

Hearing on Nomination of Caroline Kennedy as Ambassador to Japan

Remarks by Chairman Robert Menendez

Senate Foreign Relations Committee – September 19, 2013

“Our first nominee this morning is Ms. Caroline Kennedy Schlossberg of New York to be Ambassador to Japan. Welcome to the Committee.

Let me take this opportunity to recognize Japan’s Ambassador to the United States -- Ambassador Sasae who is here today. Welcome, Mr. Ambassador. We appreciate you taking the time to join us.

To all of us, on both sides of the aisle -- no matter our politics -- the Kennedy name has been synonymous with public service for over a century- a family that has sacrificed so much in service to this nation.

Ms. Kennedy, your uncle Ted was a good friend to me here in the Senate -- and a good friend to many of my colleagues. His ability to express strong convictions -- yet find a way to reach across the aisle -- was a compelling example of what good governance is all about.

You represent a legacy of the best and brightest in politics, and a time in our history when we stood at the confluence of intellectualism and a respect for public service and government.

You bring to this opportunity to serve the nation an extraordinary range of qualifications beyond the over-simplified perceptions of your family-connections: your own experiences, your own abilities, your own perspective -- that uniquely qualify you for this position.

As an author and editor, President of the John F. Kennedy Library Foundation, Chair of the Senior Advisory Committee of the Institute of Politics at Harvard, a trustee of the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, and Vice Chair of the Fund for Public Schools in New York City, Board member of New Visions for Public Schools, honorary Chair of the American Ballet Theater, Board of Directors of the NAACP as well as the Commission on Presidential Debates – you have lived a life that honors your family’s history of service to the arts, education, government, and the nation - and will bring a broad intellectual curiosity and commitment to serve to your new role as ambassador.

If confirmed – you will be the first woman to represent the United States as our Ambassador to Japan -- a post that has been held by some of our most respected leaders – Senator Mike Mansfield, the longest serving U.S. Ambassador to Japan; Former Speaker of the House, Tom Foley; and former Vice President, Walter Mondale.

It is a post that has always been -- and remains -- of utmost importance to this nation and to the people of Japan. Your nomination underscores the regional importance of the relationship between our two nations.

You would assume your new duties as rise of the Asia-Pacific region may well prove to be the single most transformative geo-political-shift of the twenty-first century. You will arrive in Tokyo at a time when friction between Japan and China on maritime disputes is high, and many challenges lie ahead as Asia-Pacific issues become global. You will arrive as the region takes on new economic importance.

In 2010, U.S. exports to the Asia-Pacific region totaled \$775 billion – up almost 26 percent from 2009 and in 2011, totaled \$895 billion, accounting for 60 percent of our exports, creating and sustaining millions of U.S. jobs in sectors across-the-board – automobiles, power generation machinery, aircraft, and other vital sectors of our industrial economy.

In just 3 years we've gone from \$775 billion in exports to the region – to almost \$900 billion and we can assume that figure will be \$1 trillion in the not-too-distant future. I think it is safe to say that -- for the rest of the this century and beyond, much of the strategic, political and economic-future of the world will likely be shaped by the decisions made in Washington and the capitols in this region over the next four to five years.

Our alliance with Japan is a cornerstone of our strategic engagement in Asia – which will put you front and center in the U.S.-Japan partnership of equals, a partnership that links the world's first and third largest economies and our shared commitment to democracy and human rights.

When it comes to the economies of our nations, Japan is a valuable trade and economic partner.

Its views on regulation, the environment, and intellectual property complement those of the United States, and your voice on these issues will be America's voice in Tokyo. On TPP, Trans-Pacific Partnership, we will work with Japan toward a comprehensive agreement that addresses labor, the environment, currency manipulation, and intellectual property rights.

For Congress to support the TPP -- we will need to be assured that our industries are competing with Japanese industries on a level playing field, and, as Ambassador, you will be at the table.

You will be at the table on our military presence in Japan, on issues concerning Okinawa, and you will be at the table in bridging whatever differences may arise between our nations.

Ms. Kennedy, your father -- in a commencement address at Syracuse University the year you were born -- described the nexus between education and intellectualism and the importance of public service, reminding students that “our nation’s first great politicians were traditionally our ablest, most respected, most talented leaders who moved from one field to another with amazing versatility and vitality.”

In that speech he reminded graduates that a contemporary described Thomas Jefferson as “a gentleman who could calculate an eclipse, survey an estate, tie an artery, plan an edifice, try a cause, break a horse, dance a minuet, and play the violin.”

I don’t believe your father would have expected you to dance a minuet, but his point is well taken. Your background, your experience, your versatility, your intellect, and the legacy of service your family has stood for in American history makes you exactly the kind of person we need to serve the interests of this nation as Ambassador to Japan. With that, let me turn to Senator Corker for his opening comments.”