

Honorable Chairman Risch, Ranking Member Shaheen, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. It is an honor to be nominated to be the United States Ambassador to Türkiye. I am grateful to President Trump for the confidence and trust he has placed in me at this sensitive and challenging moment in a critically complex and globally important region. I would also like to thank my family for their unrelenting support, love and sacrifice which affords me the opportunity to assume these responsibilities, if fortunate enough to be confirmed for this important American post. With me today are four of my six children: Jodi, TJ, Brett and Nicholas and my two youngest Alaia and Jaden are cheering from afar. The strength and purity of their character is a piercing and timeless reflection of the dedication and unrelenting values of their mothers.

Now, a brief snapshot of my own journey which is nothing more than a tribute to the American Dream. Whatever tiny modicum of success that I have achieved has not much to do with me - it rather has everything to do with the selection by fate itself - of the intersection of a free, democratic and embracing America, with the DNA from an ancient and diverse civilization of Lebanon.

My grandfathers both immigrated to the USA around 1900. Youseff Abdullah (Joe), at the age of 12 and Khalil Shaheen (Kelly) at 14. Both were raised in the region now known as Lebanon, which had a long reputation from its Phoenician beginnings for a multicultural fabric of Arabic and Christian influences and was an administrative region within the Ottoman Empire. Joe was one of nine Maronite Christian children and the youngest of six boys living in Zahle, a town in the Bekaa valley. At that time there was a tremendous war raging between the Maronites and the Druzes and Joe's mother did not want to sacrifice her youngest son to this brutal and senseless clash. The Baraks were a merchant family of modest means and had no ability to maintain their large family or to aid any of their six sons to find solace or relief elsewhere. Zahle was governed by an Ottoman mayor known as a Mutasarrif. Mutasarrif was a non-Lebanese Christian selected by the Ottomans based in Constantinople (now Istanbul) who had absolute authority over the Christians and the Druze. Joe's mother was a household servant for Mutasarrif and asked for his help to allow her youngest son, Joe, to board a Cargo vessel that would eventually arrive in America. The cost at the time for "steerage class" was about \$20 in Turkish Lira which Joe's family did not have. The Ottoman governor then benevolently gave Joe's mother the fare money and an Ottoman passport for Joe's travel and told her he was free to go. They walked hand in hand 34 miles to the Port of Beirut, where he first boarded the Ottoman postal steamship to Naples where he transitioned to the larger ship, the SS Patria for the three-week journey to America. She believed she would never see him again or perhaps even know where he was... only a mother could have that strength. He crawled into the filthy hole of that vessel with 13 Turkish Lira, one shirt, one pair of pants, and a note pinned to his shirt written in Arabic saying, "Thank you for accepting me."

The rest is the story of America. My father and my grandfather and our family lived and worked together running a small neighborhood grocery store in Culver City, California. Watching their lifetime of sacrifice and humility instilled in my sister and

myself the gift of courage, resilience, compassion, gratitude and a blind eye towards race or religion.

My professional life has been dedicated to understanding the complexity of building and aiding teams in global financial markets, while administering the art of a cultural sixth sense, and carving a path upon which others have not traveled. After a Jesuit education and law school, I was privileged to work for a major USA law firm representing global engineering and construction companies in the Middle East. Fluor, Bechtel and Jacobs were giants of American ingenuity and engineering in a booming “black gold” driven Middle East. I was a finance lawyer and was sent to Saudi Arabia in 1973 to work on project finance on several large gas and oil production facilities in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia. Temperatures soared to 120 degrees, there was no internet, no TV, no movies, no books, very little English language, no Christian churches or Jewish synagogues, no hotels, no banks... basically only an Aramco compound and a beautiful and pure Bedouin culture rooted in Islam. Each night I would go to a majlis of elders and sheepishly participate drinking gahwa (Arabic coffee), listening to men sharing stories of politics, water access, tribal disputes, and business in a dialect I could not understand. Breaking for salah (prayer) five times a day and visiting the mosque with my Sunni friends on Friday became the weekly routine. I had grown up in a Jewish neighborhood and while attending Catholic schools and had joined my friends’ families weekly for Shabbat and now I was immersed in an adventure through Islam. It was in those years in the Middle East that I found my true north point - “tolerance.” This was a foundation stone in my role as Chairman and CEO of Colony Capital, a global private equity firm I founded in 1991, with offices in 19 countries, including the Middle East, and an investor constituency representing most continents.

