

**Statement of Bernadette Meehan
Nominee for U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Chile
Senate Foreign Relations Committee**

March 15, 2022

Chairman Cardin, Ranking Member, and Distinguished Members of the Committee, I am deeply honored to appear before you today as the President's nominee to be the U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Chile. I am grateful to President Biden and Secretary Blinken for the confidence they have placed in me.

I want to thank my husband, Evan, my parents Terry and Joe, and my sister Liz for their love and support, and note how much we love and miss my brother Chris, who passed away last summer. I'd also like to express my love for my daughter Milly, who at three years old is the light of my life and reminds me every day how rewarding and challenging it is to be a working mom.

Over 25 years, I have been fortunate to hold diverse positions in the government, non-profit, and private sectors, but the highest privilege was representing my country for 13 years as a Foreign Service Officer. It would be the honor of my life to return to the service of the American people as a U.S. diplomat. If confirmed, I look forward to working closely with the Congress to advance the interests of the United States in Chile.

While serving in Colombia on my first tour as a Foreign Service Officer, I was abducted and assaulted by armed assailants. During my year serving in Iraq, I witnessed every day the dangers facing Americans – diplomats, military, NGO staff, journalists, and civilians. I am proud to volunteer with a non-profit organization that supports families of Americans taken hostage or wrongfully detained abroad, and the former hostages and detainees when they return home. These experiences ingrained in me the solemn responsibility that the U.S. government has, and if confirmed, the safety of American citizens will be my highest priority.

I first visited Chile in 1992, when I was a 16-year-old high school exchange student in Argentina. On school break, I joined my host family on a bus trip across Patagonia and Magallanes to Punta Arenas, Chile. In the 30 years since, Chile has undergone enormous changes.

The United States' relationship with Chile is one of the strongest, most diverse, and mutually beneficial in the Western Hemisphere, from trade and investment to cooperation in science, technology, and defense, to promoting good governance and human rights throughout the region. For over 30 years, Chile has been a champion of democracy and free and fair trade and a like-minded partner with robust economic, academic, and cultural ties. Chile is also a leader in calling out human rights abuses and undemocratic practices in Cuba, Venezuela, and Nicaragua.

If confirmed, I will build on our shared values to continue this important and productive partnership, with a focus on three areas:

First, supporting Chile's vibrant democracy at a pivotal moment in Chile's history, with free and fair elections last year that set a powerful example for the world and a constitutional assembly that is channeling grievances into a peaceful and democratic reform process. If confirmed, I look forward to working with President Boric and his Administration and offering U.S. support to the Chilean government and civil society organizations as they seek to deliver greater economic opportunity and social equality to the Chilean people.

Second, promoting economic opportunity and trade that will benefit all Americans and Chileans. Our Free Trade Agreement has nearly quadrupled bilateral trade in goods, propelling job creation and economic growth in both countries. The United States is Chile's number one source of foreign direct investment, with \$23 billion in FDI, and the Department of Commerce reports that U.S. exports to Chile support an estimated 87,000 American jobs. I believe Chile's commendable tradition of openness, combined with a responsible investment screening mechanism that considers national security interests, would maintain the security of Chile's critical infrastructure and sensitive technologies, as well as Chile's attractiveness to foreign investors. To protect and expand U.S. business opportunities, if confirmed, I will advocate for a continued business climate in Chile that is based on respect for free trade, transparency, and democratic good governance.

Third, bolstering our already strong collaborations in science, technology, and innovation, including on priorities such as investing in renewable energy and combatting the climate crisis, as well as space, health, and emerging technologies. U.S. investment in scientific infrastructure in Chile exceeds \$1 billion. Chile is a leader on oceans and climate issues and in deploying clean energy, such as solar, wind, and hydrogen. Chile is also a world leader in vaccinating its people against COVID-19. The United States values our partnerships with Chile in these areas, and if confirmed, I will work to expand them.

Thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you today. I look forward to your questions.

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