

**Testimony of Catherine Ebert-Gray
Ambassador Designate to Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu**

Senate Foreign Relations Committee

December 1, 2015

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, I am honored to appear before you today as President Obama's nominee to be Ambassador of the United States to Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu.

With the Chairman's permission, I would like to introduce my family – my husband, Ian Gray, also a State Department employee, as well as my son Tommy and my daughter Claire. My family has steadfastly shared both the adventures and the sacrifices of my public service career, and for this I am profoundly grateful.

I recently completed service as Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Bureau of Administration. This role prepared me for effective inter-agency and multinational collaboration. For four years I provided oversight to the foreign affairs supply chain, supported crises around the globe, and assisted with operational transitions in Iraq and Afghanistan.

I have also had the privilege to serve in eight countries since I joined the Foreign Service. Half of my professional life since college, in fact, has been spent in the Pacific. During this time I developed a great fondness for the people, cultures, and history of the region – a region of both promise and unique challenges.

I was introduced to these exotic nations as a student of World War II history. My father served on the *USS Chanticleer* in the Pacific theater. My father-in-law was an Australian Air Force tail gunner. To this day, the events of the Second World War have crystalized an enduring friendship between the United States and the people of Melanesia. As stated by Secretary Kerry, America's security and prosperity continue to be closely and increasingly linked to our neighbors in the Asia Pacific.

If confirmed, I will continue to advance the United States' overarching goal in Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu to help foster sustainable, transparent, and inclusive economic growth, and to support host nation efforts to strengthen education, health, and security. Exxon-Mobil's 2014 launch of its liquefied natural gas pipeline can be a catalyst for economic growth in Papua New Guinea; and each of the three nations continues to be appropriately focused on improved management of their natural resources, including fishing, mining, and forestry. As are all Pacific island countries, they are also deeply concerned with the effects of climate change on their shores.

You may be aware that Papua New Guinea successfully hosted the Pacific Island Games, the Pacific Island Forum, and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) 3rd Meeting of Ministers Responsible for Forestry this year. These are proud achievements in Papua New Guinea, which will also host the FIFA under 20 Women's World Cup Soccer Tournament in 2016 and APEC Leaders' Summit in 2018.

Clearly, the future potential of these Southwest Pacific nations relies on their continued commitment to security, democracy, and responsible management of their mineral wealth. Each must tap the talents of *all* of its citizens, including women and girls. If confirmed, I will continue the work of our Mission in gender-based programs to ensure that all of our assistance and public diplomacy programs in Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu maintain their focus on advancing the status and rights of females.

As the Pacific country with the highest rate of HIV/AIDS infection, Papua New Guinea also remains a partner in the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief. If confirmed, I intend to work closely with other international donors on control and treatment of the disease in support of the national health care system.

The United States shares many interests and values with the people of Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu. If confirmed, I will be a caring leader of our Mission, I will remain focused on the safety of Americans, and I will work closely with each nation to build on our strong existing relationships and to explore new areas of mutual interest and cooperation.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to appear before you. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.