

Testimony of Erik Bethel
Nominee for Ambassador to the Republic of Panama
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
August 5, 2020

Chairman Risch, Ranking Member Menendez, and distinguished Members of the Foreign Relations Committee, it is a great privilege to appear before you today. I am honored that President Trump nominated me to serve as Ambassador to Panama, and I am grateful for the support and confidence of the President and Secretary Pompeo.

Before I begin, I'd like to acknowledge my wife Michelle, my children Ana Cristina, Nicolas, and Francisca ("Panchita"), as well as my mother Diana, an émigré from Cuba and a local hire at the US Embassy Havana in the late 1950s. I would also like to acknowledge my late father Paul Bethel who spent a career in public service with the U.S. Department of State. His legacy is critical to my being here with you today. I'm especially grateful to have my wife Michelle in my life, and for her continued support of my desire to serve our nation.

This is a tremendous privilege and I can think of no greater honor than to serve our country in Panama. I've long aspired to work in the public sector, especially in the capacity of diplomacy. I look forward to sharing my objectives as a nominee and to answering any questions involving my qualifications and experiences.

My most recent experience was representing the United States at the World Bank, a position for which I was confirmed by the Senate in 2018. Previously, for more than two decades, I worked at the intersection of finance and emerging markets. I have lived and worked in both Latin America and Asia, and speak Spanish, Portuguese and Mandarin. If confirmed, I hope to utilize my professional experiences and skills to promote the mission of the State Department and further U.S. interests.

Our relationship with Panama is one of great importance. Panama has been a strong and enduring partner of the United States. Panamanians share our commitment to democracy, human rights and free markets. If confirmed, I will work assiduously with the Panamanian government and people to deepen the relationship with the United States, given our shared history and common destiny. I am also aware – notwithstanding Panama's relative economic and political stability – that there are issues of concern. Cycles of corruption, inequality, and transnational crime pose an enduring challenge to the immense potential of Panama. If confirmed I aspire to foster cooperation and work constructively with the Panamanian government and its people address these issues.

If confirmed as Ambassador to Panama, I would also seek to leverage the capabilities of all U.S. stakeholders so that our capacity can be used most productively to advance our nation's foreign policy interests. Furthermore, I will seek to work with Panama to further U.S. priorities such as safeguarding our significant expatriate population, promoting greater foreign direct investment opportunities for American businesses, and enhancing the integrity of our interconnected financial and banking systems. Finally, if confirmed as Ambassador to Panama, I will work closely with the Members of this Committee and its staff, and with other Members of Congress, to perform my responsibilities as a faithful representative of the American people.

Mr. Chairman, I thank you for this opportunity to appear before you and the other Members of the Committee, and I look forward to your questions.