

Statement of Mark W. Libby
Nominee for U.S. Ambassador to Azerbaijan
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
June 13, 2023

Chairman Van Hollen, Ranking Member Romney, distinguished Members of the Committee: It is a great privilege to testify as the President's nominee to be the next U.S. Ambassador to Azerbaijan. I appreciate the confidence President Biden and Secretary Blinken have placed in me with this nomination. If confirmed, I pledge to work closely with this Committee and all Members of Congress to advance U.S. interests in and with Azerbaijan.

I first would like to introduce my wife, Danusia, who joins me as we celebrate our 26th wedding anniversary this summer. Polish by birth, as a naturalized U.S. citizen, Danusia is American by choice. She inspires me with her patriotism through decades of behind-the-scenes public service, training U.S. diplomats in some of the world's most strategically important foreign languages. She is a wonderful mother to our wonderful son Andrew, who is also here today with his partner, Sophie Prager.

Missing today are my father, Pete, who died 12 years ago, my sister Diane, brother Stephen, and mom Marjorie. Their love has sustained me throughout my life. I'd also like to acknowledge the teams at Georgetown University Hospital in Washington and the Dana Farber Cancer Institute in Boston. They have cured me of disease repeatedly since I was 20. I literally owe them my life; thanks to them, I have been able to serve my country for so many years and can be here today.

All U.S. diplomats have a core duty to protect American citizens – and if I am confirmed, this will be my most important task. In my three decades of public service, I have seen the persistence and sacrifices made by U.S. Foreign Service, civil service, military and other interagency partners, and by our locally engaged staff. These dedicated colleagues often face danger and hardship to safeguard their fellow Americans and pursue U.S. interests. If confirmed, it will be the honor of a lifetime to lead the team at Embassy Baku in pursuit of these same goals.

If confirmed, I will also support U.S. efforts to facilitate a just and sustainable peace agreement between Azerbaijan and Armenia. This tragic conflict has produced a bitter legacy of pain and mistrust. I know many Members of this Committee have concerns about Azerbaijan – and I share them. Solving issues of territorial integrity, sovereignty, and the rights and security of everyone in the region – including those in Nagorno-Karabakh – is vital to any durable and dignified peace. There is no military solution to this conflict and the U.S. condemns violence or threats of violence. But with the help of the United States and of our European Union partners, the parties are closer than ever to reaching agreement. If confirmed, I commit to help them get there through active and persistent engagement in Baku.

But signing a peace deal is only the first step. If confirmed, I will lead Embassy Baku's interagency team to support the implementation of an eventual settlement. Successful implementation of a peace agreement would open new horizons for trade and investment that will lead to greater prosperity throughout the South Caucasus and beyond. It also would pave

the way for deeper ties between the United States and Azerbaijan that will stabilize the region and thwart hostile competitors seeking to expand their malign influence by capitalizing on the conflict.

A peace deal would allow us to take to the next level much of what already works well in our relationship with Azerbaijan. Cooperation with Azerbaijan in counterterrorism and border, energy, and maritime security is noteworthy and serves the U.S. national interest. If confirmed, I will redouble our efforts in these areas.

Energy is of particular importance. Cooperation with Azerbaijan has brought more energy to market, helping our European partners diversify sources and routes away from Russia and stabilizing global supply. If confirmed, I will seek to foster further economic development and create even more numerous and diverse opportunities for U.S. companies to compete and generate jobs at home.

Democracy and human rights are core to U.S. foreign policy – not just because they reflect our values, but because they are the best foundation for peace and prosperity. They also are integral to international commitments and obligations that both we and Azerbaijan have undertaken. If confirmed, I will advocate for democracy, responsive governance, and the rights and freedoms necessary to realize the full potential of *all* of Azerbaijan's people. I pledge to engage in respectful, but frank dialogue with a wide range of Azerbaijani leaders and citizens to advocate for these values, rights and freedoms in Azerbaijan and in the wider region. If confirmed, I will work in full and open consultation with this Committee, which has shown such leadership advancing our values and interests in this complex region. I commit to cooperation with you to advance our goal of a stable, democratic, peaceful, and prosperous Azerbaijan that is a strategic partner to the United States.

Thank you for considering my nomination, and I look forward to your questions.