

Testimony of David Reimer
Nominee to be Ambassador to the Republic of Sierra Leone
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
Wednesday, December 2, 2020

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Menendez, and members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to appear before you and for your consideration of my nomination by President Trump to be the next U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Sierra Leone. I would like to thank President Trump and Secretary Pompeo for their trust in me to lead the U.S. Embassy and to maintain our strong relationship with Sierra Leone. If confirmed by the U.S. Senate, I will uphold that trust. I would like to recognize my wife, Simonetta Romagnolo, who is listening in from Italy today. Simonetta is an employee of the U.S. Consulate in Milan, Italy. I would also like to recognize my parents, Richard and Lois Reimer, in Kansas; my brother Paul and his family in Illinois and my sister Sue and her family in Pennsylvania.

Sierra Leone has demonstrated progress, despite extreme adversity, in maintaining peace, strengthening democracy, and working toward an environment suitable for economic growth. The people of Sierra Leone have demonstrated resilience and the capacity to rebuild after crises, including a devastating decade-long civil war, which ended in 2002, and the Ebola epidemic of 2014-2015, during which roughly 14,000 individuals contracted the disease and nearly 4,000 died.

Now Sierra Leone is responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, and its severe health and economic impacts.

The COVID-19 pandemic has tested the resilience of the Sierra Leonean people, and the U.S. government is a primary partner in their response efforts. The pandemic is having a devastating impact on Sierra Leone's small and fragile economy: the GDP growth rate is projected to drop from +5.1 percent to -3.1 percent by the end of 2020. Lives and livelihoods have been lost. Just as we stood with the Sierra Leoneans during the Ebola crisis, the United States will support Sierra Leone's recovery from COVID-19.

Even prior to the onset of COVID-19, Sierra Leoneans faced social and health challenges. The country ranks near the very bottom, at 181 out of 189 countries, on the UN's Human Development Index, with high rates of maternal mortality, child malnutrition, and malaria. Sierra Leone must allocate funds and resources to public health; doing so will be crucial to the country's future progress. If confirmed, I will work with Sierra Leonean leaders to ensure that public health remains a top national priority.

If confirmed, I will continue our focus on strengthening democratic institutions and combatting corruption. Since 2002, Sierra Leone has held four successful presidential and legislative elections that were broadly judged to be free, fair, and transparent. Sierra Leone has an important presidential election in 2023.

I will make it a priority in my first months to engage with political parties, civil society, and other stakeholders to advocate for continued dialogue and a free, fair, and peaceful election.

The government has made progress in establishing a market-based economy and taken steps to protect worker rights. If confirmed, I would advocate to improve the investment climate for U.S. and foreign businesses, which would contribute to Sierra Leone's private sector growth and development. And at the same time, I will work closely with the U.S. business community to encourage greater trade and investment between our two countries to spur prosperity both for Americans and Sierra Leoneans. As an Economic-conned officer, this is an area of particular professional and personal interest.

We are starting off on a strong footing with our relationship with Sierra Leone. We have many shared goals, and if confirmed, I will enhance our strong bilateral relationship, while maintaining our principles of promoting democratic governance, respect for human rights, and the rule of law.

In addition to these policy aims, I hold paramount the safety and security of the hundreds of U.S. citizens resident in Sierra Leone, and the entire U.S. Embassy team, including U.S. citizen employees, their families, and our Sierra Leonean colleagues. If confirmed, I would do everything within my power to ensure the security of our Mission and oversee its smooth operation.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman for the opportunity to appear before you today. I welcome your questions.