STATEMENT OF

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BEFORE THE

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
PERMANENT SELECT COMMITTEE ON INTELLIGENCE,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS, AND
COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT & REFORM

CONCERNING

THE IMPEACHMENT INQUIRY

PRESENTED ON

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I. Introduction

My name is David Holmes, and I am a career Foreign Service Officer with the Department of State. Since August 2017, I have been the Political Counselor at the U.S. Embassy in Kyiv, Ukraine. While it is an honor to appear before you, I want to make clear that I did not seek this opportunity to testify today. You have determined that I may have something of value to these proceedings, and it is therefore my obligation to appear and tell you what I know. Indeed, Secretary Pompeo stated last week, "I hope everyone who testifies will go do so truthfully, accurately. When they do, the oversight role will have been performed, and I think America will come to see what took place here." That is my goal today: to testify truthfully and accurately to enable you to perform that role. And to that end, I have hurriedly put together this statement over the past couple days to describe as best I can my recollection of events that may be relevant to this matter.

II. Background

I have spent my entire professional life serving my country as a Foreign Service Officer. Prior to my current post in Kyiv, Ukraine, I served at the Embassy in Moscow, Russia as Deputy and Internal Unit Chief in the Political Section, and before that as Senior Energy Officer in the Economics Section. In Washington, I served on the National Security Council staff as Director for Afghanistan and as Special Assistant to the Under Secretary of State. My prior overseas assignments include New Delhi, India; Kabul, Afghanistan; Bogotá, Colombia; and Pristina, Kosovo. I am a graduate of Pomona College in Claremont, California, and received graduate degrees in international affairs from the University of St. Andrews (Scotland) and Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs.

As the Political Counselor at the U.S. Embassy in Kyiv, I lead the Political Section covering Ukraine's domestic politics, foreign policy, and conflict diplomacy, and serve as the senior policy and political adviser to the Ambassador. The job of an embassy political counselor is to gather information about the host country's internal politics, foreign relations, and security policies, report back to Washington, represent U.S. policies to foreign contacts, and advise the Ambassador on policy development and implementation.

In this role, I am a senior member of the Embassy's Country Team and continually involved in addressing issues as they arise. I am also often called upon to take notes in meetings involving the Ambassador or visiting senior U.S. officials with Ukrainian counterparts, particularly within the Ukrainian Presidential Administration. For this reason, I have been present in many meetings with President Zelenskyy and his administration, some of which may be germane to this inquiry. Other issues that may be relevant to this inquiry, including energy and the justice sector, did not fall under my specific portfolio and I was not the expert, but I followed those issues inasmuch as they had a political component.

While I am the Political Counselor at the Embassy, it is important to note that I am not a political appointee or engaged in U.S. politics in any way. It is not my job to cover or advise on U.S. politics. On the contrary, I am an apolitical foreign policy professional and my job is to focus on the politics of the country in which I serve so that we can better understand the local landscape and better advance U.S. national interests there. I joined the Foreign Service through an apolitical, merit-based process under the George W. Bush administration and I have proudly served administrations of both parties and worked for their appointees, both political and career.

III. Service in Ukraine Prior to Zelenskyy's Inauguration

I arrived in Kyiv to take up my assignment as Political Counselor in August 2017, a year after Ambassador Yovanovitch received her appointment. From August 2017 until her removal from Post in May 2019, I was Ambassador Yovanovitch's chief policy advisor and developed a deep respect for her dedication, determination, and professionalism. During this time we worked together closely, speaking multiple times per day, and I accompanied Ambassador Yovanovitch to many of her meetings with senior Ukrainian counterparts. I was also the note-taker for senior U.S. visitors with President Poroshenko, whom I met at least a dozen times.

Our work in Ukraine focused on three pillars addressing peace and security, economic growth and reform, and anti-corruption and rule of law. These pillars match the three consistent priorities of the Ukrainian people since 2014 as measured in public opinion polling, namely, an end to the conflict with Russia that restores national unity and territorial integrity, responsible economic policies that deliver European standards of growth and opportunity, and effective and impartial rule of law institutions that deliver justice in cases of high-level official corruption. Our efforts on this third pillar merit special mention because it was during Ambassador Yovanovitch's tenure that we achieved the hard-fought passage of a law establishing an independent anti-corruption court to try corruption cases brought by the National Anti-corruption Bureau (NABU), another independent institution established with U.S. support. These efforts strained Ambassador Yovanovitch's relationship with President Poroshenko and some of his allies, including Prosecutor General Yuriy Lutsenko, who resisted fully empowering truly independent anti-corruption institutions that would help ensure that no Ukrainians, however powerful, were above the law. However, the Ambassador and the Embassy kept pushing anti-corruption and the other pillars of our policy toward Ukraine.

