

Statement of David B. Cornstein
U.S. Ambassador to Hungary Nominee
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
May 9, 2018

Chairman Corker, Ranking Member Menendez, and distinguished members of the committee, it is a tremendous honor to appear before you today as President Trump's nominee to be the United States Ambassador to Hungary. For me, it is humbling that the President has confidence in me, hopefully with your approval, to represent the American people in engaging with an important ally in a challenging and changing part of the world.

I would like to thank my loving family who sit behind me today. They represent quality over quantity. There are only four living relatives in my entire family. The girl I married forty-nine years ago, my wonderful wife Sheila. We have two children, one by birth -our son Marc, and one by marriage -our daughter Natasha. They have been married for seventeen years. Last but for sure not least, the best part of this big family, my grandson Danny, who is twelve years old and whom I love beyond belief. I would also like to remember my wonderful parents, Fanny and Irving, and Sheila's parents, Rose and Morris, and the only grandparent I had the privilege of knowing, my Hungarian grandmother Sarah. My family's love and support has been a constant in every phase of my life.

During my career, I have had experience in both government service and the private sector. In the private sector, I started with one leased fine jewelry department in a JC Penney store and forty years later had twelve hundred fine jewelry departments in practically all of the department stores in the United States. Our company also had departments that we operated in England, Germany, and France. When I retired from the company, it was doing well over a billion dollars in revenue and was listed on the NASDAQ exchange. I had accomplished what I had set out to do and was ready to give back some of what I had learned in business to public service.

During the Giuliani administration, I served as Vice Chair of the Economic Development Corporation of New York City, where we negotiated many of the deals that came into the city. During the Pataki administration, I served on the boards of Battery Park City and The Javits Convention Center. I also chaired the New York State Olympic Commission, an eight year labor of love to bring the 2012 Olympics to New York City. During the Bloomberg and Spitzer administrations, I completed my sixteen-year tenure as Chairman of the New York City and New York State Off-Track Betting Corporations. I have been an active member of several philanthropic boards including The Marine Corps Law Enforcement Foundation, The Federal Law Enforcement Officers Foundation, New York Law School and Park East Synagogue, among others. Through these experiences, I learned how to accomplish goals by working with City and State governments and finding common ground between Republicans and Democrats.

I feel confident my past experience in government, business, and philanthropy has prepared me for this important opportunity to lead the U.S. mission in Hungary. If confirmed to serve as U.S. Ambassador, I will work closely with the teams from across the government to strengthen our relationship and focus on the following key areas of our alliance.

First and foremost, I will encourage Hungarian officials at all levels of government to advance American interests and to promote American and democratic values; the freedom of speech, the freedom of press and the freedom of religion are values that cannot and should not be compromised.

I will work closely with the Hungarian government to address collective security concerns. Working together, we can further strengthen communication between our law enforcement and counterterrorism communities and further global security.

I hope to advance our economic interests in Hungary. Under Prime Minister Orban, the country's economy is doing extremely well. In 2017, GDP grew by over four percent and unemployment was under four percent, Hungary lowered its corporate tax rate to nine percent, and since then has received more than 2.5 billion dollars in foreign

investment. Although the United States is Hungary's largest non-European Union investor, there certainly is room for existing American companies doing business in Hungary to do more. We also can have new United States companies sell their services and products to Hungary. There are many Hungarian companies that should have offices in the United States to manufacture and sell their products and services, thereby creating more American jobs. I would work with our Commerce department to achieve these goals.

An extremely important goal I have, if confirmed, is to halt the rise of anti-Semitism in Hungary and Central and Eastern Europe. I am a very proud American Jew and it hurts and disturbs me deeply that this cancer continues to grow. I will work diligently with Jewish organizations, other religious communities, and the Hungarian government to make sure the Jewish community feels safe and secure. I will reach out to the Hungarian people from all walks of life to share this American value of religious freedom, protection, and tolerance for all people.

Finally, if confirmed, I will work diligently to lead our mission team and to work closely with all agencies to deepen our strong alliance with the Hungarian government.

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Ranking Member, and members of the committee, I thank you for the honor of appearing before you today and I look forward to answering your questions.