

NOMINATIONS

TUESDAY, JULY 13, 2021

U.S. SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS,
Washington, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:07 a.m. in Room SD-G50, Hon. Bob Menendez, chairman of the committee, presiding.

Present: Senators Menendez [presiding], Cardin, Kaine, Markey, Booker, Van Hollen, Risch, Johnson, and Hagerty.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. ROBERT MENENDEZ, U.S. SENATOR FROM NEW JERSEY

The CHAIRMAN. Good morning. This hearing of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee shall come to order. We are here to consider nominees for four important positions: Ambassador Gentry Smith to the Assistant Secretary of State for Diplomatic Security, Ambassador Rena Bitter to be Assistant Secretary of State for Consular Affairs, Ms. Monica Medina to be the Assistant Secretary of State for Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs, and Mr. Marc Knapper to be the Ambassador to Vietnam.

Congratulations to the four of you on your nominations, our thanks for your willingness to serve our country in this capacity, and the members of your family because this is a family sacrifice as well. So we appreciate their sacrifices.

I see that our distinguished colleague and member of this committee, the senator from Massachusetts, is going to be introducing Ms. Medina this morning.

So we will turn to him first before any opening statements.
Senator Markey?

STATEMENT OF HON. EDWARD J. MARKEY, U.S. SENATOR FROM MASSACHUSETTS

Senator MARKEY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, very much and Ranking Member Risch, thank you so much as well.

It is my pleasure this morning to introduce President Biden's nominee to be Assistant Secretary of State for the Bureau of Oceans and International Environment and Scientific Affairs, and my friend for 38 years, Monica Medina.

It is impossible to think of anyone more qualified for this job.

The CHAIRMAN. You knew her in your infancy then?

Senator MARKEY. And, again, I am now in the infancy of my second adulthood, as the Senate Foreign Relations Committee makes it possible for us to enjoy extended political life expectancy.

It is impossible to think of anyone more qualified for this job. Monica has been working for decades and across multiple administrations on environmental law and policy.

She understands the interconnected world we live in and knows that the 21st century U.S. foreign policy goes not simply beyond the water's edge, but to the seas and the skies and the sands of the world where universal threats and their solutions lie.

Monica won a Reserve Officers Training Corps scholarship while at Georgetown University, and while working at the Defense Department in the Obama administration, she worked to end discrimination against women in the military, to provide them with opportunities that were previously closed to them simply because of their gender.

Monica has always been a fierce fighter for justice and never backs down from a tough challenge, and she has confronted some of the world's toughest global challenges.

Ms. Medina has called out the connection between illegal wildlife trafficking and organized criminal networks. She has fought against illegal fishing, which is tied to global piracy and human rights violations.

Just like the climate crisis, these are global spanning threats to our national security, and Monica's expertise in these areas is why former Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta and the Center for Strategic and International Studies have turned to her as an expert and advisor.

Monica knows that we cannot protect ourselves at home without a robust strategy abroad, and diplomacy is not just something that she has practiced in international work. She has worked across the aisle with stakeholders from different states and industries in the United States to protect our oceans and our ocean economy.

After the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, she worked with the five Republican governors of affected states to get \$1 billion in restoration funds from oil company BP so that states could quickly start rebounding from the disaster.

Her work at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration was praised by groups like the Seafood Harvesters of America, who support her experience and legacy of protecting our oceans, and the workers and communities that depend upon them.

Louis Pasteur once said that science knows no country because knowledge belongs to humanity, and is the torch which illuminates the world.

Science is the highest personification of the nation because that nation will remain the first which carries the furthest the works of thought and intelligence.

Monica Medina has dedicated her career to promoting America's excellence in these two realms, the tools of science and the values of humanity, because it is there where America's excellence and promise to the world is to be found.

She knows that, and throughout her distinguished career, she has become supremely prepared for the role of Assistant Secretary of State for the Bureau of Oceans, Environment, and Science.

She has been training for it in every position in which she has served, every mission that she has fulfilled, every discussion she has held with key stakeholders.

I am so grateful for her continued commitment to our country and planet, as well as for our years of friendship, and I hope my colleagues will join me in supporting her for this important position.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Markey. A rather glowing introduction—

Senator MARKEY. Well deserved.

The CHAIRMAN [continuing]. And we know that you have, I am sure, well earned. I know that you may have other committee business to do, and so at your leisure you are welcome to depart from us, and thank you for your introduction.

Let me turn to our panel, speak briefly about each of them, turn to Senator Risch, and then we will listen to your testimony.

Ambassador Smith has served the United States and the State Department during his entire professional career with two and a half decades, ensuring the security of U.S. diplomatic personnel and U.S. citizens here and abroad.

He has been a special agent protecting the secretary of state, the regional security officer in multiple foreign posts, a deputy assistant secretary and senior advisor in the Bureau of Diplomatic Security.

He has served as director for the Office of Foreign Missions for which he was previously confirmed by the Senate. There is no question in my mind that he is fully qualified and deeply experienced for this position.

Ambassador Smith's experience and commitment will be needed, as the State Department faces multiple challenges in keeping its personnel safe, including a relatively new one.

Indeed, U.S. personnel have recently faced the prospect of silent stealthy assaults from what may be some sort of directed energy weapons, first employed in Cuba and now showing up in other parts of the world.

These incidents deserve the full attention of the United States in order to ensure accountability and that the parties responsible are brought to justice, but most of all, to protect personnel.

So, Ambassador Smith, I trust that, if confirmed, you will be devoted in your efforts to meet this and all threats against U.S. diplomatic and other personnel.

Ms. Medina, as our colleague, Senator Markey has said, your knowledge and experience, including as Principal Deputy Undersecretary of Oceans and Atmosphere at the Department of Commerce and in various leadership roles focused on ocean conservation and environmental policy, suits you well for this position.

If confirmed as Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of Oceans, International, Environmental and Scientific Affairs, you will be responsible for maintaining U.S. leadership on cooperative efforts to maintain the health and sustainability of the world we all share.

If confirmed, you will also be responsible for managing U.S. diplomacy on addressing global plastic pollution, protecting endangered species, and combating wildlife trafficking, representing the U.S., the Montreal Protocol, and the Arctic Council, among others.

I know you are up to that challenge. As you may know, I co-authored the Save Our Seas 2.0 Act, and I look forward to working

with you on the next steps to combating plastic pollution and other global environmental problems.

Ambassador Bitter, I am pleased to see you back before the committee. Your service in Laos these past several years, apparently, may not have made headlines in Washington, but it has been with distinction.

The position you are nominated for as Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs is perhaps one of the most challenging positions in the department today.

The effects of the COVID pandemic have been particularly felt in the CA on the massive repatriation of American citizens abroad carried out by the department last year, to the financial challenges resulting from the consular office fee-for-service model at a time when fees have dried up as a result of decreased international travel.

That is something that has changed dramatically. We have now a huge demand and a big backlog on passports, which several colleagues on the committee have raised with me. I am sure that may be raised with you as to how we deal with it.

The mismanagement of the department, broadly speaking, and the Consular Affairs in particular over the past four years leaves the next Assistant Secretary with no shortage of challenges.

As Consular Affairs is also the part of the department that has the most engagement with American citizens processing passports and visas, supporting overseas travelers in need, and the like, it is also a bureau that receives a high level of congressional scrutiny.

While the challenges in the bureau are evident, I am confident in your abilities and capacity to serve capably in this position.

Finally, I am pleased to see Marc Knapper before the committee for consideration as our next ambassador to Vietnam.

We look to develop a genuine strategic partnership with Hanoi, one animated by our shared interests and our values, and I can think of few more qualified Foreign Service professionals than Mr. Knapper to be entrusted with this important task.

In closing, while the four of you have a series of challenges ahead, I am confident that your knowledge and experience will serve you well as you take on your new responsibilities upon confirmation. I look forward to each of your testimonies.

And with that, let me turn to the distinguished ranking member for his opening comments.

**STATEMENT OF HON. JAMES E. RISCH,
U.S. SENATOR FROM IDAHO**

Senator RISCH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I want to thank the witnesses for being here today and being willing to serve in these positions, and your families, who we know share the sacrifices that you make.

I want to start with the nomination of Assistant Secretary of State for Oceans and International Environment and Scientific Affairs.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed what I believe to be serious gaps in U.S. international pandemic prevention, preparedness, and, importantly, response efforts. This includes the failure of the Department of State over multiple administrations of both parties

to adequately prioritize global health policy and diplomatic engagement beyond the PEPFAR program.

We now realize how important that is. PEPFAR, of course, was an exception to that. It was very successful, and it is important that we duplicate the success that we had in PEPFAR in what will undoubtedly be future challenges of a global health nature.

Ms. Medina, if confirmed, you will lead the bureau responsible for ensuring foreign policy coherence and program integrity for global health and biosecurity.

I look forward to hearing from you how you plan to improve State's leadership in these vital areas, which, as I said, I think suffer some shortcomings, which have become painfully obvious as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition, COVID-19 has brought to light the risks of collaboration on life sciences research with countries that do not share our interests like China.

If confirmed, you will have a role in overseeing international scientific cooperation and global health security, and it is critical that you work across the department to prevent the misuse of such research.

Lastly, as we discussed when we met last month, the Columbia River Treaty remains an important issue to myself and the rest of the Northwest delegation. I look forward to hearing more about how you plan to make Columbia River Treaty negotiations a priority.

Next, we have the nomination of Assistant Secretary of State for Diplomatic Security. For decades, the State Department has struggled with what has been dubbed colloquially a bunker mentality, which greatly over-prioritizes security to the detriment of our diplomatic effectiveness.

Security is undoubtedly very important, but as with all things, it must be put in its proper place. This severe risk aversion often keeps our diplomats cooped up behind embassy walls instead of engaging with the local community and conducting traditional diplomacy.

America's adversaries do not place similar burdens on their diplomats, putting the United States at a strategic disadvantage.

Earlier this year, I introduced legislation to improve the process for investigating security incidents abroad so that the department's diplomats can safely do their jobs, promote U.S. interests with host countries, and engage local populations with appropriate protection.

If confirmed, it will be vitally important to ensure the department learns to manage risk more effectively.

Ambassador Smith, I look forward to hearing your thoughts on these issues.

Moving on to the nomination of Assistant Secretary of State for Consular Affairs, the Bureau of Consular Affairs has a unique opportunity to demonstrate how the State Department assists U.S. citizens every day while also advancing our national interests.

Whether it is helping Americans who lost a passport on vacation get home or visiting U.S. citizens who have been incarcerated abroad, Consular Affairs often directly serves the American people.

However, last year's travel restrictions and resulting loss of visa fee revenue greatly hurt the Bureau's finances, potentially affecting its ability to provide these important services.

As vaccination rates climb, there will be more people seeking to travel. Demand for passports and visas are rapidly increasing, leading to significant delays in processing times.

Ambassador Bitter, I look forward to hearing your plan to get Consular Affairs fully operational and to reduce these extremely irregular passport processing times.

Finally, we have the nomination of Ambassador to Vietnam. Vietnam is an important U.S. partner and an ASEAN member. I am very glad to see the recent U.S. donation of 2 million Moderna vaccine through COVAX to Vietnam in addition to separate donations to Indonesia and Malaysia.

Southeast Asian countries need vaccines. Given the importance of this region to the United States and the pressure some countries are facing from China to accept its clearly substandard vaccines, it is crucial that the United States continue to prioritize deliveries to our partners there.

We need to redouble our efforts following the nontransparent COVAX procurement deal announced earlier this week that will allow China to profit mightily from the distribution of its substandard vaccines, all of this very erotic.

Beyond vaccines, I think it is crucial that we advance collaboration with Vietnam in important areas such as the South China Sea and the Mekong region, and the crisis in Myanmar.

We should also continue to prioritize all forms of energy engagement, including liquefied natural gas.

Finally, in closing, I continue to support engagement with Vietnam to promote freedom of speech and religion.

Mr. Knapper, I look forward to hearing how you will tackle all these issues if you are confirmed.

We have a lot to cover today, and I will yield back.

Mr. Chairman, thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Risch.

All right. We will start our testimony from our nominees. We would ask you to summarize your statement at about five minutes.

All of your full statements will be included in the record, without objection, and we will start with Ambassador Smith and then move down the aisle.

Ambassador Smith?

STATEMENT OF GENTRY O. SMITH, OF VIRGINIA, TO BE AN ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF STATE [DIPLOMATIC SECURITY]

Mr. SMITH. Chairman Menendez, Ranking Member Risch, and members of the committee, I am honored to appear before you today as President Biden's nominee to be the Department of State's Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of Diplomatic Security.

I am grateful for the confidence that the president and Secretary Blinken have placed in me and I am humbled by the opportunity to lead such an outstanding organization.

In the 105-year history of diplomatic security, I am just the third DS agent to be nominated to serve as Assistant Secretary.

In my 30-year career with the Foreign Service, I am proud to have served as a DS agent for 27 years prior to my appointment as the director for the Office of Foreign Missions, a position that I held into my retirement in 2017.

I would like to thank you for your continued and unwavering support for both the department and for diplomatic security. I am very proud to be associated with the outstanding women and men who labor tirelessly to protect America's diplomatic facilities, critical information, and, most importantly, American lives.

They also conduct extensive important law enforcement investigations necessary to keep our country safe.

I want to thank my wife, Georgette, our adult children and their spouses, and our six adorable grandchildren for the love and support and for allowing me to return to rejoin an institution that I love.

It is, indeed, an honor to lead the dedicated special agents, security engineers, diplomatic couriers, security technicians, and other specialized personnel in providing a secure environment in which to conduct U.S. foreign policy.

I first joined Diplomatic Security in 1987 after proudly serving as a police officer in Raleigh, North Carolina. These were the early days of building the Diplomatic Security Service.

I grew up in the organization as it grew to meet increasing global security challenges as well as domestic challenges and U.S. national security interests.

Having served in Cairo during both Gulf wars and Rangoon during a period of unrest and uncertainty that rivals the current situation, I am familiar with the importance of strong leadership and requisite security operations.

Upon returning to the U.S. and serving in senior positions in Diplomatic Security, I am proud to have collaborated closely with other department colleagues, the intelligence community, DOD, and members of Congress to construct and improve diplomatic facilities here and abroad while enabling our personnel to project U.S. government interests around the world.

I am also proud and honored to have received Senate approval to lead the Office of Foreign Missions during my last tenure with the department.

My body of work within the department and subsequent experiences as an independent consultant in the private sector is what has prepared me to assume leadership as the assistant secretary for Diplomatic Security.

I am aware that there will always be challenges as we seek to advance U.S. interests around the world. With support and continued guidance from members of this committee and Congress as a whole, my top priority, if confirmed, will be to help to ensure that the department effectively protects its physical assets, information, and, most importantly, lives.

At the same time, however, I recognize that effective diplomacy is virtually impossible without the ability to take considered risk in service of strategic goals and objectives.

It will be my responsibility to evaluate various threat-mitigating strategies and help the department make the best possible calculations in support of American diplomacy.

Risk management is particularly critical in high-threat countries, most notably at the moment in Afghanistan as American troop levels are drawn down.

Closer to home, we need to do more to promote diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility within our ranks, while empowering diplomatic security agents to conduct effective investigations in support of protective details, as well as passport and visa fraud.

The recent SolarWinds intrusion has underlined the importance of DS' role in maintaining a 24/7 watch on the department's global cyber infrastructure, a challenge which promises to intensify over the coming years.

I also look forward to overseeing further improvements in our law enforcement and other security training at the department's new Foreign Affair Security Training Center in Blackstone, Virginia.

Finally, if confirmed, I look forward to working closely with this body to ensure your interests and concerns are properly address and that we work together to protect our personnel, facilities, and national interests abroad and domestically.

Thank you for your time and consideration, and I am happy to entertain any of your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Smith follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. GENTRY O. SMITH

Chairman Menendez, Ranking Member Risch, and members of the committee. I am honored to appear before you today as President Biden's nominee to be the Department of State's Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of Diplomatic Security. I am grateful for the confidence that the President and Secretary Blinken have placed in me, and I am humbled by the opportunity to lead such an outstanding organization. In the 105-year history of Diplomatic Security, I am just the third DS agent to be nominated to serve as Assistant Secretary.

In my 30-year career with the Foreign Service, I am proud to have served as a DS Agent for 27 years prior to my appointment as Director of the Office of Foreign Missions—a position I held until my retirement in 2017. I would like to thank you for your continued unwavering support for both the Department and Diplomatic Security. I am very proud to be associated with the outstanding women and men who labor tirelessly to protect America's diplomatic facilities, critical information, and, most importantly, American lives. They also conduct extensive, important law enforcement investigations necessary to keep our country safe.

