

Opening Statement of Laura Stone
Nominee for U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of the Marshall Islands
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
January 25, 2024

Chairman Van Hollen, Ranking Member Romney, Members of the Committee, good morning. I am honored to appear before you as the President's nominee for U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of the Marshall Islands.

I want to extend a special thank you to Senator Romney. Utah was my family's home and a special place for my kids to return to every year throughout their nomadic foreign service childhoods.

I am grateful for the confidence shown by the President and Secretary Blinken in nominating me. I have spent my 31-year career advancing U.S. interests in the Indo-Pacific, including seventeen years in the region. If confirmed, I look forward to working with Congress to reinforce ties with the Republic of the Marshall Islands, one of our most strategically important and steadfast partners in the Pacific.

I would like to take a moment to thank my family, who have supported me in my life and career. My parents, who live in Summit County Utah, gave me a profound curiosity about the world around me and a desire to make the world a better place. My husband, Mark, has been a true partner and soul mate in this adventurous life, and has made me a better person and better public servant. My sister Nikki and her family have shown me what it means to stick my neck out and soar. And my kids, Sarah a college student in Louisiana, and Rachel who joins me today, provide constant thoughtful inspiration and meaning to my life's work, and show me what it means to be powerful and confident young women forging their own paths forward. I am in awe of both of you. Finally, although there are too many to name, I want to thank my many friends and colleagues, who have provided guidance and inspiration. My world has been enriched and blessed by all of you.

I have spent a lifetime preparing for the challenges we now face in the Pacific. I have worked with partners like Taiwan, Japan, Thailand, India, Mongolia, and

Vietnam. But I have also spent years working to understand the tactics and motivations of the PRC – identified by recent National Security Strategies from Democratic and Republican Administrations as our most serious developing competitor and most consequential geopolitical challenge.

Building on our National Security Strategies, Indo-Pacific Strategies, and Pacific Partnership, we have a path forward that I believe in, and in which our approach to the Marshall Islands can safely nest. We must counter the PRC's advances by reinforcing our relationships with our allies and partners – to include a focus on deepening ties with Pacific Island Countries. And while the People's Republic of China's provocative actions span the globe, they are most acute in the Pacific. Addressing corruption is not just a moral imperative; it is a strategic necessity for the prosperity and well-being of our nations.

I'm excited about the prospect, if confirmed, of working with our partners in the Marshall Islands. This month, the Marshall Islands re-elected Dr. Hilda Heine to a second term, championing gender equality. I hope to continue to forge strong bonds with the Marshallese to find opportunities for women's economic empowerment and combatting human trafficking and gender-based violence.

The astonishing videos out of Kwajalein Atoll this week demonstrated the threat to the Marshall Islands posed by rising sea levels. If confirmed, I would enhance bilateral cooperation on resilience to sea-level rise and harness U.S. expertise to support Marshallese partners. I feel we can implement strategies to help protect the people of the Marshall Islands and our strategic facilities.

With the October 16th signing of COFA-related agreements, I am excited to be at the forefront of implementation. These agreements signify the strength of our enduring partnership and underline our shared commitment to mutual prosperity. Together, we can enhance economic development and advance the well-being of the people of the Marshall Islands.

If confirmed, I aim to promote the ability of Marshallese veterans, who have served in the United States armed forces, to receive the healthcare and veteran benefits they deserve, by streamlining and enhancing access to healthcare services. Our veterans deserve nothing less than the best medical care and support.

As we pursue these policies, if confirmed, I am excited to work with my colleagues in U.S. law enforcement, the military, Interior, and others throughout the interagency. I have the deepest respect for the skills, perspective, and expertise our interagency partners bring, and recognize the need for coordination and collaboration to find the best outcomes. As the greatest of nations, our people and our principles are our greatest strength.

Thank you again for your consideration and the opportunity to appear before you today. I look forward to your comments and questions.