

**Testimony of Ambassador-designate David Shear
Nominee for United States Ambassador to Vietnam
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
April 6, 2011**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, I am honored to appear before you as the President's nominee to serve as Ambassador to the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. I am deeply grateful for the confidence that President Obama and Secretary Clinton have shown in me and, if confirmed, I look forward to working closely with Congress to advance U.S. interests in Vietnam.

Thirty-five years ago our two countries ended a war that left an indelible mark on both of our peoples. For Americans of my generation, the experience of that war represents an important juncture in our history. Yet today, just 15 years after restoring diplomatic relations, we are already seeing the benefits of a commitment on both sides to move beyond our difficult past and forge a constructive relationship.

As Secretary Clinton said in Hanoi last year, our two countries have reached a level of cooperation that would have been unimaginable just a few years ago. That is why in her conversations with Vietnam's senior leaders in Hanoi last July, and again in October, she proposed that we consider establishing a strategic partnership with Vietnam. This is the logical next step for a relationship that has moved consistently toward increased cooperation and dialogue.

The range of U.S. senior-level engagement last year was extraordinary. If confirmed, I will continue to deepen our engagement in areas such as regional security, nonproliferation, law enforcement, health, climate change, and science and technology. I am also committed to increasing educational and other people-to-people exchanges. These connections enrich us and strengthen the bonds between our two societies.

Trade will remain a linchpin of our relationship with Vietnam. Our two-way trade continues to grow -- from \$15.7 billion in 2009 to \$18.5 billion last year. If confirmed, I will do everything I can to increase U.S. exports to Vietnam through the President's National Export Initiative; in addition to continuing negotiations with the Vietnamese to advance the Trans-Pacific Partnership.

Improved military-to-military ties will also contribute to stronger bilateral relations. Currently, there is already cooperation on maritime security, search and

rescue, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, peacekeeping operations, defense academy exchanges, and military medicine. There is also a successful record of ship visits, including a historic port call to Danang by the *USS John S. McCain* last year.

Additionally, I hope that we will continue to provide funding to strengthen Vietnam's health systems and to help the country build the capacity it needs to address the scourge of HIV/AIDS and emerging pandemic threats.

As we develop a strategic partnership with Vietnam, we must remain focused on increasing the Vietnamese government's respect for human rights and religious freedom. There remains a deep concern about the imprisonment of dissidents, restrictions on the media and the internet, and the harassment of religious groups. Vietnam will not realize its full potential without greater respect for human rights, and its troubling record in this area could limit the growth of our relationship. If confirmed, I will make human rights and religious freedom a central part of my conversations with Vietnam's leaders and with the Vietnamese people.

While major strides have been made in our relationship, 15 years is still too short to have completely overcome the painful legacy of our past. If confirmed, I will continue to strengthen our cooperation with Vietnam on the solemn task of accounting for Americans missing from the war. I will work hard to maintain our assistance with demining and efforts to remove unexploded ordnance. By January 2012, we will have broken ground on a major effort to remediate dioxin residue from the soil at Danang Airport, one of several "hotspots" where the defoliant Agent Orange was stored during the war. We also continue to provide assistance for Vietnam's disabled citizens, without regard to cause.

I have spent my career in the Asia-Pacific region, and I am personally committed to using all of the knowledge and skills I have gained over the past 29 years to pursue the American people's interests in Vietnam. If confirmed, I will do my utmost to ensure that our relationship with Vietnam is among the most successful in the East Asian region. There is much work to be done, and I look forward to earning your confidence.

Thank you for your consideration of my nomination. I welcome your questions.