

Statement of William W. Popp
Nominee for Ambassador to the Republic of Guatemala
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
July 23, 2020

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Ranking Member, distinguished Members of the Committee, it is an honor to appear before you as the President's nominee to serve as the next U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Guatemala.

I would like to begin by recognizing my family, without whose support I would not be here. In particular, I want to thank my wife of 21 years, Milena, and my daughter Alicia Pilar. I am grateful to both for joining me in the privilege, joys, and sacrifices of serving our nation overseas.

As a career Foreign Service Officer, I have been honored to represent the United States in six postings across Latin America and Africa. From Nicaragua to Angola, Colombia to Brazil, and Kenya back to Brazil, I have advanced U.S. interests and collaborated with partner nations to achieve shared goals. Most recently, I served as Deputy Chief of Mission in Brazil, our sixth-largest diplomatic Mission in the world. This assignment included serving as *Chargé d'Affaires* for 21 months, helping to drive an unprecedented expansion in bilateral relations. I believe, if confirmed, this experience will be valuable in constructively leading our Mission and deepening our partnership with Guatemala.

The United States and Guatemala share a historic relationship, strong economic ties, mutual security interests, and deep people-to-people bonds. As close neighbors and democratic nations, we both gain immensely from enhanced and sustained cooperation.

Since his inauguration in January, President Giammattei has prioritized partnering with the United States. He has demonstrated commitment to increasing security, curbing irregular migration, fighting corruption, and supporting private sector-driven growth. He has also underscored Guatemala's commitment to democracy, stood up for freedom in Venezuela, and reinforced relations with Taiwan.

As such, we are at an important moment of opportunity to maximize our partnership for security, prosperity, good governance, and democracy. At the same time, we face the tremendous challenge of COVID-19, with its painful human toll and economic impact. More than ever, it is vital that we work together.

First, protecting our citizens' security, combating transnational crime, and addressing the regional challenge of irregular migration must be priorities. To protect U.S. and Guatemalan citizens, and our respective homelands, it is key for us to work together to dismantle transnational criminal organizations, increase border security, strengthen justice institutions, and highlight the dangers associated with the long journey to the U.S. border. With U.S. partnership, Guatemala is making progress. New courts have been established for prosecuting human traffickers, extortion cases, and femicide. Strong cooperation with the Guatemalan Navy Special Forces has reduced maritime narcotics trafficking. And migrant encounters of Guatemalans at

the U.S. southern border have significantly fallen since the peak of the humanitarian and security crisis in May 2019. Notwithstanding this progress, more capacity building is needed as well as the sustained commitment of all branches of the Government of Guatemala.

Second, it is vital that we broaden prosperity for both countries by unleashing private investment, expanding trade, and increasing formal sector employment. With one of the youngest populations in the world, the lowest tax revenue collection rate in the Americas, and nearly 60 percent of the population living in poverty, generating opportunities for Guatemalan youth, women, and the indigenous community is imperative. Our assistance is an important part of the solution, but so is working with the public and private sectors to create an enabling environment for businesses to thrive, especially small and medium enterprises. If confirmed, I will seek to create more opportunities that benefit both Guatemalan and U.S. businesses.

Third, underlying security and prosperity is the crucial need to promote rule of law, fight corruption, respect human and labor rights, and end impunity. U.S. assistance is strengthening Guatemala's judicial institutions, and President Giammattei has taken an important step to establish a new anti-corruption commission to uncover corruption within the executive branch. Together, we are fostering dialogue with indigenous communities and civil society in areas of high migration. We should deepen these efforts to build the integrity of public institutions, enhance access to justice, and bolster space for civil society. A more just and inclusive Guatemala will have a positive effect on the challenges both our countries face.

Finally, Guatemala is an ally in the defense of democracy and creating a hemisphere of freedom. President Giammattei's recognition of Venezuela's legitimate government and the democratically-elected National Assembly, his breaking of ties with the illegitimate Maduro regime, and his reinforcement of relations with Taiwan in the face of pressure from the PRC are powerful statements. Closer U.S.-Guatemala cooperation will benefit our citizens as well as increase freedom more broadly.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, Mr. Ranking Member, Members of the Committee, if confirmed, I will work steadfastly to advance U.S. interests and values. That begins with protecting the over 60,000 U.S. citizens who reside in Guatemala, as well as the thousands who visit each year. It also means pursuing a shared agenda with our Guatemalan partners for security, prosperity, good governance, and democracy.

If confirmed as Chief of Mission, I will lead the nearly 550 American and Guatemalan professionals who comprise Mission Guatemala to advance this agenda by creating a safe, inclusive, and respectful workplace. I will vigilantly safeguard resources and maximize effectiveness across U.S. agencies to build a more secure and prosperous future with Guatemala.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I look forward to answering your questions.