

Statement of Alex N. Wong
Nominee for Alternate Representative of the United States of America
for Special Political Affairs in the United Nations
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
August 5, 2020

Chairman Risch, Ranking Member Menendez, distinguished members of the committee, I'm deeply honored to appear before you as the President's nominee to serve as the Alternate Representative for Special Political Affairs at the United Nations. And I'm humbled by the confidence President Trump, Secretary Pompeo, and Ambassador Craft have shown in me with this nomination.

There are so many people to thank for bringing me to this point in my professional life. The late Ambassador Tom Schweich, Judge Janice Brown, Lanhee Chen, the late Ambassador Rich Williamson, Paula Dobriansky, National Security Advisor Robert O'Brien, Brian Hook, Ambassador Stu Eizenstat, Senator Romney, Senator Cotton, Deputy Secretary Steve Biegun. All of these distinguished statesmen and women gave me the opportunity to fail, succeed, and grow as a professional. I'm greatly indebted to them all.

All of these individuals took a chance on me. But it was my parents—Robert and Grace Wong—who took the biggest chance of all for my sake. They left Hong Kong 43 years ago. They settled into a single-room rental in Kew Gardens, Queens, with an infant, a bus pass for the commute to an arduous and unstable job, and a whole lot of belief in the United States of America. If I'm so fortunate to return to the city that welcomed them to America to represent the country they so dearly believed in, it will vindicate that belief in a way they could have scarcely imagined as newly arrived immigrants.

And, Mr. Chairman, I am truly blessed to have three godsenders who sustain me every day, who inspire me, and who give my life its meaning: my baby girl Avery, my dear son Chase, and my beautiful bride Candice.

Mr. Chairman, my professional life has been focused on advancing U.S. interests in the foreign policy realm. I joined the civilian surge in Iraq that was so necessary to complement the military surge. I had the opportunity to work as Senate staff to advise and support Senator Cotton on a range of national security matters. And three years ago, I returned to the State Department, first, to deepen U.S. engagement in the Indo-Pacific region and, second, to help realize the final, fully-verified denuclearization of North Korea. In all of these roles, I've been reminded of the importance of pragmatism in an arena as difficult and uncertain as foreign affairs. But I've also seen the overriding value of standing firmly and boldly for American principles. My late mentor Rich Williamson—who held the very job I've been nominated for—would often say to me, “You have to be a realist to take steps in the everyday, but an idealist to know in which direction you're going.” That is a philosophy I would bring to the United Nations.

Mr. Chairman, many of the core functions of the United Nations are centered at the Security Council. The Council has a weighty mandate to preserve international peace and security. But too often, it doesn't live up to it.

The world has no doubt entered into a period of heightened geopolitical competition. This is a time when the United States and our friends and allies in the Free World are facing greater challenges and more dire threats. This heightened competition is manifesting itself at the Security Council.

This is in large part why the Council has not been able to take decisive action—as the UN Charter demands and as our conscience demands—to address conflict and human suffering in hot spots spanning the globe. Russia and China block discussion of Maduro’s crimes in Venezuela. Because the Assad regime has two permanent P5 protectors, the Council has never done right by the Syrian people in this decade of their suffering. And even in this year of 2020—well into the 21st Century—our close and steadfast friend Israel still faces attacks in the UN system that echo the most sinister prejudices of centuries past.

But even though our work at the Council may be harder in this era of great power competition—even though it may be more frustrating—it doesn’t mean it’s any less important. In fact, I believe it’s more important than ever. Strategic, principled, and tireless diplomacy at the Council is needed to unify our partners, blunt damaging initiatives, and advance U.S. interests to benefit the world.

Now there are functions of the Council that, for the most part, are working. UN peacekeeping is a vital institution for promoting international peace and security. To protect the credibility of that institution and—more importantly—to protect vulnerable populations around the world, the United States has demanded and successfully won increased scrutiny and reform of peacekeeping budgets, mandates, and accountability mechanisms for poor performance and misconduct. Our efforts—as well as the efforts of this Committee—resulted in new training, reporting, and accountability measures for sexual exploitation and abuse committed by peacekeeping personnel. And, we have succeeded in giving missions realistic and achievable mandates as well as clear exit strategies to keep them from remaining in place beyond their useful purpose, which was too often the case in the past.

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, in an era of great power competition in which the values of the Free World are under pressure, I believe it is vital that the United States hold firmly to its position of leadership at the United Nations. It is American values—liberty, fundamental rights, and the sovereignty of a nation’s people—that animate a just and workable international system. Those values will always be at the front of my mind if I’m so fortunate as to be confirmed for this position.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.