

TESTIMONY OF Judith Garber
AMBASSADOR-DESIGNATE TO THE REPUBLIC OF LATVIA
July 28, 2009
SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE

Madam Chair and 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 the Republic of Latvia. I am deeply grateful to President Obama and Secretary Clinton for the confidence and trust they have placed in me. If confirmed, I pledge to maintain that trust by advancing our nation's interests in Latvia while deepening the partnership between our two nations. I also commit myself to work closely with this Committee, your staff, and your Congressional colleagues in pursuing our common objectives and shared agenda.

My appearance before this Committee today is the culmination of more than two decades of public service as an American diplomat. In this privileged role, I have spent most of my adult life working to protect and advance our country's interests. The diverse experiences of my service overseas in Europe, the Middle East, Latin America, and at home in the Department of State, have helped prepare me for the responsibilities and challenges I will face if confirmed for this position.

A key objective of all Presidents since World War II, both Democratic and Republican, has been to work with Europe to realize our shared vision of a Europe whole, free, and at peace. Latvia embodies the success and potential of this vision. Since regaining its independence in 1991, Latvia has embraced democracy and the principles of an open market. In 2004, Latvia officially joined the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

As Latvia has prospered, it has also understood the importance of helping others to achieve security, stability, and greater prosperity. As a valued NATO ally, this nation of 2.2 million has stood shoulder to shoulder with the United States in many parts of the world. In Afghanistan, where Latvia has lost three soldiers, two as recently as this past May, there are over 160 Latvian troops deployed to teams dedicated to provincial reconstruction and operational mentoring of the Afghan National Army. Latvia also provides development assistance and expertise to other countries of the former Soviet Union, helping to build a zone of peace and prosperity throughout Europe. Over the last decade, Latvia has provided both economic assistance and technical expertise to Georgia, Moldova, Belarus, and Ukraine. While its current economic crisis has forced Latvia to sharply curtail its material assistance, it remains committed to sharing the knowledge it gained from the political and economic reforms it undertook to accede to NATO and the EU. If confirmed, I will work to support and encourage

Latvia's continued engagement in support of a Europe whole, free, and at peace and in meeting our collective security objectives in Afghanistan and beyond.

The global economic crisis has hit Latvia hard. Economic uncertainty may aggravate questions of identity and lead some to call for Latvia to turn inward, or slow the pace of needed economic and fiscal reforms and of continued steps toward strengthening the rule of law and increasing transparency. If confirmed, I will work to keep Latvia engaged on common challenges and use my considerable experience working on economic issues to help deepen our bilateral economic ties and Latvia's own pursuit of sustainable economic growth. I will also work with Latvia as it seeks to strengthen its energy security and build new energy links to Europe.

Latvia is working to overcome the legacy of World War II and Soviet rule, particularly in promoting social integration, historical reconciliation, and the rule of law. Latvia was the first of the Baltic nations to reach formal agreement with Russia on delineating their common border, and has established a joint intergovernmental commission with Russia to address bilateral issues. Almost a third of Latvia's residents are ethnic Russians, of whom nearly two thirds are non-citizens. The Latvian Government is working towards a more complete social integration of this minority population. The recent election of an ethnic Russian as the mayor of Riga represents an important opportunity. If confirmed, I hope to use

my position as ambassador to support the government in its outreach efforts not only with the Russian community, but with all minority communities.

Latvia is also making progress in coming to terms with the horrors of the Holocaust but more needs to be done. Although the restitution of Jewish property has been substantially completed, further progress on compensation for communal and heirless private properties is needed. If confirmed, I will work with the Government and the local Jewish community to address Holocaust legacy and property restitution issues.

If confirmed, I pledge to dedicate myself to advancing America's interests in Latvia while promoting America's values and ideals. I thank you again for the honor of appearing before you today. I would be delighted to answer any questions you may have.