

Opening Statement of Marisa Lago
Nominee for Under Secretary of Commerce for International Trade,
Department of Commerce
Before the Senate Finance Committee
November 16, 2021

Chairman Wyden, Ranking Member Crapo, Members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for welcoming me here, and for allowing me to testify virtually. It is a tremendous privilege to be considered by this Committee as the nominee for Under Secretary for International Trade at the Department of Commerce. Considering the achievements of those who have served in this position in prior Administrations, it is humbling to be before you today. It is increasingly important that our nation remain the global leader on trade, especially as we look to a post-pandemic world. If confirmed, I will treat the role of leading the International Trade Administration with the significance that it deserves.

Before I discuss my priorities, I would like to take a brief moment to recognize three major influences in my life:

- My partner of 47 years, my beloved architect husband, Ronald Finiw. Ron is the son of Ukrainian parents who our country welcomed as Displaced Persons following World War II. Ron and I met at Cooper Union, which provided each of us with a tuition-free education for which we are eternally grateful. I am also grateful to Congress for the Work-Study Program, which allowed me to earn the funds I needed to support myself while in college.
- My mother, Maria Pita, a Spanish immigrant and proud American, who raised me bilingually and who passed along her rock-solid ethical core.
- And my late father, Louis Lago, child of Spanish immigrants and a World War II Navy veteran.

My parents instilled in me a lifelong hunger for learning; bursting with pride when I became my family's first college graduate. My father's career as a 30-plus year civilian employee of the Department of Defense set a powerful example for his children. My brother Paul Lago has spent his entire career as a federal civil servant at the Department of Defense. And, my Dad's lessons have shaped my career in federal, state and municipal government, a career that has focused on the importance of supporting jobs for the American people – stable, well-paying jobs that support families.

Throughout my time in government, I have seen first-hand the power of trade and investment to improve lives. During my seven years as Treasury Assistant Secretary for International Markets and Development, I worked with the World Bank and its regional counterparts to increase women's access to capital, allowing them to build businesses and support both their families and their communities. I came to see firsthand that, over the longer term, these investments create export opportunities for U.S. businesses of all sizes, which in turn create more jobs for U.S. workers.

Similarly, when I was President and CEO of New York State's economic development arm, I saw the multifaceted benefits of the investments that we made. I helped revitalize the decaying, formerly industrial Brooklyn waterfront where my grandfather had worked as a cook on a tugboat. Some of you may have personally enjoyed the result of this initiative, Brooklyn Bridge Park, which has grown into a major recreational hub, as well as a national and international tourist draw -- contributed significantly to the vibrancy, livability and economic health of my hometown and our nation.

Of course, ITA not only supports U.S. businesses and exporters, it plays an essential role in ensuring that our trading partners are abiding by the rules of the road. My prior service heading international affairs at the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission, a formidable enforcement agency, gives me a deep-seated appreciation of the importance of ensuring that other nations comply with our trade agreements and, when they do not, deploying our robust enforcement tools on behalf of American businesses and American workers.

When competing on a level playing field, U. S. businesses and the workers that they employ can successfully innovate and succeed. And, their success bolsters American competitiveness, economic and national security, and the lives of the American people.

If I have the honor of being confirmed, I look forward to being a committed partner to this Committee and Congress more generally, as well as a passionate, tireless advocate for the people of the United States of America.

I look forward to any questions you may have for me.