

William Douglass Opening Statement
Nominee for United States Ambassador to The Bahamas
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
August 6, 2020

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and distinguished Members of the Committee, I am honored to appear before you today as the President's nominee to serve as the next U.S. Ambassador to the Commonwealth of The Bahamas. I am grateful to President Trump and Secretary Pompeo for the confidence they have placed in me. If confirmed, I commit to work closely with this committee and its staff, and other Members of Congress, to advance the U.S. national interest and deepen our already close partnership with The Bahamas.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank my family—my wife Kristin and children Elizabeth and William—for all their support over the years, which has made this opportunity possible. For over three generations, my family has maintained connections to The Bahamas, its business leaders and residents. The Bahamas is a proud, independent, sovereign Nation having gained its independence some forty-seven years ago. It is, therefore, one of the great honors of my life to be considered for the position of Ambassador of the United States to The Bahamas.

In recent months, The Bahamas was struck with the back-to-back disasters of September 2019's Hurricane Dorian, the strongest in the country's history, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Although it is true that Hurricane Dorian and COVID-19 have both taken a severe toll on the Bahamian economy, I'm glad to report that the country is now reopening. Both posed severe economic and social challenges to the country, and in both cases the United States has proven itself a staunch and stalwart partner in assisting The Bahamas to recover. If confirmed, I intend to continue working with The Bahamas to restore the country's economic strength in order to maintain our strong bilateral ties and protect vital U.S. economic equities including trade, investment, and tourism. *This* will be critical to ensuring The Bahamas remains a strong and stable partner in protecting our homeland from illegal drugs and irregular migration and a partner in promoting our shared goals and values internationally.

Since gaining its independence in 1973, The Bahamas has been a steadfast partner with the United States. Our shared interests and values, strong people-to-people ties, trade, and integrated security cooperation are second to none. At its nearest point, the country lies just 45 nautical miles from the coast of Florida. In recent years, our countries have worked together to significantly increase narcotic interdictions and increase the interoperability of our security

forces. If confirmed as Ambassador, I commit to continue and advance these efforts.

The Bahamas has also been a strong partner with the United States within the Caribbean Community on our efforts to restore democracy and human rights in Venezuela. It was the first Caribbean country to join the United States in recognizing president Guaidó. In March 2019, the Prime Minister of The Bahamas joined President Trump at Mar a Lago where he reinforced his country's commitment to democracy in the hemisphere. Since then, the country has led on regional issues at the Organization of American States and in the United Nations. If not for the pandemic, The Bahamas would have hosted the OAS's general assembly in June. The Bahamas is also a strong advocate for democracy and human rights issues with regard to Nicaragua.

I have been visiting the Bahamas for more than 50 years. Over the past decade I have witnessed first-hand China's increased interest in gaining a foothold in The Bahamas. This has been a concern of many Bahamians and should give us concern. China's presence is evident ---- and has included multiple road projects, a port facility in North Abaco, mega-resorts and hotels across New Providence, and large-scale development grants for economic and technical cooperation. I recently saw the Chinese build a port facility near Cooperstown, Abaco three years ago, which cost the Bahamians more than 40 million dollars and is still not operational. In addition, many Bahamian telecommunications industry platforms utilize Huawei hardware. If confirmed as Ambassador, I will not only seek to increase American investment and promote our countries' shared values, but also clearly communicate the risks of opaque Chinese deals that so often come with strings attached and limited employment value for Bahamian citizens.

For over thirty-five years, I have been blessed to be successful in business. I believe my business and management experience is integral in running a successful U.S. mission in The Bahamas and has well prepared me for the duties of Ambassador there. If confirmed, I would look forward to leading the efforts of 11 sections and agencies at our mission in The Bahamas to coordinate a whole of government effort to advance U.S. national interests. I would also ensure our Embassy platform runs efficiently to support our dedicated public servants and their families serving there.

If I am confirmed, I will also promote greater economic ties between the United States and The Bahamas. The Bahamas remains an attractive destination for U.S. businesses, U.S. homeowners, and I will work with the government to provide stable and transparent regulations for increased trade and investment.

I will utilize a whole-of-government approach to link U.S. businesses to the many investment and U.S. export opportunities in the Bahamas. I strongly believe that American companies can compete when transparent regulations, practices, and

respect for the rule of law prevail. If I am confirmed, I will ensure that the United States remains the commercial partner of choice in The Bahamas.

One of the strongest bonds between the United States and The Bahamas continues to be our people-to-people ties. If confirmed, I will also seek to expand our educational exchanges. I will work to broaden our engagement under the Administration's U.S.-Caribbean 2020 strategy and to identify ways to enhance the region's resilience to natural disasters. Finally, as a matter of the highest priority, I would like to emphasize that I will have no higher priority as Ambassador than to protect U.S. citizens in The Bahamas, including U.S. Mission personnel.

In closing, I commit to you that I have the integrity, experience, and passion to lead our bilateral relationship with the people and the Government of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas. If confirmed, I pledge to uphold the tradition and high standards of public service expected of a U.S. ambassador. Thank you, and I welcome your questions.