

NOMINATIONS

THURSDAY, AUGUST 5, 2021

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

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:04 a.m. in Room SH-216, Hon. Chris Van Hollen presiding.

Present: Senators Van Hollen [presiding], Kaine, Young, and Rounds.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. CHRIS VAN HOLLEN, U.S. SENATOR FROM MARYLAND

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Good morning, everybody. The nominations hearing of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee will come to order.

I want to welcome all of you here and thank my colleague, Senator Rounds, who is the ranking member of the Africa Subcommittee and the Subcommittee on Global Health Policy. I look forward to continuing our work together.

I am very pleased to welcome our three nominees this morning, Ambassador Michael Raynor to be Ambassador to the Republic of Senegal and Ambassador to the Republic of Guinea-Bissau, Mr. Marc Ostfield to be Ambassador to the Republic of Paraguay, and Mr. Troy Fitrill to be Ambassador to the Republic of Guinea.

Again, welcome all of you here. Congratulations on your nominations and thank you for your ongoing service to the country as members of the Foreign Service, and I also want to thank and salute your family members who have joined with us today.

Before we hear from our nominees, I would like to outline several key topics of relevance for today's panel before turning it over to the ranking member for his opening statement.

Ambassador Raynor, I am pleased to welcome you back to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and glad that President Biden has selected you to represent the United States in two nations that hold great promise and great potential for enhancing our diplomatic presence in West Africa, Senegal and Guinea-Bissau.

As you know, Senegal has been a democratic stronghold in the region and a long-standing friend of the United States, and I hope that should you be confirmed you will work in partnership with this committee and regional stakeholders in Senegal to deepen the bonds that link our two nations.

In contrast, Guinea-Bissau has undergone significant political upheaval in recent years, and those political challenges are paired with serious development challenges.

The World Bank estimates that 70 percent of the population in Guinea-Bissau lives on \$1.90 per day or less, and that hardship has only been compounded by the economic fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic.

I look forward to discussing with you your potential avenues and your ideas for engagement in Guinea-Bissau as we work to promote development, both in that country and across West Africa.

Mr. Fitrill, you have been selected by the president to serve in Guinea, another country that presents many challenges and also opportunities for engagement.

I was pleased to see the State Department's determination from last year that Guinea has, quote, "great potential," unquote, for the programs of the new International Development Finance Corporation, especially in the areas of banking, agriculture, IT, energy, and infrastructure.

In addition, the USAID Office of Transition Initiatives recently launched a \$15 million regional program seeking to bolster stability in coastal West African nations, including Guinea.

At the same time, we must be clear eyed about the challenges we face in Guinea from last year's violent and controversial reelection of President Condé. Also, to look at the impact of China's deepening influence in the country.

I look forward to discussing measures the United States can take to leverage the tools at our disposal for the benefit of our interests and those of the people of Guinea.

We all recognize that Africa is not a monolith. It is essential that we work with community partners and local leaders to address specific challenges facing each of these African nations, and as we work to strengthen our bilateral relationships also to impact our broader effort to enlarge prosperity that is mutually beneficial to African nations and the United States in West Africa and throughout the continent.

That larger mission must include finding ways to broaden our development efforts through initiatives like USAID and DFC, and enhance trade by making full use of the African Growth and Opportunity Act, AGOA, and other trade tools. We look forward to discussing those ideas with you as well.

Finally, we come to Mr. Ostfield, who has been selected to serve on the other side of the Atlantic, in Paraguay, which is a long-time friend and partner to the United States, and I have been pleased to see the Biden administration make a concerted effort to strengthen our already warm relations with Paraguay.

On March 14th, Secretary Blinken spoke on the phone with President Benítez and reiterated the United States support for the Paraguayan people, and in June, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Victoria Nuland, traveled to Paraguay to participate in the second U.S.-Paraguay Strategic Partnership Dialogue, a forum that has been vital in advancing discussions between our countries on trade, security, democracy, and collaboration.

Mr. Ostfield, we look forward to exploring with you the current state of U.S.-Paraguay relations and looking at areas where we can further strengthen that relationship.

Let me just end where I started by congratulating all of you on your nominations. I look forward to our discussion during this hearing.

And with that, let me turn it over to my colleague, Senator Rounds.

**STATEMENT OF HON. MIKE ROUNDS,
U.S. SENATOR FROM SOUTH DAKOTA**

Senator ROUNDS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

First of all, let me just begin by saying that I am very pleased to see this well-qualified panel of nominees before us today with one previously confirmed twice by this committee to serve in two ambassadorial posts, as well as two other very experienced State Department personnel with great records of service. I want to thank you and your families for your service to our country.

Ambassador Raynor, your background with Africa to include two tours as an ambassador will serve you well if you are confirmed to be our next ambassador to Senegal and Guinea-Bissau.

I look forward to hearing your thoughts on how you will apply lessons learned from your most recent tour in Ethiopia, particularly regarding how the COVID-19 pandemic and recent unrest in Senegal is affecting Senegal stability and economic prospects.

I would also like to hear how you will approach our relationship with Guinea-Bissau and your views on the prospects for greater political stability under President Embal?.

Dr. Ostfield, if confirmed, your experience in global health security and managing other global issues will make you well placed to serve as our Ambassador to Paraguay.

I am interested in your thoughts on what additional assistance from the U.S. or other international partners Paraguay might need in order to overcome the health and economic effects of the pandemic.

We would also welcome your ideas on improved governance and rule of law, increasing security cooperation, and advancing U.S. business interests.

Mr. Fitrill, if you are confirmed, I would be very pleased that we would be sending a diplomat to Guinea who has held a number of senior positions in the Bureau of African Affairs, including most recently as director of the Office of West African Affairs.

Now, this oversees the U.S. engagement with Guinea. I am interested in your thoughts on how Guinea might overcome its deep political divisions and recommit to regular democratic transfers of power.

With that, Mr. Chairman, thank you, and it is back to you, sir.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you, Ranking Member Rounds.

I want to recognize that we have been joined by Senator Kaine, who, among other things, oversees the Western Hemisphere.

Welcome.

And before I turn it over to all of you for your testimony, let me just expand a little bit on your backgrounds, and Senator Rounds mentioned some of your experiences.

But I do think it is worth emphasizing the deep experience that all of you have and I must say, as someone who grew up in a Foreign Service family, I am grateful for your service and it always

serves our country's interests well when we nominate and send people who have deep knowledge of the issue areas they are jumping into.

Ambassador Michael Raynor, known affectionately by friends and colleagues here and abroad as Ambassador Mike, is a long-term member of the Foreign Service. Over the course of his extensive career, Ambassador Raynor has worked in all African sub-regions.

He most recently served as the U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia and was previously our Ambassador to Benin. Earlier in his career, Ambassador Raynor was director of the Office of Career Development and Assignments in the State Department's Bureau of Human Resources where he oversaw career development for over 14,000 members of the Foreign Service.

He has also served as the Africa Bureau's Executive Director where he led management and crisis support efforts for the Bureau's 53 U.S. embassies and consulates.

In addition, his previous service includes tours as management officer at U.S. Embassies in Zimbabwe, Namibia, Guinea, and Djibouti. He earned an MA in international affairs from Columbia University and a BA from Lafayette College.

He is the recipient of numerous State Department awards, including the Leamon R. Hunt Award for management excellence. He is fluent in French and, as an extra bonus, at least for me, he is a resident of the state of Maryland. Welcome.

Mr. Marc Ostfield is a career member of the Senior Executive Service with over 40 years of experience in international affairs and national security.

He is the current ombudsman of the United States State Department, and also has served the department as Acting Director of the Foreign Service Institute, Director of the Office of Policy and Global Issues in the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, Senior Foreign Affairs officer at the Office of Science and Technology Cooperation, and Senior Advisor for Bioterrorism, Biodefense, and Health Security in the Office of International Health and Biodefense.

Mr. Ostfield earned his BA, MS, and Ph.D. from the University of Pennsylvania. He is the recipient of a Presidential Rank Award, numerous Senior State Department awards, and a range of other honors including a prestigious diplomacy fellowship from the American Association for the Advancement of Science. He speaks Spanish, Portuguese, French, and Arabic. Welcome to you.

Mr. Troy Damian Fitrill is a career member of the Senior Foreign Service and current Director of the Office of West African Affairs at the State Department.

He has previously served as deputy chief of mission at U.S. Embassies in Ethiopia and Mauritius, and as Deputy Director of the Department's Office of Southern African Affairs.

In addition, he served as Senior Advisor to the United States Special Envoy for the Great Lakes of Africa. Mr. Fitrill has also spent time on Capitol Hill as a Pearson Fellow.

We will not hold it against you, you worked on the House side instead of the Senate side. But you worked on the House Foreign

Affairs Committee where your portfolio included a suite of issues relevant to Asia, the Pacific, and Africa.

I am also proud to know that Mr. Fitrill earned his BA in my home state at the University of Maryland and an MS at the National War College. He speaks French, Spanish, Portuguese, Swedish, and Danish, and let me just welcome you as well.

So it is wonderful to have a group of three very qualified nominees to be ambassadors to these important posts.

Now, let me turn it over to each of you for your opening statements.

Let us begin with Ambassador Raynor.

**STATEMENT OF THE HON. MICHAEL RAYNOR OF MARYLAND,
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 REPUBLIC OF SENEGAL, AND TO SERVE CONCURRENTLY AND WITHOUT ADDITIONAL COMPENSATION AS AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE REPUBLIC OF GUINEA-BISSAU**

Ambassador RAYNOR. Thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Rounds, and members of the committee, I am honored to appear before you today as President Biden's nominee to serve as Ambassador to the Republic of Senegal and to the Republic of Guinea-Bissau.