I want to thank my wife Georgette, our adult children and their spouses, and our six adorable grandchildren for their love and support, and for allowing me to rejoin an institution that I love. It is indeed an honor to lead the dedicated Special Agents, Security Engineers, Diplomatic Couriers, Security Technicians, and other specialized personnel in providing a secure environment in which to conduct U.S. foreign policy.

I first joined Diplomatic Security in 1987, after proudly serving as a Police Officer in Raleigh, North Carolina. These were the early days of building the Diplomatic Security Service. I grew up in the organization as it grew to meet increasing global security challenges, as well as domestic challenges to U.S. national security interests. Having served in Cairo during both Gulf Wars and in Rangoon during a period of unrest and uncertainty that rivals the current situation, I am familiar with the importance of strong leadership and requisite security operations. Upon returning to the U.S. and serving in senior positions in Diplomatic Security, I am proud to have collaborated closely with other Department colleagues, the Intelligence Community, DoD and Members of Congress to construct and improve diplomatic facilities here and abroad while enabling our personnel to project U.S. government interests around the world. I am also proud and honored to have received Senate approval to lead the Office of Foreign Missions during my last tenure with the Department.

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Finally, if confirmed, I look forward to working closely with this body to ensure your interests and concerns are properly addressed, and that we work together to protect our personnel, facilities, and national interests abroad and domestically.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much.
Ambassador Bitter?

**STATEMENT OF THE HON. RENA BITTER, OF THE DISTRICT OF
COLOMBIA, A CAREER MEMBER OF THE SENIOR FOREIGN
SERVICE, CLASS OF MINISTER-COUNSELOR, TO BE AN AS-
SISTANT SECRETARY OF STATE [CONSULAR AFFAIRS]**

Ms. BITTER. Chairman Menendez, Ranking Member Risch, and members of the committee, I am honored to appear before you today and grateful to President Biden and Secretary Blinken for the trust they have placed in me.

It is with no small measure of humility that I approach the responsibility before me, if confirmed. I believe there is no part of the Department of State more directly responsible for the security and well-being of Americans at home and abroad than the Bureau of Consular Affairs.

In fact, diplomats have been serving their fellow citizens abroad in consular missions since before the Constitution was written.

These are the oldest and most vital functions of the Department of State. Consular work is not glamorous and it can often be heart-breaking. But colleagues in the bureau do not do this work for recognition. They are the truest of public servants, working under sometimes very difficult conditions on behalf of the American people.

For a recent example, the men and women of the Bureau of Consular Affairs led the repatriation of nearly 100,000 Americans at the beginning of the pandemic, often risking their own health and safety.

The Senate recognized this effort with Senate Resolution 567 commending the department for its efforts on behalf of our fellow citizens.

I would also like to add my thanks to the Bureau for all it does on behalf of the American people, much of which takes place below their notice.

If confirmed, it would be the honor of a lifetime to lead this extraordinary team. I have had many jobs and many proud moments during the span of my 27-year career, but the proudest have revolved around Consular Services.

In Amman, my team issued the very first Special Immigrant Visas for Iraqi translators at the start of that program in 2006. I understand on a very personal level the U.S. government's commitment to the men and women who serve beside us.

Another proud moment was more recent as ambassador when I received a letter from two grieving New England families whose newlywed children were tragically killed while on their honeymoon in Laos.

The families wrote to thank me for the compassionate support they received from our embassy team during their time of immeasurable grief. They enclosed their children's joint obituary from their hometown paper, in which the families thanked our consular officer by name.

As I said, the work can often be heartbreaking, but it is vital and never more so than now. President Biden promised to craft a foreign policy for the middle class. A strong healthy Bureau of Consular Affairs will be critical to this effort.

But the global pandemic has taken a toll on the bureau. I know the department is very grateful to Congress for its support for consular services over the last several months.

I am aware that the bureau has had to make some difficult decisions due to pandemic-related constraints on space and resources. More difficult decisions lie ahead. But prior to the pandemic, international visitors contributed more than \$260 billion to the U.S. economy and directly supported millions of jobs, and we must get back there again.

If confirmed, my top priority will be that we do, to see that the bureau is able to meet the need for consular services even in this constrained resource environment and with the continued uncertainty of the global pandemic.

A related priority, if confirmed, I will work with department stakeholders and our partners in Congress to develop a more resilient funding model so the bureau will always have a stable platform from which to carry out its mission.

Finally, I believe the Bureau of Consular Affairs has no more important partner than Congress. The Department of State is charged with representing the interests of U.S. citizens around the world with reminding foreign governments that the United States has no higher priority than the welfare of its citizens, and with ensuring that our foreign policy reflects that goal.

I believe executing these responsibilities are at the heart of the mission that the president and secretary have entrusted me with and to which I am prepared to dedicate all my energy.

If confirmed, I will advocate for your constituents. On a personal note, I would like to thank my family and my family of friends, who have put up with long absences over the course of my career,

and then generously welcomed me home as if I had never been gone. Many of them are here today or watching.

When I last had the honor to appear before this committee, my nephew, Josh, was among them sitting behind me. He died in December, and today, as every day, we mourn his absence.

But I think he would be pleased to know that our love for him would be memorialized in the Congressional Record, and I thank the committee for indulging me in doing so.

With that, I thank you and I welcome your questions.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Bitter follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. RENA BITTER

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Consular work is not glamorous and can often be heartbreaking. But colleagues in the Bureau do not do this work for recognition. They are the truest of public servants, working under sometimes very difficult conditions on behalf of the American people. For a recent example, the men and women of the Bureau of Consular Affairs led the repatriation of 100,000 Americans at the beginning of the pandemic, often risking their own health and safety. The Senate recognized this effort with Senate Resolution 567, commending the Department for its efforts on behalf of our fellow citizens. I, too, would like to add my thanks to the Bureau for all it does on behalf of the American people, much of which takes place well below their notice. If confirmed, it would be the honor of a lifetime to lead this extraordinary team.

I have had many jobs and many proud moments during the span of my 27-year career. But the proudest have revolved around Consular services. In Amman my team issued the first Special Immigrant Visas for Iraqi translators at the very start of that program in 2006. I understand on a very personal level the U.S. Government's commitment to the men and women who serve beside us. More recently, as Ambassador, I received a letter from two grieving New England families whose newlywed children were tragically killed while on their honeymoon in Laos. The families thanked me for the compassionate support they received from our Embassy during their time of immeasurable grief, and they enclosed their children's joint obituary from their hometown paper, in which they thanked our consular officer by name. As I said, the work can be heartbreaking.

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am prepared to dedicate all my energy. If confirmed, I will advocate for your constituents.

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The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Ambassador, and our sympathies to you and your family for the loss of your nephew.

Ms. Medina, the floor is yours.

STATEMENT OF MONICA P. MEDINA, OF MARYLAND, TO BE AN ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF STATE [OCEANS AND INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL AND SCIENTIFIC AFFAIRS]

Ms. MEDINA. I want to begin by thanking Senator Markey.

Make sure my microphone is on. There. Can you hear me now?

Thank you, Chairman Menendez. I want to begin by thanking Senator Markey for that very kind introduction and for decades of friendship.

Chairman Menendez, Ranking Member Risch, and members of the committee, it is a tremendous honor to appear before you today as the president's nominee for Assistant Secretary of State for the Bureau of Oceans, International, Environmental, and Scientific Affairs, or OES.

I am deeply honored to be nominated by President Biden and for the trust that he and Secretary Blinken have placed in me. I am also thrilled to have the chance to serve my country again.

I would like to begin by thanking my family. I am eternally grateful to my husband, Ron, and our grown children, Hannah, Michael, and Daniel, for their constant support and encouragement as I pursued a career in environmental conservation, even when it took me far from home.

I also must thank my mother, Jeanne, a retired middle school teacher, who, through her passion for elephants and other wildlife, taught me the importance of biodiversity to life on Earth.

If confirmed, I am eager to consult, engage, and collaborate with members of this committee and to build on your great work on ocean conservation, ending wildlife trafficking and illegal fishing, stemming the rise of future pandemics, fighting plastic pollution, and other OES issues of interest to you.

I would not be here today if it were not for the opportunity the U.S. Army gave me to attend Georgetown University on an Army ROTC scholarship at a time when there were not many women who received them.

Both my parents were teachers, and I could not have afforded a private university like Georgetown otherwise, and my dream was for a career in government and law.

I could not have imagined then that my scholarship would lead me to where I sit today, that I would serve twice in the Pentagon, once in uniform, work in positions of responsibility on the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee staff, at the Department of Justice, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Adminis-

tration, and the Department of Commerce twice, and now, with your approval, at the State Department.

OES is at the forefront of our responses to the global challenge of the present and also the global challenge of the future. Clearly, our nation must continue to work to defeat COVID-19 globally and better prepare for and prevent future pandemics.

Likewise, there is no greater long-term threat to our safety and security than climate change. I look forward to supporting the administration's work on both these fundamental threats to our health, security, and prosperity.

I would, additionally, raise three areas of particular concern to me. My decades of experience attending and representing the U.S. at international meetings leads me to believe that there will be increasing global tensions over limited natural resources.

If confirmed, I would dedicate special attention to the following.

First, the loss of biodiversity is a crisis and it is often overlooked. But there is great bipartisan work being done here in Congress to conserve species globally and to assist countries in Africa, Asia, and the Americas in their efforts to do the same.

I greatly admire the International Conservation Caucus' efforts to work collaboratively with legislative counterparts from around the world to ensure that we do not lose elephants or rhinos or tigers or penguins or pangolins to extinction.

Second, the ocean needs our attention. There is too much tension, damage, and lawless behavior in the seas due to deep disagreements over a plethora of hot-button issues, such as excessive maritime claims, illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing, the dramatic changes and rapid development in the polar regions, and the disregard by bad actors of global shipping, safety, and security rules as well as pervasive plastic pollution and ocean chemistry changes.

I am very impressed by the work of the Ocean Caucus on these issues, and if confirmed, implementing the recently passed Save Our Seas 2.0 Act will be a priority of mine.

Finally, given the rapid growth and competition in space exploration and commercialization, space policy is at a key inflection point.

A new space race could escalate global tensions among superpowers and create problems for future generations if we do not work to ensure today that space actors are complying with their obligations under international law and space activities are pursued in a manner that is safe, responsible, and sustainable.

All of these issues also merit special attention by OES, in my view, because they are central to addressing our nation's strategic competition with China. Moreover, each of these challenges must be handled in a way that ensures the equitable inclusion of diverse stakeholders and the private sector in our solutions.

In tackling these and other challenges, I want to assure the committee that I will work every day on behalf of the American people with the goal of ensuring that our efforts around the world support Americans at home and make their lives better.

Thank you for considering me for this position, and I look forward to answering your questions.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Medina follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF MONICA P. MEDINA

Chairman Menendez, Ranking Member Risch, and members of the committee, it is a tremendous honor to appear before you today as the President's nominee for Assistant Secretary of State for the Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs, or OES.

I am deeply honored to be nominated by President Biden, and for the trust he and Secretary Blinken have placed in me. I am also thrilled to have the chance to serve my country again.

I would like to begin by thanking my family. I am eternally grateful to my husband Ron, and our children, Hannah, Michael and Daniel, for their constant support and encouragement as I pursued a career in environmental conservation even when it took me far from home. I also must thank my mother, Jeanne, a retired middle school teacher, who through her passion for elephants and other wildlife, taught me the importance of biodiversity to life on Earth.

If confirmed, I am eager to engage, consult, and collaborate with members of this committee and to build on your great work on ocean conservation, ending wildlife trafficking and illegal fishing, stemming the rise of future pandemics, fighting plastic pollution, and other OES issues of interest to you.

I would not be here today if it were not for the opportunity the U.S. Army gave me to attend Georgetown University on an R.O.T.C. scholarship at a time when there were not many women who received them. Both my parents were teachers and I could not have afforded a private university like Georgetown otherwise—and my dream was for a career in government and law. I could not have imagined then that my scholarship would lead me to where I sit today—that I would meet my husband, attend Ivy League law schools, serve twice in the Pentagon, work in positions of responsibility on the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee staff, at the Department of Justice, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration in the Department of Commerce twice, and now, with your approval, at the State Department.

OES is at the forefront of our responses to the global challenge of the present and the global challenge of the future. Clearly, our nation must continue to work to defeat COVID-19 globally and better prepare for and prevent future pandemics. Likewise, there is no greater long-term threat to our safety and security than climate change. I look forward to supporting the administration's work on both of these fundamental threats to our health, security and prosperity.

I would additionally raise three areas of particular concern to me, and ones that, if confirmed, I would dedicate special attention to:

- The loss of biodiversity globally is a crisis and it is often overlooked. But there is great bi-partisan work being done here in Congress to conserve species globally and to assist countries in Africa, Asia and the Americas in their efforts to do the same. I greatly admire the International Conservation Caucus' efforts to work collaboratively with legislative counterparts from around the world to ensure we don't lose elephants or rhinos or tigers or penguins or pangolins to extinction.
- The ocean also needs our attention. There is too much tension, damage and lawless behavior in the seas due to deep disagreements over a plethora of hot button issues such as excessive maritime claims, illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing, the dramatic changes and rapid development in the polar regions, and disregard by bad actors of global shipping safety and security rules, as well as pervasive plastic pollution and ocean chemistry changes. I am very impressed by the work of the Ocean Caucus on these issues. If confirmed, implementing the recently passed Save Our Seas 2.0 Act will be a priority of mine.
- Finally, given the rapid growth and competition in space exploration and commercialization, space policy is at a key inflection point. A new space race could escalate global tensions among superpowers and create problems for future generations if we don't work to ensure today that space actors are complying with their obligations under international law and space activities are pursued in a safe, responsible, and sustainable manner.

All these issues also merit special attention by OES, in my view, because they are central to addressing our nation's strategic competition with China. Moreover, each of these challenges must be handled in a way that recognizes the disparity between developed and developing nations, and ensures the equitable inclusion of diverse stakeholders and the private sector in our solutions. In tackling these and other challenges, I want to assure the committee that I will work every day on behalf of the American people, with the goal of ensuring that our efforts around the world support Americans at home and make their lives better. Diplomacy, coopera-

tion, and compassion for our fellow residents of the planet we call home have never been more important.

Thank you again for considering me for this position, and I look forward to answering your questions.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.
Mr. Knapper?

STATEMENT OF MARC EVANS KNAPPER, OF CALIFORNIA, A CAREER MEMBER OF THE SENIOR FOREIGN SERVICE, CLASS OF MINISTER-COUNSELOR, TO BE AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM

Mr. KNAPPER. Thank you, Chairman Menendez, Ranking Member Risch, distinguished members of this committee, for the opportunity today to appear before you. I am honored in the faith that President Biden and Secretary Blinken have placed in me.

I also want to express my deep love and gratitude to my wife, Suzuko, and our son, Alex, for their support and their sacrifice. They have repeatedly changed homes and schools and have been distant from family and friends so that we could serve the United States overseas. Without them, as well as my parents, Jay and Yolanda Saltsman, I would not be here today.

The United States-Vietnam relationship has undergone a profound transformation since the normalization of diplomatic relations 26 years ago, and my own family history tracks the arc of our relationship with Vietnam.

My late father, Marine Colonel Roger Knapper, was a decorated Vietnam combat veteran who often recounted difficult memories from his time at war. Yet, he also talked many times of his earnest wish to return to Vietnam and see that beautiful country at peace and thriving.

This wish was fulfilled three times during my previous service at our embassy in Hanoi, and although he will not make it back for a fourth visit, we will always be grateful for the efforts and sacrifices he and millions of other Americans have made during our long journey with Vietnam.

Our two countries have moved from a history of conflict to a comprehensive partnership that spans political, security, economic, and people-to-people ties.

If confirmed, I will work to continue developing the U.S.-Vietnam relationship across a wide range of shared interests in four key areas.

First, security. Our two countries have significantly expanded our security cooperation, including through U.S. support to strengthen Vietnam's maritime capabilities.

The U.S. and Vietnam share an interest in upholding international law and resisting China's provocative behavior in the South China Sea and Mekong region, and, if confirmed, I will make every effort to deepen our cooperation in this area.

Second, trade and investment. Bilateral trade with Vietnam has grown significantly, increasing from nearly nothing in 1995 to more than \$90 billion in 2020, benefiting American manufacturers, farmers, and ranchers as well as consumers.

But despite this growth, challenges remain, and if confirmed, I will advocate for a level playing field for U.S. companies and investors, including by urging Vietnam to maintain equitable market access for U.S. digital services and agricultural products.

