

**Opening Statement for Lesslie Viguerie
Nominee to be U.S. Ambassador to the Kyrgyz Republic
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
July 27, 2022**

Good morning, Chairman Coons, Ranking Member Young, and honorable Members of this Committee. I am grateful to have the opportunity to speak with you today and thank you for considering my nomination to serve as U.S. Ambassador to the Kyrgyz Republic.

I would like to start by thanking my family, my wife Kathryn, who is here with me today, and my three children, William, George, and Clara. They have been my support through hardship posts, lengthy periods of separation, and frequent moves. They have also shared with me the honor of serving our country abroad, an honor for which I have always been deeply grateful.

I would also like to thank all the friends and colleagues who have supported me over my 30-year career in the Foreign Service. Their examples showed me the best aspects of leadership, including the importance of building strong teams and morale, valuing diversity, and mentoring the next generation of U.S. diplomats. These values guide me today and, if confirmed, I will have no higher priority than the safety and security of the Embassy community.

The United States and the Kyrgyz Republic recently marked 30 years of diplomatic relations. Much has happened in this time. The United States has been a strong partner to the Kyrgyz Republic from the beginning, providing generous support, including more than \$10.4 million in COVID-related aid during the pandemic. U.S. assistance helped Kyrgyz efforts to develop the country's democratic institutions, its vibrant civil society, and its independent media. Since 1993 we have supported the American University of Central Asia, where tens of thousands of the region's best and brightest have received U.S.-accredited degrees. If confirmed, I will work to build on the progress of the last three decades and ensure that our relationship fulfills its potential.

The United States and Kyrgyz Republic share many goals and a mutual interest in working together to achieve them. The Kyrgyz Republic has stated its commitment to fighting corruption and organized crime. In this effort it will find no better partner than the United States. We hope to strengthen security cooperation to address challenges such as disaster preparedness and countering transnational threats. The United States is committed to supporting Kyrgyz economic resilience, connectivity, and diversification beyond its traditional partners, by developing the country's knowledge economy, in which a thriving IT sector drives job creation and connection to the global economy. The Kyrgyz Republic has demonstrated environmental leadership in Central Asia as the first in the region to join the Global Methane pledge. Our countries share an interest in solving the climate crisis and can do much together to reduce emissions and build our ability to respond to the impacts of climate change.

The United States is also committed to supporting human rights and democratic institutions in the Kyrgyz Republic. The Kyrgyz Republic has a unique record in the region. We are proud of our longstanding support for the Kyrgyz Republic's energetic civil society and its efforts to build accountable, democratic institutions and strengthen the rule of law. It is critical that Kyrgyz

leadership safeguards the gains made over the last 30 years and upholds media freedom, elevates the role of civil society, protects the human rights of all its people, including members of all minority groups, and strengthens judicial independence. If confirmed, I will advocate for Kyrgyz civil society and speak out against erosion of democratic governance, corruption, and threats to freedom of speech and association, in accordance with the values we share with the Kyrgyz people.

For 30 years the United States has stressed our support for the sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity of the Kyrgyz Republic. If confirmed, I will emphasize the importance of holding Russia to account for its aggression against Ukraine, including the enforcement of sanctions on Russia. I will also advocate for Kyrgyz leadership to promote accountability for the PRC's use of forced labor as well as its genocide and crimes against humanity against Uyghurs and members of other ethnic and religious minority groups – including ethnic Kyrgyz – in Xinjiang.

Mr. Chairman, there is ample potential in the U.S.-Kyrgyz bilateral relationship. If confirmed, I look forward to partnering with this Committee and Congress to reinvigorate our ties and achieve mutual objectives that benefit not only our two countries, but the whole of Central Asia.

Thank you again for considering my nomination and I look forward to answering any questions you might have.