Beginning in March 2019, the situation at the Embassy and in Ukraine changed dramatically. Specifically, our diplomatic policy that had been focused on supporting Ukrainian democratic reform and resistance to Russian aggression became overshadowed by a political agenda being promoted by Rudy Giuliani and a cadre of officials operating with a direct channel to the White House.

That change began with the emergence of press reports critical of Ambassador Yovanovitch and machinations by Mr. Lutsenko and others to discredit her. In mid-March 2019, an Embassy colleague learned from a Ukrainian contact that Mr. Lutsenko had complained that Ambassador Yovanovitch had "destroyed him" with her refusal to support him until he followed through with his reform commitments and ceased using his position for personal gain. In retaliation, Mr. Lutsenko made a series of unsupported allegations against Ambassador Yovanovitch, mostly suggesting that Ambassador Yovanovich improperly used the Embassy to

advance the Democrats' political interests. Mr. Lutsenko claimed that the Embassy had ordered NABU to investigate the former head of Ukraine's tax service solely because the former head was the main Ukrainian contact of the Republican Party and of President Trump personally. Mr. Lutsenko also claimed that the Embassy had pressured former Prosecutor General Shokin to engineer the closing of the case against former Minister of Ecology Zlochevsky because of the connection between his company Burisma and former Vice President Biden's son. Mr. Lutsenko said that after Ambassador Yovanovitch's posting in Kyiv, she would face "serious problems" in the United States.

Embassy colleagues also heard from a reporter that Mr. Lutsenko had made additional unsupported claims against Ambassador Yovanovitch, including that she had allegedly given him a "do not prosecute list" containing the names of her supposed allies, an allegation that the State Department called an "outright fabrication," and that Mr. Lutsenko later retracted. Mr. Lutsenko also alleged he never received $4.4 million in U.S. funds intended for his office. Finally, he alleged that there was a tape of the current head of NABU saying he was trying to help Hillary Clinton win the 2016 election. Public opinion polls in Ukraine indicated that Ukrainians generally did not believe Mr. Lutsenko's allegations, and on March 22, President Poroshenko issued a statement in support of Ambassador Yovanovitch.

Around this same time, the Ukrainian presidential election was approaching, and Volodymyr Zelenskyy was surging in the polls, ahead of Mr. Lutsenko's political ally, President Poroshenko. On April 20, I was present for Ambassador Yovanovitch's third and final meeting with then-candidate Mr. Zelenskyy ahead of his landslide victory in the runoff election the next day. As in her two prior meetings that I also attended, they had an entirely cordial, pleasant conversation and signaled their mutual desire to work together.

On April 26, Ambassador Yovanovitch departed for consultations in Washington, DC, where she learned she would be recalled. I did not know the details of her conversations in Washington until I read her deposition statement, but it was clear at the time that she was being removed early. The barrage of allegations directed at Ambassador Yovanovitch, a career ambassador, which included aggressive reporting against her in the U.S. media, is unlike anything I have seen in my professional career.

IV. Zelenskyy's Inauguration, Rudy Giuliani, and the "Three Amigos"

Following President-elect Zelenskyy's victory, our attention in the Embassy focused on getting to know the incoming Zelenskyy administration and coordinating with Washington on preparations for the inauguration scheduled for May 20, the same day Ambassador Yovanovitch departed Post permanently. In early May, shortly after Mr. Giuliani cancelled a visit to Ukraine alleging Mr. Zelenskyy was "surrounded by enemies of the [U.S. President]," we learned that Vice President Pence no longer planned to lead the Presidential Delegation to the inauguration. The White House ultimately whittled back an initial proposed list for the official Presidential Delegation to the inauguration from over a dozen individuals to just five: Secretary Perry as its head, Ambassador to the European Union Gordon Sondland, Special Representative for Ukraine Negotiations Kurt Volker representing the State Department, National Security Council Director Alex Vindman representing the White House, and temporary acting Charge d'Affaires Joseph Pennington representing the Embassy. While Ambassador Sondland's mandate as Ambassador to the European Union did not cover individual member states, let alone non-member countries like Ukraine, he made clear that he had direct and frequent access to President Trump and Chief of Staff Mick Mulvaney, and portrayed himself as the conduit to the President and Mr. Mulvaney for the group. Secretary Perry, Ambassador Sondland, and Ambassador Volker later styled themselves the "Three Amigos," and made clear they would take the lead on coordinating our policy and engagement with the Zelenskyy Administration.

