

**Statement of John Hennessey-Niland**  
**Nominee to be U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Palau**  
**Senate Committee on Foreign Relations**

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and distinguished members of the Committee on Foreign Relations, it is an honor and a privilege to appear before you today. I am grateful for the confidence the President and Secretary Pompeo have placed in me as the nominee to be the next U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Palau. If confirmed, I look forward to working with you to advance our nation's interests with respect to our bilateral relationship with Palau, a key partner of the United States in the Indo Pacific region.

From a young age, I have always known that I wanted to serve my country. Growing up abroad, I saw firsthand the importance of American leadership. I recognize that I enjoyed a privileged upbringing thanks to my parents. My dad worked for a number of years overseas as a senior executive for Standard Oil of Indiana. As a student at Tufts University and later at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy - in addition to my studies and playing on the Varsity soccer team - I focused on passing the Foreign Service exam and being selected as an American diplomat. It has been an honor to serve over the past 30 years.

My wife Julie is here with me and without her I would not be before the Committee today. She has been by my side ever since we were graduate students together and she was the Residential Assistant in our dorm. She has done so much to support our family, including countless moves and giving up her own global career with AT&T, so that I could serve our country. Our two sons, Connor and Aidan, could not be with us today. They are both recent graduates and have both found gainful employment – which greatly pleases Julie and me as their proud parents. Connor has just completed a Masters Degree in International Politics at Trinity College in Dublin, Ireland and is a Research Services Coordinator for Qualtrics, an SAP company. Aidan graduated earlier this year with a B.A. in Economics and Government from the College of William and Mary in Virginia and is the Team Operations Coordinator for the Pittsburgh Steelers.

I have sought throughout my career to represent the United States to the best of my abilities and embody the principles and values of this great nation. I recognize that while service is a personal commitment, it is very much a shared endeavor. I believe my background – as Charge D'Affaires and Deputy Chief of Mission, as a Director at the National Security Council and as the Foreign Policy Advisor to the U.S. Marine Corps Forces Pacific (MARFORPAC) – demonstrates significant diplomatic experience and the capability to serve as a Chief of Mission. My work in the Pacific – currently as the Acting Deputy Chief of Mission and previously as the Political Counselor at the U.S. Mission in Australia, as the Political and Economic Section Head in our Embassy in Fiji – exemplifies a substantive knowledge of the region that may be particularly helpful in leading the U.S. Embassy in Palau. Personal experience with small teams in remote areas – such as my assignment as head of a prosecutions unit with the International

Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda – has prepared me for the challenges and opportunities of service at a small embassy in a distant location. I believe my management of people and budgets has shown that I have the positive attributes required to build successful organizations and use resources appropriately and effectively. I support a whole of mission approach and inclusive and innovative practices that build on the diverse strengths and talents of our officers and locally engaged staff.

The opportunity, in particular, to serve as the foreign policy advisor alongside our U.S. Marines at MARFORPAC, first as part of the Command Team of General John Toolan and later with General David Berger, now the Commandant of the Marine Corps, has been particularly meaningful in my development as a Foreign Service Officer and a leader. The power of inspiration, of leading by example, and understanding that the strength of any organization is determined by the cohesion of the unit and the clarity of its mission, are enduring lessons not just for Marines. I saw these skills put into use daily at Camp H.M. Smith and around the Pacific by the men and women assigned to the Indo Pacific Command.

Our military ties to Palau run deep. The Battle of Peleliu lasted for over 75 days from September to November 1944. U.S. Marines of the 1st Marine Division, and later soldiers of the U.S. Army's 81st Infantry Division, fought to capture an airstrip on that small coral island. By 1944, American victories in the Southwest and Central Pacific had laid the groundwork for the campaign by General MacArthur to return to the Philippines. However, before General MacArthur could do so, the Palau Islands needed to be liberated from Japanese occupation. In that key battle at Peleliu, our forces were ultimately successful. Many citizens of Palau have subsequently served in the U.S. military. Their service is a reminder of our nations' enduring commitment to peace and security in a dynamic and critical part of the world.

