

Teddy Taylor

Ambassador-Designate to Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu

Statement Before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee

July 23, 2009

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

I am honored to appear before you today as President Obama's nominee to be the Ambassador of the United States to Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu. I am grateful to President Obama and Secretary of State Clinton for their confidence and trust in me. If confirmed, I look forward to working with the Committee and other interested Members of Congress to strengthen bipartisan support for U.S. interests in the Pacific.

I would like to introduce my wife, Antoinette Corbin-Taylor, a career member of the Foreign Service, and my children Tina and Ashton. The career I have had in public service has been an enormous privilege, but it has demanded sacrifice from my family, and I want them to know how much I appreciate their partnership and unfailing support. With your permission, I would like to also acknowledge the presence of my aunt, Blanche Allen, my brother Terri Taylor, and my sister-in-law Alycia Dougans Taylor. Their sustained support over the years has contributed to making this day possible.

Prior to my nomination, I served in the State Department's Bureau of Human Resources as the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary. I have served in a wide array of domestic assignments and a number of foreign assignments in countries of various stages of political and economic development. Throughout my career, I sought challenging assignments in which I could make a difference and add value. It has been an honor and privilege to serve and represent my country as a career diplomat.

Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu are known to Americans mainly through their role in the Pacific campaign during World War II. Major offensives against the Imperial Japanese forces took place at Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands and at many locations in Papua New Guinea. Vanuatu served as a key military staging area for the United States. Unexploded ordinance is still being found throughout the islands.

Papua New Guinea achieved independence in 1975, Solomon Islands in 1978, and Vanuatu in 1980. These nations continue to face numerous economic and political challenges. The United States strongly encourages these island nations to focus on developing strong democratic institutions, rule of law, and good governance. If confirmed I will continue to work closely with Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu to build these important foundations for sustainable, free, and prosperous societies.

Papua New Guinea has the highest HIV/AIDS growth rate in Asia. The United States has increased funding to help address this problem in concert with the PNG government and other donors. Current efforts are starting to have an impact, but on-going support is needed to continue to educate, modify behavior and help the afflicted. If confirmed, I will continue to work with our donor partners and government officials to address this public health challenge.

Exxon-Mobil has committed to a multibillion dollar project within Papua New Guinea for liquid natural gas. This year Exxon-Mobil will begin to build pipeline for this project. This project will bring hundreds of American citizens and their families to live and work in Papua New Guinea. If confirmed, I will continue to work to improve the climate for American investors in the region, and the Embassy will provide quality services to the expanding American-citizen community.

The Coral Triangle spans a range of 5.7 million square kilometers of ocean and islands, from Malaysia in the west to Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands in the east. This zone has the highest marine biodiversity on earth. It provides a livelihood for more than 120 million residents, food resources for millions more in the world and is a vital component of the larger marine ecosystem for the region. The United States has been an early supporter of the Coral Triangle Initiative and continues to support the efforts by the countries in the region to end illegal and

unregulated fishing, address land- and sea-based pollution, and conserve the area's natural resources. The United States views Papua New Guinea as a key player in achieving the sustainable management of tuna resources in the Pacific. If confirmed, I will encourage Papua New Guinea's continued participation in the South Pacific Tuna Treaty.

We support increased military-to-military contact with the Papua New Guinea Defense Forces, especially as the government considers participation in international Peacekeeping and Coalition operations.

The Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI) arrived in the Solomon Islands in 2003 with a multi-stage plan to promote peace and democracy. Stage I was a military intervention to quell violence and help stabilize the country. Stage II, where we are currently, involves building institutions, rooting out corruption and improving governance. Currently RAMSI has started to work on longer-term issues to restore economic growth, strengthen governance and promote accountability in government. If confirmed, I will continue to work with the Government of the Solomon Islands and our bilateral and multilateral partners to support the development of democratic values.

Despite the introduction of 23 women soldiers into Papua New Guinea's Defense Force, women in Papua New Guinea still face severe inequalities in all spheres of life. Violence against women, including domestic violence and rape, is

a serious and prevalent problem. The unequal status of women is also reflected in the literacy rate; women continue to lag behind men in literacy and education due to discrimination.

Human trafficking also remains a serious problem in Papua New Guinea, and the fight against trafficking in persons is a high priority for the United States. Recently, the United States ranked Papua New Guinea as a Tier 3 country with examples of forced labor in logging and mining camps and of sexual exploitation. If confirmed, I will encourage the Papua New Guinea government to take aggressive measures to reduce trafficking and strengthen the role of women in society.

Pacific Partnership is the U.S. Navy's premier humanitarian mission. Pacific Partnership works with a number of partner nations, non-governmental organizations, and U.S. agencies to execute a variety of humanitarian missions. This year, Pacific Partnership 2009 will incorporate a visit to the Solomon Islands including over Guadalcanal Day in August. During the two-week visit in August, Pacific Partnership personnel will undertake dozens of health and engineering projects to benefit the local population. Pacific Partnership 2008 visited Papua New Guinea, and its positive impact resonates a year later and will continue for years to come. If confirmed, I will work with the Navy to build upon the success of these programs and seek to expand this type of humanitarian mission.

The Peace Corps has 60 volunteers in Vanuatu. This contingent provides much valuable assistance in education and natural resource management. If confirmed, I would like to explore the possibility of reopening Peace Corps programs with the Governments of Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands.

The Fulbright program was reintroduced to the South Pacific in 2009. One student from Papua New Guinea will be attending a two-year master's program this year. Additionally, Papua New Guinea currently has four students in the U.S.-South Pacific Scholarship Program, which sends students from the Pacific Region to study for a year at the East-West Center in Honolulu, Hawaii. If confirmed, I intend to increase public diplomacy outreach in Papua New Guinea and the other islands to strengthen our ties of friendship and mutual understanding.

The Millennium Challenge Corporation compact with Vanuatu is designed to build roads in order to promote economic growth in agriculture and tourism sectors. This project entered into force in 2006, with a 5 year project timeline, and continues to make progress. I look forward to seeing this major initiative through to conclusion.

Papua New Guinea is home to over 5 percent of the world's biodiversity. On Carteret Islands, part of Papua New Guinea, some of the world's first recognized climate change migrants have had to be relocated due to a rise in sea level that made their island uninhabitable. This is clearly an issue which will be

facing these three countries for sometime and if confirmed, I will continue to support measures to protect the biodiversity within the region.

The United States is committed to strengthening our relationship with Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. To this end, the Department of State plans to break ground next year on the construction of a new embassy in Port Moresby and is recruiting dedicated professionals committed to strengthening our relationship and representing U.S. interests with these Pacific Island nations at Embassy Port Moresby. If confirmed, I will be sure our Embassy officers have the tools they need to advance their work.

Thank you for this opportunity to appear before you. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.