

**John R. Bass**  
**Ambassador-Designate to Georgia**  
**Before the**  
**Senate Foreign Relations Committee**  
**July 28, 2009**

Madam Chair and distinguished Members of the Committee,

I am honored to appear before you today as President Obama's nominee to be the next U.S. Ambassador to Georgia. I am grateful for the confidence and trust placed in me by the President and Secretary Clinton through this nomination. If confirmed, I will do my utmost to advance and defend American interests in Georgia, and look forward to consulting and cooperating closely with the Committee and its staff, and with your colleagues in Congress, in pursuit of those goals.

I have spent most of my career working to advance freedom and security in Europe and Eurasia, in support of the shared objective of every president since WWII: a Europe whole, free and at peace. Those efforts include to the following:

- Working to advance NATO's first round of enlargement to the countries of central Europe;
- Working to develop the Alliance's nascent relationships with Russia and Ukraine;
- Working to reduce conventional arsenals in Europe via the Conventional Forces in Europe treaty; and
- Working to protect the legitimate results of the November 2004 elections in Ukraine which led to the Orange revolution.

I have spent the past year helping Iraqi officials and citizens strengthen their electoral system and work through the difficult challenges of governing.

If confirmed, I will build on the excellent work of my predecessor, Ambassador John Tefft, and of this committee and your colleagues in the Congress, to deepen our partnership with the government and people of Georgia; to support their efforts to build a democratic society, secure in its borders; and to choose freely their political, economic and security arrangements. As Vice President Biden reiterated last [week/month] in Tbilisi, the United States supports the Georgian people on their journey to a better, freer, more democratic Georgia.

Georgia has made remarkable progress since the 2003 Rose Revolution. The Georgian Government has restructured and downsized government ministries, privatized large state-owned entities, prosecuted corruption, and provided 24 hour access to electricity across the country. The World Bank recognized Georgia as the world's fastest-reforming economy in its 2007 "Doing Business" report, and in 2009 ranked it as the world's 15<sup>th</sup> easiest place to do business, in league with Switzerland, Estonia, and Bulgaria.

Its government and people still have much to do to ensure its political system is built around the power of ideas and sustained by free competition between political parties and interests – not by force of personality.

The keys to making the Rose Revolution irrevocable are stronger democratic institutions, political pluralism, vibrant civil society and free media. All of these goals serve American interests. As the President noted in Moscow earlier this month, America has an interest in democratic governments that protect the rights of their people. If confirmed, I will work with this committee, and with Georgia's other friends, to support the Georgian people to realize these goals.

Georgia's long-term security and prosperity depend on the peaceful restoration of its territorial integrity. As the Vice President reaffirmed last [week/month], the U.S. will not recognize the Georgian [regions] of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states, irrespective of the temporary facts created on the ground in those areas. Russia needs to fulfill completely its obligations under the arrangements ending last year's hostilities – arrangements to which it agreed. If I am confirmed, one of my top priorities will be to work for the peaceful restoration of Georgia's territorial integrity.

Georgia is recovering from the devastating effects of Russia's invasion last year, thanks in part to the vision and generosity of this committee, Madam Chair, and your colleagues in the Congress. It is important to note that as generous as the U.S. was, we are not an outlier. The contributions of other countries amounted to over three-quarters of the assistance pledged in the aftermath of the war.

The assistance package pledged by the United States in the aftermath of the conflict is showing important returns:

- Our humanitarian aid helped those displaced by the fighting and averted the need for additional food imports.

- Our direct budget support made a vital difference by maintaining stability of Georgia's banking system and broader economy and by reinforcing the relationship between the Georgian government and the people it serves.
- OPIC financing has helped defuse the economic uncertainty created by the fighting, sustaining direct foreign investment.
- The other elements of our assistance package focused on longer-term developmental assistance, especially to strengthen civil society and ensure its place in Georgian political culture.

Georgia's geography and liberal economic/business climate make it a vital ally in the United States' efforts, supported and reinforced by this committee, to promote the diversification of European energy supplies.

It made important contributions in Iraq, where it once had the third largest contingent in the Coalition, and has offered troops to NATO's mission in Afghanistan.

All of these efforts, taken together, will help Georgia realize its aspirations of joining NATO in the future. It is incumbent on the Georgian government to meet NATO's rigorous standards and contribute to the security of the Euro-Atlantic region, including by taking full advantage of the NATO-Georgia Commission created by our bilateral charter on strategic partnership.

Madam Chair, there are many other issues on the agenda in our relationship, including building on the productive start of the U.S-Georgia Commission. If confirmed, I pledge to do my very best to advance U.S. interests in that country. Thank you very much for considering my nomination, and I look forward to your questions.