

**Philip Goldberg Opening Statement**  
**Nominee for United States Ambassador to Colombia**  
**Senate Foreign Relations Committee**  
**June 20, 2019**

Chairman Risch, Ranking Member Menendez, Members of the Committee,

I am greatly honored to appear before you today as the President's nominee to serve as United States Ambassador to Colombia. I appreciate the confidence shown by the President and Secretary Pompeo in asking me to take on this important responsibility.

This is the fourth time I have come before this committee over the past 13 years to ask for your advice and consent to serve in a presidential appointment. I fully understand and deeply appreciate the vital constitutional role played by the Senate – and the Congress as a whole – in the foreign policy process. If confirmed I look forward to working closely with this committee and the entire Congress on our relationship with Colombia.

Thirty years ago I received a miniature flag of Colombia and was informed that I would be assigned to Bogota as a consular and political officer. The country at the time was racked with drug-fueled violence, urban bombings and political assassinations that threatened the future of democratic governance and stability. Through hard work and perseverance, the Colombian government and people – with the assistance of the government and people of the United States – disbanded the drug cartels of that era.

In 2000, I returned to the embassy in Bogota on a temporary assignment to coordinate our contribution to Plan Colombia, an integrated approach to deal with the deteriorating political, economic and security situation in the country. Through Plan Colombia, the Colombian government and people again organized to address the lawlessness and violence associated with insurgent groups and the drug production that sustained them. Kidnapping and homicides were reduced substantially. The Colombian government established a presence in the 32 departments. Drug production and trafficking were reduced. During this period,

the United States stood at the side of the Colombian government and people as they averted the potential collapse of the state.

In both periods, the success of our efforts in Colombia was the result of unwavering support from successive American administrations and bipartisan backing from the U.S. Congress. In my diplomatic career, it has served as a model for how bipartisan foreign policy can achieve results that serve American interests, American values and the American people.

Now, Colombia has entered a challenging but also very hopeful period in its history. Much has been accomplished over the past 20 years but much remains to be done. In 2016, the Colombian government reached a historic peace agreement with the FARC. While implementation of the peace agreement has proven difficult and at times uneven, it represents the opportunity to progress even further in key areas, particularly in extending rule of law and economic development to large swaths of rural Colombia, where human rights abuses and the plight of the displaced have disproportionately impacted the Indigenous and Afro-Colombian populations.

Another urgent task is reducing the coca cultivation and drug production that increased alarmingly from 2013-2017. To reverse this troubling trend, the United States and Colombia agreed in 2018 to a plan that aims to cut cultivation and drug production in half by the end of 2023. Aggressive Colombian efforts under the Duque government have already led to substantially increased eradication of coca plants and interdiction of coca paste. Our assistance continues to be essential in supporting all aspects of the Colombian government's integrated approach.

And then there is Venezuela, where a corrupt and undemocratic regime has driven well over a million desperate refugees and migrants into a generous Colombia – and up to four million to the region – causing social, economic and budgetary challenges that exacerbate existing problems and create whole new ones. Colombia and President Duque have, not surprisingly, been stalwart partners in our diplomatic and humanitarian efforts to restore democracy and provide safe haven to the people of Venezuela.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Menendez,

As the security situation in Colombia has improved over the past 20 years, so too has the economy. Colombia has become an important destination for U.S. trade and investment. Colombian GDP has almost quadrupled in the past 20 years. Foreign investment has increased during that time almost tenfold – and the poverty rate cut from 64% to 28%. Our two-way trade of close to \$30 billion supports over 100,000 U.S. jobs. We are Colombia’s largest trading partner, and in 2018 our bilateral trade in goods created a \$1.2 billion surplus in favor of the United States. Meanwhile, Colombia has entered the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development as an upper middle income country, a step that will lead to greater policy alignment with free market economies. With improved security, tourism has grown, including to places that 30 years ago would have been unthinkable. On a festering trade dispute – the so-called “truck scrappage law” that imposed non-tariff barriers for the sale of new U.S. trucks – the Colombian government is committed to resolving the issue and removing those barriers by the end of June.

I would be honored to return to Colombia to lead the outstanding men and women who serve at our large and multi-faceted mission. If confirmed, I pledge to work with our team to carry out a bilateral agenda rooted in a shared commitment to democracy, security and prosperity.

I look forward to answering your questions.