

TESTIMONY OF ROBERT C. BARBER
AMBASSADOR-DESIGNATE TO THE REPUBLIC OF ICELAND
SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE

January 16, 2014

Chairman Murphy, Ranking Member Johnson, and distinguished Members of the Committee,

It is a privilege to appear before you today as President Obama's nominee for Ambassador to Iceland. I am honored by this nomination, and very grateful to the President and to Secretary Kerry for their trust in me. If confirmed, I look forward to working with you and your colleagues in Congress to further U.S. interests in Iceland.

My oldest son Nicholas is with me today, representing his brothers Ben and Alexander and his mother and my wife Bonnie Neilan, and if you would permit me, I introduce Nick to you.

The opportunity to serve the United States, if confirmed, means quite a lot to me. Both my father and my maternal grandfather were career Army officers; in fact I was born at Fort Benning, Georgia. I grew up in Charleston, S.C., where the greatest influence in my life was my mother Kathleen. A teacher, after having gone back to college while raising four kids, she guided gently, making sure I was aware of opportunities available to me, and trusting me to make good decisions. I feel I have been lucky all my life, being able to attend great schools on scholarships, which opened up more wonderful opportunities. So, knowing how

lucky I have been, I look for chances to help out, to give back, to pay forward. I believe that, if I am confirmed, representing my country as the U.S. Ambassador to Iceland would be the ultimate opportunity for service.

I am hopeful that my experience in leading organizations, including my law firm, as well as political and nonprofit groups, will enable me to effectively represent the United States. I am a team player, a firm believer in team development, for it is through collaborative effort that the most productive, and fulfilling, outcomes are achieved. As well, my years acting as outside general counsel to entrepreneurs and their companies, from startups to mid-size firms, have helped me develop an ability to find solutions and to connect parties with common interests and complementary capacities.

The United States and Iceland have long enjoyed a strong bilateral relationship. When Iceland declared its independence on June 17, 1944, the United States was the first country to recognize it. In the last decade, this friendship has evolved from one dominated by political-military issues to a broad partnership that reflects our shared global agenda.

Iceland is a stalwart ally and friend of the United States. As a charter member of NATO, Iceland has made contributions to peacekeeping operations around the world. Although the Keflavik Naval Air Station closed in 2006, NATO continues to operate an important radar defense system there, highlighting Iceland's continuing contribution to our overall security.

A close partner on law enforcement issues, Iceland most recently helped break up the illegal narcotics network known as Silk Road and actively engages

with the United States on anti-trafficking in persons efforts. It also works closely with the United States Coast Guard to improve port security for vessels transiting to the United States.

Iceland is a staunch supporter of humanitarian causes. Icelandic Search and Rescue teams have provided life-saving services following earthquakes around the world. Most recently, Iceland has provided monetary assistance through the UN to help Syrian refugees in Jordan, Iraq, and Lebanon.

Following its banking sector crisis of 2008, Iceland is reemerging with a stable economy. While it is still recovering, Iceland has made, through a series of confidence-building measures, steady progress in putting its economy on sounder footing.

Our business relations with Iceland are strong and growing. The American-Icelandic Chamber of Commerce is now up and running, working on behalf of American businesses in Iceland. Raw materials and renewable energy are just some of the promising new horizons in our trade and investment relationship.

As businesses are looking to invest in Icelandic renewable energy, the United States and Iceland are cooperating to develop the technology we need for a green, sustainable future. Iceland is also growing in importance as a potential strategic partner in the development of Arctic natural resources. A world leader in the use of geothermal and hydro energy for electric power and heat generation, Iceland presents a great opportunity for “energy diplomacy” in the years ahead.

If confirmed, I shall look for ways the United States can strengthen connections among the energy industry, the Icelandic government, and relevant U.S. institutions, and I shall diligently pursue all opportunities for collaboration.

Mr. Chairman, the U.S.-Icelandic relationship yields benefits to both countries in security, energy, trade and investment, the environment, and humanitarian causes. If confirmed, I will work to broaden our cooperation in these areas and to protect and further U.S. interests and safeguard American citizens. Thank you again for the privilege of appearing before you today. I look forward to answering your questions.