti-corruption reforms in Kyrgyz Republic, and in what areas of government is progress most viable?

Answer. President Japarov has publicly and repeatedly committed to combatting corruption, and, if confirmed, I will offer full U.S. support in this campaign, including through Embassy programming in partnership with Kyrgyz law enforcement bodies and relevant local community stakeholders. Through this engagement, we will seek to ensure that Kyrgyz anti-corruption initiatives are both effective and observant of the rule of law.

In 2021, we designated former customs official Raimbek Matraimov under Global Magnitsky sanctions and raised the Transnational Organized Crime Rewards Program amount on known drug trafficker Kamchybek Kolbaev to \$5 million. In 2019, our law enforcement personnel cooperated to return \$4.6 million stolen by the former President's son, Maksim Bakiyev, to the Kyrgyz people. These efforts demonstrate our commitment to working with Kyrgyz authorities to combat these criminal networks and their corrupt influence in Kyrgyz society.

Question. Corruption at all levels continues to be a problem in Kyrgyz Republic. Do you think that the use of the State Department's 7031(c) visa ban authorities could be a useful tool for fighting corruption in Kyrgyz Republic? Why or why not?

Answer. If confirmed, I will support all actions to hold corrupt officials to account, including through 7031(c) visa bans. I believe measures like this are vital in order to show that we are backing up our words with actions.

Question. What is your stance on the continued application of the Jackson-Vanik amendment on the Kyrgyz Republic?

Answer. The Kyrgyz Republic is not subject to the Jackson-Vanik amendment.

Question. What benefits would the repeal of this amendment and the establishment of normal trade relations have for the Kyrgyz Republic and the U.S.?

Answer. The United States enjoys normal trade relations with the Kyrgyz Republic.

Question. Many U.S. missions have been under enormous stress over the last few years, in large part due to COVID. What is your understanding of morale throughout Mission Bishkek?

Answer. I understand morale is high at the Embassy, largely due to its outstanding leadership. I know from experience how important that is and will do my utmost to ensure it continues. If confirmed, the health, security, and well-being of the Embassy community will be my highest priority.

Question. How do you intend to improve morale at Mission Bishkek?

Answer. Over my 30 years in the Foreign Service, I have seen some of the best aspects of leadership, including the importance of building strong teams, valuing diversity, and mentoring the next generation of U.S. diplomats. These are the values that guide me. I will prioritize the safety and security of the Embassy community above all else and maintain a culture of respect and trust at the Embassy.

Question. How do you intend to create a unified mission and vision at Mission Bishkek?

Answer. If confirmed, I will focus on inclusivity to ensure that all Mission personnel know that I value their views and expertise. I will seek to instill a culture of trust that recognizes the unique talents of our staff members and encourages them to take ownership of their work. As the chief of mission, I will share credit for our successes but accept the blame for our setbacks. I believe in the importance of "one team" and, if confirmed, will emphasize this value as Ambassador.

Question. Management is a key responsibility for chiefs of mission. How would you describe your management style?

Answer. I always endeavor to build strong teams with high morale. Accomplishing this requires a commitment to inclusion, focus on professional development, and culture of trust and respect for all colleagues. As a leader, I convey to my team that all opinions and ideas are welcome. I see mentoring as an obligation so that staff not only thrive in their current assignments but are prepared to succeed in future

positions as well. I seek to recognize others' accomplishments as often as possible and will assume responsibility when things go wrong. I also understand well that the Ambassador's responsibilities are not limited to within the Embassy's walls. Mission staff sacrifice much in this line of work and they expect—and deserve—leadership that cares as much about the personal as the professional side. To that end, I will always prioritize the well-being of the Embassy community above all else.

Question. Do you believe it is ever acceptable or constructive to berate subordinates, either in public or private?

Answer. Never. As a leader it is one's responsibility to put staff in a position to succeed and offer counseling and instruction when they do not. I believe in addressing poor performance promptly, but always in a respectful manner.

Question. How do you envision your leadership relationship with your deputy chief of mission?

Answer. Good leaders utilize the talent around them and I expect to have a close, collaborative relationship with my DCM. In Bishkek, I will be serving with a DCM who served as chief of mission for over a year. I expect we will divide responsibilities in a way that sees the DCM focus more on internal Embassy matters, but of course I will rely on their expertise and experience in all that I do.

Question. If confirmed, what leadership responsibilities do you intend to entrust to your deputy chief of mission?

Answer. If confirmed, I expect we will divide responsibilities in a way that sees the DCM focus more on internal Embassy matters, though of course I will rely on their expertise and experience in all that I do. Specifically, I will rely on the DCM to chair the Emergency Action Committee and further DEIA efforts at Post, especially with regards to recruitment of new officers.

Question. In order to create and continue employee excellence at the Department, accurate and direct employee evaluation reports (EERs) for Foreign Service Officers are imperative, though often lacking. Do you believe that it is important to provide employees with accurate, constructive feedback on their performances in order to encourage improvement and reward those who most succeeded in their roles?

Answer. I believe providing constructive feedback and mentoring is one of the most important roles a leader can play. This should happen throughout the year—not just when EERs are due—to give the employee time and opportunity to learn and develop. If confirmed, I will emphasize the importance of developing our staff and providing timely feedback at all levels of the Mission.

Question. If confirmed, would you support and encourage clear, accurate, and direct feedback to employees in order to improve performance and reward high achievers?

Answer. Yes. I believe providing clear, accurate, and direct feedback is one of the most important roles a leader can play.

Question. It is imperative that U.S. diplomats get outside of posts abroad to meet with local actors, including host government officials, non-government organizations, and fellow foreign diplomats stationed in Kyrgyz Republic. In your opinion, do U.S. diplomats get outside of our embassy walls enough to accomplish fully their missions?

Answer. Staff at our Mission in Bishkek routinely leave the Embassy to meet with Kyrgyz Government, private sector, and civil society interlocutors. If confirmed, I will encourage this practice, as there is no substitute for face-to-face diplomacy. I will regularly review procedures with our Regional Security Office to ensure that our staff can do their jobs safely.

Question. How do you intend to improve the ability of U.S. diplomats to better access all local populations?

Answer. Officers at Embassy Bishkek regularly travel throughout the country and, if confirmed, I will continue to support such trips as we cannot understand a country only from its capital. Our network of American Corners act as a vital bridge between the Embassy and local communities and I will encourage—and seek appropriate funding for—regular Embassy visits to these centers. I will also advocate for more Kyrgyz-language training at the Foreign Service Institute given the increasing prominence of Kyrgyz across the breadth of society.

Question. Public diplomacy is an important aspect of U.S. foreign policy efforts. What is the public diplomacy environment like in the Kyrgyz Republic?

Answer. Public diplomacy programming in the Kyrgyz Republic is among the most robust in Central Asia. Our Embassy disseminates messages—in English, Kyrgyz, and Russian—through a range of social media platforms that highlight our shared values and the breadth and impact of U.S. efforts, countering Russian disinformation. Our programming supports civil society that bolsters democratic development, economic development, good governance, inclusive education and opportunities, and tolerance.

Additionally, our Mission hosts large-scale regional programs, including the Central Asia Design Hub and multiple programs at the American University of Central Asia. Our American Center and seven American Corners throughout the country offer cultural programs, educational resources, and information on studying in the United States to tens of thousands of people per year.

Question. What public diplomacy challenges do U.S. diplomats face there?

Answer. Russian disinformation is ubiquitous in the Kyrgyz Republic, flooding the press and social media with anti-U.S. propaganda. Staff are forced to dedicate significant time to refuting and countering these lies. Our Embassy Public Diplomacy Section has done a great job of highlighting the positive role the United States plays in the Kyrgyz Republic and, if confirmed, I will offer them all the support I can in these efforts.

Question. How do you balance the importance of Main State versus the in-country mission when it comes to tailoring public diplomacy messages for foreign audiences?

Answer. Our diplomats overseas are experts on the local environment and are best placed to tailor messages to Kyrgyz audiences. Having served as Deputy Assistant Secretary for Central Asia, I saw firsthand the excellent cooperation between Mission Bishkek’s Public Diplomacy team and their counterparts here in Washington. If confirmed, I will seek to maintain that level of collaboration.

Question. “Anomalous health incidents,” commonly referred to as “Havana Syndrome,” have been debilitating and sidelining U.S. diplomats around the world for years. They have caused serious, negative consequences for U.S. diplomacy, yet many believe that the Department is not doing enough to care for, protect, and communicate to its personnel. If confirmed, do you commit to taking this threat seriously?

Answer. Yes. If confirmed, I will have no higher priority than the security and safety of the Mission community. I will commit to taking all anomalous health incident reports seriously and to investigate them in a transparent manner.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to talking as openly as you can to Mission Bishkek personnel?

Answer. Yes. If confirmed, I will work to build a culture of trust, respect, and transparency at the Mission, and talk as openly as I can to our Mission community.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED
TO LESSLIE VIGUERIE BY SENATOR MARCO RUBIO

Question. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP), like all communist parties, views all capitalist systems as a threat to their existence. Anywhere people are allowed to decide for themselves how to live their lives, protect their families and achieve their dreams undermines the CCP’s narrative that only it is the arbiter of truth. It should be no surprise that the CCP has worked to undermine Kyrgyzstan, once called the “island of democracy” in Central Asia. Current Kyrgyz President Sadyr Japarov, with the support of the CCP and Vladimir Putin, has overseen a political transition that has concentrated his power and gone after opposition leaders, journalists, and activists.

- Is the CCP a threat to the United States?

Answer. As Secretary Blinken has noted, the ruling Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has become more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad, making the PRC the most serious long-term challenge to the international order. If confirmed, I will continue to support the sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity of the Kyrgyz Republic as we have for the last 30 years

Question. Does the increasing influence of the CCP in Kyrgyzstan threaten American interests?

Answer. We are concerned about the fact that the Kyrgyz Republic has a large debt burden to China. In many areas, Beijing’s leaders seek unfair advantages; be-

have aggressively, non-transparently, and coercively; and undermine the rules and values at the heart of an open and stable international system. We will continue to support the sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity of the Kyrgyz Republic, and seek to expand cooperation, including to support the country's economic growth and resilience.

Question. Kyrgyzstan has been among the region's largest recipients of U.S. democracy assistance. How does the erosion of democracy there support CCP narratives that democracy is not a better model than its totalitarian system?

Answer. The Kyrgyz people are proud of their democracy. If confirmed, I will continue to emphasize our commitment to supporting the Kyrgyz Republic's democratic system of government, rule of law, and the human rights and freedoms the Kyrgyz people have won since independence.

Question. If confirmed, what will you do to support pro-democracy groups and sectors in Kyrgyzstani society?

Answer. If confirmed, I will advocate for Kyrgyz civil society and speak out against erosion of democratic governance, corruption, and threats to freedom of speech and association, in accordance with the values we share with the Kyrgyz people. I am critical that Kyrgyz leadership safeguards the gains made over the last 30 years and upholds media freedom, elevates the role of civil society, protects the human rights of all its people, including members of all minority groups, and strengthens judicial independence.

Question. The Chinese Communist Party is orchestrating nothing less than a genocide of Turkic Muslims in Xinjiang. We all know of the Uyghurs' plight, but this genocide has also ensnared ethnic Kyrgyz and Kazakhs. Despite this, the Kyrgyzstani Government has been remarkably silent about the systematic killings, detentions and abuse levied against ethnic Kyrgyz in Xinjiang. Even more shocking, there are indications that CCP efforts to convince the Kyrgyzstani Government to forcibly repatriate ethnic Kyrgyz back to Xinjiang are gaining ground. Earlier this year, Representative Chris Smith and I helped Ovalbek Turdakan, a Christian Kyrgyz resident of Xinjiang who had fled to Kyrgyzstan to escape the CCP, to seek asylum in the United States.

- Why do you think the Kyrgyzstani Government is unwilling to stand up to the CCP and call out its genocide of ethnic Kyrgyz in Xinjiang?

Answer. We will continue to encourage the Kyrgyz Government to promote accountability for the PRC Government's use of forced labor, as well as its genocide and crimes against humanity against Uyghurs and members of other ethnic and religious minority groups in Xinjiang, including ethnic Kyrgyz. We respect the Kyrgyz Republic's desire to have peaceful and constructive relations with all its neighbors, including the PRC, but believe all countries must join together in calling for an immediate end to the PRC's atrocities and for justice for the many victims. We will strongly advocate that the Kyrgyz Government respect its international obligations regarding non-refoulement of refugees and asylum-seekers.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to using your position to assist and protect ethnic Kyrgyz who flee to Kyrgyzstan to escape the ongoing genocide in Xinjiang?

Answer. Yes, I commit to assisting and protecting ethnic Kyrgyz who flee to the Kyrgyz Republic to escape the ongoing genocide in Xinjiang. I will also advocate for Kyrgyz leadership to promote accountability for the PRC's use of forced labor as well as its genocide and crimes against humanity against Uyghurs and members of other ethnic and religious minority groups—including ethnic Kyrgyz—in Xinjiang.

Question. In 2010, Chinese security services used Shanghai Cooperation Organization Channels to solicit the Kyrgyz Government to interrupt a film festival in Kyrgyzstan that a Chinese Uyghur human rights activist was planning to attend. At Beijing's request, Kyrgyz authorities subsequently stopped the screening of a film made by the Uyghur activist. How can we best combat the long arm of Beijing in Kyrgyzstan?

Answer. If confirmed, I will continually emphasize that the Kyrgyz Republic will find no better partner to achieve its development objectives than the United States. We recently celebrated 30 years of bilateral relations, during which the United States has provided over \$2 billion in assistance to the Kyrgyz Republic; by contrast, China has provided unfair, non-transparent loans. In addition to U.S. bilateral support to the Kyrgyz Republic's development goals, the United States contributes to

international development finance institutions which are making major investments into the Kyrgyz Republic's infrastructure needs.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED
TO HON. DANIEL N. ROSENBLUM BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

U.S.-Kazakhstan Relations

Question. Since its invasion of Ukraine, Russia has had a somewhat diminished influence in Central Asia, notably in Kazakhstan, as it focuses its diplomatic efforts elsewhere. This has opened a window of opportunity for increased U.S. involvement in the country.

- In what ways can the United States best take advantage of this opportunity and lay the foundation for more permanent progress in the U.S.-Kazakhstan relationship?

Answer. Since Kazakhstan's independence in 1991, the United States has invested in building strong and broad-based ties with the Government and people of Kazakhstan, from educational and cultural exchanges to foreign trade and military-to-military cooperation. Today, Kazakhstan continues to seek U.S. engagement as part of its "multi-vector" foreign policy, which aims to maintain positive relations with all global powers. Since the 1990s, U.S. companies have been some of the largest investors in Kazakhstan, and even more U.S. companies may choose to move regional offices to Kazakhstan following Russia's further invasion of Ukraine. In the security sector, there are new opportunities to help Kazakhstan diversify away from Russian training, doctrine, and equipment, in ways that meet Kazakhstan's fiscal constraints and defense priorities. If confirmed, I will continue and expand upon our work to strengthen bilateral people-to-people ties, level the playing field for U.S. companies wanting to do business in Kazakhstan and promote U.S. alternatives for Kazakhstan's security needs.

Question. Kazakhstan has publicly stated they will abide by western sanctions, but has not formally make a commitment to do so. Should the United States seek a formal sanctions commitment from Kazakhstan? Why or why not?

