

Statement of Michael J. Fitzpatrick
Ambassador-Nominee to Ecuador
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
March 12, 2019

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, distinguished members of the committee, it is an honor to appear before you today as the President's nominee for U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Ecuador.

I would like to recognize some members of my family, without whose strong and continuing support I likely would not be here today. First, my wife, Silvana. Although our daughter, Michelle, cannot be here, she is watching the webcast. I would like to recognize them both for their repeated personal sacrifices as they too have so proudly served our nation as representatives abroad. My brother, John, and my sister-in-law, Ellen, also join us here today.

Mr. Chairman, during my thirty-three years with the State Department – first as a Presidential Management Fellow, then as a career Civil Servant, and now for three decades as a commissioned Foreign Service Officer – I have been honored to represent the United States while living on five continents, and TDY service to a sixth. I have had the opportunity to travel to scores of nations around the world. Nevertheless, it is Latin America where my career began. Latin America has been a constant in my life. And it is Latin America that has been the focus of my most recent assignments: As *Chargé d'Affaires, a.i.* and Deputy Chief of Mission in Lima, Peru; as the Interim United States Representative to the Organization of American States; and most recently, as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for the Andes, Brazil and the Southern Cone. I believe this long-standing involvement and understanding will be of great value to me, if confirmed, both in leading our Missions in Guayaquil and Quito, and in partnering with the government of Ecuador, under the leadership of President Moreno.

Since his inauguration in 2017, President Moreno has: repeatedly advanced efforts to enhance democratic rights and practices, notably press freedom; launched an anti-corruption campaign that resulted in the imprisonment of his own Vice President; repealed some authoritarian decrees targeting civil society; and,

welcomed greater international cooperation, including from the United States, in addressing complex international challenges.

The United States thus has a distinct opportunity now to advance our relationship with both the government and people of Ecuador, for us to rebuild a genuine partnership in pursuit of shared interests. Given that this has not always been the case, it is incumbent upon us, I believe, not to squander this occasion. Chief among the many opportunities, in my mind, as we seek to build a stronger bilateral compact are: Democracy, Prosperity, and Security.

Let me speak to each of those, starting with the last, though hardly the least, of these three: Security.

Security

Indeed, the first responsibility of any U.S. Ambassador must be to ensure the safety and security of our citizens. Ecuador is, with good reason, an increasingly attractive destination for Americans, be they tourists, students, entrepreneurs, or retirees. I assure you that, if confirmed, I will continue to prioritize investments and activities that protect all of our personnel and citizens in Ecuador.

Ecuador also now faces significant challenges from narco-trafficking and transnational crime. Mexican cartels, seeking to transit cocaine from the neighboring nations of Peru and Colombia to the United States and world markets, have expanded their presence in Ecuador. Former members of the FARC launched multiple armed attacks over the last year along Ecuador's common border with Colombia. The Government of Ecuador has demonstrated a clear desire to partner with the United States, Colombia, Peru, and Mexico to combat transnational organized crime and strengthen its security, prosecutorial and judicial institutions. We should respond positively, cooperating with Ecuador – particularly through capacity-building efforts and the sharing of best practices – in their efforts to fortify public institutions, reduce international crime and enhance border protection while safeguarding legitimate travel.

Democracy

A presidentially supported public referendum on constitutional reforms won handily last year. Among other steps, this re-introduced a two-term limit to the

presidency. Although this represents a step towards deeper democratization, persistent social and fiscal challenges will continue to weigh on governance.

The United States should continue to promote the rule of law and the freedom of speech and association; this will help revitalize civil society, restore confidence in national institutions and foster greater support for shared values and policies. We must also support Ecuador in its efforts to tend to the significant number of Colombian, and increasingly, Venezuelan, refugees and migrants, with emphasis on protecting the rights of the most vulnerable among them.

Prosperity

External economic shocks have contributed to the ousting of three democratically elected presidents of Ecuador since the late 1990s. While record-high oil prices helped underwrite the public largesse of President Moreno's immediate predecessor, fate has not so blessed his own administration. Yet his government gains international support for its steps to increase transparency, strengthen fiscal institutions and re-establish a competitive private-sector driven economy. I commit to work, if confirmed, with both the public and private sectors to address business environment deficiencies. Together, we can reduce trade barriers, promote investor-friendly practices, increase infrastructure investments and reduce corruption while providing greater employment opportunities.

In sum, Mr. Chairman, if confirmed, I will work in Ecuador to advance U.S. values and interests. That begins with pursuing a shared vision of good governance, transparent economic development, free and fair commerce, and a fair, open and secure environment in which all may pursue their individual, God-given talents.

I would like to express my appreciation to this Committee and its members for your support for U.S. engagement with Ecuador at this important time in our countries' relationship -- and for your consideration of my nomination. Thank you Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and Members of the Committee. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.