I am grateful to the president and Secretary Blinken for their trust and confidence in me, and I am deeply indebted to my wife, Kate, my son, Bradley, and my daughter, Emma, for their sacrifices and support throughout my Foreign Service career.

During more than 31 years as a Foreign Service officer, I have developed substantial policy and managerial experience and a record of inclusive leadership fostering interagency collaboration, strong performance by diverse teams, and high morale in challenging environments.

As Ambassador to Ethiopia, I advanced our bilateral priorities at the time, which included supporting the country's transition toward democratic governance and free market economics, launching new programs to bolster human rights and counter ethnic strife, strengthening peacekeeping and counterterrorism efforts, and facilitating major growth in U.S. commercial investments. I am devastated by the current situation there.

As Ambassador to Benin, I elicited strong security cooperation, helped improve the country's business climate and U.S. commercial prospects, and strengthened the country's democratic trajectory.

As Assistant Chief of Mission in Afghanistan, I led some of the United States' largest foreign assistance and justice sector programs, as well as the embassy's large and complex management, consular, and security operations, while regularly engaging Afghan leaders on governance and security concerns.

As Executive Director of the Bureau of African Affairs, I led the State Department's management and crisis support for more than 50 posts in Africa.

If confirmed as the next U.S. Ambassador to Senegal and to Guinea-Bissau, my highest priority will be the welfare interests and security of American citizens, whether ensuring responsive consular services, advocating for U.S. businesses, or strengthening partnerships to confront regional instability.

This priority will guide every embassy objective and activity. If confirmed, I will also do everything I can to ensure that the dedicated women and men serving at the U.S. embassy are secure, healthy, and provided every opportunity for success.

Our close partnership with Senegal spans more than 60 years and is rooted in our shared values of democracy and human rights, peace and security, economic opportunity, and prosperity.

Senegal's long democratic tradition of peaceful transitions of power, free and fair elections, a robust private press, and a strong civil society is unique in West Africa and serves as a model for the region.

Senegal's dynamic economy has achieved impressive growth while creating new opportunities for U.S. investment. While the pandemic has hampered this progress and worsened the economic strains felt by Senegal's large youth population, U.S. public and private investments can play a key role in reigniting the country's growth.

Embassy Dakar and Washington counterparts are pursuing a number of possibilities for U.S. investment to strengthen Senegal's economy and its long-term security and democratic governance.

Senegal is a key security partner in West Africa and a critical ally in the United States' efforts to promote stability and counter violent extremism. It is a major contributor to peacekeeping missions across Africa and regularly hosts regional military exercises in partnership with the United States and France.

If confirmed, I will work to strengthen the United States' essential democratic, commercial development, and security partnerships with Senegal.

In Guinea-Bissau, the United States has sustained its programs in partnership despite pandemic-related challenges, and there is scope to expand the bilateral relationship further in the days ahead.

If confirmed, I will seek to advance our two countries' shared interests in bolstering democracy and human rights, promoting stable and responsive civilian governance, advancing development and economic opportunity, and countering drug trafficking.

Senegal and Guinea-Bissau are dynamic nations with extraordinary histories and extraordinary potential. I am honored by your consideration of me to serve in such an important posting.

If confirmed, I will welcome advice and input from you and your staff on any aspect of the United States' multifaceted relationships with Senegal and Guinea-Bissau.

I will also be pleased, if confirmed, to welcome you and your staff in Senegal and Guinea-Bissau, and to keep you up to date on the activities of the U.S. embassy in Dakar.

Thank you for the opportunity to address you today. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.

[Prepared statement of Ambassador Raynor follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. MICHAEL RAYNOR

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Risch, and members of the committee, I am honored to appear before you today as President Biden's nominee to serve as Ambassador to the Republic of Senegal and to the Republic of Guinea-Bissau. I am grateful to the President and Secretary Blinken for their trust and confidence in me, and am deeply indebted to my wife Kate, my son Bradley, and my daughter Emma for their sacrifices and support throughout my Foreign Service career.

During more than 31 years as a Foreign Service Officer, I have developed substantial policy and managerial experience and a record of inclusive leadership fostering interagency collaboration, strong performance by diverse teams, and high morale in challenging environments. As Ambassador to Ethiopia, I advanced our bilateral priorities at the time, which included supporting the country's transition toward democratic governance and free-market economics, launching new programs to bolster human rights and counter ethnic strife, strengthening peacekeeping and counter-terrorism efforts, and facilitating major growth in U.S. commercial investments. I am devastated by the current situation there. As Ambassador to Benin, I elicited strong security cooperation, helped improve the country's business climate and U.S. commercial prospects, and strengthened the country's democratic trajectory. As Assistant Chief of Mission in Afghanistan, I led some of the United States' largest foreign assistance and justice sector programs as well as the embassy's large and complex management and security operations, while regularly engaging Afghan leaders on governance and security concerns. As Executive Director of the Bureau of African Affairs, I led the State Department's management and crisis support for more than 50 African posts.

If confirmed as the next U.S. Ambassador to Senegal and Guinea-Bissau, my highest priority will be the interests, welfare, and security of American citizens. Whether ensuring responsive consular services, advocating for U.S. businesses, or strengthening partnerships to confront regional instability, this priority will guide every Embassy objective and activity. If confirmed, I will also do everything I can to ensure that the dedicated women and men serving at the U.S. Embassy in Dakar are secure, healthy, and provided every opportunity for success.

Our close partnership with Senegal spans more than 60 years and is rooted in our shared values of democracy and human rights; peace and security; and economic opportunity and prosperity. Senegal's long democratic tradition of peaceful transitions of power, free and fair elections, a robust private press, and a strong civil society is unique in West Africa and serves as a model for the region.

Senegal's dynamic economy has achieved impressive growth while creating new opportunities for U.S. investment. While the pandemic has hampered this progress and worsened the economic strains felt by Senegal's large youth population, U.S. public and private investments can play a key role in reigniting the country's growth. Embassy Dakar and Washington counterparts are pursuing a number of possibilities for U.S. investment that will strengthen Senegal's economy and its long-term democratic governance and security.

Senegal is a key security partner in West Africa and a critical ally in the United States' efforts to promote stability and counter violent extremism. It is a major contributor to peacekeeping missions across Africa and regularly hosts regional military exercises in partnership with the United States and France.

If confirmed, I will work to strengthen the United States' essential democratic, commercial, developmental, and security partnerships with Senegal.

In Guinea-Bissau, the United States has sustained its programs and partnership despite pandemic-related challenges, and there is scope to expand our bilateral relationship further in the days ahead. If confirmed, I will seek to advance our two countries' shared interests in bolstering democracy, promoting stable and responsive civilian governance, advancing development and economic opportunity, and countering drug trafficking.

Senegal and Guinea-Bissau are dynamic nations with extraordinary histories and extraordinary potential. I am honored by your consideration of me to serve in such an important posting. If confirmed, I will welcome advice and input from you and your staff on any aspect of the United States' multi-faceted relationships with Senegal and Guinea-Bissau. I will also be pleased, if confirmed, to welcome you and your staff in Senegal and Guinea-Bissau and to keep you up to date on the activities of the U.S. Embassy in Dakar.

Thank you for the opportunity to address you today. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you, Mr. Ambassador.
Mr. Ostfield?

STATEMENT OF MARC OSTFIELD OF PENNSYLVANIA, A CAREER MEMBER OF THE SENIOR EXECUTIVE SERVICE, TO BE AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE REPUBLIC OF PARAGUAY

Mr. OSTFIELD. Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and members of the committee, it is an honor to appear before you today as the president's nominee to serve as the U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Paraguay.

I am grateful for the trust and confidence President Biden and Secretary Blinken have placed in me. I appear today with the support of my husband of 32 years, Michael, who has encouraged me throughout my career of public service.

Over the course of the past 35 years, my work has always been about making the world a healthier, safer, more just, and more equitable place.

Whether on the frontlines of AIDS prevention, developing global health campaigns in Latin America and worldwide, or in the Department of State shaping policy on issues ranging from bioterrorism to human rights to human trafficking to anti-corruption, my professional experience has demonstrated the power of diverse teams that reflect the country we serve and the ability to build coalitions in challenging environments.

My experience as a volunteer firefighter has reinforced the importance of mutual aid and decision making in high-pressure situations. If confirmed, I will draw upon this experience to advance U.S. goals in Paraguay by working to strengthen governance, increase security, and promote U.S. business interests.

Mr. Chairman, Paraguay has proven to be a reliable partner and ardent defender of democracy in the region, calling for an end to undemocratic practices in Venezuela and Nicaragua, and supporting Cubans' right to peaceful protest.

Paraguay's steadfast support for Taiwan is another indicator of its commitment to democracy. Like all democracies, Paraguay has its challenges, particularly the need for stronger rule of law and democratic governance.

Transparency International's 2020 Corruption Perceptions Index ranks Paraguay 137 out of 180 countries, near the bottom for Latin America.

In order to deliver prosperity for all its citizens and foster greater economic opportunities with the U.S., Paraguay must continue its efforts to root out corruption and impunity, increase transparency, and repair judicial integrity.

If confirmed, I will prioritize anti-corruption and leverage tools such as Section 7031(c) of the 2019 Appropriations Act, which Secretaries Blinken and Pompeo have used to designate corrupt Paraguayan officials.

The global pandemic created outsized risks for Paraguay, with the world's highest daily per capita death rate in June of this year. The U.S. proudly donated 2 million vaccine doses to Paraguay in July, which promptly began its mass vaccination campaign.

Additional U.S. support this year will bring U.S. funding for vaccine assistance to over \$9 million since the start of the pandemic.

Paraguay's long-standing bond with like-minded democratic partner Taiwan has made it a target of pressure tactics by the People's Republic of China to push Paraguay into switching diplomatic relations to Beijing.

If confirmed, I will work to support Paraguay's economic and political sovereignty and its commitment to Taiwan.

