

**Robert Frank Pence**  
**Nominee to be U.S. Ambassador to The Republic of Finland**  
**Submitted to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee**  
**March 1, 2018**

Chairman Johnson, Ranking Member Murphy, distinguished Members of the Committee. It is an honor to appear before you today as President Donald Trump's nominee to be the United States Ambassador to The Republic of Finland. I am also grateful to Senator Cornyn for his gracious introduction of me to this Committee.

I am humbled by the President's selection of me for this position, and the support of Vice President Pence – who, I might add, is not related to me. I relish the opportunity of working with Secretary Rex Tillerson and the competent and dedicated women and men of the State Department, at Mission Finland, and in the various federal agencies whose portfolios touch and concern Finland. If confirmed, I will direct all of my energies in meeting the trust and responsibly placed upon me.

I am here today with the love of my life, Suzy; our three sons Steve, Geoff and Brian; and their children. Even though my parents, Hank and Stella, and Suzy's parents, Bud and Dolly Sarbacher, have passed on, the memory of them and the love, guidance, and support that they and the rest of our family have given me make my being here today possible.

By way of introduction, I am a life-long Washingtonian. I built a career over the past 47 years in commercial real estate. I have, either individually or with others, developed over 35 projects – all of them successful. My work has led me to develop many of the management and diplomatic skills I expect to call upon if confirmed. Each project has involved substantial interactions with local political, administrative, civic, and business interests. If confirmed, I look forward to working with President Sauli Niinistö, Prime Minister Juha Sipilä, Foreign Minister Timo Soini, and the people and civic, cultural, educational, military and religious institutions of Finland.

In addition to my professional interests, I have spent much of my adult life involved in actions that enrich our society and give back to those who have sacrificed so much for our country. My philosophy has been: I follow when others lead, I lead when others cannot or will not. And I lead when no one else is around or yet involved. I am perhaps most proud of my part in establishing the Gary Sinise Foundation which supports veterans, first responders, and their families by creating unique programs that entertain, educate, inspire, strengthen, and build communities. It has been an honor to sponsor USO dinners and concerts for our troops both domestically and overseas at the Ramstein Air Force Base in Germany featuring The Beach Boys and Gary Sinise's Lt. Dan Band. I have supported our troops as well through my work with the AU law school and am especially proud of having participated in launching a program that allows any new student who served honorably in the American military to go to the AU law school tuition free.

It has been an incredible honor to have been associated with the Kennedy Center for the past decade plus. For about twelve years I served on various boards at the Kennedy Center and with my wife Suzy have represented the Kennedy Center abroad as a part of the Kennedy Center Gold

Medal in the Arts program. These week-long, intensive, high level programs get to the root of our relations with other nations, their citizens, and their cultures. The nexus of my professional and private interests is most evident in my role on the new building you see rising on the Potomac. For four years I chaired the expansion committee at the Kennedy Center, and could not be prouder of the expansion of the arts in our nation's capital.

If confirmed, I look forward to bringing a similar dedication and leadership to our country's relationship with the government and people of Finland. In December Finland celebrated its 100th anniversary as a sovereign nation. About 700,000 Americans of Finnish descent joined in the festivities. If confirmed, I look forward to further cementing the ties between our great countries. During the past years Finland has transformed itself from a farm and forest economy to a diversified modern industrial economy. To do so it needed a highly educated and technically trained workforce. It succeeded by demonstrating the unique trait that the Finns call *sisu* (which I take to mean an inner sense of mental and physical strength). I hope to build on my professional and philanthropic experiences to advance our nation's interest and build our alliance with Finland.

The United States has welcomed Finland's integration into Western economic and political structures over the past decades. Finland provided the venue for the Helsinki Accords of 1975, the terms and conditions of which Russia has not yet fully complied. Finland joined the European Union in 1995 and, while not a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, it joined NATO's Partnership for Peace program and was designated a NATO Enhanced Opportunity Partner at the 2014 Wales Summit. Finland shares an 833 mile border with an increasingly militant Russia, a southern border on the Baltic Sea over which Russia is attempting to extend its hegemony, and a northern border which almost reaches the Arctic Sea which Russia is rapidly militarizing. Finland is a member of both the Arctic Council and the Northern Group, two alliances formed to deal with the complex military, commercial, freedom of navigation, and ecological issues confronting the area.

The important strategic relationship the United States has today with Finland is reflected in the numerous high level engagements over the past year to include reciprocal visits to Finland by Defense Secretary Mattis and a visit to Washington to meet President Trump by Finland's President Niinistö. Finland's security concerns are consistent with our own: North Korea's escalating armaments development, the deteriorating situation in the Ukraine, Russia's attempted annexation of Crimea, the threat of combined Russian and Chinese naval exercises in the Baltic, and the possible adverse effects of the Nord Stream II pipeline. For a country of about 5.5 million people with an expanding economy and a GDP of about \$240 billion dollars, Finland punches far above its weight.

If I am fortunate enough to be confirmed by the Senate, I can assure you of my commitment to the women and men serving our country in Finland. As Secretary Tillerson has clearly mandated, my paramount obligation is to ensure the safety and security of the embassy and its personnel and their family members. The events of last week in Montenegro reinforce this priority. I am also committed to leading Mission Finland in accord with three values enunciated by Secretary Tillerson: accountability, honesty, and respect.

In his Inaugural Address President John Fitzgerald Kennedy famously challenged all Americans to “. . . ask not what your country can do for you--ask what you can do for your country.” My answer is this: “I wish to take this step to pay back, in some small way, the country that has offered me so much.”

Thank you for your time and I look forward to your questions.