

**Statement of Mr. Joel Ehrenreich**  
**Nominee to be U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Palau**  
**Senate Committee on Foreign Relations**  
**June 13, 2023**

Chairman Van Hollen, Ranking Member Romney, Members of the Committee, good afternoon. I am honored to appear before you as President Biden's nominee for Ambassador to the Republic of Palau.

I want to give a special thank you to Senator Hagerty, someone whom I greatly admired as ambassador and whose mentorship I am grateful for. You honor me, Senator, by providing that introduction.

I am grateful for the confidence shown by the President and Secretary Blinken in nominating me. I have spent the bulk of my nearly 30-year career in the Indo-Pacific region, and, if confirmed, I look forward to working with Congress to advance U.S. interests in this region that I and so many others believe is fundamental to America's future.

I would like to take a moment to thank my loved ones who have contributed to me ending up here today. My sons, Cooper and Calvin, both of whom I'm so proud of and who have brought me joy every day of their lives. My daughter-in-law Nada, who has been a wonderful addition to the family, and our newest wonderful addition, our grandson Zayn, born just a few weeks ago. And of course, Rachel, my wife of 33 years, my love, my soul mate, the person who makes me a better person. I also want to thank my brother, Josh, in-laws Jackie and Scott Alter, and mother-in-law Janice McClelland. I am truly blessed to have so many marvelous people in my life.

And here I'm compelled to also try and right a wrong. My official nomination bio mentioned where I was born, Omaha, but left out where I grew up and the place that still feels like home to this day: Milwaukee, Wisconsin. So a shout-out to the town I love and all my friends there, and if I could just add one request for my fellow Whitefish Bay High School alum, Milwaukee Brewers manager Craig Counsell: if you could sprinkle just a little extra of your magic on the Brewers this season, I would love it, just once before I die, to know what it feels like to cheer for the World Series Champion.

Senators, a couple weeks ago, when we concluded the 2023 Compact Review Agreement, Palau's president, Surangel Whipps, Jr., posted on his Facebook page "God bless Palau! God bless the United States of America. God bless us all!"

I share President Whipps' enthusiasm for our partnership and potential for the future. I believe the United States and Palau have a real convergence of interests at this time. If confirmed, I am eager to continue to build on our special, unique relationship, and would look forward to advancing win-win opportunities for our two countries.

To do so, I would first turn to our National Security Strategy, Indo-Pacific Strategy, and Pacific Partnership Strategy. These documents describe in no uncertain terms that the United States

faces unprecedented challenges from the People's Republic of China. We have seen that while the PRC's provocative actions span the globe, they are most acute in the Indo-Pacific. The strategies highlight the importance of enhancing our relationships with allies and partners, to include a specific focus on deepening ties with Pacific Island Countries.

Regarding the 2023 Compact Review Agreement, I urge Congress to quickly take up the relevant implementing legislation, appropriate funds, and allow for the entry into force of the agreement. If confirmed, and once the agreement enters into force, I would work to ensure both sides live up to the obligations made in the new agreement. The new agreement addresses investment and economic prosperity, oversight, and numerous other areas that will enhance our relationship for the next twenty years and beyond.

I would also point to our embassy's Integrated Country Strategy, which cites the need to address Palau's top priority: the existential threat from rising sea levels and increasing natural disasters. The people of Palau are counting on the international community to unite with them in confronting this challenge. If confirmed, I would continue to work closely with the Government of Palau and other partners to support disaster preparedness and response.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and Members of the Committee, thank you again for your consideration and the opportunity to appear before you today. I look forward to your comments and questions.