

**Statement of Michael DeSombre  
Nominee for Ambassador to Thailand  
Senate Foreign Relations Committee  
October 16, 2019**

Chairman, Ranking Member, Senators. I thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today as the nominee for the Ambassador to the Kingdom of Thailand.

I want to thank President Trump for nominating me to be his personal representative to the Kingdom of Thailand and I wish to thank Secretary Pompeo for his strong support.

I am grateful to all members of this Committee for the opportunity today to speak with you about my qualifications and intentions.

I want to thank my wife and four children for their support of my desire to enter public service. My wife Jean and I recently celebrated our 27<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. Jean has always been my inspiration and in the last 27 years we have managed to build our respective professional careers while together raising four wonderful children – Winnona, Gabrielle, MichaelRay, and Phoenix. Notwithstanding the logistical challenges of two continents and three cities, I am very pleased to be joined here today by my wife Jean, my two daughters and my youngest son Phoenix. My eldest son Michael Ray plays scrum half on his rugby team in Hong Kong and is critical to their success at two matches during this period and thus was not able to make it here today. If I am confirmed, my son looks forward to playing rugby in Bangkok.

I also would like to thank my parents Eugene and Nancy for their support. Mom and Dad were not able to make it here in person but I know they are watching the livestream back in Chicago.

Since a young age I have been motivated to serve my country. I believe that my experience in legal, economic, and strategic matters over the past thirty years is directly relevant to the position for which I have been nominated.

I have been a practicing lawyer for almost 25 years. I fundamentally believe in the importance of the rule of law, transparency and good governance. This is true both for corporations and for countries.

As the head of Sullivan & Cromwell's acquisitions practice in Asia, I have advised many Western corporations on complex investments in many different Asian countries, including Thailand. I also am frequently engaged by corporations to provide training on high-stakes negotiations.

I have been a student of strategic issues between the United States and China since the late 1980s when I received my Master's degree in East Asian Studies focused on China's military and foreign policy. While living and working in Hong Kong and China for the past two decades, I have had a front row seat to the challenges and opportunities presented by China's economic and military modernization.

If confirmed, I will apply my background in law, commerce and strategic issues in Asia to work with our long-time ally, Thailand, to advance a free and open Indo-Pacific, including

promoting the rule of law and good governance; strengthening the economic partnership with Thailand; and further enhancing the U.S.-Thai military alliance. In that regard I would like to thank Senator Gardner and Senator Markey for their leadership on the Asia Reassurance Initiative Act, which reflects very clearly the administration's foreign policy priorities in Asia.

Thailand and the United States share an enduring friendship. Last year marked the 200th anniversary of Thailand and the United States as great and good friends, as President Lincoln told His Majesty Rama IV back in 1862. 2019 has already been a historic year for our Thai friends. Thailand saw the coronation of His Majesty, King Rama X, and also saw the long-awaited elections that stood up a new civilian government led by Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha. The resumption of elected civilian governance presents an opportunity for the U.S. to raise its cooperation with Thailand to a new level.

Thailand is a major non-NATO ally and the only United States ally in mainland South East Asia. We have a broad, multi-faceted relationship with Thailand that is both bilateral and regional in scope. On the security side, we have frequent joint exercises and interactions, including our annual Cobra Gold multinational exercise that we have been co-hosting since 1982.

America's partnership with Thailand also helps Thailand address increasing security and humanitarian challenges throughout the Lower Mekong region, including methamphetamine flows, trafficking in persons, and wildlife trafficking.

The U.S.-Thai alliance helps Thailand and the lower Mekong countries maintain their sovereignty while protecting their security, supporting their economies, and safeguarding their rich cultures and environment. Our deep partnership with Thailand also includes more than half a century of extensive cooperation on public health issues of common concern in Thailand and in the region such as HIV, infectious diseases, and malnutrition.

United States and Thailand have a growing economic and commercial relationship and, if confirmed, it will be a priority of mine to focus on expanding this relationship. I am particularly excited by the opportunities available by the creation of the Development Finance Corporation under the BUILD Act and other initiatives under the economic pillar of the Indo Pacific Strategy.

Thailand is making democratic strides. However, more progress is needed. If confirmed, I will consult closely with Congress to ensure we continue to promote the rule of law, transparency, human rights, democracy, and good governance in Thailand. I am confident that Thailand will become an even stronger ally as it strengthens its democratic institutions.

If confirmed, I hope to apply my knowledge and training to assist this important ally to continue democratic progress and will seek to use existing exchange programs like the Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative, or YSEALI, and the International Visitor Leadership Program to empower the next generation of Thai leaders to embrace the benefits of the rule of law, transparency, and good governance.

If confirmed, I will dedicate myself to the U.S. government's highest priority – the protection of U.S. citizens in Thailand. I will also have the honor and privilege of leading the dedicated Americans and local staff of the State Department and the many other U.S. government

agencies that make up Mission Thailand. As Secretary Pompeo emphasized before this Committee in April of last year, the State Department's responsibility, and one of my top priorities, if confirmed, is to empower the staff of Mission Thailand and provide them with the necessary support to apply their capabilities and ideas to further U.S. foreign policy goals. I have spent the last 15 years leading teams and organizations in the private and NGO sectors in Asia and would hope to bring this experience to the management of Mission Thailand.

Finally, Chairman, Ranking Member and Senators, I thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.

I look forward to your questions.