

**Opening Statement of Kathleen Kavalec
Nominee for U.S. Ambassador to Romania
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
November 29, 2022**

Thank you, Chairwoman Shaheen, Ranking Member Portman, and distinguished Members of the Committee.

I am honored to appear before you today as President Biden’s nominee for U.S. Ambassador to Romania. As we speak, Secretary Blinken is in Bucharest, which underscores the importance of our long-standing partnership with Romania. Thank you for your consideration of my nomination.

Allow me first to introduce my husband, Mark Taplin, a retired FSO, and my three children, Ben, Sam, and Gwen. I want to thank them from the bottom of my heart for all the great support they have given me in my career.

I had the pleasure of serving in Romania once before, as Cultural Affairs Officer at Embassy Bucharest. In that role, I traveled throughout the country to carry out our public diplomacy programs and expand our network of “American Corners” – resource centers where Romanians can learn more about American culture, history, and government.

I gained an appreciation for cultural exchange from my late father, a Spanish instructor, Fulbright grantee, and proponent of good listening skills, which are critical to effective diplomacy. In my diplomatic career, I have focused on building coalitions, nurturing relationships, and listening. If confirmed, I look forward to applying these and other core diplomatic principles to America’s vital relationship with Romania.

To that end, please allow me to outline my policy priorities that will guide my work as U.S. Ambassador to Romania, if confirmed. First, I will commit myself foremost to the safety and security of our Mission team and of U.S. citizens living, working, and traveling in Romania.

Second, if confirmed, I will advance our cooperation with Romania on vital security matters. Since the end of the Communist dictatorship in 1989, Romania has made remarkable progress in building a genuine democracy and market economy. Romania made it clear, early on, that its goal was to join NATO and the European Union, and through hard work and determination, the country and its people succeeded. I was on hand in 2008 when Romania hosted the Bucharest NATO summit, a source of pride for the entire country. My family and I joined the celebrations in Sibiu on New Year’s Day 2007 – led by the then mayor, now President Klaus Iohannis – that greeted Romania’s official accession to the EU.

Today, Romania is a model for other NATO members. It has budgeted 2 percent of its GDP for defense – and most recently committed to raising its defense budget to 2.5 percent, much of it allocated to purchase U.S. equipment in its robust modernization effort. It hosts multinational NATO forces and is a longstanding contributor to NATO missions and operations worldwide. If confirmed, I will continue strengthen this security cooperation.

I am determined to work closely with Romania as we stand united against the Kremlin's unprovoked, unjustified, and horrific war against Ukraine. The firm resolve of Romania has been especially laudable in this crisis. The country and its people have welcomed, with open arms and hearts, over two and a half million Ukrainian refugees, more than 85,000 of whom remain in the country, and have generously supported these refugees with critical assistance and essential services. In addition, Romania has supported unprecedented sanctions to weaken Putin's war machine and aided Ukraine through a wide range of other humanitarian and security efforts.

Nor has Romania shied from pushing back on the People's Republic of China's attempts to impose coercive economic arrangements on countries in Central Europe. Romania passed 5G legislation that excludes untrusted vendors from its 5G tender, blocked greater PRC involvement in Romania's civil nuclear industry, and instituted robust investment screening legislation to protect its critical infrastructure. If confirmed, I will coordinate closely with Romanian authorities to counter efforts by the PRC government to pursue steps that would weaken Romanian's national security or economic standing.

I also pledge to work on deepening and broadening our economic cooperation with Romania. I will encourage Romania's efforts to foster a business climate that facilitates U.S. investment. The country's efforts to advance clean energy technologies, including in nuclear and other renewables, are already a model for the region.

Finally, I stand ready to support Romania's efforts to fight corruption and strengthen its democratic institutions, including in supporting a free and independent media.

In sum, I will commit myself to expanding our longstanding American partnership with Romania. This year, the United States and Romania are celebrating the 25th anniversary of our bilateral Strategic Partnership. I look forward to taking the next steps in building upon this strong foundation.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear today and I look forward to your questions.