

**Opening Statement of Elizabeth K. Horst
Nominee to be U.S. Ambassador to Sri Lanka
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
May 9, 2024**

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Ricketts, and distinguished Members of the committee, thank you for holding this hearing. I am honored to be here today as the President's nominee for U.S. Ambassador to Sri Lanka. I am grateful to be considered for this trusted and special responsibility. Senators, thank you for considering my nomination.

I started my diplomatic career in South Asia more than 20 years ago and have long been a champion of fundamental U.S. principles, including respect for human rights and economic freedom. Our American ability to prosper and grow while still protecting the democratic values enshrined in our Constitution is what sets us apart and makes us an example to follow. If confirmed, I look forward to working with Congress to support and advance U.S. interests.

Before I get into more detail about our relationship with Sri Lanka, I'd like to acknowledge and thank a few of the people who helped me reach this hearing today. Most importantly, my husband Army COL JP Gresh. He is my anchor and my joy. Our home embodies civ-mil cooperation, and together, we've built our lives around a shared love for public service and adventure: five countries, four dogs, fifteen years and counting.

We are joined today by my sister, Sarah Horst, who never fails to make me laugh or provide the honest, incisive, feedback that only a sister can give. My two nieces, Bailey Evans and Kate Evans, are here as well, and I hope that being in the Senate today inspires them on their own path of public service. I also want to thank my parents: my father, Dr. Jim Horst, who taught me empathy, and my mother Reverend Dr. Judith Stone, who taught me generosity. These qualities have served me well as a diplomat and leader in the U.S. Foreign Service.

Sri Lanka is a vital partner to the United States in the Indo-Pacific region, and it has been for over 76 years. If confirmed, I would focus on three main pillars of the U.S.-Sri Lanka relationship: broadening our economic cooperation, bolstering our security interests, and deepening our ties with Sri Lanka's diverse and vibrant population.

Sri Lanka's economy has great potential. Strengthening trade relations, encouraging private sector-led growth, and promoting inclusive innovation and entrepreneurship are key aspects of my vision for enhancing our economic ties.

Sri Lanka is a resilient country. While still healing from a civil war that ended in 2009 and from the political and economic crises of 2022, Sri Lanka continues to make steady progress in the face of remarkable internal and external challenges. During the crisis of 2022, the United States provided immediate food aid and chemical fertilizers to check hunger and ensure a good harvest. Today, the United States continues to provide food for school children across the country. As Sri Lanka regains its economic footing and confidence, we will continue to be a strong partner to support the Sri Lankan people.

Sri Lanka's strategic significance in the Indian Ocean and proximity to global maritime lanes calls for close collaboration in promoting a secure Indo-Pacific region. Our partnership is critical to addressing new security challenges and competitors, including countering transnational crime, enhancing maritime security, and responding to natural disasters. If confirmed, I will reiterate our shared commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific region, collaborative maritime security, the rules-based international order, and stability throughout the Indian Ocean.

Sri Lanka has a vibrant civil society, and if confirmed, I look forward to expanding our people-to-people ties, including with the dynamic Sri Lankan American community. I will support members of marginalized populations, accountability, truth and reconciliation, and transparency and justice in Sri Lanka.

Let me close by noting a fourth pillar, the true source of diplomatic success: the people at U.S. Embassy Colombo. If confirmed, I look forward to leading, developing, and empowering our interagency team and local staff to make a difference in our bilateral relationship, and practice a foreign policy that benefits the American people. I look forward to working with Congress to build our important relations with Sri Lanka. Thank you and I look forward to your questions.