

Testimony of Peter Bodde
Ambassador-Designate to Nepal
Before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
May 16, 2012

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, it is an honor and a privilege to appear before you today as the President's nominee to serve as the next United States Ambassador to Nepal. I am grateful for the trust placed in me by President Obama and Secretary Clinton. If confirmed, I look forward to working with this Committee and my colleagues in the U.S. Government to further the interests of the United States in Nepal and in the region. I also want to take this opportunity to express my appreciation for the special efforts the Committee has made to schedule these nomination hearings.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to introduce four generations of my family this morning. My grandson Andrew, my daughter Sara, who is one of your constituents in Woodbridge, my son Christopher – who recently started his career at USAID – and my father, Ambassador William Bodde. Mr. Chairman, he and I literally switched seats today. More than thirty years ago, I sat where he is when he appeared before your predecessor, the late Senator Paul Tsongas, during my dad's first confirmation hearing prior to becoming Ambassador to Fiji. Unfortunately, the press of work in Baghdad precluded my wife Tanya from being present today. I am very proud of her and I note that as a career foreign service employee, she has accompanied me to all of my assignments, including Pakistan and now Iraq.

As you may already be aware, should I be confirmed, this will be my third time representing the United States in Nepal. Among the lessons I have learned during my career is that the success of every United States Mission abroad depends on a strong interagency effort and a cohesive Country Team. It also requires clear goals, strict accountability, adequate funding and trained personnel. These same critical concepts apply to our bilateral engagement and the delivery of significant levels of U.S. assistance at a critical juncture in Nepal's development. You have my full assurances that, should I be confirmed, I will provide the necessary leadership to ensure that these concepts are an essential element of all Mission programs. While the generosity of the American people is great, all of us involved in the stewardship of this generosity must be accountable for measuring success and failure.

In my current position as Assistant Chief of Mission for Assistance Transition in

Iraq, as well as in my previous positions as Ambassador to Malawi and in Islamabad, Frankfurt, Nepal, and Bulgaria, I have had the opportunity to regularly brief dozens of your colleagues both in the House and Senate. Such regular interaction – whether at post or in Washington – is critical to our continued success. Frank exchanges of accurate information that build trust are essential for the Congress to make difficult resource and policy choices. Should I be confirmed, I will make every effort to interact on a regular basis with the Members of the Committee and other Members of the Congress and Congressional staff. Nepal is one of the poorest countries in the world; it faces the daunting challenges of consolidating peace after a decade of civil conflict, writing a new constitution that will enshrine the values of a new federal democratic republic, developing its economy, expanding access to health and education, and improving its poor infrastructure. Despite these challenges, the Nepali government has made significant strides over the last few years: the ten-year civil conflict is over, the one-time insurgent Maoists have not only joined mainstream politics but are heading the current government tasked with completing the peace process, and the Government has made a meaningful commitment to raise living standards and improve the lives of its people. The United States is an important and growing partner in this process.

The primary objective of the U.S. Mission in Nepal, of course, is to promote and protect the interests of the United States and of U.S. citizens who are either in Nepal or doing business with Nepal. In addition to that fundamental responsibility, we are working with Nepal to promote political and economic development, decrease the country's dependence on humanitarian assistance, and increase its ability to make positive contributions to regional security and the broader global community. Our USAID program focuses on governance, anti-trafficking, private sector development, basic education, and disaster risk reduction. Nepal was recently chosen as a threshold country by the Millennium Challenge Corporation. And in another sign of the progress Nepal has made since the insurgency ended in 2006, Peace Corps volunteers will also be returning to the country in September after an eight-year hiatus. I have seen firsthand the significant impact a single Peace Corps volunteer can make. I want to assure you that, should I be confirmed, I will support this inspiring American outreach program.

If confirmed, I will do my utmost to ensure that Nepal finalizes its peace process and establishes a stable democracy. Nepal will soon integrate former Maoist combatants into the Nepal Army, one of the final steps in Nepal's peace process. Department of Defense programs are cultivating a professional force that respects human rights and civilian control. In addition, the Constituent Assembly is

working to complete work on a new constitution by the upcoming May 27 deadline, grappling with such issues as how to devolve power to newly-created federal states, how to ensure inclusiveness for long-marginalized ethnic minorities and women, and what form of government to establish. If confirmed, my previous experience in helping young or challenged democracies – including, especially, Nepal itself – will serve me well. Success, however, will require U.S. and international support to reinforce Nepal’s developing democratic system.

On the economic front, Nepal faces significant challenges in the near-term, including energy shortages, poor roads, and a lack of education, especially for girls at the secondary level. Another problem is the lack of adequate and suitable employment for Nepal’s burgeoning youth demographic, in which more than 64 percent of the population is under the age of 30. For me personally, this means the vast majority of the population was not even born when I completed my first tour there in 1984! Many villages in the countryside are populated primarily by the elderly and children, as many working-age Nepali citizens now go to the Gulf countries, India, or elsewhere in Asia to earn a living, sending back as much as 25 percent of Nepal’s GDP in remittances. From a longer-term perspective, however, the end of the conflict in Nepal and political stability means the country’s leaders can refocus attention on improving economic opportunities for its citizens – indeed, this will be crucial for the peace process to be considered successful. Nepal has genuine opportunities for U.S. exporters and investors in sectors such as hydropower, agribusiness, tourism, and information technology. To that end, I will seek to improve the environment for foreign direct investment.

Nepal also faces ongoing human rights challenges. If confirmed as Ambassador, I will continue to promote the rights of refugees, including the large Tibetan and Bhutanese refugee communities in Nepal. Reducing trafficking-in-persons will be another top priority, working closely with the government and courageous NGOs such as Maiti Nepal. Finally, the country is also still coming to terms with the gross human rights abuses that took place during the conflict, and we are urging the country’s leaders to establish transitional justice mechanisms that are credible are consistent with best practices and address the concerns and ensure the rights of the victims.

Weak health systems and disease, including malaria, tuberculosis and chronic malnutrition, pose a tremendous obstacle to Nepal’s continued growth. The Nepali government has been a willing partner in addressing the challenges of improving access to health care, but government and public sector capacity remain weak. The United States, through the President’s Global Health Initiative, has played a critical

role in increasing access to treatment and public awareness and in improving health indicators such as maternal and infant mortality. Although Nepal is now on track to meet its Millennium Development Goals in reducing maternal and under-five mortality rates, there is still much work to be done. If confirmed, I will be proud to shepherd the continued growth of these critical programs.

As Nepal continues to develop domestically, it is increasingly able to play a constructive role in advancing important issues throughout the region. One example of such contributions is Nepal's continued deployment of peacekeeping battalions to UN missions in Sudan, Iraq, Congo, and other countries. Kathmandu is also host to the South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Secretariat, to which my predecessor was appointed the lead U.S. Government representative. As an official observer to SAARC, the United States is encouraging the development of the organization's leadership in areas of regional concern such as trade, environment, and disaster risk reduction.

In closing, I want to note that anyone who represents the United States abroad has a unique responsibility. More often than not, we are the only nation that has the will, the values, and the resources to solve problems, help others, and to be a positive force for change in our challenged world. Being nominated to serve as an Ambassador representing our nation is in itself an incredible honor. With the consent of the Senate, I look forward to assuming this responsibility while serving as the next U.S. Ambassador to Nepal. Thank you for this opportunity to address you. I look forward to answering your questions.