

Statement of Jeffrey Prescott
Nominee for U.S. Representative to the United Nations
Agencies for Food and Agriculture, with the rank of Ambassador
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
November 16, 2023

Chairman Schatz, Ranking Member Hagerty, distinguished members of the Committee: thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.

I am grateful to President Biden for his trust, and to Secretary Blinken and Ambassador Thomas-Greenfield for their partnership over many years. I want to thank my colleagues across the U.S. Mission and the State Department for their dedicated service, day in and day out, on behalf of the American people.

I owe my deepest debt of gratitude to my family. When I arrived in Washington in 2010 as a White House Fellow, I expected to serve just a few short months. I have been honored to continue that service over the last decade, including now as deputy to Ambassador Thomas-Greenfield. With this privilege comes sacrifice, and I am grateful to my family for helping bear the burden. That includes my mother, Barbara Blackburn, and stepfather, Ed Blackburn, watching from their home in North Carolina. But I would not be before you today without those sitting behind me: my wife, Susan Jakes, and my daughters, Amalia and Phoebe. Thank you for your love and support on this day, and every day, as you inspire me and make possible my continued service to our country.

This is as complex and consequential a moment in the world as any we have faced. We are in a geopolitical competition to shape the future of the international order. And we are grappling with intractable global challenges that cross borders.

Food security sits at the intersection of these two great strategic challenges. As the members of this Committee know well, the world is facing an unprecedented global food security crisis, with approximately 735 million people around the world suffering from hunger. This is a crisis fueled by compounding factors: by the pandemic, by drought and other climate shocks, and, critically, by conflict.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has worsened an already profound challenge, driving increases in hunger and extreme poverty. Ukrainian farmers that should be cultivating some of world's most productive farmlands are instead defending their homeland as Russia destroys fields and ports. Additional conflicts and crises, across the Middle East, Africa, the Western Hemisphere, and Asia are further straining the global humanitarian system.

Over nearly three years, I have advanced the Biden Administration's use of every tool available to confront these crises, working with Secretary Blinken and Ambassador Thomas-Greenfield to bring food security to the forefront of the agenda of the United Nations. We mobilized more than 100 countries around a common roadmap, convened a Global Food Security Summit, and rallied

countries to end the use of food as a weapon of war. More recently, I traveled with Ambassador Thomas-Greenfield to the Chad-Sudan border to galvanize action to provide life-saving relief and to hold accountable those responsible for the suffering.

Building on my own record, if confirmed, I would seek to focus on three top priorities.

First, to ensure we use taxpayer dollars as effectively and efficiently as possible in international institutions. The bipartisan support that makes America the most generous donor to the UN system depends on transparency and accountability, and budget discipline. If confirmed, I will be your partner in fighting to maintain integrity, promote U.S. values, and uphold good governance.

Second, even as America has stepped up – a testament to this Committee and your colleagues across the Congress – our efforts alone are not sufficient to match the scale. If confirmed, I will seek to expand opportunities to leverage the private sector in responding to emergencies and building resilience, to engage non-traditional donors to share the burden, and to establish new, innovative sources of support.

I believe we should strengthen partnerships with American farmers in our work on agriculture and hunger around the world. American farming is the gold standard, and I'd be honored to connect my early experiences growing up in Kansas and working summers on a Texas farm to this role. Our farmers not only have the power to share their yields with markets all over the world, but also the capacity to share best practices around science and technology to teach people to better feed themselves.

Third, we have an imperative to advance American interests and values in the face of unrelenting efforts of our competitors. After all, great power competition does not end at the UN's front door, certainly not from the perspective of our adversaries. I have a deep expertise and a clear-eyed understanding of the challenge posed by China and know what it takes to compete. If confirmed, I would vigorously engage in this intense competition.

Finally, I am humbled that, if confirmed, I would follow distinguished former U.S. ambassadors in this role. That certainly includes Ambassador Cindy McCain, who held this position before assuming leadership of the World Food Program last April. I have benefited from close consultations with many other leaders in this field, including Ambassador McCain's predecessor, Governor David Beasley.

I understand the critical responsibility that this Committee, and Congress as a whole, has on these issues and, if confirmed, would seek to partner closely with you and your staff.

There has never been a more important time for U.S. leadership on global food security, agriculture, and humanitarian issues. If confirmed, I will be honored to represent the American people to maintain and expand our global leadership. I look forward to your questions.