

Statement of Brian P. McKeon
Nominee to be Deputy Secretary of State for Management and Resources
Committee on Foreign Relations
March 3, 2021

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Risch, members of the Committee, it is an honor to appear before you as the President's nominee to be Deputy Secretary of State for Management and Resources.

I would like to start by thanking President Biden and Secretary of State Blinken for selecting me for this position. It is particularly gratifying to appear before this Committee, which was my professional home for 12 years, when I worked on the Democratic staff supporting then-Senator Biden during his tenure as Chairman or Ranking Member from 1997 to 2009. I spent many hours sitting in confirmation hearings; I am not sure that I ever imagined sitting on this side of the dais as the President's nominee.

I would not be here without the strong support of my family, particularly my parents and my wife. My parents, both children of the Depression, taught me the value of hard work and perseverance. My father, a lawyer by training whose main avocation was politics, sparked my interest in public service, and taught me that politics is a noble profession. My wife, who spent 25 years working in this chamber for five different senators, has, simply put, made me a better person. She provided unstinting love, support, and advice, and patiently endured the long hours that I spent away from home over the years, for which I am deeply grateful.

My over 20 years of service working in the Senate, and eight years in the Executive branch, have given me a strong appreciation for the many challenges that confront our country, long experience in international affairs and national security policy, and a deep knowledge of how the two political branches operate. I believe I have demonstrated an ability to manage large organizations, to get things done, and to work across party lines, including through close collaboration with the staffs of Senators Helms and Lugar on this Committee.

I also greatly respect the role of Congress in foreign affairs. The debates in this chamber on the Gulf War, the Iraq War, the Balkan conflicts, the Chemical Weapons Convention and the expansion of the North Atlantic Alliance were among the most memorable and important of my time here -- because in a democratic society, matters of war and peace must be publicly debated and require the informed consent of the American people, through their representatives in the Congress.

I know intuitively from this experience that not all wisdom resides in the Executive Branch. I firmly believe that we share the same commitment to protecting and advancing the security and well-being of our country, and that we must work together. As Secretary Blinken made clear in a recent message to the workforce, the Department of State must consider the Congress a full partner in its work.

My first priority, if confirmed, is to help the Department of State build back better to meet the diplomatic and security challenges of the 21st century. That starts with investing in its greatest asset – the over 75,000 public servants who work in Washington, at over 270 posts around the world, and in dozens of facilities around the United States. Our diplomats are on the front lines of America’s security and interests. They deserve our support and efforts to strengthen their ranks. We must ensure that we recruit, develop and retain a diverse and professional workforce that is prepared and empowered to advance not only our traditional diplomatic interests, but also to address the pressing challenges of this era, such as climate change, global health security, irregular migration, advanced technology, increased economic competitiveness, threats to democratic governance, and, not least, long-term strategic competition with China.

Let me say a few words in particular about diversity, which will be a top priority for all of the senior leadership. Stated simply, the Department of State cannot fully represent America unless its workforce is fully representative of America. We must make real gains in advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion through concrete actions to dismantle structural barriers at the Department. Meaningful change will require sustained focus on three key areas: talent management, transparency, and accountability. Secretary Blinken has made clear he will have such a focus, and so will I, if confirmed. As an initial action, the Secretary has followed through

on his commitment to this committee by creating a Chief Diversity and Inclusion Office, reporting directly to him.

If confirmed, I also intend to devote considerable attention to ensuring that we are aligning our resources with our policy priorities – both investments in our operations and in State and USAID foreign assistance programs – and that we are good stewards of taxpayer dollars.

For the last several years, the Congress has, on a bipartisan basis, protected the international affairs budget from requested cuts, which has thankfully provided a solid foundation on which to build as we undertake the collective work to revitalize the Department of State. If confirmed, I look forward to working with you to ensure the Department has the resources and authorities it needs to meet the many challenges we face. I am committed to ensuring the effective management of the resources made available to us, but we will need your help to make the necessary investments in our workforce, in information technology, in building and maintaining safe and secure embassies, and in our foreign assistance programs that seek to advance our national interests.

I appreciate the opportunity to appear here today. I look forward to your questions.