

Kathleen M. Fitzpatrick
Nominee to be U.S. Ambassador to the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
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Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Markey, Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today as the President's nominee to become the next U.S. Ambassador to the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste. I am deeply grateful to the President and Secretary Tillerson for placing their confidence in me to serve the United States in Timor-Leste, a young and promising democracy and friend of the United States.

I would like to introduce my family, whose support and encouragement has brought me to where I am today. With me today is my husband, retired Foreign Service Officer Richard Figueroa. I would also like to acknowledge our wonderful daughters, Elizabeth and Alexandra Figueroa; Elizabeth is here today, while Alexandra is away at college. My brothers Michael and Tom Fitzpatrick and sister-in-law Terry have also joined us today. Both of my parents passed away six years ago but they would have been very proud of this moment. My Mom's love still surrounds us. And, my father, a WWII veteran--who flew as a navigator on B-17s, and when his plane was shot down, was a POW for a year and a half--serves as a shining example of service to country and devotion to family. I would also like to send my love to the Figueroa side of our family who live in Puerto Rico and St. Thomas, with gratitude that they are safe as they endure the aftermath of Hurricane Maria. Finally Mr. Chairman, I also thank my many mentors and colleagues who have supported me throughout my career.

Mr. Chairman, Timor-Leste has shown that it is possible for a new country to emerge from years of conflict as a nation succeeding on the foundations of democratic principles and respect for human rights.

Timor-Leste and the United States share a friendship based on those common values, and our bilateral relations are anchored in mutual respect and admiration. We respect the tremendous struggles Timor-Leste has endured to become the newest country in Asia, and we commend the vibrant and developing democracy Timor-Leste has built to respond to the aspirations of its diverse people. As President Trump said in a message on Timor-Leste's 15th independence day this year, the progress of this young country reflects the national spirit and determination of the Timorese people.

Secretary Tillerson echoed the President’s comments in his own message when he said: “Fifteen years of independence is a remarkable milestone, reflecting the resolve and commitment of the Timorese people to build a new democracy based on respect for human rights and the rule of law. We are committed to deepening ties between the American and Timorese peoples in the years to come.” Mr. Chairman, if confirmed, I will work to fulfill our commitment to deepen ties with a country that has earned our respect, a country that has set its own path – symbolized by the star the Timorese chose to adorn their nation’s flag – as a democratic, resilient and stable state.

Timor-Leste has held peaceful, credible and fair presidential and parliamentary elections in 2017, the first without UN peacekeepers, reflecting the diversity of emerging political views, especially among young people voting for the first time, and with an impressively high turnout.

As a young country in a large and strategic neighborhood, Timor-Leste faces economic, security, and environmental challenges. Timor-Leste is actively addressing some of these concerns. Its leaders are working with Australia in a conciliation process to resolve peacefully a maritime boundary dispute in accordance with international law using a mechanism that could be a model for other countries seeking to solve such differences. It has applied to join ASEAN and the World Trade Organization. Timor-Leste is an increasingly important voice for human rights and democracy globally. It is a founding member of the g7+ fragile states group and shares experiences and best practices on how societies rebuild after conflict. Timor-Leste has also been an important voice on regional issues of mutual concern, including calling for North Korea to abide by UN Security Council resolutions at the ASEAN Regional Forum in August.

Our cooperation, whether through USAID, military-to-military engagement, Peace Corps, or a new Millennium Challenge Corporation Threshold Program, will build capacity for inclusive economic growth, maritime security, and stronger governance. Much of our collaboration assists Timor-Leste in diversifying its economy for more sustainable development, bolstering Timor-Leste’s ability to work with the United States on issues of common concern. A coffee cooperative established and developed with USAID and USDA assistance, for example, now provides sustainable income and access to rural health clinics for its 22,000 members.

Our growing security partnership with Timor-Leste builds capacity to respond to natural disasters and humanitarian crises, strengthens maritime security, and

deepens the professionalism of the Timorese military. Our armed forces conduct regular bilateral exercises, and a rotating U.S. Navy Seabees detachment provides critical humanitarian assistance and infrastructure support to the Timorese people. To support Timor-Leste's efforts to strengthen rule of law, we also train Timorese law enforcement personnel at the regional International Law Enforcement Academy. We have also worked with Timor-Leste as it strengthens its ability to combat trafficking in persons.

Mr. Chairman, if confirmed, I will work with our team in Dili and Washington, our Timorese hosts, and other international partners to further strengthen our bilateral and multilateral cooperation with Timor-Leste and advance U.S. interests there and in the region. I will also work to deepen our outreach to the Timorese people, particularly the large youth population, so that our future ties are built on a strong foundation.

Mr. Chairman, during my Foreign Service career, I have proudly served the United States both in Washington and abroad. If confirmed, I will use my experience to guide our mission in Dili to strengthen our relationship with the region's newest nation. Over the years, members of the U.S. Congress have shown particular interest in Timor-Leste's development and success, having played an important role in the country's independence. If confirmed, I look forward to working with this Committee and other members of Congress, whether here in Washington or in the region, as we continue to promote our interests in Timor-Leste and the broader East Asia and Pacific region.

Thank you for this opportunity to appear before you today. I am honored to take your questions.