

**Opening Statement for James C. O'Brien**  
**Nominee for Coordinator for Sanctions Policy with the rank of Ambassador**  
**Senate Foreign Relations Committee**  
**January 12, 2022**

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and distinguished Members of the Committee, I am honored to appear before you today. Thank you for considering my nomination, and I also thank the Committee staff for meeting with me.

I am here because of the support of my wife Mary, our children Sean and Jamie, my father Jim, and my sisters Meghan and Nan. My mother, Jane, died just over a year ago. She was the bedrock of our family and instilled a love of community and public service that has shaped my life.

Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member, I welcome the opportunity to return to public service if I am confirmed. I began my career as an attorney-adviser in the State Department in 1989 and was proud to serve the U.S. government and the American people until 2001, when I finished an assignment as presidential envoy for the Balkans upon the democratic transition in Serbia. In 2015, I became the first U.S. presidential envoy for hostage affairs, a position that allowed me to work with many brave Americans seeking the safe return of their family members. It was a privilege.

I am honored that President Biden and Secretary Blinken have nominated me to be Sanctions Coordinator. I thank the Committee for its strong advocacy – collectively and through several members – for the position. If confirmed, I look forward to consulting closely with Committee staff and with each of you.

Sanctions can be very powerful, and the use or threat of sanctions can be extraordinarily effective when in support of a coherent strategy and in concert with other elements of national power. The Executive Branch under both parties and, with the urging of Congress, has invested considerable resources in the U.S. capacity to design, implement, and enforce sanctions. From my informal count, there are hundreds of officials at the Departments of State and the Treasury, as well as in other agencies, working to develop and implement authorities that promote anticorruption, human rights, counterterrorism, counternarcotics, nonproliferation, and other core principles of U.S. policy. I am committed to making sure we preserve and enhance the effectiveness of sanctions. If confirmed, I look forward to working with these officials, as well as those responsible for other tools of foreign policy and economic statecraft.

The scale of this effort means that proposals for sanctions arise across the U.S. government on different timelines and for disparate reasons. The recent U.S. Treasury review of its sanctions noted an increase in individual sanctions designations, under Treasury authorities alone, to more than 9,421 in 2021. Each must be coordinated by and with officials responsible for other facets of U.S. policy. This poses several challenges.

First, sanctions must be part of a strategy; they themselves cannot be the strategy. As the Treasury review notes and the Department of State has also expressed, each sanction, however well-justified, should support a clear policy objective and rest upon analysis of alternatives, effects, and support from our partners. This requires that its purpose be understood beyond the U.S. government, that we work with other governments, including at the United Nations, and that we maintain and adapt sanctions

regimes as technology changes and targets of sanctions react. The Office of the Sanctions Coordinator cannot do this alone and the office's success will require the leadership and cooperation of colleagues from across the government, the Department, and especially from our embassies.

Second, we must do more to understand both the effectiveness and the effects of U.S. sanctions, in particular human consequences. Sanctions may serve many purposes, and we should know both what our aim is and whether we have hit it. We should also work to avoid causing unintended consequences and take into account the effects on U.S. businesses and competitiveness. The White House has announced a review of the humanitarian consequences of sanctions, and I look forward to being active in those discussions if I am confirmed before the review is complete.

Each of these goals requires that the U.S. government and our partners engage regularly with the business community and with nongovernmental bodies and independent journalists. These groups add to our understanding of the impact of our sanctions actions and where they may help us achieve our foreign policy goals.

Third, if confirmed, I look forward to engaging with our global partners whose cooperation will make sanctions programs more effective. This would again require that the Sanctions Coordinators' office work closely with US missions abroad and other officials who engage other governments.

Finally, sanctions are crucial to the fight against corruption. The Administration has put forward a robust strategy, and Secretary Blinken has announced that the Department will appoint a senior anti-corruption coordinator. If confirmed, I look forward to working with the coordinator to address the threat from corrupt actors and the networks that enable them.

Thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you today and for considering my nomination. I look forward to answering your questions.