

**Opening Statement for Elizabeth Rood
Nominee to be Ambassador to Turkmenistan
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
March 15, 2023**

Good morning, Chairman Murphy, Ranking Member Hagerty, and Honorable Members of this Committee. I am grateful to have the opportunity to speak with you today. Thank you for considering my nomination to serve as Ambassador to Turkmenistan.

I would like to start by thanking Senator Casey for the honor of his introduction, as well as the family, friends, and colleagues who have supported me. My family cannot be present today, but I would especially like to acknowledge my children, Margaret, Alice, and Andrew Kimbrell, who are now grown but accompanied me in my Foreign Service career. I have the honor to have as guests today two former Ambassadors to Turkmenistan, Ambassador Steven Mann and Ambassador Laura Kennedy. Their mentoring and friendship across decades play a large role in my presence here today.

Since Turkmenistan's independence in 1991 and the establishment of diplomatic relations the following year, progress in our engagement has been slow but steady. The United States has been steadfast in our commitment to Turkmenistan's independence, prosperity, sovereignty, and territorial integrity, and our consistent diplomacy has borne fruit.

Our persistent diplomatic efforts in recent years have yielded expanded U.S. commercial ties with Turkmenistan, a broadening of security cooperation to face security threats in the region, increased engagement to fight climate change through the reduction of methane emissions, unprecedented cultural and educational exchanges, and nascent progress on human rights, highlighted by the government's pardoning in 2021 of 16 Jehovah's Witnesses incarcerated for their conscientious objection to mandatory military service.

I believe all these developments demonstrate that tenacious, principled engagement with Turkmenistan works. If confirmed, I will work to build on this progress to ensure our bilateral relationship reaches its full potential.

I want to underscore that despite our differences, the United States and Turkmenistan share several important interests.

We share with Turkmenistan an interest in securing the country's borders, particularly its 462-mile border with Afghanistan. Secure borders help counter the threats posed by terrorism, drug trafficking, and the smuggling of other dangerous and illicit materials. When we help Turkmenistan secure its borders, we are not only promoting the sovereignty and stability of Turkmenistan and the broader Central Asian region, but we are also helping to keep the American people and the world safe.

There is also tremendous potential for our two countries to achieve the key administration goal of addressing climate change. In the last few years, Turkmenistan has clearly demonstrated an awareness of the threat climate change poses and the part it can play in combating that threat. Turkmenistan's interest in combating climate change provides a strong basis for engagement and cooperation with the United States. As just one example, we have recently offered to share our expertise to help Turkmenistan reduce methane leaking and venting.

We also share with Turkmenistan an interest in building commercial ties between our countries. Greater commercial ties provide greater opportunities for U.S. companies to expand sales and boost the U.S. economy while creating greater incentives for the government of Turkmenistan to reduce corruption, strengthen its legal system, and improve its business environment.

We are also invested in preserving Turkmenistan's rich cultural heritage. Some of the more notable projects include restoration of the country's oldest standing mosque, unique forms of folk music, antique carpets and manuscripts, and important Silk Road sites. This cooperation preserves something valuable to both Turkmenistan and the world and has been a high point in our bilateral relationship for many years.

Maintaining a productive relationship with Turkmenistan is in the best interests of the United States because it allows us to engage with the government of Turkmenistan on issues of vital importance to our national security.

For example, if confirmed, I will emphasize the importance of holding Russia to account for its aggression against Ukraine and urge cooperation on the implementation of sanctions on Russia. I will use every opportunity to urge the government of Turkmenistan to adhere to its international legal obligations and commitments, including as a member of the UN and the OSCE.

I will also continue to send a strong and clear message about the importance of human rights and fundamental freedoms, including freedom of religion or belief, freedom of expression, and civil and political rights, and will also continue our advocacy for labor rights, women's rights, civil society, and the rule of law.

Mr. Chairman, there is tremendous potential for our bilateral relationship with Turkmenistan. If confirmed, I look forward to partnering with this Committee and Congress to build on our progress so that we may achieve mutual objectives for the benefit of the people of the United States and the people of Turkmenistan. Thank you for considering my nomination. I look forward to answering any questions you might have.