Around the same time, I became aware that Mr. Giuliani, a private lawyer, was taking a direct role in Ukrainian diplomacy. On April 25, Ivan Bakanov, who was Mr. Zelenskyy's childhood friend, campaign chair,

and ultimately appointed head of the Security Services of Ukraine, indicated to me privately he had been contacted by "someone named Giuliani who said he was an advisor to the Vice President." I reported Mr. Bakanov's message to Deputy Assistant Secretary of State George Kent. Over the following months, it became apparent that Mr. Giuliani was having a direct influence on the foreign policy agenda that the Three Amigos were executing on the ground in Ukraine. In fact, at one point during a preliminary meeting of the inauguration Delegation, someone wondered aloud about why Mr. Giuliani was so active in the media with respect to Ukraine. My recollection is that Ambassador Sondland stated, "Dammit Rudy. Every time Rudy gets involved he goes and f---s everything up."

The inauguration took place on May 20, and I took notes in the delegation's meeting with President Zelenskyy. During the meeting, Secretary Perry passed President Zelenskyy a list of "people he trusts" from whom Zelenskyy could seek advice on energy sector reform, which was the topic of subsequent meetings between Secretary Perry and key Ukrainian energy-sector contacts, from which Embassy personnel were excluded by Secretary Perry's staff.

On May 23, Ambassador Volker, Ambassador Sondland, Secretary Perry, and Senator Ron Johnson (who had also attended the inauguration, though not in the official delegation) returned to the United States and briefed President Trump. On May 29, President Trump signed a congratulatory letter to President Zelenskyy, which included an invitation to visit the White House at an unspecified date.

It is important to understand that a White House visit was critical to President Zelenskyy. He needed to demonstrate U.S. support at the highest levels both to advance his ambitious anti-corruption agenda at home, and to encourage Russian President Putin to take seriously President Zelenskyy's peace efforts. President Zelenskyy's team immediately began pressing to set a date for the visit. President Zelenskyy and senior members of his team made clear they wanted President Zelenskyy's first overseas trip to be to Washington to send a strong signal of Western support, and requested a call with President Trump as soon as possible. We at the Embassy also believed that a meeting was critical to the success of President Zelenksyy's administration and its reform agenda, and we worked hard to get it arranged.

When President Zelenskyy's team did not receive an affirmative reply, they made plans for President Zelenskyy's first overseas trip to be to Brussels, in part to attend an American Independence Day event that Ambassador Sondland hosted on June 4. Ambassador Sondland hosted a dinner in President Zelenskyy's honor following the reception, which included President Zelenskyy, Jared Kushner, Ulrich Brechbuhl, Federica Mogherini, and comedian Jay Leno, among others. In the week leading up to the event, Ambassador Sondland, Secretary Perry, and Secretary Perry's staff were taking a very active and unconventional role in formulating our priorities for the new Zelenskyy Administration and personally reaching out to President Zelenskyy and his senior team.

V. Ambassador Taylor and an Oval Office Meeting

Ambassador Bill Taylor arrived in Kyiv as Charge d'Affaires on June 17. For the next month, a focus of our activities – along with the Three Amigos – was to coordinate a White House visit, and to that end we were working with the Ukrainians to deliver things we thought President Trump might care about, such as commercial deals benefitting the United States. Ambassador Taylor reported that Secretary Pompeo had told him prior to his arrival in Kyiv, "We need to work on turning the President around on Ukraine." Ambassador Volker told us the next five years (i.e. President Zelenskyy's term) could hang on what could be accomplished in the next three months.

