

David J. Kramer, Nominee
for
Assistant Secretary for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor
U.S. Department of State
before
The Senate Foreign Relations Committee
January 30, 2008

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee,

I am honored to appear before you today to seek confirmation as Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. I am grateful to Secretary Rice for recommending me and to President Bush for nominating me for this position -- a position central to the pursuit of the President's global freedom agenda.

If confirmed, I will devote my utmost energy and effort to serving as our Government's lead representative in the worldwide defense and advancement of human dignity and democracy. Should you afford me the opportunity to serve, I know that my work will be strengthened, as that of my predecessors has been, by the active, bipartisan support of this Committee, and indeed, of the entire Congress.

Let me also take this occasion to say, Mr. Chairman, that if confirmed, I will be fortunate to inherit an impressive Democracy, Human Rights and Labor Bureau from my distinguished colleague and good friend, Barry Lowenkron.

The advancement of human rights and democratic freedoms reflects the core values of the American people. As President Bush said during his visit to Prague last summer, "[F]reedom is the non-negotiable right of every man, woman, and child, and the path to lasting peace in our world is liberty."

In his Prague speech, the President spoke about the great promise that has emerged with the rebirth of freedom in many parts of what used to be the Soviet Union, and Central and Eastern Europe. That region for many years has been the primary focus of my professional efforts, both during my time in government and before that when I worked in the foundation world, helping to establish one of the first, independent public policy think tanks in post-Soviet Russia, the Carnegie Moscow Center.

My commitment to promoting human rights and democratic principles is long-standing. Relatives on my father's side were the victims of Soviet totalitarian brutality. Only one family member in Riga, my father's first cousin, survived -- after 17 harrowing years of forced labor in Siberia. She died five years ago. What happened to her and countless millions like her is seared upon my memory. And so I am personally, as well as professionally, committed to do all I possibly can to help other innocent men and women who are caught in the cruel grip of oppression -- from Belarus to Burma, Zimbabwe to Cuba, North Korea to Iran, and Eritrea to Syria. And, if confirmed, I also will use every

tool available to me as Assistant Secretary to support those in every region of the world who are working to help their countries make the transition to accountable, democratic government.

President Bush's second inaugural address in January 2005 struck a deep chord with me and reminded me why I wanted to serve in government in the first place. Early in this Administration, I had the privilege of serving as senior advisor to Under Secretary for Democracy and Global Affairs Paula Dobriansky -- and I would look forward, if confirmed, to the pleasure of working with her in my new capacity. I worked intensively on democracy and human rights issues. I pressed, for example, for more attention to be focused on the tragic situation in Chechnya. I also played a role in developing the President's unprecedented HIV/AIDS initiative -- a vivid demonstration of the good that our compassionate country can do. This experience also impressed upon me the need not just to promote democracy, but also to strengthen the capacities of democracies so that they can deliver a better life to their people. Human rights and democracy assistance is not the same as development aid -- both are important and they are mutually reinforcing.

Similarly, advancing democracy cannot be pursued to the exclusion of important security interests, such as combating terrorism and extremism and promoting non-proliferation. At the same time, cooperation with the United States on strategic matters of mutual interest should not win a country a pass on pushing forward with political liberalization and reform. As President Bush said during his recent trip to the Middle East: "...the best way to defeat the extremists in your midst is by opening your societies, and trusting in your people, and giving them a voice in their nation."

In my current position as Deputy Assistant Secretary for Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova, I have made sure that democracy and human rights issues are at the top of the agenda. The collapse of the oppressive Soviet empire opened the possibility for nearly 400 million people to live in freedom, many for the first time in their lives. This opportunity, I know, has not yet been realized for all in this region. Time and again, Mr. Chairman, my colleagues and I have been deeply moved by the courage of human rights defenders, independent journalists, NGOs, religious and minority rights advocates and labor activists striving -- some even sacrificing their lives -- to secure the blessings of liberty for their fellow citizens. Indeed, much of my work and that of my colleagues has been focused on the defense of human rights and democratic processes in this part of the world.

I have been told that I am not allowed into Belarus anymore because of my advocacy for freedom in that country and my leadership in imposing sanctions against that dictatorial regime due to its human rights abuses. I guess I have been doing something right.