U.S. security goals center on helping Paraguay counter illicit networks, which threaten the safety of U.S. citizens and the region through money laundering, counterfeiting, drug trafficking, trafficking in persons, and links to terrorist organizations.

If confirmed, I will prioritize helping Paraguayan regional partners strengthen border security and address transnational crime.

The United States is Paraguay's number-one investor and U.S. exports to Paraguay support an estimated 7,000 American jobs. To protect and expand U.S. business opportunities, I will engage Paraguayan authorities on investment disputes, procurement tenders, and intellectual property rights.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and members of the committee, if confirmed, I will consult with this committee as we work for the safety, freedom, and prosperity of the U.S. and Paraguayan people.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today and I look forward to your questions.

[Prepared statement of Mr. Ostfield follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF MARC OSTFIELD

It is an honor to appear before you today as the President's nominee to serve as the U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Paraguay. I am grateful for the trust and confidence President Biden and Secretary Blinken have placed in me.

I appear before you today with the support of my husband of 32 years, Michael, who has encouraged me throughout my career of public service.

Over the course of a career spanning 35 years, my work has always been about making the world a healthier, safer, more just, and more equitable place. I spent 15 years on the front lines of HIV/AIDS prevention, developing global health campaigns in Latin America and worldwide. For the past almost 20 years, I've been honored to serve in the Department of State—creating initiatives to combat bioterrorism; shaping policy on issues ranging from human rights to human trafficking to anti-corruption and the environment; leading the Foreign Service Institute in delivering essential training for the U.S. diplomatic workforce; and supporting that workforce to address conflict as Ombudsman. My experience as a professional has demonstrated the power of diverse teams that reflect the country we serve, and the ability to build coalitions in the most challenging environments. My experience as a volunteer firefighter has reinforced the importance of mutual aid, and the ability to make decisions in high pressure situations. If confirmed, I will draw upon this experience to advance U.S. foreign policy goals in Paraguay by working to strengthen governance, increase security, and promote U.S. business interests.

Mr. Chairman, Paraguay has proven to be a reliable partner and ardent defender of democracy in the Western Hemisphere, voting consistently in multilateral fora to call for an end to undemocratic practices in Venezuela and Nicaragua, and supporting Cuban citizens' right to freedom of expression and peaceful protest. Paraguay's steadfast support for Taiwan is another indicator of its commitment to democracy.

Like all democracies, Paraguay's has its challenges—particularly the need for stronger rule of law and democratic governance. Transparency International's 2020 Corruption Perceptions Index ranks Paraguay 137 out of 180 countries, near the bottom for Latin America. In order to deliver prosperity for all its citizens and foster greater economic opportunities with the United States, Paraguay must continue its efforts to root out corruption and impunity, increase transparency, and repair judicial integrity. The United States is supporting these goals with \$44 million in USAID funding over five years. If confirmed, I will prioritize anti-corruption and leverage tools such as Section 7031(c) of the 2019 Appropriations Act, which Secretaries Blinken and Pompeo have used to designate corrupt Paraguayan officials.

The global pandemic created outsized risks for Paraguay which has endured one of the world's deadliest – surges, with the world's highest daily, per-capita death rate in June 2021. The United States proudly donated two million vaccine doses to Paraguay, which promptly began an effective mass vaccination campaign. Additional U.S. support this year will bring U.S. funding for non-vaccine assistance—including technical assistance, medicines, respirators, oxygen, and field hospitals—to over \$9 million since the start of the pandemic.

Paraguay's long-standing bond with like-minded democratic partner Taiwan has made it a target of pressure tactics by the People's Republic of China to push Paraguay into switching diplomatic relations to Beijing, including through quid pro quo vaccine diplomacy. If confirmed, I will work to support Paraguay's economic and political sovereignty and its commitment to Taiwan. U.S. security goals center on helping Paraguay counter illicit networks, which threaten the safety of U.S. citizens and the region. Paraguay's Tri-Border Area (TBA) with Argentina and Brazil is one of the principal routes for multi-billion-dollar money laundering, counterfeiting, drug trafficking, trafficking in persons, and other smuggling operations. Some TBA criminal organizations have known or suspected links to terrorist organizations. To address these threats, U.S. programs build Paraguayan capacity to combat money laundering, financing of terrorism, and criminal gangs—along with programs to strengthen judicial and prosecutorial capacity. U.S. military assistance to Paraguay correspondingly strengthens cooperative crisis response capabilities. If confirmed, I will prioritize helping the TBA countries reinvigorate the Regional Security Mechanism, which coordinates efforts to enhance border security, dismantle transnational criminal organizations, and prevent money laundering and the financing of terrorism. The United States is Paraguay's number one investor, and the Department of Commerce reports that U.S. exports to Paraguay support an estimated 7,000 American jobs. To protect and expand U.S. business opportunities in Paraguay, I will continue to ensure our Embassy engages Paraguayan authorities on investment disputes, procurement tenders, and Intellectual Property Rights.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and members of the committee, if confirmed, I will consult with this committee as we work for the safety, freedom, and prosperity of the U.S. and Paraguayan people. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I look forward to your questions.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you, Mr. Ostfield.
Now we will turn to Mr. Fitrill.

STATEMENT OF TROY DAMIAN FITRILL OF VIRGINIA, A CAREER MEMBER OF THE SENIOR FOREIGN SERVICE, CLASS OF COUNSELOR, TO BE AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE REPUBLIC OF GUINEA

Mr. FITRILL. Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and members of the committee, I am deeply honored to appear before you today and grateful to President Biden and Secretary Blinken for the confidence they have placed in me as their nominee for Ambassador to the Republic of Guinea.

I am proud to have my family here today, my wife, Kathryn, a fellow Foreign Service officer, and my children, Madeleine and Sam, who have spent their lives immersed in the Foreign Service themselves.

Although my career has taken us all to several continents, we are drawn to and always thrilled to be in sub-Saharan Africa, where we have spent the majority of our assignments.

My last assignment as Director for West African Affairs was, like everyone's, shaken up by the pandemic. But the one and only trip I was able to take before the pandemic struck began in Guinea, where I had the pleasure of traveling up country with my friend and colleague, Ambassador Simon Henshaw, whose passing was a shock to all who knew him. It would be a signal honor, if confirmed, to try to build upon his work.

The relationship between the United States and Guinea has passed through various stages during Guinea's 63 years of independence.

But we have always extended our hand in partnership through support for nascent democratic institutions, productive economic initiatives, and supporting the Guinean people directly through effective education and health programs, including in response to the Ebola epidemic in 2014.

Indeed, in this current pandemic, American investments in health systems paid off as Guinea sought to mitigate the ravages of COVID-19.

In the midst of this crisis, however, Ebola raised its ugly head again earlier this year, and those American-supported institutions reacted swiftly and effectively, halting it this time in a matter of months and with minimal loss of life.

Economically, Guinea is growing faster than anticipated, sustained mostly by strong mining activity, construction, and agriculture. U.S. companies have been in Guinea since the days of independence and more are joining them every year.

Recent investments in energy infrastructure, mining, and banking show that when given a fair chance, the United States is the preferred partner.

I do not minimize the challenges. There are opportunities in infrastructure precisely because so little infrastructure exists. The challenges to doing business in Guinea are well documented, and recent political tensions only increase the level of difficulty.

As we partner with the Guinean people, we advocate for fundamental freedoms, we advocate for open political participation, and we advocate for justice and dignity.

Guinea was born a nation of peace and leadership, and the citizens of that country, the region, and the world need a Guinea that builds upon that history.

Right now, Guineans rightfully express concern about peace and security both at home and in the region. If confirmed, I will encourage dialogue among the parties to strengthen political pluralism. Such dialogue can only succeed if all sides feel confident that there can be a positive outcome.

We support efforts to reform Guinea's security institutions with capacity-building efforts to bolster civilian protection, rule of law, and accountability. Guinea's troops have performed well in Mali, the most dangerous peacekeeping mission on Earth, and we recognize Guinea for that contribution.

If confirmed as the twenty-third U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Guinea, I will support and encourage the ongoing democratic process, I will promote economic development, including advocacy for U.S. exports, support for U.S. investment and helping diversify Guinea's economy, and I will work to improve public health institutions, enhance Guinea's efforts against trafficking in persons, and strengthen our security partnership.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and members of the committee for the opportunity to address you today. My wife and I are both former Hill staffers, and so I would also like to thank your staffs for all they do to support you and your constituents every day.

If confirmed, I look forward to working with you in representing the interests of the American people in Guinea, and I hope very much to welcome you there on a visit one day soon.

And with that, I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Thank you.

[Prepared statement of Mr. Fitrill follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF TROY DAMIAN FITRELL

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, I am deeply honored to appear before you today, and grateful to President Biden and Secretary Blinken for the confidence they have placed in me as their nominee for Ambassador to the Republic of Guinea. I am proud to have my family here today: my wife Kathryn, a fellow Foreign Service Officer, and my children Madeleine and Sam, who have spent their lives immersed in the Foreign Service themselves.

Although my career has taken us all to several continents, we are drawn to and always thrilled to be in sub-Saharan Africa, where we have spent the majority of our assignments. My last assignment, as Director for West African Affairs was, like everyone's, shaken up by the pandemic, but the one and only trip I was able to take before the pandemic struck began in Guinea, where I had the pleasure of traveling up-country with my friend and colleague, Ambassador Simon Henshaw, whose passing was a shock to all who knew him. It would be a signal honor, if confirmed, to try to build on his work.