Answer. The United States should not seek a formal sanctions commitment from Kazakhstan, as doing so could be counterproductive and, additionally, provoke Russia to apply even greater pressure against Kazakhstan not to abide by U.S. and partner-country sanctions. The Kazakhstani Government already is actively engaging with the United States to ensure not only that it supports U.S. sanctions, but that Russia does not use Kazakhstan to evade these sanctions. For example, the Kazakhstani Government has created a website to help local companies keep track of international sanctions against Russia and Belarus, and the Government has facilitated the exit from Kazakhstan's financial sector of sanctioned Russian's banks. If confirmed, I will work to ensure that Kazakhstan's Government and business community continue to abide by western sanctions and that Kazakhstan's economy is not used to evade these sanctions.

Question. How will you work with Kazakhstan's Government and private sector to increase economic ties with the United States?

Answer. If confirmed, I will continue and expand upon outreach with Kazakhstan's businesses, both public and private, to encourage business opportunities for U.S. companies. There already are strong U.S.-Kazakhstan business ties in the hydrocarbon sector, and at least one U.S. bank has had offices in Kazakhstan for over 20 years. Sectors like agriculture; renewable energy; and tourism all show great promise for U.S. business. The U.S. —Kazakhstan Business Council, the Department of Agriculture's Foreign Agricultural Service, and the Department of Commerce's Foreign Commercial Service provide services to build business relationships and help U.S. exporters. If confirmed, I will also continue to support the Kazakhstani Government's efforts to improve the business and investment climate to ensure a level playing field for U.S. companies.

Question. As Ambassador, how will you work to build people-to-people ties between the U.S. and Kazakhstan, particularly to counter Russian influence?

Answer. Russian influence and disinformation remain extremely prevalent in Central Asia and in Kazakhstan. If confirmed, I will use all the tools of our robust Public Diplomacy Section to engage the Kazakhstani people. In-person engagements, social media, and participation in local festivals and holidays all play a role. Our Embassy also has significant journalist training and countering disinformation pro-

grams that we will continue to utilize and hope to expand. The Government of Kazakhstan has also expressed interest in continued and increased collaboration in academic and professional exchanges and higher education partnerships and if confirmed, I would work to find mutually beneficial areas to expand in this sphere.

Energy and Critical Minerals

Question. Kazakhstan is a significant producer and exporter of crude oil and natural gas and has a significant amount of uranium resources that can be used for nuclear fuel.

- Could Kazakhstan be a viable alternative to Russia for energy exports to Europe?

Answer. Kazakhstan accounts for about 2 percent of the global oil market, but 90 percent of exported oil currently uses pipelines which transit Russia and thus are vulnerable to Russian interference. More than 50 percent of these exports is destined for European markets. Kazakhstan is actively seeking alternative export routes, especially across the Caspian Sea. In the longer term these routes may allow Kazakhstan's oil to become a viable alternative for Europe to Russia's oil, but Kazakhstan's exports are very unlikely to replace Russia's exports to Europe entirely, especially in the short term.

Question. What challenges stand in the way of Kazakhstan increasing its energy exports to Europe?

Answer. The biggest challenge is geography. Kazakhstan exports 80 percent of its oil via the Caspian Pipeline Consortium which transits Russia and thus is vulnerable to Russian interference. Another 10 percent goes through other Russian pipelines. The only other viable option to Europe is the trans-Caspian Sea route; issues there include a limited number of tankers to transport oil from Kazakhstan's ports to facilities in Azerbaijan and limits on available capacity. Kazakhstan's export options are further limited by the fact that the closest ports on the western Caspian are in Iran and Russia.

Question. How could the U.S. help solve challenges that stand in the way of Kazakhstan increasing its energy exports to Europe?

Answer. The biggest short-term challenge is lack of shipping capacity in the Caspian Sea to transport oil from Kazakhstan's ports to Azerbaijan. Another option is moving oil by rail to other ports, such as in Georgia, although these routes would also transit Russia. On routes, the United States should use a scatter approach. Allowing Kazakhstan to deliver energy exports to multiple ports takes full advantage of available capacity. Longer term, encouraging cooperation on expanded trans-Caspian pipeline capacity is the best way to supply energy to Europe without involving Russia.

Question. Could Kazakhstan be a viable alternative to Russia for uranium exports?

Answer. Kazakhstan is the world's largest exporter of natural uranium, which it exports in the form of yellow cake to other countries, including Russia, which then convert and enrich the uranium into a form that can be used to fabricate fuel for nuclear reactors. Currently Russia owns roughly 40 percent of the world's conversion and enrichment infrastructure. Kazakhstan has categorically stated it will not enrich uranium. Therefore, while Kazakhstan will continue to be a strong exporter of natural uranium, it cannot provide an alternative to Russia's converted and enriched uranium exports.

Question. How could the U.S. help Kazakhstan develop its capacity to export uranium?

Answer. Kazakhstan is the world's largest exporter of natural uranium, which it exports in the form of yellow cake to other countries, including Russia, which then convert and enrich the uranium into a form that can be used to fabricate fuel for nuclear reactors. Kazakhstan has categorically stated it will not enrich uranium. This is a decision made in part due to the role Kazakhstan played as the site of the Soviet Union's nuclear testing program, which left a legacy of nuclear contamination, environmental degradation, and health problems for the people of Kazakhstan. If confirmed, I will work to continue the United States' cooperation with Kazakhstan to remediate its Soviet era nuclear legacy, strengthen our collaboration on nuclear nonproliferation, and explore cooperation and research on the peaceful use of nuclear energy, where U.S. technology can play an important role.

Question. Should the U.S. help Kazakhstan develop its capacity to export uranium?

Answer. Kazakhstan is already a major global exporter of natural uranium, including to the United States. Although most of these exports go through Russia, since 2018 Kazakhstan has shipped a portion of its uranium by sea through the Caspian to Azerbaijan. Kazakhstan is also a potential source of valuable rare earth elements. It is in the strategic economic interests of the United States that Kazakhstan brings these commodities to the global market, so they are not monopolized by other countries such as the PRC. If confirmed, I will encourage Kazakhstan's Government to diversify the country's trade routes and reduce trade barriers.

Question. Could Kazakhstan be a viable alternative to Russia for critical minerals or other commodities?

Answer. Kazakhstan is also a potential source of valuable rare earth elements. It is in the strategic economic interests of the United States that Kazakhstan brings these commodities to the global market, so they are not monopolized by other countries such as the PRC, and steps already are underway to improve Kazakhstan's ability to identify mineral resources. If confirmed, I will encourage Kazakhstan's Government to diversify the country's trade routes and reduce trade barriers.

Question. Kazakhstan is landlocked and relies on trade routes through neighboring countries to conduct international trade.

- What challenges does Kazakhstan face in exporting energy because of this, and how can the U.S. help protect Kazakhstan's ability to export oil and gas (and other goods) from political pressure by its neighbors?

Answer. The biggest challenge is geography. Kazakhstan exports 80 percent of its oil—its largest product which accounts for nearly one quarter of its GDP—via the Caspian Pipeline Consortium which transits Russia and thus is vulnerable to Russian interference. The only other currently viable option to export oil to world markets is the trans-Caspian Sea route. The United States should use a scatter approach here. Allowing Kazakhstan to deliver oil to multiple ports takes full advantage of available capacity. Longer term, encouraging cooperation on expanded trans-Caspian pipeline capacity is the best way to supply energy to Europe without involving Russia. For other goods, Kazakhstan mostly is a transit country for PRC goods heading to Europe rather than a major exporter itself.

Question. How can the U.S. help Kazakhstan lessen its reliance on the sale of its energy resources and diversify its economy?

Answer. The United States supports Kazakhstani Government efforts to diversify its economy, including by improving the education of its citizens so they can better compete in the global, knowledge-based economy. Kazakhstan already has taken important steps, such as sending thousands of students overseas for to receive higher education, and beginning to implement the goal of tri-lingual (Kazakh, Russian and English) public education to make the workforce more competitive. Kazakhstan has great potential for renewable energy, especially wind and solar. The U.S. Agency for International Development has done significant work in this area, including helping the Government set up renewable energy auctions and strengthening regional electricity grids throughout Central Asia. The Embassy recently supported thousands of women entrepreneurs to expand their networks and utilize e-commerce. U.S. companies are also investing hundreds of millions of dollars to support health, education, and entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan. If confirmed, I would build on existing efforts to encourage Kazakhstan to train its workforce and diversify its economy with an eye to the future, and advocate for Kazakhstan to use U.S. educational institutions, businesses, and technologies to do so.

Press Freedom

Question. Independent journalism that helps the public hold governments and corrupted elites accountable for their actions is under threat throughout Central Asia, and impacts the work of Congressionally-funded international media outlets such as RFE/RL. Throughout the region, governments do not consistently respond to requests for comments and interviews on questions of interest to RFE/RL's audiences in the region, and local journalists working for RFE/RL are regularly targeted for retaliation for their journalistic work.

In Kazakhstan, RFE/RL journalists have been routinely harassed by security agents as they carry out their journalistic duties to cover major events such as the violent, nationwide protests of January 2022 and other recent expressions of popular discontent, and government officials have often ignored RFE/RL requests for comment on issues of importance to our audiences in the country, including alleged high-level corruption among Kazakhstan's ruling elites.

- If you are confirmed as U.S. Ambassador, what will you do to support the work of RFE/RL and ensure open access for Congressionally-funded international journalists at your new post?

Answer. Our Mission is in contact with RFE/RL on a regular basis and monitors the situation closely. Creating meaningful opportunities for media and civil society, including RFE/RL's Kazakh service, to provide independent commentary and input on pending laws and policies is a crucial component of the democratic process. If confirmed, I will encourage the Ministry of Information to uphold constitutional protections for freedom of the press, while urging the Government to be more transparent in its decision-making processes, budgetary matters, and other operations of public interest.

Peace Corps

Question. Peace Corps left Kazakhstan in 2011. Do you believe that Peace Corps should aim to return to the Republic of Kazakhstan? Why or why not?

Answer. Peace Corps is a valuable program that expands U.S. outreach and in so doing pays long-term dividends. The Kazakhstani Government has expressed interest in partnering with the U.S. Mission to Kazakhstan to expand on many of the services that the Peace Corps used to provide in country, such as English teaching. Therefore, if confirmed, I will focus on expanding and seeking increased funding for the multiple academic and professional exchange programs offered by our Public Diplomacy section.

Corruption and Reform

Question. If confirmed, how will you promote democratic and corruption reforms in Kazakhstan?

Answer. President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev announced a raft of political, economic, and security reforms and condemned high-level corruption in Kazakhstan, following the serious unrest of last January, which began with peaceful protests that were rooted in socioeconomic concerns. If confirmed, I will urge Kazakhstan's leadership to make good on these promised reforms, which are ostensibly aimed at strengthening representative democracy and reducing corruption. To this end, I also will support development of relevant programming and assistance, funding permitting, to build on past bilateral cooperation related to rule of law and good governance.

Question. In what areas of government do you consider progress on democratic and corruption reforms to be most viable for Kazakhstan?

Answer. Kazakhstan is a young, dynamic, and well-educated country. Government reform efforts to increase the political participation of women, youth, and persons with disabilities, and, separately, to strengthen rural self-government have the potential to transform Kazakhstan's political system and improve accountability on issues like public finance and corruption. If confirmed, I will work to expand the U.S. Government's contacts with reform-minded members of these groups in parliament, government, and Kazakhstan's rural areas and work to ensure they have the skills to succeed in building a more democratic, stable, and prosperous Kazakhstan.

Question. Corruption at all levels continues to be a problem in Kazakhstan. Do you think that the use of the State Department's 7031(c) visa ban authorities could be a useful tool for fighting corruption in Kazakhstan? Why or why not?

Answer. I believe measures like 7031(c) visa restrictions are vital in order to show that we are backing up our words with actions. If confirmed, I will support all actions to hold corrupt officials to account, including through 7031(c) visa restrictions.

Jackson-Vanik

Question. What is your stance on the continued application of the Jackson-Vanik amendment on Kazakhstan?

Answer. Jackson-Vanik is an economic tool originally designed by Congress to address restrictions on emigration. The conditions which made Jackson-Vanik necessary no longer exist in Kazakhstan. We have more effective tools to address [remaining] human rights concerns, as appropriate, including sanctions authorities and the Trafficking in Persons, and human rights and international religious freedom reports.

Central Asia is looking very differently at Russia, and the United States should be looking differently at Central Asia. At this pivotal moment in history, we should

be doing everything in our power to shore up these states as they rebuff Russia's constant pressure and entreaties to support its unprovoked war in Ukraine.

Every step we take to bring these countries closer to the West will reduce Russia's ability to pressure them to support its war in Ukraine. We should grant Kazakhstan Permanent Normal Trade Relations not only to demonstrate our solidarity with the people of Kazakhstan, but also as a measure to weaken Russia's grip on the region. Although ultimately this is a decision for Congress, the Department of State supports graduating Kazakhstan from the Jackson-Vanik Amendment.

Question. What benefits would the repeal of this amendment and the establishment of normal trade relations have for Kazakhstan and the U.S.?

Answer. Lack of Permanent Normal Trade Relations due to Jackson-Vanik remains an irritant in bilateral relations, one that is raised in nearly every encounter with Kazakhstani officials. Graduating Kazakhstan from the Jackson-Vanik amendment would send a strong signal that we view Kazakhstan as a reliable partner that has over 30 years of independence and has left behind its Soviet past, and eliminating the need for an annual waiver process would provide assurances of stability for investors.

Human Rights and International Organizations

Question. In the State Department's 2021 Human Rights Report, human rights advocates asserted that the domestic definition of torture does not meet the definition in the U.N. Convention against Torture, and there were reports of more than 200 incidents of torture throughout the year.

- If confirmed, how will you work with the Kazakh Government in moving away from torture, including by meeting the definition's international standard?

Answer. If confirmed I will continue to use vehicles such as the Human Rights Report to engage Kazakhstan's leaders on the need to come into line fully with Kazakhstan's international obligations. I will also explore opportunities to strengthen cooperation on anti-torture training, investigations, and oversight within Kazakhstan's justice sector and security sector in light of President Tokayev and other Kazakhstani leaders openly acknowledging and condemning torture following the January events.

Question. What actions would you take to hold those officers committing human rights abuses of torture accountable?

Answer. If confirmed, I will urge Kazakhstan's Government to pursue credible and transparent investigations into allegations of torture and other human rights violations and prosecute offenders where appropriate. Provided sufficient information is available, I will also support actions to hold these officials to account through mechanisms like visa restrictions under Section 7031(c) of the State appropriations act and financial sanctions under the Global Magnitsky sanctions program, as applicable.

Question. The report also indicates that prison facilities conditions are harsh and life-threatening, with prison authorities rarely conducting proper investigation into mistreatment, not publishing statistics such as deaths in detention facilities, and failing to adequately improve conditions to meet international health standards.

- If confirmed, how would you work with government authorities and international organizations to increase the transparency of prison facilities and improve conditions?

Answer. If confirmed, I will review available cooperative assistance opportunities with the aim to increase transparency and improve conditions in prison facilities and strengthen cooperation on anti-torture training, investigations, and oversight within Kazakhstan's justice sector and security sector.

Question. What steps can you take, if confirmed, to bolster human rights in country and within civil society?

Answer. If confirmed, I will make the protection of human rights and the strengthening of an independent, vibrant civil society one of my main priorities in Kazakhstan. I will regularly raise these issues in all my government and non-government meetings, as human rights are fundamental to a prosperous and stable society and will direct my staff to do the same. I will make use of all available tools, including the annual human rights report, international religious freedom report, trafficking in persons report, and child labor report, as well as bilateral assistance opportunities, to engage the Government and civil society on these issues.

