

Statement Before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations

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Howard Gutman

Ambassador-Designate to Belgium

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Thank you, Madam Chair and Members of the Committee. And thank you to Senator Warner for his introduction. Much like Presidential nominations, thirty-two year friendships are rare and to be cherished.

It is an honor and a privilege to appear before you today as President Obama's nominee to serve as the United States Ambassador to the Kingdom of Belgium. I am grateful to both President Obama and Secretary Clinton for their confidence in me, and to this Committee for its consideration.

If confirmed, I would not be the only member of the Gutman family representing our country in Belgium. With me today is my wife, Michelle Loewinger, who has been my partner and best friend for the past 28 years and, as Senator Warner would attest, has also been the best dentist in Washington D.C. My older son Collin, a rising senior, sports columnist and club hockey goalie at Yale, is also here, as is my younger son Chase, who if I am confirmed, will represent us in the 10th grade at the International School of Brussels. The world's best in-laws, Larry and Martha Loewinger, my sister Deborah Studen and my mom Roslyn Gutman are here as well. And although my dad, Max Gutman, passed away when I was 16, as you will note from my testimony, in a very real sense, he too is here today.

Today's hearing is of course about where I hope to be going. But so much of what I would bring as an ambassador relates not simply to where I would be going, but from where I have come, and from whom I have learned along the way. For I have indeed been blessed to live what often is referred to as the American Dream, but in truth is a dream shared by working families throughout the world, as much in neighborhoods such as Anderlecht, Brussels as in Queens NY, where I grew up.

My father was a Holocaust survivor who, much like those depicted in the recent movie "Defiance," survived the war in the forests of Poland after his family and entire town were destroyed. Unable to locate any surviving family members or employment after the war in Warsaw or Berlin, he came to America in 1950 and struggled in the garment district in the lower eastside of New York, but steadfastly believed in the opportunities that lay ahead for his children. When he passed away in my senior year in high school, I went to work in the evenings and on weekends as a busboy and a waiter. By supplementing table tips with the student loan program, I progressed from the public schools in New York City to Columbia University and Harvard Law School.

But my most vital lessons could never have come from textbooks or treatises. I learned about the importance of public service, professionalism, and the pursuit of justice from among the finest public servants in our nation: as a law clerk first for Judge Irving L. Goldberg of the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit, a hero in the civil rights movement in the South, and then for Justice Potter Stewart of the United States Supreme Court, the consummate gentlemen and jurist, and finally as a Special Assistant for Counter-Intelligence and Counter-Terrorism to then F.B.I Director William H.

Webster, one of our most accomplished public servant in our lifetime and a man I still count today among my friends. As well, my mentors and colleagues throughout my over two and a half decades at Williams & Connolly, have well enforced the lessons of the pursuit of excellence, diligence, judgment and integrity. I do not mean to be less than humble about the law firm that I have long called home, but if you want to know the identity of the best litigation firm in the world, just ask any corporate CEO or government official on the doorstep of a major legal problem. If confirmed, I look forward to bringing these life lessons to bear in proudly representing the United States abroad.

Belgium is sometimes described as being at “the heart of Europe.” But its importance is far more than geographical. A founding member of NATO and of the European Union, Belgium is home to both organizations and to the diplomats who fill their ranks. In recent years, Belgium has held leadership positions in the United Nations Security Council, and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. This year, Belgium and the United States were both elected to the UN Human Rights Council, and Belgium is currently President of the Council. And Belgium will serve as President of the EU in the last half of 2010. Belgium is in many respects the mind and soul of Europe. Its eyes and ears. And with its diverse and growing multicultural community, including a vibrant Muslim population estimated at half a million people out of a total population of approximately 11 million, Belgium is a place where tolerance and communication are helping to bring about greater levels of mutual understanding among people of different backgrounds and beliefs, both within and far beyond the borders of Europe.

Belgium has indeed always been a true partner of the United States. Steadfast allies through two world wars and the Cold War, Belgium and the United States remain poised to face the present challenges as partners and together to create the future that we all owe to our children. Like American troops, Belgian troops work tirelessly in Afghanistan, mentoring Afghani forces, and like American F-16's, Belgian F-16's protect Afghani skies, all to bring about a safer and more peaceful future. And Belgians and Americans work closely together to ensure that the least advantaged nations – especially those in Africa – are not denied their piece of that more secure and prosperous future. With the two countries having long been vigorous trading partners, the port of Antwerp sends more containers to the United States every day than any port in the world. In turn, U.S. investment in Belgium is so extensive that one out of every 12 Belgian employees now works for an American company.

The Belgians have indeed begun to take a fresh look toward our shores. And thus, were I to be confirmed, my overarching goal would be proudly to be part of what the Belgians see when they take that fresh look. Part of what the Belgians see along with Marine Sergeant Philip J. Caughey, who did three combat tours in Iraq and now guards the front gate at the Embassy in Belgium. Part of what they see along with Raymonde Versali, a Belgian woman who for more than 30 years has helped protect our borders and welcome visitors to the U.S. by providing first-rate consular services; and along with Wayne Bush, among the finest Deputy Chiefs of Mission in the Foreign Service; and along with the hundreds of other dedicated men and women who enrich Embassy Brussels by their service. Two countries working together on a global economic recovery that will not be easy, but can be achieved through international cooperation and lasting reform. Two countries working together to overcome a dependence on fossil fuel that undermines that economic recovery and threatens both our joint national security interests and our planet. Two valued partners engaged in cooperative efforts to combat terrorism and root out sources of terror, while always preserving justice.

Madame Chair and Members of the Committee, I can think of no greater service or responsibility than being part of the new face of America abroad. To represent our nation to our longstanding allies and thus to assist in creating new allies and a safer planet. I look forward to this challenge and hope to have the chance to serve the United States of America at this vital moment in history.

Thank you and I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.