

**Statement of Karen H. Sasahara**  
**Nominee to be U.S. Ambassador to the State of Kuwait**  
**Senate Committee on Foreign Relations**  
**March 15, 2023**

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, distinguished Members of the Committee:

I am honored to appear before you today as President Biden's nominee to serve as Ambassador to the State of Kuwait. I am grateful to the President and to Secretary Blinken for their confidence in me to undertake this important role. If confirmed, I look forward to working closely with Members of this Committee to advance U.S. national security interests in Kuwait and to ensure that Kuwait remains a strong partner for the United States.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my parents, members of that greatest generation whose devotion to their family and their sacrifices are why I'm here today. Likewise, gratitude to my siblings, who have always supported me no matter what. And of course, my husband, who has been a great source of support, both personally and as a fellow Foreign Service Officer.

If confirmed, I will work with our Kuwaiti partners to increase pressure on Iran to stop its destabilizing activities in the region. Through my service in Yemen, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and elsewhere in the Middle East, I know first-hand the harm Iran and its proxies have inflicted on U.S. interests and on our allies. Iran continues to threaten freedom of navigation in one of the world's most critical seaways, threatening regional stability and global energy markets. Its support to the Houthis in Yemen, Bashar al Assad's regime in Syria, and Hezbollah in Lebanon, destabilizes the entire region and threatens U.S. security interests. If confirmed, I will work with our Kuwaiti partners to counter this threat. Kuwait has developed stronger ties across its border with Iraq, including normalized trade relations and a modernized border crossing. If confirmed, I look forward to helping strengthen relationships across the region.

Kuwait is a member of the Coalition to Defeat ISIS and our relationship is vital to the stability and security in the Middle East and essential to our own national security. In 2021, Kuwait helped the United States relocate more than 5,000 people from Afghanistan, in addition to their most recent efforts to ease the horrific situation in Ukraine. If confirmed, I look forward to working with Kuwaiti

leadership to do even more, given Kuwait's own history with unprovoked aggression.

We can't ignore our strong economic ties with Kuwait. Kuwait invests billions of dollars in construction, capital markets, and consumer goods in the United States. There are significant opportunities for U.S. businesses in Kuwait and, if confirmed, I will advocate strongly for American companies.

Mr. Chairman, human rights are at the core of the Administration's foreign policy. If confirmed, it will be among my highest priorities. This includes strengthening the rights of women, stateless residents, and Kuwait's large expatriate workforce. Recent elections saw the return of women to the Parliament, something we were very supportive of.

Kuwait takes the issue of religious freedom seriously and is home to one of the largest cathedrals in the region. Kuwait is already a leader in the region for allowing space for political expression, fostering an independent media, and encouraging participatory government. If confirmed, I look forward to supporting these important issues in any way I can.

The United States and Kuwait share a long history that forms a strong foundation for the future. Every year, thousands of Kuwaitis come to study at universities across the United States. They return to Kuwait with their experience in the United States and contribute to building and strengthening their country.

Mr. Chairman, I want to assure the Members of this Committee that my highest priority, if confirmed, will be the safety and security of all Americans in Kuwait.

Over 30,000 U.S. citizens work as military contractors, teachers, and businesspeople, in addition to U.S. government and military personnel. Their presence is emblematic of the strong U.S.-Kuwait partnership. Enduring Congressional support and engagement is also a key element of our partnership.

I would also like to thank Chairman Menendez for his recent visit, and if confirmed, I would welcome the Members of the Committee to visit as well. I would be remiss if I didn't take this opportunity to congratulate former Kuwaiti ambassador to the United States, Sheikh Salem Al-Sabah, on his appointment to Foreign Minister. Chairman Murphy, Ranking Member Hagerty, Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I look forward to answering your questions.