Question. In the State Department's 2022 Trafficking in Persons Report, Kazakhstan remained on Tier 2, showing efforts to improve on meeting minimum

requirements to eliminate trafficking. However, the Government is lacking in key areas such as identification of victims and traffickers, insufficient legislative efforts, and maintenance of obstacles for foreign victims to access protection services unless a criminal case had been initiated against the traffickers.

- If confirmed, how will you work with Kazakh officials to improve their practices at identification of victims and traffickers?

Answer. Identifying victims and gaining their support to assist with the investigation and prosecution of traffickers is key to effectively combating human trafficking in Kazakhstan. Identifying victims is a critical first step in ensuring their ability to receive the support and resources they need. If confirmed, I will ensure trafficking in persons programming at the Embassy continues to support training for law enforcement and other first responders, and government agencies whose work puts them in contact with possible trafficking victims. Recent changes in the law requiring that services be provided to foreign trafficking victims is a demonstration of Kazakhstan's willingness to improve its reputation on trafficking in persons.

Question. If confirmed, what steps could you take along with the host government to minimize the obstacles currently presented to victims of human trafficking?

Answer. The annual Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report is an effective diplomatic tool to engage foreign governments on human trafficking, and serves as a reminder to the Government of Kazakhstan of its need to increase its efforts in combating human trafficking and protecting the victims. Recent amendments to Kazakhstani law that now instruct agencies to provide services to foreign trafficking victims demonstrate the Government's intent to make changes that support victims. Additionally, work on a standalone law on trafficking in persons, which is a recommendation in the annual report, has begun and is expected to be released for public comment this year. The law will codify roles and responsibilities of various government agencies for trafficking victims. If confirmed, I will capitalize on this momentum to press for more conformity to international standards.

Question. Kazakhstan is constitutionally a secular state, however in the 2021 International Religious Freedom report, many minority religious groups, particularly those cited as 'non-traditional', faced arrest, detention, and imprisonment for their religious beliefs.

- What is your assessment of this issue and how would you assess the effects of U.S. efforts to urge greater governmental and societal respect for international religious freedom?

Answer. Kazakhstan's constitution defines the country as a secular state and provides for freedom of religion and belief as well as the freedom to decline religious affiliation; however, according to local and international observers, authorities continued to impose restrictions on and conduct additional scrutiny of what the Government considered "nontraditional" religious groups. If confirmed, I will ensure embassy officials continue outreach to a wide range of religious communities, their leaders, and religious freedom advocates, and encourage reform of relevant laws and guidelines so all citizens can conduct peaceful religious activities freely.

Question. If confirmed, how would you build upon past USG efforts to promote further religious freedom?

Answer. If confirmed, I and all my staff will continue to urge respect for religious freedom, both in general public outreach opportunities and regarding specific cases. I will advocate for more changes to the country's law regulating religious practice and raise the U.S. Government's concerns about Kazakhstan's current restrictive laws on religious freedom, especially those related to censorship of religious literature, as well those imposing criminal penalties for peaceful religious speech or praying without registration. If confirmed, I intend to meet with representatives of all faiths and will instruct my staff to do the same, to demonstrate how the United States respects and values religious freedom.

Question. The Office of Multilateral Strategy and Personnel (MSP) in the State Department's bureau of International Organizations is leading a whole-of-government effort to identify, recruit, and install qualified, independent personnel at the U.N., including in elections for specialized bodies like the International Telecommunications Union (ITU). There is an American candidate, Doreen Bogdan-Martin, who if elected would be the first American and first woman to lead the ITU. She is in a tough race that will require early, consistent engagement across capitals and within the U.N. member states.

- If confirmed, do you commit to demarching the Kazakh Government and any other counterparts necessary to encourage their support of Ms. Bogdan-Martin?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed, I commit to demarching all necessary parties to encourage support for Ms. Bogdan-Martin.

Question. If confirmed, how can you work with the International Organizations (IO) bureau and other stakeholders to identify, recruit, and install qualified Americans in positions like the Junior Program Officer (JPO) program at the U.N.?

Answer. If confirmed, I will regularly discuss the importance of qualified, independent personnel at the U.N. with Kazakhstani Government counterparts and instruct my staff to do the same. I will engage on behalf of American candidates consistently and to the best of my abilities work with the International Organizations (IO) bureau and other stakeholders to identify, recruit, and install qualified Americans in U.N. specialized bodies.

Question. Kazakhstan has one of the lowest rates of voting coincidence with the U.S. in the U.N. General Assembly and in the Security Council.

- What is your assessment of this issue?

Answer. Kazakhstan has pursued since its independence in 1991 a “multi-vector” foreign policy, which aims to maintain positive relations with all global powers, taking into account its geographic location and borders with both Russia and the PRC. If confirmed, I will engage the Kazakhstani Government early and regularly on votes in the U.N. system and ensure my staff does the same, to encourage voting with the United States and on behalf of the rules-based international order, on issues presented in the U.N. General Assembly.

Question. If confirmed, what concrete actions can you take to engage with the Kazakhs on anticipated votes in the U.N. system that would increase their voting coincidence with the U.S.?

Answer. If confirmed, I will engage the Kazakhstani Government early and regularly on votes in the U.N. system and ensure my staff does the same, to encourage voting with the United States on issues presented in the U.N. General Assembly.

State Department Management and Public Diplomacy

Question. Many U.S. missions have been under enormous stress over the last few years, in large part due to COVID.

- What is your understanding of morale throughout Mission Nur-Sultan?

Answer. Morale at Embassy Nur-Sultan and Consulate General Almaty remains strong. I was heartened to hear about the Mission community’s resilience as they recovered from the double hit of unrest in Almaty and the Omicron wave in January this year. I credit the strong leadership of our current Chargé d’Affaires as well as the professionalism and sense of purpose that is shared across both the American and local staff. If confirmed, I will work to ensure morale remains high, by fostering an inclusive workplace, recognizing and rewarding employee excellence, making sure people have the tools, and training (and vaccines) to do their jobs, and prioritizing work-life balance.

Question. How do you intend to improve morale at Mission Sur-Sultan?

Answer. If confirmed, I will work to maintain good morale at Mission Kazakhstan by modeling and creating a workplace environment that values respect, empathy, integrity, teamwork, and work-life balance. I also believe it is essential to recognize and reward employee excellence, and to make sure people have the tools, and training (and vaccines) to do their jobs.

Question. How do you intend to create a unified mission and vision at Mission Nur-Sultan?

Answer. I believe fervently in the concept of “one team, one mission” and have tried to apply it throughout my State Department career, including in a number of U.S. Government interagency settings. If confirmed, I will try to instill this approach at Mission Kazakhstan by facilitating an open and collaborative interagency coordination process, and by asking the country team to organize its work around the goals and objectives of our Integrated Country Strategy (ICS). I have found the best way to get “buy-in” to this approach is to model and encourage an inclusive and transparent leadership style, to deemphasize the differences among various agencies, and to stress what we share in common as a single country team with a single mission.

Question. Management is a key responsibility for chiefs of mission. How would you describe your management style?

Answer. I would describe my management style as focused on empowering my team to do their jobs well. I try to achieve this by: 1. Setting clear goals and prior-

ities; 2. Communicating early, often and transparently; 3. Being a good listener; 4. Being empathetic and emotionally intelligent; 5. Showing that I value good work and hard effort; and 6. Prioritizing work-life balance by encouraging attention to family and activities outside of the workplace. I try to avoid micromanaging those to whom I have delegated responsibility or picking favorites among the different elements of the team—everyone’s contribution is essential to success.

Question. Do you believe it is ever acceptable or constructive to berate subordinates, either in public or private?

Answer. No, this is not acceptable behavior. If confirmed, I pledge to treat staff at all levels with the respect they deserve. My approach is: “Praise publicly; when necessary, provide constructive criticism promptly but privately.”

Question. How do you envision your leadership relationship with your deputy chief of mission?

Answer. I plan to have a close, collaborative relationship with my DCM. I am fortunate to have a DCM who will have served as Charge D’Affaires for over a year prior to my arrival, and who therefore is familiar with all Embassy operations. I see her as the Mission’s Chief Operating Officer, and as my “alter ego,” capable of stepping in to assume Mission leadership when necessary.

Question. If confirmed, what leadership responsibilities do you intend to entrust to your deputy chief of mission?

Answer. I see her as the Mission’s Chief Operating Officer and expect she will focus somewhat more on internal Embassy matters and somewhat less on external outreach than I. But I will rely on her advice and counsel in all matters. I expect she will take on key leadership responsibilities within the Mission, including all post-level mentoring programs for entry-level and mid-level officers and local staff, and chair of the Emergency Action Committee. I would also expect that the DCM would share with me, if I am confirmed, leadership on matters related to the promotion of a diverse and inclusive workforce that fosters respect, productivity, and professional engagement across all sections and agencies. And I also see her as a force multiplier for both our government-to-government and public diplomacy efforts. By fully utilizing the DCM’s skills and experience—which have been proven during her past year serving as Chargé d’Affaires—we will better achieve our agenda vis-à-vis the Government of Kazakhstan and reach a broader range of the Kazakhstani public with our messaging and outreach.

Question. In order to create and continue employee excellence at the Department, accurate and direct employee evaluation reports (EERs) for Foreign Service Officers are imperative, though often lacking.

- Do you believe it is important to provide employees with accurate, constructive feedback on their performances in order to encourage improvement and reward those who most succeeded in their roles?

Answer. Yes. Accurate and timely feedback is important throughout the year, not just when evaluations are due. Productive development of staff is a continuous process and, if confirmed, I will emphasize the importance of this.

Question. If confirmed, would you support and encourage clear, accurate, and direct feedback to employees in order to improve performance and reward high achievers?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed, I pledge to encourage direct, accurate feedback to improve performance and reward high achievers. This is one of a leader’s most important tasks.

Question. It is imperative that U.S. diplomats get outside of posts abroad to meet with local actors, including host government officials, non-government organizations, and fellow foreign diplomats stationed in Kazakhstan.

- In your opinion, do U.S. diplomats get outside of our embassy walls enough to accomplish fully their missions?

Answer. Mission Kazakhstan staff regularly leave the office to engage with host government officials, other diplomats, and private persons. Face-to-face contact is vital for diplomacy. If confirmed, I will continue this practice and will consult regularly with our security personnel about whether it remains safe for staff to do so.

Question. How do you intend to improve the ability of U.S. diplomats to better access all local populations?

Answer. Officers at Mission Kazakhstan—both the Embassy in Nur-Sultan and the Consulate in Almaty—regularly travel within the country and, if confirmed, I

will strongly encourage such trips. We cannot understand a country only from its capital and large cities. Our network of American Corners act as a vital bridge between the Embassy and local communities and I will encourage—and support appropriate funding for—regular Embassy visits to these centers.

Question. Public diplomacy is an important aspect of U.S. foreign policy efforts.

- What is the public diplomacy environment like in Kazakhstan?

Answer. Interest in U.S. culture, learning English, studying in, or traveling to the United States, and forming connections with U.S. businesses remains high. While technically free, the media environment in Kazakhstan is characterized by a lack of a professional journalist corps, a high degree of self-censorship, and periodic government blocking of websites allegedly propagating extremism or anti-government criticism. Russian-language media continues to be extremely influential in shaping Kazakhstanis' understanding of the world. If confirmed, I commit to ensuring our PD programs continue to counter disinformation through engaging journalists, encouraging English language learning and media literacy; engaging civil society to support human rights and democratic processes; and promoting the importance of inclusive, diversified economic growth.

Question. What public diplomacy challenges do U.S. diplomats face there?

Answer. While there is much interest in and many opportunities for collaboration, some U.S. policy priorities are still considered sensitive and controversial in Kazakhstan, especially outside large cities. There is also a vocal online group which claims some of the programs run by the U.S. Embassy in Kazakhstan are antithetical to traditional Kazakh values. If confirmed, I will support our Public Diplomacy Section's efforts to address these challenges and raise concerns with appropriate government authorities.

Question. How do you balance the importance of Main State versus the in-country mission when it comes to tailoring public diplomacy messages for foreign audiences?

Answer. Mission Kazakhstan maintains effective lines of communication with relevant offices at Main State to craft appropriate messaging and alleviate any discrepancies. If confirmed, I will make sure these lines of communication remain open.

Question. "Anomalous health incidents," commonly referred to as "Havana Syndrome," have been debilitating and sidelining U.S. diplomats around the world for years. They have caused serious, negative consequences for U.S. diplomacy, yet many believe that the Department is not doing enough to care for, protect, and communicate to its personnel.

- If confirmed, do you commit to taking this threat seriously?

Answer. Yes. If confirmed, I will have no higher priority than the security and safety of the Mission community. I have already had to deal with several AHIs over the past three years in Tashkent. If confirmed, I will do everything possible at Mission Kazakhstan to ensure that employees who report a possible AHI receive immediate and appropriate attention and care and the incident is reported through appropriate channels.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to talking as openly as you can to Mission Nur-Sultan personnel?

Answer. Yes, if confirmed, I will be as open as possible with Mission Kazakhstan personnel to build a culture of trust and respect, as I have done at Mission Uzbekistan over the past three years.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED
TO HON. DANIEL N. ROSENBLUM BY SENATOR MARCO RUBIO

Question. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is orchestrating nothing less than a genocide of Turkic Muslims in Xinjiang. We all know of the Uyghurs plight, but this genocide has also ensnared ethnic Kyrgyz and Kazakhs. In Kazakhstan, we have seen signs that the Kazakh state has served as an extension of the CCP's transnational system of surveillance and repression. Ethnic Kazakhs who flee Xinjiang are denied permission to enter the country, civil society groups raising awareness of the genocide find their profiles on social media and YouTube blocked and removed. Several individuals may have even been forcibly repatriated to Xinjiang.

- Is the CCP a threat to the United States?

Answer. As Secretary Blinken has noted, the ruling Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is the most serious long-term challenge to the international order. Beijing's coercive tactics—from Lithuania to Taiwan—are deeply destabilizing and threaten U.S. interests across the globe. PRC authorities have committed genocide and crimes against humanity against Uyghurs and members of other ethnic and religious minority groups in Xinjiang. Secretary Blinken has made clear that the United States stands with countries and people around the world in condemning the atrocities happening in Xinjiang, and if confirmed, I will advocate that Kazakhstan promote accountability for the PRC's atrocities against Uyghurs and members of other religious and ethnic minority groups—including ethnic Kazakhs—in Xinjiang.

Question. Is the CCP's increasing control over the Kazakh state threatening ethnic Kazakhs?

Answer. With an 1,100-mile shared border and deep historical, political, and economic links, Kazakhstan approaches its relationship with the PRC with great caution. If confirmed, I will work to support Kazakhstan's freedom to pursue a multi-vector foreign policy within which it can advance its national interests through cooperation with a variety of partners. That national interest includes promoting and protecting Kazakhstan's unique cultural identity, and the rights of members of all Kazakhstan's ethnic groups, including ethnic Kazakhs. If confirmed, I will also advocate that Kazakhstan's Government continue to uphold its international obligations regarding non-refoulement of refugees, and that it allows victims of PRC atrocities, their relatives, and NGOs advocating on their behalf to speak and organize freely.

Question. Is Kazakhstan a possible template for how the CCP will go after its opponents who have fled overseas to other countries?

Answer. Kazakhstan offers benefits, including a simplified pathway to citizenship, for ethnic Kazakhs from abroad, including individuals from the PRC. As a party to the 1951 Refugee Convention, 1967 Refugee Protocol, and 1984 Convention Against Torture, Kazakhstan has an obligation to refrain from forcibly returning noncitizens to a country where they would be persecuted or tortured, and thus far has granted temporary refugee status to four individuals fleeing the PRC. If confirmed as Ambassador, I will continue to work with Kazakhstan and international organizations like the U.N. to ensure the safety of refugees, including those from Xinjiang, and encourage full compliance with the terms of the 1951 Refugee Convention, 1967 Refugee Protocol, and 1984 Convention Against Torture.

