

Statement by John Learie Estrada
Ambassador-Designate to Trinidad and Tobago
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
Thursday, February 6, 2014 2:30 p.m.

Mr. Chairman and distinguished Members of this Committee: Good Afternoon.

It is an honor to appear before you today. I want to express my gratitude to President Obama and Secretary Kerry for the trust and confidence they have placed in me with this nomination to represent my country as the next Ambassador to the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

Please allow me the opportunity to introduce my wife Elizabeth Anne Coté Estrada, who is with me here today.

I am particularly thrilled at the prospect of representing the United States in the country of my birth, if confirmed. I was born in Trinidad and Tobago, and at age fourteen, I immigrated to the United States to forge a new life. I brought with me a respect for diversity and an inherent sense of the equal value of all people. I served with honor in the U.S. Marine Corps -- attaining the Corps' highest enlisted rank as the 15th Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps. After retiring from the Marine Corps, I continued serving my country as a Presidential-appointed Commission member of the American Battle Monuments Commission and as a committee member on the Defense Advisory Committee for Women in the Services. In the private sector, I led Lockheed Martin Training Solutions, Inc., a wholly-owned subsidiary company specializing in flight training and logistics solutions.

I firmly believe that one of the greatest aspirations of all free people is to live their lives to the fullest without limitations based on their ethnicity, class, race, gender, or sexual orientation. If confirmed as Ambassador, with that ideal as my guide, I would seek to strengthen the ties between the citizens and elected representatives of our two great nations.

Trinidad and Tobago is an important Caribbean partner of the United States. The relationship between our countries rests on a strong foundation. We share a common language and a firm commitment to democratic principles, the rule of law, and a free market system.

The U.S. Mission to Trinidad and Tobago has three strategic objectives: On security, the Mission works with the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to improve the capacity of Trinidadian law enforcement and justice sector institutions to reduce violent crime and illicit trafficking, safeguard human rights, and create safer communities. The Mission promotes increased commerce and a transparent investment climate to enhance our mutual prosperity. On social inclusion, the Mission conducts extensive outreach and encourages regional leadership by Trinidad and Tobago to protect vulnerable populations, including at-risk youth. If confirmed, I look forward to leading our efforts in these crucial areas.

The United States and Caribbean partners have developed the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative (CBSI), an ongoing, multi-faceted citizen security initiative for the Caribbean, of which Trinidad and Tobago is a key player. In creating CBSI, the United States and Caribbean partners prioritized three pillars: substantially reducing illicit trafficking of narcotics and arms, increasing public safety and security, and promoting social justice. I will do my utmost, if confirmed, to

increase cooperation and encourage Trinidad and Tobago to become a leader in security in the Caribbean.

As a resource-rich country, Trinidad and Tobago is full of opportunity for energy companies. The United States works cooperatively with Trinidad and Tobago to develop new avenues for regional energy security and conservation. I am excited Trinidad and Tobago is playing a growing role in regional integration and promoting business relationships in the hemisphere, including by hosting the upcoming 2014 Americas Competitiveness Forum. The United States welcomes and supports Trinidad and Tobago's membership in and chairmanship of the Pathways to Prosperity initiative. If confirmed, I would advocate on behalf of U.S. companies and commercial interests to assure a level playing field and support their engagement with Trinidad and Tobago.

Education is the foundation for economic growth. If confirmed, I will work with the government of Trinidad and Tobago to explore ways in which we can provide at-risk youth and other vulnerable populations with tools that can help them succeed.

I firmly believe that my service in the Marine Corps and my experience in the private sector, coupled with my personal history, have prepared me to represent the government and people of the United States to the government and people of Trinidad and Tobago.

If confirmed, it would be my great honor to work closely with this committee and others in Congress to advance our objectives in the Caribbean.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to appear before this distinguished committee. I look forward to answering your questions.