

Opening Statement of Richard H. Riley
Nominee for U.S. Ambassador to the Federal Republic of Somalia
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
October 19, 2023

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and Distinguished Members of the Committee, I am honored to come before you today as President Biden's nominee to be the next United States Ambassador to the Federal Republic of Somalia. I am deeply grateful to the President and Secretary Blinken for their confidence in me.

My wonderful wife of 37 years, Cheryl Wong, sister and brother, Lisa Schwarz and Shawn Riley and their families are all watching online. I am also very proud that my beloved daughter, Eden Riley is here with me today. I want to thank all my family for their love and support.

Mr. Chairman, I've been privileged to serve in the U.S. Foreign Service for over 31 years. I joined in 1986 and have faithfully served in twelve countries in Asia, Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East, including two tours in Iraq, three in Afghanistan, Assistant Chief of Mission in Kabul, Deputy Chief of Mission for Yemen, and last year as Consul General in one of our most remote and dangerous posts - U.S. Consulate General Peshawar, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa. I volunteered for these assignments because I always wanted to serve where our Nation's vital national interests are most at stake. I believe my extensive experience, including senior leadership positions in four Muslim-majority countries in four war zones, has allowed me to work very successfully with our U.S. Military, USAID, and other interagency colleagues to fight against terrorist threats worldwide. Our work together in all these countries also strengthened good governance, supported democracy, and brought much needed humanitarian relief to

millions. I believe my three decades of experience has prepared me well to lead our extraordinary interagency team in Somalia today.

Somalia is making progress on its long road to recovery from state collapse. Since the May 2022 election of President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, we have seen renewed commitment on the part of Somali authorities and the Somali people to rid themselves of al-Shabaab and their extreme ideology. Local communities supported by the Somali government, African Union military forces, and other international partners, including the United States, have retaken more territory in the last 14 months than in the previous several years combined. Key transportation corridors have reopened, allowing for the free movement of goods and services and economic revitalization. However, al-Shabaab remains a resilient and capable adversary. Recent setbacks against the group have led the federal government to request a pause in the ongoing drawdown of African Union forces, scheduled to withdraw completely by the end of next year.

Sustainable gains require the expansion of governance, service delivery, and political reconciliation. Fundamental questions related to federal structures and authorities and the constitution must be addressed. Economic growth is also imperative to expand employment opportunities for the two thirds of Somalis under the age of 30. Improved oversight of the banking sectors, government revenue generation, and public sector financial management are vital for the government to access international financial institution lending for infrastructure development and poverty reduction and promote foreign direct investment. We are encouraged that the current government in Mogadishu agrees these are top priorities and is taking action to address them. If confirmed, I am committed to supporting its efforts to advance good governance and institution building.

The United States has a stake in Somalia's success. We have a shared interest in eliminating al-Shabaab and ISIS from Somalia, which threaten U.S. persons and interests throughout East Africa. A stable, democratic Somalia would enable the return of hundreds of thousands of refugees requiring international assistance. There are strong connections between our peoples, with hundreds of thousands of Somali Americans in communities across the U.S., many of whom have returned to Somalia in recent years to help rebuild and pursue economic opportunities.

Somalia also continues to suffer the aftereffects of an historic drought that has destroyed the lives and livelihoods of thousands of Somalis. The tremendous generosity of the American people, who have funded the majority of international relief efforts, helped prevent famine and far greater death toll. If confirmed, I am committed to helping to break Somalia's dependency on international humanitarian aid by building the resilience of the Somali people to withstand natural disasters as well as the Somali government's ability to respond.

The security challenges in Mogadishu remain significant. I have dedicated much of my career to advancing U.S. interests in countries under hazardous conditions and have always made the safety, security, and morale of my staff, U.S. personnel, and Americans my top priority. If confirmed, I am committed to ensure appropriate safeguards are in place to enable our Embassy to accomplish our mission safely and effectively.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, members of the Committee, I thank you for this opportunity to appear before you. I look forward to your questions.