

Statement of Mr. Gautam A. Rana
Nominee for U.S. Ambassador to the Slovak Republic
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
July 28, 2022

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I am honored to be President Biden's nominee for the position of Ambassador to the Slovak Republic. I am grateful for the trust and confidence the President and Secretary Blinken have placed in me. If confirmed, I pledge to work with you to advance our nation's interests in the Slovak Republic.

I first want to thank my wife, Alexsa Alonzo, and my sons Rohan and Arjun. Alexsa and Rohan are here with me today, and Arjun is watching from home with my wonderful sister-in-law Alicia Alonzo. I am so proud of them all, and I am here before you today because of their love, sacrifice, and support. As part of a diplomatic family that moves every few years, I want to thank them for their own service to our country.

My family and I are the embodiment of the American Dream, thanks to the courage, vision, and sacrifice of my parents, Amrat and Nirmala Rana. When I was only a year old, my father departed his native India and arrived at JFK Airport with \$20 dollars in his pocket. For three years, he worked a succession of minimum wage jobs before his wife and three children joined him in New Jersey. My mother and father made tremendous sacrifices for me, my sisters, and their extended family, believing in their hearts that America truly was the land of opportunity and that their hard work would be rewarded. They stressed to my sisters and me the importance of education and how it could liberate us to pursue our dreams. Thanks to my parents' sacrifices and hard work, and my own journey as an immigrant, I am deeply conscious of how privileged I am to be an American citizen and I am honored to have served and represented my country as a diplomat for the last twenty years.

As a person with a disability, I am also immensely grateful for the opportunities and freedom I have had as an American. I contracted polio as an infant in India and need to use a leg brace and forearm crutches to walk. Between my time in the Peace Corps and Foreign Service, I have lived and worked in eight foreign countries on four continents. Though we still have much to do in the United States to ensure all disabled people can live full and dignified lives, I believe from my own lived experience that we are doing much better than many other countries. I sit before you today as an ambassador-nominee only because my parents had the wisdom and foresight to come to the United States.

As a Foreign Service Officer, I have advanced U.S. interests all over the globe, including in Europe. Next year marks the thirtieth anniversary of Slovakia's independence, and if confirmed, I hope to continue strengthening our already close relationship with the Slovak Republic.

If confirmed, I will have no greater priority than the protection of my Embassy team and our citizens – from ensuring the safety of individual American travelers, to bolstering homeland security through bilateral law enforcement cooperation.

If confirmed, I will also focus the Embassy on three priorities: first, supporting Slovakia's capacity to become a more active and capable partner in strengthening regional and global security and stability. I will also prioritize supporting Slovakia as it stands with Ukraine against Russia's aggression. Slovakia has already provided more than 159 million euros in humanitarian and military aid to Ukraine, including donating an S-300 air defense system at a crucial time. Slovakia remains one of the largest donors to Ukraine measured by aid as a share of GDP, and since 2014, Slovakia has provided a critical link for Ukraine to import natural gas from Europe.

Second, if confirmed, I will also focus on strengthening bilateral trade and investment, including by increasing opportunities for U.S. companies in the Slovak market and for Slovak companies that want to invest in the United States. I will promote U.S. exports, fight for transparency and the rule of law as Slovakia improves its business environment, and press for greater energy diversity and efficiency that will enhance Slovak and European energy security while advancing their climate change goals.

Third, if confirmed, I will also focus on reinforcing Slovakia's commitment to the West and on actively engaging the Slovak public to build support for our shared commitment to democracy and human rights. This includes working with our Slovak partners in addressing disinformation.

As demonstrated by the First Lady's visit to the Slovak Republic in May, the United States continues to deepen our partnership with Slovakia. If confirmed, it would be the honor of my life to lead our outstanding team in Bratislava to advance our country's interests there and across the region.

Mr. Chair, Ranking Member, and Members of the Committee, thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you today. I welcome your questions.