

**Testimony of Kelly C. Degnan
Nominee for Ambassador to Georgia
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
Tuesday, October 29, 2019**

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, distinguished members of the Committee,

I am deeply honored to appear before you as President Trump's nominee to serve as the United States Ambassador to Georgia. I am grateful to the President, and Secretary Pompeo, for the confidence they have placed in me. If confirmed, I pledge to work closely with this Committee to advance U.S. values and interests in Georgia, and build on the productive partnership our two countries have developed.

I am also very grateful to my family and friends for their unending support during my 26 years of government service, especially my two sisters, Kim and Kate, and my partner, Doug Morris.

I deeply regret that my parents are not here with me today. They were both originally from small towns – in upstate NY and Colorado – and the core values they lived by – hard work, integrity, respect – continue to guide me.

While I have not yet had a chance to visit the Republic of Georgia, the issues Georgia faces are not new to me. I was serving in Turkey when Russia invaded Georgia in August 2008. A year later, I served at NATO, where Georgia was, and is, a valued partner. Allies reaffirmed just last year NATO's 2008 pledge that Georgia will become a member of NATO. During my three years at NATO, I was very impressed by Georgia's commitment to reforming and strengthening its institutions and military.

I saw that same commitment serving in Afghanistan, where Georgia has deployed one of the largest contingents of forces, fighting with no caveats, and at

the cost of 32 Georgian lives, and 290 wounded. Georgia is still with us there, with almost 900 soldiers deployed to NATO's Resolute Support Mission.

Now, as Foreign Policy Advisor to U.S. Naval Forces Europe, I have seen Georgia's value as a capable, dedicated partner supporting U.S. and NATO efforts in the Black Sea. Just this summer, Georgia conducted a major, multilateral exercise in the Black Sea, involving 14 countries, including the U.S.

Our outstanding security cooperation underscores the fact that Georgia is a key partner, in a geostrategic region of vital importance to the United States. We will continue our steadfast support of Georgia as it seeks NATO membership and economic integration with the EU and the West. Our work together is aimed at strengthening Georgia's capacity to defend its borders, while it builds a prosperous, integrated, democratic society. If confirmed, I look forward to working with the Georgian government on these and other priorities.

The progress Georgia has made hasn't been easy, and in many cases, it has come through U.S. engagement and foreign assistance. Georgia has repaid that investment by taking concrete action, such as increasing parliamentary oversight, and making significant judicial reforms.

There is still much work to be done to hold and build on those achievements, especially in promoting a pluralistic legislature, an independent judiciary, a diverse media, and a vibrant civil society. A continued commitment to the principles of democracy and the rule of law is fundamental to Georgia's continued Euro-Atlantic integration. If confirmed, I look forward to working with all parties in Georgia to ensure free and fair elections next year.

Despite its successes, Georgia still finds itself the target of destabilizing and destructive Russian actions. The United States will continue to be a vocal advocate of Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders. We strongly condemn the ongoing occupation of Georgia's

Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions by Russian forces, and Russia's attempts at "borderization" of the Administrative Boundary Line.

The solution to this conflict, which was created by Russian aggression, is for Russia to fulfill all of its obligations under the 2008 ceasefire agreement, including withdrawing its forces to pre-conflict positions, allowing humanitarian access, and reversing its recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Georgia's tenacity in the face of Russian malign activities is clear from its efforts to create a transparent business environment and spur much-needed economic growth. As Ambassador, I would make it a priority to promote a level playing field, to foster economic development, and create more opportunities for U.S. companies.

If confirmed, I commit to sustaining our efforts to help the Georgian government and people build a resilient society, that values its diverse heritage, and that can withstand the pressures of Russian malign activities and growing Chinese influence.

Thank you again for considering my nomination. If confirmed, I will be a strong representative of our country, and all that it stands for. I look forward to answering your questions.