Third, war legacy and humanitarian issues. If confirmed, providing the fullest possible accounting for U.S. personnel missing from the Vietnam War era will be my solemn duty. Furthermore, for decades, Vietnam has provided critical assistance to those efforts and we are grateful.

Since 1993, the U.S. has also contributed more than \$160 million to mitigate lingering threats posed by unexploded ordnance, and together with Vietnam, we have successfully completed the remediation of dioxin contamination in Danang, and in 2019, we broke ground on another project to remediate dioxin at the Bien Hoa airbase.

Our cooperation on these issues as well as providing \$125 million since 1989 in humanitarian assistance, supporting over a million persons with disabilities regardless of the cause, has been an important foundation for our bilateral relationship.

Fourth, and finally, people-to-people ties. The bonds between the American and Vietnamese people are strong and growing.

Prior to the pandemic, nearly 700,000 Americans traveled to Vietnam annually, including more than 1,200 American students, and here in the U.S., we welcome 30,000 Vietnamese students each year. These people-to-people ties are an important bridge between our two countries.

All that said, our thriving relationship is not without its challenges. We remain deeply concerned about Vietnam's human rights record, in particular, reports of the troubling trend of harassment, arbitrary or unlawful arrests, unjust convictions, and harsh sentences of journalists and activists.

If confirmed, I will press the government of Vietnam to respect the freedoms of expression, association, peaceful assembly, and religion and belief.

Only when we see significant progress on human rights can our two countries' partnership reach its full potential, and as always, my number-one priority will be protecting the safety and welfare of all United States citizens in Vietnam and I will also make the safety and welfare of Mission Vietnam personnel a top priority.

The thriving U.S.-Vietnam partnership is a result of the courage, goodwill, and painstaking work of dedicated people in both countries who believed in the possibility of peace and reconciliation between two former enemies.

Our overarching goal remains to advance American interests and support the development of a strong, prosperous, and independent Vietnam that contributes to international security and respects human rights and the rule of law.

Thank you for considering my nomination. I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Knapper follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF MARC E. KNAPPER

Thank you Chairman Menendez, Ranking Member Risch and distinguished members of this committee for the opportunity to appear before you today. I am honored in the faith that President Biden and Secretary Blinken have placed in me.

I also want to express my deep love and gratitude to my wife, Suzuko, and our son, Alex, for their support and their sacrifice. They have repeatedly changed homes and schools and been distant from family and friends so that we could serve the United States overseas. Without them, as well as my parents Jay and Yolanda Saltsman, I would not be here today.

The U.S.-Vietnam relationship has undergone a profound transformation since the normalization of diplomatic relations 26 years ago. My own family history tracks the arc of the United States' relationship with Vietnam. My late father, Marine Colonel Roger Knapper, was a decorated Vietnam combat veteran, who often recounted difficult memories from his time at war. Yet, he also talked many times of his earnest wish to return to Vietnam and see that beautiful country at peace and thriving. This wish was fulfilled three times during my previous service at our Embassy in Hanoi. Although he will not make it back for a fourth visit, we will always be grateful for the efforts and sacrifices he and millions of other Americans have made during our long journey with Vietnam.

Our two countries have moved from a history of conflict to a Comprehensive Partnership that spans political, security, economic, and people-to-people ties. If confirmed, I will work to continue developing the U.S.-Vietnam relationship across a wide range of shared interests in four key areas.

First, security. Our two countries have significantly expanded security cooperation, including through U.S. support to strengthen Vietnam's maritime capabilities. Last year, Vietnam welcomed the USS Theodore Roosevelt, the second U.S. aircraft carrier to visit since we established diplomatic relations. The United States and Vietnam share an interest in upholding international law and resisting provocative behavior in the South China Sea and Mekong region, and if confirmed I will make every effort deepen our cooperation in this area.

Second, trade and investment. Bilateral trade with Vietnam has grown significantly, increasing from nearly nothing in 1995 to more than \$90 billion in 2020, benefiting American manufacturers, farmers and ranchers, and consumers. Despite the growth, challenges remain. If confirmed, I will advocate for a level playing field for U.S. companies and investors, including by urging Vietnam to maintain equitable market access for U.S. digital services and agricultural products.

Third, war legacy and humanitarian issues. Providing the fullest possible accounting for U.S. personnel missing from the Vietnam War era remains our most solemn duty. For decades, Vietnam has provided critical assistance to those efforts. Since 1993, the United States has contributed more than \$160 million to mitigate lingering threats posed by unexploded ordnance. Together with Vietnam, we successfully completed the remediation of dioxin contamination in Danang in 2018, and in 2019 we broke ground on the 10-year dioxin remediation project at the Bien Hoa airbase area. We have provided more than \$125 million since 1989 in humanitarian assistance, directly and indirectly supporting over a million persons with disabilities, regardless of the cause. Our cooperation on these issues continues to build a foundation of trust to expand our relationship.

Fourth, people-to-people ties. The bonds between the American and Vietnamese people are strong and growing. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, nearly 700,000 Americans traveled to Vietnam annually, including more than 1,200 American students. Here in the United States, we welcome 30,000 Vietnamese students each year. On the occasion of the 25th anniversary of U.S.-Vietnam relations last year, we signed an agreement to bring Peace Corps volunteers for the first time ever, a significant and symbolic milestone.

Our thriving relationship is not without its challenges. We remain deeply concerned about Vietnam's human rights record, in particular reports of the troubling trend of harassment, arbitrary or unlawful arrests, unjust convictions, and harsh sentences of journalists and activists. If confirmed, I will press the Government of Vietnam to respect the freedoms of expression, association, peaceful assembly, and religion or belief. Only when we see significant progress on human rights can our partnership reach its fullest potential.

As always, my number one priority will be protecting the safety and welfare of all United States citizens in Vietnam. I will also make the safety and welfare of Mission personnel a top priority.

The thriving U.S.-Vietnam partnership is the result of the courage, goodwill, and painstaking work of dedicated people in both countries, who believed in the possibility of peace and reconciliation between two former enemies. Our overarching goal

remains to advance American interests and support the development of a strong, prosperous, and independent Vietnam that contributes to international security, and respects human rights and the rule of law.

Thank you for considering my nomination. I look forward to your questions.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much.

We will start a round of five-minute questions, and before I start my own line of questions, I have some overarching questions for the committee.

First, I have a few questions that speak to the importance that this committee places on responsiveness by all officials in the executive branch and that we expect and will be seeking from all of you.

So I would like to ask each of you to provide a simple yes or no answer to the following questions.

Do you agree to appear before this committee and make officials from your office available to the committee and designated staff when invited?

Ms. BITTER. Yes.

Mr. SMITH. Yes.

Mr. KNAPPER. Yes.

Ms. MEDINA. Yes. Yes.

The CHAIRMAN. All right. Do you commit to keep the committee fully and currently informed about the activities under your purview?

Ms. MEDINA. Yes.

Mr. SMITH. Yes.

Mr. KNAPPER. Yes.

Ms. BITTER. Yes.

The CHAIRMAN. Do you commit to engaging in meaningful consultation when policies are being developed, not just providing notification after the fact?

Ms. BITTER. Yes.

Ms. MEDINA. Yes.

Mr. KNAPPER. Yes.

Mr. SMITH. Yes.

The CHAIRMAN. And finally, do you commit to promptly responding to requests for briefings and information requested by the committee and its designated staff?

Ms. BITTER. Yes.

Ms. MEDINA. Yes.

Mr. KNAPPER. Yes.

Mr. SMITH. Yes.

The CHAIRMAN. All right. Thank you very much.

Ambassador Bitter, let me ask you, there is a lot of issues under what will be your portfolio. From the question of COVID vaccines for American citizens abroad, which will not be only within the responsibility of the Bureau of Consular Affairs but I cannot imagine that you will not be engaged in it, what do you think are the primary challenges for CA and the department, more broadly, on administering such a vaccine program in the face of a global pandemic for American citizens abroad?

Ms. BITTER. Thank you, Senator, I am aware of the concern that members of Congress have and also this issue, I know, is of great concern to many Americans. You know, the way that the depart-

ment has approached this is that it has worked in the interagency to try to make sure that vaccines are available to countries who have yet to acquire them.

And then within the department, we have tried to make available consular information to Americans abroad to ensure that they are aware of how they can get access to vaccines where they are available and make sure that they have information about local medical providers in healthcare, and that is the general form of consular services to those abroad.

And if there are particular needs, of course, the embassies abroad are always prepared to address consular services and whatever needs American citizens have.

The department has not typically provided medical care to private citizens. So I think there would be many challenges attendant upon that, not least of which would simply be the issues involved in just administering the vaccines. It would be quite challenging.

The CHAIRMAN. I hope we will think about—and I understand that the department has not been involved in delivering health care services to citizens abroad, but in the global pandemic, I hope we will think about how we help an American citizen living abroad, maybe because of work or some other reason, to find access to a vaccine, because when a country has its own vaccination program, of course, it is focused on its own citizens and so that leaves an American citizen in limbo, potentially.

So I hope we will give a little thought to how we can create a greater connection for American citizens abroad in that context.

Let me turn to the question of passports. As you may know, an artifact of the COVID crisis is the department remains considerably backed up on passport processing at the National Passport Center.

I was listening to several of our colleagues on the committee and my own experience back in New Jersey of citizens for months who have applied for their passport and cannot get a response and, of course, with the opening of the world and the surge in demand, there is a greater demand.

Do you have a sense—I know you are not there, but in your briefings do you have a sense of the current backlog and what is your thoughts about working to clear it up?

Ms. BITTER. Thank you, Senator.

I am very aware of this issue and I know it is very important to you and to your constituents. It is important to the department as well, and just I share your concern about the length of time that it is currently taking, and the department takes very seriously its responsibility in this area.

It is a very visible part of the work that the department does and it is important to get secure and efficiently issued visa—passports, rather, out to American citizens as quickly as possible.

You know, like many organizations, the bureau and its partners have been faced with ramping up in a situation where COVID restrictions are lifting more slowly than demand is rising. So it is a pretty fast-moving situation.

The department is reviewing each passport agency according to the science and deciding when they can fully reopen. So it is an evolving situation.

I know, again, that this is something of great concern to you and I would be very happy to work with my colleagues in Congressional Affairs to make sure that members and your staff can get up to the minute briefings and the most recent information.

But right now, I think it is taking, between the passport office and its partners, up to 18 weeks for passports that are not expedited to be processed.

The CHAIRMAN. Yeah. Well, I will say that briefings are great. Actions are more important. What we really need is some type of surge capacity for a period of time to deal with the backlog.

I do not think that we can—many Americans, it is not just a question of travel for leisure, but it is travel for business again. It is travel to see family members who they may not have seen for well over a year and a half, two years, because of COVID. So it is about a family reunification issue as well.

I will tell the secretary as well, but I really urge you all to think about a surge capacity for a period of time to get us into a more reasonable period of time in which people have to wait.

Finally, not because there are not many more issues, but I appreciate the important work the department does to vet visas to assure there is no fraud and abuse.

But I can tell you I have a regular stream of complaints about the department's transparency and communication and sometimes its agility and responsiveness when it comes to processing visas for non-American family of U.S. citizens to visit the United States, student visas and work and business visas.

I am interested in your thoughts about where and how we can improve the visa application and processing system so that applicants, even if they are turned down, face an open, transparent, and rapid process that speaks to our best values as a nation.

I cannot tell you how many times—I know that an applicant has to overcome the hurdle of showing that they have roots in their country, that they are likely to return, that they are not likely to stay in the United States. I am very familiar with the immigration law in that respect. So that is a hurdle they must meet.

But I cannot tell you how many times I have had individuals who have properties in their country, businesses in their country, deep family ties in their country, and no reasonable expectation that they would stay in the United states, and many of them feel they get arbitrarily and capriciously just rejected.

So there is the feeling, you know, we want people in the world to think of the United States as a place that is welcoming and follows rules of law.

Yet, they feel that they have not had, so to speak, their day in court. I understand the incredible crush on consular officers. But we have to think of how we can process in a better way.

Do you have any thoughts on that?

Ms. BITTER. Thank you, Senator. I would not be telling the truth if I had not said to you that I have not heard those comments as well. I have. And I think they speak to issues of respect and issues of making sure that our consular officers are able to have what are sometimes quite quick interactions in a respectful and clear way. It can be a very challenging job.

But I am very conscious of the fact and we all are, in the department, and I know the Bureau of Consular Affairs is as well, that these officers are often the first or sometimes the only Americans that these host country nationals will meet, and it is enormously important that that interaction does reflect our values and does reflect the best that we have to offer.

So I take your point, and I share it and I share your concern, and if confirmed it would be my goal to make sure that every consular officer in every embassy and every interaction that they have with host country nationals reflects the diplomats that they are and reflects the best values of America.

The CHAIRMAN. All right. Thank you.

Senator Risch?

Senator RISCH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

First of all, I want to associate myself with the remarks regarding a surge to get caught up on the visas and passports.

Certainly, one of the great freedoms Americans have is the freedom to travel and also to welcome their non-American family members here to the United States and it is important we get caught up on that, as we go forward.

I want to focus, however, on another area that the chairman and I are working together on and that is global health. We are here where we are on the pandemic and we are really focused on vaccines today, and that is important. It is very important.

I think the only way we are going to get past this is a good vaccine program not only in the United States but around the world.

But, more importantly, I think we need to look to the future, and I think one of the most important things that this committee can do is to work on a protocol for the future and establishing protocols and infrastructure that will get all of the countries pulling the wagon together to address a global pandemic.

That did not happen this time. We all know that. There were major flaws, major holes in various countries attempted to get through this.

And so the chairman and I have been working on global health policy and a global health bill, and I hope, Ms. Medina, that you will familiarize yourself with that and commit to helping us get in place an infrastructure protocol for dealing with these things when they happen immediately.

There is no substitute for being able to address the challenge immediately, and that is primarily what our legislation is designed to do.

We all know, and the stories are legion, as far as the failures right at the beginning of this pandemic that caused no end of problems for the world, including the number of deaths. And so I would like to hear your thoughts on that.

Ms. MEDINA. Senator Risch, thank you very much for that question. And as you know, when we discussed it in your office and with your staff, there is no higher priority for the Bureau of Oceans, Environment, and Science than dealing with the current crisis and preventing and preparing for future crises, and I look forward to working with you, if confirmed, to try and build up, bulk up, the ability of the bureau to be that repository of expertise and

to prepare the U.S. for what is likely to be additional challenges like the one we faced in the future.

And I look forward to working with you on your legislation and to hearing your thoughts, if confirmed, about how we could do that together.

Senator RISCH. Well, thanks. And I will tell you that we all know the United States government is big, it is complex, it has got many agencies, and there is an important function that Congress can play and, hopefully, we will play with legislation that the chairman and I have been working on as far as resolving who is in charge and who makes those decisions because, again, sometimes you get people of equal stature in the government making conflicting decisions, and somebody has got to straighten that out, and this legislation attempts to address that and, hopefully, will address that.

In addition to that, of course, it is the same thing internationally, and that is establishing some type of structure internationally where these kind of questions can be answered and answered clearly.

We had a lot of gray areas particularly during the early parts of the pandemic, and these, in the best interest of the American people, in the best interest of the world, need to be straightened out and that responsibility is right here with the Foreign Relations Committee.

So we are attempting to discharge that responsibility. We will, certainly, look to you for your assistance and help, and we believe that the State Department is the appropriate place as a clearinghouse for making these kind of decisions.

And, again, I fully appreciate that we are focused on vaccine right now. But it is really important that we walk and chew gum at the same time and prepare for the next pandemic.

So with that, my time is up. Thank you.

Senator CARDIN. [presiding.] I understand we have Senator Booker by WebEx who is next.

[Pause.]

Senator CARDIN. I understand he is not available. We will go to Senator Kaine.

Senator KAINE. Thank you to my colleagues and congratulation to the nominees for your appointments. I have questions. I have a million questions for all of you. But in five minutes, I am going to ask questions of Mr. Smith and Mr. Knapper.

Mr. Smith, Virginia is the home for training of security professionals who work not only for the State Department in the capacity center that you referenced in your opening statement at Fort Pickett in Blackstone, Virginia, but also the Marine security guards that protect our embassies around the world are trained at a wonderful facility at Quantico.

I have worked very hard as a member of this committee over the nine years I have served on it to advance the security training of our State Department professionals.

The siting of the training center at Fort Pickett was something I was very involved in in the early part of my time on the committee.

It has come a long way and I think there is even more that can be done there, and I would hope at some point, should you be con-

firmed, to possibly visit with you so we could assess together its current status and what more might be done to enhance the security training of State Department personnel.

Mr. SMITH. If confirmed, Senator, I look forward to that, and thank you for your support.

Senator KAINE. Right. Thank you so much.

