Opening Statement of Paul Watzlavick
Nominee for U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Suriname
U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
November 10, 2026

Chairman Risch, Ranking Member Shaheen, and distinguished Members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.

As a Career Member of the Senior Foreign Service, I am genuinely honored to have been entrusted by President Trump and Secretary Rubio with this nomination to be U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Suriname. I am also grateful for the many years of encouragement that my family, friends, and colleagues who join me here in person – and elsewhere today – have given me. I particularly want to thank my wife, Dawn, who began this journey with me in 1999, serving 20 years in the State Department before retiring, and my two adult children, Sarah and Owen, who were with us most of my career and have given me great joy. I am truly blessed by their support.

I also want to recognize my late parents and grandparents – all from small towns in Texas – for the wonderful foundation they provided me. I was very fortunate to be raised in a loving and supportive environment, where the values of education, hard work, and treating people with respect were ingrained in me from an early age. This has served me well during my diplomatic career, as I have seen that around the world, if you approach others with the idea that we should be working to achieve common interests – security, economic prosperity, and a better life for the next generation – people often realize how good a friend the United States can be to them.

If confirmed, I will focus my efforts on strengthening the United States-Suriname relationship and advancing American interests and the Administration's vision for a safer and more prosperous Western Hemisphere. In addition, I commit to working closely with Congress to advance our interests in Suriname, a country with which the United States celebrated 50 years of bilateral relations last year.

My utmost priority, if confirmed, will be the protection of American citizens. I will ensure our embassy maintains robust consular services, emergency preparedness, and close coordination with host nation authorities to safeguard American lives and interests.

Suriname's growing offshore oil and gas industry is set to transform its economy for generations and offers real opportunity for American businesses and workers. If confirmed, I intend to promote U.S. investment, expand our commercial interests, and encourage the kind of transparent, rules-based economic growth that benefits both our countries. Opportunities for U.S. exporters, service companies, and engineering firms are poised to continue expanding as we see increased U.S. activity in the mining and oil sectors. Economic opportunity and security go hand in hand – lasting stability in this region depends not just on safety, but on giving people real jobs and a genuine stake in their own future.

Transnational criminal networks and narcoterrorists pose one of the most pressing security challenges anywhere in the hemisphere today. Given its location along key trafficking routes, Suriname has real potential as a strategic partner to confront these threats together with our regional allies. The United States and Suriname have worked together to enhance the security and prosperity of the region under the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative, which aims to strengthen the country's capacity to disrupt illicit trafficking and transnational crime. If confirmed, I will work to deepen our law enforcement and defense cooperation with Suriname, strengthening both our nations' security.

Finally, if confirmed, I am committed to working with the Government of Suriname to strengthen border security and migration cooperation to ensure that U.S. engagement with Suriname serves our national interests and reinforces our nation's right to control its own borders, resources, and decision-making.

Chairman Risch, Ranking Member Shaheen and distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you again for this opportunity, and I look forward to your questions.