

**Opening Statement of Darryl Nirenberg
Nominee for U.S. Ambassador to Romania
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
November 19, 2025**

Chairman Risch, Ranking Member Shaheen, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today as President Trump's nominee to be the U.S. Ambassador to Romania.

I am grateful to President Trump and to Secretary Rubio for placing their confidence in me, and, if confirmed, giving me the opportunity to fulfill my dream of serving our country overseas.

It is a particular honor to be before this Committee on whose staff I served during a pivotal time in our history. It was the experience of a lifetime and a privilege for which I will always be grateful.

It gave me a unique and foundational window into how foreign policy is made and provided me with an appreciation for the role our Founding Fathers set forth for the Senate in its conduct.

With me today are my wife, Lori, our son, Drew, and our daughter, Kelly. I am grateful for their support.

Lori was also a Senate staffer. We met right next door in the Hart Building. Lori worked for the Judiciary Committee and for Senators Paul Laxalt, Gordon Humphrey and John Warner.

Her father, the late Chic Hecht, served as Senator from Nevada. He was later approved by this Committee and confirmed by the Senate as Ambassador to the Bahamas. He saw that an assignment as a highlight of his career.

Our son, Drew, is the third generation to work in the Senate. He served as Communications Advisor to Senator Rob Portman, who, Senators will recall, served on this Committee.

Our daughter Kelly lives in Chicago, where she works in Public Relations. She, like me, is a proud graduate of Colgate University. She is also a national award-winning amateur photographer.

Mr. Chairman, permit me a moment to share my background. I grew up in a small, picturesque town at the foot of the Catskill Mountains in Upstate New York. My father suffered a heart attack when I was a boy. He survived, but it left me having to pay for my education – and many of my non-essentials.

So, I started a paper route, mowed lawns in the summers and shoveled sidewalks in the winter. I worked in a convenience store, in a grocery store and in our local high school, and bussed tables at a Catskills resort. During college, I started a business selling premium candies, and during a semester here in DC, waited tables at the Key Bridge Marriott.

My high school mentor helped get me into Colgate University, his alma mater. That is where I discovered my passion for foreign policy, starting during my first January term. That is when I participated in an international relations program here in DC led by a professor who had been head of policy planning at the State Department.

The day I graduated, I got in my old clunker, drove to DC, got my job back waiting tables in the evening at the Marriott, and within days, I was hired onto the staff of Senator S.I. Hayakawa.

Upon the Senator's retirement, I joined the staff of the Senate Agriculture Committee, during which time I earned my law degree at night at George Washington University.

Upon receiving my degree, I became Minority Counsel, and later Deputy Staff Director, to this Committee. I then served as Chief of Staff and Legislative Director to Senator Jesse Helms, including when he chaired this Committee.

Since leaving the Hill, I have practiced law first at Patton Boggs, and now at Steptoe, and have had the privilege of having as clients some of our nation's great entrepreneurs.

No one gets where they are without receiving a hand along the way. In addition to President Trump and Secretary Rubio, I owe a great deal to those who opened doors for me here on Capitol Hill.

I am also indebted to the nine former US Ambassadors, six of whom served in Romania, who took the time to brief me – especially those with whom I have met multiple times. I appreciate their helping prepare me for this hearing, and with the Senate's consent, for serving in Romania.

Mr. Chairman, it is deeply meaningful for me to be nominated to be Ambassador to Romania. My grandparents emigrated to America from Eastern Europe.

And I saw history unfold during my time on the staff of this Committee when the Berlin Wall fell and Romania won its freedom from Communism and embarked on its democratic path. Should I be confirmed, this assignment would bring things full circle for me.

In the decades since, America's relationship with Romania has grown into a stable and strategic alliance with cooperation across a range of vital areas.

The Alabama Air National Guard has a long-standing and multifaceted partnership with Romania, established through the U.S. National Guard State Partnership Program more than three decades ago.

Romania occupies a strategic position bordering Ukraine, and on the Black Sea – which is so important to commerce between East and West and the flow of grain to the rest of the world. One of our previous ambassadors to the country referred to it as the strategic hinge where Europe and Asia meet.

And, Romania has great potential when it comes to energy and critical mineral resources. American firms are participating in the development of these resources -- which will help reduce Europe's dependence on Russia.