The relationship between the United States and Guinea has passed through various stages during Guinea's 63 years of independence, but we have always extended our hand in partnership, through support for nascent democratic institutions, productive economic initiatives, and supporting the Guinean people directly through effective education and health programs, including in response to the Ebola epidemic in 2014. Indeed, in this current pandemic, American investments in health systems paid off as Guinea sought to mitigate the ravages of COVID-19. In the midst of this crisis, however, Ebola raised its ugly head again earlier this year, and those American-supported institutions reacted swiftly and effectively, halting it this time in a matter of months and with minimal deaths.

Economically, Guinea is growing faster than anticipated, sustained mostly by strong mining activity, construction, and agriculture. U.S. companies have been in Guinea since the days of independence, and more are joining them every year. Recent investments in energy, infrastructure, mining, and banking show that when given a fair chance, the United States is the preferred partner. I do not minimize the challenges; there are opportunities in infrastructure precisely because so little infrastructure exists. The challenges to doing business in Guinea are well-documented and recent political tensions only increase the level of difficulty.

As we partner with the Guinean people, we advocate for fundamental freedoms, we advocate for open political participation, and we advocate for justice and dignity. Guinea was born a nation of peace and leadership and the citizens of that country, the region, and the world need a Guinea that builds upon that history. Right now, Guineans rightfully express concern about peace and security both at home and in the region. If confirmed, I will encourage dialogue among the parties to strengthen political pluralism. Such dialogue can only succeed if all sides feel confident that there can be a positive outcome. We support efforts to reform Guinea's security institutions, with capacity-building efforts to bolster civilian protection, rule of law, and accountability. Guinea's troops have performed well in Mali, the most dangerous peacekeeping mission on earth, and we recognize Guinea for that contribution.

If confirmed as the 23rd U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Guinea, I will support and encourage the ongoing democratic process. I will promote economic development, including advocacy for U.S. exports, support for U.S. investment, and helping diversify Guinea's economy. And I will work to improve public health institutions, enhance Guinea's efforts against trafficking in persons, and strengthen our security partnership.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, for the opportunity to address you today. My wife and I are both former Hill staffers and so I would also like to thank your staffs for all they do to support you and your constituents every day. If confirmed, I look forward to working with you in representing the interests of the American people in Guinea and I hope very much to welcome you there on a visit one day soon. I am happy to answer any questions.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you, Mr. Fitrill, and I thank all of you again, and welcome to all the family members who are with us, and I want to reinforce your statement of appreciation for all our staffs as well.

Ambassador Raynor, if you were to pick the top challenge that you will face in each of the two countries that you would go to, if confirmed, can you just identify those very quickly?

Ambassador RAYNOR. Thank you, Senator. Absolutely.

In Guinea-Bissau, the top challenge is to create a sense of partnership that reflects shared values of democracy and governance, and creates opportunity to bring U.S. influence to bear on the development of that country, the economic opportunities of that country, and the political opportunities for the people of that country so that it can build its governance, it can reinforce its stability, and it can become more integrated into regional and international community of nations.

Senegal, if I may, I will give a one-part question, a three-part answer. Politically, it is a, as we both have noted, sir, a very long-standing democracy.

But all democracies incur strains, and paying attention to maintaining political space to respecting citizens' rights and opportunities of expression and participation remains important for all of our democracies, and I would very much want to reinforce our partnership with Senegal in that regard.

Senegal plays an enormously important security role, both as a bulwark against terrorism in the Sahel and its peacekeeping mission.

I would very much want to reinforce its capacity to play both of those roles while also continuing to support its efforts to inculcate its security and military institutions with a high respect for democratic norms.

Economically, enormous potential for U.S. firms. I would very much want to support and broaden those opportunities and bring deals to fruition while also, through private sector and public engagement, building up Senegal's economy, its capacity to create jobs for its large youth population both to create economic opportunity for all of us but also to contribute to Senegal's ongoing stability and democracy as well.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you, Mr. Ambassador.

And just staying with West Africa for now, Mr. Fitrill, we talked about the relative democratic stability in Senegal. We have a different situation, of course, in Guinea.

How concerned are you about political space and democracy in Guinea, and what can the United States do to strengthen democratic norms there?

Mr. FITRILL. I am, indeed, concerned about these issues. Right now, the levels of political tension in the aftermath of the violence and conflict of last year's election season still echoes.

The number of detainees currently held in custody in Guinea are worrying. Our focus is on the process. If there is wrongdoing, they should be charged.

If they have been charged, they should have a fair trial, and while detained, they should be given humane treatment. That is on the immediate sense of some of the issues in the country.

But, more broadly, the ability for people to exercise those fundamental rights of freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, these are under some threat in Guinea.

I think the United States can keep its efforts on overarching democratic processes in the country and we could use our messaging both, public and private, to be able to encourage a greater advance towards political dialogue in that country.

At the moment, the tensions are such that there is very little dialogue occurring. People are talking past one another. And I believe the United States, we can use our good offices of the embassy and of officials in Washington to help encourage a greater dynamic of political dialogue in the country in order to achieve a future in which more regular democratic transitions can take place.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you, and in my remaining 50 seconds, if you could assess China's influence in Guinea, because we know that Guinea has been a major recipient of Belt and Road support.

China, of course, does not adhere to the same standards with respect to rule of law and democratic norms that we aspire to.

Can you talk a little bit about the influence of China in Guinea and how that impacts U.S.-Guinea relations?

Mr. FITRILL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

They are the largest trading partner that Guinea has. That is a challenge for Guinea and for the rest of the world.

The emphasis is on a level playing field, and we know that that is not always the case with China. But our focus on the broader macroeconomic policies of the country have led to real competition and that is why U.S. investors have been successful in the country as well as investors from other parts of the world.

But keeping that attention on transparency, on the applicability of the rule of law, these are the areas in which we need to remain focused so that we can have full, even, and fair competition.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you.

Senator Rounds?

Senator ROUNDS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and let me begin just simply, once again, by thanking all of you and your families for your service to our country.

Ambassador Raynor, in your previous assignment in Ethiopia, you engaged with the Ethiopian Government on several complex issues for the United States, including the war in Tigray and the historic transition under Prime Minister Abiy.

Senator Inhofe, Senator Bozeman, and I were there earlier this spring and we had the opportunity to visit with President Abiy at that time, and seemed to me that there were some real challenges there that we tried to work through with the Prime Minister.

You, clearly, have some insights with regard to what had occurred in Ethiopia. Now, as you move forward with coming to Senegal, you find yourself in a unique situation once again.

If confirmed, what lessons would you draw from your time in Ethiopia and how would you apply them in Senegal?

Ambassador RAYNOR. Thank you, Senator.

I guess I would note at the outset that the while there would, certainly, be much commonality in my engagement in Senegal, if

confirmed, as there was in Ethiopia, the starting point is pretty different.

Ethiopia was just launching during my time there a very new and ambitious effort to create a democracy and a free market economy, preceded by, frankly, millennia of repression and closed ways of doing business. Senegal, of course, has a long and strong democratic tradition.

But I think one of the lessons I learned from Ethiopia is that democracy can never be taken for granted, that you have to deal forthrightly with your counterparts in the country, make sure they are aware of what you can do to support our shared interests but also make sure they are aware when you have concerns about what they are doing that you feel is getting in the way of those shared interests.

That is something I have done throughout my career and throughout my two ambassadorships and we, certainly, anticipate doing in Senegal as well.

Senator ROUNDS. Thank you, sir. I am going to stick with Africa on my discussions.

And Dr. Ostfield, I see that Senator Kaine is here, and I am sure that he is going to provide ample opportunity for discussions with regard to Paraguay.

So if I could, I would like to turn to Mr. Fitrill, and just curious, as the former Director of the Office of West African Affairs you have had a unique perspective on developments in the West Africa region.

How would you assess the democratic, economic, and security landscape in the region, and how does Guinea fit into these regional trends?

Mr. FITRILL. Thank you. It has been a challenging two years, no question. I would say that all of those aspects that you mentioned are linked.

One of the problems is the advancement of violent extremist organizations has not occurred in a vacuum. It did not occur just because the organizations chose to enter the space.

They have achieved the success that they have had because they found a ground that was available for that kind of activity.

The local grievances, the backsliding of democracy, widespread corruption have all been problematic in the region, and the current attention needs to focus on all the drivers of extremism and not just the extremists themselves.

Our efforts to address the extremists themselves has to be done in a way in which it is not actually counterproductive.

All of these issues, frankly, pay no attention to national borders, and I know that the Government of Guinea itself is deeply concerned about its eastern and northeastern borders and considers these issues to be existential for their country.

And so the attempt to address those drivers of extremism across the Sahel, across West Africa, are absolutely critical for any way of addressing sustainably the concerns that these governments have right now.

Senator ROUNDS. If you could provide advice to us today with regard to Chinese influence and how to offset it; if there were, perhaps, one or two specific areas where we could be more precise,

more exacting, more on target with the type of programs that we should support, what would you recommend to us in terms of the right tools for use?

Mr. FITRILL. Bingo, Senator. You put it right in your own words. The programs that you gave us with the International Development Finance Corporation is probably the biggest step forward for us to be able to compete on a level playing field.

We can keep shining a light on the playing field. We can keep lobbying and persuading to make sure that international norms are respected.

But if we do not have the financing behind our expeditionary commercial efforts, then we are always going to be fighting for second place, and we have already seen tremendous successes with OPIC and with its successor organization, the DFC.

We are looking forward to some tremendous successes in the region. But having that finance behind was probably the biggest step forward.

Senator ROUNDS. Very good. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you, Senator Rounds.

Senator KAINE?

Senator KAINE. Thank you, Chairman, and Senator Rounds is right. I am really here to really focus on Paraguay. So Mr. Ostfield, welcome.

Just a quick story and then a question, and it is about U.S. vaccines in Paraguay and, really, throughout the region.

Just returned from a CODEL, six of us, three Democrats and three Republicans. We went to Mexico, Guatemala, Ecuador, and Colombia, and there were many issues. But what we heard again and again was just this deep appreciation for the U.S. donation of vaccines.

