**Welcome Remarks by AmCham Vietnam Vice Chair and AmCham Hanoi Board Members and Suntory Pepsico CEO Jahanzeb Khan**

Ambassador Marc Knapper

Mrs. Knapper

Deputy Principal Officer Robert Greenan

AmCham member colleagues

On behalf of AmCham Vietnam, based here in Ho Chi Minh City, I want to extend a very warm welcome to HCMC and thank you for making time to meet with us soon after your arrival in country. Maybe just after your 30-day plan, but I think Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry’s visit may have interfered with your initial plans. I know some including our Chair Winnie Wong – who wishes she could be here today - had a brief sighting last week. We are sorry Consul General Marie Damour is not here with us tonight, but we are happy to have her back in HCMC and delighted that Deputy Principal Officer Robert Greenan could join tonight. And we want to thank you for the fantastic team throughout the U.S. Mission, including our two Honorary Board Liaisons, Stephen Jacques and Alex Tatsis, who are key partners in supporting the American business community here in HCMC.

AmCham has longstanding roots in Vietnam. In 1994, even before normalization, a few young American entrepreneurs started AmCham operations informally in both HCMC and Hanoi. We received our license as AmCham Vietnam here in HCMC in 1998, AmCham Hanoi was approved as a branch in 2001, and more recently we established an AmCham Da Nang branch in 2020 to support our members in Central Vietnam. Our mission has remained consistent over the years – to promote trade and investment between the United States and Vietnam and serve as the voice of American business in Vietnam.

While some of our original founder/entrepreneurs are still in Vietnam and active in AmCham, two here today (Fred Burke and Mark Gillin), our membership has grown significantly over the years and now represents many iconic MNCs, international law firms and consulting companies, private equity and venture capital funds, leading universities, and innovative startups. We now have over 650 corporate and 250 individual members throughout the country, about 3/4 in HCMC and the Southern and Central economic region, and the other 1/4 with AmCham Hanoi.

Together, we represent billions of dollars of investment, millions of indirect and tens of thousands of direct jobs, and a significant portion of Vietnam’s tax revenues and exports. Our actual investment in Vietnam remains understated in official statistics, since much of it comes indirectly, but it is real and growing – as you saw in your visit last week to First Solar, and hopefully will see soon in visits to Intel, Suntory Pepsico, and other AmCham member companies.

In HCMC, our vision is to be the most influential, strategic, and dynamic business association in Vietnam, that drives innovation and sustainable growth, and helps our members succeed. We welcome American, Vietnamese, and international companies that share our interest in enabling a fair, transparent, predictable, and efficient regulatory environment that values innovation. We are committed to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and Environment, Social, and Governance goals and aim to be a community that people want to join. We are dedicated to strengthening our own corporate governance and coordination as a Chamber to ensure we are representing our member’s interests effectively.

I personally serve on both the Board in HCMC and Hanoi, as does Citi’s RamC, and we are doing our best in these dual roles to strengthen AmCham’s internal collaboration and coordination.

Ambassador Knapper, we know you are a long-term Asia hand, having served multiple tours in the region including as Chargé d’Affaires in Seoul, most recently as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Japan and Korea, and earlier as Political Counselor in Hanoi. We also know you are a gifted linquist who speaks fluent Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese, an impressive feat!

AmCham has been a longstanding supporter of the bilateral relationship. We look forward to learning more about your key priorities as Ambassador and working with you and your team throughout your tour in Vietnam to deepen and strengthen our bilateral partnership -- and partner strategically on issues of common concern – in our case the trade and investment partnership. In this regard, we also welcome your thoughts on the upcoming US-ASEAN Summit later this month and prospects for a more strategic U.S. Vietnam comprehensive partnership.

**Part 2 – Strategic Priorities – Executive Director Mary Tarnowka**

***Strengthening our Bilateral Trade and Investment Partnership.*** AmCham’s overall objective is laying the groundwork for an eventual Free Trade Agreement, ideally the United States joining the CPTPP. Since that does not appear possible in the near-term, we will support other actions to strengthen trade and investment ties, whether under the Indo Pacific Economic Framework, including on the Digital Economy and Supply Chain Resiliency, or bilaterally, including on Cybersecurity and the Digital Economy, possibly under an expanded Trade and Investment Framework Agreement.

***Partnering through the Pandemic/Maintaining Supply Chains.*** We value the partnerships through the pandemic with both the U.S. and Vietnamese governments which have enabled the continuity of supply chains and the rebound now underway. Together with Ambassador Ngoc and our colleagues at the U.S. Mission in Vietnam, we were strong advocates for U.S. vaccine donations to Vietnam and donors to support COVID relief and recovery. We are proud of and grateful for the U.S. government’s 24.6 million vaccine donations to date. We also are deeply grateful for the Vietnamese government’s impressive vaccine roll-out which is protecting lives and livelihoods, enabling us to live safely with the virus.

COVID has gone from being a macro issue to a micro issue, as we all deal with how many are home from work on a given day. We have a very active Healthcare Committee that is eager to partner to promote health and wellness in Vietnam. Our manufacturing members are now most worried about the overall regulatory environment, obtaining approvals for maintaining and expanding operations, and the challenges of getting raw materials or the shipping costs and delays they experience when exporting to export. Those who cater to the local and growing consumer market are thrilled to see demand returning.

***Enabling a Safe Reopening for Foreign Travel and Tourism.*** We welcome the steps that have been taken already to streamline requirements for foreign travel, enabling the return of investors (like GenX’s Kris Karafa here with us today), and look forward to a safe reopening of the Tourism and Hospitality sector on March 15. We are excited about the opportunities to expand tourism and business travel with new direct flights to the United States by Vietnam and Bamboo airlines.

***Building Infrastructure for Sustainable Development.*** Our members want to partner to support development of ports, airports, industrial parks and logistics operations in Vietnam to support growing FDI. Our members in the Energy Sector want to partner to support Vietnam’s COP 26 climate change commitments and promote energy security and clean energy goals. Our finance and technology companies want to partner on cybersecurity and creating a digital infrastructure ecosystem that enables Vietnam to drive innovation and become a regional and global leader in the digital economy and IR 4.0.

***Developing a Globally Competitive Workforce.*** AmCham is committed to partnering to develop a globally competitive workforce in Vietnam, both through study in the United States, and here in Vietnam. Our members represent some of the top international K-12 schools in HCMC and central Vietnam, as well as leading universities like FUV and ASU. We are committed to addressing skills gaps and promoting lifelong learning.

I hope it is clear AmCham wants to be a key strategic partner to the governments of both Vietnam and the United States, and to you personally in your new role as Ambassador. I will turn now to a few of our member companies, who will share their sectoral perspectives.

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Representatives from Pfizer, Intel, AES, First Solar, Citi, Sunnyworld Group shared their views.