

Statement by D. Brent Hardt
Ambassador Designate to the Cooperative Republic of Guyana
Statement Before the
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
June 8, 2011

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today as President Obama's nominee to serve as the next United States Ambassador to the Cooperative Republic of Guyana. I am grateful for the trust and confidence President Obama and Secretary of State Clinton have placed in me.

If confirmed by the Senate, I look forward to working closely with this Committee and with your colleagues in Congress to advance our nation's many interests in Guyana and the broader Caribbean region.

Before I proceed, I would like to acknowledge the unflagging support throughout my career of my wife, Saskia and my three sons, who have served the United States in many capacities during our many overseas assignments.

Mr. Chairman, I have had the privilege of serving our country as a career Foreign Service Officer for the past 23 years. This journey has taken me to the Western Hemisphere and Europe, including four previous postings in the Caribbean. I have worked with friends and allies to strengthen security, combat

drug trafficking, promote democratic values and human rights, combat HIV and AIDS, and encourage the exchange of people and ideas. In my current position as Charge d'Affaires in the Eastern Caribbean, I have led our Embassy team to rebuild confidence in the United States as the region's partner of choice. I believe these experiences have prepared me well to lead the U.S. mission in Guyana, should I be confirmed.

Mr. Chairman, Guyana is a country with tremendous potential, with vast pristine rainforests, productive agricultural lands, proven mineral resources, and potentially large oil and natural gas reserves. It is also a country facing considerable challenges from poverty, an HIV/AIDS epidemic, ethnic and racial divisions, drug trafficking and violent crime. The United States has a strong interest in working in partnership with Guyana to meet these challenges and fulfill this potential. If confirmed, I will work with the government and people of Guyana to solidify gains in democratic governance, bolster economic growth, and promote opportunity, particularly for young people and women.

The United States also has an interest in Guyana as a key partner in strengthening regional security. Through the President's Caribbean Basin Security Initiative we are intensifying our cooperation to counter the threats of transnational crime and terrorism. Together we are strengthening maritime interdiction

capabilities, professionalizing law enforcement agencies, reforming the juvenile justice sector, and providing new opportunities for at-risk youth. Better security for the citizens of the Caribbean is indispensable both to the region's future stability and prosperity and to our interests. If confirmed, I will work with all U.S. agencies active in the region to strengthen our security cooperation with Guyana.

Guyana is a nation of enormous economic potential. Its natural resource endowment includes gold, bauxite, diamonds and timber. Experts estimate a fifty percent probability that the Guyana-Suriname Basin holds 15 billion barrels of oil and 42 trillion cubic feet of natural gas. With exploratory drilling anticipated later this year, we are helping prepare the ground for sound development of these resources through technical assistance of the Energy Governance Capacity Initiative (EGCI).

With a per capita GDP of only \$2,500, Guyana is also one of the poorest countries in the Hemisphere. That is why USAID has been working with the government and private sector to diversify the economy and create new opportunities in agribusiness, aquaculture, wood products, and ecotourism – a program singled out by the President of Guyana as a model for other donors. If confirmed, I look forward to continuing our mission's efforts to work with the

government and private sector to strengthen Guyana's market competitiveness, build its trade capacity, and reduce legal constraints to doing business.

Guyana is also a leader in efforts to address global climate change through its low carbon development strategy, which is helping to preserve its vast, untouched rain forest. To support Guyana's interest in utilizing the country's abundant forests as a development tool, our Embassy is engaged in developing sustainable forestry, ecotourism, and host country capacity to implement the Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) initiative.

In the face of a debilitating AIDS epidemic in Guyana, the United States has made a major investment in combating this disease through the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). Our \$145 million investment since 2004 has paid clear dividends in responding to Guyana's HIV/AIDS epidemic. Guyana's prevention and care programs, central laboratory, and state-of-the-art logistics system are models for other HIV programs in the region. Life-saving anti-retroviral treatment has been provided to 89 percent of HIV positive patients in need of treatment -- a six-fold increase. HIV testing among pregnant women has increased by 360 percent, and treatment of HIV-positive women increased from 57 percent in 2006 to 93 percent by the end of 2010. PEPFAR has also had a

profound impact on Guyana's health systems, enhancing the country's laboratory capacity, ability to store and distribute medicines, and management of broader health services. As a result of these U.S. government investments, Guyana now is able to take on more of the responsibility for this response. If confirmed, I will work with the government and other health partners to achieve enduring country-ownership and sustainability of these important life saving advances in public health.

Mr. Chairman, Guyana is poised for elections later this year that can build on progress it has made as an emerging democracy. International observers deemed its 2006 presidential elections to be free, fair and transparent and, for the first time since independence, they were also peaceful. It is important that Guyana continue along this path in the elections scheduled to take place later this year. If confirmed, I will work with the government and civil society to help strengthen democracy and governance, promote constructive political dialogue, and encourage greater citizen participation in the political process. To this end, I will also encourage the government to hold local elections, which have not been held since 1994.

The United States has a special link to Guyana through the many Guyanese who live in our country, many of whom are dual nationals and who maintain close

ties with family in Guyana. In fact, over 70 percent of Guyana's citizens have family living in the United States. If confirmed I will look to work with this talented and hard-working Diaspora to find ways that their creativity can contribute to building a more stable and prosperous Guyana.

As a Caribbean country geographically in South America, Guyana is emerging as a bridge between the two regions. It hosts the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) headquarters, and is currently serving as the Chair for UNASUR, which seeks greater integration of South American nations. If confirmed, I will also be accredited to the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), which brings together 15 Caribbean states to promote regional integration and cooperation. CARICOM has a vital role to play in building a secure and prosperous Caribbean, and, if confirmed, I look forward to working with the Secretary General and CARICOM members to advance our common interests in trade, investment, development, and citizen security.

Mr. Chairman, these are some of the opportunities and challenges that await the next United States Ambassador to Guyana. They are opportunities and challenges I welcome. If confirmed and entrusted with this office, I look forward to working with you and your colleagues in Congress to forge a close and productive partnership between the United States and Guyana. I assure you that I

will seek to represent the President and the American people with creativity, dedication, and dignity.

I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have. Thank you.