

Opening Statement of James C. O'Brien
Nominee for Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
July 26, 2023

Chair Duckworth, Ranking Member Hagerty, Members of the committee:
I am honored to have been nominated to be Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs. Thank you for the opportunity to appear today.

I am here because of the support of my family – my wife Mary, our children Sean and Jamie, Mary's father John O'Donnell, and my father Jim and sisters Meghan and Nan. I grew up in Nebraska, and my family still live in Omaha. My mother, Jane, who died early in 2021, instilled a love of community and public service that has shaped my life.

The job of our diplomats is to promote American security, prosperity, and values. Today that mission addresses war in Europe and the rise of China. First, Russia's further invasion of Ukraine touches every aspect of Europe and Eurasia. Ukraine, which continues to fight courageously and successfully, draws on a coalition led by the United States comprising dozens of countries, including most in this region. Together, we provide Ukraine with the security assistance to defend itself and the humanitarian and economic support to respond and rebuild in the face of continuing Russian attacks. We are also working together to restrict the Kremlin's access to resources necessary to wage its unjustified war and diminish Russia's future destabilizing capabilities. The coalition's strength is critical, and we must work to keep it powerful, aligned, and up to date. The number of elections across the coalition in the next 16 months means that this will require active diplomacy.

For many countries in the region the next period will be pivotal. Ukraine knows from this month's Vilnius Summit and announcements by the European Union that its future lies in the transatlantic security and economic space. Moldova, too, has never had a clearer path to its EU

future. These European nations need to show their own people, and ours, that their societies will be more prosperous and free – and their democratic and economic institutions stronger – as the region emerges from this hot war. Our assistance and experience – especially that of our private sector – will be essential.

The six states of the western Balkans should be given renewed clear requirements, and incentives, to reform as they make their way toward the European Union. Georgia and countries across the Caucasus to the Caspian will have opportunities to build new relationships to Europe and global trade routes. US engagement will define the choices before each country.

In short, the next year can set the template for a deeper, stronger rules-based community of freedom across this region, touching the Arctic, the Atlantic, the Adriatic, the Black Sea, and the steppes of central Asia. This is the fabric that our citizens depend on every day to keep them safe and create more economic opportunity.

One aspect of this work deserves special focus. The U.S. leads a global alliance network – rooted in Europe and NATO – that no other country can match. We must ensure that this framework is fit for purpose going forward. Next year's 75th anniversary NATO summit here in Washington will let us reinforce key elements: an iron-clad Article 5; our enduring commitment to each other to spend at least 2% of GDP on defense investment; a NATO with deeper links to the Indo-Pacific; and growing Alliance of 31 – and, with Sweden, 32 members – with an unwavering open-door policy.

We must also work to strengthen the commitment of all countries across the region to democracy and the rule of law.

Third, I will focus on our country's prosperity. Our society is starting to see huge technological leaps in artificial intelligence, energy production, and medicine. Over the next decades, these advances can make us, especially our middle class, richer and more secure or lead to new battles over

emerging technology. We should work with our closest partners to share approaches and agree on the risks posed by alternative systems. Wherever possible we should agree on the approaches to critical minerals, supply chains, the uses of new technologies, and the protection of our critical infrastructure including from cyberattacks. Working with the EU is key – including through the U.S.-EU Trade and Technology Council (TTC) and U.S.-EU China Dialogue. A new European Commission will take office in 2024; the agenda it sets for its five-year term will be important for the next two US Administrations.

Madam Chair and Ranking Member, it would be a privilege to join the 12,000 hard-working, dedicated men and women of our State Department EUR community. This team has done extraordinary work to sustain an America that is more secure and more prosperous because Europe is whole and free. I look forward to working together with them to develop plans of action to realize the objectives laid out here over the next 6, 12, 18 months. I also look forward to working with the members of this Committee.

Over the next 18 months, our adversaries will be questioning whether the promises America makes are ones we will keep. Our work will be much more effective when others hear our shared commitment to an America that is stronger with a Europe whole and free.

Thank you and I welcome your questions.