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OPENING WRITTEN TESTIMONY US SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE – CONFIRMATION HEARING May 24, 2005

Chairman Lugar, Ranking Member Biden, Senators... I am very pleased to come before you today, as you consider my nomination for United States Ambassador to Spain and Andorra. Thank you for the opportunity to introduce members of my family sitting in the audience: my wife of 37 years, Maria Teresa “Tere” Aguirre, and my daughter Tessie Aguirre, who is a student at George Washington University’s Medical School. My family continues to support me as a full partner in my quest for public service. I am deeply honored that President Bush has nominated me for this important position and grateful for the confidence that he has placed in me.

This marks my third Senate confirmation hearing to serve in President George W. Bush’s Administration. Almost 44 years ago, I came to this land of freedom and opportunity as a 15-year old Cuban refugee. Like Senator Mel Martinez, I arrived with no family, no money, and no working knowledge of the English language. Along the way, I was sheltered and taught by Catholic Charities, cared for by the United Way, and helped by many, many selfless benefactors. Later, a very affordable U.S. Department of Education student loan program allowed me to earn a degree from Louisiana State University. Days like today punctuate my continuing journey as I realize my version of the American Dream. I am extremely proud, and yet humble, to serve my adopted country, and, if confirmed, hope to do so again. I am grateful beyond words for these opportunities.

The United States and Spain enjoy a dynamic relationship, grounded in history and bonded by multiple common interests. We both deal with interwoven fundamental issues, spanning the broad spectra of security, geopolitics, economics and commerce, and much more. Furthermore, as a Hispanic-American whose ancestors emigrated from Spain, I am keenly aware of the centuries of rich cultural legacy that our country, and our hemisphere, inherited from that great nation.

I also recognize that, in recent times, our two governments have had divergences of opinion. If confirmed, I will, from day one, aim to seek common ground in an environment of mutual respect. Hopefully, together we will find a path that brings the relationship between our two countries to a stronger and healthier level. I am also looking forward to emulating the “transformational diplomacy” practiced by Secretary Condoleezza Rice. Thus, if confirmed, I will lead our Diplomatic Mission in communicating to the governments and the people of Spain and Andorra our priorities and concerns. At the same time, I will listen carefully to their respective priorities and concerns.

For the past four years, I have served in President Bush's Administration, most recently as the first Director of the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, an Under Secretary rank position in the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. I lead a team of over 15,000 to secure America's Promise – as a nation of immigrants – by fundamentally transforming the delivery of U.S. immigration services. I am proud to note that USCIS has made significant and measurable progress in three basic priorities: eliminating the immigration benefit application backlog, improving customer service, and enhancing national security. Before USCIS, I led the Export-Import Bank of the United States (Ex-Im Bank) to become more market focused and customer driven while enhancing risk management practices. As I demonstrated in my two previous jobs, I welcome the opportunity to work with the Senate and the House of Representatives.

Four years of leadership roles in President Bush's Administration, thirty-four years in commercial banking, and many hands-on civic leadership roles, are the prelude to accepting this new and exciting challenge. If confirmed, I will bring to the role of United States Ambassador a strong desire for interpersonal communications, my experiences in management and leadership skills, and a respectful awe for the trust placed on me.

In closing, I want to acknowledge my family as the bedrock of my value system. We are hard-working, God-fearing people who keep and treasure our immigrant roots. Government service allows us to give back some of the many blessings that have come our way.

Mr. Chairman, Senator Biden, Senators... If the Senate sees fit to confirm me, I look forward to bringing all my commitment and energy to this important post. I stand ready to respond to any questions that you may have.

Thank you for your consideration.