If confirmed, I commit to advance President Trump's America First Agenda and work to make America stronger, safer and more prosperous. I will strengthen ties with Romania, support our military partnership, and promote and defend American's economic and security interests.

Specifically, I will first focus on the fundamentals of embassy operations, chief among them, ensuring the safety and security of Americans in Romania – including those serving there and their families, and the many who visit annually.

Having worked for Senators who put constituent service first, I have an appreciation for this primary responsibility. It is fulfilling work and what the American taxpayer expects.

My time working in the Senate, and in managing teams there and in private practice, also gave me an understanding of the need for, and elements of, teamwork where all pull in the same direction in support of a mission.

Second, if confirmed, I will work to deepen our military and security partnership.

Romania is a strong NATO Ally. It sets an example through its commitment to defense spending and support for Alliance activities. Romania currently spends 2.28 percent of GDP on defense and at the NATO summit earlier this year, pledged to raise that to five percent by 2035. Romania hosts several multinational NATO headquarters and the U.S. Aegis Ashore site under NATO's Ballistic Missile Defense System.

Romania has committed \$16 billion to U.S. foreign military sales, including an order last year for F-35s. It has devoted resources to co-production efforts with U.S. companies to contribute to European burden-sharing and NATO readiness.

If confirmed, I will work to advance this cooperation with the goal of furthering our defense partnership for years to come.

Romania is a strong law enforcement partner, helping detect threats and stop terrorists and other bad actors before they get to our shores.

Consistent with the tenets set forth by Secretary Rubio, if confirmed, I will work cooperatively with Romania and colleagues across the U.S. government to build on this partnership with the goal of ensuring we continue to keep America safe.

Third, if confirmed, I will focus on strengthening our trade and investment relationship with Romania.

Commercial diplomacy is rightfully a core element of President Trump's America First agenda. I will work to promote U.S. exports, including in the agricultural sector, to help reduce our \$2.5 billion trade deficit.

I will use what I have learned from decades of experience inside and outside government to advocate on behalf of American companies. And I will encourage investments that create jobs in the United States.

The United States is the fourth largest investor in Romania, with contracts and investments totaling hundreds of millions of dollars. I will assist American companies in identifying and securing more investment opportunities in Romania with a focus on those that result in more jobs for Americans. And I will urge the

Romanian government to maintain the economic climate necessary to attract such investment.

I will particularly focus on development of Romania's energy resources, which will reduce Europe's dependence on Russia.

The Neptun Deep Gas Field in the Black Sea is scheduled to start production in 2027 and will solidify Romania's place as the largest gas producer in the EU.

Romania's nuclear reactor in Cernavodă is set to be refurbished by 2030, with two new reactors projected to come online a few years after. And Romania is slated to be the first member of the EU to deploy small modular reactors and will do so with U.S. technology.

In addition to the three priorities, if confirmed, I will work to build on one of our most important linkages – our people-to-people ties. Romania has long looked favorably towards the United States, and Romanian public sentiment towards the United States is among the most positive in Europe.

We share core beliefs in the importance of faith and family. We have strong work ethics that put a premium on getting the job done, and we both take great pride in our democracies and our countries' rich heritages and achievements.

Numerous governmental and private sector leaders in Romania have first-hand experience with our country gained through academic and professional exchanges. This has created relationships, understanding and an appreciation for our values that has helped build ties between our countries over decades.

Now is the time to take steps focused on future generations to solidify this relationship for the long-term.

Should I be confirmed, my tenure will coincide with our nation's 250th anniversary. This will provide a unique opportunity to celebrate and highlight the democratic principles upon which our nation was founded and thrives.

In my engagements, whether public or private, I will underscore our country's commitment to protecting and promoting fundamental freedoms, especially freedom of expression.

I will also work to ensure American perspectives are well represented; the elements of President Trump's America First agenda are well known; and any malign propaganda vigorously countered.

This nomination is the honor of a lifetime, for which I am grateful to President Trump and to Secretary Rubio. Should I be confirmed, I pledge to be a strong advocate for American interests, and a dedicated representative of President Trump and the American people.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Shaheen, and Members of the Committee. Thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you today. I look forward to answering your questions, and if confirmed, working closely with the Committee to strengthen our relationship with Romania and promote America's national interests.