The transition from business to government service at times can be a bumpy road and I was blessed as a young man to be appointed by President Ronald Reagan as Deputy Undersecretary of the Department of the Interior. It was there I gained an admiration for the dedication and competence of Civil Servants and Foreign Service Officers as well as the importance of a coordinated and transparent approach between the Executive and Legislative branches. If confirmed, I will lead my Mission with that respect and interaction.

Our partnership with Türkiye is grounded in a wide range of critically shared interests. Since Türkiye joined NATO in 1952, it has been a cornerstone of transatlantic security, admirably maintaining the defense of the Alliance’s southern flank. There is no question that Türkiye is a significant and valued NATO ally.

Today, Türkiye fields the second largest military in NATO and answered President Trump’s call to invest more in Europe’s security and has met or exceeded NATO’s guidelines. Türkiye supports our objectives in key areas like counterterrorism, a strong regional mediator, as it was in the Black Sea Grain Initiative with Ukraine and Russia and has been a contributing and continuing stabilizing force in Syria and the Eastern Mediterranean. There are also areas of tension between our two countries, but if

confirmed, I will navigate these to ensure that through these challenges, our partnership endures as a pillar of transatlantic stability and mutual trust. If confirmed, I will advocate for Türkiye to use its influence in the region for stability and prosperity. I will encourage Türkiye to maintain constructive diplomatic engagement with Greece and, once and for all, solve these historic issues through negotiation and dialogue.

Türkiye is an essential partner in President Trump's maximum pressure campaign to counter Iranian influence across the Middle East and a key to Peace discussions between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Türkiye is also historically aware of the potential threat posed by Russia's aggression and has supported Ukrainian territorial integrity, sovereignty, and independence from the onset of the Russia-Ukraine War. Türkiye has also emerged as an alternative to China in emerging markets, particularly in Africa, where Turkish firms challenge their Chinese counterparts for crucial infrastructure development projects.

Türkiye is also a leader in the Global Coalition to defeat ISIS, a valued principal in crafting a stable Syria and seeks to prevent the resurgence of extremism. Continued cooperation in this realm will help keep the American homeland safe from terrorist threats.

Our nations' interests strongly converge in the economic sphere. Bilateral foreign direct investment between our countries totals over \$8 billion and bilateral trade is over \$40 billion, sustaining thousands of American jobs. Türkiye is a partner in sectors like aerospace technology and is a significant importer of American LNG. Türkiye also has untapped critical mineral reserves and could become a strategic partner as we diversify from Chinese supply chains. If confirmed, I will prioritize economic exchange to facilitate prosperity through partnership. With enough effort, we can and will reach President Trump's goal of \$100 billion in bilateral trade.

There are certainly challenges in this relationship, challenges that must be addressed. I believe we have a unique opportunity to partner in pursuit of shared objectives and to work towards an even greater partnership that will deliver peace, prosperity and security for both of our nations.

In closing I would like to share with you a mantra which I will use as a driving principle for my Mission should you elect to confirm me:

"I never apply the sword when the lash suffices, nor the lash when my tongue is enough. If there is even one thread binding me to my fellow man, I do not let it break. If he pulls, I loosen. If he loosens, I pull."

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and Members of the Committee, if confirmed, I am committed to working together with Congress to advance American national interests. Should the magical wand of destiny allow me to return to the root of this amazing American/Ottoman adventure, I will relentlessly pursue President Trump's goal of

peace, prosperity and security for both America and Türkiye. I look forward to answering any and all questions that you may have.