

**Statement of Mr. Lawrence R. Silverman  
Nominee to be Ambassador to Kuwait  
Senate Foreign Relations Committee  
June 21, 2016**

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Cardin, Members of the Committee, I am honored to appear before you, and gratified by the trust President Obama and Secretary Kerry have shown by nominating me to serve as U.S. ambassador to the State of Kuwait. If you will permit me, I would also like to thank my family for their support throughout my career. My wife Vicki, a former Foreign Service Officer herself, my daughter, Lina, and my son, David, are here with me today.

I would also like to acknowledge the exemplary service of my colleague, Doug Silliman, as the U.S. ambassador to Kuwait. Some of our best and brightest in the Foreign Service have served as Ambassador to Kuwait. I have learned from them and hope to build upon the strong U.S.-Kuwait bonds they have forged.

If confirmed, I will work closely with this committee and others in the Congress to sustain and enhance our close, productive and mutually beneficial relationship with Kuwait. For the past 25 years, Kuwait has prospered under the security and stability afforded by our relationship, and the United States has been able to work closely with Kuwait and other Gulf Cooperation Council partners in addressing threats to our interests because of that same relationship. Today, our partnership serves as a cornerstone of U.S. national security interests in the region and helps us find solutions to destabilizing regional conflicts, combat extremism and terrorism, promote commerce, advance cooperation on global issues such as eliminating human trafficking -- on which we are making some progress in Kuwait. --.. Moreover, we are working to further strengthen the investment and education ties between our countries.

Mr. Chairman, if confirmed, I will have no higher priority than protecting the safety and security of all Americans in Kuwait – those in our Mission, deployed military personnel and the large number of private Americans.

. From the beginning of the campaign to defeat Da'esh, Kuwait has been a key member of the coalition we have led. It has provided strategic access and logistical support to coalition forces deployed in support of Operation Inherent Resolve, and is a member of the Coalition's Small Group, in recognition of its significant role across several lines of effort in this campaign. Indeed, Kuwait has been a leader amongst the GCC countries in providing humanitarian assistance to

the millions of individuals displaced by conflicts across the region, and we look forward to Kuwait continuing this vital support.

Almost exactly one year ago, Kuwait was a direct victim of Da'esh's terrorism. The June 2015 bombing of the Imam Sadiq Mosque resulted in 27 deaths and 227 injured. None of us can reverse what happened that day or in other terrorist acts and bring back the lives lost, but we can redouble our efforts to prevent further attacks. Kuwait has drawn exactly that lesson from the tragedy at the mosque, increasing its resolve to combat terrorism, including steps to stop money laundering and terrorist financing. With our help, it is building its capacity for such efforts and has successfully prosecuted several Kuwaiti nationals and expatriate residents on terrorist financing charges. We look forward to further cooperation to stop terrorist financing, especially as there is more than we believe Kuwait can do in this regard.

Since its liberation by a U.S.-led coalition in 1991, Kuwait has been a uniquely close defense partner, generously hosting a major U.S. military presence, including the regional headquarters of U.S. Army Central (ARCENT) and the headquarters of the Combined Joint Task Force for operations in Iraq and Syria. Kuwait is committed to advancing cooperative defense efforts. If confirmed, I promise to lead my team in doing all we can not only to maintain this unique and strategically important defense relationship, but also to help it further evolve so as to meet present day challenges. I will also do all I can to support our men and women in uniform serving there.

I want to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the sacrifice of U.S. soldiers who helped liberate Kuwait in Operation Desert Storm in 1991. I arrived at my first posting in the Foreign Service, Amman, Jordan, one week after Saddam Hussein invaded and occupied Kuwait, and met people fleeing that invasion near the Jordan-Iraq border. In my office, I keep on the wall a reminder of that occupation -- a license plate the Saddam regime issued to pretend that Kuwait was a province of Iraq -- and of the bravery of our soldiers in ending that occupation. While U.S.-Kuwait bonds were forged in war now over a quarter century ago, we are working every day to forge further bonds in peacetime. Even more significantly, under the leadership of Amir Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah Kuwait has prioritized improved ties with the Iraqi people, supporting their efforts to defeat Daesh. Kuwait has provided practical help to stabilize Iraq, previously postponing billions of required reparations payments by Iraq for the occupation of Kuwait and , pledging an additional \$200 million in assistance to help Iraqis internally displaced by violence in their own country. We welcome this support,

