

**Opening Statement of Mark Toner**  
**Nominee for U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Liberia**  
**Senate Committee on Foreign Relations**  
**October 19, 2023**

Chairman Merkley, Ranking Member Young, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today as the President's nominee to serve as the next U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Liberia. I am grateful for the trust and confidence President Biden and Secretary Blinken have placed in me with this nomination and look forward to working closely with the Members of this Committee and your staff to promote and protect U.S. interests in Liberia.

I would like to begin by acknowledging my family, friends, and colleagues who have helped me get here. That includes my parents, both members of the Greatest Generation; my siblings – all five of them; my wonderful daughters – all four of them; my large extended family, and, most important of all, my wife, Mimi, who has never wavered in her support and love through all the ups and downs of foreign service life.

I have a strong personal connection with Liberia, having served there as a Peace Corps Volunteer – a formative experience that kindled my desire to become a Foreign Service Officer. During that time, I had the privilege to work alongside many dedicated Liberian health professionals, people who showed up every day to work under difficult circumstances without any guarantee of a regular paycheck. These are the people who inspire me to this day through their commitment, courage, and determination.

If confirmed, it would be an honor to return as the U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Liberia, a country with which the United States shares a special bond rooted in our deep historical ties, and preserved through our shared commitment to democracy, human rights, health security, economic prosperity, and regional stability.

Liberia is also a country shaped by years of conflict, terror, disease, and hardship. It speaks to the Liberian people's resilience when, in 2017, the country achieved a significant milestone by carrying out the first peaceful transition of power

between two elected presidents in over 70 years. The next test is now underway, as Liberians cast their ballots last week to elect their next president. President Weah and his challengers pledged to hold an election that is peaceful, free, and fair; and we, the United States, and our partners are doing everything in our power to hold them accountable for delivering on that commitment.

The United States is the largest bilateral donor to Liberia, with more than \$5 billion in bilateral assistance since 2003. That assistance has paid concrete dividends in the economic, education, security, and public health sectors, but that progress has also been heavily eroded by growing lawlessness and corruption within the present administration. If confirmed, I will lead our embassy's efforts to hold corrupt government officials accountable and keep Liberia on a path to self-reliance, so that ordinary Liberians see the benefits of private-sector growth and accountable government, and the country remains the United States' most steadfast partner in Africa.

If confirmed, my team and I will also work to increase investment opportunities for U.S. businesses and promote inclusive economic development focused on job creation, providing much-needed opportunities for a population in which the median age is 19 ½ years. But the onus, ultimately, is on Liberia's political leaders to increase transparency and tackle corruption, as both are integral to establishing the conditions necessary to attract responsible foreign investment.

We must apply this same approach to human rights, as Liberia's justice sector works to address reported cases of gender-based violence, forced child labor, and human trafficking, as well as the legacy of war crimes. These abuses must be confronted for their own sake, as well as to ensure a broader system of accountability, good governance, and rule of law.

If confirmed, I look forward to building on the outstanding work the previous Ambassador and his excellent team have done to assist with the many challenges facing Liberia. I am optimistic the United States can work with its partners in the Liberian government and people to help strengthen their democracy and secure a brighter, more prosperous future for the next generation.

Mr. Chairman, I thank you for this opportunity to appear before you and the other members of the Committee, and I look forward to your questions.