And if I had read a memo about it, I would have sort of understood it, but I really had to go and hear it because the story we heard again and again is the U.S. is donating vaccines to us. China and Russia are willing to sell us vaccines.

We really feel good about the quality of the U.S. vaccines. We are not 100 percent sure about the quality of the China and Russia vaccines, and when we make a contract with China and Russia to get vaccines, they may or may not come through.

Paraguay has had a very difficult time during COVID. It has one of the lowest vaccination rates in the Americas. It has got a population of 7 million.

They did a contract with China to sell them a million vaccines through Sinopharm and China just unilaterally cancelled the contract because Paraguay is one of the 15 countries in the world that recognizes Taiwan.

This is a huge political issue in Paraguay. President Benítez's handling of the pandemic and the challenges they have had led the congress there to consider impeaching him just a couple of months ago. They averted that, but China likely saw that as an opportunity and so just last month canceled the vaccines.

On the other hand, the United States has delivered a million vaccines, donated a million vaccines to Paraguay, and with the an-

nouncement of President Biden the other day, there is a chance that we may donate more.

Other nations in the Americas—El Salvador, the Dominican Republic—as soon as they stopped recognizing Taiwan, China gave them vaccines.

Often, in the last few years what we have heard from leaders in the region is that the U.S.—we would much rather deal with the U.S. than China, much rather—we are culturally so connected. But you are not around and China is, and if China is around we are going to deal with them.

The vaccine delivery and donations by the United States gives us such a massive opportunity to rebuild goodwill and, really, kind of accelerate our goodwill ahead of China's in the region if we do it right.

So I will ask you, Mr. Ostfield, should you be confirmed, how might you use the fact that the U.S. is being a great global donor, including to countries in the Americas, including Paraguay, to build our standing and deepen the relationship between the United States and Paraguay?

Mr. OSTFIELD. Thank you, Senator Kaine. It is great to hear about your experience on the recent CODEL to the region.

If confirmed, I would look forward to building on the recent U.S. donation of 2 million doses of vaccine. The first tranche of a million arrived July 9th. The last tranche, I believe, arrived last week.

If you ever look at any press reports, they arrived on planes with Star Wars logos. So quite a media story, in addition to the vaccine itself arriving in Paraguay.

By all reports, Paraguay has already implemented a fairly effective mass vaccination campaign. Reports I saw just this week there is now people receiving their second dose. So they have been that efficient, that effective, at getting vaccines out there.

And it is true that the China-Taiwan relationship or the China-Taiwan issue complicates things for Paraguay. They do not have access to the Chinese resources.

If confirmed, I would look forward to working with the Government of Paraguay to strengthen Paraguay's commitment to Taiwan. It was encouraging to note that during Under Secretary for Political Affairs Nuland's recent trip to Paraguay the President of Paraguay made a statement affirming Paraguay's long-standing connection to Taiwan. They are like-minded democratic partners.

The U.S. Embassy in Asunción in May of this year hosted the first virtual forum for U.S. and Taiwanese entrepreneurs, looking at investment opportunities in Paraguay specific to things like renewable energy and electric vehicle manufacturing.

If confirmed, one of the calls I look forward to making in Asunción is to the Taiwanese Ambassador there to identify ways that the U.S. and Taiwan can partner.

The U.S.-Taiwan connection is good for the United States, it is good for Taiwan, and it is good for Paraguay. And so ways that we can work together to help them are in our interests and I look forward to furthering those, if confirmed.

Senator KAINE. Well, just to kind of underline and exclamation point something, so the U.S. has donated 2 million vaccines in a country of 7 million.

I mean, that is a big deal in terms of the percentage of the population that U.S. donations are now able to cover.

We visited Ecuador. Just for my colleagues, Ecuador has had a tradition of an anti-U.S. Government for about 30 years.

They had an election in the spring and they not only elected a pro-American president, but they also elected a parliament where 80 percent of the members are brand new, and one of the reasons they did that is because the 30-year closer and closer to China, what has it gotten them?

It has got them oil drilling in the Amazon by Chinese companies that are causing huge environmental challenges, slipshod infrastructure projects, including dams that are causing waterfalls and rivers to dry up, Chinese fishing fleets vacuuming up fish around the Galapagos, which is part of Ecuador.

And many people view the election in Ecuador and this very dramatic turn toward a pro-U.S. posture as a revulsion at what happens when you get too close to China and the debt that comes along with that, and the slipshod quality of some of the work caused the public to want to do something else.

We have a real opportunity and the innovation of American firms, Operation Warp Speed, the Biden administration's decision to deploy in a very generous way, is something that in Africa, in the Americas, all around the world, it is a great opportunity for us to deepen ties.

Mr. Ostfield, I look forward to working with you, should be confirmed, and I think this is going to give you a really good ability to do good work there.

Thank you.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you, Senator Kaine, and I think Paraguay is a really good example, as you said, of where the U.S. donation of 2 million vaccines has had a huge impact. Hopefully, it will be a model for how we approach others in the region and around the world.

Senator Young, I am told, may be joining us now via WebEx.

Okay. He is no longer available.

So I just have one last question because I did not have a chance to ask you one, Mr. Ostfield, and it relates to the environmental situation in Paraguay, and my colleagues will have another round, of course, for other members who are interested in asking additional question.

So, you know, last October, Paraguay endured one of its worst wildfire seasons and it is currently suffering from a drought that has depleted the Paraguay River, which is the country's main waterway and trade corridor that has gone to record lows.

This has led to environmental degradation and worsened economic hardship during the pandemic. It has also led Paraguay to ask Brazil, which is suffering from its own severe drought, to release water from the low-capacity Itaipu Dam.

So what is your assessment of the environmental and economic impact of the drought and how has this impacted Paraguay's relationship with neighboring Brazil?

Mr. OSTFIELD. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

If confirmed, I would look forward to working with the Government of Paraguay on strengthening their ability to respond to the kind of environmental threats you described.

Paraguay has taken some meaningful actions in this step, already participated in the Ministerial Roundtable in April with Special Envoy for Climate Change Kerry, committed to achieving zero net emissions by the year 2050, and with USAID support has been working on improving sustainable livestock processes and forest fire management, recognizing the great threat they have experienced and that they face.

At the same time, the threats that Paraguay faces that are environmental in nature are linked to some of the issues that I described in my opening statement, particularly, rule of law, corruption, and impunity in the country. For Paraguay to effectively address these environmental challenges, which it needs to do, it is going to need to ensure that it has a system where there is an ability to enforce laws that are passed to achieve compliance with standards that the Government may assess and that U.S. assistance in these areas in investigation, prosecution, and so forth will actually be an asset for Paraguay in addressing the environmental challenges that it and its neighbors in the region are facing.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you. I will turn it over to the ranking member.

Senator ROUNDS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I have one question but I would direct it to both Ambassador Raynor and to Dr. Ostfield, and it follows along the same line as I had earlier for Mr. Fitrill.

And that is with regard to the programs that we have available to us to provide and to promote goodwill and to improve our economic activity between the different countries, I also serve on the Armed Services Committee and in there we talk about ways in which we can promote with our allies and our friends the ability to coordinate activities and to have them learn our way of military activity.

But time and again, as we speak with these military officers, they talk about the need for the engagement by the Department of State and the different programs that can be very, very helpful and very efficient in maintaining good relationships with these countries and can be done at a very low cost, really, for the amount of impact that we provide.

I would ask, beginning with Ambassador Raynor, if there were particular programs that you have found to be beneficial, could you share that with us?

And then, Dr. Ostfield, if you could as well give us your thoughts.

Ambassador RAYNOR. Thank you, Senator.

I think I would mention three things in response to that.

First, I would note that our traditional development work is important. It meets human needs. It shows that we are in partnership with the country where we are engaged and not there to pursue our own narrow interests, and elevating the visibility of that impact is something that I have always sought to do at the embassies I have served at.

I think that is an important piece of it because we need to persuade not only the governments but the people of these countries where their true friends and partners are.

Secondly, I would note that leadership development programs in the United States, our programs—you mentioned the military ones, the War College, that sort of thing—world class. No one comes close to the quality.

But what we lack is scale. China does not do it as well as we do but they do it for hundreds of thousands of times more people than we do.

So if there were a way that we could increase the scale of some of these programs—bring them to the United States. It is not the same to do the work in the country because when they come to the United States they understand America in a way that they will never understand if they are not physically there, absorbing everything that we are.

The third thing I would mention is, as important as I think training and development programs are, I think the way that the United States, ultimately, will be transformational is through the private sector through high-quality private sector engagement with countries.

We have enormous interest in Senegal and in every country I have served at in the quality of U.S. private sector engagement, sharing information, high-quality labor standards, and environmental standards. We do it right. However, where we suffer is on the competitive cost side of that.

So you mentioned DFC, and I got to say that is a very exciting reinvention of that program from where I sit based on what we did before. The scale of it is more in keeping with what we need to be doing. Its construct can and should make it more nimble, because what we do is run out of time. We have processes, and China and others come with financing built in.

So we need to streamline and make more scaled and impactful the financing piece of the support we provide to our own private sector engagement.

Senator ROUNDS. Thank you.

Dr. Ostfield?

Mr. OSTFIELD. Thank you, Senator Rounds.

I would focus on three areas in terms of where the U.S. can better help Paraguay develop and become more of an even stronger and more viable partner for us and for the region it works in.

The first of those is addressing governance and rule of law and U.S. training and technical support and financial support to help Paraguay root out corruption.

To strengthen the integrity of their judicial system, which has a reputation of being weak and corrupt, is an essential element of ensuring that Paraguay has the kind of thriving democracy that the Paraguayan people deserve and that we also want to see for Paraguay.