And, Mr. Knapper, with respect to Vietnam, I traveled on a bipartisan CODEL to Vietnam in April of 2019. It was a tremendous visit, and we found so much interest in deeper partnerships with the United States on military cooperation.

There was appreciation for the U.S. role, led by Senator Leahy for decades now, to work on cleanup of dioxins and other contaminants at military bases in Vietnam, and the warm welcome we received from Vietnamese officials and the Vietnamese public was very heartwarming.

But of the number of concerns I have about Vietnam, one that is most significant is the deplorable absence of press freedom. The organizations that rank countries in the world for press freedom put Vietnam very low on the list of recent ranking. Had them 175th out of 180.

One of the things that seemed pretty vibrant in 2019 was, while the press was being cracked down on, there was still a pretty vibrant and open internet culture. But that has also been significantly constrained in the last two years.

What can the United States do? What would you do as ambassador, should you be confirmed, to try to promote broader notions of press and freedom and freedom of speech in Vietnam?

Mr. KNAPPER. Well, thank you, Senator, and thank you to you and your colleagues for the great support that Congress has provided our bilateral relationship over the years.

As for press freedoms and other freedoms in Vietnam, I fully agree. We have serious, serious concerns. This is something that, if confirmed, I will make a focus of mine.

I think one way we can seek to improve the situation is just to never miss an opportunity to raise with senior Vietnamese officials our deep concerns and to underline the point that our relationship will never reach its full potential unless we are able to see improvements in some of these areas, whether it is freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of assembly.

As you noted, the internet is increasingly a contested area for these basic freedoms and, you know, among the messages we can deliver to the government of Vietnam is that they have signed on to a number of international treaties in which they have committed to support universal rights, such as those of freedom and assembly.

And so I think a point we can strongly make is that should Vietnam seek to earn its place in the international community as a leader it is going to have to abide by some of the commitments it has made internationally.

Senator KAINE. The last thing I will say about the U.S.-Vietnam relationship is one of the powerful, I think, attraction of the U.S. relationship to the Vietnamese people: Their deep concern about China and the historic animosity that they have had because of Chinese incursions into Vietnam.

Shortly before our visit, there were massive protests all around Vietnam that were a little bit unusual, street protests, and they were fomented by the Communist Party leadership of Vietnam prepping to do sort of a sweetheart deal where China and Chinese companies would be able to come into an economic zone without really any competition from anyone else.

And it was notable to see that the Vietnamese Government wanted to do it, that the Vietnamese people took to the streets to stop them from doing it, and that at least in some temporary way it caused the Communist Party leadership of Vietnam to step back.

There is a deep desire for deeper relationship with the United States to be a counterpoint to a China that has been so often an aggressor against Vietnam, and that is important for us to know and it is important for us to contemplate as we seek to build a deeper relationship with Vietnam.

I look forward to working with all of you should you be confirmed. Very high qualified panel.

Thank you. I yield back.

Senator CARDIN. Thank you.

Senator Hagerty?

Senator HAGERTY. Thank you, Senator Cardin, and congratulations to each of you for being nominated today.

I take particular interest in one of our nominees. That is Ambassador-to-be Marc Knapper.

Marc, I am delighted to see that Suzuko and Alex have joined you today. I would say this—that I am certain Colonel Roger Knapper is smiling today, too. I am sure he takes a great deal of pride in your career.

It has been my great honor to have served with you for the past four years working with you, and I also take a great deal of pride in the fact that you are sitting here today.

I am also very optimistic. I think that you will be confirmed and I think that you are going to work with a great team—my former DCM, Joe Young, Dan Kritenbrink, I think, at EAP. We are going to be very well represented in an area that presents great strategic challenges for America today.

So I am very, very pleased to see you here. You know, America is challenged in the South China Sea like never before. The world is challenged in the South China Sea like never before, because of the claims that China continues to maintain, I think, without foundation to sovereignty over much of that region.

You have had unique experience, Marc. You have had experience in Japan. You have had experience in Hanoi. You have had experience dealing with India on the India desk, with China and Mongolia, and, certainly, you did a wonderful job as DCM and charge d'affaires in South Korea.

You understand this region. I see great opportunity between Vietnam and the United States from an economic standpoint that has been manifest. We have seen great trajectory there. I think economic ties support strategic ties.

But what I would really like to talk about for a moment is the strategic opportunity that Vietnam presents for the United States, for our Quad partners, and for the safety and security of that re-

gion. I would love to get your thoughts on the role that you would play and help lead as our Ambassador to Vietnam.

Mr. KNAPPER. Thank you very much, Senator, and thank you very much for your kind words about my family.

I mean, you are absolutely right. Right now, I think our shared view with Vietnam is that there is no greater challenge we face right now than that of China, China's aggressive and provocative behavior, particularly some of its sweeping and unlawful maritime claims in the South China Sea, what it is doing along the Mekong River, damming and releasing water, causing deep, deep problems for 66 million people who live along that river and rely upon it for their livelihoods.

If confirmed, Senator, I will make a priority deepening our strategic relationship with Vietnam. Right now, we have what we call a comprehensive partnership. We hope to raise it to a strategic partnership, and I will take steps to do that by strengthening even further our security relationship with Vietnam.

This is something that you mentioned, Ambassador Kritenbrink. He did a great job over three years in bringing us to the next level.

I would like to take us further. I think deepening our economic partnership by opening the market there further to American agricultural goods, digital services.

As you said, strengthening our trade and economic ties can only benefit our strategic sort of interactions and our strategic sort of interdependence. And so this, if confirmed, will be a priority of mine, as well as deepening our people-to-people ties.

The shoulders upon which all of our efforts with Vietnam stand are the ties between our two peoples, whether it is young people going back and forth, students studying in each other's countries. And so that will also be, sir, a priority of mine, if confirmed.

Senator HAGERTY. Well, thank you very much. I look forward to working with you along all of those lines and know that you have a strong ally in the United States Senate, only with me but with the members of this committee, in achieving these goals.

Could I turn to you, Ambassador Bitter?

There is an area, again related to China, which is a deep concern of mine. I am certain that you are aware of this concern, and that is overseas students coming from China that pose a security threat to the nation.

I would just like to ask you in very specific terms if you are familiar with the Executive Order 10043. That executive order suspends the entry of certain students and researchers from the People's Republic of China.

Ms. BITTER. Yes, Senator.

Senator HAGERTY. And if you are confirmed, do you agree to notify me and this committee if there are any changes made to that executive order?

Ms. BITTER. Yes, Senator.

Senator HAGERTY. And in the meantime, do you agree to uphold the tenets of that executive order?

Ms. BITTER. Yes, Senator.

Senator HAGERTY. Thank you very much, Ambassador. I appreciate it.

I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. [presiding.] Thank you. Senator Cardin?

Senator CARDIN. Well, first, let me thank all four of our nominees for their service to our country and our willingness to continue to serve our nation. We thank you. We thank your families. We know that this is very much a family commitment.

Ambassador Bitter, I would like to start with you. I just want to concur with Senator Menendez's comments in regards to the passport issues. And as Senator Menendez said, you are not responsible for the current backlog. Eighteen weeks is unacceptable. Unacceptable.

We have constituents who, in good faith, have made travel plans, expecting that if they requested a passport document that it would be done in a matter of a few months, not four months.

And some are suffering now extreme economic hardships as well as personal hardships not being able to get those documents and they do not fall into the narrow definition of a life's emergency that would require more immediate action.

We are also concerned that some have requested passport support months ago, may not even be at the front of the line in regards to people who are now requesting help. And again, we recognize that you are not responsible for the current circumstances.

I thought Senator Menendez made an excellent point about the need for surge. I would like to get your commitment that this will receive your priority, if confirmed, and that we cannot allow an 18-week backlog in passport applications.

Ms. BITTER. Yes, Senator, you have my commitment. I share your concern and it will be my top priority, if confirmed.

Senator CARDIN. Thank you very much.

Mr. Knapper, I want to follow up on the questions that were asked by Senator Kaine in regards to Vietnam. I have been to Vietnam. Vietnam, certainly, is a much different country than it was when we were at war with Vietnam.

We have made significant progress in improving our relationship between our two countries. We were on the path towards the Trans-Pacific Partnership on a good governance section that was important to deal with the corruption in the country and good governance.

Vietnam was making progress, I would suggest, on basic human rights even though it is an authoritarian government, and now we have seen a backsliding, as Senator Kaine said, on freedom of the media.

I could also add the right of their citizens to peacefully protest their government has been very much infringed upon. And they have now changed their cyber laws in regards to comments about history can be now challenged by the government and infringing upon the use of the internet.

These are trends that are very disturbing, and I would like to drill down a little bit more about your strategies for dealing with the human rights issues in Vietnam, and how you will keep us informed and work with us as we look at the tools that we have given the administration to advance human rights and making sure that they are used fully in Vietnam.

Mr. KNAPPER. Well, thank you, Senator.

I think one area in which we have seen progress over the past few years have been in the expansion of rights afforded to women, minorities, people with disabilities, members of the LGBT community, and I think one of the ways we were able to secure and see these advances was thanks to sort of increased cooperation with and assistance to the NGOs and activists within Vietnam who work within these specific areas and with these groups.

And so, if confirmed, I would seek to not only continue the great work that the U.S. government has done, not just with activist groups and NGOs within Vietnam but also groups in the United States—the Vietnamese-American community, for example—to identify problematic areas, to try and identify potential strategies and tactics, going forward, because this is absolutely a priority area for me personally.

I worked on these issues 15 years ago when I previously served in Vietnam, and it will continue to be an area of focus for me and for Mission Vietnam. And you absolutely have my commitment to work with you and your colleagues, sir, in the Congress to look for opportunities and tools to further seek to improve the situation there in Vietnam.

Thank you.

Senator CARDIN. I would just add that it is very important that our mission in Vietnam support the NGOs and civil society groups that are working to advance these priorities so that our embassy is always a home for those who have roles to improve the governance in Vietnam and sometimes need the support of our embassy.

And I see you are shaking your head yes and I will just put your shaking of the head yes into the record.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I will yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. All right. I prefer an oral answer when I ask you a question, but I do not want to interpret your headshaking as a yes and then maybe you tell me later on it was a no. So—

Mr. KNAPPER. Well, it was actually a head nodding, Senator.

[Laughter.]

The CHAIRMAN. Okay.

I understand there are no other members.

Oh, I am sorry. Senator Van Hollen just walked in.

Senator Van Hollen?

Senator Van Hollen: All right. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Risch, and to all of you, congratulations on your nomination.

And let me start, if I could, with you, Ambassador Bitter, and I know Chairman Menendez asked you some questions about the current backlog in passport processing.

You know, obviously, we have been through a very difficult time with COVID. I recognize that, and the State Department has had to deal with all of the pressures that that brings.

In our state office, we have gone from things like small business access to PPP loans being the top priority and other issues to now number one relates to getting passports, where my understanding is we now have about a four-and-a-half-month average backlog.

And the other big issue, of course, is as families now have the opportunity to reunite and visit with friends, the issue of visas for people coming just to visit family and friends in the United States.

Can you talk about what we can do right now to address these issues and what, if confirmed, you would do?

Ms. BITTER. Thank you, Senator.

I am very aware of these issues, and I should take this opportunity, of course, to thank Congress for the support that it has given to the bureau over the last several months.

As all of you know, the bureau is under tremendous financial pressure since the start of the pandemic, and Congress has been enormously responsive in filling some of those gaps and allowing the bureau to continue to deliver consular services.

But so I know that the bureau is very grateful and that it will be continuing to engage with Congress on future budgets.

I just want to point out that these issues are not just money related. So while the U.S. is experiencing a return to what feels a little like normal, our posts overseas are still working under some pandemic space constraints, which means that they cannot offer the same number of appointments that they used to because they cannot have the same number of people in their waiting room.

So these restrictions are very important. They protect our staff, they protect the customers, they protect the community, but they do limit possibility to provide services.

And as a result, what has happened is my colleagues overseas have had to make some difficult prioritization decisions about how to use the space that is available to them.

If confirmed, this is very much job one. I recognize that visas also impact your community with respect to small businesses maybe relying on workers overseas that are unable to get back, family reunification, all of those issues. Right now it is a very difficult time.

Senator Van Hollen: Well, thank you for that statement. You know, this is the area where our constituents most frequently interact with the State Department, right, and so that is where they are really feeling the presence or lack of responsiveness and services.

So our office is working very closely with the team at the State Department. We are grateful for the relationship we have. But this is a big, big issue, the visa part but also just getting a passport for U.S. citizens who is here.

Ms. Medina, thank you for your testimony, and I appreciate your mentioning the issue of biodiversity, as you mentioned, and we are seeing a disappearance of biodiversity at alarming rates around the world and look forward to working with you on those issues, going forward.

Mr. Smith, thank you for taking on this assignment. As you well know, you know, Foreign Service officers go into the Foreign Service to really get to know and interact with the countries where they are serving.

And so while it is absolutely true that we have to provide security, I hope, as you think this through, you will also find ways to make sure that our Foreign Service officers overseas can interact with the rest of the population. Otherwise, they might as well just be in D.C.

In Kabul, we have, of course, a particularly immediate situation, and I know you will be monitoring that very carefully with respect to the situation there.

Finally, if I could, Mr. Knapper, congratulations on your nomination to Vietnam. Lots of issues to cover.

But let me just ask you about one, because over the past several years we have seen Vietnamese authorities increase their scrutiny over Vietnamese citizens' activities on the internet and social media, cracking down on any kind of free expression, requiring U.S. and other internet-based companies and social media companies to force them to comply with laws that can crack down on people's speech or try to force them.

Can you just talk briefly about how we are dealing with that situation?

Mr. KNAPPER. Well, thank you, Senator.

The one specific case right now that is attracting the most attention, of course, is that of Facebook, and the Vietnamese government, in some instances, demanding that Facebook removed certain posts that it finds offensive or contrary to political order, so to speak.

And right now, the U.S. embassy in Hanoi, we are working very closely with Facebook folks on the ground there as well as the Vietnamese government to try and find a way forward that, again, preserves the space on Facebook and other social networking sites to allow for free speech and to allow for the free expression of political and other views, and also just allowing an American company to be able to operate without a threat of its data being cut off or throttled, is the term that they use.

But, if confirmed, Senator, I will absolutely focus on this as a human rights issue, but also as a press freedom issue.

Thank you.

Senator Van Hollen: I appreciate that. As you say, it is really part of the larger, I think, growing challenge in Vietnam with respect to human rights. But thank you all for your testimony.

Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you. Some final questions.

Ambassador Smith, as I mentioned in my opening remarks, I am deeply concerned about what seems to be an emerging threat of directed energy attacks targeting U.S. personnel and our ability to pivot and adequately protect them and their families in the face of these attacks.

I hope that will be a major focus for you upon your confirmation?

Mr. SMITH. Yes, it will, Senator, and I look forward to engaging as we progress on this issue.

The CHAIRMAN. Well, that is incredibly important to us because, you know, we ask our people to do incredible work for the United States. We put them, sometimes, in harm's way. We need to do everything possible to protect them.

And this is something that seems to be challenging and escaping us. So I hope this will become one of your highest priorities upon taking office.

One of the most significant challenges I can see on the horizon is the security at Embassy Kabul. What is your current assessment—I know you are not there yet but from your experience of

our ability to ensure the safety and security of the embassy compound?

And will you commit to keeping the committee updated on the steps that Diplomatic Security has taken to ensure the safety of U.S. personnel?

Mr. SMITH. If confirmed, Senator, yes, I will commit to that. Afghanistan will continue to garner a lot of attention, particularly as U.S. forces continue to withdraw, and it is going to be important for Diplomatic Security to remain very much engaged both with our colleagues and contacts here and also with the Afghan forces on the ground to see how they can help to enhance our security operations.

The CHAIRMAN. Well, if you, when you get confirmed, I hope you will give us an assessment of what is needed, if anything is needed beyond what we have.

And also Port-au-Prince—we, obviously, have an ongoing difficult situation in Port-au-Prince. I know you will pay attention globally. But these are some hotspots that I think we need to pay attention to.

Do you have any sense of that, our embassy at Port-au-Prince?

Mr. SMITH. Again, I agree with you that Port-au-Prince is definitely a point of concern at this moment. I have not received any additional briefings on the activities there beyond what is in the open source.

But look forward, if confirmed, to focusing very, very clearly and specifically on that activity as well.

The CHAIRMAN. Okay. We will look forward to hearing from you once you are confirmed.

Mr. Knapper, finally, as you contemplate the possibilities of taking the relationship that we have with Vietnam to the next level and inaugurating a genuine strategic partnership, an aspiration I certainly support, how will you balance our very real shared strategic interests with Vietnam with our ongoing human rights concern?

