

**Statement of Stephen B. King**  
**Nominee to be U.S. Ambassador to the Czech Republic**  
**Senate Committee on Foreign Relations**  
**August 1, 2017**

Chairman Johnson, Ranking Member Murphy and Members of the Committee—thank you for taking the time to meet with me this morning, and for considering my nomination to serve as the next U.S. Ambassador to the Czech Republic.

I appear before you today humbled by President Trump’s nomination of me to serve as U.S. Ambassador to the Czech Republic, an unwavering American ally in the heart of the European continent. Prague may be far from my own upbringing in the heart of America’s Midwest, in Indiana where I was born on the Fourth of July, and Wisconsin, where I lived and worked for most of life. But it my mind, and in the hearts of many Americans and Czechs, both are part of the same common cultural foundation upon which many of our shared values are based.

International affairs and government service have both been trademarks of my professional life. I began my career as a Special Agent of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, investigating public corruption on behalf of this institution -- the United States Senate. I eventually used my skills and expertise to create innovative businesses that provided good jobs to many of the hardworking people in southern Wisconsin. As Karen, my wife of 54 years, and I found success there and had the opportunity to give back to that community, our shared belief in the American Dream continued to grow.

Our three grown children, Kristen, Steve Jr. and Russ have been our greatest source of pride, along with our seven grandchildren.

It was not that long ago that the Velvet Revolution ended Soviet occupation of then-Czechoslovakia, and the first democratic elections in over 40 years were held in 1990. I will never forget the awe-inspiring moment when the philosopher-poet Vaclav Havel was finally elected President after fighting against tyranny his entire life.

If confirmed, I would view my role as Ambassador as a facilitator of the natural alliance that has grown between our citizens and the fiercely independent Czech people.

As an indispensable NATO partner and ally, the Czechs have gone the distance in our strategy to defeat ISIS and have supported sanctions against Russia for its invasion of Ukraine. In line with President Trump’s expectation, the Czech Republic should endeavor to increase the percent of its GDP devoted to defense, strengthening the NATO alliance and our bilateral military and intelligence cooperation. The Czech Republic is to be commended for its sacrifices for the good of the Alliance, and I look forward to working with them on behalf of the President and Secretaries Tillerson and Mattis.

As the Committee knows, the once-resolute and indelible imprint of democracy spreading across central Europe in the 1990s has given way in some quarters to a current of skepticism and self-doubt, where longtime opponents of freedom deliberately seek to undermine and devolve democratic values and economic freedoms into question-marks. Today, we need to reaffirm our commitment to allies like the Czech Republic, and make clear that the United States is dedicated to the democratic values we espouse at home.

Fortunately, our partnership with our Czech allies is a great asset in opposing this trend. If there is one thing I instantly understood learning from (former) Amb. Richard Graber about America's relationship with the Czech Republic, it is that we have both invested our reputations and resources in the idea that freedom and free markets will create the most just and prosperous societies ever imagined.

The United States and the Czech Republic share a unique and lasting bond of history – from the vision of an independent Czechoslovakia spelled out in the Pittsburgh Agreement almost 100 years ago, to the post-communist vision and leadership of Vaclav Havel whose bust stands in the U.S. Capitol. If confirmed, I will work to sustain our countries' historic ties and expand the people-to-people connections that are crucial to our relationship.

Like us, the Czechs have proven they know democracy and economic freedom require daily attention and renewal. Soon I expect to meet a Czech deputy -- or even a senior minister who has spent his or her entire life free of the bonds of tyranny that still haunt their parents' memories. As a younger cadre of leaders rise in the Czech Republic, we will embrace our longstanding responsibility to recognize and assist them, whether through sponsored exchanges or merely by making introductions to their American counterparts.

The foundation beneath our bond is cast in the steel of shared values: Hard, honest work, independent thinking, and fidelity to the commitments we make. If confirmed as Ambassador, I pledge to this Committee and the American people that I will work hard, stay honest, speak my mind, but always uphold our promises as a nation.

At the end of our service if I am confirmed, when Karen and I get ready to fly home, I will measure my performance against a few yardsticks. Have we upgraded our partnership across the board? And, did I serve the hardworking, patriotic team at Embassy Prague well as a leader, manager, and supervisor, and did I equip them to better serve our country? I pledge to each of you to keep these questions at the forefront of my mind to strengthen our partnership with the Czech people, to advance our shared values and our strategic interests in Europe and around the world.

Thank you, Senators, for your consideration. I am pleased to answer any questions you may have.