Secondly, U.S. assistance in improving security in the region. That includes things like money laundering, links to terrorism financing, narcotics trafficking, and counterfeiting. U.S. assistance has helped in areas related to asset forfeiture, improved investiga-

tory techniques, and better case building mechanisms strengthened prosecution across the board.

Not only do we do that on the civilian side, U.S. military has been assisting the Paraguayan military in things like crisis response to help address the security situation in the tri-border area, which is the area where Paraguay borders Brazil and Argentina, but also more broadly.

And then finally, if Paraguay wants to, indeed, be an attractive destination for U.S. businesses, for U.S. businesses to further investment there, Paraguay is going to have to address these issues.

U.S. assistance is already working with Paraguay, for example, on improving the transparency of its solicitations and its procurement tenders, which have a tendency to be opaque, to help the Government of Paraguay better understand the risks with untrusted vendors, and to dissuade Paraguay's business community from the investment disputes and frivolous lawsuits in violation of intellectual property rights, which, ultimately, act as a deterrent for many U.S. businesses to invest in Paraguay.

Senator ROUNDS. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you, Senator Rounds.

And I do not know if you have any closing remarks.

Senator ROUNDS. I would just simply say thank you to our panelists before us today, our nominees. Clearly, as I said earlier, you are a qualified group of individuals, and I thank you and your families for your service.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Let me second that and just say I think this is a very important moment for American diplomacy around the world, and in my judgment, all of you will help our country meet that moment in the countries you have been nominated to be our ambassador in, and I look forward to supporting your nominations.

For any members wishing to submit questions for the record, the hearing record will remain open until the close of business tomorrow, Friday, August 6th.

And with that, this hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 10:55 a.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

Additional Material Submitted for the Record

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED
TO HON. MICHAEL RAYNOR BY SENATOR ROBERT MENENDEZ

Question. What is the risk of terrorist activity in Senegal? From where do the threats emanate? On what areas will you focus U.S. efforts to support Senegal's counterterrorism efforts if confirmed?

Answer. Senegal's internal security situation is stable and generally peaceful, and its professional and capable police and gendarmerie forces operate throughout the country. I am concerned, however, by increasing instability and violence in the region. Our military and civilian security cooperation is focused on preparing Senegalese military and civilian forces to address terrorist and other threats. The United States is a key security partner to Senegal, and Senegal regularly hosts large scale AFRICOM military exercises in the region. Pre-COVID, the United States planned 45 joint defense engagements with Senegal. I understand most of our planned defense cooperation events were cancelled in 2020, but that the United States has since rescheduled several of our mission-critical bilateral engagements.

Senegal is a recipient of U.S. security assistance under the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP). Through the TSCTP, the United States works to increase Senegal's immediate and long-term capabilities to address terrorist threats and prevent the spread of violent extremism. Senegal maintains a strong will to counter violent extremism and seeks to deepen our already close counterterrorism partnership to further develop its capacity in this regard. If confirmed, security cooperation will remain a key priority of mine.

Question. Senegal remained on the Trafficking in Persons Tier 2 Watch List for the second consecutive year. According to the report, the Government "did not investigate or prosecute traffickers exploiting children in forced begging consistent with the 2005 anti-trafficking law and did not take action against officials who refused to investigate such cases. . . . Officials did not consistently use the 2005 anti-trafficking law to prosecute alleged traffickers and continued to apply penalties inconsistent with the law." If confirmed, how will you encourage accountability for officials who refuse to investigate forced begging? What steps will you take to encourage the Government to apply penalties for trafficking consistent with the law?

Answer. Per the 2021 TIP Report, the Government of Senegal does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking but is making significant efforts to do so. I understand that cooperation on anti-trafficking efforts with the Senegalese Government remains a top priority for Mission Dakar. Senegalese Government efforts this past year included implementing the third phase of its program to remove vulnerable children, including trafficking victims, from the streets; increasing investigations, prosecutions, and convictions; and adopting a new national action plan. The Government identified and referred to services 6,187 vulnerable children, including potential child trafficking victims, during the reporting period, a significant increase compared to the 1,358 children identified during the previous reporting period.

If confirmed, I will work to expand on this progress and to address with the Senegalese Government the prioritized recommendations in the 2021 TIP Report. These include increasing efforts to actively investigate and criminally prosecute trafficking offenses, punishing convicted traffickers with significant prison terms consistent with the 2005 anti-trafficking law, and establishing a system to automatically trigger investigations of alleged traffickers when potential trafficking victims are identified, including potential child forced begging victims. I will also continue to support the Department's project to combat sex trafficking under the Program to End Modern Slavery.

Question. Two prominent would-be candidates in the 2019 Presidential elections—Karim Wade, son of the former president, and Khalifa Sall, the former mayor of Dakar—were barred from running due to corruption convictions which some critics viewed as politically selective, particularly in the case of Khalifa Sall whom President Sall pardoned months after the vote. Local activist groups also came under increased state regulatory pressure during the electoral period. And Ousmane Sonko, an anticorruption activist who challenged President Macky Sall in the 2019 elections was arrested on charges of rape and disturbing public order in March 2021, prompting protests in Dakar and elsewhere. What accounts for the legal troubles of opposition figures? Are the charges politically motivated? What is the trajectory of democracy in Senegal—is space expanding or shrinking? What will you do if confirmed to help preserve political space in Senegal?

Answer. Although the official investigation into sexual assault charges against opposition leader Ousmane Sonko is ongoing, he and his supporters claim the accusations are a political conspiracy by President Sall to sabotage Sonko's 2024 presidential aspirations, comparing the charges to previous criminal cases orchestrated against Khalifa Sall and Karim Wade to disqualify them from the 2019 presidential election. Sonko's subsequent arrest in early March triggered several days of intense political protests that spiraled into widespread riots and looting, the worst Senegal had seen in decades. The unrest resulted in at least fourteen deaths, hundreds of injuries, and significant damage to private businesses across the country. It has also shifted the country's political landscape in ways that remain to be seen fully, including exerting additional pressure on President Sall to clarify his position on whether he will seek a third term in 2024. If confirmed, I will continue to call on the Government of Senegal, both publicly and privately, to respect democratic norms and constitutional requirements, including term limits and regular democratic transitions of power. I will also engage like-minded missions, civil society, and other relevant stakeholders to speak in a unified voice on issues of democracy and preserving political space in Senegal.

Question. A regional court with jurisdiction in Senegal determined that a controversial election law enacted in 2018 which requires citizen endorsements for presidential candidates violated civil liberties and directed Senegal's Government to annul it. Has the law been annulled? If not, why not, and is failure to annul it an indicator of a deterioration of the rule of law in your view?

Answer. The Government of Senegal annulled this law on July 8, 2021.

Question. What are the most important actions you have taken in your career to date to support democracy and human rights? What has been the impact of your actions?

Answer. As Ambassador to Ethiopia, I launched major new programs to support democratization, human rights, opposition political parties, independent media, civil society, and relevant national institutions, including the creation of a credible human rights commission and electoral board. I led the design and implementation of new USAID programs in economic empowerment, political participation, education, and health to promote greater participation by women in political and economic life.

As Ambassador to Benin, I worked closely with the then-president and other elements of the Beninese Government to ensure respect for constitutional term limits, resulting in a democratic and peaceful transition of presidential power. I established new programs to counter corruption and boost government accountability and transparency, as well as significant new initiatives to foster interreligious tolerance and cooperation. As Acting Chief of Mission in Afghanistan, I led major development and justice sector programs to promote the well-being, human rights, education, rule of law, security, and economic prospects of Afghans and, in particular, Afghan women.

Question. What issues are the most pressing challenges to democracy or democratic development in Senegal? These challenges might include obstacles to participatory and accountable governance and institutions, rule of law, authentic political competition, civil society, human rights and press freedom. Please be as specific as possible.

Answer. Senegal has long served as a democratic model in the region with a strong history of democratic values and peaceful transitions of power, respect for the rule of law, tolerance, and respect for human rights, values which the United States shares. I was deeply concerned, however, by the March unrest, which led to the tragic loss of life of fourteen individuals who were killed during the protests. A significant contributing factor to the unrest was political dissatisfaction related to perceived government oppression of critics, as well as concerns over youth unemployment and economic anxiety exacerbated by government-mandated Covid-19 restrictions. The Government took other deeply concerning actions during the unrest, such as suspending transmission of two opposition-friendly television channels broadcasting news and commentary on the protests. While Senegalese media have traditionally operated freely, and many international press outlets have offices in Senegal, press freedom is an area of increasing concern as government pressure on opposition voices has increased in the past year.

If confirmed, I will use my unique platform and voice as the U.S. Ambassador, both publicly in my interactions with the Senegalese people and privately with Senegalese officials, to elevate issues of democracy, democratic norms and constitutional requirements, press freedom, respect for human rights, and the need for citizen-responsive governance. I will continue to urge all parties to exercise restraint, to avoid future violence and destruction of property, and to work toward peaceful and inclusive dialogue to resolve complicated problems, which will require cooperation by all Senegalese to make meaningful progress.

Question. What steps will you take - if confirmed - to support democracy in Senegal? What do you hope to accomplish through these actions? What are the potential impediments to addressing the specific obstacles you have identified?

Answer. Senegal has long served as a democratic model in the region with a strong history of democratic values and peaceful transitions of power, respect for the rule of law, tolerance, and respect for human rights -- values which the United States shares. The Senegalese people understand how important democracy is, and they overwhelmingly support having a say in how they are governed and by whom, as evidenced by the March protests over concerns about the economic situation and youth unemployment, as well as political dissatisfaction related to perceived government oppression of critics. If confirmed, I will ensure that in our diplomatic engagements with the Senegalese Government we pay close attention to access to justice, respect for democratic norms and constitutional requirements, free and fair elections, media freedom, the health of civil society, and government transparency and

accountability. I will continue to advance opportunities to strengthen the capacity of civil society organizations and amplify their voices, encourage the Government to collaborate with these organizations for the betterment of the Senegalese people, and ensure coordination of effort with like-minded missions and other key stakeholders.