A couple years back we had the president of Vietnam here. It was a very interesting exchange. First time in my 30 years of doing foreign policy and sitting with foreign dignitaries that he did not take any questions.

And it is not our process in the committee when we are meeting with a head of state to allow them to ramble along and eventually never take a question.

That was emblematic, in my mind, of what is going on in Vietnam. What sort of linkages or conditioning do you think is appropriate and constructive as we consider additional military security, economic or diplomatic engagement, with Vietnam?

Mr. KNAPPER. Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

I think you really have nailed the challenge that we face. It is, you know, how do we address our shared strategic interests in the region with Vietnam while staying true to our values regarding human rights, religious freedom, other areas.

And I think, if confirmed, I would like to build upon the good progress we have made so far. We have been able to keep that balance, I believe, between ensuring that our values related to universal human rights are upheld and asserted in our high-level con-

versations with the Vietnamese government, but at the same time recognizing that in Vietnam we have no stronger or more vocal partner within ASEAN when it comes to speaking out against the challenge that China poses in the South China Sea and elsewhere in the region.

So as I mentioned earlier, Mr. Chairman, I think there are ways to point out to our Vietnamese government and Communist Party of Vietnam interlocutors that there will be limitations to how much our relationship can grow under the circumstances in which we have concerns about human rights and religious freedom.

And I think we have to make clear that as we do consider ways to expand the relationship that we will let them know that there are potential breaks on progress that we will have to consider.

The CHAIRMAN. All right.

Ms. Medina, I do not want you to think that I—you have no object of my affection or interest. So but between your statement—your answers with Senator Risch and Senator Markey’s incredible description of your history, I think you have answered the issues I am concerned about.

So we look forward to working with you upon your confirmation. Global health for myself and for the ranking member is a critical issue, and while it may not seem in the title of your position to be the focal point, it is a focal point for this committee. So we will look forward to working with you on that.

With no other member, as I understand it, either virtually or present, to come before the committee, the record will remain open until the close of business on Wednesday, July the 14th for questions.

I would urge the nominees if you get questions for the record to answer them fully expeditiously so we can consider your nominations at a business meeting.

And with the thanks of the committee for your willingness to serve, this hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:27 a.m., the committee was adjourned.]

Additional Material Submitted for the Record

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED
TO HON. GENTRY O. SMITH BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

Risk Tolerance for Diplomats Abroad

Question. Diplomacy is an inherently dangerous business, and effective diplomacy cannot be conducted without accepting some degree of risk.

- How do you think the culture should change at the State Department to accommodate more risk management as opposed to risk avoidance?

Answer. I agree that the Department must balance the essential need to protect our people with the need to engage our partners around the world to advance U.S. interests. Department leadership acknowledges that our national security mission entails diverse types of risk and is committed to managing it appropriately. The Bureau of Diplomatic Security (DS) goes to great lengths to facilitate our nation’s diplomacy in challenging places, including high-threat locations, and welcomes further efforts, including with Congress, to ensure that the Department is able to meet mission objectives while protecting our personnel.

To quote Secretary Blinken, “The safety and security of our personnel abroad should not be politicized, nor should we assume negligence if, and when, prudent, calculated risk decisions play out with negative consequences.”

Question. How do you view your role in promoting that cultural shift in the department? What specifically could you do as assistant secretary—if confirmed—that would better enable our diplomats to get outside our posts abroad and advance America's interests?

Answer. This is an issue that, if confirmed, I intend to examine closely, in concert with senior Department leadership, especially with regard to what the Department can do to further enable diplomacy in High Threat/High Risk locations. Department leadership acknowledges that our national security mission entails diverse types of risk and is committed to managing these risks appropriately. My experience has been that the Bureau of Diplomatic Security goes to great lengths to facilitate our nation's diplomacy in challenging places, including high-threat locations, and welcomes further efforts, including with Congress, to ensure that the Department is able to meet mission objectives while protecting our personnel.

Talent Retention

Question. The Bureau for Diplomatic Security (DS) loses a lot of mid-level officers at the senior-two and senior-three levels for many reasons, but two frequent ones are lack of jobs at their level that reflect interest/ability and lack of promotion opportunities due to the limited number of positions available.

- If confirmed, what can you do as Assistant Secretary to address the loss of mid-level officers?

Answer. If confirmed, I look forward to working with senior Department leadership to look at ways to retain existing staff and expand opportunities for mid-level officers. We will continue to engage with Global Talent Management to assess the availability of positions at all levels and ensure that we provide all officers ample opportunities to compete for promotion.

Question. What policies or internal measures can you pursue to help address the loss of mid-level officers who leave due to the lack of promotion potential?

Answer. DS recognizes that mid-level officers have expressed concerns regarding assignments and the slow pace of promotions. In the past we sought to address concerns by reclassifying some positions to provide more opportunities for advancement. If confirmed, I look forward to working with Global Talent Management's leadership to explore additional ways to address these concerns.

Resources

Question. DS has multiple responsibilities that sometimes lead to a competition for resources. How do you feel DS should prioritize resources to the various missions?

Answer. The safety of our personnel and security of our information and facilities are among the Department's highest priorities. Congress has been very supportive to DS in providing the resources it has requested. If confirmed, I intend to work with Department leadership and this Committee to prioritize resources to its various missions.

Key Personnel Skills

Question. The State Department faces a shortage of speakers of critical languages. Many of our pool of qualified speakers have close family ties to countries where the language is needed. Do you feel the current DS system of issuing preclusions adequately mitigates CI vulnerabilities that are identified during the background investigation?

Answer. The State Department is committed to a diverse, skilled workforce. Some assignment limitations are preclusions that reflect the Department's inability to accredit diplomats to foreign countries of which they are citizens or to foreign countries that consider them citizens. In adjudicating security clearances, the Department utilizes the whole person concept to determine whether facts and circumstances indicate that eligibility is clearly consistent with the national security interests of the United States. Any doubt is resolved in favor of national security. Part of this process identifies potential CI vulnerabilities and considers whether they are mitigated under the National Security Adjudicative Guidelines. The Department is committed to protecting its employees and national security information.

Programming

Question. Where does DS programming fit within the broader Department of State and interagency security sector capacity building structure and related planning processes?

Answer. Diplomatic Security is an important contributor to security capacity building in partner nations around the globe. DS serves as the primary implementer of the Department's Antiterrorism Assistance (ATA) program, which provides selected foreign governments with counterterrorism training, equipment, and technical assistance in coordination with policy guidance and funding provided by the Bureau of Counterterrorism. Regional Security Officers (RSOs) frequently work with host country governments, local organizations, and other diplomatic missions to provide advisory security opinions to schools, hospitals, and similar institutions.

Question. What are DS's comparative advantages in the U.S. Government's security sector capacity building framework and tool set?

Answer. Numerous U.S. Government agencies have resources and skills that can contribute to assisting foreign development beneficial to the national interest. While Diplomatic Security possess its own impressive cadre of security professionals and world class training and assistance programs, DS' greatest asset is in the organization's status as a security and law enforcement agency and integral part of the Foreign Service. DS personnel are trained investigators, cyber experts, security engineers, analysts, and diplomats. That broad functionality allows DS to soundly evaluate and deploy needed security and training assistance, whether those efforts ultimately originate from within DS or from another agency.

Question. How can DS better leverage these advantages to further political goals?

Answer. Diplomatic Security should continue its role as the lead law enforcement representative on an embassy's Country Team. A Regional Security Officer's ability to advise a Chief of Mission on both diplomatic and security consequences assures that U.S. foreign policy goals are examined from both a political and security dimension.

Havana Syndrome

Question. Between late 2016 and May 2018, the State Department found that certain Embassy Havana community members suffered a series of unexplained injuries, including hearing loss and cognitive issues. Many other U.S. Government officials in other countries have experienced similar incidents.

- If confirmed, will you commit to continuing the investigation into the circumstances surrounding the sonic attacks?

Answer. If confirmed, I intend to continue to prioritize the application of DS' technical and investigative talent to support the investigation to identify the source and cause of these unexplained health incidents. I look forward to working with Congress on this very important issue.

Question. Will you seek to ensure the safety and security of U.S. diplomatic personnel in Havana and other posts where personnel were injured?

Answer. There is no higher priority for the Department or for me than the safety and security of our personnel and this certainly includes mitigating against unexplained health incidents. I know that this issue is a top priority for Secretary Blinken. If confirmed I will work closely with the interagency to fully apply DS technical and investigation resources to ensure that our efforts to determine cause and attribution remain a priority.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to work constructively with other government agencies on finding the cause of the attacks as well as on how best to support those U.S. government employees who have been injured?

Answer. If confirmed, I intend to continue coordinating with multiple agencies to identify the source and cause of these reported injuries. In addition, I intend to focus on ways to strengthen the already robust mitigation efforts that are taking place to further enhance the safety and security of all USG personnel and family members overseas under our security responsibility.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to regularly sharing new information, including updates on any live investigations, to Congress?

Answer. If confirmed, I will work through the Bureau of Legislative Affairs to ensure that Congress promptly has the information it needs to perform its Constitutional obligations, consistent with obligations involving interagency information and existing practices for the protection of law enforcement activities.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED
TO HON. GENTRY O. SMITH BY SENATOR BENJAMIN L. CARDIN

Risk Management

Question. Some former State Department officials, Members of Congress, and other stakeholders have expressed concern with what they view as a growing level of risk intolerance at U.S. missions abroad, especially at high-risk posts, which they maintain inhibits U.S. diplomats from effectively fulfilling their mandates. I am considering a hearing on this topic in my subcommittee.

- What is your view on the State Department's current diplomatic security risk management approach? In your view, how, if at all, should the current approach be adjusted more towards risk tolerance or, alternatively, more towards mitigating risks facing U.S. diplomats and other personnel under Chief of Mission Authority?

Answer. I agree that the Department must balance the essential need to protect our people with the need to engage our partners around the world to advance U.S. interests. Department leadership acknowledges that our national security mission entails diverse types of risk and is committed to managing it appropriately. The Bureau of Diplomatic Security (DS) goes to great lengths to facilitate our nation's diplomacy in challenging places, including high-threat locations, and welcomes further efforts, including with Congress, to ensure that the Department is able to meet mission objectives while protecting our personnel.

To quote Secretary Blinken, "The safety and security of our personnel abroad should not be politicized, nor should we assume negligence if, and when, prudent, calculated risk decisions play out with negative consequences."

Question. What is your view of the Accountability Review Board (ARB) process? Do you believe the ARB process is excessively tilted toward finding someone to blame in the case of a security incident, or alternatively, does action need to be taken to ensure accountability? What kinds of adjustments, if any, would you suggest Congress make to the ARB process?

Answer. The Department recognizes that the advancement of foreign policy inherently involves diverse types of risk, and that taking considered risks can be essential to advancing U.S. interests. If confirmed, I would welcome working with Congress to look at ways to improve the ARB process.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED
TO HON. GENTRY O. SMITH BY SENATOR MARCO RUBIO

Question. Since 2016, U.S. personnel posted to the Embassy in Havana, Cuba have reported a common set of symptoms now referred to as "Havana Syndrome." Since then, these symptoms have been reported in many other countries hosting U.S. diplomats, including China and Russia. These often debilitating injuries present a major risk to U.S. diplomatic personnel there.

- What is your assessment of the risks present to U.S. diplomatic personnel assigned to Havana?

Answer. If confirmed, I will closely assess the situation in coordination with Department of State stakeholders and interagency partners.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO HON. RENA BITTER BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

Question. Last year's travel restrictions and the resulting loss of visa fee revenue negatively impacted Consular Affairs' finances. Now, as vaccination rates climb and more people seek to travel, demand for passports and visas are rapidly increasing, leading to significant delays in processing times for passports and visas. Some of these delays take extra months. If confirmed, what is your plan to reduce lengthy passport processing times?

Answer. If confirmed, my number one priority will be the reduction of service backlogs impacting both our domestic passport agencies and our overseas posts. Prior to COVID-19, our domestic passport service standards were up to three weeks for expedited applications, and up to eight weeks for routine applications. It is my

goal to return to these timelines as quickly as possible, not only through the use of overtime and increased hiring, but also by exploring how we might utilize Department staff to surge domestic passport processing capacity. Addressing visa backlogs overseas will require solutions tailored to the unique needs of each post, but I will devote myself and the CA team to identifying and implementing these solutions as quickly as possible.

Question. It appears that the Biden administration is not currently prioritizing visas for seasonal workers and other business-related needs. How are you going to better balance the needs of our small and medium-sized businesses, who often rely on seasonal workers to survive?

Answer. If confirmed, I will continue efforts to sustain the long-standing program of temporary workers coming to the United States, which is vital to maintaining supply chains for food and other critical items. In addition, I will seek to continue existing policies to waive the in-person interview requirement for certain first-time H-2 applicants and those renewing within 48 months. These provisions will continue to permit the processing of many H-2 applications without the need for an in-person appearance, which creates efficiencies in processing while still adhering to COVID health protocols.

Question. Upon a determination by the Secretary of State that the detention of a United States national abroad is unlawful or wrongful, how will you work to efficiently transfer such cases from the Bureau of Consular Affairs to the Special Envoy for Hostage Affairs?

Answer. The Bureau of Consular Affairs (CA) works closely with the Office of the Special Presidential Envoy for Hostage Affairs (S/SPEHA) and other Department offices to implement the Robert Levinson Hostage Recovery and Hostage-Taking Accountability Act. CA works hand in hand with S/SPEHA, the relevant regional bureau, post, and the Department's Office of the Legal Adviser to develop recommendations on individual cases. When a detention is determined to be wrongful, the transfer of the case to S/SPEHA is a smooth and efficient process. If confirmed, I pledge to help facilitate continued close collaboration.

Question. How do you plan to ensure that all families with relatives held abroad are given timely access to information?

Answer. The U.S. Department of State has no greater responsibility than the protection of U.S. citizens overseas. Some of our most vulnerable U.S. citizens abroad are those who are arrested or detained in a foreign country. Consular officers stand ready to provide all appropriate consular services in cases where U.S. citizens are detained and arrested abroad. We will continue to work with local authorities to ensure our embassies or consulates are notified of a U.S. citizen arrest, and our consular officers will seek access to the citizen without delay. Consistent with the decision of the detained citizen and in line with the Privacy Act, consular officers provide status updates to family members as soon as possible. I pledge, if confirmed, that CA will continue to prioritize service to these U.S. citizens including providing as much information as possible to their families.

Question. What steps will you take to improve the Bureau of Consular of Affairs with regards to United States nationals held abroad?

Answer. With all detentions, consular officers seek prompt access to ensure detained U.S. citizen prisoners are:

- receiving adequate food and necessary medical care;
- not being mistreated;
- able to access legal counsel;
- having communications facilitated with their families consistent with their preferences under the Privacy Act, and
- receiving all substantive and procedural protections under local law and fair trial guarantees consistent with international obligations, including human rights law.

If confirmed, I will seek to ensure individuals have access to any medication or medical attention they may need and highlight our concerns to local authorities, that officers also assist with the transfer of funds from family and friends in the United States to pay for attorneys' fees, food, and medicine while incarcerated, and that they raise concerns and protests regarding credible allegations of mistreatment. In cases where potential indications of a wrongful detention exist, I will ensure CA consults with S/SPEHA and other relevant Department offices on whether a wrong-

ful detention determination by the Secretary as called for under the Levinson Act might be appropriate.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO HON. RENA BITTER BY SENATOR TIM KAINE

Question. State Department statistics released this month show fewer children are being successfully returned to the U.S. following parental abduction than before—See <https://bit.ly/3nExd6J>

The percentage of children returned to the U.S. as share of all reported outgoing abductions has steadily dropped from 2011 to 2020.) While recognizing that not all returns to the U.S. are for cases that happened in previous years, we are nonetheless concerned by the apparent decreases in proportion of children returned to the U.S.

- To what do you attribute this decline?

Answer. Each child’s case, and each country, is unique. If confirmed, I will ensure the Bureau of Consular Affairs continues to assist parents seeking the return of their abducted children and to engage with countries to promote procedures to achieve better outcomes for children and families in child abduction cases. I will direct our focus to those countries cited for demonstrating a “pattern of noncompliance” in our Annual Report to Congress on International Child Abduction, and those countries that are not party to the Hague Abduction Convention, as these are the countries from which it may be the most challenging to resolve cases.

In referring to the data publicly shared by the Department, I am also encouraged to observe that from 2010 to 2019, there was more than a 50 percent drop in the number of international parental child abductions reported to the Department. If confirmed, I will ensure the Bureau of Consular Affairs continues its robust efforts in collaboration with U.S. Customs and Border Protection to prevent these abductions from occurring in the first place.