Question. If confirmed, how will you press the Kazakh Government to recognize the genocide of ethnic Kazakhs in Xinjiang?

Answer. If confirmed, I will continue to advocate that Kazakhstan publicly condemn the PRC's atrocities against Uyghurs and members of other religious and ethnic minority groups—including ethnic Kazakhs—in Xinjiang. I will also advocate on behalf of freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, including for Xinjiang advocates, and for full protection of refugees, including those from Xinjiang, consistent with the 1951 Refugee Convention and 1967 Refugee Protocol.

Question. Earlier this year, Kazakhstan experienced the most significant anti-government protests in its history. It's clear from independent media that these initially peaceful protests expressed frustration with increasing prices, a stagnant economy, and rampant government corruption. The Government's crackdown on these protests, supported by Russian special forces, was so violent that many Kazakhs call the protests "bloody January."

- Are you aware of U.S. efforts to hold Kazakh officials accountable for human rights abuses against peaceful protesters in Kazakhstan? If so, please describe.

Answer. Violent organized groups co-opted initially peaceful January protests and fomented violence on the streets of multiple Kazakhstani cities in an effort to weaken President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev or remove him from power. Violent rioters attacked and burned government buildings, looted commercial buildings, and killed 19 members of Kazakhstan's security forces. In the face of the sudden violence and political uncertainty, President Tokayev called on the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) to provide perimeter security around critical infrastructure and thereby help restore order.

During the Government's response to the violence there were credible reports of abuse and excessive use of force by security forces, including credible allegations of torture and deaths of individuals in detention. More than six months after these events, the Government continues to investigate these credible allegations of abuses of power, killings, and torture. Nine members of security forces have been detained and another 15 have been identified as suspects and are reportedly under investiga-

tion. The Government has also detained senior members of the security forces on charges of treason and abuse of power for allegedly organizing or allowing the violence.

The United States is actively working with civil society to encourage the Government of Kazakhstan to ensure that these investigations are credible and independent, and that victims and their families receive the accountability and justice they deserve. If confirmed, I will continue to press the Government of Kazakhstan to hold its security forces accountable for their actions in January and will ensure that my embassy team does the same.

Question. What is your assessment of claims made by the Kazakh opposition that agents of the Kazakh Government embedded themselves in protests to spark violence and thereby justify a violent crackdown?

Answer. The State Department's current understanding of the events is that violent organized groups co-opted initially peaceful January protests and fomented violence on the streets of multiple Kazakhstani cities in an effort to weaken President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev or remove him from power. Violent rioters attacked and burned government buildings, looted commercial buildings, and killed 19 members of Kazakhstan's security forces. In the face of the sudden violence and political uncertainty, President Tokayev called on the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) to provide perimeter security around critical infrastructure and thereby help restore order.

During the Government's response to the violence there were credible reports of abuse and excessive use of force by security forces, including credible allegations of torture and deaths of individuals in detention. More than six months after these events, the Government continues to investigate these credible allegations of abuses of power, killings, and torture. Nine members of security forces have been detained and another 15 have been identified as suspects and are reportedly under investigation. The Government has also detained senior members of the security forces on charges of treason and abuse of power for allegedly organizing or allowing the violence.

Question. If confirmed, what will you do to support democracy activists and civil society in Kazakhstan?

Answer. If confirmed, I will continue efforts to encourage and strengthen civil society and citizens' participation in Kazakhstan's governance and political process. I will explore ways to further build capacity and skills for more inclusive participation in all levels of Kazakhstani Government. I will also advocate on behalf of freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, and association, so that all those who so choose can peacefully express their political views and contribute to Kazakhstan's future.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED
TO JOEY R. HOOD BY SENATOR ROBERT MENEDEZ

Economic Concerns

Question. As you know, Tunisian authorities have been in consultation with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) regarding a \$4 billion loan to address Tunisia's economic concerns. The sharp rises in grain and energy prices caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine are exacerbating inflation and widening the Government's budget deficit, leading to delays in state salaries and difficulties in paying for wheat imports.

- How can the U.S. work with other donor nations to encourage a return to a transparent and inclusive system of democratic governance?

Answer. In tandem with our G7 and other international partners, if confirmed, I would continue to publicly and privately advocate for implementation of measures to return to democratic governance. I would also coordinate with international partners to align assistance programs to ensure they are encouraging a return to democratic governance and supporting economic stability through robust assistance to civil society, relief to citizens, and bolstering the private sector.

Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC)

Question. Following President Saied's dismissal of parliament, the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) suspended its nearly \$500 million compact with the Tunisian Government. This compact includes projects to strengthen Tunisia's transportation, trade, and water sectors.

- Given that the signing of a compact hinges on Tunisia having a democratically elected parliament, what is the current outlook for the compact?

Answer. Although the compact is ready for signing and implementation, MCC eligibility criteria requires partner countries to demonstrate a commitment to democratic governance. If confirmed, I would seek every opportunity to engage with Tunisia's leaders, civil society, media, political parties, unions, and other stakeholders advocate for the re-establishment of a democratic government accountable to their people. Until that occurs, the compact is unable to move forward.

Question. How, if it all, should American security engagement with Tunisia change if Saied continues to consolidate power? Do you believe that threatening to curtail or suspend U.S. aid and security assistance to Tunisia would effectively pressure Saied to change course?

Answer. The Tunisian military remains an apolitical and professional force that reports to civilian leadership. Tunisia continues to face a threat from ISIS and other U.S.-designated terrorist organizations as well as from instability in the region, especially in neighboring Libya. U.S. security assistance is critical in supporting Tunisian-led efforts to secure its borders, counter terrorism, and provide a safe and stable environment in the region.

Anomalous Health Incidents

Question. I am very concerned about directed energy attacks on U.S. Government personnel (so-called Anomalous Health Incidents). Ensuring the safety and security of our personnel abroad falls largely on individual Chiefs of Mission and the response of officers at post. It is imperative that any individual who reports a suspected incident be responded to promptly, equitably, and compassionately.

- Do you agree these incidents must be taken seriously, and pose a threat to the health of U.S. personnel?

Answer. Yes, I fully agree this must be taken seriously.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to ensuring that any reported incident is treated seriously and reported quickly through the appropriate channels, and that any affected individuals receive prompt access to medical care?

Answer. If confirmed, I will be committed to the safety and well-being of Mission personnel and to working in close partnership with the President's AHI Interagency Coordinator, the Department's Health Incident Response Task Force, and the broader government-wide effort to ensure the full resources of the U.S. Government are brought to bear to get to the bottom of these incidents and to ensure access to needed care for those affected.

Question. Do you commit to meeting with medical staff and the RSO at post to discuss any past reported incidents and ensure that all protocols are being followed?

Answer. Yes. If confirmed, I would be committed to providing Mission Tunisia personnel with the most up-to-date information available, as we learn more, including guidance on how to respond if they have concerns that they might have experienced an incident and how to access medical care.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED TO JOEY R. HOOD BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

Policy Priorities

Question. Please outline U.S. national security interests and your policy priorities as the United States Ambassador to Tunisia.

Answer. If confirmed, my most important priority as ambassador would be the safety and security of Americans living in and visiting Tunisia. My next priority would be to help put Tunisia on a more stable and prosperous trajectory through inclusive and open economic growth. The country must enact necessary economic reforms that foster inclusive growth. Tunisia should return to a democratic system of checks and balances, with an effective and accountable government that protects human rights and fundamental freedoms. I would continue engagement with Tunisia's leaders, civil society, media, political parties, unions, and other stakeholders to re-establish a democratic government accountable to its people. Tunisia will continue to face persistent security threats caused by regional instability, the return of Tunisians from foreign conflict zones, and domestic terrorism. We will ad-

vocate for prioritization of Tunisian security forces' partnerships with the United States and avoidance of partnerships that undermine Tunisia's sovereignty and regional stability. Counterterrorism and military support will seek to focus continued Tunisian attention to the dismantling of domestic violent extremist organizations, securing Tunisia's land and sea borders, and participating in regional and U.N. security missions.

Democratic Backsliding

Question. Initially a Democratic success story after the Arab Spring and Jasmine Revolutions, Tunisia's President Kais Saied is unilaterally dismantling Tunisia's democratic institutions. Further, Saied has been seemingly immune to international pressure to change course.

- Please outline your strategy for creating leverage with President Saied and the prospects for halting Tunisia's democratic backsliding and restoring the balance of power and rule of law.

Answer. An independent and strong civil society is integral to an effective democracy, helping promote accountability, human rights, and fundamental freedoms. If confirmed, I would continue to support Tunisia's vibrant civil society while reiterating the need for the Government of Tunisia to respect human rights, including freedom of expression and association. U.S. support to civil society has been and will continue to be a critical component of our assistance to Tunisia. I would seek every opportunity to also urge the Government to see civil society as a partner in advancing democratic principles, public health, education, and human rights. With legislative elections scheduled in December, this is a crucial moment for the Government to demonstrate inclusivity and transparency in the new electoral law, taking into consideration the perspectives of civil society and political parties, which will be essential for the legitimacy and representativeness of the future Parliament.

Question. What are your takeaways from Tunisia's constitutional referendum and the resulting constitution?

Answer. I acknowledge Tunisians' overwhelming concerns about corruption, economic mismanagement, and the ineffectiveness of past governments. I also note the concerns of many Tunisians regarding the lack of an inclusive and transparent process for the drafting of the new constitution, and concerns over the constitution's weakened checks that could threaten their democracy and human rights. If confirmed, I will encourage Tunisia's leaders to develop an effective, democratic government that protects human rights, freedom of expression and association, rule of law, and judicial independence, and promotes long-term economic prosperity based on a system of checks and balances, a critical component for the health of all democracies.

Question. Is U.S. assistance an effective lever to influence Saied's conduct?

Answer. We continuously review our assistance programs to ensure they align with our policy goals and values. Reductions in the administration's FY 23/FY 23 budget request, in comparison to prior year requests, reflect our significant concerns over democratic backsliding. U.S. assistance that addresses the pressing needs facing the Tunisian people will continue, including our support for civil society and efforts to promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth.

Question. Would a unified message and coordinated assistance reductions tied to democratic benchmarks across the G7 better influence Tunisia's trajectory?

Answer. Our work with partners including unified messaging from the G7 has been an important element in of our efforts to set democratic benchmarks that Tunisia should meet to preserve democratic institutions. In tandem with international partners, I would, if confirmed, continue publicly and privately to advocate for a swift return to democratic governance. I would also coordinate with international partners to align assistance programs to ensure they are encouraging a return to democratic governance and supporting economic stability through robust assistance to civil society, relief to citizens, and bolstering the private sector.

Mil-to-Mil Relationship

Question. Elsewhere in North Africa, select members of Congress have sought to curtail the U.S.-Morocco mil-to-mil relationship over Western Sahara concerns—even as far as to reject Moroccan participation in AFRICOM's capstone exercise African Lion.

- Should the United States consider revoking Tunisian participation in African Lion as a consequence of democratic backsliding? Why or why not?

Answer. The Tunisian military remains an apolitical and professional force that reports to civilian leadership. Tunisia continues to face a threat from ISIS and other U.S.-designated terrorist organizations as well as from instability in the region, especially in neighboring Libya. Military trainings and exercises, including African Lion, are critical in supporting Tunisian-led efforts to secure its borders, counter terrorism, provide safety and foster stability in the region.

Economy

Question. According to the World Bank, the Tunisian economy has grown on average by a meager 1 percent annually. The Tunisian Government has tried to maintain social peace through extensive subsidies and expanding Tunisia's civil service—now among the largest in the world.

- What are the most effective tools to spur Tunisia's economic recovery?

Answer. The Government is negotiating a potential agreement with the IMF, and this could help support reforms that would benefit all Tunisians. One key aspect of the proposed reforms involves the development of the private sector, which would expand investment potential, reduce the influence of monopolies, and support local entrepreneurship. If confirmed, I would promote a vision of inclusive, open economic growth and stronger ties with U.S. companies.

Question. Are Kais Saied's "anti-corruption" reforms effectively addressing Tunisia's economic woes? How would you advise him to change course?

Answer. If confirmed, I would work with our G7 partners to reinforce the message that many of Tunisia's corruption challenges can be addressed through an economic reform agenda. By reducing the nation's dependence on subsidies, supporting the private sector, and better managing government spending, including on public wages and state-owned enterprises, the President has the best chance of stabilizing his nation's economy while addressing corruption.

Question. How do you strike the balance between Tunisia's austerity measures (subsidies, expansion of civil service etc.) and necessary IMF reforms?

Answer. A potential IMF program would be designed to support and enable core reforms that Tunisia needs to undertake urgently. These are reforms outlined in the Government's own economic reform agenda. Stakeholders, including the Government of Tunisia, the IMF, international donors, trade unions, and private sector representatives, broadly share an understanding of the reforms needed to address the economic crisis, although they differ on the details of how reforms should be carried out. Ultimately, only the Government of Tunisia can ensure reforms are implemented.

Question. How does Tunisia implement IMF reforms and prevent instability and unrest?

Answer. Reforms are critical to Tunisia's political and economic stability. President Saied has a crucial role to play in explaining to the public his economic reform priorities as well as their urgency and necessity. He will also need to help Tunisians understand his government's plans to mitigate the impact of reforms on vulnerable citizens. If confirmed, in collaboration with our G7 partners, I would encourage President Saied to increase his communication with the Tunisian people about the importance of implementing proposed reforms.

Chinese Influence

Question. What are the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) goals in Tunisia?

Answer. The People's Republic of China (PRC) has increased efforts in recent years to deepen ties with Tunisia. PRC companies are active in the technology and infrastructure sectors. If confirmed, I would highlight the risks associated with PRC engagement that could impact Tunisia's security and sovereignty, as well as U.S. interests.

Question. Given Tunisia's strategic location, how does the United States plan to compete with China—particularly given cuts to U.S. assistance?

Answer. Increased engagement with the Tunisian people, civil society, and government officials will be vital to mitigate the influence of the PRC Government. The United States will continue to advance our strategic interests in the region through diplomatic engagement, public outreach, and judicious use of foreign assistance and other funding. We will also coordinate with like-minded partners to put forward alternatives to PRC offerings of concern. We will at times need to collaborate with Tunisian Government agencies and entities to counter PRC messaging, influence,

and funding. This is particularly important given the dominance of state-owned monopolies in a number of key sectors, including all major critical infrastructure.

Question. How do you strike the appropriate balance between pushing Tunisia to adopt democratic reforms and competing with China’s ‘no strings attached’ approach?

Answer. The PRC has sought to expand its influence where countries face significant economic challenges and/or lack deliberative democratic processes. If confirmed, I would highlight those democratic values—the free exchange of ideas, respect for the rule of law, transparency, and accountability—would best position Tunisia to safeguard its security, sovereignty, and future prosperity against unwanted outside influence.

Ukraine Invasion and Food Insecurity

Question. Tunisia is among the most vulnerable countries, relying on Ukraine and Russia for 56 percent of its annual wheat imports. Many on the Tunisian “street” have argued that food insecurity will set conditions for a potential “revolution” on your watch.

- What are the most effective methods to address Tunisia’s food security and mitigate the impacts of Russian aggression in Ukraine?