Within a week or two, it became apparent that the energy sector reforms, commercial deals, and anti-corruption efforts on which we were making progress were not making a dent in terms of persuading the

White House to schedule a meeting between the presidents. On June 27, Ambassador Sondland told Ambassador Taylor in a phone conversation (the gist of which Ambassador Taylor shared with me at the time) that President Zelenskyy needed to make clear to President Trump that President Zelenskyy was not standing in the way of "investigations." I understood that this was referring to the Burisma/Biden investigations that Mr. Giuliani and his associates had been speaking about in the media since March. While Ambassador Taylor did not brief me on every detail of his communications with the Three Amigos, he did tell me that on a June 28 call with President Zelenskyy, Ambassador Taylor, and the Three Amigos, it was made clear that some action on a Burisma/Biden investigation was a precondition for an Oval Office meeting. We became concerned that even if a meeting could occur it would not go well, and I discussed with Embassy colleagues whether we should stop seeking a meeting altogether.

VI. The Freezing of Security Assistance

I was present in the Embassy conference room for the National Security Council secure video conference call July 18 when an Office of Management and Budget staff member surprisingly announced the hold on Ukraine security assistance near the end of an almost two-hour meeting. The official said the order had come from the President and had been conveyed to OMB by Mr. Mulvaney with no further explanation. This began a week or so of efforts by various agencies to identify the rationale for the freeze, conduct a review of the assistance, and to reaffirm the unanimous view of the Ukraine policy community of its importance. NSC counterparts affirmed that there had been no change in our Ukraine policy, but could not determine the cause of the hold or how to lift it. While I am now aware of testimony regarding discussions between Ambassador Taylor, Ambassador Volker, and the Three Amigos on July 19-20, I was not aware of those discussions at the time.

VII. July 26 Meetings and Ambassador Sondland's Call to the President

On July 25, President Trump made a congratulatory phone call to President Zelenskyy, after his party won a commanding majority in Ukraine's parliamentary election. Contrary to standard procedure, the Embassy received no readout of the call, and I was unaware of what was discussed until the transcript was released September 25. Upon reading the transcript, I was deeply disappointed to see that the President raised none of what I understood to be our inter-agency agreed upon foreign policy priorities in Ukraine and instead raised the Biden/Burisma investigation and referred to the theory about Crowdstrike, which was supposedly connected to Ukraine and allegedly played a role in the 2016 election.

The next day, July 26, 2019, I attended meetings at the Presidential Administration Building in Kyiv with Ambassador Taylor, Ambassador Volker, and Ambassador Sondland and took notes during those meetings.

We first had a meeting with Andriy Bohdan, the Chief of Staff to President Zelenskyy. The meeting was brief, as Mr. Bohdan had already been summoned by President Zelenskyy to prepare for a subsequent broader meeting, but he did say that President Trump had expressed interest during the previous day's phone call in President Zelenskyy's personnel decisions related to the Prosecutor General's Office.

The delegation then met with President Zelenskyy and several other senior officials. During the meeting, President Zelenskyy stated that during the July 25 call, President Trump had "three times" raised "some very sensitive issues," and that he would have to follow up on those issues when they met "in person." Not having received a readout of the July 25 call, I did not know what those sensitive issues were.

After the meeting with President Zelenskyy, Ambassador Volker and Ambassador Taylor quickly left the Presidential Administration Building for a trip to the front lines. Ambassador Sondland, who was to fly out that afternoon, stayed behind to have a meeting with Andriy Yermak, a top aide to President Zelenskyy.

As I was leaving the meeting with President Zelenskyy, I was told to join the meeting with Ambassador Sondland and Mr. Yermak as note-taker. I had not expected to join that meeting and was a flight of stairs behind Ambassador Sondland as he headed to meet with Mr. Yermak. When I reached Mr. Yermak's office, Ambassador Sondland had already gone in. I explained to Mr. Yermak's assistant that I was supposed to join the meeting as the Embassy's representative and strongly urged her to let me in, but she told me that that Ambassador Sondland and Mr. Yermak had insisted that the meeting be one-on-one, with no note-taker. I then waited in the anteroom until the meeting ended, along with a member of Ambassador Sondland's staff and a member of the U.S. Embassy Kyiv staff.

When the meeting ended, the two staffers and I accompanied Ambassador Sondland out of the Presidential Administration Building and to the embassy vehicle. Ambassador Sondland said that he wanted to go to lunch. I told Ambassador Sondland that I would be happy to join if he wanted to brief me on his meeting with Mr. Yermak or discuss other issues, and Ambassador Sondland said that I should join. The two staffers joined for lunch as well.

