

Statement of Rex Wayne Tillerson, May 21, 2019 Transcribed Interview
House Foreign Affairs Committee

Chairman Engel, Ranking Member McCaul—Thank you for inviting me here today and for taking the time out of your schedules to meet with me personally. I also want to thank Ms. Carey and Mr. Mullins for welcoming me here this morning. I appreciate the work they—and the rest of the Committee staff—have done over the past few weeks to make for a productive discussion today.

I have always viewed this Committee as playing an important role in American foreign policy. Your work helps reinforce the Department’s principal goals—advancing the security and economic prosperity of our people; protecting Americans both at home and abroad; and advancing American values around the world. I am grateful for the productive working relationship we had during my tenure as Secretary, and I am hopeful that our past relationship can frame our discussion today.

I am deeply appreciative of the opportunity I had to serve our country as Secretary of State. When I was first approached about the position by President Trump, I was just a few months shy of retirement, and, frankly, I was looking forward to spending the next chapter of my life on my family’s ranch in Texas, with my wife, our four sons and daughters-in-law, and a house full of grandkids. The position is not one that I sought, but I welcomed the opportunity to serve my country. In retrospect, the experience was both humbling and inspiring—and it will always be the great honor of my life. I am grateful to President Trump for nominating me and to the Senate for confirming me.

I believe I discharged the duties of my office in a manner that respected both the interests of the United States and the Office of the President. It is no secret that President Trump and I disagreed on some aspects of United States foreign policy, and I am sure you will ask me about

some of those today. But at bottom President Trump and I shared a common goal: to secure and advance America's place in the world and to promote and protect American values.

Those American values—freedom, democracy, individual liberty, and human dignity—are the north star that guided every action I took at the State Department. They are the true essence of American foreign policy through the ages. Although the policies used to advance those values may change from administration to administration, or Secretary to Secretary, the values remain the same. I want to commend Secretary Pompeo for his efforts to advance them during his tenure as Secretary.

One of the key ways both President Trump and I sought to advance those values was by seeking cooperation and accountability from our partners on the world stage. To me, “America First” never meant “America alone.” We value our friends, allies, and partners, and recognize the strength that comes from our multilateral alliances, which have developed over decades and have served as a positive, stabilizing force in the world for generations. At the same time, we also sought to reintroduce balance to those relationships—for example, by reminding our NATO partners of their obligations, or by reorienting our trading relationships.

My tenure was all the more meaningful because of the talent and dedication of the career foreign service officers, civil servants, and diplomats at the State Department. American diplomacy is not a one-man job; it is possible only through the tireless efforts of the State Department personnel, many of whom have devoted their entire professional lives to serving our country and advancing our interests abroad. The unflagging professionalism, commitment, and patriotism of the men and women of the State Department inspired me every day of my tenure, and I have nothing but respect for the people who translate our values into action day in and day out. That is why one of my goals as Secretary was to ensure that the Department was organized

to enable them to succeed—so that their work could contribute most effectively to the State Department’s mission.

As you know, I am here today voluntarily in response to your request for my testimony. I chose to come back to Washington to speak with you today on a bipartisan basis because I understand and appreciate the critical role that Congressional oversight of the Executive Branch plays in our constitutional system. That role is especially important with respect to foreign affairs, where our position is strengthened when the world knows that we speak with one voice in protecting America’s interests abroad.

I intend to answer each of your questions today to the best of my ability—but I ask you to forgive me if my memory is foggy or incomplete at times. I did not review my State Department files in preparation for today, nor did I speak with my former staff, other than State Department lawyers. And, as you can imagine, given the breadth and volume of matters that the State Department handles, I may not remember all of the details of every issue that arose during my tenure. I want you to understand that if I make a mistake, it is unintentional. If I learn at a later date that I misspoke today, it would be my goal to ensure that the record is corrected.

I also respectfully ask that you honor my obligations to the President and current and future diplomats. I owe them discretion about personal conversations, and our Nation benefits when other countries, our diplomats, and our President can be confident that sensitive and candid discussions will remain confidential when appropriate. This may require me to answer some questions at a higher level of generality given our transcribed format, but I hope to be able to address all of your areas of interest satisfactorily.

My time in government is over, but I hope that my testimony today will help you as you continue to do the critical work of this Committee. I look forward to our discussion.