

Statement of Mark Gilbert
Ambassador-Designate to New Zealand and the Independent State of
Samoa
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
February 13, 2014

Mr. Chairman and distinguished Members of the Committee, I am honored to appear before you today as President Obama's nominee to serve as the United States Ambassador to New Zealand and to the Independent State of Samoa. I am grateful to the President and to Secretary Kerry for their trust and confidence in nominating me, and I am equally grateful to receive this Committee's consideration.

With the Chairman's permission, I would like to introduce my family: my wife Nancy and daughters Danielle and Elizabeth. They are the driving force behind everything I do. I'm so delighted that they are here today.

Mr. Chairman, I can imagine no higher honor than to be asked to serve my country as Ambassador to New Zealand and Samoa. Connected by the Pacific Ocean, we have partners committed to expanding global trade and promoting democratic values while pursuing peace and security.

With almost three decades of experience in global finance and investment, I appreciate our enduring economic ties to New Zealand and economic opportunities in Samoa, and the Pacific region as a whole. If confirmed, I will strive to advance our nation's interests, nurture those economic ties, and build on our growing relationships.

Our relationship with New Zealand is stronger now than it has been in nearly three decades. In 2010, our nations signed the Wellington Declaration, pledging increased diplomatic ties and regional cooperation, and in 2012 laid the foundation for strengthened defense cooperation in the Washington Declaration. Over the past few years, we have initiated senior-level policy and military dialogues and resumed joint military training exercises. Despite being separated by thousands of miles of Pacific Ocean, our two countries share the values of democracy, fair economic opportunity, and a more open global community. We actively collaborate in advancing those shared values. In Wellington, we have a partner committed to expanding global trade and promoting democratic values while pursuing peace and security. These are exactly the sort of diplomatic relationships we seek to forge around the globe, and we will continue to expand

our connections to the next generation of New Zealanders of all backgrounds to renew and strengthen our partnership.

The United States is one of New Zealand's top trading partners and we have collaborated closely on the Trans-Pacific Partnership negotiations. If confirmed, I will work to promote an even stronger economic link between our countries – capitalizing on opportunities not only to increase U.S. investment in New Zealand, but also to expand New Zealand investment here at home.

New Zealand is an active partner in the United Nations, committed to resolving conflict through negotiation. It plays a far larger role on the world stage than the country's size would suggest. Its armed forces have led and participated in numerous peacekeeping missions around the globe and have worked side-by-side with our troops in Afghanistan.

New Zealand is an integral link in the global effort against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and actively works in the Asia-Pacific region on counterterrorism issues as well.

As an island nation with a culture and economy deeply rooted in its natural resources, New Zealand understands the seriousness of global scientific and public policy challenges, including greenhouse gas emissions and climate change.

Fifty years ago we forged a scientific partnership with New Zealand in Antarctica. Christchurch serves as the U.S. Antarctic Program's gateway city for operations – conducting vital environmental research at McMurdo Station and our South Pole Base.

And we closely cooperate in multilateral settings – working to provide technical assistance to Pacific Island economies – in education, in energy policy, and in training of the local workforce.

As the first independent country to be formed out of island territories in the Pacific, Samoa is a leader in security and economic stability in the Pacific region. Its commitment to free trade was enhanced by its entry into the World Trade Organization, where it has exhibited unique leadership in forging a stronger partnership with the Pacific Islands Forum. In our bilateral relationship, the Peace Corps has deepened our ties between Samoans and the people of the United States by sending volunteers for more than four decades to work in communities throughout Samoa.

Its capital, Apia, is the home of the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environmental Programme, which cooperates with our scientists and researchers on projects like climate change and the protection of vital marine habitats and resources.

The United States is committed to engagement with Samoa. Last year, the U.S. Navy was in Samoa for ten days, working with our Samoan and international partners through the Pacific Partnership to provide a range of assistance. And just a short time ago, we opened a brand new U.S. funded medical center there. We also work closely with Samoa in protecting important natural resources. In Fiscal Year 2013, we conducted the first exercise of our 2012 Shiprider Agreement between the U.S. Coast Guard and Samoa to achieve sustainable management of Pacific fisheries resources and combat illegal fishing.

Mr. Chairman, I have been fortunate to have had a diverse and interesting career in business, community engagement, and professional athletics. I am humbled to be nominated to represent the United States to countries as diverse as New Zealand and Samoa. If confirmed, it will be my great honor to lead a strong team of Foreign Service, civil service, military experts, and local staff. I also look forward to working closely with this committee and other Members of Congress to promote and protect the interests of the United States.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I would be pleased to answer any questions that you might have.