

Statement of Richard Buangan
Nominee to be U.S. Ambassador to Mongolia
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
July 13, 2022

Chairman Schatz, Ranking Member Romney, and distinguished members of the committee, I am deeply honored to be here today as the President's nominee to serve as the United States Ambassador to Mongolia. I am grateful for the confidence of President Biden and Secretary Blinken in entrusting me with this important responsibility. If confirmed, I look forward to working closely with this committee to advance U.S. priorities in Mongolia and further strengthen our bilateral partnership. I deeply appreciate the crucial role Congress plays in the foreign policy process.

I want to take a moment to acknowledge my parents who are joining me today all the way from San Diego, California, as well as my family, friends, and colleagues who are watching from around the world. They have been a source of inspiration and strength for me throughout my 23-year journey as a Foreign Service Officer. If confirmed, I look forward to working alongside our Embassy Ulaanbaatar team, my American colleagues as well as our locally engaged Mongolian staff, who have been the linchpin of our deep and abiding relationship with the Mongolian people for decades.

This year marks the 35th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations with Mongolia, and 30 years since its peaceful transition to democracy. During this time, the United States has worked closely with Mongolia to strengthen its commitment to human rights and the rule of law, to promote democratic values, and to expand defense cooperation. Mongolia continually seeks increased U.S. engagement, trade, and investment. We are proud to call Mongolia a strategic partner.

The U.S.-Mongolia relationship is built on a foundation of shared values and common interests. If confirmed, I will focus on efforts to bolster Mongolia's democratic and economic institutions. Our goal is to support the Mongolian people in building a strong, resilient democratic system and a prosperous, private sector-driven economy that can play a constructive role in the international community.

I would like to comment on a few specific issues:

First, Mongolia is at a critical juncture in its energy transition. With abundant reserves of coal and other minerals, Mongolia is dependent on extractive industries both to meet its own energy needs and to generate foreign exchange. At the same time, Mongolia has huge potential for clean energy, ranging from hydropower to solar and wind. If confirmed, I will strive to help Mongolia begin the transition to a clean energy future.

Second, given Mongolia's ongoing economic and geostrategic challenges, U.S. development support remains critical to helping the country move forward. For example, the U.S. government's largest investment in Mongolia is the Millennium Challenge Corporation's \$350 million Water Compact, which will re-develop Ulaanbaatar's water and wastewater system and increase the city's supply of water by 80 percent when completed in 2026. Separately, the U.S.

International Development Finance Corporation manages a \$38 million portfolio, while USAID projects support small and medium-sized enterprises, empower women and youth, and improve energy governance.

Third, the United States and Mongolia view military-to-military cooperation as a cornerstone of our relationship. The United States is grateful for the service of Mongolian soldiers who served alongside U.S. and NATO coalition partners in Afghanistan. Furthermore, the U.S. military provides extensive assistance and training to improve the Mongolian Armed Forces' information infrastructure, engineering capabilities, and readiness for peacekeeping operations. If confirmed, I will support efforts to continue expanding Mongolia's already impressive UN peacekeeping operations capability.

Finally, turning to public diplomacy, I believe it is critical to strengthen our people-to-people exchanges with Mongolians, particularly with youth, who are increasingly eager to seek opportunities to study abroad and develop closer ties with the United States and other free-market open societies.

Over the years we have received an excellent return on our investments in exchanges in general. Numerous senior military leaders, prominent persons in business and finance, and influential members of civil society and academia, as well as one-third of current parliamentarians, are alumni of U.S. exchange or training programs.

One important key to improving our people-to-people ties is supporting English language education in Mongolia. Approximately 100 Peace Corps volunteers each year taught English across the country until COVID-19 forced volunteers to return to the United States in 2020. As Ambassador, I would commit to seeing this vital program return to, and even exceed, prior levels as quickly as possible.

Chairman Schatz, Ranking Member Romney, committee members, it would be the honor of a lifetime to represent my country as a U.S. ambassador and lead the outstanding staff of the U.S. Mission to Mongolia. If confirmed, I look forward to working with Congress to continue deepening ties with our strategic partner Mongolia, while also paying tribute to the rich culture and history of the Mongolian people and helping their government meet the challenges of the 21st century.

Thank you for your time and I look forward to answering your questions.