

**Testimony of Cassandra Butts
Nominee for U.S. Ambassador to The Bahamas
March 25, 2015
Senate Foreign Relations Committee**

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today as President Obama's nominee to be the next Ambassador to the Commonwealth of The Bahamas. I am profoundly grateful for the honor the President has bestowed upon me and for the confidence shown in me by Secretary Kerry as I look to take up this assignment, if confirmed.

Please allow me to introduce the members of my family who are here today. My family has been a wellspring of support. I am here today because of their love and support and because of their dedication and belief in me.

I believe my experience as a lawyer and policy advisor and my service to my country in the executive and legislative branches have well prepared me for the duties of Ambassador to the Commonwealth of The Bahamas. Having worked on some of the major legal and policy issues of our time, including my most recent experience in international development at the Millennium Challenge Corporation, I have always sought solutions consistent with the values of our great nation. I understand that leading with our values is the basis for finding lasting policy solutions and building strong partnerships at home and abroad. If the Senate

confirms me, I would bring those experiences, grounded in my strong belief in equality, justice, and compassion, to the post of Ambassador to the Commonwealth of The Bahamas.

Through close political, economic, and cultural ties, the United States and The Bahamas have forged a strong bilateral relationship that has served both countries well. Bahamians regularly travel to the United States to visit friends and family and to conduct business. And approximately six million U.S. citizens travel to The Bahamas annually. The proximity of The Bahamas to the United States inextricably links our countries' national security. Together we are confronting shared challenges such as illicit trafficking, including in narcotics, arms, and people, as well as bolstering the rule of law.

If confirmed, my first and foremost priority will be to ensure the safety and security of U.S. citizens living in or visiting The Bahamas, as well as the Turks and Caicos Islands, which are included under Embassy Nassau's consular oversight. I will work closely with Bahamian authorities, community groups, and the entire U.S. Mission, including U.S. law enforcement officials under Chief of Mission authority, to promote innovative, effective, and whole-of-government based efforts to reduce crime rates and other illegal activities. I also will continue to promote greater economic ties and growth, including exploring ways to make The Bahamas a more attractive place in which to invest and do business through the development

and enforcement of stable and transparent regulations as well as procurement and investment procedures.

If confirmed, I will work to assist The Bahamas in protecting and preserving for future generations the incredible natural beauty that makes it the vacation destination of choice for so many people, including by expanding marine protected areas. As part of this same effort, I will encourage The Bahamas to adopt cleaner technologies and build strong and resilient energy markets, which will not only provide a more secure and sustainable clean energy future and economic growth, but also limit the effects of greenhouse gas emissions.

I also will make working with our Bahamian partners on human rights issues a priority by seeking to further gender equality; to expand opportunities for disenfranchised youth; and to encourage Bahamian officials to adopt fair, humane, and transparent practices related to irregular migrants, including improved access to refugee status determinations.

Expanding educational exchanges is one of the best ways to deepen the already existing cultural and historical ties between the United States and The Bahamas. At present, approximately 1,700 students from The Bahamas study in the United States, and more than 750 students from the United States study in The Bahamas. If confirmed, I will seek to increase levels of educational exchange

between our two countries, including through enhancing existing partnerships and the building of new ones.

While geography and history have forged strong bonds between our countries, The Bahamas also maintains close economic ties with many other nations. As the world economy continues to rebound, The Bahamas' key tourism and hospitality sectors have seen increases in Asian investment. We do not see foreign economic and commercial links to The Bahamas as a threat to U.S. interests. We strongly believe that American companies can successfully compete with anybody in the world when transparent regulations and practices and steadfast respect for the rule of law prevail.

The United States has not had an ambassador in Nassau for over four years, but we have had strong leadership and staff at the U.S. embassy in The Bahamas continuing the important work of the mission. Still, the value of having a confirmed U.S. ambassador to advance U.S. interests cannot be overstated. If confirmed, I will strive to further the good work of our Nassau mission and strengthen a close and productive bilateral relationship.

In closing, I am confident that I have the experience, imagination, and energy to lead our bilateral relationship with the people and the Government of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas. While at the Millennium Challenge

Corporation, I have seen firsthand the important work carried out by our ambassadors and their teams as they engage and advocate for U.S. policy goals and objectives. If confirmed, I pledge to uphold the tradition and high standards of public service expected of a U.S. ambassador. I look forward to the opportunity to continue to serve my country.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I welcome your questions.