

Opening Statement of Mr. Stephan Lang
Nominee for U.S. Coordinator for International Communications and Information Policy, with
the rank of Ambassador
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
February 8, 2024

Thank you, Chairman Cardin, Ranking Member Risch, and Members of the committee.

I'm deeply honored to appear before you today as the President's nominee to serve as the U.S. Coordinator for International Communications and Information Policy. I'm grateful to Secretary Blinken and Ambassador at Large for Cyberspace and Digital Policy Nathaniel Fick for their support for my nomination and the opportunity to advance critical U.S. interests on digital and tech policy. And I'd like to give special thanks to Senator Klobuchar for giving me the honor of introducing me.

I'm so happy that my mother, Stephanie Lang, is here today. The example she and my late father, Bill, set for me of hard work and perseverance, no matter what, was the inspiration for my career. I wouldn't be here if it weren't for my wife and career partner, Karin Lang. Raising our family while pursuing two Foreign Service careers in tandem has been the adventure of a lifetime and my greatest joy. And I'd like to sincerely thank my daughters Nathalie, who's here today, and Veronica, who's watching from Michigan, for putting up with so much as their mother and I have dragged them around the world a few times over in service to our country.

When I was a kid growing up in the suburbs of Kansas City, I never imagined that I would be here as a nominee to lead U.S. diplomacy on information and communications technology. I had never left the United States, and I could count the people I had met from foreign countries on one hand. But I unexpectedly had the opportunity to study in the UK, and a whole new set of experiences opened up for me. Back then, I wrote my friends letters on paper. I couldn't access U.S. newspapers, even in the school library. And I talked to my parents on the phone only once every other week.

So much has changed. We have constant and instantaneous access to information from anywhere in the world. I can video call friends on the other side of the globe basically for free. And the digital economy has become the foundation of the global economy, improving lives around the world.

But with these great benefits have also come challenges, and we must work diligently and relentlessly to overcome them. I am proud to be part of the U.S. team championing an affirmative vision for technology and supporting America's unmatched leadership in innovation and entrepreneurship. It has been an honor to work with U.S. stakeholders—in the private sector and civil society—to advance the cause of an open, secure, interoperable, reliable, and innovative global digital economy.

We urgently need solidarity with like-minded partners around world to better face the existential challenge from countries that don't share our democratic values, particularly China. The PRC's stated ambitions for leadership in the digital economy, including through emerging technologies such as AI, telecommunications infrastructure, and other elements of their Digital Silk Road, are clear. We must work together with those who share our democratic values to ensure that we lead the development and deployment of advanced technologies because it is foundational for both our national security and our economic strength.

This work is also critical to preserving and advancing our democratic values. We and our partners must lead in setting standards, defending norms, and building interoperable regulatory frameworks in order to make sure that technology enables free expression, allows people to assemble virtually, and lets different perspectives and ideas coexist. We cannot allow these technologies to become tools to monitor citizens, censor dissent, and measure loyalty.

If confirmed, I will accelerate our work to promote trusted supply in digital infrastructure in markets around the world. We will encourage telecom operators to choose trusted vendors, including when building out 5G networks and to reject the misleading below-market pricing of untrusted vendors such as Huawei. We'll further strengthen our support for providers that won't be under an obligation to share data at the whim of the Chinese Communist Party. And we'll further expand that work to include other technologies like cloud services, data centers, subsea cables, and low-earth orbit satellite constellations providing broadband Internet services.

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee has been a strong supporter of the Bureau of Cyberspace and Digital Policy, and as a recent GAO report confirmed, the bureau has been successful in elevating U.S. diplomacy across the range of tech issues. Confirming a U.S. Coordinator for International Communications and Information Policy with the rank of Ambassador will further elevate this important work. And if confirmed, I commit to consulting with you as we advance our leadership in this increasingly critical domain of global competition.

Thank you so much for the opportunity to appear before you here today. I look forward to any questions you may have.