

**Statement of Leslie Meredith Tsou
Ambassador-Nominee to the Sultanate of Oman
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
October 31, 2019**

Chairman Rubio, Ranking Member, distinguished Members of the Committee, I am honored to appear before you today as President Trump's nominee to serve as U.S. Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman. I thank the President and the Secretary for the trust they have placed in me and am grateful for their confidence. If confirmed, I pledge to work closely with you to advance U.S. national security interests and values in Oman.

Here with me today are my father, Edward Tsou, a first-generation American and retired U.S. Air Force officer who served with the 101st Airborne Division in Vietnam, and my mother, Carol Tsou, a former registered nurse who holds Masters Degrees in Liberal Studies and Theological Studies. My sister Wendy Berg is here, as well as my nieces Alexa and Haley Strunk. I value their love and support more than they know.

If confirmed as Ambassador to Oman, I will focus on three core priorities.

My first priority will be the safety and security of all Americans in Oman -- those at the Embassy as well as the many U.S. citizens living, working, and traveling there.

My second priority will be to build on our already strong cooperation with Oman to confront threats to regional security and to U.S. national interests. I will focus intensively on countering the threat from Iran, promoting safety and security of navigation through the Strait of Hormuz, pushing for a political solution to the conflict in Yemen, and combatting terrorism in all its forms.

As we have recently seen in Saudi Arabia, Iran's malign activities throughout the region pose a threat to international stability. Oman has a policy of open communication with its neighbors, including Iran, with which it borders the Strait of Hormuz. Approximately 40 percent of the world's exported oil and gas passes through the Strait of Hormuz, most through internationally-approved shipping lanes in Oman's territorial sea. Unlike Iran, Oman is committed to the safety and security of navigation through the Strait. It shares our concern about Iranian behavior. We hold regular discussions with the Government of Oman on our Iran

sanctions policy, and Oman is committed to ensuring that its banks and companies fully comply with U.S. sanctions. If confirmed, I will prioritize in my consultations with Omani leaders our government's work to counter Iran's destabilizing activity in the region.

Across Oman's southwest border, the conflict in Yemen has entered its fifth year. Oman is deeply concerned about it and has continuously called for a political solution. It fully supports the UN process led by Special Envoy Martin Griffiths to bring the conflict to an end. The U.S. government is working with Oman to secure its border with Yemen, and specifically to prevent Iran from shipping weapons, advisers, and dual-use technology to the Houthis. Our comprehensive border security assistance program with Oman aims to deepen our engagement with Omani defense and law enforcement, and to strengthen Oman's capacity to effectively protect its borders. Recent border security assistance efforts include provision of equipment and training to expand Oman's intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities along the Oman-Yemen border; training sessions for Omani law enforcement personnel on management of border security checkpoints, rural border patrol operations, and response plans to counter cross-border threats; and training to improve Oman's ability to detect and interdict weapons, explosives, WMD materials, and dual-use technology.

If confirmed, I will commit myself to continuing and strengthening these efforts. Iran has zero legitimate national interests inside Yemen, apart from inflaming regional tensions, prolonging the conflict, inflicting damage on the Yemeni population, and precluding meaningful political negotiation.

Secretary Pompeo visited Oman most recently in January, during which he praised what he called "Oman's unique capacity to create opportunities for dialogue on difficult issues at challenging times, including by separately hosting both Palestinian Authority President Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu in Oman in October [2018]." Oman made history in October 2018 when the Sultan invited Israeli Prime Minister Bibi Netanyahu to Muscat, the first time an Israeli Prime Minister has visited a Gulf country in over two decades. Through its unique role, Oman has also helped bring the Houthis into the UN peace process. In the past few years, it has played a pivotal role in securing the safe release and return of about a dozen U.S. citizens held in Yemen, and continues to offer its good offices to secure the release of other Americans unjustly held in Yemen, Iran and Syria.

Ultimately, safety and stability in Oman, and Oman's ability to play a productive role in regional stability, will depend on its ability to transform its economy and bring prosperity to the Omani people.

This is why, if confirmed, my third priority will be to expand our economic partnership with Oman. The United States and Oman signed a Free Trade Agreement in 2009. In the 10 years since, the value of American exports to Oman has tripled, and the value of Omani exports to the United States has doubled. This is a solid basis from which to expand trade even further. U.S. and Omani companies have only scratched the surface on potential benefits from our Free Trade Agreement and our Science and Technology Cooperation Agreement, which we signed in 2016.

Oman is already taking steps to diversify its economy. The ambitious Port of Duqm project is creating a new logistical and shipping hub in the region to link Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. U.S. companies can be a part of this, and, if confirmed, I will make sure American firms understand the opportunities available to them at Duqm Port and the surrounding Special Economic Zone.

Chairman Rubio, Ranking Member, Members of the Committee, you have my commitment that if confirmed, I will promote American values and U.S. national security interests in every engagement that the U.S. Embassy has with the government of Oman and its people.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you. I look forward to taking your questions.