Question. How will you utilize U.S. Government assistance resources at your disposal, including the Democracy Commission Small Grants program and other sources of State Department and USAID funding, to support democracy and governance, and what will you prioritize in processes to administer such assistance?

Answer. Supporting democracy and good governance are key U.S. priorities in Senegal. I understand that U.S. public diplomacy and outreach in Senegal support Mission and Department goals on promotion of democracy and good governance through press outreach, small grants, American Center-based programs, digital video conferences, visiting speakers, exchange programs, and social media engagement. For example, USAID provides support to the Government of Senegal to meet its own governance targets to decentralize management and fiscal authority by delegating decision-making to regional and local governments, improve transparency and accountability at the national level, and consolidate and improve the quality of democracy in Senegal. USAID's work seeks to increase citizen engagement in government processes, strengthen effective local governance, improve transparency and accountability, and promote peacebuilding efforts in Casamance. If confirmed, I will prioritize these key efforts as Ambassador.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to meet with civil society members, human rights and other non-governmental organizations in the U.S. and with local human rights NGOs, and other members of civil society in Senegal? What steps will you take to pro-actively address efforts to restrict or penalize NGOs and civil society via legal or regulatory measures?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to meeting with civil society members, human rights and other non-governmental organizations in the U.S., and with local human rights NGOs, and other members of civil society in Senegal. Organizations promoting human rights, civil society, and good governance are critical to any functioning democracy. If confirmed, I will continue and strengthen the relationships built by Mission Dakar and the Department of State more broadly with civil society members, human rights and other non-governmental organizations in the United States, and Senegalese human rights NGOs, and other members of civil society in Senegal. I will continue to advance opportunities to strengthen the capacity of civil society organizations and amplify their voices, encourage the Government to collaborate with these organizations for the betterment of Senegal, and ensure that we coordinate our efforts with like-minded missions and other key stakeholders to address our concerns with a unified voice.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to meet with democratically oriented political opposition figures and parties? What steps will you take to encourage genuine political competition? Will you advocate for access and inclusivity for women, minorities and youth within political parties?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to continue strengthening the relationships Mission Dakar has built across the political spectrum, including by engaging with both ruling and opposition parties and leaders. I will work with both the Government and opposition parties to develop a more inclusive political environment and will urge the Government to ensure the freedoms of association and peaceful assembly for all political actors, even those who do not agree with the Government. Through public statements, development projects, small grants, and direct engagements, I will advocate for a political environment that is inclusive of Senegalese women, youth, and minorities.

Question. Will you and your embassy team actively engage with Senegal on freedom of the press and address any government efforts designed to control or undermine press freedom through legal, regulatory or other measures? Will you commit to meeting regularly with independent, local press in Senegal?

Answer. If confirmed, I will actively engage with Senegal on press freedom issues. Senegalese media has traditionally operated freely, and many international press outlets have offices in Senegal. Press freedom is an area of increasing concern, however, as government pressure on opposition voices has increased in the past year. During the March 2021 unrest, the Government suspended transmission by two opposition-friendly television channels broadcasting news and commentary on the protests. I will also call on the Government to prevent and stop the harassment of journalists and media outlets whose reporting is critical of the Senegalese Government's

policies. Such actions have a negative impact on press freedom and underscore the need for the Government to be transparent, as doing so would make independent media outlets better positioned to share accurate information with ordinary Senegalese. We will continue to prioritize providing training and other capacity building opportunities for journalists. If confirmed, I will commit to meet regularly with independent, local press in Senegal.

Question. Will you and your embassy team actively engage with civil society and government counterparts on countering disinformation and propaganda disseminated by foreign state or non-state actors in the country?

Answer. If confirmed, I will continue and, as appropriate, expand upon the Embassy's ongoing engagements with civil society and government counterparts to promote the importance of countering disinformation and propaganda disseminated by foreign state or non-state actors in Senegal.

Question. Will you and your embassy teams actively engage with Senegal on the right of labor groups to organize, including for independent trade unions?

Answer. If confirmed, I will actively engage with Senegal on the right of workers and labor groups to organize, including to form independent trade unions, and I will call out incidents when this right to associate is restricted.

Question. Will you commit to using your position, if confirmed, to defend the human rights and dignity of all people in Senegal, no matter their sexual orientation or gender identity?

Answer. Promoting respect for human rights and democracy is a priority for our mission in Senegal. If confirmed, I will use all diplomatic tools at my disposal to defend the human rights and dignity of all individuals in Senegal, no matter their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Question. What challenges do the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) people face in Senegal?

Answer. In a country that otherwise largely respects human rights, the struggle for LGBTQ+ individuals in Senegal is ongoing. The situation of Senegal's LGBTQ+ community remains dire, and members of the community continue to be subject to arbitrary arrests and to convictions for consensual same-sex activity. Incidents include the arrest and beatings of suspected LGBTQ+ individuals by religious police in Touba and arrests of LGBTQ+ individuals in Dakar for holding a birthday party. The Covid-19 pandemic has created additional difficulties for LGBTQ+ organizations and their mission to serve their communities. In February, following President Biden's message to the African Union, comments from Senegalese citizens overall were positive and generally appreciative of U.S. re-engagement in Africa, but 10% of the comments criticized its references to LGBTQ+ inclusion. Several warned against warming up to the United States too quickly and advised caution regarding mentions of the LGBTQ+ community. Likewise, Senegalese are widely critical of calls to respect the human rights of LGBTQ+ persons.

Question. What specifically will you commit to do to help LGBTQ people in Senegal?

Answer. Promoting the human rights of LGBTQ+ people is a challenging endeavor in a society as conservative as Senegal. It is also a priority of the Biden administration around the world, and, if confirmed, I commit to carrying out the President's mandate. It is critically important, in doing so, to consult with LGBTQ+ individuals and organizations in Senegal to take account of the local context and ensure we do not exacerbate the problem. For instance, it may not always be appropriate to issue public statements in response to specific anti-LGBTQ+ incidents, but to engage in quiet, closed-door diplomacy that minimizes additional risks to LGBTQ+ people. Embassy Dakar has relaunched an interagency Human Rights Working Group to identify ways to assist human rights defenders, including LGBTQ+ activists, in addressing harassment and violence. Discretion and strategic engagement with the international community are the only avenues for LGBTQ+ activists to operate within the current social environment. LGBTQ+ activists and individuals will continue to face a difficult road as long as Senegal remains intolerant of LGBTQ+ persons. In gauging how, when, and whether to engage on this topic, it is invaluable to understand the sense of the local LGBTQ+ community, and I commit that, if confirmed, the Embassy team and I will continue engaging with the LGBTQ+ Senegalese and their allies.

Question. Will you commit, if confirmed, to ensuring that you fully brief Members of Congress and/or their staff each time you are in Washington for visits or consultations during your tenure as Ambassador to Senegal?

Answer. If confirmed, I commit, in coordination with the State Department's Bureau of Legislative Affairs, to accommodate promptly all appropriate requests for briefings. As someone whose professional career began as a staff member of a Senate Select Committee, I have a strong appreciation and respect for Congress' key oversight role and will fully cooperate in accommodating that role.

RESPONSES TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED
TO TROY DAMIAN FITRILL BY SENATOR ROBERT MENENDEZ

Question. How much democracy and governance related assistance has the United States provided for programs and activities in Guinea over the last four fiscal years and in what areas? If confirmed, in what areas would you recommend assistance be channeled?

Answer. From FY 2017 to FY 2020, the State Department and USAID allocated \$12 million in bilateral foreign assistance to Guinea to support good governance; political competition and consensus building; and independent media and free flow of information.

If confirmed, I would recommend that we continue these programs, and also that we prioritize additional democracy and governance areas including rule of law, strengthening political parties, and transparency in elections.

Question. There were multiple reports that security forces killed civilians related to the March 2020 referendum and legislative elections, and the October 2020 Presidential elections. What is the status of the investigations into elections related violence in Guinea? If confirmed, how will you support accountability related to electoral violence?

Answer. I understand that there has been no progress on investigations into violence surrounding the 2020 elections and referendum. If confirmed, I will press the Government of Guinea to investigate thoroughly and transparently, and to hold accountable those responsible for human rights violations and abuses, including those associated with the alleged unlawful killings in 2019-2020 in the lead up to and aftermath of the legislative elections, constitutional referendum, and presidential election.

Question. Human rights organizations claim that 300 to 400 people were arrested in the wake of the October elections. Opposition figures were targeted for arrest the following month. Were these arrests politically motivated? What is the status of those detained? What specific actions will you take, if confirmed, to address politically motivated detention, harassment and intimidation of opposition and civil society?

Answer. Authorities reportedly arrested an estimated 400 people during the March 2020 legislative and October 2020 presidential election periods. Arrested individuals include opposition leaders, civil society members, and journalists. Many of these arrests appear to be politically motivated. The Government of Guinea has released an unknown number of detainees since November 2020 and recently released eight high-profile opposition leaders, but arrests continue. At least two detainees have died in detention, while others continue to suffer from lack of access to adequate health care, prison overcrowding, and life-threatening prison conditions.

If confirmed, I will press the Government of Guinea to ensure that detained members of the political opposition receive all applicable procedural protections and fair trial guarantees for those who have been charged, and that those detained are treated humanely to help Guinea establish a more representative, democratic, and transparent government. I will press for the release of those who have been unjustly detained, who have not been charged, and whose detention appears politically driven.