Answer. Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has worsened inflation and increased food insecurity everywhere, so the international community must redouble diplomatic pressure on Russia to end Putin’s war of choice. If confirmed, I would focus on working with international partners to mitigate the impact of Russia’s aggression on food security in Tunisia and would encourage Tunisian efforts to increase domestic food production and implement economic reforms. I would speak out, publicly and privately, against any Russian misinformation and disinformation that Putin and his acts of aggression against Ukraine are responsible for energy price increases and food insecurity in Tunisia.

Abraham Accords and Normalization with Israel

Question. What are the prospects and associated benefits/pitfalls for Tunisian normalization with Israel?

Answer. The normalization of relations with Israel, including through the historic Abraham Accords, has led to greater peace and security in the region and deepened opportunities for expanded economic growth and cooperation. Administration officials regularly discuss with our partners in the region the benefits of improved regional cooperation, including with Israel, and I would plan to do so with Tunisian officials and citizens, as well, if confirmed.

Question. With the constitutional referendum placing consolidated power in President Saied’s hands, the slide towards authoritarianism fails to provide institutional guarantees for human rights. This has left many human rights groups concerned over the undermining of the judicial system and other post-revolutionary gains.

- What is your assessment of the current situation on democratic backsliding in Tunisia and the possible implications on human rights in the country?

Answer. The Tunisian people have experienced an alarming erosion of democratic norms over the past year. Since July 25, 2021, the suspension of constitutional governance, consolidation of executive power, and weakening of independent institutions have raised deep questions about Tunisia’s democratic path, both in Tunisia and internationally. Together with international partners, we have urged an inclusive democratic reform process, emphasized continued protection of fundamental freedoms, and insisted on respect for judicial independence, as well as the rule of law. The U.S.-Tunisia bilateral relationship is strongest when there is a shared commitment to democratic values, human rights, and fundamental freedoms.

Question. If confirmed, how would you work with the host government to bolster human rights amid backsliding?

Answer. If confirmed, I would continue to engage with the Tunisian Government at the highest levels to advocate for democratic institutions. In tandem with international partners, the administration will continue to urge the Government to return to democratic governance—including separation of powers via a functioning legislature and an independent judiciary—by conducting reforms in a transparent and inclusive way.

Question. The State Department’s 2021 Human Rights Report on Tunisia noted significant human abuses of torture by government agents, arbitrary arrests, mili-

tary prosecution of civilian cases, restrictions of freedoms of expression, corruption, and violent threats and criminalization against LGBTQI+ communities.

- If confirmed, what actions with civil society groups and the host government would you take to address these violations?

Answer. If confirmed, I will continue to prioritize programming that reinforces rule of law, protects human rights, and empowers civil society. The administration has shifted our planned activities to bolster civil society oversight of the judiciary and law enforcement, increase access to justice, promote judicial independence, and strengthen accountability mechanisms. The Department requires vetting for Tunisian military and law enforcement personnel and units and conducts end use monitoring of transferred equipment.

Question. In the State Department's 2022 Trafficking in Persons Report, Tunisia remained on Tier 2, showing some efforts to improve on meeting minimum requirements to eliminate trafficking but continued to stymie progress in a few key areas. The Government failed to appropriately identify victims and traffickers, and lacked training to sufficiently understand and address trafficking cases, leading to some victims being penalized for acts traffickers compelled them to commit.

- If confirmed, how will you work with Tunisian officials to increase their efficiency at identification of trafficking victims and traffickers?

Answer. Although the Government of Tunisia demonstrated significant and increasing efforts to combat human trafficking in 2022, including by convicting sex and labor traffickers for the first time in three years and significantly increasing investigations and prosecutions of traffickers, more can be done. If confirmed, I will continue to urge the Government to hold sex and labor traffickers criminally accountable using Tunisia's 2016 anti-trafficking law, which does meet international standards.

Question. If confirmed, what concrete steps could you take in your mission and with the host government to assist Tunisia to better meet the minimum standards and promote anti-trafficking work?

Answer. If confirmed, I will work closely with the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons (TIP Office) to continue to implement anti-trafficking programming, in addition to engaging with the Government to make progress on the priority recommendations noted in the 2022 Trafficking in Persons Report in order to meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking. I would support the TIP Office's goal of measurably reducing human trafficking by building the capacity of government and justice sector officials to investigate and prosecute trafficking cases, as well as more effectively identify and protect trafficking victims through adequate care and legal representation.

Question. Previously, Tunisia was a country with Islam as its official religion, and a 99 percent Sunni Muslim majority. In the new constitution, Tunisia is no longer an Islamic State.

- What is your assessment of the implications for religious minorities following the removal of Islam as the country's religion from Article I of the constitution?

Answer. It remains too early to tell what the implications for religious minorities will be following the removal from the constitution of the mention of Islam as the religion of the state. The constitution still notes that Tunisia is part of the Islamic community. If confirmed, I would continue to speak out against laws and policies that impede or threaten freedom of religion and would continue to stress with the Government the need to respect religious freedom for all, including members of Tunisia's religious minority groups.

Question. Prior to referendum, the 2021 International Religious Freedom report from the State Department notes that some religious minorities feel societal pressure to hide their beliefs and are not given full recognition of their religious rights. If confirmed, what actions would you take with the Tunisian Government to improve recognition of religious freedoms for all religions?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to working with others in the Department, including the Office of International Religious Freedom, to advance freedom of religion for all people, including members of religious minority groups. I would also hold regular meetings and discussions with members of religious minority and majority communities throughout the country and lead the mission in highlighting the importance of protecting members of religious minority groups and promoting interfaith dialogue.

Question. The Office of Multilateral Strategy and Personnel (MSP) in the State Department's bureau of International Organizations is leading a whole-of-government effort to identify, recruit, and install qualified, independent personnel at the U.N., including in elections for specialized bodies like the International Telecommunications Union (ITU). There is an American candidate, Doreen Bogdan-Martin, who if elected would be the first American and first woman to lead the ITU. She is in a tough race that will require early, consistent engagement across capitals and within the U.N. member states.

- If confirmed, do you commit to démarche the Tunisian Government and any other counterparts necessary to encourage their support of Ms. Bogdan-Martin?

Answer. Yes.

Question. If confirmed, how can you work with the International Organizations (IO) bureau and other stakeholders to identify, recruit, and install qualified Americans in positions like the Junior Program Officer (JPO) program at the U.N.?

Answer. The Junior Professional Officer program is one of the key opportunities offered by the U.N. to encourage young professionals interested in serving in international organizations, and it provides them with hands-on experience across various U.N. agencies. If confirmed, I will work with the IO Bureau to identify qualified and diverse candidates for the JPO program.

Question. Tunisia has one of the lowest rates of voting coincidence with the U.S. in the U.N. General Assembly and in the Security Council.

- What is your assessment of this issue?

Answer. Tunisia supported two significant U.N. votes on Ukraine. If confirmed, I would continue to lobby Tunisia in support of other U.S. policy priorities at the U.N.

Question. If confirmed, what concrete actions can you take to engage with the [Tunisians] on anticipated votes in the U.N. system that would increase their voting coincidence with the U.S.?

Answer. Tunisia voted in favor of U.S.-sponsored U.N. General Assembly resolutions on Ukraine on March 25 (humanitarian resolution) and March 2 (resolution condemning Russia's invasion). If confirmed, I will continue to lobby Tunisia to support U.S. policy priorities at the U.N.

STATE DEPARTMENT MANAGEMENT AND PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

Question. Many U.S. missions have been under enormous stress over the last few years, in large part due to COVID.

- What is your understanding of morale throughout Mission Tunis?

Answer. Mission Tunis, including the co-located Libya External Office, includes a high number of families and has strong morale, in part because Mission Tunis offers a number of job opportunities for qualified family members. The biggest issue affecting our locally employed staff's morale is wages. Their salaries remain roughly 65 percent of people doing comparable work in the local labor market and are not keeping up with inflation. The Embassy has established a Mission-wide wage working group to analyze wage and inflation trends. If confirmed, I would work diligently to ensure that mission moral remains high for all employees, in part by ensuring that all colleagues feel valued, supported, and respected.

Question. How do you intend to improve morale at Mission Tunis?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to working closely with my leadership team to promote an environment that recruits for diversity and hires for merit, while also promoting inclusion on a daily basis. I would also continue focusing on the professional development of all employees and find creative ways to foster a good work-life balance despite high work demands. I am also committed to working closely with our locally employed staff to understand their concerns regarding their wages and would advocate for them where appropriate to ensure Mission Tunis can retain and continue to recruit strong talent.

Question. How do you intend to create a unified mission and vision at Mission Tunis?

Answer. If confirmed, I would meet early and regularly with colleagues throughout the Mission, and work with my interagency team to formulate, disseminate, and implement our unified mission vision.

Question. Management is a key responsibility for chiefs of mission. How would you describe your management style?

Answer. I rely on an inclusive management vision, inviting colleagues of all backgrounds to share ideas and concerns as we formulate ways to advance U.S. interests. Once our vision is set, I consult regularly with people from across the organization to ensure they have the support and tools they need to fulfill their roles, and when they do not, I direct or advocate for change.

Question. Do you believe it is ever acceptable or constructive to berate subordinates, either in public or private?

Answer. No. It is never acceptable to berate subordinates.

Question. How do you envision your leadership relationship with your deputy chief of mission?

Answer. I would entrust my deputy chief of mission (DCM) with being my “alter ego,” able to step in and lead any aspect of the mission at a moment’s notice. To empower the DCM to be successful in that role, I would ensure that they are privy to all appropriate information and included in all substantial decisions before they are made. I would also ensure that they have a public role and meaningful relationships with government officials to complement my efforts or stand in for me as needed.

Question. If confirmed, what leadership responsibilities do you intend to entrust to your deputy chief of mission?

Answer. In addition to the responsibilities described above, I would entrust my DCM with mentoring and guiding our more junior colleagues, playing the role of chief of staff for agency and section heads, presiding over the emergency action and family advocacy committees, and working closely with our Community Liaison Officer and others to ensure high mission morale.

Question. In order to create and continue employee excellence at the Department, accurate and direct employee evaluation reports (EERs) for Foreign Service Officers are imperative, though often lacking.

- Do you believe that it is important to provide employees with accurate, constructive feedback on their performances in order to encourage improvement and reward those who most succeeded in their roles?

Answer. I firmly believe that providing employees with timely, accurate and constructive feedback is not only important but a key responsibility of all managers to ensure we can address any potential issues before they turn into serious problems. It is also a key way of recognizing and encouraging high performing employees and to inspire others to do the same. For our locally employed staff, I am very happy that Embassy Tunis will be one of the first posts in the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs to implement Merit Based Compensation which I believe can be an effective tool to provide accurate and constructive feedback coupled with training plans focused on professional development.

Question. If confirmed, would you support and encourage clear, accurate, and direct feedback to employees in order to improve performance and reward high achievers?

Answer. Yes.

Question. It is imperative that U.S. diplomats get outside of posts abroad to meet with local actors, including host government officials, non-government organizations, and fellow foreign diplomats stationed in Tunisia.

- T1 In your opinion, do U.S. diplomats get outside of our embassy walls enough to accomplish fully their missions?

Answer. U.S. diplomats are consistently in the field with grantees, implementing partners, and beneficiaries of economic assistance and public diplomacy programs, as well as local politicians, religious leaders, civil society activists, and businesspeople. We conduct robust outreach for educational, cultural, and exchange initiatives, as well as to correct the record of misinformation about the United States. If confirmed, I would continue these activities and seek ways to expand them, not just for myself but for all my colleagues.

Question. How do you intend to improve the ability of U.S. diplomats to better access all local populations?

Answer. Host country engagement is a critical component of diplomacy. If confirmed, I will work closely with my Regional Security Office to ensure that our diplomats are able to safely accomplish our mission. Mission Tunis has a range of projects funded by the U.S. Government that are creating new job opportunities and providing relief to small businesses hardest hit by COVID. Those are important to

highlight, celebrate, and build upon. There are also 73 American companies operating in Tunisia. If confirmed, I would encourage diplomats to visit these sites and partners to gain a deeper understanding of the economic needs facing average Tunisians and to highlight the economic investments that the United States is making in support of the people of both our countries.

Question. Public diplomacy is an important aspect of U.S. foreign policy efforts. What is the public diplomacy environment like in Tunisia?

Answer. Most Tunisians are enthusiastic consumers of American culture, so there is a great appetite for our educational, cultural and exchange programs. We have been able to reach our audience both in person and through a highly engaged social media environment. Many young Tunisians prefer to learn English and eagerly participate in our English language programs. The opportunities for our public engagement, especially in underserved areas outside of the large cities, are nearly endless. Our public diplomacy programs are making a real difference in the quality of life for thousands of young Tunisians through enhanced educational opportunities and skills development.

If confirmed, I would both participate in and strongly encourage outreach throughout Tunisia, particularly to historically underserved regions and communities, in order to connect with a diverse range of Tunisian voices and U.S. voices. Public diplomacy is an important aspect of U.S. foreign policy efforts.

Question. What public diplomacy challenges do U.S. diplomats face there?

Answer. Tunisia is marked by a sometimes-slow bureaucracy, and security restrictions that preclude U.S. diplomats, some of our visiting experts, and cultural performers from traveling to some parts of the country. The growing but limited use of English can also present challenges. Russian and PRC misinformation and disinformation also pose challenges.

Question. How do you balance the importance of Main State versus the in-country mission when it comes to tailoring public diplomacy messages for foreign audiences?

Answer. Main State provides guidance and support to our public diplomacy colleagues at Embassy Tunis for all our programs. The Public Affairs Section, on the other hand, provides insights on in-country developments, which helps them to appropriately match public diplomacy resources and programs with mission goals. This balance is crucial to achieving our policy objectives.

Question. “Anomalous health incidents,” commonly referred to as “Havana Syndrome,” have been debilitating and sidelining U.S. diplomats around the world for years. They have caused serious, negative consequences for U.S. diplomacy, yet many believe that the Department is not doing enough to care for, protect, and communicate to its personnel.

- If confirmed, do you commit to taking this threat seriously?

Answer. Yes. If confirmed, I would have no higher priority than the security and safety of Americans in Tunisia. I will commit to taking all anomalous health incident reports seriously and to investigate them in a transparent manner.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to talking as openly as you can to Mission Tunis personnel?

Answer. Yes.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED
TO JOEY R. HOOD BY SENATOR MARCO RUBIO

Question. Over the last several years, Tunisia and the People’s Republic of China (PRC) have signed a series of agreements to develop closer economic, cultural, and technology ties. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is filling a vacuum left by the lack of investment from Europe, the United States, and the Gulf States, who have all prioritized other countries.

- Is the CCP a threat to the United States?

Answer. We are proud to be Tunisia’s security partner of choice and we continue to share deep economic and cultural ties with Tunisia. If confirmed, I would seek to maintain those relationships, in part by highlighting the risks associated with PRC engagement that could weaken Tunisia’s security and sovereignty, and damage U.S. interests. Increased engagement with the Tunisian people, civil society, and

government officials will be vital to mitigate concerning PRC efforts to influence Tunisia.

Question. Does growing CCP influence in Tunisia threaten U.S. interests?

Answer. The PRC has increased efforts in recent years to deepen ties with Tunisia. PRC companies are active in the technology and infrastructure sectors. If confirmed, I would seek to expand our efforts to promote a fair and equitable business climate for the benefit of U.S. investors and the security of our allies and partners. I would also strive to engage and educate decision makers in the Tunisian public and private sectors on the implications of PRC engagement in key areas such as smart cities and 5G technology.

Question. If confirmed, what will you do to further encourage stronger ties between Tunisia, the United States, and its allies?

