

Statement of Dr. Atul Gawande
Nominee to be USAID Assistant Administrator for Global Health
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
September 29, 2021

Senator Van Hollen, Senator Rounds, Members of the Committee, I am honored to appear today as President Biden's nominee for Assistant Administrator for Global Health at the U.S. Agency for International Development. I am immensely grateful to President Biden and Administrator Power for putting their trust in me at this critical time.

Serving in this role would be a privilege and responsibility my parents could not have imagined for a child of theirs when they met in Brooklyn in the 1960s as young new doctors from India. I would like to thank my mother, my late father, and my sister, Sumeeta, for their love and support; my children—Walker, Hattie, and Hunter—who have made me so proud; and my wife, Kathleen, whose encouragement and sacrifices have made this opportunity possible.

I have been among the beneficiaries of USAID's vital work. My father grew up in a village in Maharashtra that went from suffering recurrent famine and praying for food aid to growing cash crops like sugar cane and cotton for export, thanks to USAID's critical support of agricultural development in India. Then, as a child, I had an anaphylactic reaction to the smallpox vaccine, preventing my ability to complete vaccination and travel abroad. USAID's leadership in helping eradicate smallpox in 1979 meant that I could not only travel and work in global health, but even be nominated to lead the bureau and dedicated people behind that effort.

If confirmed, I commit to working with you and others in Congress in a bipartisan manner to strengthen and support USAID's staff and to further the agency's long-established leadership in global health. And I will seek to specifically address three simultaneous, colossal needs: controlling COVID-19; preparing for the next pandemic; and strengthening global health systems to regain the massive ground lost in advancing life expectancy.

The global health challenges facing USAID and our country are daunting. But if confirmed, I believe my career as a surgeon, journalist, and public health leader have prepared me for service as Assistant Administrator. Over the last two decades, I have had a singular focus on reducing suffering and saving lives through leadership and innovation to reduce disparities in systems of health care and public health worldwide. In my research and writing, I've endeavored to expose gaps and produce solutions. In my public health roles, I've worked to deliver those solutions widely. And from this first-hand experience, I've learned not just how to make investments, but how to use them to make systems work across a wide range of domains in health.

For instance, I led a global partnership that created a two-minute surgical safety checklist that was found in a trial in hospitals from Seattle to rural Tanzania to reduce complications and deaths by more than one-third. Then I helped lead a decade of work that has produced daily use of the checklist in 75 percent of surgical procedures globally. Through Lifebox, an NGO I co-founded, we lowered the cost of oxygen-

monitoring equipment for operating rooms in low-income countries by 80 percent. I also founded Ariadne Labs, a center for health systems innovation that has improved the safety of childbirth in India and sub-Saharan Africa; improved U.S. care in serious, life-limiting illness; strengthened outbreak response in the H1N1, Ebola, and coronavirus pandemics; and improved primary care in low-income countries.

Early in 2020, I turned my work toward the coronavirus pandemic. Nothing has made the gaps in the delivery of health and survival clearer. I co-founded CIC Health, a public benefit corporation to provide logistics and operations for U.S. COVID-19 needs that our existing health systems struggled to meet. We have provided three million coronavirus tests and vaccinations across the northeast and are now working to deliver testing capacity for thousands of schools in need. This experience – along with my publications in medical journals, the *New Yorker*, and elsewhere during the pandemic – led to two additional roles. I was privileged to serve on the Biden-Harris Transition COVID-19 Advisory Board, and as co-leader of STAT, a Rockefeller Foundation-supported alliance of COVID-19 officials for 40-plus states who have met weekly for the last year to design and share solutions for controlling the pandemic.

Across my work, I have seen the quiet, unrecognized heroism of the people in our public health and development agencies across the country and the world. They have saved and are saving more lives than most will ever know by taking on the toughest health challenges of our time. That is why I could not be more excited by the possibility of joining them at USAID.

It is an extraordinary privilege to be here. I look forward to answering your questions.