

**Testimony of Ian Brownlee, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary,  
Bureau of Consular Affairs  
U.S. Department of State  
House Committee on Foreign Affairs  
Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific and Nonproliferation  
Thursday, February 27, 2020**

Chairman Bera, Ranking Member Yoho, thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

As Deputy Assistant Secretary Fritz said, mission number one has always been the safety and security of U.S. citizens abroad. In response to this outbreak, the Bureau of Consular Affairs has provided critical information and travel alerts for U.S. citizens overseas, arranged evacuations of U.S. citizens from two countries, and provided in-person consular services to U.S. citizens impacted by the outbreak.

To keep U.S. citizens informed in the face of fast moving developments, we have issued numerous Travel Advisories in recent weeks, including the Level 4 Do Not Travel Advisory for China recommending that U.S. citizens depart China by commercial means. Our embassies and consulates in the region have issued multiple health and safety alerts to U.S. citizens regarding specific conditions in their respective countries.

In China, we made extraordinary efforts to evacuate U.S. citizens out of Hubei province. U.S. Embassy and consulate staff made thousands of phone calls and corresponded tirelessly via email and various online platforms to reach U.S. citizens in Hubei province. We worked with the Chinese government to facilitate travel to the United States of certain immediate family members of U.S. citizens, such as Chinese grandmothers who accompanied their U.S. citizen grandchildren on the evacuation flights. As the Chinese government locked down Wuhan to prevent the spread of the virus, our team coordinated with Chinese authorities to ensure that U.S. citizens would be allowed to travel to the airport to be evacuated. We even ensured that Chinese police officers had license plates of individual U.S. citizens, allowing them to drive to the airport

on roads closed by the quarantine lockdown. Using State Department chartered evacuation flights, and working with our interagency partners such as HHS, CDC, and DoD, we were able to bring approximately 800 U.S. citizens from Wuhan back to the United States.

In Japan, U.S. Embassy staff created a dedicated webpage for U.S. citizens quarantined on the cruise ship *Diamond Princess* and reached out to them individually by e-mail and phone. As some U.S. citizens developed health problems (not all related to COVID-19), consular officers worked with hospitals in Tokyo and neighboring cities to ensure U.S. patients received appropriate medical care. In collaboration with our interagency partners, the Department transported over 300 U.S. citizens back to the United States on February 16, 2020. Working with U.S. Embassy and CDC staff in Japan, we remain in close communication with Japanese authorities and the cruise line to assist U.S. citizens who remained in Japan after the evacuation.

In Cambodia, U.S. Embassy staff met the cruise ship *Westerdam* in the port city of Sihanoukville. Our staff provided key liaison roles, ensuring our citizens were connected with appropriate cruise ship officials and Cambodian health care professionals. We also sent a team to the airport in Phnom Penh to provide consular services.

In addition to assisting U.S. citizens abroad, the U.S. government has a responsibility to protect our citizens at home. The President signed Presidential Proclamation 9984, which suspends the entry into the United States of any aliens who were present in the People's Republic of China, excluding the Special Administrative Regions of Hong Kong and Macau, during the 14 days preceding their entry or attempted entry into the United States. There are some exceptions in the proclamation, including for legal permanent residents, certain immediate family members of some U.S. citizens and legal permanent residents, adoptees, and others. Due to limited staffing and the current Chinese government restrictions on large public gatherings, our Embassy

and Consulates in China have suspended normal visa operations, although they are accepting some emergency visa appointments for applicants who may qualify for an exception to the proclamation. This allowed us to focus all of our energy on American Citizen Services and meet the President's directive to protect the homeland. We have also worked to complete adoption cases for parents who were already present in China.

Most of the State Department's consular funding comes from visa fees collected from applicants. Under our fee authorities, we can also use these fees to cover most of the costs of providing essential services to U.S. citizens abroad. However, based on what we know now, we anticipate the loss of at least of \$98 million in consular visa revenues from China this year compared to last year as a result of SARS-CoV-2. As it is essential to ensure our ability to assist U.S. citizens in distress despite falling visa revenues, I would ask that you grant the Department greater flexibility in spending existing U.S. passport security surcharge fees and visa fees, by implementing the authorities proposed in the President's FY2021 budget. This would enable us to support American Citizen Services more broadly.

We remain committed to protecting the health and welfare of U.S. citizens overseas and are actively working with governments and international partners to achieve this goal in this crisis.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I look forward to answering your questions and those of other members of the Subcommittee.