

Statement of C. Steven McGann
Ambassador Designate to the Republic of the Fiji Islands, the Republic of Kiribati, the
Republic of Nauru, the Kingdom of Tonga, and Tuvalu
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
September 10, 2008

Madam Chairman, Senator Murkowski, Members of the Committee, I am deeply honored that President Bush has nominated me to be United States Ambassador to the Republic of the Fiji Islands, the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru, the Kingdom of Tonga, and Tuvalu. I want to thank President Bush and Secretary Rice for their trust in nominating me for this position. Madam Chairman, I want to thank you and the Members of this Committee for your efforts to address a burgeoning array of challenges confronting these countries and for giving me this opportunity to appear before you today. If confirmed, I will work closely with members of Congress to maintain strong bipartisan support for U.S. goals and priorities in the Pacific.

Madame Chairman, I would like to acknowledge the support of my wife, Bertra McGann, the dedication of my mother, Evangeline Hutson, and the enthusiasm of my children, Leyland, Steven, Bethany, Bradford, and Benjamin, my family, friends and colleagues that led to my being before the committee today.

Prior to being nominated, I served as in the State Department's Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs as the Director of the Office of Australia, New Zealand and Pacific Island Affairs as well as the Maritime Security Coordinator. I also served as the Director for Asia and Near East in the Bureau for Population, Refugees and Migration as well as in other positions during my twenty-nine year career in the U.S. Foreign Service.

If confirmed, I plan to build upon my work over the past two years leading the Office of Australia, New Zealand, and Pacific Island Affairs to build U.S. relationships in the Pacific. During my tenure, I focused on four important areas – promoting democracy, increasing economic growth, strengthening environmental stewardship, and enhancing maritime security. As Ambassador, I will be building upon the United States' historically friendly relations with Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Tonga, and Tuvalu. Those relations began with nineteenth century mariners and missionaries and grew stronger during the Second World War. Some of the

bloodiest fighting in the Pacific theater took place on Tarawa atoll in Kiribati, and U.S. forces set up bases at several locations in Fiji, Tonga, and Tuvalu.

If confirmed as the U.S. Ambassador, resident in Suva, Fiji, I would be responsible for our bilateral relationships with five independent nations. Suva also is the headquarters of the Pacific Islands Forum, the preeminent multilateral organization in the region and home to offices of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, which manages technical and development assistance programs in the region. Fiji's place in the Pacific, as host to numerous diplomatic missions and international organizations, including the United Nations, and as a transportation center, makes it a key focal point for our larger regional engagement.

Embassy Suva is a busy hub of American activity in the Pacific. If confirmed, I will lead an Embassy team of professional, highly dedicated public servants. They manage relations with five sovereign countries and collaborate with multilateral organizations. The Embassy serves as a center for regional public diplomacy activities, environmental programs and policies, and defense-related relationships. The Embassy also has consular and commercial responsibilities for French Polynesia, New Caledonia, and Wallis and Futuna, making it the largest geographic consular district in the world. The Pacific's balmy weather, welcoming people, and natural wonders attract over 150,000 American visitors to Embassy Suva's consular district annually. Provide services to these Americans would remain a high-priority of our embassy during my tenure.

If confirmed as Ambassador, fostering regional stability and eliciting support for the war on terror would remain priorities of the Embassy. Tonga and Tuvalu became early members of the Coalition to liberate Iraq. Tongan troops currently provide security for Coalition forces at Camp Victory. Fiji's troops are doing the same for the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq in Baghdad.

Pacific Island nations face many of the same "global issues" threats and challenges that the United States and other countries face – but in the case of the Pacific Islands the repercussions can be more acute.

Protecting the environment, fighting HIV/AIDS, stemming the flow of illicit drugs, and combating human trafficking are growing concerns in the region. Environmental degradation poses an especially critical challenge for these countries. Many are low-lying atolls that are increasingly vulnerable to the effects of rising sea levels. Overfishing threatens marine resources and hits hard in the Pacific, because these island states depend on fish stocks not only for the sustenance, but as a major

source of government revenue. We are also working with Pacific countries to help save coral reefs and protect the marine environment from invasive species. If confirmed, I will work with Pacific nations to help make them green economies based on environmentally sustainable policies and adopting renewable energies, including solar, wind and wave, to advance our common interests.