which reflects the important strategic recognition that the security of Kuwait and our GCC partners is linked, in part, to Iraq's success in defeating Daesh.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Cardin, Members of the Committee, our relationship with Kuwait is much broader than security, and so are the mutual benefits. This will be reflected in the inaugural U.S.-Kuwait Strategic Dialogue, which we look forward to hosting in July. Kuwaitis are major investors in every sector of the American economy, from real estate to IPOs, and we want to see our economic ties grow. Separately, Kuwait has committed to participate in a new ministerial-level economic dialogue that the President and GCC leaders announced at the U.S.-GCC Summit in April. It will focus on U steps Kuwait and other GCC partners can take to diversify their economies, increase economic cooperation, and also support reforms that could make available additional resources for Kuwait to help meet the economic and social aspirations of their young people and all of their citizens.

And regionally, Kuwait has been a staunch supporter of our mutual interests. It has been at the forefront of supporting Iraq and its government, and of welcoming the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action with Iran, while remaining concerned about Iran's activities destabilizing the region.

Today, Kuwait is hosting the UN-mediated Yemen negotiations. The Amir has personally urged the parties to reach a peaceful solution to the conflict. The Kuwaitis have also been a world leader in humanitarian assistance for the Syrian crisis, pledging \$1.4 billion through the United Nations, hosting three pledging conferences, and co-hosting a fourth this past February. As Secretary Kerry has said, "We appreciate the strong partnership in trying to deal with the troubles of the region."

In the all-important energy field, Kuwait is the world's eighth largest oil producer, the fourth largest in OPEC. Our Mission in Kuwait is promoting U.S. technical assistance to the oil and petrochemical industry. There are commercial opportunities for American renewable energy technology leaders, as Kuwait seeks to generate 15 percent of electricity production from renewable energy by 2030.

Commercial ties between our countries expanded by over 42 percent between 2009 and 2015 -- to \$7.5 billion. U.S. exports to Kuwait grew by 29 percent, making Kuwait our fifth largest export market in the Middle East-North Africa region. Kuwait's multi-billion dollar investment in major power generation, transportation, oil and gas, and health care infrastructure projects presents

American contracting firms and vendors with enormous business opportunities. As one example, our Embassy in Kuwait just hosted the largest U.S. trade delegation ever to Kuwait, focused on health care.

Within the region, Kuwait stands out for its relatively open political environment, vibrant civil society, and tradition of constitutional participatory governance. There is a relatively free press, and the parliament is freely-elected and independent. Women are represented in the Cabinet; their participation in the public sector reached 54 percent in 2015. There is, however, room for improvement, and we will continue to encourage democratic, economic and social development.

The U.S.-Kuwaiti relationship is between peoples as well as governments. We want to continue investing in those ties. Five generations of Kuwaitis have studied in the U.S., and the number of those studying here has grown to 9,000. With a quarter of the population under the age of 25, our educational opportunities are a vital part of sharing American principles. If confirmed, I will prioritize our engagement with this new generation to ensure that our bilateral ties continue to remain strong into the future.

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee, for me, if confirmed, this assignment would represent coming full circle since my first tour in Jordan, where I saw the effects of the occupation of Kuwait. I believe my experience working on regional conflicts and counter-terrorism, and the promotion of commercial relations of American values, would help me to effectively protect and advance U.S. interests as Chief of Mission in Kuwait. I have made a concerted effort to offer advice to and encourage the development of the skills of those with whom I have had the privilege of serving. I have also been fortunate to have mentors who emphasized that each Mission – including all the agencies represented – must function as a team for us to succeed in advancing U.S. interests.

Chairman Corker, Ranking Member Cardin, Members of the Committee, if confirmed I look forward to the opportunity to welcome you and your staff in Kuwait to continue building our important relationship. Thank you very much again for this opportunity to appear before you. I look forward to responding to your questions.