

Opening Statement of Margaret Taylor
Nominee to be Legal Adviser, U.S. Department of State
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
March 7, 2024

Chairman Cardin, Ranking Member Risch, and Members of the Committee:

It is a tremendous honor to appear before you as President Biden's nominee to serve as Legal Adviser to the Department of State. I am grateful to President Biden, Secretary Blinken, and Administrator Power for their confidence in me. I also want to express my gratitude to the Members of this Committee, and your staff, for your consideration.

I had the privilege of working for this Committee as its Democratic Deputy Counsel, and later Chief Counsel and Deputy Staff Director. The 5 and ½ years I spent here were among the most rewarding and meaningful of my career. The work of this committee is incredibly important, and I was honored to have the chance to assist in that work. Because of it, I am dedicated to the importance of the Article I branch of government in shaping and implementing our nation's foreign policy.

I welcome my family, seated behind me, including my loving husband of nearly 22 years; my wise son; my supportive sister; and my kind daughter—who I'm told is watching from her college dorm room. I also want to acknowledge my parents, who instilled in me the importance of education and hard work. They are no strangers to the sacrifices of public service. My father was a Major in the United States Army when I was born at Fort Bliss in Texas.

I also want to acknowledge my maternal grandfather, Edward Turner, who served on a Landing Ship Tank, LST-912, in the South Pacific in World War II, participating in 5 invasions in 1944 and 1945, and surviving an attack by an enemy plane. He and his generation sacrificed so much so that we could be free.

I felt called to public service early on. I worked at the Department of Justice before attending Columbia Law School in New York City. It was in my third year there that terrorists flew planes into the World Trade Center towers a few miles south of where I sat—stunned, speechless, and terrified for my country. In the days and weeks that followed, the call I felt to public service became a single-minded commitment to the rule of law, to combat the threats to America's safety and security, and to advance the safety and security of peace-loving people around the world.

After graduation and a judicial clerkship, I spent 10 years as an attorney pursuing these goals in the Office I am now nominated to lead. I worked under both Republican and Democratic

administrations. I spent years learning the ins and outs of the legal aspects of sanctions, foreign assistance, international extradition, treaty negotiations and ratification, and combating trafficking in persons. I want to highlight this last item. It was a privilege to be a part of the efforts to use diplomacy to prosecute traffickers, protect victims, and prevent human trafficking; and I recognize and appreciate Congress's role in pressing for action to combat international trafficking in persons.

I won't rehash all of the accomplishments of this Committee while I was a staffer here. Suffice it to say, I believe the role of this Committee, and Congress, in shaping our foreign policy is vitally important. And when I departed the Committee in 2018, I sincerely wanted the public to understand that better. So, I spent several years, outside of government, writing and offering public commentary about the legal aspects of Congress's role in foreign policy and national security.

If confirmed, I will do what I have always sought to do throughout my career as a lawyer: provide objective legal advice of the highest quality; with the utmost commitment to integrity and ethical leadership; and in the service of our Constitution and the American people. If confirmed, this will be my top priority. I have led the Office of the General Counsel at USAID for more than three years with this philosophy, and I am grateful to my colleagues there for the privilege of working alongside them to help people around the world live lives of dignity.

In addition, if confirmed, I will use legal diplomacy vigorously to advance U.S. interests internationally and support the international legal rules that the U.S. helped to develop and that have benefited the United States so greatly since the end of World War II.

We depend on these norms of behavior in international politics. Russia's flagrantly illegal, full-scale invasion of Ukraine is a direct challenge to these international rules. So are the People's Republic of China's expansive maritime claims in the South China Sea. There are other examples.

We are a nation of laws. We respect our international obligations. The United States must continue to be a confident and principled voice for international legal norms in international politics.

I would be humbled and honored to serve the United States in this new capacity. I look forward to your questions.