Question. Are media freedoms respected in Guinea? Are journalists free to be critical of the Government without fear of reprisal? A recent legislative change calls for the High Authority of Communication to be appointed by presidential decree as opposed to being elected by a group of peer commissioners. How will that impact media freedoms? What steps will you take if confirmed to support free media?

Answer. I understand that press freedom in Guinea is significantly constrained due to government action. Journalists have been subjected to harassment and intimidation after publishing reports critical of the Government. Guinean journalists have been detained by security forces, and foreign journalists have been forced to leave the country. Government officials attempt to censor the media on spurious legal and administrative grounds. The July 2020 law allowing the president to ap-

point the chair of the High Authority of Communication and raising the number of presidentially chosen members is just another example of the Government's efforts to constrain press freedom.

Answer. If confirmed, I commit to engaging across the spectrum on the importance of press freedom and to meeting regularly with press outlets. I will call on the Government of Guinea to respect press freedom and to prevent harassment of journalists critical of the Government. If confirmed, I will seek to continue support for the development of free press and journalists through training and capacity building programs for journalists.

Question. According to the State Department Country Report on human rights, Guinean law "criminalizes rape and domestic violence, but both occurred frequently, and authorities rarely prosecuted perpetrators." What assistance is the U.S. providing to law enforcement to address rape and sexual violence in Guinea?

Answer. The State Department, through the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL), has provided \$400,000 for FY20. U.S. Government support provides mentoring and training to Guinean law enforcement officers to improve their understanding and support of internationally recognized human rights, fight trafficking in persons, and address sexual and gender-based violence. I understand that this training also strengthens Guinean law enforcement's capacity to identify and investigate rape and domestic violence cases.

Question. Guinea is on the Tier 2 Watch List for the second year in a row, according to the 2021 Trafficking in Persons Report. The report indicates that the Government does not "provide sufficient funding to the Office for the Protection of Gender, Children, and Morals." What efforts will you undertake, if confirmed, to encourage the Government to dedicate resources to that office? What other efforts will you engage in if confirmed to ensure the Government adequately addresses trafficking in persons?

Answer. I understand that Guinea remains on the Tier 2 Watch List in the 2021 Trafficking in Persons Report because the Government did not demonstrate overall increasing efforts to address trafficking in persons compared to the previous reporting period, even considering the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on its anti-trafficking capacity.

If confirmed, I will work to raise awareness and enlist the support of communities and local government to address the human trafficking issue. I will press the Government to fully fund and support government officials and entities that work to support and protect trafficking victims. We will continue to work together with the Government of Guinea to strengthen Guinean capacity to improve its trafficking in persons record, and with NGOs and the international community to provide assistance and training to Guinean law enforcement and the judicial system to ensure that traffickers face justice. I will also continue to support the Department's project to combat child trafficking under the Program to End Modern Slavery, as well as the Department's bilateral project to identify and provide services to victims of trafficking.

Question. What are the most important actions you have taken in your career to date to support democracy and human rights? What has been the impact of your actions?

Answer. Almost every position in my career has had a focus on promoting respect for human rights. As Labor Attaché in Guatemala, I counseled nascent factory unions in achieving formal recognition and lobbied government officials to allow unions to make use of arbitration proceedings. The former increased the number of recognized unions and the latter increased access to legal redress in the face of labor rights abuses. As Chargé d'Affaires in Mauritius, I led my Embassy team to organize and execute a three-day skills camp to train women to run for elected office. After Constitutional changes took place, the number of women in elected positions increased four-fold. If confirmed, I commit to keeping respect for human rights at the forefront of U.S. engagement in Guinea.

Question. What issues are the most pressing challenges to democracy or democratic development in Guinea? These challenges might include obstacles to participatory and accountable governance and institutions, rule of law, authentic political competition, civil society, human rights and press freedom. Please be as specific as possible.

Answer. I am deeply concerned by the number of members of the political opposition in Guinea who remain imprisoned and the limiting of political space for opposition parties and groups by the Guinean Government. All Guineans must be free to express opposing views. Abuses by law enforcement and security forces must be in-

investigated and those responsible must face justice. The press must be free to report critically. If confirmed, I will call upon the Government of Guinea to resolve the detainee issue and make other positive overtures to the opposition to ease political tension. I will press for an investigation into violence and killings around the 2020 elections. I will push for greater freedom of the press and greater protections for journalists.

Question. What steps will you take - if confirmed - to support democracy in Guinea? What do you hope to accomplish through these actions? What are the potential impediments to addressing the specific obstacles you have identified?

Answer. If confirmed, I will continue to raise concerns publicly and privately about lack of accountability for alleged human rights violations and abuses by security forces and the continued pretrial detention of opposition supporters, civil society members, and journalists. Potential impediments include the lack of transparency and accountability within the justice system, slow bureaucratic processes, and a lack of resources.

Question. How will you utilize U.S. Government assistance resources at your disposal, including the Democracy Commission Small Grants program and other sources of State Department and USAID funding, to support democracy and governance, and what will you prioritize in processes to administer such assistance?

Answer. The United States Government implements projects in Guinea supporting local governance, civil society, and media to consolidate good governance across the country. If confirmed, I will prioritize implementation of security sector reform projects and training to help prevent future human rights violations and abuses and instruct on the role of security services in sustaining and supporting democratic processes and institutions. We will work to build capacity of civil society organizations to promote respect for democracy and human rights and accountability in the democratic process.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to meet with civil society members, human rights and other non-governmental organizations in the U.S. and with local human rights NGOs, and other members of civil society in Guinea? What steps will you take to pro-actively address efforts to restrict or penalize NGOs and civil society via legal or regulatory measures?

Answer. Promotion of respect for human rights in Guinea is one of the most important priorities for the United States. If confirmed, I commit to meet with civil society members, human rights and other non-governmental organizations in the United States and with local human rights NGOs, and other members of civil society in Guinea. I will ensure our Embassy continues to build and strengthen its relationships with a broad spectrum of civil society both in the United States and in Guinea. I will work with our diplomatic and international partners to encourage the Government to cooperate with civil society to create a safer, freer, and more democratic Guinea.

Question. If confirmed, do you commit to meet with democratically oriented political opposition figures and parties? What steps will you take to encourage genuine political competition? Will you advocate for access and inclusivity for women, minorities and youth within political parties?

Answer. If confirmed, I will work to strengthen our existing relationships and build new ones across the political spectrum and will engage with democratically oriented political figures and parties. I will work with both the Government and opposition parties to develop a more inclusive political environment which respects human rights and democratic norms. Through engagement, programs, and grants I will advocate for greater participation by women, minorities, and youth in politics.

Question. Will you and your embassy team actively engage with Guinea on freedom of the press and address any government efforts designed to control or undermine press freedom through legal, regulatory or other measures? Will you commit to meeting regularly with independent, local press in Guinea?

Answer. A free press is vital in any democracy to hold leaders to account, as well as exposing and fighting corruption. If confirmed, I commit to engaging across the spectrum on the importance of press freedom and to meeting regularly with independent, local press in Guinea. I will call on the Government of Guinea publicly to respect press freedom and to prevent harassment of journalists critical of the Government. If confirmed, I will seek to continue support for the development of free press and journalists through training and capacity building programs for journalists.

Question. Will you and your embassy team actively engage with civil society and government counterparts on countering disinformation and propaganda disseminated by foreign state or non-state actors in the country?

Answer. The corrosive effects of disinformation and propaganda on democracy are particularly troubling in countries still working toward enshrining democratic principles and respect for fundamental freedoms in their political cultures. If confirmed, I will continue current engagement and promote new engagement with government, the press, and civil society organizations to counter disinformation and propaganda disseminated by foreign state or non-state actors in Guinea, including through the Embassy social media platforms.

Question. Will you and your embassy teams actively engage with Guinea on the right of labor groups to organize, including for independent trade unions?

Answer. My tour as Labor Attaché in Guatemala taught me the importance of engaging with labor groups, including unions, to protect and promote the welfare of workers. If confirmed, my team and I will actively engage with the Government of Guinea on the right for workers, labor groups, and independent trade unions to form and join organizations of their own choice, and I will publicly call out abuses or restrictions of this right of freedom of association.

Question. Will you commit to using your position, if confirmed, to defend the human rights and dignity of all people in Guinea, no matter their sexual orientation or gender identity?

Answer. Promotion of human rights in Guinea will be one of my top priorities if I am confirmed. I commit to using all the tools at my disposal to promote and defend the human rights and dignity of all Guineans, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Question. What challenges do the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) people face in Guinea?

Answer. The confluence of traditional local cultures with Islamic tenants has created an environment in Guinea where consensual same-sex sexual conduct and recognition of the LGBTQI+ community is a strict taboo. The legal environment does not allow same-sex relationships or marriages, and Guinean law does not consider LGBTQI+ individuals a protected class. Anti-discrimination laws to protect LGBTQI+ persons do not exist. I am unaware of any prominent individuals that champion the cause of equal societal treatment for the LGBTQI+ community. In addition, the traditional nature and outlook of the majority of Guineans would be a natural obstacle to holding a frank public discussion about LGBTQI+ issues.

Question. What specifically will you commit to do to help LGBTQ people in Guinea?

Answer. If confirmed, I will use my office to highlight the strengths of diversity and acceptance of all people for who they are. The United States is rightfully proud of the strides we have made, and continue to make, in living up to our founding principle that everyone is equal under the eyes of the law. I believe that if confirmed, I can use the persuasive power of the Embassy to help Guineans begin to address this important issue.

Question. Will you commit, if confirmed, to ensuring that you fully brief members of congress and/or their staff each time you are in Washington for visits or consultations during your tenure as Ambassador to Guinea?

Answer. If confirmed, I will work together with the State Department's Bureau of Legislative Affairs to respond promptly to all appropriate requests for information and briefings for members of Congress and their staff, and to offer such briefings whenever I am in Washington.