Question. What would you do as Assistant Secretary to more forcefully and effectively advocate for the return of abducted children to the U.S.?

Answer. Consular Affairs has no more important role than the protection of U.S. citizens abroad, especially children wrongly removed or retained abroad by a parent from their U.S. homes. If confirmed, I will prioritize our engagement on international parental child abductions with both our Hague Convention partners and non-partner countries, with special focus on the 11 countries cited for demonstrating a “pattern of noncompliance” in our 2021 Annual Report to Congress on International Child Abduction. I will ensure we use every effective means to get these countries to work with the United States to quickly resolve these cases and help parents bring their abducted children home.

Question. If confirmed, would you support efforts to routinely inform parents applying for passports for minor children about the potential for international child abduction?

Answer. If confirmed, I will maintain the Bureau of Consular Affairs’ priority focus on the prevention of international parental child abduction. All recipients of a U.S. passport currently receive a flyer advising them of the risks of international parental child abduction and providing contact information for the Office of Children’s Issues. I am also encouraged that close to 55,000 children are actively enrolled in the Children’s Passport Issuance Alert program, and I will continue the Department’s work to strengthen this important child abduction prevention program.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO HON. RENA BITTER BY SENATOR MARCO RUBIO

Question. The COVID-19 pandemic has placed an incredible strain on the State Department’s ability to process visas. This is, in part, due to the need to protect the safety and health of our diplomats in countries where the pandemic is still uncontrolled. However, as countries increase the vaccination of their citizens and the spread of the pandemic decreases, the U.S. should resume regular consular services in many countries.

- If confirmed, how do you plan to address the consular services backlog?

Answer. If confirmed, my number one priority will be the reduction of service backlogs at both our domestic passport agencies and our overseas posts. Prior to COVID-19, our domestic passport service standards were up to three weeks for expedited applications, and up to eight weeks for routine applications. It is my goal to return to these timelines as quickly as possible, not only through the use of overtime and increased hiring, but also by exploring how we might utilize Department staff to surge domestic passport processing capacity. Addressing visa backlogs overseas will require solutions tailored to the unique needs of each post, but I will devote myself and the CA team to identifying and implementing these solutions as quickly as possible.

Question. One consequence of the shutdown of consular services in most embassies has been the practice of referring citizens in one country to have their interviews conducted in another country. For example, ordinary Cubans have had to travel to Guyana.

- In your opinion, what message does it send to ordinary Cubans when they have to travel to Guyana to process their visas, but the Cuban baseball team was able to get visas in Havana to play a game in the U.S. earlier this year?

Answer. I am sympathetic to the financial and other difficulties Cuban citizens face in applying for visas and recognize there are humanitarian reasons that individuals may want to seek an appointment with the consular section in Havana. The U.S. Embassy suspended routine visa services following the ordered departure of non-emergency personnel in September 2017. The consular section must also comply with Cuban COVID-19 restrictions. Embassy Havana continues to provide emergency assistance to U.S. citizens in Cuba, and to provide limited non-immigrant visa services including for medical emergencies and official and diplomatic travelers. I am hopeful future conditions may permit a reevaluation of what services can be provided by the Embassy.

Question. During the Trump administration, the State Department decided to allow Americans born in Jerusalem to list "Israel" as their place of birth in their passports. This is a policy and is reflective of U.S. law that recognizes Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.

- If confirmed, do you commit to upholding this policy decision?

Answer. If confirmed, I have no plans to seek to change the Department's current policy regarding the place of birth listed on U.S. passports for U.S. citizens born in Jerusalem.

Question. The Visa Waiver program is an initiative that allows citizens of participating countries to travel to the U.S. for 90 days without a Visa. Many of the participating countries are among our strongest allies and partners, such as the United Kingdom, Ireland, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan. For several years, the State Department has worked to include Israel in the Visa Waiver program.

- If confirmed, do you commit to working with Israel on these efforts?

Answer. The Secretary of Homeland Security, in consultation with the Secretary of State, may designate countries for participation in the Visa Waiver Program when and if the country meets established statutory and policy criteria. I commit to continuing the efforts to work with Israel on its progress to qualify for designation into the program.

Question. In 2014 the Obama administration agreed to afford multi-entry, non-immigrant visas (B1/B2) with ten years' validity to qualified PRC nationals. Now that two subsequent administrations have determined that the PRC is a strategic competitor, and have sought to calibrate U.S. policy accordingly, it is time to revisit the risks associated with visa policy.

- If confirmed, do you commit to evaluate the security risks of providing multi-entry visas of such long duration to PRC nationals, particularly Chinese Communist Party members and military personnel?

Answer. Yes, I will work with the administration and the Department to evaluate all security risks posed by the People's Republic of China. We maintain robust vetting of all non-immigrant visa applications, including for B1/B2 visas, under our longstanding Security Advisory Opinion process. In addition, the Department and its partners continuously vet all visa holders and may revoke a visa at any time if we identify potential security concerns. Currently, B1, B2, and B1/B2 non-immigrant visas are limited to one-month, single-entry for members of the Chinese Communist Party, as well as their spouses and unmarried children under the age of 21. This change went into effect in December 2020 and is being applied at all visa units

worldwide. We will continue to assess how to update and adapt visa vetting processing to best address threats to U.S. national security. Presidential Proclamation 10043, which went into effect on June 1, 2020, has also suspended the entry of PRC students and researchers with ties to China's Military-Civil Fusion.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO HON. RENA BITTER BY SENATOR CORY A. BOOKER

Question. COVID-19 has wreaked havoc on the State Department's ability to meet passport and visa demand. Right now, wait times for a new U.S. passport are 18 weeks for routine services and 12 weeks for expedited services. Relatedly, many U.S. embassies and consulates around the world are still only processing non-immigrant visas in emergency situations. For those that are issuing visas, the estimated wait time to receive an interview appointment can range from a couple of weeks for a student visa to months for a tourist visa.

As you can imagine, I have received a great deal of correspondence from constituents who are exasperated for themselves and family members as they seek to travel around the world.

- What plans do you have in mind to address these severe backlogs? What do you intend to do on Day 1 to help get Consular Affairs back on track?

Answer. If confirmed, my number one priority will be the reduction of service backlogs impacting both our domestic passport agencies and our overseas posts. Prior to COVID-19, our passport service standards were two to three weeks for expedited applications, and six to eight weeks for regular applications. It is my goal to return to these timelines as quickly as possible, not only through the use of overtime and increased hiring, but also by exploring how we might utilize Department staff to surge domestic passport processing capacity. Addressing visa backlogs overseas will require solutions tailored to the unique needs of each post, but I will devote myself and the CA team to identifying and implementing these solutions as quickly as possible.

Question. Through nearly two decades of U.S. assistance programming in Afghanistan, the United States has funded, through cooperative agreements and grants, multiple programs on human rights, democracy assistance, support for independent media, and the empowerment of women and marginalized groups.

Thousands of Afghan nationals directly implemented U.S.-funded civilian aid and development programs across the country, alongside U.S. and international personnel. They demonstrated a commitment and dedication to this important work for their country despite the fact that the association with the United States placed their lives at risk.

I visited Afghanistan in 2018, and have seen firsthand the dedication and sacrifice that Afghan nationals have given to support our efforts. These brave men and women are now under threat as the Taliban has stated in no uncertain terms that it plans to target those who helped the United States as translators, interpreters, and in other ways over the years. Many of these nationals have applied for Special Issuance Visas to come to the United States with their families, but the backlog for processing their applications runs into the thousands.

- What is your plan for addressing this backlog and potentially saving the lives of thousands of Afghans who helped us in our war efforts over the past two decades?

Answer. I take seriously our commitment to the Afghan men and women who have assumed enormous risks to support our military and civilian personnel. I am very cognizant of the threats they face and fully agree that assisting them is a top priority. The Department has increased resources and undertaken steps to streamline the process at every application stage. If confirmed, I will ensure my team completes processing of SIV applications to the fullest extent possible. We will also keep working with Congress to identify where we can make the SIV application process more efficient and adjust requirements that do not impact national security.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
 SUBMITTED TO MONICA P. MEDINA BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

Question. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed serious gaps in U.S. international pandemic prevention, preparedness, and response efforts, including the failure of the Department of State—over multiple administrations—to prioritize global health policy and diplomatic engagement beyond the PEPFAR program. What is your plan to improve State Department leadership on global health security?

Answer. The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrates how global health security is essential to U.S. national and economic security. The State Department is strongly positioned to lead the global effort to beat COVID-19 and increase the global capacity to prevent, detect, and respond to future outbreaks, and the Secretary has appointed a Coordinator who reports directly to him to work across the Department and with other agencies to elevate global health policy in the Department's diplomatic efforts. If confirmed, I will immediately look closely at the bureau's structure and resources and come back to you to discuss this issue further, with a view to working with the committee as it considers how to strengthen health security at the Department. If confirmed, I am committed to work with Coordinator Gayle Smith of the Secretary's Office of Global COVID-19 Response and Health Security, other offices across the interagency, and with partners to improve global health security capabilities, as well as to increase transparency and accountability. This includes modernizing and strengthening international institutions including the World Health Organization, and International Health Regulations.

Question. Do you agree that the Department needs to play a more active role in the interagency on global health security, including by ensuring foreign policy and program coherence among the U.S. agencies implementing global health programs overseas (CDC and USAID) as well as with other international partners?

Answer. Yes. The Department is playing an active and robust role on global health security within the interagency process. But the Bureau needs to build up greater capacity to deal with this and other health crises in the future. If confirmed, I am committed to working with Coordinator Gayle Smith of the Secretary's Office of Global COVID-19 Response and Health Security on these issues, as well as other offices in the Department and across the interagency. The Biden-Harris administration recognizes that COVID-19 and health security are global challenges that require global responses, and I will engage with international partners and allies on this important issue. The United States will continue to engage multilaterally to respond to and recover from COVID-19 as well as to prepare for, detect, and rapidly respond to emerging biological threats.

Question. Is there currently a review process within the United States Government for approving or disapproving life sciences or biological research collaboration with other countries that could pose dual-use concerns, including research on pathogens, viruses, and toxins? What role, if any, does the Department of State play in this review process? Within the Department of State, what role does OES play in this process?

Answer. Because I am not currently an employee of the State Department, and I understand that much of this work is outside the purview of OES, I have not taken a hard look at this process. It is my understanding that there are a variety of review processes that may apply to international life science collaboration, depending on the nature of that collaboration and the pathogens or other materials involved. These include reviews undertaken by agencies before funding certain types of research deemed to pose particular risks, and, where applicable, export licensing and visa vetting. The Department of State is in general not involved in the decisions of funding agencies to support specific research activities. I understand that much of this work is outside of the purview of OES. If confirmed, I will work colleagues in other bureaus at the State Department and across the interagency to learn more about these issues, and will work with you to assist any committee oversight over such activities.

Question. If such a process exists, what type of evidentiary information must be included to determine whether such research collaboration is appropriate?

Answer. Because I am not yet in the Department, I have not looked into this question or been specifically briefed on it. I have been advised that the types of information required depend on the nature of the research collaboration and the pathogens or other materials involved. However, it is my understanding that they would typically include the pathogens, if any, to be worked with, the nature of the activity, the identities of the individuals involved, and the purposes for which the activity would be conducted. Information regarding the location of the work and the

applicable biosafety standards may also be required. If confirmed, I will look further into this issue and will work with you and your staff on it.

Question. What steps has the Department of State taken to act on or implement the recommendations of the following guidance documents? Please be specific with respect to each document listed below:

- UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT POLICY FOR OVERSIGHT OF LIFE SCIENCES DUAL USE RESEARCH OF CONCERN, available at <https://bit.ly/2YYcFvs>
- NATIONAL SCIENCE ADVISORY BOARD FOR BIOSECURITY, PROPOSED FRAMEWORK FOR THE OVERSIGHT OF DUAL USE LIFE SCIENCES RESEARCH: STRATEGIES FOR MINIMIZING THE POTENTIAL MISUSE OF RESEARCH INFORMATION (2007), available at <https://bit.ly/3AfOqGZ>
- RECOMMENDED POLICY GUIDANCE FOR DEPARTMENTAL DEVELOPMENT OF REVIEW MECHANISMS FOR POTENTIAL PANDEMIC PATHOGEN CARE AND OVERSIGHT (P3CO) (2017), available at <https://bit.ly/3u2cMSt>
- U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES, FRAMEWORK FOR GUIDING FUNDING DECISIONS ABOUT PROPOSED RESEARCH INVOLVING ENHANCED POTENTIAL PANDEMIC PATHOGENS (2017), available at <https://bit.ly/3CmAQ5o>
- NATIONAL SCIENCE ADVISORY BOARD FOR BIOSECURITY, RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE EVALUATION AND OVERSIGHT OF PROPOSED GAIN-OF-FUNCTION RESEARCH (2016), <https://bit.ly/3zkTRTQ>.

Answer. As I understand it, these policy documents primarily provide guidance for other Federal agencies considering funding of certain types of research or work with potential pandemic pathogens. I am advised that the Department of State does not fund such research. However, the Department of State has been involved in actively promoting the development and adoption of such oversight systems abroad, including through presentations and discussions at international meetings. If confirmed, I will look further into how these documents are being used and implemented by agencies with such research funding and will work with you and your staff to understand how each is being implemented.

Question. As we discussed when we met last month, the Columbia River Treaty remains an important issue to myself and the rest of the northwest delegation. This treaty has been in the process of being renegotiated for years and will determine energy production and costs as well as water flows. If confirmed, you will lead the bureau responsible for overseeing some of the technical inputs that negotiators will consider.

Answer. The Columbia River is the lifeblood of the region. I am generally familiar with the complicated issues regarding this key shared resource from my time at NOAA. If confirmed, I will give a close look into the whole range of negotiating issues as they stand now and determine how OES can best provide greater support to the U.S. negotiating team. Canada and the United States have a shared interest in building back the regional economy and being good stewards of the region's water resources.

Question. If confirmed, will you make Columbia River Treaty negotiations a priority?

Answer. I understand the importance of reaching agreement with Canada on the modernization of the Columbia River Treaty regime. Canada and the United States have a shared interest in building back the regional economy and being good stewards of the region's water resources. If confirmed, I will look into the whole range of negotiating issues and determine how OES can best support the U.S. negotiating team.

Question. What was the total amount of appropriations in Fiscal Year (FY) 2019 used by the Department of State on global climate change programs? From which accounts did the funding come? Please provide specific details about all global climate change programs funded, including the objectives, results, and amounts of FY 2019 appropriations spent. If confirmed, how would you adjust this spending, if at all?

Answer. The Department of State used \$13,500,000 of FY 2019 Economic Support Funds on global climate change programs. These programs protect the environment while promoting economic growth and enhancing sustainable landscapes, clean energy, and adaptation. In FY19, allocated funds went to the following programs:

- SilvaCarbon—U.S. Forest Service
- Climate Fellows—U.S. Forest Service

- Clean and Advanced Technology for Sustainable Landscapes—U.S. Department of Energy
- Caribbean Natural Infrastructure Partnership for Resilience—U.S. Forest Service
- Offset National Emissions through Sustainable Landscapes—U.S. Aviation Industry Groups
- Carbon Accounting and Reporting for Wetlands—Environmental Protection Agency
- Avoiding Deforestation through a Commodities Jurisdiction Approach—Competitively Awarded Program
- Private Investment for Enhanced Resilience—Competitively Awarded Program
- Clean Energy Ministerial—U.S. Department of Energy

Question. In your March 31, 2020, opinion piece in the Washington Post, you wrote about the environmental “unexpected bright side” of the pandemic and point out the economic tradeoffs of doing with less. How will you measure and report on economic and social tradeoffs of climate programs at the State Department?

Answer. The pandemic has been an immense tragedy. It is clear that it and the climate crisis impact our economies and societies in complex and challenging ways. It is imperative that we learn from this experience and use that knowledge to build back better. If confirmed, I hope to work within the E family, and with the Department and the interagency, to address these issues holistically.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO MONICA P. MEDINA BY SENATOR BENJAMIN L. CARDIN

Authorities

Question. The position of Assistant Secretary of State for Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs has not been held by a Senate-confirmed official since 2014.

- Secretary Blinken has noted that the State Department likely requires additional hiring authorities to bring in more personnel to address emerging, complex foreign policy challenges that fall within the remit of OES, including climate change, global health, and technology. Do you share this view? Could you elaborate on the kinds of skill sets you think need to be added to the Bureau’s work?

