

Statement of Mr. Edgard D. Kagan
Nominee for U.S. Ambassador to Malaysia
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
June 13, 2023

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

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. It is an honor to do so as President Biden's nominee for the position of United States Ambassador to Malaysia. I'm grateful to the President and to Secretary Blinken for their confidence.

I'm also grateful to State Department colleagues, past and present, who have given me a lifelong education in diplomacy and public service. I have spent 32 years in the Foreign Service, 14 of which were representing the United States in the Indo-Pacific. Each post, from New Delhi to Canberra; Beijing to Kuala Lumpur, held its own lessons. But across the six Administrations in which I have served, I have seen the critical role of cooperation and alignment with Congress. If confirmed, I commit to working with you to advance U.S. strategic interests in Malaysia, ASEAN, and the broader Indo-Pacific region.

I am grateful to be accompanied today by my family. My mother, Peggy Kagan, is here, joined by my sister, Isabelle Kagan, both visiting from Lexington, Kentucky. Also here are my wife Cynthia Gire, and children Marshall, Anne-Sophie and Daniel. They have shared the challenges, pleasures, and opportunities of living together in six cities in five countries on three continents. For our children, that meant attending nine schools. I am far luckier than I deserve and could not be here today without their love, support, and forbearance. I particularly want to highlight Anne-Sophie, who is graduating from high school this week. I am so proud of you and so grateful you are here today.

I became familiar with Malaysia—its vibrant multicultural society, dynamic economy, beautiful landscapes, and exceptional people – while serving there as Deputy Chief of Mission from 2014 to 2017. Since its independence in 1957, Malaysia and the United States have forged an enduring partnership based on shared interests and mutual respect. We see the breadth and depth of our relationship in the Comprehensive Partnership between our countries. We see it, too, in our extensive trade and investment relationship, broad security cooperation, and people-to-people ties. If confirmed, I would look forward to building on this foundation in several key areas.

First, we are one of Malaysia's largest foreign investors, and our \$79.4 billion of bilateral trade in goods and services last year supported an estimated [58,000](#) U.S. jobs. Critical to supply chains, especially in semiconductors, Malaysia accounts for [24 percent](#) of U.S. semiconductor trade. Last year, in my capacity as National Security Council Senior Director for East Asia and Oceania, I was proud to work to bring Malaysia on as a founding partner of the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework. If confirmed, I will prioritize further strengthening our economic ties and promoting inclusive and sustainable growth, including in new industries.

Second, our security and law enforcement cooperation with Malaysia has grown. We work together to combat terrorism and transnational crimes, and to promote maritime security. We have also increased our cooperation on cybersecurity. Our countries hold regular military exercises to improve our ability to work together and build capacity. I will continue to support these shared priority areas, if confirmed.

Third, standing up for our values is at the heart of America's global role. If confirmed, I will work to further strengthen the rule of law, transparency, good governance, democracy, and respect for human rights in Malaysia. I am particularly concerned about human trafficking, including forced labor, and migrant worker rights. Following Malaysia's downgrade to Tier 3 in the 2021 Trafficking in Persons Report, we have encouraged Malaysia to significantly increase its efforts to protect victims and hold traffickers and complicit officials accountable. If confirmed, I will work with Malaysia to improve investigations and prosecutions of trafficking allegations, including forced labor, and to increase victim identification and support. I will also work with the Malaysian government, UNHCR, and civil society to support the nearly 186,000 refugees and asylum-seekers in Malaysia.

None of this, however, can be accomplished without the amazing U.S. Embassy team in Kuala Lumpur. I will make their safety and that of U.S. citizens my highest priority if confirmed.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, Members of this Committee — the U.S.-Malaysia partnership is strong; I believe that it holds potential to grow still stronger. Mounting challenges in the region demand no less. If confirmed, in partnership with Congress, I will do all I can to realize it. Thank you, and I welcome your questions.