

**Opening Statement of Stephanie L. Hallett
Nominee for U.S. Ambassador to Bahrain
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
September 11, 2024**

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

I am honored to appear before you today as President Biden's nominee to serve as Ambassador to the Kingdom of Bahrain. I am deeply grateful to the President and Secretary Blinken for their confidence in me and to the Committee for considering my appointment.

I am proud to share this day with my husband, Bob Castro, and our daughter Grace. My family's service to our country is a profound honor. But it is not without hardship and sacrifice, and for that I am beyond grateful for Bob and Grace's love and commitment. I am also very proud to be joined today by my mom – and Foreign Service colleague – Kathy Hallett. My mom is my rock, and I owe so much of who and where I am to her. My late father Barry also served our great nation as a U.S. Marine and combat veteran. He would be beaming to see me sitting before you today. I am also grateful for the love of my sister Kelley and stepmother Karen, and for the mighty support of my colleagues, mentors, and friends, especially Patty.

I first answered the call to public service by joining the State Department in the aftermath of September 11th, so it is especially poignant to sit before you today on the anniversary of that lifechanging day. Over the past two decades, I have been proud to advance U.S. interests in the Middle East and to support greater stability, prosperity, and opportunity for the people of the region. I helped lead our embassies in Israel, Cyprus, and Oman, and served as the Gulf Director at the National Security Council. If confirmed, I will be guided by my experiences in the region, including my previous posting in Bahrain.

This month we commemorate the fourth anniversary of the signing of the Abraham Accords. From my perch in Jerusalem, I have seen firsthand the commitment Bahrain and Israel share to their bilateral partnership. But the full breadth and depth of that partnership remains untapped. If confirmed, I will seek ways to deepen ties between Jerusalem and Manama.

Our countries' defense ties are the foundation of our bilateral relationship. A major non-NATO ally and Major Security Partner, Bahrain's hosting of NAVCENT, the U.S. Navy's Fifth Fleet, and the Combined Maritime Forces is critically important in the face of growing threats to maritime security. As a member of *Operation Prosperity Guardian* and *Operation Poseidon Archer*, Bahrain has punched above its weight to address threats to the free flow of commerce in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden. Bahrain has demonstrated a clear commitment to strengthening our close partnership, including through the U.S.-Bahrain Comprehensive Security Integration and Prosperity Agreement (C-SIPA). If confirmed, I will continue to enhance this partnership to address evolving security challenges and threats to regional stability.

Building upon the bedrock of our security and defense ties, C-SIPA also seeks to deepen our bilateral economic and technological cooperation, opening new opportunities for American businesses. In the year since C-SIPA was signed, we've seen the resumption of the Free Trade Agreement Joint Committee and Bahrain's increased commitment to trusted cellular and computer networks. If confirmed, I will build upon these early successes to ensure C-SIPA continues to yield value for the American people.

Since I first served in Manama a decade ago, Bahrain has made significant strides in advancing human rights, particularly in developing alternative legal pathways and prison reforms. But more progress can be made. We regularly raise human rights issues – including the cases of high-profile prisoners – with Bahrain's leaders. This year, more than 2,500 prisoners were released. I believe we should support such positive moves, even as we continue to press for more progress. I commend Bahrain for being a regional leader in combatting trafficking in persons and its commitment to a pluralistic society and religious coexistence. If confirmed, I will work to

support Bahrain's efforts to continue improving human rights conditions and encourage an inclusive society and political dialogue.

The United States overwhelmingly remains Bahrain's strategic partner of choice. If confirmed, I will work hard to ensure that we remain Bahrain's foremost security, economic, and technology partner, and that Bahrain's relations with Russia and China do not negatively impact U.S. interests. I am closely tracking Bahrain's diplomatic engagement with Iran. Bahrain understands the risks of engaging Iran, and we will continue working together to protect and defend against Iran's aggression and plotting.

As always, my highest priority, if confirmed, will be the safety of American citizens, including U.S. service members and their families in Bahrain, and my colleagues at Embassy Manama.

Thank you again for the honor to address this Committee today. I look forward to your questions.