

Statement of Daniel Rosenblum
Nominee to be U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Uzbekistan
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
August 23, 2018

Chairman Young, Ranking Member Merkley, Members of the Committee, I'm honored to be here today as the President's nominee for U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Uzbekistan.

The life journey that led to my sitting at this table started in Middleburg Heights, Ohio, a suburb of Cleveland, where I had the good fortune to be the son of Louis and Evelyn Rosenblum. My mother was a teacher and religious school principal, who modelled basic values that I have strived, if not always succeeded, to live up to: show respect to everyone, practice empathy, and be tolerant of beliefs and backgrounds different from your own. She and my father also passed on to me their love of learning and, especially, a fascination with history. I should add that growing up as an obsessive fan of the Cleveland Indians, Browns and Cavaliers instilled in me some other useful qualities: patience, loyalty, and a high threshold for pain!

My father was a chemist who worked at NASA for over 30 years, testing fuels for the rockets that took the first Americans into space and later developing battery and solar cell technology for use on earth. When he wasn't being a "rocket scientist," my dad was also a human rights activist. In the early 1960's, he and a few friends at his synagogue organized the Cleveland Council on Soviet Anti-Semitism, which sought to educate the American public about the plight of Jews in the Soviet Union, who couldn't freely practice their religion there, and weren't even permitted to emigrate in order to do so. His group provided moral and material support to Jews and other oppressed minorities living under Soviet Communism, and eventually joined with like-minded grassroots groups across the U.S. to create the Union of Councils for Soviet Jews. By the 1970s the campaign Lou Rosenblum and a handful of others started had become a major social and political movement, leading to passage of the so-called Jackson-Vanik amendment and eventually to mass emigration of Soviet Jews and other religious minorities to Israel and the United States.

Although very young while all this was happening, I was deeply inspired by my father's public service and tireless civic activism, and motivated to learn more about this far-away country that occupied so much of his time and

attention. No doubt this influenced my decision to study Russian history, language and literature as an undergraduate, and later to pursue a Master's degree in Soviet Studies.

In between my academic studies, I was extremely fortunate to get another kind of education, when I spent four years in this great institution, the United States Senate, learning from one of the most brilliant and hard-working public servants I have ever known: Senator Carl Levin of Michigan. Senator Levin took this chamber's oversight role very seriously, and taught me to appreciate the wisdom of our founding fathers when they created a co-equal legislative branch as an indispensable part of our system of checks and balances. As a result, during the more than two decades I have been sitting on the "other side of the table" at the State Department, I have relished opportunities to work with Congress to further U.S. foreign policy goals in a collaborative spirit. And in that spirit, if confirmed, I look forward to working together with the Members of this Committee to promote U.S. interests and values in our relationship with Uzbekistan.

On the verge of joining the Foreign Service in 1991, I opted instead to work for an NGO involved in supporting labor rights in the post-Communist countries of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. Traveling all over the region and meeting coal miners, air traffic controllers, textile workers, and teachers, I got a ground level view of the disruptive economic and social changes occurring in those societies and how they were affecting ordinary workers. I also witnessed the mixed record of international assistance in helping these countries navigate the transition away from Communism and towards free market democracy. Beginning in 1997, I was able to bring that experience to the State Department, where I spent many years coordinating U.S. foreign aid to the newly independent countries of the former Soviet Union and Western Balkans. Since 2014, I have focused on developing policy towards and managing diplomatic relations with the countries of Central Asia, including Uzbekistan.

When my friends and family heard the news about my nomination, their two most frequent questions were: 1. can you show me where Uzbekistan is on a map? And 2. why does the U.S. care what happens there? I was already quite used to answering versions of these questions from my four years as Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Bureau for South and Central Asian Affairs. My answer is straightforward, and has two parts.

First, we care because what happens in Uzbekistan and the rest of Central Asia directly affects the safety and security of the United States and its citizens. We want these countries to develop as stable, prosperous, human rights-respecting and friendly partners because if they don't, we will eventually pay the price here at home. We saw what happened in Afghanistan in the 1990s; we have seen what can happen in other parts of the world when we disengage and ignore the root causes of instability. A stable and secure Uzbekistan is very much an American interest.

Second, our country has been well served over the past two and a half decades by a bipartisan policy of supporting the sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity of the independent states that emerged from the collapse of Communism in Central and Eastern Europe. It is not in our long-term security or economic interests for a single power to dominate this region. We are much better off having mutually beneficial relations with a diverse group of sovereign countries, both big and small, in Eurasia and Central Asia. And I have personally seen how much the government and people of Uzbekistan appreciate America's steadfast support for their sovereignty since 1991, when we were the very first country to recognize their independence. A fully sovereign Uzbekistan, free to align itself internationally as it sees fit, is very much an American interest.

Uzbekistan currently is going through an exciting phase in its history as an independent nation. Over the past two years, President Mirziyoyev -- who visited Washington a few months ago and met with the President, Cabinet officials, members of Congress, and the U.S. business community -- has launched a series of sweeping reforms aimed at modernizing Uzbekistan's economy, improving its citizens' quality of life, and making its government more accountable. His policies have led to a marked, though incomplete, improvement in Uzbekistan's human rights record. Approximately 40 prisoners of conscience have been released, including all high-profile human rights activists and journalists. In addition, restrictions on civil society and the media are being loosened, incidences of forced labor in the annual cotton harvest have been reduced, child labor virtually eliminated, and important first steps have been made to expand religious freedom, such as the official registration of a Christian community last month.

President Mirziyoyev has also reoriented Uzbekistan's foreign policy by vastly improving relations with its Central Asian neighbors and actively supporting regional cooperation, including through the C5+1 format.

Uzbekistan has begun to play a prominent role in the search for reconciliation in neighboring Afghanistan and integrating Afghanistan into the Central Asian regional economic and political architecture, and if confirmed, I look forward to supporting those efforts, while ensuring they are well coordinated with international frameworks for a settlement of the Afghanistan conflict.

If confirmed by the Senate, my number one priority will be ensuring the safety and security of my Embassy team, as well as any and all American citizens in Uzbekistan. Beyond that, I will make it my priority to:

1. Deepen our partnership with Uzbekistan in pursuit of our shared security goals in the region. This includes not only working together to stabilize Afghanistan, but also achieving a new level of cooperation between our militaries and other security and law enforcement agencies in order to counter extremists, transnational criminals, proliferation threats and traffickers of narcotics and persons.
2. Support implementation of the sweeping reforms the government of Uzbekistan has initiated. Through our assistance programs, we are already providing a boost to reforms in the judicial sector, agriculture, and health care. We can and will do more to support nascent economic liberalization.
3. Help U.S. companies take full advantage of opportunities for sales and investments that will emerge as Uzbekistan makes it easier for both domestic and foreign companies to do business.
4. Continue our intensive focus on further improvements in the protection of basic rights and freedoms. We will be supportive of positive trends while offering constructive criticism when warranted, consistent with traditional American values.
5. Broaden engagement between the citizens of Uzbekistan and the United States by significantly expanding our educational, business, science and cultural exchanges in both directions. There is a strong and growing demand in Uzbekistan for English language instruction and for American technology and knowhow. And nothing will help solidify the foundation for long-term U.S.-Uzbek partnership more than building out the network of linkages between our two nations.

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee, if I am confirmed, I pledge to work closely with you to support America's growing strategic partnership with Uzbekistan. I'm grateful to the President, the Secretary of State and this Committee for giving me an extraordinary opportunity to serve my country. I look forward to your questions.