

**Statement of Ronald J. Gidwitz**  
**Nominee to be U.S. Ambassador to the Kingdom of Belgium**  
**Senate Committee on Foreign Relations**  
**June 21, 2018**

Chairman Johnson, Ranking Member Murphy, and distinguished members of the committee, it is a tremendous honor to appear before you today as President Trump's nominee to be the United States Ambassador to the Kingdom of Belgium. For me, it is humbling that the President and Secretary Pompeo have confidence in me, hopefully with your approval, to represent the American people in engaging with a critically important ally in the key center of Europe.

I would like to thank several members of my family who sit behind me today. First and foremost is Christina, to whom I have been married for almost 43 wonderful years. We have two boys, Alexander who lives in Australia and Scott who joins us here today. Alex is married to a lovely young lady, Marlien and she has recently given birth to our first grandson, Christopher. Scott is accompanied by his newly minted fiancé, Mallory DeHaven. My family's love and support has been a constant in every phase of my life.

During my career, I have had a multiplicity of experiences in government service, in the private sector as well as extensive exposure to the not for profit arena. In the private sector, I had the privilege of serving as the President and CEO of Helene Curtis, a toiletry and cosmetic manufacturer and marketer. When I took over, the company had sales of just over \$100 million. When the business was sold 17 years later, the company was closing in on \$1.5 billion and was a FORTUNE 300 company with forty percent of its sales coming from outside of the country. All of the growth was generated internally. I have also served on a number of private sector boards of directors. One of note among them was American National Can, a subsidiary of the French Aluminum company, Pechiney.

In the public sector I was a founding executive committee member of the National Committee for Employer Support for the Guard and

Reserve and served in that capacity for 10 years. In addition, I was the Chairman of the Economic Development Commission of the City of Chicago at a time when the Midwest was under great stress. I also served as Chairman of the City Colleges of Chicago, the second largest community college district in the country. As well, I served two terms as the Chairman of the Illinois State Board of Education. I was appointed to these and other public service positions by both Republicans and Democrats. I believe the record will show that I can work well with and lead organizations no matter their political stripe.

In the not for profit world I have worked with many kinds of organizations from social service to cultural institutions to educational establishments. I have served in virtually every position over my 44 year tenure with the Boys & Girls Clubs of America including chairing the national organization as well as its Government Relations Committee. I have served as Chairman of the Field Museum of Natural History as well as the Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce. In short, I have led large organizations and small ones, public, private and not for profit.

I feel confident my past experience in government, business, and philanthropy has prepared me for this important opportunity to lead the United States Mission to the Kingdom of Belgium. If confirmed to serve as U.S. Ambassador, I will work closely with the teams from across the government to strengthen our relationship and focus on the following key areas of our alliance.

First and foremost, I will work with Belgian officials at all levels of government to advance American interests, protect American citizens and to promote American and democratic values; the freedom of speech, the freedom of press, and the freedom of religion are values that cannot and should not be compromised.

If confirmed, I will work closely with the Belgian government to address collective security concerns. I will encourage our Belgian partners to move aggressively to fulfill their Wales Declaration commitment to spend 2 percent of GDP on defense by 2024. Working together, we can

further strengthen communication between our law enforcement and counterterrorism communities, enhance NATO and further global security.

If confirmed, I hope to advance our economic interests in Belgium. More than 900 American companies are represented in Belgium. In 2017, U.S. exports of goods and services to Belgium were \$35.5 billion. Imports from Belgium were \$20.4 billion creating a trading surplus of \$15.1 billion. We are Belgium's largest trading partner outside the European Union. If confirmed, I would work with our Commerce Department and our embassy economic experts to further an already robust and successful partnership.

Finally, if confirmed, I will work diligently to lead our mission team and to work closely with all agencies to deepen our historic alliance with the Belgian government and the Belgian people.

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Ranking Member, and members of the committee, I thank you for the honor of appearing before you today and I look forward to answering your questions.