Answer. The United States and Tunisia share deep economic, cultural, and military ties. If confirmed, I would promote a vision of inclusive, open economic growth, and stronger ties with U.S. companies. I would seek every opportunity to engage Tunisian civil society and urge the Government to see civil society as a partner in advancing democratic principles, public health, education, and human rights. If confirmed, I would help strengthen our robust security partnership for the benefit of both the United States and Tunisia. In tandem with international partners, I would continue to publicly and privately advocate for a swift return to democratic governance.

Question. What are the prospects of incorporating Tunisia into the Abraham Accords?

Answer. The normalization of relations with Israel, including through the historic Abraham Accords, has led to greater peace and security in the region, and has deepened opportunities for expanded economic growth and cooperation. Administration officials regularly discuss the benefits of improved regional cooperation, including with Israel, with our partners in the region, and I would seek every opportunity to do so with Tunisian officials and citizens.

Question. Over the last year, President Kais Saied has dismantled the hard-fought gains of Tunisia's Arab spring. From dissolving the parliament to pushing through constitutional reforms to strengthen his power, President Saied is increasingly emulating his authoritarian predecessors. What is your assessment of the erosion of Tunisian democracy?

Answer. The Tunisian people have experienced an alarming erosion of democratic norms over the past year. Since July 25, 2021, the suspension of constitutional governance, consolidation of executive power, and weakening of independent institutions have raised deep questions about Tunisia's democratic path, both in Tunisia and internationally. Together with international partners, the administration has urged an inclusive democratic reform process, emphasized continued protection of fundamental freedoms, and insisted on respect for judicial independence and the rule of law. The U.S.-Tunisia bilateral relationship is strongest when there is a shared commitment to democratic values, human rights, and fundamental freedoms.

Question. Does this erosion of democracy present an opening for the CCP to increase its influence in Tunisia and North Africa?

Answer. The PRC has increased efforts in recent years to deepen ties with Tunisia. In other contexts, the PRC has sought to expand its influence where countries face significant economic challenges or lack deliberative democratic processes. Increased engagement with the Tunisian people, civil society, and government officials will be vital to mitigate PRC influence of concern.

Question. If confirmed, what will you do to reverse this erosion?

Answer. The United States and international partners continue to call for an inclusive and transparent dialogue on Tunisia's political future. We acknowledge the concerns of many Tunisians regarding the lack of such a process, as well as the erosion of democratic institutions that could threaten Tunisia's democracy and respect for human rights. If confirmed, I would encourage Tunisia's leaders to forge an inclusive and accountable government that preserves the space for free debate and dissent, promotes long-term economic prosperity, and establishes the checks and balances critical to the health of all democracies. I would also seek every opportunity to engage Tunisian civil society and urge the Government to see civil society as a partner.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED
TO JOEY R. HOOD BY SENATOR TODD YOUNG

Question. Noting Tunisia's support for U.N. resolutions on the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine, how do you plan to urge Tunisia to maintain solidarity with the Ukrainian people, as well as mitigate the negative impact of Russia's invasion on international food security?

Answer. Tunisia imports over half of its wheat from the Black Sea region. The Russian attack against Ukraine has worsened inflation and increased food insecurity, including in Tunisia. We must all redouble diplomatic pressure on Russia to end this invasion. If confirmed, I would focus on working with international partners to mitigate the impact of Russia's aggression on food security in Tunisia and would encourage Tunisian efforts to increase domestic food production. I would also speak out, publicly and privately, against any Russian misinformation to make sure people in Tunisia understand that Putin and his acts of aggression against Ukraine are responsible for energy price increases and food insecurity.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO JOEY R. HOOD BY SENATOR TED CRUZ

Question. On April 16, 2022 you sent an e-mail to NEA saying "over the past several months, a number of people have reported comments that certain candidates could not be hired because straight white men, they are not of the 'right' religion." On July 26, State Dept. Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer Abercrombie-Winstanley testified that she had never seen or cleared that email. Chairman Menendez stated immediately after her testimony that "if there is an attribution then that person should come forward and it should be fully investigated what he has to say."

- Please clarify the circumstances surrounding you sending that email.
- Please list all State Department officials who cleared that email and/or the guidance in that email.
- How many comments of that nature were reported to you?
- For each comment that was conveyed to you, please describe it.
- For each comment that was conveyed to you, who made those comments?
- For each comment that was conveyed to you, when were they made?
- Please provide all documents and materials related to the comments, including emails, memos, cables, notes, decision memos, briefing papers, instructions, etc. These should include any documents or materials related to the comments themselves, as well as to the drafting, clearing, and publishing of the email.
- Regarding the comment that people could not be hired because they are not of the 'right' religion: what religion was being referenced?
- Sen. Menendez called on the author of that email to come forward and have the circumstances surrounding the email fully investigated. Why have you not come forward?

Answer. The functions and duties of a Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary at the Department of State routinely include carrying out a variety of managerial roles, including recruitment of personnel from inside the Department to fill the Bureau's domestic and overseas positions. That personnel role includes ensuring that all Bureau personnel are aware that all personnel actions are taken in compliance with applicable rules and regulations, including Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) laws that prohibit employment discrimination on the basis of (in relevant part) race, sex, religion, and disability. As Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, I was reminding our Bureau colleagues to follow EEO laws during the upcoming Foreign Service assignment season, as is done each year during assignment cycles. The email represented a restatement of longstanding Department policies and reflected review by the NEA front office and Department officials responsible for diversity, equity, and inclusion policy.

All of the hearsay discussions mentioned in the notice e-mail came to my attention during the approximate time period of January to April 2022 in the prelude to assignment season. Because these were all multiple hearsay examples of "water cooler chatter," there was not a basis for specific action and the appropriate course was to remind the Bureau to adhere to EEO laws, as I did in the email, using these

hearsay comments as illustrative examples of colloquial things colleagues may have heard but cannot be a factor in our assignments process

Question. On January 7, 2022, the State Department issued a cable with guidance for overseas engagement with Iranian opposition groups. The guidance limited and, in many cases, prohibited officials from meeting with any such groups, and it described several specific ones. The guidance was reversed within a week. You are the official who approved the cable.

- Please clarify the circumstances surrounding you approving that cable. Why did you approve it?

Answer. When I reviewed that cable, it had already been reviewed by both career and political appointee professionals in the office of the Special Envoy for Iran, which indicated that the guidance in the cable was consistent with the then-Special Envoy's policy on Iran. My review of the cable, as Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for NEA, was part of an institutional process to ensure coordination and deconfliction on issues not covered by the Special Envoy. My review did not reveal anything in other areas of USG policy that prohibited the content or intent of the cable.

Question. Do you believe that the cable and guidance accurately reflected the Trump administration's policy?

- If so, please explain why you believe it was reversed within a week.

Answer. For decades, including during the Trump administration, the Department has managed and tracked contact between U.S. personnel, Iranian officials, and Iranian opposition groups. I understand the initial cable providing guidance on contact between U.S. personnel and Iranian opposition groups went into unnecessary detail about these groups and buried the main message, which was made explicit in the cable that superseded it the following week. That message stated that standing with the Iranian people was a cornerstone of the Trump administration's policy, and U.S. diplomats should engage actively with the Iranian diaspora but contact headquarters for specific guidance before engaging with representatives of opposition groups, since not all of them share objectives and interests that align with U.S. policy.

Question. Please list all State Department officials who cleared that cable and/or the guidance in that cable.

Answer. Both career and political officials in all relevant offices of the Department reviewed the cable, including the Secretary's Iran Action Group (which at that time included the Special Envoy for Iran), the Bureau of Intelligence and Research, the Office of the Legal Advisor, the Office of the Under Secretary for Political Affairs, the Office of the Deputy Secretary of State, the Secretary's Policy Planning Staff, the Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, the Counter Terrorism Bureau, the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs, the Bureau of European Affairs, the Bureau of African Affairs, and the Bureau of East Asia and Pacific Affairs.

Question. The cable stated that engagement with opposition groups would be counterproductive to pressuring Iran into a comprehensive deal with Iran. Do you still agree with this assessment?

Answer. I believe that the second cable stated administration policy much more clearly than the first one did: not all Iranian opposition groups' interests and priorities align with U.S. policy priorities. I agree with that assessment.

Question. Do you believe that American overseas posts should limit their engagement with Iranian opposition groups?

Answer. I am a firm believer in outreach to the Iranian people, both inside and outside Iran, which is why I led efforts in 2012 to create the first U.S. Government website dedicated to engaging with them. Recognizing the danger efforts like this represented to their rule, the regime blocked the site the day after it was launched and intensified its crackdown on Internet freedom. I believe that U.S. diplomats should use good judgment and seek guidance from the Department in engaging with representatives of Iranian opposition groups with which Department officials are not already in regular contact.

Question. In early 2021 the State Department distributed internal guidance through emails about how to refer to the normalization between Israel and other countries. In the emails, staffers were instructed that the State Dept. would no longer refer to the normalization as the "Abraham Accords," and the use of "normalization agreements" instead was indicated, according to a June 4 report by the

Washington Free Beacon. You told me that in our interview that you do not remember any memo relating to that guidance.

- Did you know the guidance was being issued?

Answer. No. I do not recall seeing such guidance.

Question. Did you clear any such guidance, as described in the emails revealed by the *Washington Free Beacon*?

Answer. I do not recall clearing any such guidance.

Question. Do you agree that State Department officials should not use the phrase “Abraham Accords?”

Answer. No. I believe that Department officials should celebrate the historic achievement represented by the Abraham Accords, which is why I fully supported prominent public statements by administration officials on the one-year anniversary of their signing. In addition, I worked diligently to help the Accords bear fruit for the United States, our partner Israel, and the United Arab Emirates by helping to lead efforts within the Department to establish the Israel-India-United States-United Arab Emirates grouping (I2U2) and recommending that senior officials support the initiative. Secretary Blinken participated in an inaugural meeting of the I2U2 foreign ministers in October 2021, and on July 14, President Biden participated in an I2U2 summit meeting to announce major joint investment projects. In their joint statement, the leaders said, “We reaffirm our support for the Abraham Accords and other peace and normalization arrangements with Israel. We welcome the economic opportunities that flow from these historic developments.” I also strongly supported senior Department officials engaging in the U.S.-Israel-UAE Religious Co-Existence Working Group, including approving the following quote from an Under Secretary of State for the joint statement: “The Abraham Accords represent one of the most significant strategic shifts over my three decades of diplomacy in this region and bring clear-cut benefits not just to the countries and peoples concerned, but to the rest of the world as well.”

Question. Please transmit copies of those emails. The *Washington Free Beacon* reviewed at least two of them.

Answer. I do not recall seeing any such emails and any such e-mails are records of the State Department, which I do not control.

Question. Please transmit any other internal guidance—emails, memos, cables, notes, decision memos, briefing papers, instructions, etc.—that instructed staffers not to use the phrase “Abraham Accords.”

Answer. I do not recall seeing any such internal guidance and any such documents are records of the State Department, which I do not control.

* * *

FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS—NUMBER 1

Question. In the QFRs submitted pursuant to your nomination, I asked you about guidance distributed within the State Department in early 2021 which instructed staffers to no longer refer to the Abraham Accords as “Abraham Accords,” but instead to call them “normalization agreements.” The existence of the guidance was revealed by the *Washington Free Beacon* (*WFB*) in a June 4 article. I asked you whether you cleared that guidance, and asked that you transmit copies of that or any other “internal guidance . . . that instructed staffers not to use the phrase ‘Abraham Accords.’” You repeatedly stated that you don’t recall clearing or seeing any such guidance.

On June 27, 2021 you and other senior administration officials held a briefing for journalists in Rome, Italy. Secretary Blinken and Israeli PM Yair Lapid had just met. State Department Spokesperson Ned Price also participated in that briefing. The briefing was held on deep background. The *WFB* article about the “Abraham Accords” guidance had been published earlier that month. In that briefing, you told journalists that you had been involved in clearing the guidance.

- Do you recall saying that or anything similar in the briefing, and if not do you recall discussing the guidance at all in the briefing?

Answer. I do not recall discussing any Department guidance in that briefing, but I recall responding to questions on this matter by saying effectively to “blame the misunderstanding on me as the Acting Assistant Secretary for the Near Eastern Affairs Bureau.” In doing so, I sought to put an end to media speculation that there

had been such guidance and instead to explain that there had been working-level discussion about how to focus on widening and deepening not just the historic Abraham Accords, but also the peace treaties, and other agreements between our partner Israel and its neighbors, as well as Israel and non-Muslim majority countries. At no time did the Secretary stop referring to the Abraham Accords as “the Abraham Accords,” and the Department, with the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, released statements celebrating their one-year anniversary shortly after that briefing, referring to them as the Abraham Accords. The Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs also organized remarks and an event the Secretary co-hosted with then-Foreign Minister Yair Lapid (a virtual ministerial) in honor of the Abraham Accords’ first anniversary.

Question. Hady Amr, who currently serves as the Special Representative for Palestinian Affairs within the Department’s Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, has consistently been involved in producing press guidance relating to Israel. For example, on July 6 and 7, he generated guidance in response to a story published in the *WFB* alleging that the State Department had misled Congress about Palestinian terrorism. Mr. Amr was involved in generating that guidance starting July 6 after the story was flagged for him by Spokesperson Price and he cleared that guidance on July 7 for NEA/FO, the Bureau’s front office. The guidance was then collected and distributed. The email thread was titled “GC on response to *Free Beacon* Article on Pal Congressional Report and Response to question on Abraham Fund.”

- Please describe any role played by Mr. Amr in also generating the early 2021 guidance instructing staffers not to use the phrase “Abraham Accords” but to use “normalization agreements” instead.

Answer. I do not recall any guidance generated by Mr. Amr of this nature.

Question. Did you clear any such guidance, as described in the emails revealed by the *Washington Free Beacon* and as you discussed with journalists on June 27 in Rome?

Answer. I do not recall clearing any such guidance and I have provided my recollection of the June 27 press backgrounder in Rome on this issue.

Question. Are you aware of anyone else at the State Department who cleared such guidance?

Answer. I am not aware of anyone else at the Department who cleared any such guidance.

Question. In the QFRs submitted pursuant to your nomination, I asked you to list all State Department officials who cleared the email that you sent on April 16, 2022, in which you stated that a number of people had reported comments that certain candidates could not be hired because of race, gender, and religious considerations. I noted that State Dept. Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer Abercrombie-Winstanley separately testified that she had never seen or cleared that email. I also asked you “Regarding the comment that people could not be hired because they are not of the ‘right’ religion: what religion was being referenced?” In your answer you did [not] clarify any aspect of these circumstances or questions.

- Did you report or refer any of the comments described in your April 16, 2022 to the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, or discuss any of those comments with anyone in the Office of Diversity and Inclusion? If so, which officials? If not, why not?

Answer. I reported, referred, and discussed the relevant comments with the relevant offices of the Department, which included the Office of Diversity and Inclusion.

Question. Regarding the comment that people could not be hired because they are not of the ‘right’ religion: what religion was being referenced?

Answer. The Department does not take into account a person’s religious faith in hiring decisions. This comment came in the context of someone wondering whether a non-Muslim could prove as effective as a Muslim engaging on issues related to Muslim-majority countries. No hiring decision was made on the basis of this comment.

FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS—NUMBER 2

Question. In the QFRs submitted pursuant to your nomination, and again in follow up questions, I asked you about guidance distributed within the State Department in early 2021 which instructed staffers to no longer refer to the Abraham Accords as “Abraham Accords,” but instead to call them “normalization agreements.” In follow up questions, I asked you about a briefing for journalists that took place on June 27 in which you participated, and specifically about any comments you made related to that early 2021 “Abraham Accords” guidance. You said that you told reporters “effectively to ‘blame the misunderstanding on [you] as the Acting Assistant Secretary for the Near Eastern Affairs Bureau.’” I also asked you about any role played by then- Deputy Assistant Secretary (DAS) for Israel and Palestinian Affairs Hady Amr in generating or clearing the guidance about not using “Abraham Accords.” You said you did “not recall any guidance generated by Mr. Amr of this nature.”

