

Statement of Robert A. Destro
Nominee for Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights & Labor
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
Wednesday, March 27, 2019

Chairman Risch, Ranking Member Menendez, and Members of the Committee, thank you for giving me the opportunity to appear before you today as President Trump's nominee to be Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights & Labor. I am humbled by the nomination, and grateful to the President for the confidence he has placed in me. If confirmed, I will be privileged to serve our great nation as a member of Secretary Mike Pompeo's team and as the leader of the dedicated public servants who, together, are the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (DRL).

Please allow me to take a moment to introduce my family. With me today are my wife, Dr. Brenda C. Destro, my daughter, Gina M. Destro, my son, Mark B. Destro, and my bother-in-law, William Cloonan. I am grateful that they have taken time from their busy schedules to be here with me today. I would also like to acknowledge the many family members, friends, colleagues and students, both present and former, who are watching this hearing online. I am grateful for your support.

I would also like to acknowledge those who came before me, but who are no longer with us. My parents, Anthony and Bette Destro, were "first-generation" Americans. My Dad was a policeman in Akron, Ohio for nearly forty years and my Mom, a homemaker who kept my sisters and me on the straight and narrow. All four of my grandparents were teenage peasants who arrived in this great country from Sicily around 1910. How amazed and proud they would be of our family.

Only in America!

I can say with confidence "only in America" because the individual success stories of the members of my wonderful and distinguished extended family would not have been possible without my grandparents having settled in a social and political community that respects the basic equality and dignity of each and every human being. That respect is written into the text and structure of our founding documents and is reflected in the text of the many human rights conventions to which the United States is a party.

Our Nation's commitment to respect for human dignity shows up in our strong support for the rights of individuals and associations, and in the demands of human rights advocates that governments and international organizations live by the command that all persons are entitled to equal *protection* of the laws. Americans support and encourage a myriad of "civil society" associations both at home and abroad because we strongly believe that, as human beings, it is our God-given nature to communicate freely and to organize associations to achieve our common goals in matters of faith, education, business, politics, the arts, and the welfare of others. *This* is why Congress and the President have asked DRL to provide support to individuals and organizations around the globe who aspire to enjoy the blessings of liberty, democracy, and the freedom to participate, both individually and collectively, in the labor market.

Respect for the inherent dignity of every human being requires no less. Respect for the rights and freedoms of others is the foundation of effective diplomacy and a stable foreign policy. It is the key to helping others to strengthen the institutions of their own civil society, and respect for difference and the interests of others is absolutely necessary for the protection of America's vital national security and economic interests.

Over the course of my career, I have been privileged to serve, both here in the United States and abroad, as a civil rights lawyer, a public servant, an academic and a policy advocate. My work on the legal and policy issues that arise at the juncture of law, religion and culture has given me a unique perspective on nearly every aspect of the critically important responsibilities that Congress has assigned to DRL.

If confirmed as Assistant Secretary, I will use all of this experience – and, consistent with the law, will draw upon the experience of the many friends and colleagues with whom I have been privileged to work – to advance DRL's ongoing efforts to protect and advance the cause of human rights across the globe. DRL is filled with dedicated public servants who are committed to the cause of human rights. If confirmed, I will work hard to earn not only their support and respect, but yours as well.

If confirmed as Assistant Secretary, I promise that I will provide my best advice and analysis to the Secretary and his leadership team. I will also work closely with this and other committees of the Congress to develop mutually agreeable outcome measures that will provide some assurance to you, and to America's taxpayers, that the money you entrust to DRL is being used wisely and effectively to advance our values and strategic foreign policy interests.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for your time and attention