

**Testimony of Jonathan Fritz, Deputy Assistant Secretary,  
Bureau of East Asian and Pacific 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 regarding the outbreak of COVID-19 (novel coronavirus) and the Department of State's response. Throughout this global public health emergency, the Department has worked around the clock on what has always been mission number one: ensuring the safety and security of U.S. citizens abroad. The Secretary and his senior leadership team have been personally engaged in directing and supporting the U.S. response to this outbreak, in close consultation with our colleagues at the Department of Health and Human Services (including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention), the Department of Homeland Security and others.

Utilizing their expertise, our diplomats and staff serving in the region executed evacuation plans, provided consular services, engaged foreign governments, and reported on economic issues arising from this outbreak. We simply could not have done so much to care for U.S. citizens and our own personnel in China without a Department-wide effort. U.S. diplomats in China,

Seoul, Tokyo, Phnom Penh, and elsewhere contributed to our evacuation efforts, ably aided by our locally employed staff.

Throughout it all, we regularly engaged the People's Republic of China at the most senior levels, including President Trump's February 7, 2020 conversation with President Xi. Secretary Pompeo also spoke with his counterpart about the evacuation from Wuhan and stressed that protecting U.S. citizens in times of crisis is our number one priority. Ambassador Branstad worked directly with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to facilitate evacuation flights and U.S. deliveries of donated assistance. Our team in China was on the ground, helping obtain permissions for our flights and processing passengers, operating in often difficult conditions. This work was instrumental in evacuating U.S. citizens, and even some of our allies, to safety.

We faced challenges in evacuating U.S. citizens from the quarantine zone in China, and additional complexities supporting U.S. citizens on cruise ships. The Department worked closely with our allies in Japan to ensure the health and safety of U.S. citizens onboard the *Diamond Princess* cruise ship docked in Yokohama. The U.S. Embassy in Tokyo coordinated closely with the Japanese government, Carnival Corporation, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and other components of the Department of Health and Human Services to assist U.S. citizens on the ship. After a high number of COVID-19 cases were identified

onboard, and out of consideration for Japan's already overburdened health system, the Department of Health and Human Services made an assessment that the U.S. citizens and crew on board were at high risk of exposure and should be repatriated to minimize risks to their health going forward.

In Cambodia, we organized response teams in Sihanoukville and Phnom Penh to assist U.S. citizens on the cruise ship *Westerdam*, working in close coordination with Holland America, Cambodian authorities, and the embassies of other countries with citizens on the ship. Embassy teams included consular, medical, and logistics experts to facilitate health screenings, lodging, and travel needs of more than 600 U.S. citizen passengers. Our embassy also utilized its consular messaging platform and social media accounts to provide timely updates to passengers.

In coordination with these efforts, USAID has provided an initial tranche of funding for affected and at-risk countries to address critical gaps in COVID-19 country readiness, including risk communication and community engagement, laboratory detection, enhanced surveillance, and infection prevention and control. In addition, USAID is arranging shipments of essential personal protective equipment to selected countries in coordination with the World Health Organization.

Our efforts continue apace. We are continually engaging with host governments in the Asia-Pacific region to ensure they are informed of our policies, and that we can share information and best practices to address this outbreak. We successfully encouraged Beijing to accept U.S. experts in the World Health Organization's mission to China. On February 7, 2020 the United States government announced that it is prepared to provide up to \$100 million in existing funds to assist countries, including China, impacted by and at-risk from the virus. Assistance to contain and combat COVID-19 will be provided bilaterally and through multilateral organizations. This commitment - along with the hundreds of millions generously donated by the American private sector - demonstrates strong U.S. leadership in response to the outbreak.

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