On Feb 4, 2021 Rachel Rubin, the press officer for Israel and Palestinian Affairs in the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs (NEA), emailed Meghan Dean, another press officer, saying “we are no longer using ‘Abraham Accords’ to refer to the normalization of relations between Israel and other countries.” The email instructed staffers that further language would be sent when the language was “cleared” and that no references should be made to Abraham Accords in the meantime. Hady Amr was then DAS for Israel and Palestinian Affairs. The email thread was about Mr. Amr’s calls to counterparts and public affairs guidance about those calls.

- Were you aware of this specific email or the instructions referenced in the email?

Answer. No.

Question. Did you clear this specific email or the instructions referenced in the email?

Answer. I do not recall clearing this specific email or the instructions referenced in them.

Question. The email instructed staffers to wait for new language that would not include “Abraham Accords.” Did you clear such new language on or after Feb 4, i.e. not the guidance but new language written in line with that guidance?

Answer. I do not recall clearing new language on or after February 4. I recall a number of working-level conversations, stretching back into the Trump administration, about how to refer to Israel’s past and potential future agreements with its Arab neighbors in a way that would maximize the chances of deepening existing agreements and reaching new agreements. In those conversations, it was noted that the Kingdom of Morocco declined to join the Abraham Accords, pursuing instead an agreement under its own terms, and that other governments wanted their treaties with Israel recognized in public as such. There was broad consensus at the working level that other Arab countries seeking to establish diplomatic relations with our partner Israel would likely do so not by joining the Abraham Accords, but by forging their own understandings. All of these factors gave rise to working-level discussions about how to refer to present and future agreements in the most inclusive fashion possible, but they did not, to my knowledge, result in a written policy not to refer to Israel’s agreements with the UAE and Bahrain as the “Abraham Accords.” This is why many U.S. officials, including our Chargés d’Affaires in Abu Dhabi, Manama, and Jerusalem, as well as the Secretary of State and others, never stopped using the term in public discourse, and it is also why I cleared on the concept proposal and the remarks used when the Secretary hosted a ministerial and issued statements celebrating the one-year anniversary of the Abraham Accords. I also supported the Bureau’s work to take advantage of the historic nature of the Abraham Accords to foster investment agreements between the Abraham Accords signatories and India.

Question. These instructions reversed a core priority of the previous administration. They were generated in reference to calls made by Mr. Amr, in a policy area overseen by Mr. Amr, and sent by the press staffer responsible for public affairs in that policy.

- In your experience in NEA, what would be the role of the DAS of the relevant office in generating such instructions?

Answer. In general, the bureau’s press officers draft language that is then cleared by a desk officer, office director and/or the DAS, among others.

Question. In your experience in NEA, what would be the role of the DAS of the relevant office in clearing such instructions?

Answer. In general, press guidance is cleared by a desk officer, office director, or DAS.

Question. Would be it unusual for those instructions to be generated without input from that DAS?

Answer. No.

Question. Would be it unusual for those instructions to be distributed without being cleared by that DAS?

Answer. No.

Question. Would it be unusual for those instructions to be generated without input from the subject of the guidance, i.e. Mr. Amr?

Answer. No.

Question. Would it be unusual for those instructions to be distributed without input from the subject of the guidance, i.e. Mr. Amr?

Answer. No.

Question. Please describe any role played by Mr. Amr in formulating these instructions or having them distributed, including asking for them to be generated or clearing them.

Answer. I am not aware of any role played by Mr. Amr in formulating, generating, or clearing these instructions or having them distributed.

Question. In the QFRs submitted pursuant to your nomination, and again in follow up questions, I asked you about an email that you sent on April 16, 2022, in which you stated that a number of people had reported comments that certain candidates could not be hired because of race, gender, and religious considerations. I noted that State Dept. Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer Abercrombie-Winstanley separately testified that she had never seen or cleared that email. In your response to follow up questions, you said that you “reported, referred, and discussed the relevant comments with the relevant offices of the Department, which included the Office of Diversity and Inclusion.”

- Did you ever report, refer, or discuss these comments with Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer Abercrombie-Winstanley? If so, please describe the nature of the discussion, if not, why not?

Answer. I reported these general comments and sentiments to Ambassador Abercrombie-Winstanley, and discussed that hiring decisions should never be made on the basis of gender, race, religion, and disability. I sent that guidance email in order to stress that such comments and sentiments do not comport with Department policy, and would be prohibited if part of a hiring decision. I am not aware of any hiring decisions made on the basis of these comments.

Question. Are you aware of anyone else who reported, referred, or discussed these comments with Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer Abercrombie-Winstanley?

Answer. No.

Question. Do you consider the comments to have been sufficiently acute that they should have been elevated to Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer Abercrombie-Winstanley?

Answer. Yes, as a policy matter, which is why I sought the Ambassador’s input, though the CDIO has no operational role in the day-to-day EEO law administration.

* * *

FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS—NUMBER 3

Question. In the QFRs submitted pursuant to your nomination, and again in follow up questions, I asked about guidance distributed within the State Department in early 2021 which instructed staffers to no longer refer to the Abraham Accords as “Abraham Accords,” but instead to call them “normalization agreements.” The guidance was distributed on Feb 4 in an email between press staffers with the instruction “we are no longer using ‘Abraham Accords’ to refer to the normalization of relations between Israel and other countries.”

On June 27 you told reporters in Rome, Italy “effectively to ‘blame the misunderstanding on [you] as the Acting Assistant Secretary for the Near Eastern Affairs Bureau.’” Nevertheless you have said that you were not aware of the Feb 4 email or the instructions to use “normalization agreements” instead of “Abraham Accords.” I am seeking to clarify the degree to which you knew about the existence of this policy and any actions you took regarding it, or whether the policy had been set from within your bureau and for the State Department without your knowledge.

On April 1, 2021, Spokesperson Ned Price told reporters that he was capable of saying the words “Abraham Accords” but that the State Department “call[s] them normalization agreements.” The full exchange was extensive and received broad coverage—

QUESTION: Okay. And then just as an aside, what does this—what do you call these agreements between—

MR. PRICE: They’re normalization agreements.

QUESTION: Yeah, but what are the—what is the name for them?

MR. PRICE: Normalization agreements.

QUESTION: No, there’s a specific name that they all signed onto. I believe you know what it is.

MR. PRICE: Look, we call them—we call them normalization agreements. That’s—

QUESTION: Why do you not—

MR. PRICE: That’s precisely what they are.

QUESTION: —use the name that the leaders of these countries signed onto—

MR. PRICE: We’re—

QUESTION: —which is the Abraham Accords? Why is that—

MR. PRICE: I’m not averse to using that. I’m describing what these are. These are normalization—

QUESTION: Well, then can you say it for me, please?

MR. PRICE: Of course I can say the term “Abraham Accords,” Matt.

QUESTION: Thank you.

MR. PRICE: But we call them normalization agreements.

Question. On June 4 the *Washington Free Beacon* reported the existence of the policy, citing “one source with direct knowledge” and “two internal State Department emails” reviewed by the outlet. The State Department did not deny the details of the story, and indeed it is now clear that they could not deny it.

- Did you ever become aware of the existence of the State Department policy instructing inter alia public affairs staffers to only refer to the “Abraham Accords” as “normalization agreements?” If so, please describe when and how you became aware of the policy, and whether you sought to have it reversed.

Answer. I do not recall becoming aware of any such Department policy instructing anyone to refer to the Abraham Accords exclusively as “normalization agreements.”

Question. Regarding Spokesperson Price’s April 1 press briefing in which he said that the State Department “call[s] them normalization agreements” not “Abraham Accords”: did you discuss that statement with him after the briefing in any way (e.g. personally, phone, email, text, chat, etc.)? For example, did you ask him whether that was actually the State Department’s policy, why it was the policy, who set it, when it was set, and so on? If you did not, why not? If so, please describe the exchanges.

Answer. I recall that there were working-level discussions, stretching back into the Trump administration, about how to refer to Israel’s past and potential future agreements with its Arab neighbors in a way that would maximize the chances of deepening existing agreements and reaching new agreements, because it was clear that other governments may not wish to join the Accords but to forge their own normalization agreements with Israel. I do not recall asking Mr. Price if it was Department policy not to refer to the Abraham Accords as such because I do not recall believing that this was Department policy, having witnessed the Secretary, our Charges d’Affaires in Jerusalem, Abu Dhabi, and Manama, as well as other senior U.S. officials, refer to the Abraham Accords as such on a regular basis. I recall discussing with Mr. Price and others, however, that it was becoming clear—as evidenced by the April 1 press briefing and the *Washington Free Beacon* article—that

there was some public misperception about the Biden administration's appreciation for the Abraham Accords because of the use of the term "normalization agreements" to refer to the varied agreements Israel has concluded with its neighbors. I recall discussing with colleagues the need to correct that misperception in our public remarks. That was reflected in the language used in a series of statements, op-ed pieces in Washington and in the region, and events celebrating the one-year anniversary of the Abraham Accords, as well as working on projects that could widen and deepen the Abraham Accords.

Question. Regarding Spokesperson Price's April 1 press briefing in which he said that the State Department "call[s] them normalization agreements" not "Abraham Accords": did you discuss that statement with anyone after the briefing in any way (e.g. personally, phone, email, text, chat, etc.)? For example, did you seek to determine whether that was actually the State Department's policy, why it was the policy, who set it, when it was set, and so on? If you did not, why not? If so, please describe the exchanges.

Answer. I recall engaging with colleagues around that time about the need to correct the misperception that the administration did not support the Abraham Accords or wish to refer to them as such.

Question. Regarding Spokesperson Price's April 1 press briefing in which he said that the State Department "call[s] them normalization agreements" not "Abraham Accords": please transmit any email or text threads in which you participated about his statement.

Answer. My search of my records has not produced any such communications, though you would need to make requests for Department records to the Department.

Question. Regarding the *Free Beacon* June 4 story that cited two emails instructing staffers to use "normalization agreements" not "Abraham Accords": did you attempt to determine whether the story was accurate? For example, did you inquire if the emails existed, why they were sent, who sent them, when they were sent, and so on? If you did not, why not? If so, please describe the exchanges.

Answer. I recall urging colleagues to find ways to correct the misperception that the administration did not appreciate the Abraham Accords or wish to refer to them as such. I recall pursuing if anyone had seen the emails referenced by the *Free Beacon*, and I recall being told no. I also recall engaging with staff about finding ways to widen and deepen the Abraham Accords so that the signatories' relationships did not settle into a "cold peace," as had been the case for some of Israel's other relationships. That effort to deepen and broaden substantive cooperation included support for the "I2U2" project between one of the Abraham Accords signatories—the UAE—and Israel, India, and the United States. When Secretary Blinken launched that effort, the Department's public statement noted that, "The Secretary reiterated the Biden administration's support for the Abraham Accords and normalization agreements and discussed future opportunities for collaboration in the region and globally."

Question. Regarding the *Free Beacon* June 4 story that cited two emails instructing staffers to use "normalization agreements" not "Abraham Accords": did you ever attempt to acquire or read the cited emails? If you did not, why not? If so, please describe the steps you took to acquire or read the cited emails.

Answer. I recall pursuing at the time if anyone had seen emails of this nature, and I recall colleagues saying that they had not.

Question. Regarding the *Free Beacon* June 4 story that cited two emails instructing staffers to use "normalization agreements" not "Abraham Accords": please transmit any email or text threads in which you participated about the story.

Answer. I have not found any emails or texts in my records with regard to this story, and any request for Department records will need to be addressed to the Department.

* * *

FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS—NUMBER 4

Question. In the QFRs submitted pursuant to your nomination, and again in follow up questions, I asked you about guidance distributed within the State Department in early 2021 which instructed staffers to no longer refer to the Abraham Accords as "Abraham Accords," but instead to call them "normalization agreements."

The guidance was distributed on February 4 in an email between press staffers with the instruction “we are no longer using ‘Abraham Accords’ to refer to the normalization of relations between Israel and other countries.” On April 1 Spokesperson Ned Price told reporters that the policy of the State Department was to call “call them normalization agreements.” On June 4 the *Washington Free Beacon* (*WFB*) confirmed the existence of the policy, citing “two internal State Department emails” reviewed by the outlet.

During this time period, i.e. February 4 to June 4, you were Acting Assistant Secretary for the Near Eastern Affairs Bureau (NEA). I am seeking to clarify the degree to which you knew about the existence of this policy and any actions you took regarding it, or whether the policy had been set from within your bureau and for the State Department without your knowledge.

You have confirmed that you eventually took responsibility for the public controversy over the issue: you told reporters in a non-public briefing on June 24 “effectively to ‘blame the misunderstanding on me as the Acting Assistant Secretary for [NEA].’” Nevertheless, you have also replied that you were not aware the guidance was issued on February 4, that you did not ask Mr. Price specifically about his comments on April 1, and that when you asked others whether they had seen the emails referenced in the June 4 *WFB* story they told you no. You have also said that you searched your digital records and found no communications on these issues.

Finally, you cited a statement by Sec. Blinken using the phrase “Abraham Accords” from October 2021, well after the policy had been publicly confirmed by the *WFB* and the State Dept. moved to reverse it.

More broadly, these statements are difficult to align with the full public record.

By March 11 Mr. Price was already referring to the Abraham Accords as normalization agreements. Even the section in the State Dept.’s official transcript for that day’s press briefing is labeled “ISRAEL/NORMALIZATION AGREEMENTS”—

QUESTION: My question is: What concretely are you guys doing to expand the Abraham Accords? Are you talking to Saudi Arabia, for example, about them recognizing Israel? Could you tell us a little bit about what concretely you’re doing? Thank you.

MR. PRICE: Absolutely. Well, when it comes to Prime Minister Netanyahu’s travel, we’d refer you to the Government of Israel regarding his travel. As we have said, as the Secretary said yesterday, we welcome, we support the normalization agreements between Israel and countries in the Arab—in—and the broader Muslim world. It is something that we will seek to build on. It is something that we have welcomed from the previous administration and something, again, we will seek to build on going forward. We have discussed it in the bilateral context with some of our partners in the Arab and Muslim world. It is something that we have discussed with the Israelis. I wouldn’t want to get ahead of where—of private conversations at this point, but I expect before too long, you will—we’ll be in a position to say more and you’ll be in a position to see more about how we are going to build on that.

On May 10 Mr. Price again pointedly and exclusively referred to the Abraham Accords as normalization agreements—

QUESTION: Right. Okay. So then let me ask something on the Abraham Accords. Do you think it might actually be counterproductive in that they make it easier for the Israel Government not to meet the aspirations of Palestinian people for an independent state?

MR. PRICE: The normalization agreements, and—is something that we support. It is something that we think is not only good for Israel, it is good for the region. Improved ties between Israel and its Arab neighbors is something that we will continue to support in our diplomacy and engagement, both with the Israelis and Arab states.

QUESTION: But could it be counterproductive because it doesn’t actually give any leverage or any benefit to the Palestinians?

MR. PRICE: The normalization agreements are one element of our engagement in the region. Of course, we continue to engage in the context of a two-state solution, and I think if you saw Jake Sullivan’s readout, if you’ve seen our recent statements, if you were provided with call transcripts—most of which we read out—you would see our emphasis on a two-state solution. So we can do both. We can work to see improved ties between Israel

and its neighbors, just as we work to forge some advance in the prospects of a two-state solution.

