

Statement of Michael C. Gonzales
Nominee to be U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Zambia
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
May 24, 2021

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and Distinguished Members of the Committee:

I am honored to appear before you today as President Biden's nominee to be the next U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Zambia. I appreciate the confidence the President and Secretary Blinken have shown in me. If confirmed, I look forward to working with you and other Members of Congress and staff to advance U.S. interests and ensure the safety of U.S. citizens in Zambia.

Just over 100 years ago, my great-grandparents – fishermen from Spain and Sicily – came to America seeking a better life. The fact that today I – the son of a piano tuner and a bartender from Seaside, California – sit before you as a nominee to be a U.S. Ambassador reflects yet another realization of the American Dream. I want to salute my parents, Andy and Gini Gonzales for their courage in sending me off as an AFS exchange student at age 15 where I developed my fascination with the world beyond our borders. They have supported me ever since. At Occidental College I declared my focus on African Studies. My pursuit of bridging America with Africa has provided a breathtaking life of opportunities for me and my family ever since. I am grateful to be accompanied on this journey by the great love of my life, my wife Carol Jenkins, a gifted diplomat herself. Carol joins me here today with the two other people who make my heart full, our kids. Robin is passionate, creative, and wise-beyond-their-years. I am proud of their advocacy for decency, equity, and justice. Hailey is a dynamic, fun, and deeply caring young lady who shows me the brightness in each day.

The United States and Zambia have enjoyed decades of close partnerships since Zambia's independence in 1964. Zambia's founding father Dr. Kenneth Kaunda frequented the White House. His ethos – “one Zambia, one nation,” remains a powerful call for unity, not unlike America's own motto “E Pluribus Unum.” Indeed, the strength of both our countries rests in our diversity.

In August, a record number of young people, women, and first-time Zambian voters bravely stepped forward to denounce corruption and demand change, accountable governance, fundamental freedoms, and inclusive economic opportunity.

Thanks to their bravery, Zambia today stands at a turning point in its history. If confirmed, I will lead U.S. government efforts to support the Zambian people to seize this historic opportunity to strengthen resilient institutions of government to cement the foundations for accountable, responsive, and sustainable democratic governance. I will also leverage the Zambian people and the American private sector to support reforms that improve the business enabling environment to unleash Zambia's inclusive economic potential and deepen linkages with American businesses.

I was proud to see the recent return of Peace Corps volunteers to Zambia – the first country program to re-open since the pandemic. Over the past three decades nearly 2,500 American Peace Corps Volunteers have touched, and made lasting impacts in, every corner of the country. I salute the service of these frontline ambassadors.

Investments by the Millennium Challenge Corporation support the larger, structural changes critical to unleash Zambia's economic development. MCC's first Compact transformed Zambia's water sector, ensuring healthy families and workers could contribute fully to their nation's success. If confirmed, I look forward to partnering again with MCC to deliver a similarly transformational second Compact.

Funding for health programs comprises the bulk of our assistance to Zambia. Decades of work by U.S. and Zambian experts – supported by the unmatched generosity of American taxpayers and our expert staff from USAID, the Centers for Disease Control, and other agencies – has saved millions of Zambian lives. Over nearly 20 years, the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) has supported robust public health systems, slashed maternal mortality, improved childhood nutrition, and provided the backbone for pandemic response. If confirmed, I will guide our interagency team toward realizing epidemic control in Zambia.

Our assistance does not just save lives, it directly advances U.S. interests. USAID is rightly celebrated across the country for decades of partnerships with the Zambian people. Their investments in citizen-responsive governance contribute directly to the stability and resilience of Zambia's democracy. Poverty reduction programs improve the livelihoods of millions of Zambians – and with them, Zambia's prospects of self-reliance and prosperity. And USAID-supported education programs increase childhood literacy, providing the foundational skills for Zambians to create and seize opportunities to realize their dreams.

The Zambian people have spoken. Like us, they too demand a more perfect union. They too dare to envision the Zambian Dream. And, if confirmed, I would be honored to shepherd American support for its realization, to our mutual benefit.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I would be pleased to respond to any questions.