

**Dennis B. Hankins**  
**Nominee for U.S. Ambassador to Haiti**  
**Senate Foreign Relations Committee**  
**July 26, 2023**

Madam Chairwoman, Ranking Member, and Distinguished Members of the Committee, I am deeply honored to appear before you today, and grateful to President Biden and Secretary Blinken for the confidence they have placed in me as their nominee for Ambassador to the Republic of Haiti. I want to thank my wife Mira, and my son, Navy Lieutenant Commander Danu Hankins, for their encouragement, sacrifice, and support throughout the years. As diplomacy is inherently about relationships, my wife of more than 40 years has always been my better three-quarters and the reason for whatever success I have had as a diplomat.

I am particularly honored that today's Chairwoman and Ranking Member hold separate titles of former public service near and dear to my heart – that of Lieutenant Colonel in the Army National Guard and of Ambassador to Japan. It has been an honor to serve in challenging assignments around the world for the last thirty-nine years. Many of these assignments have been in countries in crisis – including Haiti. These posts have offered me the opportunity to make a real impact on lives. If confirmed, I look forward to working with you and other Members of Congress to advance American interests in Haiti.

If confirmed, I would draw upon my existing and new relationships with key U.S., international, and Haitian interlocutors to deepen bilateral ties, protect my American and Haitian colleagues who work tirelessly at the U.S. mission in Haiti, and continue our work combatting insecurity and lawlessness; restoring stability; fostering inclusive, democratic governance; bolstering economic growth; and meeting basic humanitarian needs. Of course, an ambassador has no higher responsibility than the safety and security of American citizens abroad and that will always be my top priority.

Haiti faces multiple and competing crises, all of which are exacerbated by gang-led activities in and around Port-au-Prince. Gangs control approximately 30 percent of the capital and are increasingly able to operate in neighborhoods previously regarded as safe. Gang activity has severely impacted the economy and security of the entire country. Gangs also hamper the Haitian government's limited ability to deliver public services and the ability of international partner to distribute humanitarian assistance.

If confirmed, I am committed to supporting the Haitian National Police (the HNP) in its efforts to combat gang influence, maintain basic security, and institute community-based prevention efforts. I want to ensure that HNP members receive extensive and practical human rights training to minimize the risk of abuses.

In addition to meeting immediate security needs, I will work to address the underlying drivers of violence and instability in Haiti through the *U.S. Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability*. This 10-year plan will improve coordination between U.S., Haitian and external partners to build inclusive and sustainable foundations for long-term security, stability, and democratic governance.

In October 2022, Haitian Prime Minister Ariel Henry requested an international force after gangs blocked access to Haiti's port and main fuel terminal, paralyzing the country. The United States and our international partners support this request. Whatever form such a force takes, it can give Haitians the space they need to address the many challenges they face – but it is incumbent on them to do so.

Organized criminal group activity continues to exacerbate humanitarian needs and displacement throughout Haiti. Approximately 4.9 million people—nearly half of the country's population—will likely require emergency food assistance over the summer. If confirmed, I will work to address with national and international partners the urgent needs of the most vulnerable Haitians.

While we fund humanitarian and security efforts to save lives, our collective attention must focus on emerging Haitian solutions to Haiti's political crisis. Since January, there have been no elected officials in Haiti with a current mandate. We have seen Prime Minister Henry make several significant steps towards creating a path forward for inclusive elections, by installing the High Transition Council, reconstituting the Supreme Court, and holding political roundtables with opposing political parties. Neighboring countries though CARICOM are also deeply engaged in promoting a return to uncontested political legitimacy. If confirmed, I will urge all political parties (indeed, all players in Haitian society) to come forward, compromise, and create a transparent and inclusive electoral process where all parties can compete for Haitian votes.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I would be honored to respond to any questions.