Answer. Yes, I agree. The Bureau has in its purview two of the major crises facing our country and the world today—climate and health—and they are likely to be difficult challenges for the foreseeable future, requiring more resources for the Bureau. OES needs the right mix of people, fresh and diverse perspectives, and people who understand how to apply the latest scientific understanding and technologies to these problems.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO MONICA P. MEDINA BY SENATOR MARCO RUBIO

Question. If confirmed, how will you work with our allies and partners in the region to counter the Chinese Communist Party’s illegal territorial claims?

Answer. This matter is an important problem, and if I am confirmed, it will be a priority for me. I have been to China and Japan with the Secretary of Defense, and I understand the issue well. The United States can and should push back on the PRC’s coercive behavior, unlawful maritime claims in the South China Sea, and disregard for the marine environment. Countering the PRC’s tactics requires a government-wide effort that leads with diplomacy, development, and economic engagement. Secretary Blinken recently affirmed in his statement on the 5th anniversary of the Arbitral Ruling on the South China Sea that freedom of the seas is an enduring interest of all nations and is vital to global peace and prosperity. If confirmed, I will look forward to working with our ASEAN partners along with other partners and allies including Australia, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Japan, New Zealand, and the European Union to preserve the rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific region including the East and South China Seas.

Question. If confirmed, how do you intend to work with other federal agencies and international partners to crack down on illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing practices in the South China Sea?

Answer. Ending IUU fishing is a top priority of mine because of the detrimental food security impacts it has in the regions where it is occurring, as well as because of the human rights and environmental harms it is causing. Nowhere is this security and environmental challenge more urgent than in the South China Sea. When I worked for Secretary Panetta at the Department of Defense, I witnessed the growing tensions in this region and the national security concerns it creates first-hand.

I understand that the State Department and OES work with interagency partners to monitor and address IUU fishing by PRC vessels, support capacity building for coastal states threatened by it, and implement multilateral fisheries enforcement and management schemes. OES and its interagency partners also engage directly with the PRC on broader fisheries conservation and management issues to push for Beijing's responsible oversight of its fleet. I understand the State Department and other agencies have also done work with Southeast Asian coastal States to strengthen fisheries law enforcement and maritime domain awareness in the region. If confirmed, I look forward to continuing the Department's leading role in the recently formed Maritime SAFE Act Interagency IUU Fishing Working Group, where we are working with our interagency partners, as well as with key stakeholders, to coordinate and strengthen U.S. efforts to combat IUU fishing wherever it occurs. It is imperative, in my view, that we step up our efforts in international fora and at international meetings to confront China on its aggressive actions that undermine the rule of law on the seas.

Question. Is there currently a review process within the United States Government for approving or disapproving life sciences or biological research collaboration with other countries that could pose dual-use concerns, including research on pathogens, viruses, and toxins? What role, if any, does the Department of State play in this review process? Within the Department of State, what role does OES play in this process?

Answer. Because I am not currently an employee of the State Department, and I understand that much of this work is outside the purview of OES, I have not yet taken a hard look at this process. It is my understanding that there are a variety of review processes that may apply to international life science collaboration, depending on the nature of that collaboration and the pathogens or other materials involved. These include reviews undertaken by agencies before funding certain types of research deemed to pose particular risks, and, where applicable, export licensing and visa vetting. The Department of State is in general not involved in the decisions of funding agencies to support specific research activities. I understand that much of this work is outside of the purview of OES. If confirmed, I will work with colleagues in other bureaus at the State Department and across the interagency to learn more about these issues, and will work with you to assist any Committee oversight over such activities.

Question. If confirmed, what actions will you take to work with our allies and partners in Africa and Latin America to combat Chinese illegal fishing?

Answer. Department's continued close work with the U.S. Coast Guard, NOAA, and other agencies and partner governments around the world to strengthen the rules and improve enforcement processes and capabilities for international fisheries. The Bureau plays a role in 16 bilateral cooperative fisheries law enforcement agreements between the U.S. Coast Guard and partner countries in the Pacific and West Africa, and I fully support its efforts to pursue additional agreements throughout the world, including in Latin America and Africa. These agreements allow for the United States to assist coastal and flag States to enforce their domestic laws, strengthening and supporting development of partner nations' capabilities. In addition, I understand that the Maritime SAFE Act IUU Fishing Working Group has recently determined that a number of regions in Africa and Latin America are "priority regions," as described by the Act. OES will continue to collaborate with its interagency partners through that Working Group to determine the best approaches to strengthening the capabilities of countries in those regions to address IUU fishing individually and through regional cooperation.

Question. If confirmed, what actions will you take to work with other agencies in investigating the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic?

Answer. Like many, I very much want to know the origins of COVID-19. It is imperative that we learn what caused this tragedy and act to do everything we can to prevent it from happening again. President Biden recently requested a deeper re-

view of the origins of COVID-19 by the U.S. intelligence community, with support from the National Labs and other agencies of the U.S. government. As part of this review, President Biden has asked for investigation into all areas that may be relevant. I look forward to the results of this report and, if confirmed, identifying next steps for follow-up and assisting in whatever capacity I can. Additionally, the World Health Organization (WHO) is currently working on developing Phase 2 of its study of the origins of COVID-19, including in China.

Question. If confirmed, and absent passage of my bill, what actions will you take to combat the deplorable action of finning sharks in foreign nations?

Answer. Shark populations are declining globally and in my view we need to do more to conserve them. The United States, through the Department of State and the NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service, has spearheaded a series of agreed shark finning prohibitions in RFMOs in both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. The United States works through RFMOs to strengthen enforcement of current fishing prohibitions—and strengthen the measures themselves when needed—as part of our work to support the conservation and sustainable management of key shark species. If confirmed, I will press for continued and expanded U.S. leadership in these and other international organizations to ensure the sustainability of these vital species, as well as continuing to work with other countries to develop and enforce national conservation and management measures, including species-specific data collection programs for sharks.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO MARC EVANS KNAPPER BY SENATOR ROBERT MENENDEZ

Question. As you contemplate the possibilities of taking this relationship to the next level and inaugurating a genuine strategic partnership what is your vision of what such a partnership should look like and encompass?

Answer. Twenty-six years since the normalization of diplomatic relations, the U.S.-Vietnam partnership has never been better. We have moved from a history of conflict and division to a Comprehensive Partnership that spans political, security, economic, and people-to-people ties.

I am confident that the positive momentum in our relationship will continue. The United States and Vietnam have a common sense of purpose and a common vision for a rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific. We seek to deepen our cooperation that spans our close collaboration on war legacy and humanitarian issues to regional security and shared prosperity. We also seek to deepen cooperation on climate change, pandemic disease, wildlife and drug trafficking, maritime security, and transnational crime..

Our interests include maintaining the peace and stability that has allowed regional and bilateral trade to flourish over the last quarter century.

If confirmed, I commit to consulting closely with Congress as the administration considers next steps in the relationship.

Question. If confirmed, how will you balance our very real shared strategic interests with Vietnam with our on-going human rights concerns? What sort of linkages or conditioning do you think is appropriate and constructive as we consider additional military-security, economic or diplomatic engagement with Vietnam?

Answer. Twenty-six years since the normalization of diplomatic relations, the U.S.-Vietnam partnership has never been better. We have moved from a history of conflict and division to a Comprehensive Partnership that spans political, security, economic, and people-to-people ties.

The United States and Vietnam have a common sense of purpose and a common vision for a rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific. We must continue to build on the progress in the bilateral relationship, but as the Biden-Harris administration has committed to putting human rights back at the center of American foreign policy, we must also bring all the tools of our diplomacy to defend human rights, including freedom of expression, and religion or belief. If confirmed, I will continue to press Vietnam to improve its implementation of human rights obligations and commitments.

Question. As Beijing continues to pursue its aggressive and expansionist tactics in the South China Sea, where are the opportunities—and necessity—for greater US-Vietnam maritime partnership?

Answer. We will continue to support Vietnam's enhancement of its maritime security and law enforcement capabilities to better monitor its maritime domain and resist coercion in the South China Sea.

In 2017 and 2020, the U.S. Government officially transferred to Vietnam through the State Department's Excess Defense Articles (EDA) program two 378-foot Hamilton-class cutters, with the second arriving in Vietnam earlier this summer. These vessels are the largest in Vietnam's fleet and significantly enhance Vietnam's maritime security capabilities. The United States has also transferred to Vietnam 24 Metal Shark patrol boats and six Scan Eagle UAV, as part of our effort to work with Vietnam to make it better able to protect its sovereignty and rights in the South China Sea. Through the State Department's International Narcotics and Law Enforcement program, we are developing four training facilities for Vietnam's Coast Guard. We are bringing U.S. Coast Guard personnel to Vietnam to train Vietnamese Coast Guard and DFIRE Fisheries Enforcement counterparts on key maritime law enforcement skills to ensure that maritime law enforcement capabilities forces are modern, resilient, and capable. If confirmed, I will continue to seek opportunities for maritime capacity building.

Vietnam sent its first cadet to the U.S. Air Force Academy in August 2020, and we are hopeful to have more Vietnamese cadets attend U.S. service academies in the coming years.

Question. How and where can the United States work with Vietnam to assure continued ASEAN centrality as a strategic counterweight and to develop functional problem-solving regional architecture?

Answer. The Biden-Harris administration is committed to deepening our engagement with ASEAN as part of reinvigorating our multilateral partnerships. ASEAN plays a central role in the U.S. vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific. Secretary of State Blinken has publicly reaffirmed the United States' steadfast support for ASEAN centrality and to expanding our work together.

Vietnam, as Chair of ASEAN in 2020, helped the organization respond to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and we applauded them for their leadership.

We will continue to seek opportunities to partner with Vietnam and other ASEAN partners to advance U.S. priorities and interests on pressing regional issues. This extends beyond our meetings with ASEAN to ASEAN-related fora such as the East Asia Summit, ASEAN Regional Forum, and Mekong-U.S. Partnership. As part of the non-traditional security pillar of this partnership, the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement is developing a program to combat Transnational Organized Crime in the region, building Vietnam's capacity to investigate and prosecute crime in cooperation with its neighbors.

We will also continue our work to build the capacity of the ASEAN Secretariat on political, economic, and socio-cultural issues, and broader efforts to develop human capital and support the next generation of ASEAN leaders, including through capacity building seminars at the Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative (YSEALI) Academy at Fulbright University Vietnam (FUV).

Question. What would be your priorities—resilience? zero-carbon energy resources?—to work with Vietnam on climate change?

Answer. The 2020s will be the decade for climate action, and no region of the world has a more pivotal role in realizing the global goal of net-zero emissions by 2050 than the economies in the Indo-Pacific region. We will continue to work with Indo-Pacific countries to increase regional ambition, implement 2030 targets and net-zero goals, enhance the impact of climate financing, and increase adaptation and resiliency through regional frameworks such as the Quad as well as bilateral engagements.

I was pleased that Vietnam was invited to the Leaders' Summit on Climate and appreciated hearing from President Nguyen Xuan Phuc about the challenges Vietnam faces from climate change. Vietnam is increasingly vulnerable to the threats associated with climate change, evidenced by record floods that caused horrible devastation last year. Vietnam is also a significant greenhouse gas emitter.

If confirmed, I will prioritize elevating climate change in my discussions with Vietnamese Government and business leaders and urging Vietnam to transition to a cleaner energy environment and to commit to setting a net-zero emissions date.

Question. Cyber and Human Rights: in recent years Vietnam has cracked down on numerous bloggers and journalists, and adopted troubling new laws and regulations, that have closed down freedom of expression in cyberspace. How and where can we work with Vietnam to assure that civil society actors and journalists have space and freedom to operate in the cyber realm—and to convince Vietnam that China's model of digital authoritarianism is contrary to Vietnam's interests.

Answer. I am concerned about the shrinking environment for the exercise of freedoms of expression and association online and offline. The trend of harassment, arbitrary or unlawful arrests, unjust convictions, and harsh sentences of journalists and activists for exercising their human rights is deeply troubling. If confirmed, I will advocate with the Government of Vietnam to respect freedom of expression, both offline and online, and engage with social media companies to promote approaches that preserve freedom of expression online and an open, interoperable, reliable, and secure internet.

Question. Fulbright Vietnam University: The establishment of FVU, with congressional support, has been a really success story for the bilateral relationship in recent years. Where do you see opportunities for FVU to continue to grow and contribute to Vietnam's development? For example, is there a role for FVU to serve as a hub for cyber-security education and training for Vietnam and for the region?

Answer. Fulbright University Vietnam (FUV) is an incredible symbol of the strength of our partnership with the people of Vietnam and Southeast Asia. It is the first private, independent, non-profit Vietnamese university, and is based on American higher education traditions of open inquiry, research, and critical analysis.

The U.S. Government has helped FUV develop into a center of academic independence that models core principles, including academic freedom, meritocracy, transparency, and equal access. FUV has brought world-class university standards to Vietnam and helped unlock tremendous potential in Vietnam's education sector.

We are proud to partner with FUV to create the YSEALI Academy at FUV, which offers executive-level capacity-building seminars for entry- to mid-level professionals from ASEAN countries and Timor-Leste around the themes of technology and innovation, public policy, and entrepreneurship.

If confirmed, I look forward to exploring all possible avenues to use FUV as a platform, including for cybersecurity training and educational programs on the Mekong Delta, for increased engagement with the Vietnamese people and with leaders across Southeast Asia.

Question. Even though we are many decades from the end of the war, legacy issues including cleaning up of UXO and addressing the use of Agent Orange continue to be important to both the Vietnamese and American people. What priorities would you have in addressing these or other war legacy issues, if confirmed?

Answer. Addressing humanitarian and war legacy issues is a foundational element of the strong relationship between the United States and Vietnam. Providing the fullest possible accounting for U.S. personnel missing from the Vietnam War era remains our most solemn duty. I acknowledge the Senate's longstanding support of U.S. initiatives in this regard.

Since 1993, the United States has contributed more than \$160 million to conventional weapons destruction (CWD) efforts to clear unexploded ordnance (UXO), risk education, victims' assistance, and capacity building. The U.S.-funded UXO clearance program targets high-priority sites in the most UXO-contaminated provinces of central Vietnam: Quang Tri, Quang Binh, and Tha Thien Hue. Our progress with UXO authorities in these areas is a prime example of how provincial level success can be replicated at the national level going forward. If confirmed, I will advocate for these successes to be adopted at the national level for effective implementation of U.S. taxpayer funding, and to make real progress for the people of Vietnam.

Separately, the United States and Vietnam successfully completed the remediation of dioxin contamination in Danang in 2018, and in 2019 we broke ground on the 10-year dioxin remediation project at the Bien Hoa airbase area. The United States has provided more than \$125 million since 1989 in humanitarian assistance, directly and indirectly supporting over a million persons with disabilities, regardless of the cause.

Our cooperation on these issues continues to build a foundation of trust to expand our relationship and, if confirmed, I will prioritize deepening our cooperation in these efforts.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO MARC EVANS KNAPPER BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

Question. What should our main goals for the Indo-Pacific region be in the short-term, medium-term, and long-term?

Answer. The Biden-Harris administration is committed to advancing a free and open Indo-Pacific region. To achieve this, I will work to revitalize ties with our allies and partners, advance inclusive economic policies that support all Americans, and promote democratic resilience and respect for human rights. I will invest in capabilities and work with allies and partners, including in regional organizations, to defend the international rules-based order, its foundational values, and international law. I will also work closely with Congress and partners in the region to address pressing challenges, including the threat posed by the DPRK nuclear program, transnational crime, recovery from COVID-19, and climate change.

Question. What are realistic goals for the U.S.-Vietnam strategic partnership in the next decade? Please be specific.

Answer. Twenty-six years since the normalization of diplomatic relations, the U.S.-Vietnam partnership has never been better. We have moved from a history of conflict and division to a Comprehensive Partnership that spans political, security, economic, and people-to-people ties.

I am confident that the positive momentum in our relationship will continue. The United States and Vietnam have a common sense of purpose and a common vision for a rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific. Over the next decade, we seek to deepen our cooperation that spans our close collaboration on war legacy and humanitarian issues to regional security and shared prosperity. We also seek to deepen cooperation on climate change, pandemic disease, wildlife and drug trafficking, maritime security, and transnational crime..

Our interests include maintaining the peace and stability that has allowed regional and bilateral trade to flourish over the last quarter century..

Question. If confirmed, what are the three main things you will seek to accomplish in your first 100 days as U.S. Ambassador to Vietnam?

Answer. The U.S.-Vietnam relationship has undergone a profound transformation since normalization of diplomatic relations in 1995, and our ties are thriving. President Biden's Interim National Security Strategic Guidance noted that the United States will deepen our partnership with Vietnam to advance shared objectives. I look forward to leading those efforts.