The four of us went to a nearby restaurant and sat on an outdoor terrace. I sat directly across from Ambassador Sondland and the two staffers sat off to our sides. At first, the lunch was largely social. Ambassador Sondland selected a bottle of wine that he shared among the four of us, and we discussed topics such as marketing strategies for his hotel business.

During the lunch, Ambassador Sondland said that he was going to call President Trump to give him an update. Ambassador Sondland placed a call on his mobile phone, and I heard him announce himself several times, along the lines of "Gordan Sondland holding for the President." It appeared that he was being transferred through several layers of switchboards and assistants. I then noticed Ambassador Sondland's demeanor change, and understood that he had been connected to President Trump. While Ambassador Sondland's phone was not on speakerphone, I could hear the President's voice through the earpiece of the phone. The President's voice was very loud and recognizable, and Ambassador Sondland held the phone away from his ear for a period of time, presumably because of the loud volume.

I heard Ambassador Sondland greet the President and explain that he was calling from Kyiv. I heard President Trump then clarify that Ambassador Sondland was in Ukraine. Ambassador Sondland replied, yes, he was in Ukraine, and went on to state that President Zelenskyy "loves your ass." I then heard President Trump ask, "So, he's gonna do the investigation?" Ambassador Sondland replied that "he's gonna do it," adding that President Zelenskyy will do "anything you ask him to." Even though I did not take notes of these statements, I have a clear recollection that these statements were made. I believe that my colleagues who were sitting at the table also knew that Ambassador Sondland was speaking with the President.

The conversation then shifted to Ambassador Sondland's efforts, on behalf of the President, to assist a rapper who was jailed in Sweden, and I could only hear Ambassador Sondland's side of that part of the conversation. Ambassador Sondland told the President that the rapper was "kind of f----d there," and "should have pled guilty." He recommended that the President "wait until after the sentencing or it will make it worse," adding that the President should "let him get sentenced, play the racism card, give him a ticker-tape when he comes home." Ambassador Sondland further told the President that Sweden "should have released him on your word," but that "you can tell the Kardashians you tried."

After the call ended, Ambassador Sondland remarked that the President was in a bad mood, as Ambassador Sondland stated was often the case early in the morning. I then took the opportunity to ask Ambassador Sondland for his candid impression of the President's views on Ukraine. In particular, I asked Ambassador Sondland if it was true that the President did not "give a s--t about Ukraine." Ambassador

Sondland agreed that the President did not "give a s--t about Ukraine." I asked why not, and Ambassador Sondland stated that the President only cares about "big stuff." I noted that there was "big stuff" going on in Ukraine, like a war with Russia, and Ambassador Sondland replied that he meant "big stuff" that benefits the President, like the "Biden investigation" that Mr. Giuliani was pushing. The conversation then moved on to other topics.

Upon returning to the Embassy, I immediately told the Deputy Chief of Mission and others at the Embassy about the call with the President and my conversation with Ambassador Sondland. I also emailed an Embassy official in Sweden regarding the issue with the U.S. rapper that was discussed on the call.

July 26 was my last day in the office ahead of a planned vacation that ended on August 6. After returning to the Embassy, I told Ambassador Taylor about the July 26 call. I also repeatedly referred to the call and conversation with Ambassador Sondland in meetings and conversations where the issue of the President's interest in Ukraine was potentially relevant. At that time, Ambassador Sondland's statement of the President's lack of interest in Ukraine was of particular focus. We understood that in order to secure a meeting between President Trump and President Zelenskyy, we would have to work hard to find a way to explain Ukraine's importance to President Trump in terms that he found compelling.

VIII. Lifting the Hold on Security Assistance

Over the ensuing weeks, we continued to try to identify ways to frame the importance of Ukraine in ways that would appeal to the President, and to try to move forward on the scheduling of a White House visit by President Zelenskyy. On July 28, while President Trump was still not moving forward with a meeting with President Zelenskyy, he met with Russian President Putin at the G20 Summit in Osaka, Japan, sending a further signal of lack of support for Ukraine.

Ukrainian Independence Day is August 24 and presented a good opportunity to show support for Ukraine. Secretary Pompeo had considered attending (National Security Advisor Bolton attended in 2018 and Defense Secretary Mattis attended in 2017), but in the end nobody senior to Ambassador Volker attended.