A key partner in this effort is the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC). I have had the pleasure of working with several SPC leaders, and if confirmed, I would look forward to our continued collaboration in such areas as maritime security; the fight against diabetes and other public-health concerns; women's issues; bio-security; natural resource conservation; and economic development. In addition, if confirmed, I will implement initiatives to spread to the Pacific community the economic and employment opportunities related to the multi-billion dollar relocation of U.S. forces from Okinawa to Guam.

As in other parts of the world, Peace Corps volunteers in the Pacific make a tremendous difference in so many lives. Simply put, they are among America's most effective ambassadors. The Peace Corps plays an essential role in enhancing our people-to-people relations in the region. I have worked closely with Peace Corps staff and volunteers during the past two years and in my previous posts. If confirmed, I will build on these close relationships to ensure the health and safety of volunteers, and consult with key stakeholders on the possibility of expanding the Peace Corps' presence in the region.

I would like to take a few moments to address a number of pressing bilateral issues the United States faces in the region, beginning with Fiji. This list is by no means exhaustive. In December 2006 the Fiji military, led by Commodore Voreqe Bainimarama, overthrew the country's lawfully elected government. This was the Fiji's fourth coup in 19 years. The coup has created a prolonged political and economic crisis in Fiji. In accordance with the Foreign Operations Assistance Act, the United States suspended military and some foreign assistance programs in Fiji because of the coup, and those restrictions will not be relaxed until Fiji returns to democracy. We have also imposed visa sanctions and taken other measures directed against coup leaders and their supporters. We have taken these steps in close coordination with our allies and partners in the region to underline the urgency to restore democracy and to bolster the efforts of the Pacific Islands Forum. Recently, Fiji's interim government withdrew its pledge to Pacific leaders to hold free and fair elections no later than March 2009. If confirmed, I will work with all elements of Fijian society and regional partners to quickly restore the rule of law, strengthen civil society, and rebuild democratic institutions in Fiji.

Nauru's once bountiful phosphate mines are almost exhausted. Per capita income in that country has plummeted from among the world's highest to near subsistence levels. Tuvalu, one of the world's smallest nations, has nine atolls only a few feet above sea level. The Government of Tuvalu has expressed concern that any rise in sea level associated with climate change may completely engulf Tuvalu and necessitate the relocation of its entire population. Kiribati generally manages its affairs responsibly but has severely limited prospects for economic development. This year's legislative elections showed that Tongans have a strong desire for democratic reform, and Tongan King George Tupou V has agreed that democratic reforms are needed in the country. If confirmed as Ambassador, I would work closely with our long-standing friends of the United States to address these economic, political, and social issues.

Many nations have significant interests in the South Pacific. Australia and New Zealand have strong cultural, political, historical, and security ties with the region, and the United States works most closely with these two countries in coordinating policies and programs throughout the area of Embassy Suva's responsibility. If confirmed, I will work with my counterparts in Australia and New Zealand to achieve our common objectives.

China is rapidly expanding ties throughout the Pacific in its pursuit of seeking resources and commercial opportunities. China's competition with Taiwan for diplomatic recognition and influence plays out directly in Embassy Suva's area of responsibility: Kiribati, Nauru, and Tuvalu recognize Taiwan, while Fiji and Tonga recognize China. If confirmed, I will engage with both China and Taiwan to press for responsibility, accountability, and transparency in development programs to ensure that their assistance supports good governance and the rule of law.

Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Tonga, and Tuvalu occupy a strategically important place in the Pacific. As our partners in addressing critical global and regional issues, it is in the United States' interest to remain fully engaged with these countries. If confirmed, I will do my best to promote excellent relations between the United States and each of these five countries and the territories within my consular district. Working together we can achieve our common goals for a more peaceful and prosperous Pacific region.

Again, I applaud the Committee's efforts to address challenges confronting the Pacific region. At this time I would be pleased to respond to any questions you may have.

