

Statement of Natalie E. Brown
Nominee for Ambassador to the Republic of Uganda
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
May 13, 2020

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and Members of the Committee, I am honored to appear before you today as the President's nominee to be the next United States Ambassador to the Republic of Uganda. I appreciate the confidence and trust the President and Secretary have placed in me by submitting my name to this body for consideration, and I welcome the opportunity to speak with you today in this innovative format. If confirmed, I pledge to work with you – directly or virtually – to advance our nation's interests in Uganda.

Mr. Chairman, with your permission, I would like to acknowledge my family members without whose support, encouragement, and sacrifices, I would not be with you today.

It was my mother, Betty Brown's, love of geography and interest in global events that made me curious about the world, and it has been a delight to travel with her to many of the places we read about in my National Geographic Children's Atlas.

My sister Daryle Glynn Brown has been my staunchest supporter, as well as my toughest critic -- like most siblings -- and I thank her for always challenging me to do better.

And with me in spirit today are my father Eugene, whose 27 years as a police officer inspired my career in public service; my dear friend Fay Holl, whom I met on my first diplomatic assignment and who provided a home away from home throughout the course of my career; and my fiancé Fikret Yildiz, who passed away recently, most likely a victim of pandemic that has claimed far too many lives globally, and who was looking forward to joining the State Department family.

Mr. Chairman/Senators since 1990, in eight countries, primarily in Africa and the Middle East, as well as in Washington, I have had the great privilege of representing the United States and the American people, of advancing American interests, and of promoting our democratic values. In doing so, I have assisted American citizens in need and adjudicated visa applications of people interested in visiting the United States, I have helped identify overseas business opportunities for American companies and I was proud to support Kuwaiti women in their very first efforts to vote and run for elected office. In what was for me the most "foreign" of my assignments, I even spent a year at the Marine Corps Command and Staff College, getting to better know my uniformed colleagues and their varied roles in protecting American interests.

In addition to this substantive experience, I am grateful for the leadership opportunities afforded to me to in directing U.S. foreign policy and mentoring the next generation of Foreign Service Officers. For example, I recently concluded a three-year assignment as Chief of Mission in Asmara, Eritrea, where my small team and I worked to revitalize long-strained relations against a backdrop of profound political and security change in the Horn of Africa. In Rome, as Deputy Permanent Representative of our Mission to the UN Food Agencies, my colleagues and I coordinated with numerous United States agencies in building consensus with a range of partners to alleviate hunger and ensure responsible use of contributions to the UN agencies. I was also

Deputy Chief of Mission in Tunisia as that country transitioned from dictatorship to democracy. There, the U.S. response to that transformation was swift and substantial, and one of the highlights of my career remains our work with the Tunisian people to instill democratic practices.

I believe the sum of these experiences has prepared me well to work with and guide our country team in Uganda, which is working on some of the world's most challenging issues, including threats to peace and stability, massive refugee flows, rapid population growth, and corruption. Of course, in the headlines today are efforts to curb the spread of pandemic disease. Here, Uganda's experience in combatting HIV/AIDS, Ebola, and other infectious diseases, bolstered by significant long-term technical and materiel support from the United States, is helping to set an example for many others.

Mr. Chairman/Senators, the United States and Uganda have enjoyed a solid bilateral relationship over the past 25 years, cooperating to counter terrorism and promote stability, particularly in Somalia; to encourage economic growth and prosperity, evidenced by increasing private U.S. investment in the country; and, as noted, to curb the spread of pandemics. We have made notable progress on all fronts and, if confirmed, my team and I will work hard to continue and hopefully accelerate this trend.

The urgency of the current global health crisis, however, should not detract from other areas warranting continued serious attention and engagement. Strengthening Uganda's multiparty democracy, promoting good governance, combatting corruption, and reinforcing respect for human rights, including for marginalized populations, are key U.S. policy priorities. Regrettably, these are also areas where the trend is not so positive and where there have even been efforts to stifle voices and curb political aspirations. If confirmed, these are areas on which I intend to focus.

Uganda will hold elections in early 2021, during which President Museveni is expected to seek a sixth term. If confirmed, I will urge President Museveni to ensure the political space required for an open and vibrant campaign with the free and full participation of all parties. Given Uganda's influence in the region, this is important not only for the future of the country and its people, but also for its neighbors.

Mr. Chairman/Senators, key to much of Uganda's progress in safeguarding the region, in growing its economy, and in taking care of its people is the significant assistance provided by the United States. We have invested in security and combatting terrorism, and we make contributions to agriculture and education. The vast majority of our assistance, however, targets the health sector, with a historical special focus on achieving HIV epidemic control and fighting malaria as a healthier population is essential to Uganda's continued development. Healthy students learn and perform better, and healthy workers can help the economy grow faster. If confirmed I will work with Uganda to maintain momentum and prepare for the day when it assumes full responsibility for the health programs now funded by the United States.

On the critical issue of economic growth, with 80 percent of Uganda's population under the age of 30, in order to compete in the global marketplace, it is vital that Uganda encourage and

promote job creation, technological advances, and foreign investment. Harnessing the potential of this tremendous youth bulge as a force for economic ingenuity and prosperity will also be critical as a counter narrative to violent extremism and despair. Partnering with U.S. firms can help achieve these goals and create jobs in both countries. If confirmed, I will strive to expand trade and commercial ties between the United States and Uganda for the betterment of both our countries.

Thank you. I look forward to your questions.