Shortly thereafter, on August 27, Ambassador Bolton visited Ukraine and brought welcome news that President Trump had agreed to meet President Zelenskyy on September 1 in Warsaw. I took notes in Ambassador Bolton's meeting with President Zelenskyy and Chief of Staff Mr. Bohdan. Ambassador Bolton told Mr. Bohdan that the meeting between the presidents in Warsaw would be "crucial to cementing their relationship."

Between meetings that day, I heard Ambassador Bolton express to Ambassador Taylor and National Security Council Senior Director Tim Morrison his frustration about Mr. Giuliani's influence with the President, making clear there was nothing he could do about it. He recommended that new Prosecutor General Ruslan Ryaboshapka, who would replace Mr. Lutsenko, open a channel with Attorney General Barr in place of Mr. Yermak's channel with Mr. Giuliani. He also expressed frustration about Ambassador Sondland's expansive interpretation of his mandate, musing that he should ask his staff to confirm that the mandate of the U.S. Ambassador to the European Union was limited to the European Union and had no authority with the individual member states, let alone non-members like Ukraine. Ambassador Bolton further indicated the hold on security assistance would not be lifted prior to the Warsaw meeting, where it would hang on whether President Zelenskyy was able to "favorably impress" President Trump.

President Trump ultimately pulled out of the Warsaw trip, so the hold remained in place with no clear means to get it lifted. After the trip was cancelled, Ambassador Taylor also told me that Ambassador Bolton recommended that Ambassador Taylor send a first-person cable to Secretary Pompeo articulating the

importance of the security assistance. At Ambassador Taylor's direction, I drafted and transmitted the cable August 29, which further attempted to explain Ukraine's importance and the importance of the security assistance to U.S. national security.

During this time, we were still trying to appeal to President Trump in foreign policy and national security terms. By this point, however, my clear impression was that the security assistance hold was likely intended by the President either to express dissatisfaction that the Ukrainians had not yet agreed to the Burisma/Biden investigations or as an effort to increase the pressure on them to do so. I have since read in Ambassador Taylor's testimony an account of a meeting in Warsaw in which Ambassador Sondland told Mr. Yermak (according to Mr. Morrison) that the security assistance freeze would not be lifted until President Zelenskyy committed to the Burisma/Biden investigation. I have also read Ambassador Taylor's testimony about the text exchange and phone call between Ambassador Taylor and Ambassador Sondland in which Ambassador Sondland admitted that "everything" was dependent on such an announcement and that President Trump wanted President Zelenskyy "in a public box."

On September 5, I took notes at Senator Johnson and Senator Chris Murphy's meeting with President Zelenskyy in Kyiv. President Zelenskyy asked about the security assistance. Although both Senators stressed bipartisan Congressional support for Ukraine, Senator Johnson cautioned President Zelenskyy that President Trump has a negative view of Ukraine and that President Zelenskyy would have a difficult time overcoming it. Senator Johnson further explained that he was "shocked" by President Trump's negative reaction during an Oval Office meeting on May 23, when he and the Three Amigos proposed that President Trump meet President Zelenskyy and show support for Ukraine.

I was not aware until I read Ambassador Taylor's testimony of the various exchanges on September 7-8 about President Trump apparently insisting that President Zelenskyy personally go to a microphone and say he was opening investigations of the Bidens and 2016 election interference, or Mr. Yermak's message to Ambassador Sondland that President Zelenskyy was prepared to make a statement on CNN. However, Ambassador Taylor did tell me on September 8 "now they're insisting Zelenskyy commit to the investigation in an interview with CNN." I was surprised the requirement was so specific and concrete. While we had advised our Ukrainian counterparts to voice a commitment to following the rule of law and generally to investigating credible corruption allegations, this was a demand that President Zelenskyy personally commit to a specific investigation of President Trump's political rival on a cable news channel.

On September 11, the hold on security assistance was lifted, though it remained unclear why it was imposed in the first place. Although we knew the hold was lifted, we were still concerned that President Zelenskyy may have committed to give the interview at the annual YES! Conference in Kyiv on September 12-14 where CNN's Fareed Zakaria was one of the moderators. On September 13, an Embassy colleague received a phone call from a colleague at the U.S. Embassy to the European Union (under Ambassador Sondland) and texted me regarding the call, "Sondland said the [Zelenksyy] interview is supposed to be today or Monday [Sept 16] and they plan to announce that a certain investigation that was 'on hold' will progress." The text also explained that our European Union Embassy colleague did not know if this was decided or if Ambassador Sondland was advocating for it.

