

United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations

WASHINGTON, DC

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Contact:
adam_sharon@foreign.senate.gov

Chairman Menendez Opening Remarks at Nomination Hearing

WASHINGTON, DC – U.S. Sen. Robert Menendez (D-NJ), Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, delivered the below statement, as prepared for delivery, at today's nomination hearing:

"Today, as we approach the holiday recess, we have seven well-qualified nominees for the Committee's consideration.

These nominees, if confirmed, will hold some of the most important positions in the State Department and in this hemisphere:

We are considering nominees for the two top economic positions in the State Department at a time when our country is pursuing the most ambitious trade agenda in generations, our companies and workers are facing tougher competition than ever before, the global energy landscape is changing radically, and at a time when the world faces serious environmental threats:

Nominees who will oversee State's Counter-Terrorism and Political Military Affairs – at a time when the State Department's role in counter-terrorism diplomacy is more important than ever and nominees who will serve as our Ambassadors to three of our most important allies in this hemisphere, Canada, Chile, and Colombia.

Our first panelists are Catherine Novelli, nominated to be Under Secretary of State for Economic Growth, Energy, and the Environment.

Ms. Novelli has had a distinguished and highly successful career in both the public and private sectors, and has shown a deep personal commitment to public service over several decades.

Former Assistant U.S. Trade Representative for Europe & the Mediterranean, Ms. Novelli coordinated U.S. trade and investment policy for the over 65 countries of Western Europe, Central Europe, Russia, the CIS, the Middle East and Northern Africa. In that position, and in prior roles at USTR, she has taken a leading role in many of the most important U.S. trade negotiations in Europe, Russia, the Middle East, and North Africa of the last 25 years.

Most recently she has served as the Vice President of Worldwide Government Affairs at Apple, heading a multinational team responsible for Apple's federal, international, and state and local government relations and public policy.

Charles Rivkin has been nominated as Assistant Secretary of State for Economic and Business Affairs.

Mr. Rivkin has appeared before our committee before, and has served for the last four years as the United States Ambassador to France and Monaco.

Ambassador Rivkin is most well-known as President and CEO of award-winning entertainment companies including The Jim Henson Company and Wildbrain.

He has been credited with great success in expanding public diplomacy efforts.

Let me remind you that your opening statements will be included in the record in their entirety, but if you could please summarize them in five minutes we can proceed. And if you have family members with you, please feel free to introduce them.

Our second panelists are Tina Kaidanow to be Coordinator for Counterterrorism with the rank and status of Ambassador at Large.

Ambassador Kaidanow is a career member of the Senior Foreign Service, most recently serving as Deputy Ambassador at the U.S. Embassy in Kabul. She was Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, and previously served as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs.

She has also served as Chief of Mission and Principal Officer at our Embassy in Pristina, Kosovo, and as U.S. Ambassador to Kosovo and served on the National Security Council at the White House and Puneet Talwar, no stranger to this Committee, where he served with distinction as Senior Professional Staff Member and chief advisor on the Middle East for then Chairman and now Vice President Joe Biden.

He has now been nominated to the top diplomatic post of Assistant Secretary of State for Political Military Affairs. Mr. Talwar has been President Obama's top advisor on the Middle East for over four years. Welcome back to the Committee.

Your opening statements will be included in the record in their entirety, but if you could please summarize them in five minutes we can proceed. And if you have family members with you, please feel free to introduce them.

Our third panelists today are Michael Hammer, nominated to be Ambassador to the Republic of Chile; Kevin Whitaker, nominated to be Ambassador to the Republic of Colombia; and Bruce Heyman, nominated as Ambassador to Canada.

Michael Hammer has served as Special Assistant and Senior Director of Press and Communications at the White House and Spokesman for the National Security Council. His foreign service includes assignments in Bolivia, Norway, Iceland, and Denmark, but I want to take a moment to make a couple of special remarks about Mr. Hammer's father, Michael Hammer, Sr.

Public service and a love and commitment to Latin America was a driving force in his father's career as it is for Michael. Michael Hammer Sr. was a career foreign service officer before he joined the AFL-CIO's American Institute for Free Labor Development.

He served in a number of countries in Latin America where he promoted democratic trade unionism and agrarian reform...

Sadly and tragically, Michael's father – and two of his father's colleagues – were gunned down by a right-wing death squad while working in El Salvador in 1981. I want to say that our country owes a debt of gratitude to you and your family.

I also want to recognize two of your father's friends and colleagues who are here today to show their support: Mr. Joe Campos and Mr. Jim Holway.

Gentlemen, welcome and thank you as well for your years of service in advancing the rights of workers throughout the Western Hemisphere.

Our second panelist is Kevin Whitaker, the nominee for Ambassador to the Republic of Colombia. Mr. Whitaker is also a career member of the Senior Foreign Service and is currently Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for South America in the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs.

He was Deputy Chief of Mission at the U.S. Embassy in Venezuela and has served at the State Department as Deputy Director of the Office of Cuban Affairs and at the Office of Mexican Affairs.

Our third panelist is Bruce Heyman, nominated to be Ambassador to Canada. Mr. Heyman is Managing Director of Private Wealth Management at Goldman Sachs.

He is the Business Leaders Council Advisor for the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget and Fix the Debt Coalition, and serves on a number of boards including the Executive Committee for the Chicago Council on Global Affairs.

Welcome to all of you.

Your opening statements will be included in the record in their entirety, but if you could please summarize them in five minutes we can proceed. And if you have family members with you, please feel free to introduce them.”

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