On May 18, White House Spokesperson Jen Psaki said “Aside from putting forward a peace proposal that was dead on arrival, we don’t think they did anything constructive, really, to bring an end to the longstanding conflict in the Middle East.”

In a previous question, I asked you whether you discussed with Mr. Price his April 1 statement about the Abraham Accords, i.e. that the State Dept. “call[s] them normalization agreements.” You said: “I do not recall asking Mr. Price if it was Department policy not to refer to the Abraham Accords as such because I do not recall believing that this was Department policy.” You also said “I recall discussing with Mr. Price and others, however, that it was becoming clear—as evidenced by the April 1 press briefing and the *Washington Free Beacon* article—that there was some public misperception about the Biden administration’s appreciation for the Abraham Accords because of the use of the term ‘normalization agreements’. I recall discussing with colleagues the need to correct that misperception in our public remarks.”

I also asked you about any role played by then-Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Israel and Palestinian Affairs Hady Amr in generating or clearing the guidance. Mr. Amr’s office oversaw this policy area and the State Dept. official who issued the guidance was the press officer for Israel and Palestinian Affairs. You suggested you have no knowledge of any role he played.

- Was Mr. Amr one of the colleagues with whom you spoke regarding what you describe as the need to correct misperceptions “because of the use of the term ‘normalization agreements’”? If so, please describe the nature of that discussion: when did it happen, what was the topic, what was Mr. Amr’s reaction. If you did not discuss this topic with him, why not?

Answer. Yes, DAS Amr was one of the colleagues with whom I spoke regarding the need to correct misperceptions about the administration’s support of the Abraham Accords. I do not recall the precise date of these discussions, as they would have been part of our daily consultations, but I recall that DAS Amr agreed with this need.

Question. You replied to a previous question by saying you discussed with Mr. Price the “public misperception” about the Biden administration’s stance on the Abraham Accords “as evidenced [inter alia] by the April 1 press briefing.” Did that discussion take place before or after his May 10 press briefing, in which he again pointedly emphasized that the State Dept. calls them “normalization agreements”? If the conversation happened before, why do you believe he nevertheless reemphasized the position despite your concerns, including in your capacity as Acting Assistant Secretary for NEA? If the conversation happened was after the May 10 press briefing, why did you wait as long as you did to have the conversation?

Answer. To the best of my recollection, this discussion took place after the June 4 press briefing in Rome identified in previous questions for the record. I regret that I did not act faster and more decisively to help dispel the notion that the Biden administration did not support the Abraham Accords.

Question. You have testified that you did not know about the February 4 email instructing public affairs staffers to call the Abraham Accords “normalization agreements.” Do you believe that it was inappropriate to clear or implement that guidance without your awareness, in your capacity as Acting Assistant Secretary for NEA?

Answer. Yes. I believe such proposed guidance should also have been discussed with our Chargés d’Affaires in Abu Dhabi, Manama, and Jerusalem, who told me that they never received instructions not to refer to the Abraham Accords in public exclusively as “normalization agreements.”

Question. Do you believe that the policy outlined in the February 4 email, i.e. to refer to the Abraham Accords as “normalization agreements,” was in the national security interests of the United States? Please also describe any effects that you believe it had on U.S. diplomacy more broadly.

Answer. I do not believe it was Department policy to refer to the Abraham Accords exclusively as “normalization agreements,” although I am now aware that the aforementioned press guidance shared between press officers existed. I do not believe that press guidance constituted a policy decision, nor do I believe that it was in the national security interests of the United States because it contributed to confusion in some quarters of the public regarding the administration’s support for the Abraham Accords specifically.

Question. It would have been relatively straightforward for you to trace Mr. Price's public statements and comments. There would have been language in his briefing book, email threads in which State Dept. officials from your bureau cleared that language, at least one specific list of officials clearing on behalf of specific offices in your bureau, etc. Did you try to obtain any of these materials? If you did not, why not? If you did, did you succeed and if so please describe the materials.

Answer. I did not seek these materials. Then-candidate Biden expressed his support for the Abraham Accords when they were signed and Secretary Blinken, as a nominee testifying before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, also expressed the new administration's support for the Abraham Accords (by name). For me, those were the clearest expressions of Biden administration policy with regard to the Abraham Accords. Once I became aware of the public misperception of the administration's support for the Abraham Accords, I began discussing with colleagues the need to address it, not only through public statements but also through activities and initiatives that would provide a "warm peace" for the people of the signatory countries. I believed that this public misperception stemmed largely from the fact that administration officials had stated that they were conducting a review of the Abraham Accords, along with most other policies in their first months in office. I recognize and take responsibility for the confusion these discussions may have contributed to in the early months of the Biden administration; as Acting Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs, I regret that I did not take more decisive action earlier to clarify the administration's support for the Abraham Accords specifically, along with Israel's other current and potential future diplomatic relationships.

Question. Mr. Price pointedly and exclusively used "normalization agreements" in his March 11 press briefing and explicitly told reporters in his April 1 press briefing that the State Dept. refers to the Abraham Accords as normalization agreements. You have said that you did not believe that was the State Dept.'s policy. What was the basis for your belief, i.e. that he had repeatedly mischaracterized State Dept. policy? In previous answers you have gestured toward presumably contradictory statements made by other State Dept. officials. To the extent that you believe they are relevant, please cite them specifically.

Answer. Among other public statements were the following: On January 27, 2021 at a press availability, Secretary Blinken said, "First, as we've said, we very much support the Abraham Accords. We think that Israel normalizing relations with its neighbors and other countries in the region is a very positive development, and so we applauded them, and we hope that there may be an opportunity to build on them in the months and years ahead." In a March 11, 2021 press briefing, the White House Spokesperson referred to the Abraham Accords as such, noting that the administration was reviewing them. A June 9, 2021 joint statement on the eighth U.S.-UAE Economic Policy Dialogue, in which I participated, noted that the two delegations "commended the historic signing of the Abraham Accords in September 2020."

Question. At any time—after March 11, April 1, or May 10—what was your understanding regarding why Mr. Price kept publicly telling journalists the opposite of what you understood to be the State Dept.'s policy?

Answer. My understanding is that Mr. Price was following guidance offered by press officers that had not been reviewed by me and that sought to be as inclusive as possible in discussing Israel's past and potential future diplomatic agreements with its Arab neighbors.

Question. Regarding Mr. Price's May 10 press briefing, in which he pointedly emphasized that the State Dept. refers to the Abraham Accords as "normalization agreements": did you discuss that statement with him after the briefing in any way (e.g. personally, phone, email, text, chat, etc.)? For example, did you ask him whether that was actually the State Department's policy, why it was the policy, who set it, when it was set, and so on? If you did not, why not? If so, please describe the exchanges.

Answer. I would note that on May 10, I was on a trip that included stops in the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt, and Iraq. I do not recall watching this press briefing or hearing about it from my staff. I do not recall asking Mr. Price if it was Department policy not to refer to the Abraham Accords as such because I do not recall believing that this was Department policy, having witnessed the President, the Secretary, our Chargés d'Affaires in Jerusalem, Abu Dhabi, and Manama, as well as other senior U.S. officials, refer to the Abraham Accords as such. While I do not recall the date, I recall discussing with Mr. Price and others that it was becoming clear—as evidenced by the press briefing exchanges and the *Washington*

Free Beacon article—that there was some public misperception about the Biden administration’s appreciation for the Abraham Accords because of the use of the term “normalization agreements” to refer to the varied agreements Israel has concluded with its neighbors. I recall discussing with colleagues the need to correct that misperception in our public remarks and actions. That was reflected in the language used in a series of statements, op-ed pieces in Washington and in the region, and events celebrating the one-year anniversary of the Abraham Accords, as well as working on projects that could widen and deepen the Abraham Accords. I certainly regret that I did not act faster to help correct that public misperception, believing as I did that initiatives to deepen the Abraham Accords, such as the “I2U2” Ministerial and investment projects would send powerful messages of support.

Question. In your assessment, did Ms. Psaki’s May 18 statement, i.e. “Aside from putting forward a peace proposal that was dead on arrival, we don’t think [the Trump administration] did anything constructive, really, to bring an end to the longstanding conflict in the Middle East,” contribute to what you describe as the “public misperception about the Biden administration’s appreciation for the Abraham Accords.”

Answer. Yes.

Question. In your own assessment, is it accurate to assess that aside from putting forward a peace proposal that was dead on arrival the Trump administration didn’t do anything constructive to bring an end to the longstanding conflict in the Middle East?

Answer. As a member of the Foreign Service, I have served under Democratic and Republican administrations. I proudly served in the Trump administration as Deputy Chief of Mission in Kuwait, as Deputy Chief of Mission and Chargé d’Affaires in Iraq, and as Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State under Assistant Secretary David Schenker in the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs. I believe that the administration accomplished a great deal in trying to bring an end to the longstanding conflicts in the Middle East, including—*inter alia*—supporting and facilitating the signing of the Abraham Accords, as well as Morocco’s re-establishment of diplomatic relations with Israel and efforts to resolve the conflict over the region known as the Western Sahara. I believe the Trump administration also exerted constructive efforts in supporting the Iraqi Security Forces, including the Iraqi Kurdistan Region’s Peshmerga forces, in liberating Iraqi territory from ISIS, as well as helping communities targeted for genocide to recover. These included Yezidis, Christians, and Muslims, both Sunni and Shia. In my time under the last administration, I regularly represented and defended the Trump administration’s policies in the Middle East, including on Capitol Hill. Thank you for the opportunity to address this question.

* * *

FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS—NUMBER 5

Question. In QFRs submitted pursuant to your nomination, and again in follow up questions, I have been asking you about a policy distributed by the Near Eastern Affairs Bureau (NEA) in which State Dept. staffers were instructed not to refer to the Abraham Accords as “Abraham Accords,” but instead to call them “normalization agreements.” During the period this guidance was in place you were Acting Assistant Secretary for NEA. You have confirmed that on June 24 you told journalists, not for publication, “effectively to ‘blame the misunderstanding on me as the Acting Assistant Secretary for [NEA].’”

The policy was set around February 4, 2021, when instructions to that effect were distributed. The policy lasted roughly through June 4, when the *Washington Free Beacon* (*WFB*) confirmed the instructions, citing “two internal State Department emails” reviewed by the outlet. In between, Spokesperson Ned Price publicly confirmed and followed the guidance: he referred to the Abraham Accords as “normalization agreements” in press briefings on March 11, April 1, and May 10, and during his April 1 briefing he said the State Dept.’s policy regarding the Abraham Accords was to “call them normalization agreements.”

As discussed in previous questions, this policy was both consistently implemented and went through NEA. The February 4 email was distributed by Rachel Rubin, the press officer for Israel and Palestinian Affairs. Language used by Mr. Price in his press briefings would have been discussed over email threads with NEA officials, and there would have been a list of officials who cleared on behalf of NEA offices. Canned public affairs guidance about the Middle East generated by NEA followed

the guidance. Other public affairs products regularly cleared by NEA officials, including on behalf of NEA/FO, exclusively used “normalization agreements.” The *WFB* story indicated that the outlet asked for comments, and any response would have been discussed with and cleared by NEA officials.

Nevertheless—you have said you did not know any such policy was in place. More specifically, you have said that you did not know NEA distributed the email, that you don’t recall seeing or clearing any such guidance, that you asked staffers for details about the relevant emails but they denied knowing about them, that you did not call for any materials related to the language Mr. Price was publicly using, that you did not ask him about that language, that you did not watch or hear about at least one of his press briefings about the issue, that you are not aware of any role played by then-Deputy Assistant Secretary for Israel and Palestinian Affairs Hady Amr in formulating or clearing the instructions, and that you have no digital communications about this controversy or about the guidance or about the *WFB* story.

You have said that you didn’t ask for further details because you didn’t believe the guidance reflected the Biden administration’s policy toward the Abraham Accords, which you have characterized as supportive. You have cited four statements on this question. Three were outside the time the guidance was seemingly in place, i.e. February 4 to June 4, and a fourth was by White House Spokesperson Jen Psaki criticizing the Accords. None are tenable examples of relevant supportive language.

You have also said that it was inappropriate to implement the guidance without you clearing it, in your capacity as Acting Assistant Secretary for NEA, and that the “misunderstanding” undermined the perception of America’s commitment to our Middle East allies.

I am deeply troubled by this breakdown in process and substance, both because of what it suggests about the Biden administration’s policymaking regarding our Israeli allies, and the degree to which it speaks to your nomination for Ambassador to Tunisia, an extremely challenging post.

- In retrospect, what specific steps do you believe you should have taken to avoid the breakdown, and why?

Answer. I regret that I did not establish an internal policy of reviewing all new press guidance to ensure that it fully and accurately reflected the President’s stated policy positions, including support for the Abraham Accords, along with Israel’s agreements with its other Arab neighbors.

Question. To what extent do you believe the breakdown is relevant to broader organizational challenges within NEA, both domestically and abroad at American embassies? What specific steps do you believe need to be taken to avoid similar incidents in the future?

Answer. It is not unusual for press officers to offer guidance that is not cleared at the highest levels of the Bureau due to the need to respond to media inquiries quickly. Having learned from this experience, in any future leadership position in Washington or overseas, I will establish with my staff an internal policy of personally reviewing any changes in press guidance.

Question. Please assess the damage to American national interests caused by the belief that the Biden administration had prohibited the use of “Abraham Accords” to refer to the Abraham Accords?

Answer. I do not assess there to have been damage to U.S. national interests due to this misperception, primarily because, fortunately, the President himself and the Secretary of State were on record commending the historic nature of the Abraham Accords and expressing the Biden administration’s support for them.

Question. Do you believe that Ms. Rubin distributed the guidance to use “normalization agreements” in place of “Abraham Accords” without being instructed to do so, i.e. ‘on her own’? If so, please explain why she did so. If not, to the best of your current knowledge—

- Who instructed Ms. Rubin to distribute the guidance?

Answer. To the best of my current knowledge and recollection, and after conferring with colleagues in the NEA front office at the time, I am not aware that anyone in the NEA front office sent any instruction with regard to this press guidance.

Question. Who cleared on Ms. Rubin distributing the guidance to use “normalization agreements” in place of “Abraham Accords?”

Answer. After conferring with colleagues in the NEA front office at that time, I am not aware that anyone in the NEA front office cleared on such guidance. NEA’s press officers do their best to provide press guidance as quickly as possible.

Question. To the best of your current knowledge, who cleared on the language that Mr. Price used in his press briefings, and specifically his statement on April 1 that regarding the Abraham Accords the State Dept. “call[s] them normalization agreements?”

Answer. To the best of my knowledge, Spokesman Price’s press guidance relevant to countries in the NEA region is normally drafted and sent to the spokesman by NEA press officers.

Question. You have said that you spoke to Mr. Amr in broad terms about the controversy and about emphasizing that the Biden administration supported the Abraham Accords, and that he was supportive. The stance is in tension with statements he made before entering the administration, in which he expressed hostility toward the Trump administration’s Middle East peacemaking. It is also in tension with the contents of a memo he drafted in late February, The U.S. Palestinian Reset and the Path Forward, in which he called for re-centering the Israeli-Palestinian issue in the context of “normalized relations” between our Israeli and Arab allies. Please describe the extent to which Mr. Amr was supportive of the Abraham Accords.

Answer. In all my conversations with DAS Amr, he expressed support for strengthening the Abraham Accords, as well as Israel’s other agreements with Arab governments, and support for negotiating new agreements between Israel and governments of Muslim-majority countries.
