

Statement of Laurence J. Socha
Nominee for U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of The Gambia
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
July 16, 2026

Chairman McCormick, Ranking Member Rosen, and distinguished Members of the Committee, I am grateful to appear before you today. I am deeply honored by President Trump's nomination and the confidence of Secretary Rubio to serve as the United States Ambassador to the Republic of The Gambia. If confirmed, I pledge to advance American interests, strengthen our bilateral partnership, and represent the values that define our nation.

I am here today because of the hard work of a kid who minded his father's store in Chicopee, Massachusetts during the Great Depression, because an Italian American family escaped Mussolini's fascism in 1930, and because a nurse and pharmacist fell in love at a hospital in Chicago 50 years ago. My grandparents and parents taught me the value of integrity and the importance of hard work. Every day of their lives, they supported the dreams of my brother, sister, and me. Together with my wife, Denice, who I am grateful said yes to this journey 15 years ago, I try to follow their example for our boys, Santiago and Marcelo. With their mom, they are here today to watch their dad participate in the constitutional process of the country that gave the Stachowiczses, the Bonavitas, and the Sochas the home we all love so much.

I have been privileged to represent the United States in 12 countries across four continents, dedicating a third of my career to strengthening U.S. relationships in Africa. I have spent most of that career sharing the American story with foreign audiences, alongside outstanding members of the Foreign Service and our interagency colleagues. While I am clear-eyed about the security challenges I saw in Nigeria and Somalia, the majority of African voices I heard were positive regarding Africa's future.

The Gambia stands as an example of democratic transformation in West Africa. In 2016, after 22 years of authoritarian rule, the Gambian people courageously voted for change and achieved the country's first democratic transfer of power since independence. In a region often challenged by instability, violent extremism, and democratic backsliding, The Gambia's progress serves as a positive example of what is possible.

If confirmed, I will have no higher priority in The Gambia than the safety and security of U.S. citizens. This includes our Mission team doing extraordinary work in Banjul and the Peace Corps volunteers who serve in communities across the country. Their dedication and professionalism, paired with that of our talented locally employed staff, advance American interests every day.

I would also work to deepen our economic partnerships. The Gambia's strategic location on the Atlantic coast, its deep-water harbor, and river present significant opportunities for American investment. I would advocate for American businesses in The Gambia, work to remove non-tariff barriers, and promote an environment where American enterprise can flourish, create jobs, and advance prosperity for both our countries.

In addition, I would prioritize American security interests. The Gambia has proven itself a reliable partner in combating transnational threats. It contributes troops to peacekeeping missions and has consistently supported U.S. positions in international fora. If confirmed, I would work with The Gambia to strengthen its security and encourage The Gambia to assume an increasingly active role in advancing regional peace and security.

The challenges facing The Gambia are significant. Poverty remains widespread. Youth unemployment drives irregular migration to Europe and the United States. The Gambian government faces severe resource constraints. These challenges create vulnerabilities that our strategic competitors, particularly China, are eager to exploit. The United States supports The Gambia because we believe in the Gambian people's right to determine their own future, to live in dignity and freedom, and to build prosperity through democratic governance and economic opportunity. If confirmed, that is the partnership I seek to advance.

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to your questions.