The relationship between Palau and the United States, forged in the field of battle, continues to be strong, with the U.S. commitment to our Compact of Free Association with Palau, as well as our Compacts with the other two Freely Associated States – the Federated States of Micronesia and the Republic of the Marshall Islands. As Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Sandra Oudkirk testified before this Committee in July, our relationship with Palau has contributed to a secure, stable and prosperous Western Pacific, which is a strategic location for the United States in the larger Indo-Pacific region. As DAS Oudkirk noted in her testimony, recognizing our unique, historic and special relationship with the Freely Associated States, including Palau, we consult closely on foreign policy matters and the U.S. has full responsibility and authority for security and defense matters in or relating to these three countries. Palau also shares our core values, supporting democracy and human rights, and continues to maintain strong diplomatic ties with Taiwan.

The United States and Palau enjoy a close and positive relationship, anchored in shared history and values. In 1947, the United Nations assigned the United States administering authority over the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, including what is now Palau, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, and the Commonwealth of

the Northern Mariana Islands, which the United States had liberated from Japanese occupation. In 1981, Palau adopted its own constitution and in 1986 the Governments of the United States and Palau concluded a Compact of Free Association which entered into force in 1994. This Compact of Free Association provides the framework for much of our bilateral relationship with Palau.

If confirmed, I pledge to work closely with President Remengesau and his government to deepen and strengthen the ties between Palau and the United States. With a large and increasing number of U.S. government agencies engaged in projects in Palau, coordination and leadership of U.S. government initiatives will be a priority to ensure a whole-of-government approach to our mission and to ensure transparency and accountability for all our programs in Palau.

I'd like to reiterate the thanks expressed by Deputy Assistant Secretary Oudkirk in her testimony to this Committee in July, for working to fulfill the commitment to Palau under the 2010 U.S. – Palau Compact Review Agreement and the leadership of this Committee in that regard continues to be greatly appreciated. The implementation of the Compacts with the Freely Associated States is closely watched by our allies, partners, other Pacific Island countries and our competitors in the region and is seen as a sign of our commitment to the Indo Pacific. The Secretary announced on August 5 that we have begun negotiations on agreements to amend certain provisions of the Compacts of Free Association with the Federated States of Micronesia and the Marshall Islands, and have begun Compact Review discussions with Palau. The progress of these negotiations and future funding decisions will be an important signal of our support to the region.

Our cooperation with Palau is comprehensive and extensive. The U.S. Civic Action Team (CAT) headquartered at Camp Katuu, with its six-month rotations of military engineers and Seabees, supports a large number of projects around the islands of Palau which benefit the Government and people of Palau. Palau participates in the Proliferation Security Initiative to interdict illicit transfers of weapons of mass destruction consistent with international law. Palau cooperates closely with us to ensure its shipping registry is not used by bad actors. Palau is a key partner in deregistering and reporting vessels that have been found using its flag for sanctions evasion and is actively engaged in a maritime law enforcement agreement to combat illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and other illicit activities in its Exclusive Economic Zone. We work closely with Palau on a full suite of law enforcement matters through the Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Coast Guard, Drug Enforcement Agency and the Federal Bureau of Investigation. We conduct law enforcement training in Palau and collaborate on law enforcement investigations. Together, the United States and Palau are working to secure our borders, including our shared maritime border with the Freely Associated States. The scope of our people-to-people ties continues to expand. The United States is working with the next generation of leaders in the region and the annual Young Pacific Leaders conference is a positive example of this focus. The Department of State, together with the Government of New Zealand and the East-West Center, is implementing a women's leadership program in Palau and across the North Pacific to address community needs and increase women's participation and decision-making in their communities.

As noted in the joint statement issued after the historic meeting in Washington in May of this year between the President of the United States and the Presidents of the Freely Associated States, the U.S. and Palau are committed to ensuring the Pacific Ocean continues to be an important and vibrant corridor for maritime trade and that we will work together to reduce vulnerabilities to shared concerns, such as natural disasters, and support the resiliency of the Pacific Islands environment. The joint statement concludes with the shared confidence that our relationship with Palau and the other Freely Associated States will “further our abiding mutual interests and remain a source of regional security, stability, and prosperity.”

If confirmed, I pledge to promote and protect U.S. interests and our people in Palau to the best of my ability and to lead effectively and in good spirit our talented and dedicated American and Palauan staff at the U.S. Embassy in Koror. I warmly welcome the opportunity to work with you to ensure the strongest possible relationship with the Republic of Palau – a key partner of the United States in the Indo Pacific.

Thank you again, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and distinguished members of the Committee, for this opportunity to speak with you today and answer your questions.