

Statement of Sarah Margon
Nominee to be Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights,
and Labor
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
September 22, 2021

Thank you, Chairman Menendez, Ranking Member Risch, and distinguished members of this Committee. I am honored to be here today as the nominee for Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor -- and deeply grateful to the President and Secretary Blinken for the trust they've placed in me.

It's a special honor to have Senator Feingold introduce me. Working for him was a master class in principled integrity. As a result of his leadership, I saw how standing up for what's right can be central to effective policy making -- and that reaching across the aisle usually makes for better and stronger policy.

Indeed, America in the world should represent *all* Americans.

I come from a long line of New Yorkers, many of whom rarely left the state, but all of whom believed in the promise of a better life through hard work and a little bit of luck. It is that gritty mindset that enabled my grandfathers, Albert Simon – born Abraham Simonofsky -- and Solomon Mogiliwsky– changed to Margon – to flourish. One owned a pharmacy in Queens. The other became a dentist in Brooklyn.

That same grit could be found in their wives as well. Gertrude Simon labored at her family's light and lampshade business on Brooklyn's Pitkin Avenue and raised two girls, while Florence Margon became a secretary, carrying her family through the Depression, and, in later years, raising my father – all at the same time.

I am deeply grateful for the support of my parents, Arthur and Marilyn Margon; my brother Andrew Margon, and sister-in-law Zoe Stopak-Behr; my husband Sam Chaltain, whose big dreams and generosity are all the cushion one could need; and my sons – 8.5-year-old Izzy and 12-year-old Leo, both of whom give me hope for the curiosity, decency, and empathy of future generations. I am indebted to the women of national security and their wisdom, guidance and community.

Today's chaotic and complicated world requires us to be more firmly tethered to core democratic principles. Rising repression and autocracy require us to be bold in adhering to these values, which as the President has said are inseparable from our national interests and are the foundation of our diplomatic strength. The global assault on basic freedoms also requires us to be intentional about who we support – and why we fight for rights and dignity. This means considering not just policy choices, but also how we engage in countries where those in power are using state institutions, the media, elections, corrupt individuals and entities, and even the pandemic to centralize power undemocratically and to repress their own people.

If confirmed, I will apply these insights to focus on three priorities.

First, I will ensure DRL carries forward an agenda that affirms the United States as a leader *and* a partner in the struggle for democracy, pluralism, and human rights. Our priority must be protecting these foundational values – and making sure governments such as China, Russia, and Cuba – do not succeed in their efforts to undermine international human rights norms and the rules-based order. I will pay special attention to China, whose pernicious attacks on dissent and the rule of law are both on the rise domestically and fast becoming a common export.

Second, I believe we must focus on countering technological and digital threats *as* a human rights issue. For example, as we have seen too often, the promotion of disinformation – from Russia to China to Ethiopia – can have life-and-death implications. Without U.S. leadership and pushback, malign actors will continue abusing technology to enable mass atrocities, undermine democracies and human rights, and harm U.S. interests. Congress has been on the frontlines of this fight, and if confirmed, I look forward to navigating the path together.

Third, I will focus on ensuring human rights is considered as part of U.S. arms sales and security assistance. Advancing democracy and protecting human rights are national security interests, as the President has made clear. If confirmed, I will make sure DRL provides strong analysis to help ensure our decisions on these issues align with our democratic values and our commitments to human rights.

If confirmed, I look forward to a strong working partnership with Congress, so that together we can promote and protect our shared American values and interests around the world. I will endeavor to make good use of the tools you have already developed, from Global Magnitsky sanctions to The Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act to The Corporate Transparency Act. And I will engage allies, the private sector, and civil society to help realize the Biden-Harris administration's goal of centering human rights within U.S. foreign policy.

Thank you for the consideration of my nomination. I look forward to your questions.