

Statement of Michael Raynor  
U.S. Ambassador-designate to Benin  
Before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations  
March 22, 2012

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, I am honored to appear before you today, and grateful to President Obama and Secretary Clinton for the confidence they have placed in me as their nominee for Ambassador to the Republic of Benin.

I am happy that my wife Kate, my son Bradley, and my daughter Emma are able to join me today. They have all done America proud through many years overseas, and I couldn't be more grateful for their support.

I have focused on Africa during 20 of my 24 years in the Foreign Service, including 14 years at our embassies in Congo, Djibouti, Guinea, Namibia, and Zimbabwe, and six years in Washington, most recently as the Executive Director of the Bureau of African Affairs. From this service I have gained rich experience upon which I will draw to support U. S. interests, if confirmed as the next U. S. Ambassador to the Republic of Benin.

Mr. Chairman and Senator Isakson, I greatly respect the interest you have taken in Benin. Your visit last June highlighted important U.S. Government programs as well as your strong interest in achieving justice for Kate Puzey, a wonderful Peace Corps volunteer who was tragically murdered just over three years ago. The impressive luncheon you hosted last July for President Yayi and three other West African presidents further reflected your significant engagement in the region.

The United States and Benin have a strong relationship founded on common interests and objectives. Benin is a West African success story and a proponent of values we Americans hold dear. Since the early 1990s, Benin's embrace of democratic pluralism has resulted in multiple free and fair elections including peaceful democratic transitions between political parties, and it continues to buttress its democratic institutions and procedures. If confirmed, I will promote

U.S. engagement in support of good governance, accountability, and capacity-building within the government and civil society.

Benin has a strong record on human rights. Religious tolerance and freedom of expression are hallmarks of Beninese society. Benin and the United States have collaborated to promote women's and children's rights and to counter violence against women. If confirmed, I will build upon efforts to protect Benin's most vulnerable populations. This commitment extends to investing in the health of the Beninese people to boost maternal and child health, keep Benin's HIV rate in check, and combat malaria and other diseases.

Benin and the United States share an interest in countering terrorism and promoting regional stability. Benin's region presents significant terrorist and maritime security concerns. Benin participates actively in U.S. International Military Education and Training programs and has contributed to United Nations peace-keeping efforts in Africa and Haiti. If confirmed, I will support Benin's capacity to promote regional and global security.

Since embracing free market principles over 20 years ago, Benin has pursued economic reforms and diversification. Last October, Benin completed a \$307 million Millennium Challenge Corporation Compact that improved Benin's port and increased its citizens' access to entrepreneurial credit, land title, and legal remedies. Due to this success, and in light of Benin's commitment to good governance and economic development, Benin was deemed eligible to develop a proposal for a second MCC Compact. If confirmed, I will work closely with the Government of Benin toward a second Compact, both to enhance Benin's economic vitality and to promote U.S. commercial opportunities in Benin.

While Benin is indeed a success story, it faces challenges to sustaining and building upon its progress. Benin ranks low on many development indicators, including measures of education, health, corruption, personal income, and business climate. The United States has a strong stake in helping Benin overcome these challenges, not only for the sake of the Beninese people, but because of the value that a democratic, responsible, and economically vibrant Benin brings to U.S. efforts to promote these values more broadly. When he met with President Obama in Washington last July, President Yayi reiterated his commitment to building

upon Benin's strengths, addressing its vulnerabilities, and expanding its positive role on the world stage. If confirmed, I will work hard to enhance the vital role of the United States in this effort.

Any discussion of U.S. interests in Benin must sadly include the terrible murder of Kate Puzey, a tragedy not only for her family and friends but for all who stood to benefit from her positive influence on the world. Great good was brought from this tragedy through the enactment of the Kate Puzey Peace Corps Volunteer Protection Act last November, but legal justice is needed as well. The United States continues to assist Benin in investigating the crime. If confirmed, I will press efforts to achieve justice and resolution.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, for the opportunity to address you today. If confirmed, I look forward to working with you in representing the interests of the American people in Benin. I am happy to answer any questions.