Also on September 13, following a meeting with President Zelenskyy in his private office in which I took notes, Ambassador Taylor and I ran into Mr. Yermak on the way out. When Ambassador Taylor again stressed the importance of staying out of U.S. politics and said he hoped no interview was planned, Mr. Yermak shrugged in resignation and did not answer, as if to indicate they had no choice. In short, everyone thought there was going to be an interview, and that the Ukrainians believed they had to do it. The interview ultimately did not occur.

On September 21, Ambassador Taylor and I collaborated on input he sent to Mr. Morrison to brief President Trump ahead of a September 25 meeting that had been scheduled with President Zelenskyy in New York on the margins of the UN General Assembly. The transcript of the July 25 call was released the same day. As of today, I still have not seen a readout of the September 25 meeting.

As the current impeachment inquiry has progressed, I have followed press reports and reviewed the statements of Ambassador Taylor and Ambassador Yovanovitch. Based on my experience in Ukraine, my recollection is generally consistent with their testimony and I believed that the relevant facts were therefore being laid out for the American people. However, in the last week or so, I read press reports expressing for the first time that certain senior officials may have been acting without the President's knowledge in their dealings with Ukraine. At the same time, I also read reports noting the lack of first-hand evidence in the investigation and suggesting that the only evidence being elicited at the hearings was "hearsay." I came to realize I had first-hand knowledge regarding certain events on July 26 that had not otherwise been reported, and that those events potentially bore on the question of whether the President did, in fact, have knowledge that those officials were using the levers of our diplomatic power to induce the new Ukrainian President to announce the opening of a particular criminal investigation. It is at that point that I made the observation to Ambassador Taylor that the incident I had witnessed had acquired greater significance, which is what he reported in his testimony earlier this week.

IX. Conclusion

I would like to take a moment to turn back to Ukraine. Next week marks six years since throngs of pro-Western Ukrainians spontaneously gathered on Kyiv's Independence Square to launch what became known as the Revolution of Dignity. While the protests began in opposition to a turn toward Russia and away from the West, they expanded over three months to reject the entire corrupt, repressive system that the President oversaw and ultimately led to his flight from Ukraine to Russia. Those events were followed by Russia's occupation of Ukraine's Crimean peninsula and invasion of Ukraine's eastern Donbas region, masterminding an ensuing war that, to date, has cost Ukraine almost 14,000 lives. Over the past five years, they have rebuilt a shattered economy, adhered to a peace process, and moved economically and socially closer to the West – toward our way of life.

Earlier this year, large majorities of Ukrainians again chose a fresh start by voting for a political newcomer as president, replacing 80 percent of their parliament, and endorsing a platform consistent with our democratic values, reform priorities, and strategic interests. This year's revolution at the ballot box underscores that, despite its imperfections, Ukraine is a genuine and vibrant democracy and an example to other post-Soviet countries and beyond – from Moscow to Hong Kong.

How we respond to this historic opportunity will set the trajectory of our relationship with Ukraine and our position on core principles central to our vital national interests for years to come. Ukrainians want to hear a clear and unambiguous reaffirmation that our long-standing, bipartisan policy of strong support for Ukraine remains unchanged and that we fully back it at the highest levels. Vice President Pence said after his meeting with President Zelenskyy in Warsaw, "The U.S.-Ukraine relationship has never been stronger." Ukrainians and their new government earnestly want to believe that.

Ukrainians cherish their bipartisan American support that has sustained their Euro-Atlantic aspirations, and they recoil at the thought of playing a role in U.S. domestic politics or elections. At a time of shifting allegiances and rising competitors in the world, we have no better friend than Ukraine – a scrappy, unbowed, determined, and above all dignified people who are standing up against Russian authoritarianism and aggression. We are now at an inflection point in Ukraine, and it is critical to our national security that we stand

in strong support of our Ukrainian partners. Ukrainians and freedom-loving people everywhere are watching the example we set of democracy and the rule of law.

Thank you, I am happy to answer any questions.