For the first time in a long time, there may be some reason for hope in Belarus. In the past two weeks, the government has released several political prisoners -- a cause that my colleagues and I in the U.S. Government have been pressing for years. While the government of Belarus needs to do much more, we may be seeing our policy of pressuring the regime through sanctions combined with support for the democratic

opposition finally paying off. If confirmed, I will continue to press hard for reform in Belarus.

When governments veer from the democratic path, it is our responsibility to speak up for the people who are being denied their rights, to urge the governments to return to the path of democracy, and, when necessary, to take appropriate punitive action. As the President said in his speech last summer in Prague, "Freedom can be resisted, and freedom can be delayed, but freedom cannot be denied."

Mr. Chairman, the goal of the Bush Administration's democracy promotion efforts is not to impose America's ways on others, it is to encourage adherence to international principles and help others effect positive change so that they have the freedom to choose. As Secretary Rice has said, we seek "to expand the circle of well-governed states that enshrine liberty under the rule of law, that provide for their people, and that act responsibly in the international system. America cannot do this for other countries. Nor should we. It must be their choice, and their initiative. But we can help and we must help. This is partnership, not paternalism."

If confirmed as Assistant Secretary, I will continue to concentrate DRL's diplomacy and programs on the core components of democracy that must be present in countries around the globe if human rights are to be effectively exercised and protected: (1) free and fair electoral processes, with a level playing field to ensure genuine competition; (2) good governance, with representative, transparent and accountable institutions operating under the rule of law, including independent legislatures and judiciaries; and (3) robust civil societies, including independent media and labor unions.

These components are central to our efforts to help the people of Afghanistan and Iraq to assume their rightful places in the global democratic community. As the President said in his State of the Union speech on Monday, over the past seven years, "We've seen Afghans emerge from the tyranny of the Taliban and choose a new president and a new parliament. We've seen jubilant Iraqis holding up ink-stained fingers and celebrating their freedom. These images of liberty have inspired us."

At the regional level, we will continue to deepen work with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the African Union, the Organization of American States, and the Association of South East Asian Nations. These bodies already have established or are in the process of establishing human rights and democracy standards, institutions and mechanisms. At the global level, we seek to strengthen the institutional capacity of the Community of Democracies. And we will continue to work in partnership with like-minded countries at the United Nations to defend human rights and democratic principles, for example by marshalling international efforts to press for democratic reform in Burma and an end to the Darfur crisis.

Partnerships with NGOs – indigenous and international -- are essential to the development and success of free societies and play a vital role in ensuring accountable government and peaceful, democratic change. If confirmed as Assistant Secretary for

Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, I will regularly reach out to civil society representatives here and abroad for their valuable ideas and insights. There also is much that we can do in partnership with the private sector, for example, to promote corporate social responsibility and uphold international labor standards.

Mr. Chairman, outstanding, dedicated men and women serve in the Bureau for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. I see my job, if confirmed by the Senate, as helping them to do their vital work by ensuring that DRL has a strong voice at the policy table and that issues of human rights and democracy are fully integrated into the decision making process here in Washington and at our foreign posts.

Mr. Chairman, if this Committee and the Senate see fit to confirm me, I will make the most of each and every day as Assistant Secretary. The brave men and women around the world who are striving against great odds, often at great risk, to advance human rights and democracy deserve nothing less. I am acutely aware that this is a time when NGOs, the independent press, labor activists and other human rights and democracy defenders are under siege in every region of the world in countries as various as China, Russia and Zimbabwe. In many countries, those in power wield unjust laws like weapons, or dispense with all pretense of legality and employ brutal extrajudicial measures against people who try to peacefully exercise their rights. As long as men and women around the globe are deprived of their most fundamental freedoms of belief, expression, association, assembly and movement, we, who live in liberty, can never do enough.

Mr. Chairman, if confirmed, I look to work closely with this Committee and with your other Congressional colleagues on the full range of human rights and democracy concerns in furtherance of the goals set forth in the Advancing Democratic Values Act. I also am determined to ensure that when my term is ended, I will leave the DRL Bureau in strong shape for my successor in the next Administration. Working for freedom's cause transcends politics. It is part of what it means to be an American, and that is why I would be deeply honored to serve the American people as Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor.

And now, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, I will be happy to try to answer any questions you may have.