If confirmed, I will seek to deepen our security ties with the conclusion of a General Security of Military Information Agreement with Vietnam, which would enhance information sharing and expand defense trade. I will also press Vietnam to take bold steps to commit to a cleaner energy future, using the November COP 26 Conference in Glasgow as a catalyst for action. Finally, I will seek to expand on the progress that ethnic and religious minorities, the disabled, and LGBTQI+ citizens in Vietnam have made, but will express serious concern to Vietnam's leadership to underscore our commitment to supporting universal human rights—and stress that improvements in this area can only strengthen our overall relationship.

Question. If confirmed, will you commit to continuing economic cooperation with Vietnam on cultivating liquefied natural gas in addition to other renewable resources? In light of recent policy changes by the Biden administration, what tools will you have at your disposal to advance such energy cooperation with Vietnam?

Answer. Vietnam is projected to be one of the fastest growing energy demand markets in the region. The State Department is committed to supporting Vietnam's economic aspirations, energy security and sustainable development, and to support U.S. companies seeking opportunities to invest and trade in this dynamic market.

At the same time, the United States is committed to working with key partners around the world, like Vietnam, to encourage them to select policies, measures, and investments that direct their economic growth toward a climate-aligned pathway. Those decisions will be critical to achieving the goals of the Paris Agreement and a global net zero future by 2050. The science is unequivocal: we have no alternative. We must keep the Earth's warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius to avoid catastrophe. To get there, the science says the world needs to get to a state of net zero greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by around mid-century.

As we head further into the 2020s, we must grow more discerning of the future role for natural gas in achieving the world's climate goals. If we are to achieve net zero emissions by 2050, the world must be especially judicious about new gas infrastructure. That said, Vietnam has an opportunity to eliminate coal projects and continue the impressive growth of solar and wind power over the past two years.

If confirmed, I will work with U.S. companies and U.S. agencies to plan their energy investments in a way that ensures access to cleaner and affordable energy and advances our climate goals.

Question. What else do you think the U.S. should provide to Vietnam in terms of security assistance, especially with respect to South China Sea issues?

Answer. We will continue to support Vietnam's enhancement of its maritime security and law enforcement capabilities to better monitor its maritime domain and resist coercion in the South China Sea.

In 2017 and 2020, the U.S. Government officially transferred to Vietnam through the State Department's Excess Defense Articles (EDA) program two 378-foot Hamilton-class cutters, with the second arriving in Vietnam earlier this summer. These vessels are the largest in Vietnam's fleet and significantly enhance Vietnam's maritime security capabilities. The United States has also transferred to Vietnam 24 Metal Shark patrol boats and six Scan Eagle UAV, as part of our effort to work with Vietnam to make it better able to protect its sovereignty and rights in the South China Sea. Through the State Department's International Narcotics and Law Enforcement program, we are developing four training facilities for Vietnam's Coast Guard. We are bringing U.S. Coast Guard personnel to Vietnam to train Vietnamese Coast Guard and DFIRE Fisheries Enforcement counterparts on key maritime law enforcement skills to ensure that maritime law enforcement capabilities forces are modern, resilient, and capable. If confirmed, I will continue to seek opportunities for maritime capacity building.

Vietnam sent its first cadet to the U.S. Air Force Academy in August 2020, and we are hopeful to have more Vietnamese cadets attend U.S. service academies in the coming years. We are also providing Vietnam with T-6 trainers, so that Vietnam's future Air Force pilots will learn on state-of-the-art, American-model aircraft.

Question. What are your views on Vietnam's use of a maritime militia in the South China Sea? What are your views on the new unit Vietnam just stood up in this maritime militia?

Answer. The United States supports maritime law enforcement within the bounds of international law and has consistently opposed the threat or use of force to settle maritime and territorial disputes.

The United States opposes the use of coercion and intimidation by any claimant seeking to assert its maritime claims in the South China Sea and calls for all states to ensure that all of its maritime forces and other vessels act in accordance with international law, avoid provocative behavior, and behave in a professional manner.

Question. Apart from maritime cooperation, what do you see as the major opportunities for growth in the U.S.-Vietnam security relationship?

Answer. Our defense relationship has become one of the strongest pillars of the overall relationship. While much of our current or future planned security assistance to Vietnam aims to enhance the country's ability to enforce international maritime law and police its EEZ, we hope to expand upon peacekeeping efforts, search-and-rescue abilities, humanitarian/disaster relief capacity, military medicine, and the development of Vietnam's Coast Guard and Air Force.

Question. What challenges does Vietnam's reliance on Russian defense technology and weapons present to the growth of the U.S.-Vietnam security relationship?

Answer. Vietnam is working to diversify defense partners and suppliers, and is evaluating and exploring future procurement opportunities with the United States. In this context, the United States is focusing support on strengthening maritime law enforcement and domain awareness capabilities, peacekeeping efforts, search-and-rescue abilities, humanitarian/disaster relief capacity, military medicine, and the development of Vietnam's Coast Guard and Air Force.

Question. If confirmed, what will be your top three priorities for working with Vietnam on Mekong issues?

Answer. The United States has long been a presence in the Mekong subregion and has long been a partner of Vietnam. The Mekong subregion matters to America. Not only is the subregion home to Vietnam, one of the fastest growing economies in the world, it is also home to a growing and incredibly dynamic population. Helping the subregion's economy thrive and innovate, including by ensuring opportunities for marginalized populations and helping talented young people realize their full potential, benefits us all and also helps fulfill President Biden's foreign policy for the middle class. The subregion is also the front line for strategic competition with PRC, and we want to ensure the Mekong states are secure, independent, and prosperous. Vietnam supports our efforts through the Mekong-U.S. Partnership to ensure the subregion is prosperous, resilient, and that the people of the region enjoy good governance and security.

If confirmed, I will prioritize support of a sustainable Mekong basin development plan, work with Vietnam on its efforts to combat climate change, and press for greater economic connectivity across the sub-region.

Question. If confirmed, will you commit to working with Congress on matters related to the financial sustainability of Fulbright University Vietnam?

Answer. Fulbright University Vietnam (FUV) is an incredible symbol of the strength of our partnership with the people of Vietnam and Southeast Asia. It is the first private, independent, non-profit Vietnamese university, and is based on American higher education traditions of open inquiry, research, and critical analysis.

The U.S. Government has helped FUV develop into a center of academic independence that models core principles, including academic freedom, meritocracy, transparency, and equal access. FUV has brought world-class university standards to Vietnam and helped unlock tremendous potential in Vietnam's education sector.

If confirmed, I will work with Congress to continue our work to help FUV continue to flourish and achieve financial sustainability.

Question. Vietnam has signed and ratified the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) and was among the original 50 states parties to the treaty when it entered into force on January 22, 2021. Will you commit to raising U.S. concerns about TPNW with counterparts in Vietnam?

Answer. Yes, as appropriate. While the United States understands and shares the desire to advance nuclear disarmament goals, we do not support the TPNW. The TPNW is incompatible with U.S. extended deterrence relationships that are still necessary for international peace and security and may reinforce divisions that hinder the international community's ability to work together to address pressing proliferation and security challenges. The U.S. position on this issue has spanned administrations. Seeking to ban nuclear weapons through a treaty that does not include any State Parties that possess nuclear weapons will not reduce nuclear arsenals.

Question. If confirmed, will you commit to raise with the Vietnamese Government its alleged use of extraterritorial tactics against dissidents and others? For example: Vietnam's hacking of its own dissidents' accounts overseas; the alleged abduction of a Vietnamese oil executive from Berlin; and the alleged abduction of a Radio Free Asia journalist from Bangkok?

Answer. I am deeply concerned by report of such tactics against individuals for exercising their fundamental human rights. These activities run counter to Vietnam's international human rights obligations and commitments. If confirmed, I commit to engage with the Government of Vietnam to underscore our strong objection to these tactics and ensure Vietnam adheres to its international human rights commitments.

Question. According to Freedom House's Freedom of the Net report, internet freedom in Vietnam dropped to an all-time low in 2020. What will you do to ensure that the internet in Vietnam remains free and open?

Answer. I am concerned about the shrinking environment for the exercise of freedoms of expression and association online and offline. The trend of harassment, arbitrary or unlawful arrests, unjust convictions, and harsh sentences of journalists and activists for exercising their human rights is deeply troubling.

If confirmed, I will advocate with the Government of Vietnam to respect freedom of expression, including online, and engage with social media companies to promote approaches that preserve freedom of expression online and an open, interoperable, reliable, and secure internet.

Question. In the State Department's 2021 Trafficking in Persons Report, Vietnam was identified as a Tier 2 Watch List country for the third consecutive year. Because Vietnam was listed for three years on the Watch List, it was subject to a downgrade to Tier 3, but was provided a waiver for its general efforts to eliminate trafficking. It is clear the Vietnamese Government must improve its protection, prevention, and prosecutorial efforts in this coming reporting period in order to improve its ranking. How will you work with the host government to address these issues if you are confirmed as Ambassador?

Answer. In recent years, the Vietnamese Government has demonstrated significant efforts by providing trafficking victims the affirmative right to legal representation, increasing TIP funding for law enforcement and victim support, passing new legislation that better protects workers migrating overseas and prohibits brokerage

fees for overseas migrant workers, continuing large-scale awareness campaigns in communities vulnerable to trafficking, and training law enforcement officials.

Significant challenges remain, however, including insufficient victim screening, cumbersome and ineffective victim identification and assistance procedures, limited interagency coordination, and the need to better address predatory recruitment practices that charge workers seeking overseas employment higher fees than the law allows.

If confirmed, I will encourage the Government of Vietnam to vigorously prosecute all forms of trafficking and convict and punish traffickers, especially in cases involving forced labor or complicit officials. I will also encourage the Government to expand victim screening amongst vulnerable groups such as migrant workers, individuals in commercial sex, and child laborers, and improve victim identification and referral mechanisms.

Question. In the State Department's 2020 Report on International Religious Freedom, Vietnam was depicted as a country which is not particularly tolerant of religious freedoms. In one example, Vietnam continues to enforce a Law on Belief and Religion (LBR), which requires religious groups to register with the State and allows government entities to harass unregistered groups. What is your assessment of this particular issue and, if confirmed, how will you work with the Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom to bolster religious freedom in-country?

Answer. Vietnam's Law on Belief and Religion, while imperfect and inconsistent with international standards, reduces registration times and grants legal status to some religious groups. Some groups who remain unregistered in remote areas continue to face harassment from local authorities.

The United States remains concerned that the law maintains significant government control over religious practices and exacerbates uneven implementation of the law at the subnational level. The State Department's annual international religious freedom report to Congress detailed these concerns, and if confirmed, I will continue to raise them with Hanoi.

If confirmed, I will also continue to work closely with the Ambassador-at-Large to emphasize the importance of religious freedom with Vietnam's leaders, including cases of individuals harassed or imprisoned for their beliefs.

Question. In the State Department's 2020 Human Rights Report, Vietnam was identified as continuing to undermine fundamental human rights like speech, assembly, press, religion, and association. If confirmed, what steps will you take to address these instances with the Vietnamese Government?

Answer. I am very concerned about the human rights situation in Vietnam and committed to pushing for improvements. Despite progress in some areas, the trend of escalating harassment, unjust arrests and convictions, and increasingly harsh sentences of journalists and activists for peacefully exercising their right to express their opinions is deeply troubling. Vietnam is an important partner in the Indo-Pacific region, but that partnership can only reach its fullest potential if the Vietnamese Government improves its human rights record.

If confirmed, I will work with the Government of Vietnam to improve its implementation of its human rights obligations and commitments. I will urge the Government of Vietnam to ensure law enforcement and the judicial system effectively and fairly enforce existing constitutional guarantees and laws protecting human rights, including freedom of religion or belief. I will continue to raise our concerns with the Government of Vietnam, including during the annual U.S.-Vietnam Human Rights Dialogue, and call on Vietnam to respect and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms, consistent with its international obligations and commitments.

Question. In the State Department's 2020 Human Rights Report, Vietnam was identified as continuing to undermine fundamental human rights like speech, assembly, press, religion, and association. If confirmed, how will you direct your embassy to work with civil society organizations to improve the human rights situation on the ground in Vietnam?

Answer. If confirmed, I will encourage my team to continue its longstanding work with civil society organizations who are trying to make space for positive progress in Vietnam. I will also continue the strong engagement with human rights and civil society organizations in the United States, including the Vietnamese-American community and local human rights NGOs in Vietnam, as previous Ambassadors have done.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED
TO MARC EVANS KNAPPER BY SENATOR BENJAMIN L. CARDIN

Cybersecurity

Question. Over the past several years, Vietnamese authorities have increased their scrutiny over Vietnamese citizens' activities on the Internet and in social media. Vietnam's new cybersecurity law, which went into effect in recent months, criminalizes the "distortion of history, denial of revolutionary achievements, undermining national solidarity, taking advantage of cybersecurity protection activities to violate national security, national interests or sovereignty, or disrupt public order." What has been the impact of measures such as these on Vietnamese citizens' online activities?

Answer. I am concerned about the shrinking environment for the exercise of freedoms of expression and association online. The trend of harassment, arbitrary or unlawful arrests, unjust convictions, and harsh sentences of journalists and activists for exercising their rights, both offline and online, is deeply troubling.

If confirmed, I will advocate with the Government of Vietnam to respect freedom of expression, including online, and engage with social media companies to promote approaches that preserve freedom of expression online and an open, interoperable, reliable, and secure Internet.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO MARC EVANS KNAPPER BY SENATOR MARCO RUBIO

Question. If confirmed, how will you support the Vietnamese Government's efforts to counter the Chinese claims in the South China Sea?

Answer. The U.S. position on the South China Sea is principled and longstanding. In keeping with its global policy, the United States does not take a position on the territorial disputes over land features among the many South China Sea claimants, while at the same time taking a strong principled position on compliance with the international law of the sea. Like Vietnam, the United States has a national interest in upholding international law, including freedom of navigation and overflight, and opposing the use of coercion to resolve disputes.

The United States will continue to support Vietnam's enhancement of its maritime security and law enforcement capabilities to better monitor its maritime domain and resist coercion in the South China Sea. In 2017 and 2020, the U.S. Government officially transferred to Vietnam through the State Department's Excess Defense Articles (EDA) program two 378-foot Hamilton-class cutters, with the second arriving in Vietnam earlier this summer. These vessels are the largest in Vietnam's fleet and significantly enhance Vietnam's maritime security capabilities. Through the State Department's International Narcotics and Law Enforcement program, we are developing four training facilities for Vietnam's Coast Guard. We are bringing U.S. Coast Guard personnel to Vietnam to train Vietnamese Coast Guard and DFIRE Fisheries Enforcement counterparts on key maritime law enforcement skills to ensure that maritime law enforcement capabilities forces are modern, resilient, and capable.

If confirmed, I will continue to support the development of a strong and independent Vietnam through its maritime capacity building, and will remain united in our support for peaceful resolution of disputes, including through international dispute resolution mechanisms.

Question. Since the Vietnam War, the United States and Vietnam have repaired their relationship. Vietnam is now a key strategic partner in the Indo-Pacific. However, it is my sincere belief that that relationship cannot reach its full potential unless Vietnam commits to respecting the human rights of its people. For example, in April, journalist Tran Thi Tuyet Dieu was sentenced to eight years in prison for reporting news on Vietnamese political figures. If confirmed, what steps will you take to press for the release of Dieu and other Vietnamese people who are unjustly targeted by Vietnamese security services?

Answer. I am deeply concerned by the convictions of individuals for exercising their freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. These convictions run counter to Vietnam's international human rights obligations and commitments. Vietnam should ensure its laws and actions are consistent with those obligations and commitments.

If confirmed, I will engage with activists, their family members, and lawyers to determine the facts in specific cases and urge authorities to release all persons detained for exercising their rights in Vietnam.

I will stress, above all, the need to follow through on the commitment that the Vietnamese Government has made to fundamentally reform the laws under which activists have been targeted in the past, to bring the country's laws into full compliance with its constitution and with its international obligations.

Question. How will you promote U.S. cooperation with Vietnam, which is important, while simultaneously encouraging Hanoi to embrace meaningful political reforms and protect the basic rights of its citizens?

Answer. Twenty-six years since the normalization of diplomatic relations, the U.S.-Vietnam partnership has never been better. We have moved from a history of conflict and division to a Comprehensive Partnership that spans political, security, economic, and people-to-people ties.

The United States and Vietnam have a common sense of purpose and a common vision for a rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific. We must continue to build on the progress in the bilateral relationship, but as the Biden-Harris administration has committed to putting human rights back at the center of American foreign policy, we must also bring all the tools of our diplomacy to defend human rights, including freedom of religion or belief. If confirmed, I will continue to press Vietnam to improve its implementation of human rights obligations and commitments.
