

Statement of Lynda Blanchard
Nominee to be U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Slovenia
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
August 16, 2018

Thank you Chairman Johnson, Ranking Member Murphy, and distinguished Members of the Committee.

I would also like to thank the Alabama delegation, and particularly Senator Shelby and Senator Jones, for their generous introductions as well as their unfailing support and dedication to our great state.

I am blessed to be here today as the President's nominee to serve as Ambassador to the Republic of Slovenia. I understand and appreciate the immense importance of this post to the First Lady, and I am honored by President Trump's and Secretary Pompeo's faith in me. If confirmed, I will work tirelessly on behalf of the people of the United States to strengthen our relationship with this friend and Ally.

I am here today with my family. I would not be in this position today if not for their unwavering love and support.

Our country has afforded me many opportunities, for which I am ever grateful. I was married at 19, became a mom to a three year-old son six months later, and then earned my degree in my 30s when we were finally able to afford it. I have served in a variety of professional roles, at times just to make ends meet. This includes serving as an orthopedic assistant, business executive, and humanitarian. I have partnered with international business leaders and foreign dignitaries on projects to improve education, decrease poverty, and instill dignity and hope. My family and I have accomplished this through our non-profit organization that provides care to thousands of children across the globe.

As an adoptive parent of children from around the world, I take my role in positively impacting lives both personally and seriously. I look forward to putting my humanitarian passion, business acumen, and large-scale management proficiency to work for our country on the international stage. If confirmed, I am confident that these experiences will make me an effective and reliable representative of the United States and friend to Slovenia.

I realize that upon my arrival in Slovenia, I will not be the expert. In my experience working in different countries abroad, I have found that the first order

of business is to learn from the experts in that country. This includes our embassy officials at post as well as Slovenian government officials, businesspeople, academics, representatives of the media and NGOs, as well as the Slovenian public.

Slovenia has positioned itself as a reliable partner of the United States. However, there are many ways to improve relations between our countries.

Though a young country, Slovenia has emerged as a regional leader in implementing democratic reforms and has played a positive role in the Balkan region. Slovenia has built an impressive reputation for international cooperation, multilateral engagement, and respect for rule of law. As a member of the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Slovenia has supported many American initiatives abroad. Its military has supported our mission in Afghanistan and in Iraq; its government has adopted rigorous measures to combat human trafficking; its institutions safeguard civil liberties and promote human rights domestically and around the globe. These commitments and the values that underpin them are not simple or easy, and they must be recognized and commended.

With 50% of the Slovenian economy under state ownership or control, there exists opportunities for increased investment. In recent years, the government has taken steps to privatize state-owned enterprises. Privatization and deregulation have contributed to improved economic outcomes such as higher wages, increased productivity, and growing consumer demand. Encouraging these reforms and initiatives will help Slovenia attract U.S. companies and investors interested in doing business there. If confirmed, I will relentlessly advocate and use every available tool at my disposal to encourage Slovenians to accelerate reforms to improve bilateral trade and investment opportunities.

Lastly, relations between our two countries must continue to improve through direct outreach to and engagement with the Slovenian people. If confirmed, I will seek to expand and enhance further American standing by directly engaging the Slovenian public. I will build on my predecessor's efforts to foster greater understanding and cooperation by facilitating sustained dialogue between our two peoples.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to answering your questions.